

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Appliances of the Past Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 789

JOANNE LEPORE CHANGET

Interviewed

by

Robert Fabian

on

May 23, 1985

JOANNE LEPORE CHANGET

Mrs. Joanne Lepore Changet was born on July 29, 1903 in Italy. Mrs. Changet came to the United States through Ellis Island in 1914 and settled with her family in Edgerville, Illinois. She later moved with relatives to a mining town in Pennsylvania, called Ellsworth. In 1919, Joanne married, and then moved to North Canton in 1928 to find work and to stay with relatives. Her husband became ill which caused Joanne to find work outside her home. She did not have any education higher than grade school. However, Joanne held a variety of jobs. She worked for a tire company, a Federal Garment Factory, the Singer Sewing Machine Company as a salesman, and finally in home offices. Since 1971, Mrs. Changet has been active in the Rosary Antar Society, a member of Saint Paul's Church and Retired Seniors Volunteer Program.

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INTERVIEWEE: JOANNE LEPORE CHANGET

INTERVIEWER: Robert Fabian

SUBJECT: Hoover Company, modernization, housework

DATE: May 23, 1985

F: This is an interview with Mrs. Joanne Lepore Changet for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Hoover Company Project. This interview is being conducted by Robert Fabian on May 23, 1985.

If you would just tell me some background, where you grew up, where you were born?

C: My name is Lepore Changet; Lepore is my first husband and I go by that name on everything. I was born in Italy in 1903. I am 81 years old, soon to be 82.

F: Did you live in a city in Italy? Where did you live in Italy? When did you come over to the United States?

C: I was born in 1903, and I was eleven years old when I came across, so that makes it 1914. I came across in 1914, landed in New York. We were housing in Ellis Island for a week. After that we traveled and I lived in Illinois. We lived in Illinois until I was sixteen years old. Then I went to stay with an uncle in Pennsylvania who I kept house for. I met my husband there. I was only fifteen years old mind you, but in those days you didn't leave girls alone because there weren't enough girls like there is today. We went back to Illinois to get my mother's consent to be married. We came to Ohio for our honeymoon and then went back to Pennsylvania where we lived for a few years.

F: Where did you live in Pennsylvania?

C: Ellsworth, Pennsylvania.

F: Was it a farming area?

C: It was a large mining town. It is still there.

F: When did you live there?

C: Right after I got married.

F: When was that?

C: 1919. We lived there for about three years. After that we went back to Illinois where my mother lived and lived there until the mines shut down.

F: What was it like living in a mining town in Illinois or Pennsylvania?

C: It was nothing but housekeeping. There was nothing else for the ladies to do. The men all had jobs in the mines.

F: How long did you live in Pennsylvania and then Illinois?

C: I would say about three years in Pennsylvania and then moved to Illinois where I lived for about eight years. The mine closed down and there was no work, so I sold my house for \$800. I was lucky to sell it; a lot of people had to leave them. They couldn't even take their furniture because they had no money to go anywhere; they just closed them up and let them sit there.

F: Did they have electricity and running water?

C: We had electricty, but no running water, just pumps. You pumped your own water.

F: In the back . . .

C: Yes, but I was lucky enough to have mine inside my house. It was in the big breakfast room where I had my pump.

F: Was it the same in Illinois as in Pennsylvania?

C: Yes, it was the same. You had to go out and pump your water. There was no such thing as water in the house until later when they did put water in the house, quite a while later.

F: Were you still living there when they put the water in the house?

C: No.

F: When did you move to North Canton? After you lived in Illinois?

C: I came to North Canton on Easter. I spent Easter with an aunt of mine who lived on Liberty Avenue; there is no such thing anymore. It's a big shopping . . . When I saw how Canton was and the work that was here, we made up our minds to move to

- Canton. They were building--southwest wasn't even built up much--on Twelfth and Eleventh Street. My aunt told us to buy a house with the money we had saved and she would rent it for us so that we could make the payments.
- F: So you had family living here already?
- C: I had my mother's sister living here. We bought the house on Twelfth Street southwest which is still there. We went back to Illinois because he still had some work for a while. When the mines closed down, my husband moved here and stayed with my aunt. I stayed and sold the house and then I moved.
- F: When did you move here?
- C: Fifty-seven years ago. We went back once for a reunion. It wasn't the same. There wasn't any of the grocery stores, school-houses, nothing; everything had deteriorated away.
- F: So you have lived in North Canton since the early 1930's.
- C: We moved here in 1928 and lived here ever since.
- F: Do you have any family?
- C: I have two daughters and one son. Frank Lepore lives in the northeast Canton area and has a beautiful place there. My one daughter, Olga Patterson, works at Hoover and one daughter lives in Florida. That's all the family I have.
- F: Have you ever worked outside the home?
- C: God, have I. I've worked all over.
- F: What did you do?
- C: I had to. In 1948 my husband got sick and couldn't work anymore. He had arthritis of the spine and in those days they didn't have therapy and all the things they have now. So I went to work.
- F: What did you do?
- C: Did you ever see some of those old-fashioned cars where they have the tarp covering the back of the car with pictures on it?
- F: Yes.
- C: Well, I worked with that car company.
- F: What was the name of it?

- C: I used to sew the rubber inside of them to put it on the tire and then you tightened it. The shop was on the corner of Sixth Street southwest, near the swimming pool.
- F: Do you remember the name of it?
- C: No, but I could call somebody who worked there who would know the name of it.
- F: How long did you work there?
- C: I worked there for a while, maybe six or seven months. I was always moving to where I could make a few cents more. I worked across the street at the Federal Garment Factory. I don't know if it's still existing or not, but I think it is; I think it's in Louisville now. I worked there for awhile and I wasn't making very much so I went with the Singer Sewing Machine Company. I worked for them for a long time, selling sewing machines from house to house.
- F: You sold sewing machines?
- C: Yes. I was strong then. I used to be able to just pick it up and bring it in the house. Now I can't even move two feet. Of course, I was young and strong and out on the road. My daughter drove the car because I didn't know how to drive. I was learning but I gave it up after I had a wreck. I didn't have a wreck, but some other guy just passed right in front of me.
- F: So what do you do now?
- C: I volunteer four days a week and go the the YWCA. I have a big garden and I do all of my own housework.
- F: That keeps you busy then.
- C: Yes, it keeps me busy.
- F: Let me ask you some questions on household appliances and that. Can you describe when you were back living in Pennsylvania or Illinois what kind of washing machine you used?
- C: A water power. You used your hands on the washboard.
- F: What did it look like?
- C: The water power machine that I used when I moved to Canton was hooked onto the two spigots, cold and hot, and the strength of the water would make the machine go back and forth. It was a wooden machine, no metal.
- F: This was when you were in North Canton?

C: No, I was in Liberty Street southeast.

F: What about in Illinois?

C: We just used our hands on the washboard. You boiled your clothes, rinsed them and hung them out.

F: What kind of washer do you have now?

C: A Maytag.

F: Electric?

C: Yes.

F: When did you use the water pump one?

C: When I first moved to Canton, in 1928.

F: What kind of stove did you have back then?

C: I had a gas stove to cook and for heating we had a big pot-bellied heater.

F: Was it right next to it?

C: No, it was in the dining room, the heater. The stove was in the kitchen.

F: What kind of stove did your mom use? Same thing?

C: Same thing. A coal stove.

F: Hard to take care of and clean up?

C: Well, we didn't mind in those days. We got up in the morning and if the fire was out from the night before you fixed your fire in the morning. You put a match underneath it, made it light, and then put on the coffee pot.

F: Did most of your neighbors have the same thing?

C: Same thing. The stove did have a big lid on one side where you put water. It would keep it hot whenever you needed water.

F: To the left or the right side?

C: To the right side.

F: Was it easy to cook on?

C: Yes, at the top of the stove it had a splashboard and then a warming oven where you kept your food warm. If your husband

came home late, you could put his food in there to keep warm. We baked all our own bread and pastries; never bought anything. We made and grew everything. I still do. I have my own big garden and I raise my own plants. I don't buy plants. I still live pretty much the old way and I find it is the best.

F: Why 's that?

C: I don't have to go to the store and buy everything like these young kids. That's why they don't have any money. They are as poor as church mice. Even if they make \$60 to \$80 a day they still don't have anything because they go out to eat. I can fix you a meal in about fifteen minutes because I always have something started. I've got a big freezer downstairs and it's always full. I have homemade bread, rolls, cakes, everything. I don't eat cake much now, but I still have it in case I get company.

F: What if you didn't have a freezer downstairs? How did you use to store bread or things like that?

C: Well, we just made enough for a week then, but now I make enough for a month and freeze it.

F: When did you get the freezer?

C: I was working for a doctor. Her husband died and they had three apartments. She had a lot of refrigerators and had the freezer downstairs with nothing in it. She told me to clean it out one day. I went to clean and she said that she wanted to sell it if she could find somebody. I told her I would buy if off of her or my son would. I went to my son and he could never find her at home. I told my husband we shouldn't let him buy it, we should buy it ourselves. I paid her for half and I worked the other half off.

F: What kind of work were you doing for this doctor?

C: Housecleaning. I made more housecleaning than I did at the shop. I would work for all kinds of rich people.

F: What year was this about?

C: After 1936.

F: You still have the same freezer?

C: That freezer will never go out. They are not like they make today. They are only guaranteed for so long and then that's it. This one is guaranteed forever.

F: What is the name of it?

C: I would have to go down and look. I don't remember the name of it.

- F: What kind of refrigerator did you have in Illinois?
- C: We had an icebox and now they are worth a fortune. I gave mine away to the Salvation Army. My granddaughter goes out to buy one--just to have something antique--and pays \$100 for one.
- F: What did they look like? Were they big?
- C: No, about three feet wide. It had two doors and inside were the shelves in it. On top it had a door where you put ice in. The iceman would come once a week or if you needed ice sooner you called him up and he would bring you the ice.
- F: How much did it cost for the ice?
- C: Twenty-five cents for a big block of ice, that's all.
- F: When you moved to North Canton, what kind of icebox did you have then?
- C: I've always had an electric one after that. No, I didn't. I had a gas one that I bought off of Canton Hardware. A gas refrigerator, it didn't cost anything to run, not even ten cents a month.
- F: Really! This was the first one you had?
- C: Yes, it was the first one I had.
- F: How long do they last?
- C: They last forever. They never wear out. My daughter had it in her basement until just recently. She decided to get rid of it because she has two electric ones, but there was nothing wrong with it.
- F: Why did you go to the electric one?
- C: After I moved, I left it in the house. She bought the house off of me in Canton, so I just left it in her house.
- F: It is just as convenient as . . .
- C: Yes, just the same except the freezer is small, just enough for ice cream.
- F: Do you think the newer types of refrigerators made it easier to store foods?
- C: Sure. The freezer is what makes it easier.
- F: Do you think baking the bread and stuff saves you time?

- C: It doesn't save you time, it saves you money. Five pounds of flour will make you nine loaves of bread. Five pounds of flour only costs 89¢. Not only that, it's healthier for you; there are no preservatives in my bread. I even sell a few loaves. Maybe that's why I'm living so long.
- F: Yes, you don't look 81. Do you think living in the mining towns may have made you a little harder?
- C: Yes, it makes you work. You have to do things yourself because there is no one there to do things for you.
- F: How did your husband feel about you having to get a job outside of the home because he was ill?
- C: What else could he do? He did what I had to do--pack the kid's lunches before they went to school.
- F: How did you like getting out of the house?
- C: I liked it. I like people and I'm used to going out to work. I'm not used to staying home.
- F: Who did the housework when you were at these various jobs?
- C: Whenever he could get up he would fix the bed himself. He did the best he could. When I got home, I would start to fix supper or I would tell him what to start and he would have it started. We had no arguments.
- F: What about the cleaning and the washing?
- C: I always did the cleaning and washing on the weekends?
- F: So you really did two jobs then. One outside and . . .
- C: That's still the old Maytag that I have had for years and years and it's still going. Why should I go and buy an automatic?
- F: This one isn't an automatic? Is it the one with the agitator in it, the wringer?
- C: That's right. Then the lady moved away from here and she had a little Hoover washer. What I do now to save myself time, I take them out of my Maytag and put them in the Hoover washer that wrings them almost dry. Then I hang them up in ten minutes and they are almost dry.
- F: What kind of cleaning did you do for your carpets?
- C: A broom of course. We just opened the door and swept it out of the house.

F: This was in Illinois and Pennsylvania?

C: Yes.

F: Even when you came to North Canton?

C: Yes, for a good while.

F: When did you get a vacuum?

C: The first vacuum I got was an Airway.

F: What was that like?

C: More of a suction sweeper with no brushes on it.

F: Did it have attachments to it?

C: Yes, it had attachments. The handle was a hollow handle that was very light. You could turn it around and clean all of your baseboards and around your carpet. It was a real handy thing. I gave it to a couple that had just started housekeeping and they have had it for a long time.

F: Do you remember when you got it?

C: I was living on Twelfth Street then, so it must have been 1932 or something like that.

F: How long did you have it?

C: I had it for a long time, more than ten years.

F: What did you replace it with?

C: I have a Hoover now, because my daughter works at Hoover. So naturally, I would have a Hoover. I don't think it is as good as what I had.

F: Why? What's the difference?

