

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Appliances of the Past Project

Personal Experiences

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ADELMA VECCHIONE

Interviewed

by

Robert Fabian

on

June 10, 1985

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Appliances of the Past Project

INTERVIEWEE: ADELMA VECCHIONE

INTERVIEWER: Robert Fabian

SUBJECT: housework, appliances, personal background

DATE: June 10, 1985

F: This is an interview with Adelma Vecchione for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Appliances of the Past Project. This interview is being conducted by Robert Fabian on June 10, 1985.

To begin with, do you want to tell me a little bit about your background, where you were born . . .

V: I was born in Barrea, Italy. I was eight years old when we came to America and I've been here ever since, all these years. We settled in Niles and we've lived at 115 Moore Street since I was eight years old. I went to school in Niles and got married in Niles. I married a Niles man and my children were all born in Niles. My husband worked at Youngstown Sheet & Tube.

F: You never worked outside of the home?

V: No, I never worked. I was one of those ladies that never had to work because I took care of the sick.

F: You took care of the sick?

V: My mother, my father, and even at the end, my husband.

F: Who did you come over from Italy with?

V: My parents. First my father came; he was here several times and would go back and forth. The two older brothers came by themselves and then we came.

F: What year did you come over?

V: I think it was 1922.

F: Did you have to come through Ellis Island?

V: Yes.

F: What was that like?

V: Ellis Island is in New York.

F: What was it like?

V: I was eight years old and I do remember that it was awfully wet because it was right by the ocean. My father had a citizen paper when he was sixteen years old and that made all of his children . . . They said when he married and had children, they would be American citizens because he got his paper that old. We came as Americans, so we had to land at night while all the rest had to stay there. We landed at night and went to a hotel, and stayed there for a day or two. Then we went to Ellis Island, got on the train, and came straight to Niles. My father had a house ready for us.

F: Why did he settle in Niles, do you know?

V: My mother's brothers and sisters were here. My father never worked at Niles. He worked at the McDonald Mill and the Republic Mill, but never in Niles. McDonald Mill is real close. My brothers worked there too.

F: Did you have a big family?

V: No, there were just five. They died and only five of us were living. Two of my brothers have died now, so there are two other brothers and myself. We are a real nice family.

F: Did you do a lot of housework with your mother?

V: Just our own housework at home.

F: Did you ever have anybody come in and help you out?

V: My mother did most of it because when I was a girl, I didn't work that hard. I didn't work hard until I was about fourteen or fifteen years old. I just didn't.

F: What kind of housework did she let you do?

V: The cleaning, dusting, and I was the dishwasher. We used to have buckets then. We didn't have lunches like we do today, and just those four buckets . . .

F: Did you have running water and electricity at your house?

V: Yes.

F: That made it a little bit easier then.

V: Yes. The Depression came right after that.

F: What was it like during the Depression?

V: It was hard and you would never realize it. As a young girl, going through the Depression, like most girls my age, it was unbelievable. We didn't have anything.

F: Did you do any outside work or bring any income home?

V: I never worked.

F: Do you feel disappointed because you never did?

V: Yes.

F: Why is that?

V: Because I wanted to go out to work. My husband never would let me because he said he married me and was going to take care of me. I had too much sickness. I was the only daughter; I had four brothers. I had to take care of my mother.

F: You were almost working at home as a nurse?

V: I was always in the home. I would take care of mom and all of that because . . . That's the reason why all of my friends and I quit school that year. We only had to go back for our reportcards and we never went back. I wonder if they still have it. I should have graduated in 1933, but I never went for the twelfth grade because all of my friends quit so I did too. They went to work at GE because it had opened, but I didn't. They wouldn't let me go to work, but then my mother took sick so it was a good thing that I was home. I had a beautiful childhood. I was an only daughter. The only girl in the family. But I wasn't a sissy because I had brothers. We played ball, kicked the can outside. Anytime they needed an extra player they would come and get me and I would go out and play with the boys.

F: Did they ever help in doing the housework?

V: Yes, when my mother was sick, they had to knead the bread. We used to make all that bread and it was too much for a young girl to do. My younger brother had to knead the bread because it was hard for me to do. My mother was sick for quite some time.

F: How old were you when you started taking over the housework for your mother?

