

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Fascism in Italy Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 768

MARIANGELA BRUNO

Interviewed

by

Elisa Calabrese

on

June 10, 1986

MARIANGELA BRUNO

Mariangela Bruno was born to Antonio and Caterina Bruno on March 16, 1967 in Youngstown, Ohio. Mariangela has two brothers: Joseph, age 21, and Emilio, age 18.

Graduating from Sharon High School in June 1985, she began her college education in September of that year. Her career goal is to receive a M.B.S. in hospital administration. Presently Mariangela is employed with Strouss' Company and Scotto's Pizza Shop.

Honors, awards, and other recognition include: Honor student, French honor award and President Academic Fitness Award. Mariangela is a member of St. Joseph Church in Sharon, Pennsylvania and has special interests in dance, running and cooking.

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INTERVIEWEE: MARIANGELA BRUNO

INTERVIEWER: Elisa Calabrese

SUBJECT: World War II, Italian American experiences,
folk stories, cultural differences

DATE: June 10, 1986

C: This is an interview with Mary Bruno for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, by Elisa Calabrese on June 10, 1986, at Buechner Hall. Topics of discussion are fascism in Italy and first-generation Italian-Americans.

Can you please tell me a little bit about yourself? Your age, family background, brothers and sisters and so on?

B: I'm nineteen years old. I have two brothers. My oldest brother is Joseph Bruno. Emilio Bruno graduates this year; he's my youngest brother, he's eighteen. My mom and dad both came from Italy. My dad still has all his family in Italy. My dad is 49, my mom is 47. My mom came here when she was fifteen years old. My mom and dad met through letters; she went back to Italy, got married, and then came here when she was about 20 or 21. My father came over a year after that. So they were separated for one year. I still have all my grandparents, and I have three of my great-grandparents. They all live in Italy. I have two grandparents that live in Italy, three great-grandparents that still live in Italy, and two grandparents here, who live in Austintown.

C: Tell me a little bit about your grandparents, stories that you have heard growing up, your favorite personal experiences of your family. I understand that you have visited Italy once.

B: Yes. Well; my grandparents here are still old-fashioned and keep all the traditions.

C: Tell me some of the traditions of the Italian family.

B: Grandma's always in the kitchen, you know, and she does not

drive. She was married when she was fourteen years old. You sit down at the table with them, and you're just there and everybody just respects them. Grandpa's always at the head of the table and everybody just looks up to them, and treats them with like a great honor. I know it sounds funny when you say it, but it is the honest-to-God truth.

C: Sure.

B: Grandpa was in the war.

C: What war?

B: World War II.

C: In Italy?

B: In Italy, right.

C: Tell me some of the stories that were passed down to you.

B: I don't really know exactly anything about the war, but my mom always said Grandpa was never there; he was never home. She never really knew her father until she was a teenager because he was in the war and then when he came back, he worked.

C: Where did they live in Italy?

B: My mother is from Colobrarro. She showed me a picture; it's so different from here. The houses are stone, and right next to each other. It's just a small little village. My father is from Castroeggio; his father does construction. He was never home; he was always in West Germany doing construction. My father always talks about how it's so different here, because there he was young and he just walked everywhere, for miles upon miles. He just tells all these stories about how different it is in school. In school, when they got punished, they used to make them kneel on raw, dried beans. I used to laugh at my father about these stories, but they're so true. If he was punished, they'd put him in a corner, and he would have to sit there hour after hour. The discipline was just so much more than it is in the schools here, is what my father says. My father regrets sometimes not going to school. He's a tailor, but he likes to do construction like his father. He always wanted to go to college for that, engineering. That's why he wants his children to go to college; he wants what he never could have. That's just so evident in most foreign families that have come over here, the big land of opportunity. I can see my father misses his family quite a lot, and he doesn't really have anyone here, but my grandparents take him in like he's their son. Italian families are really close. American families are too, but it's just the traditions that keep that family alive. Every Christmas Eve, you're there, with all the

different food, all the fishes, everything. Every Sunday, you go to Grandma's. You tell your friends, "Sorry, I have to go to Grandma's." But you don't feel bad, or don't want to go. everybody just sits around and just talks. In the family, it's just always close, even though there are times when the family doesn't get along. As far as the war, also, they had to give up so much.

