

Interview with Frances Cerrone

Title: Growing up Italian in Fulton

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Frances Cerrone: My name is **Frances Cerrone**.

Michael Kline: Maybe you could start out by telling us something about your people and where you were raised.

FC: I was born in Wheeling. I was raised in Fulton. My father and my mother both came from Italy. My father came from a place called Capo D'Acqua, Beginning of Water. It is in the mountains of Italy. I could show you on a map. My mother came from San Benedetto del Tronto, that is on the Adriatic side of Italy. My father immigrated here when he was 17, and he always said that my uncle would know more. His first job was a water boy. He boarded on 19th Street, the way the Italian people did years ago with families. He worked with, I'm not sure of this, the Wheeling Corrugating that was located in Wheeling. Then my uncle, who is 98 years old, started a tire business, and he and my father were in that business together. Later on, my father left the business and started up a gasoline station and a small confectionery store. He got a heart attack, and in those days, in 1936, they didn't know that much about heart trouble, and he passed away; I think he was 56 years old. My father went back to Italy and married my mother. My mother was 37 when she got married. Her brother was a priest in Italy, and her father was a widower, and he was quite old. She hated to leave him, but she came over to America with my father. They were married in Italy. There was another brother of my mother's who was married and had three little children, so my mother felt that her father would be happy with the grandchildren and the daughter-in-law. So, my mother came here to Wheeling. She couldn't speak the language, and it was very, very difficult for her because after she came over, her father died, and her brother, who was a priest, died. She died when she was 76. That was in 1967.

MK: Your father went back to Italy?

FC: My father went back to Italy to marry my mother.

MK: They had been . . . before?

FC: No. I don't think so. I just think, maybe I'm wrong, but sometimes it is the custom to go back to your native country to find a wife, and maybe through word of mouth, he was looking for some woman that could make him a suitable wife. I am not sure how that came about, because . . . One regret I have, I was only, just turned, 13 when my father died, and I was 35 when my mother died, and they tell you things, my mother would tell me things, and it would go in one ear

and out the other. I wish that I had listened to what she had said more, but my uncle does remember. His mind is very, very clear for 98 years of age--and that probably was the way, I think, I am not certain, that my father met and married my mother.

MK: So, she was 36 at the time?

FC: No. She was 37 when she was married.

MK: And he was what age?

FC: He was older. I can't say exactly, if he was 40, I don't want to verify things. He was a few years older than my mother.

MK: So, when he brought her back here, do you know where they went to keep house?

FC: Yes. They kept house in Fulton. They had a little place next to the Fulton Tire Shop, and they stayed there until we moved down into the Woodsdale area. After my father had died, my mother and I moved down into the Woodsdale area. It was a home that my father had bought. **My father had been a WWI veteran**, and with that, in those days, if I went on to school, you got some--I think, I am not sure, don't quote me--I was able to be educated at the Mount. It was very, very difficult for my mother to send me to the Mount. I was an only child. The store and the little bit of property was her way--and I think she got some sort of benefit from my father's being a veteran. We paid monthly at the Mount, and it was very difficult. Then, I went into go to Duquesne, and in those days, there weren't that many Italian girls that went to college. I am 62 years old. Mostly, if you educated, it was always the boy, and they have an Italian sorority at Duquesne University, and I went to it about three years ago for a reunion, I hadn't been there for years. I was the old one there. Those women were amazed. They kept asking me how was it then? How did you have the opportunity to come to Pittsburgh? I was just another common sorority girl. They seemed to want to know more and more, these younger women, who were probably in their 30s and early 40s. So, that goes to show you how the education system has so changed from the time when I was a young girl to today.

MK: So you were sort of the exception?

FC: Yes, because not that many Italian girls got to go to Mount de Chantal to school because it was not a cheap school, and mostly your good income families were able to afford that kind of an education. How many Italian people had that kind of income? There were a few doctors and a few lawyers, but to my knowledge, and I am not an authority, (this is just from what I remember, and my mind doesn't remember that well) there weren't that many professional people when I was a high school girl that were of Italian descent.

MK: So, this suggests that your mother went to a lot of sacrifice?

FC: Yes, she did. I am very, very grateful that I had that opportunity to have that education, because I feel that I--not that it brought in more money, because there were a lot of girls who just went to public high schools and they succeeded, if you want to say success in the term of

material things--but, there was something that I received from the Mount and received from being able to go away to college in those days when most Italian girls just stayed at home and worked in their own city, and maybe went to a business college, or maybe went to West Liberty State College or somewhere of that nature, or West Virginia University, because that was the State University at the time . . . I feel very fortunate that my mother made the sacrifices and saw what the value of an education was, because I felt I got something there that I can't put into monetary value or words or showing, but in myself, I feel very blessed. [[Return to Top](#)]

MK: Why do you suppose your mother went to those extremes?