- V: All the time. I always had chores to do when I was a little girl. If my bed wasn't made, I wouldn't go outside with the little girls to play. Everything had to be picked up.
- F: What was the worst kind of housework that you hated to do when you were younger?
- V: I don't know. Housework was nothing for me. I never worked or cleaned anybody else's house.
- F: What about doing the laundry?
- V: Well, we did the laundry. In the beginning, it was very hard to help my mother turn the sheets and the wringer, because we didn't have washers then.
- F: What kind of washer did you have?
- V: When we got a washer . . . When the first Maytag came out, my mother had one.
- F: What did you use before that?
- V: We had the wringers and the tubs. We put a big washtub on one side, one on the other side, and then I would turn the wringer for my mother. We would get the sheets, rinse . . .
- F: Did you use a washboard? What kind of soap did you use?
- V: Always a washboard. Octagen soap, I'll never forget it.
- F: Why will you never forget it?
- V: It was some kind of a broom soap that we used all the time. We used to boil our clothes in great big tubs. They were white and then we would hang them out. That's what I did.
- F: What kind of washer did you get after you were doing this?
- V: Always a Maytag. In fact, I still have a Maytag. I like their things from the Maytag Company.
- F: What was the first one like that you bought?
- V: It was electric. They used to be made of steel.
- F: When did you get it?
- V: I don't remember when we got it. When they first came out, my mother got one.
- F: Was there a dryer with it?

V: No.

F: When did you get a dryer?

V: They didn't have such things as dryers then?

F: So you had to hang your clothes outside?

V: Sure.

F: After you started doing laundry with your Maytag, was it easier to do the laundry?

V: Of course. You had to rub some things by hand in your stationary tubs that my father made out of concrete. We had them and that was what we did, but everybody did that. A lot of people couldn't afford them either, but we had a Maytag. We used to be so proud of our Maytag. We were simple people.

F: Were you scheduled in doing the laundry on Monday or . . .

V: My goodness, you knew just what you were going to eat everyday. You knew Monday was wash day and my mother would have a big kettle of soup. We would always have soup. It's a habit. Until this day I have soup on Monday. I don't have to make it anymore though because it's in the freezer.

F: What kind of stove did she have? Did you do the cooking?

V: We used to have a different kind of stove then. We had a stove that had coal on one side. It was beautiful. On the one side, because you didn't have any furnaces . . .

F: Was it the left side?

V: On the one side we would put coal and on the other side was the gas. It had an overlapping on the top where you could warm up your food. There was a big oven at the bottom. My mother used to make bread outside because we used to have those outside ovens. They were beautiful, those great, big outside ovens.

F: Were they made of brick?

V: Yes, they were made out of some kind of the stone that . . . The stones were made so that you can bake. My mother would clean that all out . . . The fire and wood were going. The loaves of bread were big, round things. Pizza at the time was different than it is today. She would clean that oven out with all these big . . .

F: How hard of work was cleaning this [oven]?

V: My mother used to do all of that. My dad built the oven, but

my mother . . . We had it in the backyard. We moved on Moore Street and lived in a neighborhood where there weren't that many Italian people. Moore Street is close to Robbins Avenue and Our Lady of Mt. Carmel School. When my mother's oven was going, everybody was around. That's one thing about my mom, when she would make her pizza everyone would come around. It was delicious.

F: Do you still make your own pizza now?

V: Yes, but I buy it a lot too. Why make it when you can buy it?

F: But it's not as good though.

V: I make my pizza.

F: It's not as good as you would make it.

V: Oh, yes it is. You get good pizzas. We've all changed; we are in a different category.

F: Was it a cast iron stove that you had?

V: After that, I forgot the name of my mother's stove because the stoves were different. When we got that stove, I used to shine that stove. Then we got a furnace. We got rid of the stove. Do you think we sold them? We just gave it up; the guy came in and took it. Today those are all antiques.

F: Was the next stove you got gas or electric?

V: It was a gas range with real high legs. The oven was up high.

F: Was it just as easy to use as the other one?

V: We missed the other one because it was warm, but then we got the furnace and we couldn't have the coal. The ovens are all gone. Some of the people still have them, I think, on the east end of Niles, but my dad broke it up.

F: Do you have a gas stove now?

V: Yes. I love my gas stove. It's a Universal.

F: Did you ever have an electric one?

V: No.

F: Why not?

V: I never had one, but my daughter-in-law does. They are lovely. Everything is lovely. I love my gas stove because it fits nice in there. I have a Tappa with a screen, then I bought this one.

