YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of East Palestine Project

East Palestine during the Depression

O. H. 223

LENA M. GRAPPO

Interviewed

by

Stephen Casi

on

May 24, 1979

LENO M. GRAPPO

Lena M. Grappo was born in Bonefro, Italy on September 8, 1907, the daughter of Alessandro and Maria Louise Grappo. Lena Grappo arrived in New York City in 1911. She then came to East Palestine with her mother and sister to join her father who had been employed for several years with the East Palestine Brick Works on the eastern end of town, close to the Pennsylvania border.

Life in America was not what the Grappos had expected. When Lena Grappo was seven she had to help her mother with the cooking because her family operated a boarding house for Italians. When she was in sixth grade she was told by her parents that they needed her help at home since she was the oldest of thirteen children.

At the age of sixteen, in 1923, she married Michael Grappo, who was from the same town in Italy as Lena. For the next 25 years her husband was very ill off and on because of ulcers. During those 25 years the Grappos had four children. With little money and great resourcefulness, Mrs. Grappo kept the family going, even during the difficult years of the Depression.

In 1946 things finally made a turn for the better when Mr. Grappo opened up his own machine shop. Today, Mr. Grappo and his wife, after many years of struggling, live on 524 East Grant in East Palestine. Despite having very little for their children while they were being raised, all four of her children have made quite a success of their lives.

Mrs. Grappo is a member of Our Lady of Lourdes Church of East Palestine and belongs to the East Palestine Garden Club and Christian Mothers. Her hobbies include gardening, baking, sewing, and crocheting.

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East Palestine Depression

INTERVIEWEE: LENA M. GRAPPO

INTERVIEWER: Stephen Casi

SUBJECT: Italian immigrants, Depression, General life in East Palestine, especially for Italian immigrants.

DATE: May 24, 1979

C: This is an interview with Mrs. Lena Grappo for the Youngstown State Univeristy Oral History Program by Stephen Casi at 524 East Grant Street, East Palestine, Ohio on May 24, 1979, at 4:00 p.m. The subject is the history of East Palestine.

Mrs. Grappo, tell me a little about your family. What do you remember about your parents coming to the East Palestine area?

G: Well, we came from Bonefro, Italy. I was four years old. My mother had two children when she came here and we landed in the Brick Yard--we used to call it--in those days down on the Pennsylvania line. We had a little company house. Mom took in boarders. She had the vision of seeing America as a beautiful country with a nice home and everything. She ended up in a company home, with no furniture, nothing. Pop was making around 75¢ a day. She said, "We'll just have to have some boarders and help out." She did. Of course, I didn't start school until I was seven because I couldn't speak or anything and I also had to help my mother around the house cooking and things, even as little as I was. I had to because with seven boarders you almost had to do it.

C: Where was your home in East Palestine?

G: That's where I said, you know where the National Fireproofing is, they used to call it that?

C: Yes.

G: That's where they used to have the company homes. They used to call it the Brick Yard when I was a kid. We lived there for--oh, I don't know--a year or two. Finally, mom said, "This is in the woods. I have nothing and before we have a big family we better look for a house." They bought the house up here on East Grant and it was a four-room house. In those days they paid $2200. After they got more boarders they added two rooms to the house. I was eight years old, I think, when we moved to town here. I helped my mother, did a lot of the work. We had oil lamps, and a coal stove. I had to clean them before I went to school in the morning and I just grew up. It was poverty, really; there was no money. We didn't have any rugs on the floor or anything, and we lived the best way we could. Then I grew up and I went to sixth grade. I got as far as sixth grade in school. Mother had a big family. I'm the oldest of thirteen so I had to quit school to help my mother.

C: Where did you attend school in East Palestine?

G: East North Avenue, that's the one, East North Avenue, because I only went up to sixth grade.

C: Did you encounter any difficulties, the fact that you were Italian and there was a language barrier?

G: It was hard, it was very hard. Like I said, when I was in first grade I couldn't speak. The teacher would try to tell me, "Put your name on the paper here." She would write it on the board and instead of putting my name, I'd write what the teacher had on the board because I couldn't understand. She had to come and try to make me understand that I had to put my name and date and arithmetic or spelling on the paper. I eventually learned and picked up the language pretty good and tried to teach mom. As the kids grew up and went to school we tried to teach mom to speak a little more English. Of course, my father could speak English because he had been here before.

We lived there and I was fifteen then. My mother said, "Oh, get married." I said, "I don't want to get married." I didn't know anything about getting married at that time because she took me out of school to help take

care of the kids and the boarders and all. Then she thought, well pop isn't working and can't give me all the things that I want so I'd better get married. "You'll have a place of your own and you can have things that you can't have here," is what she said. I had to listen to my parents. When parents did those things, it isn't like now, you listened. You never said anything. She said, "In case things would go wrong you always have a place at home, but if you marry somebody on your own, then you're going to have to live with it." A kid that age gets scared and says, "Okay mother, I'll do it." I got married and the first thing I know, I ended up with a family, my mother-in-law and my father-in-law and two children. They lived with us.

C: Who did you marry Mrs. Grappo?

G: He was my first cousin.

C: Okay.

G: Yes. My mother and my aunt, it used to be, got along so well in the old country that they insisted I had to marry my aunt's son. She liked me so much she wanted me to marry. I did it. I ended up with a family. I had in-laws and three sisters-in-law living with me. Plus, like I said, we borrowed the money to send for them in the old country.

C: Had you met your husband Michael yet?

G: Yes, he was living here. He was living in East Palestine. The family came here. They had no money, and Mike sent them all the money to come here. Then my mother and father gave them a room to stay in until they could get situated. Well, they rushed this marriage. They had a daughter, sixteen and she fell in love with a boarder that we had. She married this fellow. He is a nice fellow. We had a double wedding together.