C: How did the war affect your grandfather?

B: Emotionally, he was just remembering everything that happened during the war, the killings and as much as they gave up, and him not being home with the family. Grandma always had to be the strong one. Grandma might be a small lady, but she was just always strong. She kept that family on their toes; she made the food even when Grandpa wasn't there. It wasn't just the idea of the food, it was just that the way she brought her children up was just a different way than they do here. Now my mom says that there really wasn't a closeness that my mother and I have. Now she has that closeness with her mother. My mom and I are very close, and I'd have to say she's my best friend. She misses some of the things that she couldn't have with her mother. There's a way that the family was close, but there are just so many walls, and it's just so different. My mom did not go anywhere. Even when she was engaged to my father, she always had to sit on another side of him. In some ways I really don't agree with that. They were pretty strict with me when I grew up. They would say, "You're Italian, your parents must be strict." My parents are strict, but they're so fair. I really don't think I would want it any other way. They would like to see me marry an Italian, maybe, but not necessarily; it's what I want.

C: What is your grandfather's name?

B: Emilio Mango. They have no middle names. He just talks about the actual fighting. He doesn't really go into detail. I think it kind of bothers him to go into detail about it. He always said that they always wanted something during the war. They always wanted you to give up all your valuables, and they gave to the point where they gave up their wedding bands. They just had their fiftieth anniversary, Sunday, and they got new wedding bands. That meant so much to him; that's the reason that he started crying at the anniversary. As soon as he put on the wedding band, he remembered . . . and he started crying. Everybody was crying. It was just so funny because Grandpa never cried. He's a very hard man to understand. He would do anything for anybody. Like I said, I think everyone just respects him so much. I look upon him highly; he does a lot for me. I would like to do a lot for him, but the war has affected him. He's been through a rough time.

C: Did he have any family members killed in the war?

- B: He lost a brother. He also had a half-brother that just recently died. He was in the war, but he didn't die from the war. He ended up having polio, so he died. He lost one brother. He has a big family. I feel kind of bad because I really don't know all his brothers and sisters. I've met them but I was real small when I met them.
- C: Tell me about your visit to Italy.
- B: When we went to Italy, I was four years old. There's so many little things that flash back in my head. Also, I see the pictures and I hear so much about it it's like you're actually there. I remember we went to this beach--my aunt has a beach house--and I guess I would always tell my grandmother, "Get the seashells," and we would walk miles upon miles. I remember that things were so different. The things you did there for amusement were like they would swing you in a basket, back and forth, and we would take walks. We went to a spring, where there was just the spring water, and just had a big picnic with the music, good food and lots of wine. You know, the typical Italian family. The houses were just so different. They're all stone. In August there are big festivals and everybody works together then, you see everybody. In Italy, the bride, in marriages, walks through the street. When my mom was married, they walked through. The best man dances around the bride while she's walking through, and all the children dance and sing to her. These are just customs that I know of. As far as remembering, I've seen so many pictures of the family, and of the places. I'm planning on going next year.
- C: That's wonderful. It's always nicer when you're older.
- B: Right, and even if I have to go by myself, I have places to stay. I want to go to Venice. You can't beat the old towns, you know; you can't beat those old villages. They're just so different. My father has pictures of his best friends; when we went to Italy, he saw them there. They did things like guys here would never have done. They used to go out by mountains and play James Bond. My father has pictures. It's so funny. You would think he's lying to us when he tells us these stories. We'll say, "You didn't do that, Dad." But he's serious. Those are the kind of things that they did. Here, it's unheard of; here, it's "Let's go out and get drunk." But things are so different there. I think that's the big difference between Italy and here. When my oldest brother left it was really hard on my mother, because they were just so close. When he comes home, it's a big get-together. My youngest brother is graduating; we'll probably have about 200 people, because that's all our close family. And the weddings are just so different. They're so special, just the dancing and everybody is just enjoying themselves, you know. There's so much kissing and hugging, and it's just such a great sensation.