- F: Did it change the variety of foods that you could make?
- V: Things were so modern and you get rid of all that stuff. Everything was nice; you would buy new furniture, coaches . . .
- F: How come you don't have a microwave? Would you every buy one?
- V: I don't have one because I don't have room for one? They told me that I do, but I don't have room for one.
- F: Do you think you would like one?
- V: I would love it.
- F: Why is that?
- V: My children all have them and I love them. I don't like that little one.
- F: Do you think the food would taste just as good as it would if . . .
- V: Yes, it's good.
- F: No problem?
- V: No.
- F: Some women think that it's too dry or something like that.
- V: My Maryann cooks turkey, ham . . .
- F: And it tastes just as good as if you had it in the oven for six or seven hours?
- V: It's delicious! Follow your rules and it's delicious. I love a microwave. I don't have a garbage disposal either and they're beautiful. You can't beat progress; progress is beautiful and I'm all for it.
- F: Do you think ~~that~~ having a microwave has made cooking a lot easier?
- V: I love it, yes. I'm speaking for my own family because they all work; everybody works today. I'm not working because I'm 72 years old. They come in from work, these young girls, and stick their frozen foods in the microwave and in no time it's melted and they start cooking.
- F: They have lost the art though of say, canning and . . .
- V: They don't can anymore.



F: Some people still do.

V: No, very few.

F: Did you do that when you were first married?

V: We canned all of the time. We never bought bread or any canned foods. We never bought that stuff.

F: How did you store the food when you were living with your parents?

V: The fruit cellar. The following year we would all separate them. We made our own lard and everything.

F: What kind of refrigeration did you have?

V: There wasn't any refrigeration; you had an icebox. Everything you get rid of today people are looking . . . When the refrigerator got in, we bought a refrigerator and out went the icebox.

F: What was the icebox like?

V: That was beautiful. They use it to put their whiskey and drinks in today.

F: Was it big?

V: Yes, we had a nice one. There were all sizes. Small ones, big ones, and the iceman would come. We would sneak the ice when the iceman would come. My dad was very, very handy and we never had to worry about water coming out of the bottom because he put a pipe that went right down the sewer down the cellar. I wouldn't trade those days for today.

F: You wouldn't want to go back?

V: No. The mother and father are both working; the children are working. Even if they go to school they have little jobs. My daughter has four cars in her family. One is going to Ohio State and one to Youngstown State.

F: If someone would take away this type of gas range, could you go back and use the other one?

V: Where's the coal?

F: But if you had it?

V: Well, I suppose if we had to. This tragedy that hit Niles, we had no electricity, television, or anything. I still have my candles. In our day, when we were young, we didn't have radios even. You want those days back? Never. Progress, you can't beat progress.

F: What kind of iron do you use?

V: I had the iron, but my son took it. We had two of them. My daughter has got two of them. My son has the other one with the pads and everything. We used to heat the iron on top of the coal thing that I was telling you about.

F: Was it a lot of hard work doing the ironing with those?

V: Sure it was and yet our clothes were ironed beautiful. It isn't like today. You get a shirt out of the washer and you can put it on. I like to press a little bit. I'm a person that likes to press. I like to see that little crease on the sleeves.

F: When a lot of these products were coming out in the 1950's, what made you buy them?

V: You had to have them.

F: Just the convenience?

V: Sure, the convenience. Even in the wintertime, my son has those gas things and cooks out in the snow. They come in with those nice steaks and everything. Who ever saw steaks in the Depression? You kids didn't realize that. We didn't have any money or anything it was bad. When I was fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen, it was bad. You had to hang on to what you had. Soup lines all over. We never had to go to the soup lines or anything like that, but we should have because we could have used it too. We never had to because they kept my dad on the Republic Mill payroll. There were big boys at home, idle, with no work. Just like it is now. All these people that are out of work. They don't have the things that we have today. They don't have gardens.

The house on 115 Morris had a great, big yard that was almost like a farm.

F: Really?

V: Everything came out of the garden, potatoes and everything. How much grass did you have? Just a little bit in the front was all and a little on the sides because you had no cars. In the back, you had your garden almost to the back porch, but you lived by that garden. We used everything, but today they don't. They don't even worm any. On the day of the tornado, I planted 40 pepper plants and four tomato plants. I still have to have my pepper and tomato plants; I don't have lettuce because . . .