Of course, she went her way. They rented an apartment. They lived over by the railroad. There was an express building over there and upstairs they had apartments. She lived there. I was stuck with a mother and dad and kids. I made the best and lived with them. Finally, one day I woke up and I said, "Boy, Mike I can't see it. I'm married. I can't do anything. I can't go to the store and have money to spend on anything. I'm worse off than what I was at home. Your father is healthy, let him go work and make a living for his family. We brought him here, now go."

He went and told his dad. When he did this his dad got all upset and he took off and moved to Alliance. He didn't want any part of us anymore because I didn't want to live with him. They just got hurt. That's the way they get. I felt bad and we lived down on South Street, now where August Oats lives. Anyhow, the house is 165 down on South Street. That's when we got married and we lived there for awhile.

C: Tell me about your wedding before you go any further.

G: We got married down on 165 South Street, a few friends came in at night. We got married in Youngstown and the next morning he had to get up and go to work at the coal mine. No money, you had to go to work. Nobody gave you anything. It isn't like today, you get all of these gifts and everything. Friends came over and maybe they would give you a couple of dollars or something like that. Kids come out and belled you with tin cans. You had to give them something so Mike went to the bank and got dimes. He threw dimes up and the kids were just thrilled. They picked up the dimes . . . for the wedding.

We lived there then. After his father went away to Alliance, after a couple of months he was working. He got a job in the steel mill. One day, he went to work and he had a stroke, even with a piece of steel still in his hands. He was bad, he was left practically a vegetable. When we heard about it--because they wouldn't write to us or anything--I went up and I asked him to come back and live with us. He was mad. He said, "No, you didn't want me to live with you before, why should I live with you now?" I said, "Dad, when I told you that I didn't want you to stay you were healthy. You were able to make your own way into the world. You ought to be proud that I'm only a kid and I came back and asked you to come and stay with me." I think he thought it over and after that he came and moved back in with us, him and his wife. The kids at that time, two of them got married and one was married and then got killed by a train three months after. That left the two of them, and they lived with us. He lived with us nine years with that stroke so bad, then he had a second one. He lived six months in bed and died. I had two boys at the time. My mother-in-law lived with me until she passed away. She was 73. I had her thirty years.

C: Let me ask you if we can go back a little bit to your childhood. You said you were always quite busy

helping your mother.

G: Yes, right.

C: You really didn't have much time for fun?

G: Nothing, no fun.

C: Was there anything that you can remember as a child as being fun, activities, entertainment? What about your family, as a family did you ever have time to have some fun or enjoyment?

G: Like I said, our family when I was at home, we had those boarders. There was no place to go. The boarders would get a keg of beer on Saturday night and someone would play the accordian and someone would play the guitar. They'd sing.

C: Were most of them Italians, your boarders?

G: Yes. They were all Italians. A lot of them were from our home town in Italy. It was like one, big, happy family. We were happy that you had that much fun because the boarders would enjoy themselves.

C: Where did most of the boarders work?

G: Down at the brick yard.

C: What year was this that all these Italians had come to work in the brick yard?

G: I don't remember. It was probably 1914 or 1915, something like that.

C: Most of the Italinas that had come to town were either working in the coal mine or in the brick yard?

G: Right. That's all there was. Then when we moved here on Grant Street they were working at McGraws, the rubber mill. My father got a job there because McGraws was hiring. Most of the boarders were working there. There was one bunch of boarders, three brothers who boarded with us. There was also this Blosoc guy that was in town, he boarded with us for years. He was like part of the family. He was only about eighteen then.

C: The Blosco's that live up in that new section behind the high school?

G: John Blosco, old John.

C: The old John.

G: He boarded with us and, oh, he just thought the world of my parents because they were nice to him. Young kid, he didn't even know how to talk. He didn't know how to read. We taught him how to sign his name when we came home from school at night.

C: He had a successful business?

G: Yes, he was a junk man then and he had a little cart and he had a horse and buggy and he'd go around, "Rags, old iron. Rags, old iron." He bought himself a motorcycle and that was his fun.

C: And today, I believe . . .

G: He's got plenty of money.

C: He did pretty well, didn't he?

G: Yes, right. He was really something. He was another one. He got married in the old country real young. Then he came here and the war broke out and his wife was taken prisoner and he never knew where she was. He always said to my mother--I said, "People don't give John credit, he's a good fellow,"--he said to my mother, "If my wife is good and I find her and she doesn't have anybody's child, I'm going to send for her. She's got to come here. Even if somebody . . . because the Germans were raping them and everything. She couldn't help herself. If they did anything like that, I can see it, but I don't want anybody else's children." He sent for her after he was living at our house. He couldn't speak but he found a way to go to Cleveland and got their consulate . . . They found his wife and she came to town and they had the biggest party. He invited everybody in town to go there, like an open house. It was great. It seemed like all Italians that were here, we were just like one, big, happy family. You got together on Sundays, you went to visit them. This was the only fun we had. I never could go out and play or anything like that.

C: You stayed together as a group?

G: That's right. Coming home from school, I had to be home at 4:00 because I had to get the supper started. My friends would say, "Isn't your mother afraid to let you cook? You'd get burned?" It was on a coal stove, no gas stove. I said, "No, my mother isn't afraid. She taught me how to do it and I have to do it because my mother doesn't have time." Before I

went to school I had to wash all the clothes, put them in the boiler. They used to boil all their clothes years ago. Then, when I came home from school--of course, my mother had the babies, one every year; then she had the boarders to cook for--so when I'd come home I'd finish them, no washer, all by hand. After I got married I didn't have a washer for fifteen years. I did it by hand. People would say, "Well, how do you do your sheets?" I said, "Well, you do them. When you haven't got any other alternative you make the best of what you've got."

C: When you were a child, how about the clothing? Did you make a lot of your clothing, your family?

