

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Fascism in Italy Project

Personal Experience

O. H. 414

EMILIO INFANTE

Interviewed

by

Elisa Calabrese

on

June 11, 1986

## EMILIO INFANTE

Emilio Infante, the son of Domenico Infante and Luivigia Negro-Infante, was born on July 21, 1934, in Bagnoli, Italy. Bagnoli is a small town near Naples.

Emilio was educated in Italy and Venezuela. He served in the Italian Army as a sergeant for two years, 1959 and 1960. On August 18, 1960, Emilio married Amelia Infante. They have two children: Domenic and Louise.

A special interest and favorite sport of Emilio is Boccia. A member of Mount Carmel Church, Emilio also is active in the Bagnoli Irpino Club.

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INTERVIEWEE: EMILIO INFANTE

INTERVIEWER: Elisa Calabrese

SUBJECT: World War II and its Aftermath, Education,  
Teenage Life in Southern Italy

DATE: June 11, 1986

C: This is an interview with Emilio Infante in Niles, Ohio,  
on June 11, 1986, at 4:30 p.m.

Thank you very much for consenting to this interview.

I: You're welcome.

C: Tell me a little bit about yourself, about growing up  
in Italy. Give me the date of your birth and so on.

I: I was born July 21, 1934. I was born in the small town  
of Bagnoli. It's a small town with a population of about  
6,000 or 7,000. It is truly a beautiful town. In fact,  
there is a story about this town. They guy who discovered  
our town 300 years ago was an explorer. He put a nickname  
on it; he said it should not be called Bagnoli, but a little  
spot in heaven, something like that. We have a lot of  
tourists because they come to ski in the mountains in the  
winter. They spend billions of dollars there. We have a  
beautiful church, a square.

C: Do you have bars there where you can walk around to them  
every night?

I: Yes. They have quite a few of them all the way around  
the square. Most of the time the people stay on the  
square. They sit down and have ice cream and things like  
that. They have beer and play cards. That is what most of  
the people do. We have a nice school, a beautiful city hall.

My life style, I grew up in hard times. It was especially  
difficult in the 1940's. There was nothing to eat; we had

no clothes; we really suffered at that time. My father was in this country and he made a couple of dollars and he came back overseas and bought us some property. Anything we ate we generated from the farm. The government used to give what is almost like welfare. You were only allowed to get so much bread and so much macaroni for the family; it depended on how many kids were in the family.

C: How many were in your family?

I: There were four brothers and two sisters. In fact, I lost one brother and one sister. My mother died back in the 1950's. I lost my mother and father when I was thirteen years old.

The life style over there is different from the life style in this country. If a family over there had a mule or horse, it was like having a car here. We had one. It was a big thing. We had a couple of goats, sheep, and things like that.

C: Did yo work on the farm much?

I: Yes. When I was five or six years old I used to help my father before I went to school.

C: The war was already going on then when you were in school?

I: Yes. When we were in school we had to dress in black shirts.

C: When you were seven or eight what did you remember about the war? Did you have to go to school and say a pledge to Mussolini?

I: Yes. When we went to school we had to salute Mussolini. You learned a lot of things about Mussolini. He was like a dictator at that time. You had to follow the rules.

C: When you got a little bit older what was impressed upon your mind during the war?

I: They scared everybody. We had the Germans coming in and there was bombing and shooting all over. The mayor of our town went out with a white flag and told the Germans that there were no American troops in our town. We didn't know why they were shooting. When the Germans left, the Americans came and it was like Christmas time. We were starving at that time because every time the Germans came through they took things. If you didn't give them what they wanted, they would shoot you. The Americans came through and gave us hot dogs and candy and food. They gave us blankets. We had a bunch of stuff from there.

C: You went to school after the war too?

I: Yes. I went to school until I was fifteen. When I was almost sixteen I went down to South America. I had a brother over there who had a business. I wanted to get out of town because I didn't have a father or mother. My brothers and sisters used to support me; they used to send me to the school. I started to feel bad because of that. There was no work anywhere and you couldn't make any money. The only chance I had was with my brother who was in South America in Venezuela. I begged him to go down there.

C: What year did you go there?

I: It was back in the 1950's.

C: How long did you live there?

I: Four and a half years.

C: So you speak Spanish?

I: I went to school over there, yes. My brother had a business and I used to do the books for him. I worked and I went to school for three years.

C: When did you come to the United States?

I: 1961.

C: Did you meet your wife in Italy?

I: My wife and I went to school together.

C: You are from the same town?

I: From the same town and from the same street.

C: Really?

I: In fact, my wife is one year older than I am. I think she came to this country in 1948.

C: How did you meet her here then?

I: I was in the Army. Back in 1960 she came overseas. She came on vacation overseas. I was a sergeant in the Army and didn't know if I wanted to stay in the Army or not. I had twenty-two guys working with me.

C: In Italy?

- I: Yes. I went to school six months in the Army. I took two courses and passed both and right off the bat I was a sergeant. I was in a special platoon. Everybody had a trade. I spent about eighteen months in the Army. The last vacation I had I went to spend in my town; that's when I met my wife.
- C: What year were you in the Army then?
- I: 1960.
- C: You went to Venezuela and then you came back to Italy?
- I: Yes.
- C: Then you went in the Army, met your wife, and then moved to the United States?
- I: Six months later I came over.
- C: Tell me more about your life over there.
- I: I had a good life when I went back overseas. After my father and mother died we had quite a bit of property. When I went back my brother came back also and we split the property. I got the house. I was single, young, a nice-looking guy I guess. I had enough money. At that time I had about \$6,000 in American money, which is a lot of money back in those days. I had a good life then.
- C: Did you work in the United States then?
- I: No, I worked in South America. It was like \$6,000 in American money, but it was in Venezuelan money. I still lived with my sister because she had a house and I didn't want to live alone. I had my own house and was doing a lot of things. After I met my wife, I wanted to stay over there, but she said no. She told me to come to the United States and spend a little time over there and see if I liked it. If I didn't like it she said we could come back. When I came over here I liked it. Right away I bought a car and I found a job. It wasn't too much; I was making \$1.59 an hour; that is what I started at. I was a mechanic and doing a lot of work on the side.
- C: Did you come to Niles when you moved here?
- I: We stayed a week in New Jersey at my uncle's. Then I came to Niles because my wife had a sister and brother here.
- C: Do you like it here?
- I: Yes.

C: What else can you tell me?

I: When I was three years old I had bronchitis. From bronchitis I got pneumonia. A week later I was dead; that is what my father told me. The doctor told my family this. We had a big picture of a saint in my room. My father believed in a lot of things and he used to pray. When the doctor told my father I was finished, he prayed to that saint. He heard a noise in the room and I came back to life. In fact, they have a church on the mount named Madonna di Monte Veccia, after this saint. When I was a kid my father used to take me up on the mount. We used to take the train and go to this town. From the town we got the bus and it stopped right at the bottom of the mount. From the bottom of the mount to the top it was at least four or five miles. My father used to take me every year to the festival there. We used to go there and pray. No one would wear shoes there; it was holy ground. Old people used to believe a lot of things like this. They used to tell me a lot of miracles.

C: In Italy is there a difference between the north and the south, the people?

I: Today there is no difference. Years ago there was a difference. The north was more accelerated. There was a lot of activity there. The south was like the dead part of Italy. The people were farmers. There were no factories. No one could afford to send the kids to college because there was no money. Northern Italy was different; there were quite a few steel mills, an automobile industry. Everything was in Northern Italy. Everything was from Rome up. From Rome down the people used to live off the land. That was the difference. In my town there wasn't even a newspaper. Very few people used to read a newspaper. Today there is a lot of progress though.

C: Is there anything else you would like to add?

I: The older people here don't have anywhere to go. In Italy it is different. The old people get a pension from the government. They have a room to stay all year long. They can play cards; they have a television, radio. The government pays for all expenses. Plus they get a vacation one week out of every year. The government sends those people on vacation. It is all paid for.

Also, for the people living on a pension who maybe have arthritis or a few other things, the government sends those people one month out of the year to get treatment, like salt water or whatever they need; it's all paid for.

C: Thank you very much. I appreciate this.