FC: Well, I feel that because she was a widow, and I think she sensed what education--I feel, as I said she was a widow, and being older when she had me, and she had lost a first child (it was born and then it died) and then she had me, she was 41 or 42, she wanted me to have a good education. I think she realized that an education in life is one of the most important things that you can give your child.

MK: You say your mother had a difficult time?

FC: Yes. She couldn't speak the language, and she had nobody here. She had a brother over near Philadelphia, but he had a family. Can you imagine leaving your home country at 37, and not knowing the language? Coming over here, and your father dies--an old man, I think he was in his late 80s--and then the one that was the priest (and she was the housekeeper for her brother), he died, and then she had a child, and she couldn't speak the language, and she had such difficulty at birth. When she was in the hospital, a nun heard crying and screaming because she was in so much pain, and she couldn't express herself; and the nun, I think she called someone who was an Italian man or told someone, "If you could hear the anguish that this woman is saying, the pain she is in, you would feel so much pity on her". That is just what some of the people had to endure in those days. I think that was not easy. Picture yourself going into another country and not knowing anything and having everybody in another land. She did try to learn English. She did go to school. She took up First Aid where they had it in schools--I don't know if it was for the War or something--they had it in the school system. They taught you different things, and she took her test orally because she couldn't speak English. When she had this little confectionery after my father died, I used to write down the numbers for the checks because my mother could hardly. . . How could she? We take for granted . . . So she would have to look at the number, and then write the check. There were a lot of drawbacks that the average person born here and speaking the language would just never give it a second thought.

MK: Was your mother--did she live in sort of isolation then, because of her language?

FC: No. My mother was a very religious person, very religious. She kept this little confectionery after my father died, and she loved a garden. When we moved out into the Woodsdale area, she had a garden. She liked to sew. She used to teach sewing in Italy. It is sad that I can't sew at all, because she did all the sewing that was required in the home. She liked to cook. She didn't cook like these women that are over there that were on the farm and were very strong. They had large families, and they cooked in bulk. She didn't cook that way. They were more or less considered an artiste, in Italy, the people who did not live off of the land. They were called "artiste", I think.

That is what we were always told. They were people who maybe did sewing for a living. Her father was like a landscapist. They did not do farming like my husband's people did, so their lives was not as strenuous, and the women were not that big, muscle-type people that went out and did this hard physical labor; that is what my mother was more or less.

MK: So, she had an active life in the Church?

FC: Well, she didn't belong to any organizations. Who belonged to organizations in those days? Unless it was like the Christian Mother's Association. She couldn't, because we were open, the business, seven days a week, and we closed at 1 o'clock on Sunday. That in itself . . . to raise one child and take care of a house and run a small little confectionery. We closed the gasoline station shortly after my father died because we just couldn't keep up with it. Then she was, about 66, when we moved out to Woodsdale. What could a woman that age do? Take care of a house, take care of a garden, sew. We used to get the Italian newspaper all the time, I think it was called El Progresso, and it came, probably, from New York, and my mother used to get that each day. She liked the Italian newspaper. It is just like my mother-in-law has the Italian radio station on all the time in Jamaica, New York, that is near Long Island, and they listen to the Italian radio. Why wouldn't they?

MK: But there was no Italian radio here?

FC: No. But she got this Italian newspaper. She liked good things, and she appreciated good things. Some of her sewing, I admired very much. I would never have that type of talent. Of course, she only had one child, and I had five; there is a difference there. My mother's and father's grave--I go there quite often, and I remember so many things that my mother would say. But, these points about family, about ancestors, about situations, I didn't listen like I should. I think these people that tell their history on cassettes and give those to their children--it is something, there is no money value on that.

MK: What are your earliest memories of your home and your home life?

FC: **It was not much of a home.** How could you have much of a home? It was behind . . . I can remember that first we had a little house that was behind the gas station, and we used to have these stoves that were heated, and I can remember my mother dressing me in front of those little stoves. We didn't have a furnace. We had a grate in the dining room, and I remember my mother used to put--we had Italian bread--and she used to take garlic and smooth it over the bread and put on olive oil and put it in the oven, and that is what I would have for breakfast. I can remember that we would warm up milk. We had corn flakes and Wheaties. I can remember when the butter looked like lard, and then you got a little yellow packet and you mixed it together, and you made that margarine. I can remember the ice man coming, and he had a truck and he had these prongs and a big block of ice and brought it into the kitchen. I can remember an old black stove that my mother used to cook on. [[Return to Top](#)] We always had a dog. We had a bathroom that was next to the kitchen. Well, you know, these young kids when they get out of college and they go to New York City--I think they live and their lives are harder than any of the boarders that--we used to call them boarders, that would live with the families, whether they were Italian or Lebanese (I don't know if the Germans had them, but I know the Italians had