G: Well, no, not too much. Mom passes them down, so I usually ended up with something new because I was the oldest. Then you just keep passing them down to the family.

C: Were there any favorite stores in town that your mom used to like to go to?

G: Yes, oh, yes. There was Klein's Clothing Store, Scareball's, and there was Fassbergs. They were Jews. They were nice, they liked mother a lot because she had a big family and they always kidded her because she'd be a Jew. She dealt there when she tried to get things cheaper. Then they had the shoe store where the Justison's Hardware is now, there used to be a shoe store. Mother would buy all her shoes there, Chamberlain Shoe Store. They had all good-grade shoes, but whenever they had a sale, she would go there, buy seven or eight pairs of shoes. They'd sell them for a dollar. She'd come home, "This is yours. This is yours. This is yours." You never tried them on. Like my sister said, "It's a wonder we all have good feet yet." Mom said, "They'll stretch, because I can't afford to pay a big price." I can remember my first pair that she bought. You had to lace them clear up to your knees. I had to get up an hour early in the morning to lace all those ties. I was proud because I had a brand new, nice, leather, pair of shoes. But boy, oh, boy!

C: How about some of the grocery stores in town?

G: Well, Jim Rogers had a grocery store where the County Court is now. My dad used to deal there a lot. When dad would pay the bill, they'd fill you a big bag of candy and they'd give it to you. If my other sister was with me, he'd give her a bag too. I said, "Who does anything like that today?" I don't know, people were so lovable at that time.

C: Did you do a lot of canning with your mom and your sisters?

G: Oh, yes.

C: You had a big garden?

G: We had a big garden. We used to can, well, most of our vegetables, that's it. Dad always had a big garden. Canned our vegetables and our fruit, peaches and pears. Dad would go out to these farms because he used to trim trees and he used to do landscaping work. He'd get Charlie Eard's--it was like a coal wagon--with two horses and they would go out to the farm and the farmer would say, "Well, you come and get all the plums you want and the peaches." Didn't cost them anything. He'd prune their trees for them or something. He'd come home and we'd can all that stuff and this is how we lived. You couldn't buy everything at the store. Mother used to bake a hundred pounds of flour at the time, bread between the family and the boarders.

C: What did you think about the way some of the people in East Palestine ate, as opposed to the way the Italian people ate? Did it seem strange, the things they ate?

G: Well, no, it wasn't too strange. I said, "Boy, macaroni, macaroni, cabbage, or garden vegetables," that's about the things we'd cook. We had meat only on Sundays. Mother used to love veal. She'd always go at Rukenbrod's. That's where she dealt all the time. Raised all the family there. She would just say, "Come on. You come home from school and get that sauce made, going to have spaghetti." I was tired of spaghetti. You bought it in twenty pound cases and she'd have five or six cases. Those days you paid about $1.00, $1.50 a case, that was twenty pounds. You had all different kinds, but they were all macaroni. You lived with it. We didn't have eggs. They were a penny a piece, but like I say, when you get 75¢ a day and you have to keep a family, mother would say, "I can't afford it, that's all." We didn't. We didn't even have milk. We had coffee. Then the Depression set in and they were rationing all the food, the flour, and the sugar. We couldn't put sugar in our coffee and the kids wanted sugar in their coffee. We never bought milk until the kids got old enough to go out to the farm. Then it was 10¢ a gallon and they walked out to the farms to go and buy it. While I was growing up I never had milk.

C: Did you have cheeses I guess?

G: Well, some Italian cheese, not too much other than that, some Italian cheese. Mainly, it was macaroni and cabbage and all kinds of greens that dad raised in the garden. That's what we lived on, and fruit. We got oranges at Christmas time. I say, "Today they think, well, if you don't have this, you don't have that, you don't have vitamins." I told the doctor one time, "Hey, I was raised this way, now what's wrong. There's nothing wrong." They tell me even today, "You're the healthiest looking woman, if you didn't have that arthritis." In fact, if it wasn't the surgery they did on me, the doctor said, "I can't find anything else wrong." We didn't have the proper food, but we lived with it, even if it was just macaroni. None of us were fat. None of our boys and girls were heavy, even though we had that kind of food.

C: We can say that your childhood and right up to the time you got married and even after you worked pretty hard, you don't have that kind.

G: Right.

C: There wasn't too much time for fun.

G: I always had to work. Then after we got married we had a big garden because he got sick and we couldn't afford to buy things. I raised and I canned three and four hundred quarts, made vegetable soup. We had all kinds of vegetables and my father-in-law, he couldn't do anything, but my mother-in-law would help. She loved to work in the garden because old people from the old country do that. We would have the garden dug or something or they'd dig a little bit at a time and we'd raise our own dried beans. One year we had about a bushel of dried beans and I laughed. I said, "How are we going to get these beans out of the hulls?" My father-in-law said, "Well, I'll show you. Get an old sheet. Put the sheet on the floor, put all these dried beans"--we'd let them dry on the plant--"put them on there and get a stick and just kind of hit them around and everything." We picked a windy day and then we just went like this and all that stuff blew out and we had a bushel of clean beans!

C: How about your husband, when you got married, tell me a little bit about some of the jobs he had.

G: First he worked in the coal mine. For quite a while he worked in the coal mine. He used to go 4:30 in the morning. Get up and get breakfast. We lived

in a little three-room house right up the street here. We paid $10 a month I think it was. At 4:30 he'd go to work and I'd get up and got to my mother's and help her do the washing and do the work. She lived right across the street. Well, then he got a job at McGraws and he worked there for a while.

C: How much did he get paid at the coal mine?