F: Why don't you think people plant gardens?

V: They don't have the time today because they are all working. I told you the category has changed; they are working. God

knows what it will be in the future; they'll probably be landing on top of roofs with their helicopters.

- F: Do you think a lot of these appliances in the home have liberated women to get out of the home and give them time to get out?
- V: They'll be making them better and better and better.
- F: But, do you think the appliances have helped women get out of the home?
- V: Very much. When I think of the work my mother did. I was just a young girl helping her a little bit.
- F: How was a work day of hers compared to yours though?
- V: There is a lot of things to be done now; you have to keep things up. I remember I used to shine the stove that I got; we have to do the same thing now. You have to keep after your appliances. If something goes wrong, you have to maintain it. Things have been made easier, but it still works. I think it's the same thing when you come down to it only it's a different category. There is more money; people are working, and we are getting things for our kids because we didn't have it when we were young. So we would buy for the kids. Even if we didn't have the money, we would charge it because they were going to give it to the kids.
- F: You want to have it better for them?
- V: That's right.
- F: How was a work day like doing the laundry with your mother and the way you do it now? Hers took all day whereas your takes a couple of hours.
- V: You don't even have to have a special day, but I just love to do things on Monday still. I'm watching television in the wintertime with the washer, dryer, and everything going at one time. You could even be ironing if you want to.
- F: So you can do almost all of your housework in one day where your mother had to work for a week.
- V: No, today it's different. The upkeep of the homes is hard.
- F: Why is that?
- V: They have to work and keep their house nice because they have beautiful things. If you want beautiful things, you have to keep them nice.

- F: What kind of sweeper did your mother have?
- V: A Hoover, always a Hoover. The old one up until the modern one.
- F: What was the old one that your mother had? What did it look like?
- V: They were different. They were a little shorter and almost all steel, now they are mostly all plastic.
- F: How good of a job did it do?
- V: A beautiful job, and everybody would borrow it. My mother was a lucky woman at the time. Like I said, my father was working at the McDonald Mill and was making good money at the time. We would clean the living room and put the crocheted doilies here where you wouldn't dare touch them because they were only for company. It was almost like a morgue in that living room. You would just go upstairs. Everybody did that in my day and now it is different. If I was going to build a home today, I wouldn't even build a living room.
- F: No?
- V: No. I would build a beautiful . . . I have a big family room. I wouldn't even build a living room.
- F: Would you want to have a big house?
- V: My daughter has a gorgeous living room, but it's only for show.
- F: Would you want to have a big house or do you think it would be too hard to take care of?
- V: Yes, because I would have bigger rooms. Everything would be up-to-date and modern.
- F: Appliancewise?
- V: Everything. I wish I had a disposal, but I don't have room for a disposal and I want to get a double sink because this small . . .
- F: What is the best thing invented that really helped women, appliancewise?
- V: I think your disposal and, of course, you washer, dryer, and all of that. In ironing, all you do is leave them plugged in to get them charged and then you don't even have to use the plug. No, it's different.

- F: Do you think it's good or bad all of these appliances? Before you were saying that you and your brothers helped with the housework and now nobody does?
- V: No, they do.
- F: You think so?
- V: Yes, they do. You would be surprised . . . Unless they are lazy and just don't want to do it, but if they want something you'll see. They are moving into apartments and everything. That's the only thing I don't like about this modern thing, everybody leaving and going into their apartments. But that's the category again. The girls get old and if they aren't married, they want to leave. They don't want to be on their parent's strength but yet they go home . . . The neighbor down the street, her daughter comes in with a little basket. While she's visiting her mother, her mother's washer and dryer is going. So they still come home. Then they come home to eat so why don't they just stay there too. That I don't like, but what can you do.
- F: Do you think we have it better now than twenty or thirty or forty years ago?
- V: I don't know what to say. Even people today don't have it. There always is that class of people . . . I am not below average; I am average. I'm a widow, but if I want something or if I know that that can't be fixed, then I will go and buy a new one. My car is a 1976. I would love to get a new one, but I don't like the little cars. I'm afraid of them. Mine is a Pontiac, but if anything goes wrong . . . I like a big car. Today they are just too expensive and I really don't need it. Just to go to Boardman to see my son, and my daughter is in Niles, the church, the store, and just to go out a little bit. I use a lot of gas because . . .
- F: Even though we have these appliances, the work is still there. You still have to do it.
- V: You still have to do it; you still have to work. It was different then; it was a different life. We did a lot of reading and I don't think kids today read. I did a lot of reading.
- F: Do you think women take more pride in their housework before or now?
- V: Well, I think they did; we always did.
- F: What about today?
- V: Today your homes are showplaces today; they are beautiful.