- C: Tell me a little bit about yourself, as a fresh generation of family here.
- B: When I was small, we didn't speak English because we were around my family. They spoke English. We spoke both languages, but I guess we mainly spoke Italian. When we went to school, then we broke away. My brothers and I completely understood the language. We could speak a little bit.
- C: Now, but when you were younger that's all you spoke?
- B: Right, when we were younger, before we went to school that's all we spoke, Italian. I think that I feel more Italian, sometimes, than I do American. It's not because I'm putting down America at all, God knows I couldn't do that. But it's just that you grow up with the rules that you would have if you were in Italy, and the environment is just the same. Yet you're exposed to America where your father is saying, "You have this opportunity here, take it." I wasn't allowed to date until I was about seventeen years old. Even then, it was like, "You can go out, but . . ." It was just different. My oldest brother was very protective. He used to, if someone said hello to me, grab that guy and throw him against the wall. I would say, "He only said hello." My youngest brother didn't start doing that until recently. He started getting really protective. My mom is a seamstress, also, and she stayed home with us when we were small, then she got a job. In high school, I got real involved. I really did like school a lot. We still live the American life. But there are still the traditions; they always kept the traditions.
- C: Tell us some of the--they might be simple to you--traditions that you keep in your household today.
- B: As far as holidays, or just in general?
- C: In general, because being a first-generation Italian-American is different than maybe being third or fourth. You lose a lot of that heritage in the inter-marriage, where you're one hundred percent pure . . .
- B: You're just as Italian as your parents are. You go to your grandmother's house. That, right there, is just a tradition. It's just that you meet there, and the family is there; everybody is with each other.

Aunts, uncles, cousins, every Sunday you go to church and then you go to grandmother's house and have a good dinner. Then you go home. As far as within the family itself, a tradition that maybe isn't so evident in an American family is that everybody sits down to dinner together every night; you had to sit down. Tradition is kissing your parents good night, when they leave, or when you come in. That's a big tradition; it's just

respecting your parents. For me, it's just my life, so it doesn't seem like tradition.

When I first came to college, I had a hard time adjusting because the people were just a little bit different than what I was used to. What I mean by that is not because I didn't like it, but I'm seeing people do things that I never knew of, you know. Not that I'm naive but it's just different at home. You see the good and you see the bad, then you come here and it's like you're on your own, who cares about tradition? These people don't care, but you'd like to keep them. That was a big adjustment for me. But I go home every weekend.

C: Every weekend?

B: I don't think my parents would want it any other way. I don't think I would want it any other way, because I feel that I would lose contact. At first I felt like I was losing contact with my mom, and she was kind of, not hurt, but it was a big adjustment for her. She got a job, so that took her time.

C: You're her only girl?

B: Yes, and that makes a big difference also. If you're the only girl, it's almost like being the last child. Even though Emilio is younger than me, it's just different because I'm the only girl. They all protect me, and my uncle will always protect me; he's worse than my brother. They all expect me to do wrong. I'm pretty close with my cousin, to a certain point. I'm always as close as probably another Italian family might be. I don't know. As far as the family, we were really close when we were small, then everybody started to go their own way. But my oldest brother and I--I have a lot of respect for him; I always looked up to him. I miss him so much. I have not seen him or talked to him. He really is one that hurts from not being with the family on Sunday at the fiftieth anniversary. And that, right there, would have been the tradition. That part of a tradition, you just have to be there for something like that, but he couldn't be there. I can't say that he's her favorite grandchild, because she doesn't do that, but there's just a little something there between them. When we go on vacations, the whole family goes. When we were younger, every Sunday, we would go see Grandma and go see other relatives. We always had to go visit the other relatives. On a holiday, we would go around and visit all the people and we would always bring food. That's another thing, when you hold a party, your relatives are always there offering food.

C: What type of heritage would you say that you have in comparison maybe to another Italian of maybe a third or fourth generation?

B: What do you mean?

C: Your parents were born there, you have grandparents there so does that mean that no one in your family except your immediate brothers were all born here?

B: Yes, but when we went to Italy, we were there for a long time; it was almost like we were raised in Italy for a little bit.

C: How long were you there?

B: I think it was almost a year. It wasn't that we were raised, but we were exposed to [the culture]. And when you're at that age, that's when you learn the most.

C: And you did speak Italian.

B: Right, and we spoke so much. As far as the difference, I know another family that is Italian, but yet the children don't know half the traditions that we do. Yet, I know another family that may be in the third generation, and they still keep the tradition, but you don't hear the Italian spoken as much; you don't hear it at all. When you go to our house, it's spoken completely. When we get together, we speak English but Italian dominates, because that's the native language. I think that is a big difference. I suppose a lot of families keep their traditions; it doesn't really matter. A lot of times, families that come here might say, "Okay, we're going to live in America, and totally forget about the Italian traditions." I know a family that's like that and I actually kind of feel sorry for them, because the mother of that whole family is just suffering further. She wants those traditions there, yet the father says, "No, we live in America now." That doesn't mean anything. Every American, probably, that's here came from some foreign country, you know. They're not necessarily true Americans. The only pure Americans are the Indians. Why shouldn't you keep your traditions? That is what keeps a family together.

C: Did you grow up in an Italian neighborhood at all? Were most of the people that you hung around with or the church that you went to predominantly Italian?

B: Our neighbors were Italian. I didn't really have Italian friends, not really. I spent more time with my brothers than I did with my friends up until about the age of thirteen. Our church is really a huge church, St. Joseph's Church. I think they were supposed to make it a cathedral. I would say it's predominantly Italian, a Roman Catholic style church. But the community isn't really Italian. There are a lot of Italians in the community, but they're not first generation.

C: Where I come from, the Italians live on the west side of town. Do they have like special communities?

- B: Sharon's not really like that. Now, my grandmother lived in Youngstown, and Youngstown's kind of like that, where the Italians live in one area. Sharon's not really like that. It's just a small town and it's just scattered throughout. You can't really say it is. Like I said, my friends weren't Italian. I knew one other girl who was Italian; she was third generation.
- C: What year did your parents first come here to the United States?
- B: My mom was fifteen when she first came here. She's 47 now, so about 1960.
- C: So really right before you were born. They came here before you, the children, were born.
- B: Right, it was the early 1960's. See, she came here with my grandparents, because her side of the family started moving to America, and she was engaged to somebody else.
- C: In Italy?
- B: In Italy. What happened is that she was introduced to my father through letters, and they started writing to each other. She went back to Italy, met him, and got to know him, then broke the engagement. They got married, and she came back here, to America, with her family. My father stayed in Italy for one year, because she had to get him papers in order for him to come over. They've been here since then. My father went back in 1976, also. He misses his family; there are a lot of brothers, his mother and father, his grandparents.
- C: That's wonderful to have that.
- B: It really is, and that's when you see the difference; like, even the way the women dress in Italy. It's so different. They actually wear, at certain festivals, they wear certain costumes. When it's not a costume--like my great-grandmother, she used to wear a lot of black.
- C: Because her husband died.
- B: Yes, after her husband died, she wore a lot of black. She's a wonderful lady. I don't know her very well, but I remember her just the way she is. She's a real tall, beautiful, elegant looking lady, not your typical short, dark haired girl. That's another thing. People characterize Italians with dark hair, dark eyes, but there are so many blondes, redheads. There are so many. It's predominantly dark hair, dark eyes, but there are other ones too.
- C: There are exceptions to the rules.

B: Right.

C: If you had to characterize growth as a first generation Italian-American, how would you sum it up?

B: My growth as far as growing up?

C: Everything that you came through as a child.

B: It probably started when I was first born, because you go through the baptism; that's your first step, you know, that's when most families . . .

C: Your culture, religious . . .

B: The religion is so strong in your Italian family, also. They say, "Why do you push your child to go to church?" Well, you push your child up until confirmation, and then after that, it's their decision. But the family that's together goes to church every Sunday. Then you don't go home to a broken home, you go home to a family that's there and everybody cares about each other, just like any other family.

C: You have a camaraderie?

B: Yes, that's the way you could sum it up. As far as my growth with my family, I think I would make my child grow up in the same way. I hope that I could be the parent that my parents were. There are going to be rules, because if there are not rules, I think that makes a big difference. At times, I would be upset because they were strict with me even more than my brothers, yet they had rules too. And my brothers have always been by my side all the time.

C: The Italian brothers.

B: Yes. And I'm actually the first one to go to college, the first girl to go to college in my family.

C: What are you studying?

B: Hospital administration.

C: Do you feel that if you marry a non-Italian, the tradition would be lost?

B: No.

C: Not at all?

B: No, I'd make that point clear before I married him. I think I would keep his tradition also, yet I could never lose mine.

- C: Do you think that the child that you bring up would be kind of divided between the both or strong in one area? Do you want him to be predominantly more Italian?
- B: Not necessarily. The child would grow up always being exposed to all those traditions.
- C: The language also?
- B: The language, everything; I would want my child to learn the language and I would want my child to hear the stories that I heard from my grandparents.
- C: What are some of those folk stories?
- B: Grandpa is the one that can tell all those stories. At night, they would just walk down the street. Everybody--they would form a big line--would go knocking at their friend's doors and say, "Come on, let's go." This was late at night! Because they have siestas in the day, but yet night is such a lively time for them. He would talk about that. And they would talk about just simple things, like eating berries off a tress, planting a garden, just little simple things. Things that might not seem as important to somebody else, these are the little stories they tell you about. They would say, "When I was in Italy, I used to walk miles upon miles and just breathe the air and just enjoy the land." You know, the little stories that they talk about, just something about them. When they do tell stories, they just talk about those kind of things and they talk about how their family was.
- C: Did he ever tell you any stories about the war?
- B: He, like I said, would tell us stories as far as . . . I really don't know how to explain. He told us some stories but not exactly stories; he would tell us about the war and how he always wanted to go home but he couldn't go home. Just stories like that; he didn't really talk about anything that happened in the war. I think that you'll find that most people who were in World War II won't. I think it's a really difficult time for them. He had lived through that.
- C: Your father was there then also, he was a small child, though. Does he ever tell you anything that he remembers?
- B: My father, yes. He just remembers a blackness over the whole country, everything was just so depressed. Yet it wasn't a depression like it is here. You know, we went through the war, and yet they got through it, and after that things were so much better. My father is the oldest. He was close with his family. But he lived more on his own; he would just go out on his own. He has much contact with them now, and he always will. He wants his brother to come here. He has a younger brother who might

become a doctor. He's out of school right now; he might go back. He's working in construction with his father, but he wants to come to live in America. But it's hard getting a man his age to America, to live here. His sister will never move. She's got her family there; she's got two children. She's a teacher, a math teacher.

C: Would you care to add anything else about your experience as an Italian-American of the first generation?

B: I think that I lived about the same life as an American child, yet I've seen that I can have my family, and I can use that for its traditions in my family because I think it just brings the family so much closer. You know, you can always have that time when you sit home with your family and just enjoy that. Even now, my parents, when we're all going out, are like, "Okay, wait a minute. This family has got to get together sooner or later. We cannot all be going in different directions like this. We've got to keep that bond." And I think that was a very important thing in growing up in an Italian family like that. And there's Grandpa and Grandpa, they're at the head.

C: They are the head, aren't they?

B: Right. I keep saying that over and over again, but I can't express that enough. It's hard growing up. It's strict but it's not that bad. An Italian does not have to be strict and unfair, they can be strict and fair. My parents have learned things from being in America.

C: Thank you, Mary.

END OF INTERVIEW