them, and they had them over in New York so much that you came over, they got you started. They used to give you food, and they washed your clothes. These kids, because my kids lived in Manhattan, the way they have to live--they don't make that much money--they live, I think, harder than the boarders years ago, because the boarders had a network, and at least they had food. Over there, people could walk over you, and they don't care, but they have to learn. I can remember, I walked to school, and my father and mother didn't understand the school system that much, but I did study, and I always made good grades. I thank God, that the Lord allowed me to have the ability to learn. I prided in making good grades. Our house was nothing to brag about. No way. I remember that Christmas was very important, and I can remember my First Holy Communion. I can remember Confirmation. My mother, I think, made my dress for Confirmation, and I remember the day of my First Holy Communion. I never went to a Catholic school because it was too far, and I went to a public school. I can remember the religion. Every Sunday we walked to church, and I can still see my mother's hands and how she prayed. We didn't have many material things. In those days everybody took a bus. You never missed what you never had.

MK: So you were born approximately 1932?

FC: Yes sir.

MK: That would have been the height of the Depression?

FC: That is when I was born.

MK: They were difficult times. Did the Italian community kind of hold together at all?

FC: **No. I don't think my parents were involved in the Italian community at all.** There was my uncle's family next door to us, but there were none, to my knowledge, of Italian people in Fulton. [[Return to Top](#)] I know I am wrong, because now that I think of it, another family . . . but as a whole we did not belong to any Italian clubs or Italian organizations. I did go to school in Wheeling (this man who came from Italy) to learn Italian. I did learn Italian at Duquesne University because I had wanted to be (how crazy) an interpreter--like these places that would sell to Italian companies, and they had to have somebody interpret the Italian language, but that got absolutely no where. They did have Italian at Duquesne University. That is why I went to Duquesne University, because I wanted to learn Italian. But I cannot speak it. I murder the language. I can understand it, but I am certainly, no way, a person who can talk Italian. I chop the language up, but that is how things are.

MK: What was going on next door with your uncle's family?

FC: He was prosperous in the tire shop business, and he had two children. My aunt lived behind there, and she still lives behind there. She is 88, and he is 98. They traveled a lot after their children got older, and their children are both in Wheeling with families, and they have grandchildren. My uncle, his son, his grandson, and he has great-grandchildren--there are four generations that have been able to remain in the city of Wheeling.

MK: Growing up though, were you close to those?

FC: Yes. We always had the holidays, like Thanksgiving, they came to my mother's home. Christmas, we went over to my aunt's. New Year's, we went over to my aunt's sister. We didn't have cars, and we didn't have all this television, everybody here, there, and everywhere--the families were much closer, much closer. Those days are absolutely gone. We never had gatherings where you played bocci like some people over in Bellaire or, I'm sure, Steubenville. There is much more of a stronger Italian element, where on Sunday all the women would get together and all the men--we never did anything like that. We would go to Wheeling Park. It was a treat for us to get the bus in the morning, and we would pack a picnic basket, we would go swimming, and then we would catch the bus before it got dark, and come home; and that, was really, compared to what people today do when they go to Florida. That's life.

MK: At the holidays, Christmas, were there distinctly Italian things that your family did?

FC: Yes. We had fish on Christmas Eve, and we had these little, I don't remember the name, they were real tiny, like minnows, and there used to be a fish market on Market Street, and we used to put them in flour and fry them. Then there was this squid that had like ink that came out, and you would take that squid, and you would fill it with bread and garlic and parsley, and I don't know what else, and you would bake that. There were some sort of beans that they call lupine that you would put in and soak for a number of days, I don't know how long, maybe two or three days, and you would cook them. So we had our type of food that we ate, and the gifts were not that many. My mother used to make this soupenglazen (in some Italian cookbooks, I still see it), but children--I never inherited her quality of cooking. I was never able to stand by in the kitchen and learn, because I used to work in a bank, and then after I worked, I got married and had children. When she died, I had three children. I was taking care of the children, and I never learned her skills of cooking. My cousin, who would be the daughter of this uncle who is 98, when she would have us over, she would have these Italian dishes that she would make this soupenglazen, and she used to make ravioli with, I think, you use sugar and cinnamon and cheese, instead of putting tomato sauce on it. I am not sure, but I think that is what she used. I never did that. They would go to the Strip District, a place in Pittsburgh, that has all different types of Italian products or up in Wintersville, (I think there is a store called Fredrico's that sells Italian products), and for the holidays they would go there. My mother used to make this Easter bread for Easter, and one bread had cheese in it. I don't know the recipe, and I don't think I could even find where it would be. I vaguely can remember tasting it, but she always made that at Easter time. In the store, we didn't sell much beef because to buy beef, the turnover wasn't that much; so we had more pork, a loin of pork, so we ate more pork, simply because that was the only meat we had to eat. There was not a variety. You had a very limited menu of food. [[Return to Top](#)] You had a very limited menu of clothes. You had no car. You went no where. We used to sit out in front of the gasoline station in a chair and watch the cars go along National Road and look at the different licenses. That used to be a treat in the summer. That was a big treat. Then they used to have a carnival in Fulton that would come down to this empty lot. That was a treat. To go to the park, to come into town, to be able to get an ice cream cone . . . I remember going on a train from Wheeling to Pittsburgh. My goodness you thought you had a million dollars given to you. It was the way you valued things--was entirely different than the way today. I am sure today that there are a lot of people who have a lot less than that. It is just where you are, and

who you are accustomed to being with that you can, more or less, compare. You know, when you look on television, the way people live on television, we don't know how lucky we are, that we are not with--in filth with no sewers and no water supply. Just to have a warm house and running water and a bathroom is really something to feel that you are rich when you compare it to other people in other parts of the world.

MK: That is true. Tell me more about your mother and your father and this being Italian in Wheeling. Were there Italian lullabies that you ever sang, any special things they said over?

FC: They talked in Italian, and I was only four when my father had a heart attack, and that made it very hard on my mother. She used to worry about him, and in those days, they didn't have all of this medicine, and he had to run and sell gasoline and people would come there and knock on our door at night, and he would have to go out and sell gasoline, and working in the little confectionery, and I can remember he used to get pain and hold his heart. I walked to school, and I remember that I was saying my prayers one night, and there was a flood. This was in, I can't even remember, 1945 when my father died, and I heard these screams, and I ran downstairs, and we had had this house that was picked up and moved. They somehow picked it up, put it under wood, or somehow a truck had moved the house a little further from where it was, because my uncle and my father separated their properties. My father had had a heart attack, and he just dropped dead. I ran out of the basement, and I ran over to my uncle, and it is a blessing that my cousin, the one who is the boy, that he called up the priest, and the priest came. I can remember that he said, "Frank, if you can hear me, you say the Act of Contrition" or whatever. I can still see, vaguely . . . I am not certain of everything, but I think his lips were already blue, and he just had died, so that was it. Then, of course, my mother tried to carry on, and I admire her because if she didn't have that little confectionery, she would have had to go work in a dry cleaners or go clean house. What skills did she have? That is the bottom line, and you see that is why I wanted my children, my daughters, so much to be educated, because you never know what life brings, and if you don't have any skills, how are you going to put food on the table?

MK: Was it after your father died that you started at Mount de Chantal?

FC: Yes. I think one reason was that I got a warm meal up there, and they kept the girls up there, in this Mount DeChantal area. Whereas, if you came in town to school, sometimes the girls would wander around town during lunch time, and my mother always feared . . . She had a fear for me because I was an only child and she had me late in life, and she was overly protective of me.

MK: So you stayed at the school?

FC: **No. I came home every day, but when you went to the school,** you were given a warm meal. You went in the morning, and you came home at the end of the day. They didn't have like the cafeteria style today, they had home cooked meals. They had a farm up there. They had ripe tomatoes, corn, and different things they grew, and it was all homestyle cooking where one girl would come out and bring out the bowls and plates and serve, and then the next week, another girl would take over, a couple of girls for each table. [[Return to Top](#)] (466)

MK: What are your recollections of downtown Wheeling on the rare occasions when you went downtown?

FC: I remember there was one celebration and I don't know what anniversary it was, it was something, and then we used to have a streetcar, and I can remember the crowd and how hard it was to get on that streetcar. It never left my mind--I must have been tiny, just three or four or five years old--just vaguely remember, like you have little things drift into your mind, and I can remember that they had a parade for Stone and Thomas. I can remember that years ago, and the city used to be very thriving. I have gone to Stone and Thomas. I can remember the Hub Department Store, and I was just talking with a priest--we are getting a new priest in at the Cathedral--and talking about the new methods, the fax machines, and what is the newest method, the computer, what is the newest thing out now?

CK: The electronic mail?

FC: Well, I can remember the Hub--it is an empty lot in back of the Riley Law Building, it was on Market Street--and the Hub was a very fine quality store. It had a men's department. It had a women's department, children's department. It had beautiful hats. Everyone would wear hats in those days. For church, you wore a hat. Anyhow, they used to have these vacuums, I don't know what they were called, they were a vacuum. When you purchased something, you put your money or your bill, and it was things that went up and around the wall, and it went to the office. [[Return to Top](#)] Someone mentioned that the computer in Kaufman's in Pittsburgh was slow, and all the people were in line because of this computer system going on. I said that I can remember the Hub--I was saying this at the Rectory of the Cathedral--how years ago that is how you paid. People used to buy turtles at this fish market. I don't know if it was Kennedy's Fish Market on Market Street, and they used to paint the backs of the little turtles, and I used to buy turtles. I had turtles and you had turtle food, and now you wouldn't be able to buy a turtle if you tried. They are, you know, banned. I can remember the Market House. I can remember walking through the Market House and how the venders were there selling their goods. (518)

MK: Were some of those Italian?