Their basements are fixed up and are beautiful. They have another older stove and that's where they do all . . .

- F: Do you think women don't think of housework as work? Is it more like pleasure because they want to keep their house up?
- V: Housework is always hard especially for all these ladies . . . For me it isn't because I'm always home. It's hard for a working women, especially with children that keep you busy. They do all right because you see them everywhere.
- F: So, in a sense, they have two jobs: One outside of the home and one in the home.
- V: I think the husband helps a little bit too. They will call and say to take this out of the freezer. Now we have the microwave and in no time it's finished.
- F: So society is becoming more simplified?
- V: No, but the work is there and you have to do it. If you don't wipe your walls then they are not going to shine. Do you want to get funny? You always have to clean. I think you always have to clean no matter what, but then there are people that don't. Then there are people that don't have anything and I feel sorry for them. We don't belong in that thing. We never did. Anything that came out we got. I don't have a microwave because I am a widow and I know I won't be able . . . How long am I going to be able to do all this work myself, which I do. Then when I can't . . . I don't worry about it. I take every day as it comes. So, what is the use in investing in things now. I'm standing still, but if anything goes wrong with my car, I'm buying a car. I can't stay home without a car.
- F: What if your washer went bad, would you buy another?
- V: [No response].
- F: Have you ever had any problems with your appliances?
- V: Hoover. I had to buy a new Hoover. I bought it two years ago at Strouss when they were having a sale. I always buy when they have sales. When they have their sales, I go. If I want anything, I'll go get it. You can't deprive yourself.
- F: How long do you think you could go without . . .
- V: I couldn't go without it a day.
- F: You're pretty dependent on them?
- V: Yes, you have to have your stuff. Today you have to. We have everything, carpeting . . . We used to scrub everything on

our hands and knees.

F: Now you just run a vacuum over it?

V: No, it's different. We did scrubbing. I don't know what to tell you. You know that your home is different today.

F: Sure. I know it's easier, but I think the work doesn't go away.

V: I think that you still have to work. I can remember when we first moved in the house, there was nothing here but wood. I remember my mother would get a boiling tub of water with a little lye in and scrub the floors just to get those boards clean and white. No one could be around so that they wouldn't get splashed. You don't do that now. It was hard then and it's hard now, but think of the conveniences we have now.

F: It's a different kind of hard.

V: You beat a cake then you had to beat by hand, a hundred and fifty strokes. Now you put your beater on.

F: You can buy the cake mix and that's it; you don't have to make it from scratch.

V: I like to too but I like to make things from scratch in a lot of things I do. Even with your cake mixes you put eggs and oil and things in them and they are delicious. I like Duncan Hines. Everything is a little different now, but no matter what it is always work. They say maybe today it's more work, well, you have more appliances, but it's easier to do. I dry clean my curtains. Now when did we ever dry clean in the old days? I don't dry clean my shears. I just put them in the washer, leave them hang a little bit, put them right back on the window, and they are beautiful. They used to pinch your fingers with the curtains getting them straight. We had to stretch out curtains with those curtain stretchers and pinch them all up. We used to put little rags . . .

F: The coal made the housework a lot . . .

V: It's hard, but the kids are different now. I always said that if anything would happen what would everybody do. Take right now the bread situation. Some of these young kids are going crazy now thinking that they are not going to get any bread. All you have to do is get some flour and yeast and make bread, but who does that now?

F: Right.

V: We do.

F: If you had to go back, could you?

- V: It's no problem at all. It's no problem at all just go and buy flour. If you can't get flour then you have a problem. Maybe I'm agreeing to everything . . .
- F: You don't have to agree to anything. You just tell me what you think.
- V: I think that progress is beautiful and it's going to continue and get better and better. It was hard then but it's hard now too.
- F: But the appliances help though?
- V: I think it was easy. When it comes to washing, I don't think I would want the wringer machine. I don't have it. I have a large one and I don't like the little ones. I always go for a name brand. That's all I know. I don't think there is anything to say.
- F: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW