

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Italian Americans

Personal Experience

O.H. 1169

PIERINA CHIOVETTI

Interviewed

by

Frank Mancini

on

October 25, 1988

Pierina Chiovetti came to America in 1957 to be with her husband. In Italy, her father was a businessman, and her mother worked on a farm. They did well for themselves. Mrs. Chiovetti went to school as a child, and in her later years of childhood, she went to sewing school for five years. She came to America with a newborn baby two years after here husband adventured to America. She only planned to be with him. Whether he moved back to Italy or stayed was his decision.

Her normal day in America consisted of preparing the food and taking care of her children. Her trip took thirteen days and ended at New York's Ellis Island. She had no problems in adjusting to America. She went to night school to learn how to read and write English. At her school, she ran into other immigrants including Greeks. Mrs. Chiovetti did not seem to think her new American life style was much different than what she had in Italy. Mrs. Chiovetti told of the Italian customs that their family still keeps. She mentioned the Christmas Eve dinners consisting of no meat and many kinds of fish including eel and squid.

M: This is an interview with Pierina Chioveti for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Italian Immigration, by Frank Mancini, at 1470 Tamarisk Trail, on October 25, 1988, at 8:00 p.m..

Where are you from in Italy?

C: Bianco. The province of Campobasso.

M: Where is that at?

C: Northern Italy.

M: How old were you when you came to Italy?

C: Twenty-one.

M: Can you remember your childhood in Italy? What did your parents do for a living?

C: My father was a salesman, and my mother worked on the farm.

M: What kinds of things did you grow on the farm?

C: Produce.

M: Did you work on the farm?

C: No.

M: Did you go to school?

C: Yes, I went to school. After school, I went to learn how to sew.

M: How long did you go to school to learn how to sew?

C: Five years.

M: What do you remember about school? Do you remember any of the games that you played, or are there any teachers who stand out in your mind?

C: Oh, yes, I remember a lot. It is too long ago to remember the games.

M: What factors led to your leaving Italy and coming to America?

- C: My husband was over here. Before my husband came to this country, we were engaged in Italy, and after two years, he came back to Italy. Then, we got married. He came back by himself over here, and I came with my daughter.
- M: Did you stay in touch all of this time?
- C: Oh, yes. We would write every week.
- M: Did you plan on coming to America and staying or going back to Italy?
- C: I had to stay with my husband. We had planned a family.
- M: Where ever he was, you planned to stay?
- C: Yes.
- M: Did you when you got to America? What was your ordinary or average day like? What did you do?
- C: I was at home, and I prepared food for my husband. I also took care of my children.
- M: What was the passage like for you when you came over? Did you come over on a ship?
- C: Yes, I came with Conta Bianco Mian. I was on the ship for thirteen days. I had a really nice time. I had my small daughter, and I did not know anybody. I was young, at that time. I was not a kid. I was so happy to come here to meet my husband.
- M: Did you have to go through any immigration centers?
- C: Yes. I was in Naples. We passed all of the physicals and all of those things.
- M: What about in America?
- C: No. We passed over there all ready.
- M: So, you did not have to stop here. You just went. When you first came, where did you go in America?
- C: We stopped in New York and then, in Youngstown, Ohio.
- M: Did you come through Ellis Island in New York at all?
- C: Yes.

- M: Okay, you went to New York. Then, where did you go?
- C: My husband, my mother-in-law, my uncle, my aunt, and I stayed just a day in New York, and then, we came to Youngstown, Ohio.
- M: What did you miss from Italy when you first got to America?
- C: My mother and father. That is all. And my friend. I missed my friend, my mother, my father, and my grandmother. That is all.
- M: Did you write to them frequently?
- C: Oh, yes. I would write to them all of the time?
- M: Did they ever come to America?
- C: Yes, I made papers for my mother and father, and they are over here now.
- M: They are over here now?
- C: Yes. My father died not long ago.
- M: In what ways was America different than what you expected it to be?
- C: I do not know. I did not find anything different, but the fact that it was the same.
- M: Did you run into any problems learning how to speak the language?
- C: No.
- M: Did you know how to speak it before you left?
- C: No.
- M: When you first got here, did you speak American or Italian?
- C: Italian.
- M: Then, over a time period, you learned how to speak American?
- C: Yes. After a little bit of time, I learned how to speak, you know.
- M: Did people help you learn, or did you go to a school to learn?

- C: I went to a school to learn how to speak. We got the papers after five years. I went to night school and learned how to right a little bit in English, and you know, I learned how to speak English.
- M: What was that like? What kind of people were in the class with you? Were there other immigrants?
- C: Yes. There were a lot of Greeks and Slovaks, too.
- M: Do you remember meeting a lot of other ethnic people on your journey to America? For example, on the ship, did you meet with other immigrants from other countries?
- C: No, it was all Italian.
- M: All Italian. When you got here did you find any other immigrants from different countries around you that lived by you?
- C: No, mostly, it was all Italian.
- M: All Italian. Did you speak Italian with them, or did you speak American?
- C: Italian.
- M: When you first came here and you mostly did the cooking, what kinds of foods did you cook? Italian dishes?
- C: Yes.
- M: What were some of your specialities?
- C: Anything.
- M: Anything?
- C: Yes. After I learned to cook English, too, I liked it.
- M: What were some of the first things that you learned how to cook as far as American foods were concerned? Do you remember?
- C: No.
- M: Maybe a hamburger?

C: Hamburger and french fries.

M: What kinds of customs did you keep? Italian customs, for example, Christmas dinners?

C: Yes. On Christmas, I would keep the Italian way. I would cook fish and no meat all of the time? It was hard, but I loved Christmas Eve.

M: What kinds of fish are there? Are there different kinds of fish?

C: There was eel, and there were some fish that I cannot recall.

M: But there was a lot of fish, right? Spaghetti?

C: Spaghetti, too.

M: Do you remember any cases of prejudice against you because you were an immigrant?

C: No.

M: Not at all? Any cases of running into the KKK who were sometimes against immigrants?

C: No.

M: Never. How was life better for you in America than it would have been in Italy?

C: To me, mostly, it was the same. I started to sew over here, too, and I was sewing in Italy.

M: Do you feel that today you speak more Italian or more American as far as language?

C: I speak both ways because of my mother-in-law and my mother. They do not speak English, so I have to speak Italian with them.

M: Can you think of any examples of people going out of their way to help you in any American custom, language, or something like that?

C: No, I do not think so.

M: When you first came here, did you have any emotions that you felt bad about leaving Italy?

C: No. It was just that I was with my mother-in-law because my husband was in the army, at that time. It was six months before he came back.

M: Do you still keep in touch with relatives and friends in Italy today?

C: Yes, oh, yes, with my cousin and my friend, too.

M: Did they ever want to come to America?

C: Sometime just for a visit.

M: Have you visited Italy?

C: Yes. I went a lot of times.

M: What has changed the most in Italy?

C: It is changed just like over here you know. I do not find too much difficulty.

M: Anything else that you would like to talk about as far as experiences that you remember on your passage or when you first got here that stand out to make the adjustment that may be tough?

C: No, it was not too tough.

M: Did you feel that you fit right in?

C: Yes, I was comfortable. I felt that I was at home.

M: No difference really?

C: No.

M: Did the Italian people in your neighborhood helped you adjust?

C: Oh, yes, they helped me adjust nicely.

M: Do you consider yourself an Italian- American or American-Italian? How would you tell your status as a person?

C: Both.

M: You are both?

C: Both. Anyway, it would not matter.

O: You are more American.



C: Yes, because I stayed over here longer than in Italy.

M: Okay.

End of Interview