G: Not very much, a couple of dollars a day; two, three dollars. We had gas light, a coal stove when I got married. That's what I say sometimes, "I feel like I'm 200 years old because I went through all that. Then came the Depression and there was nothing. You couldn't buy this, you couldn't buy that. I'd gone through it with my parents, and then after I got married. I went through the second Depression and we didn't have anything. We were dependent and had to go on welfare when he got sick, and when he didn't want to go. He was too proud and that's what made him get sick. He had every type of ulcer there is to get, until things got better for him, that he was on his own and didn't have to depend on somebody to give him charity. In those days nobody gave you anything. Like now, you can go down and get food stamps. You can get welfare. You can get medicine. You can get glasses if you need them. In my days, nobody would give you anything. When he was sick, he was supposed to have a gallon of milk a day and a half of a gallon of cream. That was the only diet he had for a long time until that ulcer . . . because his stomach burst. I said, nobody would give me anything.

I was expecting George, that was forty-five years ago. I couldn't go out. He had just come home from the hospital. I sent him to Rukenbrods to get a few things and he made him come home. A big man, he says, "I can't give you anything, your wife has overrun her welfare slip for $4. I can't give you any food." He came home. He said, "Oh, I'll never go there again." I was crying and my brother came down from Akron and he said, "What's wrong sis?" I told him and he said, "Oh boy, am I going down there and give him a piece of my mind. I caddied for him all that time at the golf course. My father raised thirteen kids and never owed him a dime and then he would turn him away for that?" He said, "I'll go down and give him that $4." I said, "I don't ever want to go in that store again when he denied me. With a sick man he ought to have been able to give it to me, rather than even charge, if he had any heart." Ralph went

down and he gave him the money and he said, "Forget it. You ought to be ashamed to treat my brother-in-law like that, just out of the hospital." He didn't say anything. It was young Kenny. I went back to the relief office and I told them, "I don't want my grocery bill there any more. I want it over at Jenkins." He said, "You can't go anyplace else because you owe Rukenbrod's $4." I said, "No, I don't owe him anymore. My brother just came down and paid him and I can go buy wherever I wish. I don't have to go and buy it there. You were told what to do." I got my stuff from them on over at Jenkins. Then he was allowed only unsalted crackers in his milk, and he finally got able to go back to work a little bit. He was working at the factory.

C: How long was your husband off from work?

G: Oh, he was off so much. For 25 years he was sick all of the time. Every year he'd get ulcers of some kind.

C: You think it was from worrying about not enough money?

G: That's what it was, right. Not enough money, and his parents to keep. We just got married. Like I said, we had that bank loan to pay back. We had to pay so much a month, plus your rent and your expenses. Of course, it bothered him. He was young, but he just couldn't see that he had to be dependent on somebody. He was healthy, but he developed these ulcers. For a long time they didn't know what it was. We went to so many doctors. What little bit of money you made, it took to go around hunting this doctor and that doctor. Everybody told him, you got to quit smoking and he only used to smoke about a pack a day. He finally did quit smoking and that really helped him. He lived on milk and crackers.

He had a little, tin box about that big and he'd put about four or five crackers in it and his thermos bottle full of milk. That's what he went to work with for a long time, until his stomach healed.

We had it rough, we didn't have anything. I bought that house off of Blosco then. I said, "John, you have to help us out. I'm tired of moving." We had moved so many times and with little children I wasn't able. I had phlebitis a lot. He sold us that house. Well, then we had the payments to make and he started to feel a little bit better, so he kept working and he said, "Well, we can pay that $20 a month for rent."

We did without a lot of things. That's what I said to my son, I said, "Your wife should be without things like I was. I have things now, but I never had them until the last fifteen years." We paid up that house, and it was a blessing that we got it because right after we bought it, the war broke out and hell broke loose and all the property went sky-high. We could have never bought a house then. We didn't have any money then. My husband said, "You're crazy. How are you going to buy a house? We don't have any down payment? I'd lie awake at nights and I'd think. We had insurance on him at Metropolitan Insurance. He never wanted insurance. Well, we never could afford it. I said, "Mike, you have to have at least $1,000. If something happens what will I do?" I finally talked him into $1,000 policy, after we were married. Well, in twenty years you'd get your $1,000 back. Well, in those twenty years he was in and out of the hospital and we had no money and I borrowed and borrowed on it. I figured it up one day and we couldn't pay it back so I said, "Mike, I think there is $300 in there." I went to the lawyer and told him. He was like my father. That lawyer was so good. I said, "Mr. Lyons, I've got to do something. Do you think I'll lose money on this insurance?" He said, "No, because it's almost matured. You'll get $300 out of it." Well, that's how I went to Blosco. Nobody would give us a house for $300 down, but John Blosco did and that's all we put down and bought that house. Mike said, "You're crazy thinking about a house. You'll never get a house for that." I said, "Well, I'm going to get that money back." I wrote in to the company and I told them the conditions and that I'd never be able to pay that back. I wanted the money back now even if I did lose. I didn't lose anything on it. That's how we bought our first house. We lived in it all those years and when we sold it we sold it for $1700.

C: You talked about some of the experiences as far as the hardships. I know to this day, East Palestine has very few Italian people.

G: A lot of them are dead now, but there were quite a few here years back, during the war.

C: Most of the people in East Palestine were not Italian.

Did you ever feel that because you were Italian you weren't treated fairly at times, without naming any people or races.

G: No, kids were cruel. Kids were really cruel in those days. They would call you names and things because you couldn't talk right or something like that, but other than that . . . Some of the people were nice. Like I say, if you got down in the gutter, you had to get up on your own because nobody helped each other. I can remember one year at Christmas--like I said, seven of us in the house--nothing, nothing for the kids. Nothing in the house, no money. He had just got out of the hospital that night before Christmas. He always would get it every year at the same time. It always seemed to come around November or December. This was a new doctor and he was really something. He knew the condition. There were no trains or buses to go to the hospital. This doctor would come and pick me up every morning and take me to the hospital because they never thought he would live.

C: What hospital were you going to?

G: Salem Hospital.

C: Salem?

G: Yes, and they had to give him blood transfusions and all that. He took him and didn't know whether he was going to make it. Then, when he finally did make it, he came home the day before Christmas. This doctor went down to Rukenbrods. He sent about a $30 order for Christmas, all the stuff Mike was supposed to eat, because he knew. I said we couldn't pay him and he moved out of town because he said in East Palestine nobody would pay him. He went up to Struthers. After about a year or so, we got on our feet and we went up one day. I said, "We want to pay you doctor. He just got married in town when he moved here and he couldn't remember. I said, "Don't you remember the fast rides you used to give me to the hospital every morning. Mrs. Grappo. Mike had bleeding ulcers and that? Oh God." He said, "You are the first person from East Palestine to come up here and want to pay me. You are the only person. I can't tell you what you owe me, because I knew--he was a very good Catholic--I knew you were good, but you didn't have it and I didn't expect your husband to make it and live. I have not put down in my books anything about you, and I don't know what to charge you." I said, "I know doctor, but just to come and pick me up every morning and everything. We're sorry that we had to wait this long, but he just got on his feet." He said, "He's the only man that I've had with that trouble that has lived. The rest of them

are all in the cemetery." He said, "He really did what I told him to do and he's living today and I'm happy for you." He said, "If it makes you happy just give me $50, just to make you fell happy that you paid me." That's all he charged. So you see, some people did good, but there were very few.

Then, some of our friends here, this Tony Ferris, he's dead now but his kids are still active. They're such nice people. He took up a collection one Christmas and he came up and he said to me, "Mike just got out of the hospital and I know it's Christmas. You don't have any money." He said, "I gathered up $50. I don't want you to feel offended about taking it, it's charity, but I thought you could use it." We accepted it graciously. I mean, it made you feel that good that they thought of you, but still, you had pride that you wished you didn't have to do that. They were nice. Then we had some nice Italian people in town.

C: Your children were raised in the Depression?

G: Depression right. This George was a Depression baby. He had a nickel policy when he was born. (Laughter)

C: How did you make ends meet during the Depression? You had how many children during the 1930's?

G: I had four children and one died.

C: How did you make ends meet? In the 1930's your husband, he was still sick?

G: Yes, he was sick. He worked two or three months and then he was back in the hospital.

C: Where was he working in the 1930's now?

G: Well, he worked in Columbiana. He worked in Beaver Falls, the B&W, during the war and that. He'd change jobs when they were laid off and he'd get something somewhere else. I had the children, and like I said, we lived up on West Martin. I had a very good neighbor that didn't know what Depression was. Her husband was a ceramic engineer at the pottery. He made a lot of money, lived next door to me. Well, they had all kinds of good food. She used to come in and she's say, "Oh Lena, what are you cooking today?" When I moved in there it got around that she said, "I don't want any dirty Italians moving next door to me," because they had money. I found out later and I said, "Oh, how come you didn't want any dirty Italians?" Well, she

said, "I didn't know you were going to be that kind. All the Italians I knew were like that." I said, "I didn't think you should have made that kind of statement." Then we were the best of friends. She used to come over because I baked and cooked and everything. He used to make keys, three for a dollar or four for a dollar, whatever it was. He had a little key machine in our living room. That was a little bit of money he made when he was sick.

I'd go down to the A&P. We had an A&P. You got bacon for 10¢ a pound. Maybe I would get a couple of pounds of bacon or something. We couldn't buy meat because we didn't have the money. They had the skin you take off of the pork and they would sell that, 10¢ a pound. I'd buy a couple of pounds of that. I'd go home, stew it, and I'd make a sauce out of it. She'd come in and she'd say, "What are you cooking? It smells so good." She was nosey. She was really nosey. She was a nice person, but nosey. She'd go at the stove and look and she'd say, "What's that?" I said, "It's pig skin. I'm making spaghetti sauce." She said, "You mean you're going to eat that stuff?" She said, "Why, they make shoes out of it." I said, "Well, we're not lucky you know. We have to eat what we can." I would make homemade macaroni and we'd have a nice meal.

C: It didn't cost you much either.

G: No. Twenty cents. I said, "Now, they sell it." I was in New York and they roll it and people say they stuff it and cook it, that fresh pork skin. I said, "Well good. We had to do that."

I had to learn how to sew. My first daughter was born fifteen years after we were married. I had all boys. My mother says, "You'll never have a girl." Well, she died and about nine and a half months later I had my first daughter. I was so happy. Then I couldn't afford to buy her clothes. I had to learn how to sew. I started making her clothes and she looked as pretty as anybody else. Two years later I had another girl. That was my last. She was the baby. I had to do my sewing. I used to make my bras; I used to make my underwear, underclothes.

C: Your kids were being raised in the Depression. How about the kids themselves, did they ever complain about not having much? What was their situation?

G: Never. They never complained. They knew we didn't have it. They accepted it. They never hounded me for

anything. We never gave the children allowance because I didn't have it. When they got old enough, like I said, I used to grow vegetables and I'd clean them and put them in a little basket and Jim would go out and sell them and that was his spending money because we didn't have it. The kids didn't complain. Didn't have new clothes. Holidays came along, no gifts because like I said, he was always sick at Christmas time, every year. One year he made them a car. He had the time and he made them a little car and that was, oh, they were tickled to death over it.

The American Legion would gather old toys and then at Christmas they would bring them out to people who were on welfare or something. I can remember that's all our kid had, was a little old car about so big. It was heavy and I went into the five-and-ten and got a can of paint for ten cents. When the kids didn't see it I painted it all up. That was the Christmas present. They never complained. My children never complained. Everybody today has lots of gifts.

C: How about East Palestine in general? During the Depression, how would you describe life in East Palestine? Did it change?