C: It beats the rug too much. I have another one downstairs which I like very much; it's a tank type. It's made like a bullet and has a big hose to it. I can do anything with it: clean walls, work around, clean furniture. I have to get a new hose though; they still sell them.

F: Do you think you had a washing machine better than the one your mother had?

C: My mother didn't have one.

F: Well, compared to the one you had where the running water

- powered the agitator, do you think doing the laundry is easier?
- C: It's easier now, naturally.
- F: Saves you time?
- C: Saves you a lot of time, but it takes a little more soap. Then you had the bar soap and rubbed your clothes with it on your washboard. A bar of soap will do your whole laundry. Now it takes you a half of box to do it. We boiled our clothes with lye if you wanted to bleach them. You didn't use too much and then you rinsed them twice and hung them out. It took you all day to do the washing.
- F: Do you have a dryer?
- C: No. Why would I need a dryer with that Hoover spinner?
- F: What do you do in the wintertime? Same thing?
- C: Same thing. I spin them dry and hang them downstairs on lines.
- F: Why wouldn't you get a dryer?
- C: What for? For just one person? What else do I have to do?
- F: Go outside of the home.
- C: I do work for nothing at all the hospitals.
- F: Was it a one day thing?
- C: That's about all you could do in one day.
- F: What about now? Do you think you could clean your house too?
- C: Sure you could. You put a load in and come up and do other work.
- F: So it saves you time?
- C: It saves a lot of time.
- F: Was your mother on a work schedule? One day would she do the ironing, the next day laundry, et cetera?
- C: Yes, her laundry was Monday; ironing was Tuesday; on the weekend we cleaned house.
- F: What about you, are you on a schedule?
- C: No, not since last year. I used to be, but now I clean house when I want to and when I don't want to I don't clean it.

- F: What about when you and your husband were here?
- C: I had to have a schedule then, certain days and certain times. When you worked you only had certain days to do things then. I would always bake on weekends, and sometimes I even had to wash on Sunday evenings, so I could hang them up Monday morning before I went to work. We worked hard and maybe that's why I'm still alive. Not working is bad for your body. A lot of people now go out jogging. Why do they jog? To make their bodies function better. Never jog fast; that's one thing you have to learn. Walk fast, but don't jog or run. Why? Because your heart bounces too much and it'll make you die quicker.
- F: How come you never got a microwave?
- C: What for? What do I need a microwave for? I have all the time in the world to cook.
- F: What if you could have had a microwave 25 years ago, would have gotten one then?
- C: No, I have all the time in the world to cook. I have an electric stove and a good electric skillet, which I like very much. I can put a whole chicken in, put it on real slow, and when I'm due home it's done.
- F: So even though you could have a new washer or dryer . . .
- C: I could have anything I wanted right now.
- F: Why don't you need these new different appliances?
- C: Why would I need them for one person?
- F: What if your husband was still here?
- C: Well, if my husband was here or if I had someone staying with me where I would have to hurry and do a lot of cooking, okay. To tell you the truth, I'm not going to be living here much longer. I have to go somewhere because soon I won't be able to take care of myself. The children don't want it.
- F: Now is your daughter doing her housework different than you do yours?
- C: I wouldn't have her housework for the world. She works all week at Hoover's, comes home--she has back trouble--lies down a while, gets up, gets supper and no housework is done. The housework waits until the weekend.
- F: Do you think she could do what you were doing 25 years ago?
- C: No, she couldn't do it.

F: Why's that?

C: When you do what she's doing, that's hard work.

F: Well, you had hard work too. You worked cleaning other people's houses and then came home to do yours.

C: There are only four people in her department that do her job. They have to take the sweeper out of the line when it comes through, take it all apart to see if it's perfect or not, and then she has to put it all together. She fixes all of our relative's Hoovers. She's ready to retire now in the fall.

F: Does she do her own baking?

C: Yes, she makes a good bread. She doesn't make bread, but she makes all her cakes and pies.

F: Where did you learn all the baking? From your mother?

C: No, I learned it myself. A lot of it I copied from books, old-fashioned books, which I still have.

F: Did you teach your daughter how to bake?

C: Quite a bit. I always told her not to buy the pastries because they have too many preservatives in them, to make her own. How long does it take to make a batch of bread? No time.

F: How do you feel about doing your own housework?

C: I like to do my own housework. I don't like other people doing it.

F: How did you feel when you had to do the rich people's homes?

C: I had very good kinds who were good to me. I didn't have it hard; you know, these rich people have everything to work with. It was nice. The hardest people to work for are Jewish people. You better do your work right or you would have to go over it again. They were good to me though; they gave me a lot of stuff to take home. I worked for the best Jewish person in North Canton. He is the head of the synagogue in Canton.

F: What do you think enabled you to go outside of the home? Do you think the new appliances enable you to go out because they save you time?

C: Sure, they save you a lot of time.

F: Do you think if you didn't have the freezer . . .

C: If I didn't have my freezer I couldn't put anything away.

- F: You would have to spend more time in the kitchen then?
- C: Sure. I raise all my own tomatoes and everything and I freeze them all. I don't have to can anymore; I used to have to can in jars. I can tomatoes in jars, but I tried freezing them last year and it worked fine. I took an old stocking of mine, put the tomatoes in plastic bags and filled up my stocking, and put it in the freezer; it worked wonderful. It was just like using fresh tomatoes in the wintertime.
- F: That's why you don't go to the grocery store and buy frozen vegetables?
- C: I don't have to buy frozen vegetables; I freeze my own.
- F: What about before you freezed the vegetables, did you do a lot of canning then?
- C: Yes, a lot of canning. I canned everything that I could get ahold of. Half of it sometimes would spoil.
- F: Because of the freezer you don't have to do all the work from canning?
- C: That's right. This freezing is wonderful. It saves a lot of work and it's fresh; you don't have all that cooked stuff all the time. It saves you a lot of work on meat. I go to the store and buy enough meat to last me a couple of months. For example, if chicken is on sale, I don't just buy one, I buy six or maybe ten of them.
- F: It's cheaper that way. What appliance invented do you think really helped the women around the house?
- C: The washer, the sweeper, electric iron . . .
- F: When did you get an electric iron?
- C: I think I got it after I moved to Canton. I still had the sat irons when I moved here. It was about 1935 when I got the electric iron. Now, you don't even have to iron your clothes, you just hang them out to dry.
- F: Do you think the new materials they invented . . .
- C: Are wonderful. Everything they have invented is wonderful.
- F: If you took away the modern inventions . . .
- C: I could do without it. I could go back to a coal stove and bake everything.
- F: There would be no problem?

- C: No problem to me at all. We lived then and we could still do it now if we had to.
- F: Well, you could still do it if you had to.
- C: If you moved out in the country where there was nothing, no gas or anything, you would have to cook on a wood or coal stove . . .
- F: You could do it?
- C: I could do it and if you had to you could too. It just naturally comes to you on how to do it. It's no problem. You could still pump water outside from the pump, bring it in and heat it up for your bath and put it in the tub. We didn't have a tub; we used a washtub to take a bath. Later on, Sears & Roebuck Company put out a collapsible bathtub made out of canvas. It was just like a tent; you opened it up in your kitchen, put hot water in it, the kids, and then gave them a bath. That was the first bathtub I had. People didn't take a bath every day to tell you the truth. In the morning, you washed yourself the best you could out of a little wash basin. When you came home from work . . . My husband would take a bath in a big washtub because he would come home black from the mine.
- F: How hard was it to keep your house clean with him working in the mines?
- C: A lot harder than it is today. Today you dust, run the sweeper and you're done. We had to scrub everything every weekend. There wasn't linoleum then, just boards. I had an aunt who got the first linoleum to come out. When I went there, she took the linoleum off the floor, put it down the basement, and said she would put it on after I got married because I would scrub the boards. She was tough. That's why I got married young. I couldn't take it anymore.
- F: I never thought of the linoleum on the floor.
- C: She never did anything; she made me do everything. She had five boarders and five children and I had to do all the work. I had never done it before I was going to school . . .
- F: That's how you learned it because you just had to do it?
- C: That's how.
- F: And it stuck with you until now?
- C: She had kind of a washing pan that had three little nigger boys on the front of it. My hands just chapped terrible the soap was so strong. I would be crying while I was washing dishes. The boarders would be in the back playing cards or something and I would have to turn my back so they couldn't

see me crying. Then we started to use a milder soap which wasn't so bad.

F: If there was something that could be invented that you would like to see invented, what would it be? What would have helped you out now?

C: I don't know what I would want. Everything is so nice now, I don't know what I would want. You can buy anything you want and most people have the money for it.

F: But then that makes them more lazy?

C: That's right; they are too lazy, yes. I've cut my own grass up until last year. This year, the neighbor told me that he would cut mine when he cut his. So I told him I would share the garden with him.

F: That's good.

C: Well, sure. You have to treat other people the way they treat you. If I bake bread, I'll always take a loaf over.

F: That's about all the questions I have. You've answered them just by talking to me.

C: Good.

END OF INTERVIEW