FC: Yes. There was one man, Mr. DiClemente, and he had a bin, or whatever they called, a stall (that is what they called them), a market stall. **Then, I think up on top of the Market,** was the Elliot School of Business at one time. Then it moved over into the Hawley Building. It is no longer here. The Elliot School of Business--that is what most girls and boys would go to after they graduated from high school. [[Return to Top](#)] Who had the money to go to college? I can remember this B&O railroad going in there, we went on and went over to Philadelphia and got the train, and I think it took you to Pittsburgh and you got a train to go to Philadelphia, and that was beautiful inside there, it was beautiful. I am trying to think. We have a lot of wealth of history in churches. A lot of wealth of history of American Legion. My father was a veteran, and I belonged to the Legionnaires, the little girls, and I can remember selling poppies. I remember they gave my mother a flag when my father died, an American flag. I still have my father's uniform from WWII, and have it put in moth balls. I don't know what condition it is in. I am trying to think about Wheeling. I remember the streetcars. I went to Fulton school. (554)

MK: Tell me everything you can remember about your early school years in Fulton.

FC: Well, we had a choir, a little chorus. I can remember that we had little chairs. We had a "Dick and Jane" book. "Run, Dick, run. See little Dick and Jane", reading books. We used to have these little chairs that we would sit around reading, and we had a principal. He had an office at the top, and he was the one that if you were so bad, he used to whip you with a strap. There was some boy, he was so bad, and he would go up there, and you could hear him screaming. I can remember the water fountain, and I can remember the playground. I can remember this teacher that when you didn't do anything right in math, it was like the 4th grade, he would come back--we had these desks, you see them around, these old school desks--and he would shake you. Get you by the shoulders and just shake you. You were just about shook to death. Then they had these big windows that they could open up and close. I remember some of the children, how poor they were; the way they were dressed. I have some old school pictures. I still see some of the people around, but very, very few from when I was in 1st grade. We would walk once a week to catechism class at church. We would go to the Catholic school and have catechism one day a week. There were different teachers. Some teachers you got along with, and some teachers you didn't get along with. Years ago, if I am not mistaken, if you were a school teacher, you couldn't marry. If you married, you could not be a teacher any longer. I think that is right, but maybe I am wrong. I remember this one teacher, Miss Gainer, the way I understood it, if you married, years ago, you could not continue to teach. I think the people who were teachers came from better families. Maybe their brother was a doctor--in order for them to be educated. They left a great impression on me. We used to have Palmer Method Writing, and we took pride. We practiced that writing and practiced that Palmer Method Writing. Then, I can remember how we would pledge allegiance to the flag. We had our cloak room. We had the Christmas plays. The school, it was a good school. I was always fat, and it was hard for me to do any kind of athletics. My mother was so worried that when I would go on the playground out at Wheeling Park, she was so fearful that I would hurt myself. Instead, the way the children romped and everything . . . I made all my children learn how to swim. I took them out to the Y. I made them be flexible. Of course, today, they have so many children that take dancing, which I think is wonderful for girls. In those days, who could afford for . . . ? Who had a car, first of all, to take you to a dancing school? That was only the better class of people. We never had Scouts, that I know of, for girls down in Fulton school. [[Return to Top](#)] Then I went to a Parochial school when I was in the 7th grade. I had learned so well in the public school that I got to do two grades in one year. This sister taught the 7th and 8th grade. It was the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade, and those kids were so bad they used to make these airplanes out of paper and throw them out the window, and jump out the window and jump out onto the roof that was to the priest. It is funny, but it wasn't funny for the poor nun, because, Sister Fredrica . . . How she had to control those kids, I'll never know. But I could see the Parochial school did not have the money that the public school had. I could see the very difference. When I went to the Mount . . .

MK: What was the name of the Parochial school?

FC: St. Joan of Arc Catholic school. Of course, St. Joan of Arc school is no longer, and the church is going to close, I think the end of next June, and it is going to merge with the Cathedral. So that is that. It will be finished. It was the church for Fulton. **Then the Mount was so different.** The grounds were beautiful, but the girls were very--just snobbish element. Whether

they just didn't know how to blend in or whether it was my interpretation of my feeling inferior of being Italian and the majority of them came from nice homes, had nice clothes, had nice figures, were much more confident . . . Maybe it was self-inflicted with me that I felt they were, because my girls went there, and they didn't feel that it was as much as I felt that it was; but it is still a snobbish school. It is a very good school, but it still has a (I'll be honest, at least I am honest the way I feel) . . . Now some other person says that is all self-inflicted, it is not that type of school, but that is how I feel. [[Return to Top](#)] Of course, Linsly, my boys went to Linsly, and it is a very competitive school. The kids are so competing. It makes it hard for you to relax and you miss a lot, because my boys went to . . . My youngest boy always said that at St. Michael's Catholic school, it was more like a family and they felt comfortable, and it was just a wonderful good feeling, where in Linsly you are always very--you can just feel that competitive edge all the time. The people there are out to get the best grades and get into the best colleges. I feel that the Mount pushes that too. I have seen a lot of success with people who have gone to the public high schools or the Catholic schools that were not private. I have seen a tremendous amount of success from those people too. So it is the individual. I think it is a lot of times, home guidance. There is not just one factor that you can say why did that happen. You can't do that. There are many factors that enter into it, but I do feel, and this is just my personal opinion, that these private schools, they better have . . . I felt, they will contradict me, this is my feeling--that the schools--you have more efficient ways of telling people what is marketable, not what is the best college they can push you into.

MK: It sounds as those, although you had this Italian upbringing and Italian past, which you weren't too sure about, but you had all of this ability too. You were able to do two grades, two years in one?

FC: That is because Fulton school was a very good school. I am not saying that St. Joan of Arc wasn't a good school. It was a good school, but they said that I could do it. (740)

MK: So, you not only went to this competitive school that had this snobbish side, but you were able to go on to college.

FC: Yes. I went up there for the Italian. There they had more of an ethnic group. There were Italian people there. There were Slavic people there. There were first generation immigrants that were going to college. Their families had come over, and they worked the steel mills. They worked the coal mines. They worked the glass factories. They worked with their hands, and they wanted a better life for their children--that was Duquesne at the time I went there. The people there . . . I didn't feel that inferiority that I felt at the Mount, because where I lived in Fulton, we didn't have a car, we didn't have a decent home. Well, who went to the Mount from Wheeling? They had, the majority of them had, nice homes, nice cars, nice clothes. My mother couldn't even speak English, and those women up there all spoke English--most of them, I am not saying all of them. Can you understand the difference is, and how you would feel? It is only normal that you would feel that way, and maybe a lot of it is self-inflicted. At Duquesne, they did not have a big dorm. They did not have many people that dormed there, and I would come home every weekend; but I know, I know, that probably if I were to investigate, a lot of the people who were in Duquesne at my time have done so well with their lives. I don't only mean materialistically, but I mean helping society, accomplishing things, whether it would be in law, whether it would

be in medicine, whether it would be in teaching, whether it would be in social work--any facet of life, not only just acquiring for their own comforts, what their talents have been able to give.

MK: The other part of being there was that you found people who were more like yourself?

FC: Yes. Yes, Dr. Kline. But, I didn't do as well there, because the Mount is a very structured school, and Duquesne was not a structured college. You go in with a large crowd, and you have a teacher that lectures, and your time is not structured. You don't have someone to say, "Well, what did you do? How did you do this? Did you get this done?" You are an adult, and I don't think I was able to cope with that as well as maybe, had I gone to a structured girls' school. You see a girls' school and a small school, there is a difference. Maybe if you had gone to Park (of course Park wasn't there at the time) but gone to a larger school where there were more different types of segments of society together . . . That is not that way at the Mount any more, because there are a lot of people with scholarships and a lot of people that go there that aren't the kinds of families that used to go there. The other schools had more of a blend of society. I think going to a bigger school--it is not as structured. It is like going to West Virginia University versus going to Wheeling College. There is more structure in a smaller number of people, where the grounds. You just go to the same place all the time. Where the other is--you are your own little you and if you want to sleep until three in the afternoon, nobody cares. In a more structured--you have to follow like when you are in high school. (790)

MK: So, did you meet your husband at Duquesne?

FC: No. My husband and I were a matched marriage. My husband came from New York City to visit his aunt in Elm Grove, and he met me. We saw each other, I think, three times before we got married. That is how, years ago, a lot of people were married, through meeting of families.

MK: Can you say a little bit more about that? How you met and what you mean by matched marriage?

FC: You've heard of matched marriage like over in Japan or some of those countries over there in the East, Middle East, wherever. They don't even see each other until the day they marry, some of the countries. I don't know what country that is. Have you heard of that, where they don't see each other until they marry? Years back, I am sure among the Greek people, the Lebanese, one family would say, "I know a girl that would be nice for this boy." So they would have a way that two young people would meet because they would have so many similarities. They have similar backgrounds, and that makes a person have many more common interests, and that is one of the strongest basis for a good marriage. I feel that the more you have differences in the way you think, the way you do, the way you act . . . How can you blend in when somebody is so entirely different from you? That passion leaves, I mean if you have a sexual attraction, that leaves. So this is where you meet, and I met my husband. We had very similar backgrounds, and we didn't have a chance to date that much because he was over there, and I was over here. We met in September, and I was married the following September. I met him the next time at Christmas time, and then Easter I went over there; and then I think he came at Memorial Day, and I got a ring, and then I went over there before the wedding. Then he came here in September, and we were married.

MK: How did you meet?

FC: He had an aunt and uncle that lived in Elm Grove, and he and his mother came over to see his aunt and uncle, and this lady called my mother and me up and invited us to go over. That is how my husband and I met.

MK: Did your mother like him?

FC: Yes. Yes. I really didn't like him that much, but she said, "I think this man is for you." My husband was a very good man, and you know, sometimes when you are young, you are attracted by these charmers who talk to one girl one day, and another girl another day. They have a very smooth personality that can entice women, and you are sometimes more attracted to those people, and basically they are not worth anything when you get down to it. A lot of them are very lazy, and they don't have good moral character, and down, down, down the road. . . My husband was a good person. He was a hard worker. He was sincere, and my mother saw a lot more than I saw, because it's like . . . You know, I tell my girls a lot of things, but they can't see, but you live hard knocks, you see a lot of things from living so many days, and you are able to comprehend personalities. [[Return to Top](#)]

MK: So he lived in . . . ?

FC: In Jamaica, New York, which is right off of Manhattan. I guess it is part of Long Island. His father and mother are still there. As a matter of fact, we are going there two weeks from now for a weekend. His father is 95, I think, and his mother is 88.

MK: So you raised your family in Jamaica?

FC: No. No. My husband came here to live when I got married. That was very hard on his mother, very hard on his mother, and my husband has been here--we have been married 34 years, I think.

MK: And what did he do then?

FC: He was an engineer. He worked for Grumman Aircraft. He was a civil engineer. He went to New York University. They moved it from where it was before, now over there in New York City. It is in the Bronx now. I don't know where it was before. He graduated in civil engineering, and he worked for Grumman. Then he came to Wheeling, and he got on with the State Road, and then he went in with this man that did sewers and water works type work. The man didn't have any children, so then he sold the business to my husband and this other man that my husband knew, and he has been here ever since. We have raised five children. The sad thing is, Dr. Kline, these young people cannot stay in this area, and that hurts, that hurts especially when you are a family that is so closely knit. There are some people who don't feel it as much. It isn't that they don't love their children, but I guess, maybe, their expectations of life are different from what other people expect life to be. I feel a lot of Italian people, not all of them, like one generation after another. My uncle has been able to have four generations stay in this area.

MK: But your kids are scattering out?

FC: Yes. That is life, and there are so many families like that around here. It is very sad. Because I think the young need the old, and the old need the young. But that is the trend of the United States, and probably getting that way, maybe in Japan and in those other places too. (872)

MK: Was Wheeling a very different sort of place for your children to grow up in than it was for you to grow up in?

FC: I think it was much easier for my children. I think Wheeling is a wonderful place to raise a family. I think they have very good school system, there are good people here, you don't have to worry. The people are, I would say the largest percentage, are honest. I think there is a strong history here. There are many churches. I think they have wonderful recreation places. I think the city is easy to get around in. If I were in New York, how would I ever be able to take my children to the Y, or take them to Scouts, or take them for piano lessons? It would take me two hours to get where I could, in Wheeling, in five minutes. Now, what do you do in a case like that? You don't let your children be exposed to all of those things. We have the Stifel Arts Center. They took art there. They had field trips. There are all kinds of culture, all kinds of musical things they could participate in, all kinds of music teachers. There are different events that come here. For a small city that is so cheap to live in, that the taxes are not high, the getting around is not difficult, you have everything here you want. What else do you want? I mean, what else do you want on Earth? But, the drawback comes. I was able to stay here, but my children . . . Where are these jobs for these young people? That hurts.

MK: What about the issue of being Italian and the Italian heritage? Was this something you have tried to instill in your own children, or were you anxious to see them become . . . ?

FC: I think a little bit of both. You have to appreciate other nationalities. I don't think the Italian people are any better than anybody else, and I don't think they are any worse than anybody else. I think the Italian people have gotten an awfully bad name with the Mafia. I think that there is good and bad in every nationality. I think there is talent in every nationality, and I always tried to make them realize that they are no better than anybody else, but they are no worse than anybody else. They should try to be proud of their heritage. Why shouldn't they be proud of their heritage? They just shouldn't go around and boast their heritage. They should be proud of it in a quiet, inner way. They shouldn't throw it down and say, "Oh, it's all Mafia, it's all this, that, and the other." No, it is not all that. There is good in the Italian people, and there is bad in the Italian people; but there is good in the other nationalities, and bad in other nationalities. So, with an inner quietness, yes I am thankful and proud to be an Italian, but I don't feel that because I am Italian, I am any better than anyone else. I don't go around and boast that. But, I am thankful that they wanted to go over and see their country. I'd never be able to travel. I am not able to travel, and maybe when they get my age, they won't be able to travel. I thank God the way they went over there. I couldn't go over there--the backpack, the cheapest ways in those pinzions, the heat of the summer, and they all sleep in a room. I mean that really takes a lot of dedication to want to go see your homeland when you have to live under those kinds of conditions; and get the cheapest rate to get over on a plane, whether it is a Pakistani plane or a secondary plane to get

over there. They made it, and they got to walk the streets of Italy, and they got to see it. Maybe later on in life, who knows, they will never be able to do that.