G: Well, I think life was much better in those days because there were a lot more people. You would go down the street, we had the rubber works, and there were a lot of people employed in the coal mines and the rubber works and the brickyard; and there was a lot going on in town, but today the town looks vacated compared to what it was when I was about twelve, thirteen or fourteen years old.

C: Did you feel that the Depression hurt most of the people in East Palestine or were there a lot of people who weren't effected that much by the Depression?

G: Well, most of them were. Some people, like I say, at the pottery, if they had a good job, they were all right. The Depression hit most of the people, but they used to grow all their own vegetables. They used to make do, help themselves the best they could.

C: As a family, what did your family do for enjoyment or entertainment?

G: They didn't, they just visited one another and had a little get-together maybe, cook a meal or a dinner or something like that. Once in a while my dad would get the family and take them to the fair. They used to

have a fair where our park is, they had the fairgrounds. There would be a circus or a fair or something like that and it would be a treat. He would say, "Well, come on. Let's take the kids to the fair."

The show used to be ten cents. We'd say, "Mom, can't we got to the grand show?" It used to be down on Rebecca Street there, right next to the Legion. She said, "I can't afford ten cents a piece for each one," so you didn't get to go. No. They had ice cream parlors everywhere. My sister used to work in one of them. Well, were you going to go? You didn't have the money so you didn't go.

C: You made it through the Depression and things started to get better with World War II.

G: Yes, after World War II.

C: When war hit, do you remember anything unusual about East Palestine, or maybe you could tell me a little bit about rationing or food stamps and things like that.

G: Well, there was rationing. They rationed all your food, your gas. You had the ticket and you went down there and you only got so much. If you were on welfare, twice a week. They would have a place where they would put whatever surplus food, whether it was butter, grapefruit, or whole wheat flour. You got something like that. Sugar was rationed a lot. We didn't have sugar. You just kind of lived with it because there was no other alternative, and people didn't kick.

C: Did it create any hardships for your family?

G: Well, it did. It was hard. It was hard because kids didn't like what you had to give them. I can remember many a times when I was at home, my mother would say, "What are we going to have for supper? I don't know what we are going to have. We don't have anything. Dad isn't working." She'd say, "Well, the birds don't starve. God doesn't let the birds starve so he isn't going to let us starve." She'd say to the kids, "Go out and get a gallon of milk and I'll bake." All she could bake was a big chocolate cake when I was home. My aunt had taught her how to do it. You put everything in a pan and mix it up. Put it in the oven. Boy, the kids were so happy to have that big, chocolate cake. That was their supper, that and a glass of milk.

C: How about . . . you had a car in the 1940's?

G: Well, we had an old car. Yes. We had an old, old Chevy. My father never drove. We never had a car. Walked miles to the coal mine and so did he [Mrs. Grappo's husband]. He walked for many years to the coal mine. He didn't have a car.

C: Did the rationing of gasoline create any problems for your husband to go back and forth to work?

G: No, no because we didn't go anyplace. We would just go to work and that's it. I used to walk to town with a basket. Carry your groceries home, that's all. Yes, he was working down at Beaver Falls. He had enough to do him and he used to give them to people who needed them once in a while. It wasn't easy, but I think people accepted it better than we do now.

C: Did you have any relatives that went off to war?

G: Oh, I had six in our family, brothers, oh, I had seven.

C: Any of your children?

G: No, not my children.

C: They missed it?

G: They missed it, yes. My son Jim, he enlisted after the war was over. He was in the Marines for two years, but the kids missed it. My brothers were all in. One boy was in Iwo Jima when they raised the flag. He made a career of the Marines. He's the one in Orlando, Florida that I go to visit. My brother was a lieutenant in the Navy. He was a college graduate. He worked his was through college, didn't have anything. My other brother was in Germany, the Battle of the Bulge. They would all write home to me because mother was dead and I was . . . more or less, they thought of me as somebody they could rely upon.

C: During the 1940's things aren't still so wonderful for the Grappo's as far as money goes.

G: No, as far as money it wasn't good.

C: And then your husband--it was about 1946--he decided to . . .

G: To start that shop, but I used to wash, iron, bake, and do things for people. We had an Isaly's store and he would come up and he would say, "Lena, make me spaghetti sauce because I want good spaghetti sauce and meatballs." Then he would serve it down there. All they would do

is boil the water and cook the spaghetti. I'd do anything to make a few dollars to buy some things for our kids because there was no money to be gotten anywhere. Today, how many people do that? I said, "I often wonder how much flour I've used in my 56 years."

C: As the kids got older, did any of your children want to go to college?

G: They wanted to go, yes. Jim did go one year at Kent State and we couldn't afford it and he couldn't get a job so he had to quit. George, he wanted to go so bad because he was good in metal art in school. I guess he's a chip off of the old block. He loves metal work. When he graduated he said, "Mother, you have to tell me something. I'd love to go college and be an engineer." I said, "Honey, how am I going to send you to college? We paid $1800 for the house. I can't go and borrow money to send you to college, and what will I do? Your father's sick and I won't have a place to live." He said, "Well, that's all I wanted. Just so I know you would send me if you could." He went out and got a job as a draftsman. He kept working himself up till today. He does all kinds of blueprints. He's good. He's really tops in his field. He learned it all the hard way. He is now a drafting engineer.

C: When you think about some of the things that took place in your years in East Palestine, what do you think, during your lifetime in East Palestine, was the greatest invention or innovation that you can think of? Something that you thought was a remarkable thing and brought some changes?

G: Well, the changes came when they started to make good roads. When I was little, all they had was dirt roads. East Main Street, West Main Street was nothing but dirt, horse and buggies running and boy, when they started to put new roads in and we could have walks and stuff like that, to me, I thought that was great. Market Street is still the same as it was when I was little, only now it has got nice, brick roads . . . or, it used to be brick, then they paved it.

C: In 1946 your husband has got his own shop. Do you start to feel that the Grappo's can relax a little?

G: No. Even after he got into business, we had no money. We had to borrow the money to buy his machinery, to get started in business. By the time we paid off that machine, we still were worse off because where was the

money coming? You had to make payments on this money. Until he got . . . well, it was two or three years or so, or four before it got really better. After he paid his machine off he felt, "Well, now I got my building made. Now, what I make we can spend a little bit." Like I say, in fifteen years I didn't own a washing machine. He made a wooden board, wash board, because those wash boards you bought, they didn't last too long. Now, sixteen years we're here, the last sixteen years has really been a lot nicer.

C: The 1950's things are still getting better?

G: Yes.

C: Your husband has got plenty of customers?

G: Oh yes.

C: How about as a family, did you start to do a little more as a family?

G: No, we still didn't go anywhere. We still didn't go anywhere. He started to save money because I was in the hospital quite a bit then. I had leg surgery, phlebitis, and I was in bed most of the time. I had to go to the hospital and we didn't have money. We didn't have insurance so we had to pay that. That was hard. Then the kids got married. We always had nice weddings for them. That took money. Another way, you couldn't splurge because what little bit you had, you had to make do with these things that came up unexpectedly.

C: Where did you live when your husband first had his shop?

G: Up the street here, 304 East Grant Street. There's a brick house. There are two brick houses together. We lived in the middle one, 315 East Grant. We moved to enough homes. It started to get better. After we moved here, I had two surgeries.

C: Let me ask you, some of the other Italian people that had moved to East Palestine, did you see a lot of families starting to move away from East Palestine?

G: No, the ones that came here stayed here. They stayed here.

C: Who were some of the Italian families that have been here for quite a long time in East Palestine?

G: Well, the Chicks and Ross' and the Orsine's and Tamaccio and Mr. Colella and Grillo, and who was the other? Oh, there were a few more. Ferris', Goldo's, Saporito, Dasco, Blosco, DeLillo, Falcon's, and the Mano's.

C: Blosco?

G: Blosco's were not Italian. Most of the Italian people, they came here, they stayed here. Penucci was a shoemaker, very good friend of ours. He stayed here quite a while and then moved to California. He was the only one that I can remember ever moved, and Joe, the one that used to come and play the serenade on Christmas, Joe Oates. Yes, the Oates family and the Bozzo families, they all came and they stayed here and we were all friends with all of them, Ungaro, Caparelli, all of them. We were friends with all of them. On Sunday, this is what you did, if you wanted to, go visit them and they came to visit us.

The Italian people--I don't know if you remember, they did that over there--whenever you have a baby, they all come to see you. The people couldn't get over it, the neighbors. The American friends, they used to say, "Gee, your house is just like a church door. You always have people coming in, coming all the time with baskets of food. Every time I was sick or had a baby or something, they would bring food over and come and visit you. We'd go and visit them. This was the pleasure you got out of life. You made friends, where today, people don't associate much like that. When you had a friend, now we have Mano's that used to have a barber shop here . . . You know them, Frank and them. Well, I've known them since they came to town. We've been good friends, never once had any disputes or any problems, just great friends.

C: The one thing you can say about your life in East Palestine is, there were a lot of good friends.

G: A lot of good friends, a lot of them. All of them in fact, all of them.

C: Do you feel that the Italians seemed to be closer when they came to America, than even when they were in Italy?

G: They were close, very close here. Once you made a friend and were honest, and you weren't the type that would talk behind their back or say something, you had a friend for life and they would do anything in

in the world for you. Then we had aunts and uncles in Alliance. We used to go up there and visit the relatives, cousins. Really, that was our pleasure we had in life. We didn't go anyplace, picnics or anything like that, but we got along with all the people and you visited. You spent Sundays doing this.

C: You stayed on East Grant Street until 1963 when you moved to this present house?

G: Yes, we moved here, right.

C: You had been married quite a few years before you actually got your first new house?

G: Right, right, it's the first house. We lived in eleven houses before we bought that one from Blosco. Like I said, that was so bad. It was during the war. Just before the war broke out we bought it.

C: Since 1963 you've lived here and your husband has continued to work.

G: He's had better health, and I've had rotten health. (Laughter) He's had good health since he was sure of himself. He was happy with his work. He knew he didn't have to depend on anybody to give him a dime, and that just seemed to boost his morale or do something so that he got better and never had any more recurrences of his ulcers.

C: Maybe for a minute we could talk about the churches of East Palestine, what you remember about the first Catholic church here in town, and maybe you could say something about how the other religions, how everybody treated each other. Do you feel that all the religions treated one another equally or . . .

G: Not like today.

C: Not like today?

G: No, no. Today it's wonderful because you think a lot of each other. In those days, the Catholics weren't allowed to go into the Protestant's and the Protestants stayed to themselves. It just wasn't a unity like it is now. We went to our little, old church. It was really an old building we had there for a long time.

C: Where was this located?

G: Where that telephone building is, on West Clark. That's where our old church used to be.

C: That was the first Catholic church in East Palestine?

G: Right, that was the first one, St. Mary's. We used to live right across the street from it, there was a house there. We lived there for quite a while. Father Hied was the priest . . . In 1941 they built that building. Then in 1941 they built this one up here, right above the school. The churches, they weren't like today at all. People didn't mingle, I don't know why.

C: There was quite a bit of closeness with the people that did attend the church?

G: Yes, the ones that did attend it, yes. Like I said, I could go to church--I used to walk a lot then--and somebody would see you, "Come on, I'll take you home." There weren't too many people that had a car, but the ones that did, they would take and bring you home. I said, "Today, you go to church and if you walk you just better walk, because nobody gives a darn."

C: You feel it's different today than it was then?