MK: I forgot to ask you your father's full name.

FC: My father's full name was Frank, I think his name was Antonio, I can't know for sure, my uncle probably knows, Frank Antonio DeCesare.

MK: DeCesare? That was your maiden name?

FC: Yes. That was my maiden name.

MK: And your mother was?

FC: Her name was Maria Silvi (that means forest in Italy).

MK: Here is Kathy come up, and she has done a lot of the things you wanted to do?

FC: Yes.

MK: She studied Italian?

FC: Yes. But you see, people today have so much more self-confidence. I guess the parents aren't as strict as they used to be. The transportation is much easier. The world has become much smaller. My kids . . . I had a daughter live in Hollywood, California. I had three kids right in Manhattan. If you don't think that is a worry for a mother . . . But they got that out of their system. So, that's life.

MK: They got that out of their system and came back?

FC: I thank God every day that they are in Pittsburgh. I feel myself most blessed. Wheeling is a beautiful city. Everybody that comes here--you have to admit what it is--geographically it is beautiful; the hills, the mountains, the way the buildings are, the old homes, the streets. The National Road--you go along that National Road, that is a beautiful National Road. We don't appreciate it. Look what the children have. They have the parks. They have good schools. They have good churches. They have enough places to buy clothes. There is all kind of entertainment. What more do you want on this earth? But there are no jobs.

CK: I just wanted to ask you why you decided to study Italian when you went off to school?

FC: I said that I wanted to be an interpreter. These business that would deal with Italian trade, maybe that sold things that had dealings with, where they had to translate Italian--a translator. That is what I wanted to be, but that was so far fetched, that . . . I should have been a school teacher or something like that. That is the main reason I went to Duquesne, because no other school around here within two or three hours . . . Now could you see a widow woman allowing me to go eight or nine hours away? In those days you didn't that. So I went to Pittsburgh, and I

took up personnel management. Well, I never used that. I worked in a bank for about five years, but in those days, if you were a bank teller, you did everything. Today, everything is on computer and departmentalized, and they have college graduates working in a bank. Years ago, you just got out of high school and worked in a bank. My goodness, the bank in Fulton, you had a card, and everything was written on it, and one teller did everything. All the tellers did everything. That is how those little banks worked. Now, today, I couldn't any more work in a bank--the system and the way it is so changed. I didn't make use of my education, but still when you did work in a bank, you did a lot more things--one person was given a lot more things to do, because it was just a small hometown bank. All these farmers would come in. People, years ago, what did they do? They kept their money under their mattress. Who had a safety deposit box? And the tax system and the complicated world that it is today . . .

MK: Earl, is there anything we missed?

EH: I have a question. I didn't want to say anything, but I have a question. When your father came here and he boarded, was the people he boarded with--did he know from the Old Country or were they strangers?

FC: I don't know. But the people were so nice, because my father would take me down to visit her, Christina, and she gave me a ring. I think I still have it. That would be the lady down on 19th Street. My uncle could tell you a lot about the immigrants, what they went through--who had a shower, baths. This woman, Christina, was very good to my father. He would never have taken me there as a little girl, if he didn't have good feelings towards her. I still see a relative, I think it must be her grandson and he must be in his late 60s, I still see him around.

MK: The question you are not sure of is how your father found his way to that place.

FC: I don't know. I should have listened, but I didn't listen. I can't say.

EH: You know how we call it networking today?

FC: Yes sir. The young college kids have their network. I am sorry, Mr. Hall, I don't know. I don't know if when he came here . . . I think, my uncle would probably know a lot more. I hope my uncle does talk to you. I will call him, and then I have your card and I can call you and see what they say. I will call my cousin first. She is older than me.

CK: What is her name?

FC: Rosalie Viola, Manual Viola, Mrs. Manual Viola. I am going to call her, because he has been here for so long, and his mind is so alert,

MK: It would be great to talk to him. Thank you Mrs. Cerrone.

FC: Thank you very much, Dr. Kline.

[**ATTENTION:** I was unable to verify the spellings of three Italian words: Capo Daqua, soupenglazen, and pinziones. I spelled them phonetically. Thanks. jcs]