G: It is different, because today there are a lot of the younger people, and the younger people, they don't associate. They don't think the same as the old people. In those days there were people maybe our age or something and they would say, "Well." You stand in front of church and you would be talking with this one and that one and the other. Now boom, boom, boom, they run. You don't see anybody anymore. Now, there's a few of our people still living here that maybe we'll get to talk to or say, "How are you," or something like that. The younger people don't seem to mingle.

Now they cried in our church to have . . . My son was at the head of it. He said, "We've got to get these new people together so that we can mingle together as one body. We're all the same here." They had, and they served lunch and everything, there was a handful of people. He said, "What do you have to do to get these people to get together like we used to years ago?" We used to get together, but I don't think the younger people want to do that today.

C: Something that I wanted to ask you earlier that I didn't was about your mother and father. Maybe you

could tell me what part of Italy they had come from in Bonefro, about when they came to America, and why your mom and dad came to enjoy a better life.

G: Well, pop came--Oh God, I don't know what year he came--he was here long before my mother, and he always worked in the brickyards too. Then he finally decided he made enough trips and he was going to send for my mother. She came, it must have been--I was four years old--1911 then, it might have been, when my mother came here.

C: He came for work?

G: He was here because he came for work. There wasn't much there and he thought he could better himself. He lived in Waynesburg for a long time and then, like George, my son used to say, "Of all the places on this earth, in America, why did they have to pick East Palestine?" They never liked it because there was nothing to do here. They said, "What do you do in this town?" Well, our kids, they had an empty lot across from where we lived and they would get all the boys together and the girls and they would play ball. Oh, they had a ball. That was their pastime, their fun. They never had any problems. One day, the lady--I met here in a beauty shop a few years back--she said, "We're going to try to vote and have a roof put over the park there, the swimming pool." I said, "Listen, I don't want to raise our taxes, we don't need a roof." She said, "Well, you don't have children. I have children, they're all under my feet." I said, "Listen, my mother had thirteen, and they weren't under her feet because they had work to do. They all had something to do. They were told to do it and they did it. The only place they had was a ball field, and they were happy. As soon as they ate their supper, got the dishes done, they were out there playing ball and they had the time of their lives." They used to belong to the Boy Scouts and they would go to different houses and do whatever they had to do. Then the Soldo's used to live--I don't know if you know Ben Soldo and all them--well, they used to live catty-corner from us. Every year on St. Anthony's Day he would always make a big fire. We would all gather together and sing all the Italian songs and church songs and things like that. Sit around till that fire would die down at night and then my mother would go get a pot of beans, put them on there and the next morning she'd go get them and they were cooked because there was a heavy fire. It was a lot of fun. The kids used to join in and they would all carry the wood there all year long, make the fire for St. Anthony's. They found pleasure in a lot of things that we did.

C: Do you remember anything about coming over yourself?

G: I just remember that when my father met us at the station we got here in East Palestine. My mother had a couple of pillows that she had stuff in and she was carrying my sister, this is the one living in Florida. She was about two and a half years old or something like that. Mom was carrying her and pop said, "Louise, in America the man has to carry the children, not the woman. You can't carry her, I'm going to carry her." Well, Clara had never seen a man in her life because she was at home with mom all the time. The minute my father wanted to grab her, she screamed. She didn't want any part of it. She grabbed mom around the neck and pop tried to get her off. That was a bad start because he said, "Here, she doesn't like me." Well mom said, "She never saw a man." I was different. Of course, I've been different all the time and that's all I can remember. All the way, we walked from the station to the brickyard, clear down there on the end of . . . on the Pennsylvania line. All the way, my father carried Clara and she cried and screamed all the way home. (Laughter)

We had to climb fences. There was Taggert's farm there. We had to climb those fences. I went to school, Wood Street, my first grade. I went to Wood Street and I used to walk from there to Wood Street. I walked home and then when I got home--of course, after a year that my mother was there she had a little girl--she didn't have enough to nurse, so I had to go down to where Clyde Davis used to live, back there. What's the name of that street now? East Main where Mary Bruner used to live, yes. They had a barn back there and they had a cow and I had to walk back to town--seven years old--with my little milk can and go and get milk for my sister, Rose. Yes, they used to have bums all along the way. They built a fire like a tepee and they would have a can, coffee can or something, and cook things. I got so scared one night. I was just so frightened. There was a man walking in front of me and I thought maybe he would hurt me, but they never hurt anybody, but I was scared. I was a little kid. I was scared. I'd start running and I kept saying, "Pop, Pop, wait on me Pop, wait." That's all I could say because I was afraid these bums would come after me. Every night I had that ritual to go from school and then back--because they didn't milk the cow till late--and I'd carry the milk home, the little bucket of milk.

C: Let me ask you, looking back over the years in East Palestine, are there any changes you would have liked to have seen taken place, in East Palestine? Just if there was anything that you think would have maybe made the town a better place to live?

G: Well, I would have thought if they would have had a few more stores in East Palestine it would have made it a better place, would induce people to stay around here and shop more. We had such a small clique here that they prevented other big stores from coming in or anything like that. That was the only thing I didn't like. I said, "Why can't we have, like a J.C. Penney or a Wards or some big store where these little store that you patronize, they couldn't gouge you because they thought you can't go anywhere else." Then, after the cars commenced, then people would go out and shop and that's when they started to hurt. Well, then of course, we got this big five-and-dime and when they got that, they started to handle everything. Some of the people stayed around and bought stuff here. I would have liked to have seen East Palestine have a good clothing store or a good cloth store, sell nothing but cloth. I know my daughter used to love to sew and she thought a couple of times she would like to open a store that just sold cloth. Well, then when she decided, the woman up the street here, she opened up that cloth store, so you can't have too many of them. Other than that . . . Like I say, they don't want East Palestine to grow, they want to keep it small. They say it's nicer when the town is smaller.

C: Well, I want to thank you Mrs. Grappo for letting me talk to you today. It was a real pleasure.

G: Thank you for coming.

END OF INTERVIEW