

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Fascism in Italy Project

Personal Experience

O. H. 422

CARMELA SCROFANO

Interviewed

by

Elisa Calabrese

on

May 1, 1986

CARMELA SCROFANO

Carmela Galofaro was born to Giuseppe Galofaro and Francesca Bardonaro-Galofaro on March 7, 1925, in Augusta, Sicilia.

In 1945 Carmela married John Scrofano. Three of their five children, Donna, Frances, and Salvatore, were born in Sicilia. Their two youngest children, Joseph and Robert, were born in the United States after John and Carmela moved to Lorain, Ohio, in the late 1950's. John suffered a fatal heart attack in 1965. Carmela has never remarried.

Currently Carmela is employed by Josphe and Feiss Sewing factor as a seamstress. She is active in St. Peter Catholic Church.

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INTERVIEWEE: CARMELA SCROFANO

INTERVIEWER: Elisa Calabrese

SUBJECT: World War II in Sicily, Italian Immigrants in U.S.A.,  
Role of Women, Life as child and teenager

DATE: May 1, 1986

C: This is an interview with Carmela Scrofano in Lorain, Ohio, on May 1, 1986, for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program. The topic of discussion is fascism in Italy.

I want to ask you a few questions. First of all, I want to know when you were born, where you were born, and a little bit about your family.

S: I was born in Sicily, in Augusta. I have a mother and father and four sisters.

C: What was your father's name?

S: Giuseppe.

C: What was your daily life like when you were small? What did you do when you began to understand about life? Did you go to school? Did you have a farm or business?

S: Yes, I went to school with my older sisters. My father had a big farm. He didn't work; he had men who worked for him. We did okay. During the Depression, he lost the farm and became a tenant farmer.

C: Do you remember what year he came to the United States?

S: Before I was born.

C: What did you do when you were small? Did you help around the house?

- S: Yes. We had to help around the house. We went to school and tried to learn something. We went out and had a lot of friends.
- C: When you were a teenager in Italy what did you go? What was the social activity for you as a teenager?
- S: It was not like today. We went dancing, chaperoned. We went to the show; we walked in the street; we looked for boys. Some days we went to church.
- C: What year were you born?
- S: 1925.
- C: When you were growing up in Italy, Mussolini was already in power?
- S: Yes. He became president in 1922. He was elected on October 28, 1922. He came from a poor family. When he was young he would try to get greens to help his family to eat. When he grew up he was a good man. He went to school and was smart. He fought with the Pope, but they resolved their differences.
- C: Did your family like him?
- S: Yes, everybody liked him. Everybody liked what he did for the people. At that time, they didn't have people who stole. We left the doors open and nobody would steal. He set work hours and adhered to train schedules. There was a sense of consistency.
- C: Do you remember Mussolini youth groups, little boys who wore shirts?
- S: Yes. They were called "fascista". The girls they called "piccola italiana."
- C: Was anyone you knew in the Mussolini youth group?
- S: No.
- C: Now you are in your teenage years; did you go to grade school?
- S: No. I only went two grades because I was sick.
- C: When you were in school do you remember learning anything about Mussolini? Maybe you had to give a pledge.
- S: Yes, there was.

- C: Do you remember any part of it?
- S: I remember we talked about him. Everybody liked him. A couple of times he came to Sicily in my town. The kids liked him so much.
- C: What year did you come to the United States?
- S: 1957.
- C: Your daughters, Donna and Frances were born?
- S: Yes. Donna was born in 1945.
- C: You lived in Italy during the war?
- S: Yes.
- C: How was that?
- S: It was really bad.
- C: Was it hard hit where you were at?
- S: Yes. When the Americans came over and bombed they closed the cities. We went to the farm. There was a lot happening; a lot of people died.
- C: You escaped to the countryside?
- S: Yes.
- C: What did you take with you?
- S: Nothing. We just took a purse or soemthing we really needed. We would go back and forth. We would go to the city for whatever we needed. After a couple of months or one year we saw how bad everything was, so we took everything with us to the farm. We didn't think we were going to be able to go back and forth anymore. At night we didn't have lights because we didn't want to show our site. If a plane came and saw the light it would drop a bomb.
- C: That must have been awful.
- S: Sure. When I hear bad things over here I am really afraid because we saw those things at work.
- C: Do you remember details of a certain happening? Did you know anyone that was killed? Were the Germans there first?
- S: No, the Americans were. The Germans were pretty bad.

C: Tell me about that.

S: When the American soldiers came they were not bad. We were scared. We thought they were bad, but they weren't. They [Germans] tied up the kids; they didn't understand. They told us not to be afraid, so they would give us chocolate and food.

When the Germans came they tried to kill everyone. They frightened us. If they asked for someone we would say, "No, nobody is here." They would go through everything. They were mean.

C: How did you feel when Mussolini and Hitler were together, allies together, and when you knew Mussolini was on the side of Germany rather than the Americans?

S: We didn't feel good about it because we didn't like the Germans. He tried to do the best.

C: Do you remember when you were young and tried to get a job? Did you used to have a paper to go get a job or anything?

S: We didn't work at that time; nobody worked. Sometimes if you knew a rich person you would look for house-cleaning work. You would just walk in and say you wanted a job. They asked you what you did and what you liked and where you came from, that's it.

C: What else can you remember about the war, any certain happenings?

S: I remember my sister was pregnant. Her husband was in the Navy and after one year he died. My sister was getting big and we were worried. My father said it would be all right. When my sister was in labor, my father risked his life and went out in the streets and found an American soldier. He told my father not to worry because he would take care of his daughter. They came and got my sister and took her to the hospital.

C: The Americans?

S: Yes. We needed the ambulance. My sister was fine and they brought her back home later. They told us if we needed anything to call them. My sister almost died because the baby died before it was born. She was really scared.

We had a lot of damage and a lot of people died. Kids, men, women, there was no difference.

C: Did you hear the bombs? Did you see the destruction?

S: Yes. A couple of times we ran over the bombs. I can't believe that I am still alive. The bombs would drop like rain. I have a nephew in America and he had to come drop bombs in Sicily. He felt bad, but that was his job. Mussolini would tell us to follow him in his speeches. Mussolini never thought he lost.

C: He always built up your hope.

S: Yes. The only thing he did bad was have a girlfriend.

C: Did you hear a lot about that?

S: He didn't want her, but she loved him so much. When he lost he went and hid up north with her. When they caught them, they killed both of them.

C: Do you remember that day?

S: No.

C: Do you remember when his son died?

S: Yes.

C: What about his son-in-law, Ciano?

S: His son-in-law was good at first, but when they had meetings with Hitler or somebody else, he never agreed with his father-in-law. That is when Mussolini tried to kill him, for betraying him. This betrayal was part of the reason for losing the war.

C: What about when he was having his campaigns, gaining land in Africa, do you remember that?

S: No.

C: The Americans came through Southern Italy, but the Germans still had Northern Italy from Monte Casino up. Was this 1943?

S: Yes. I think the Germans didn't want to quit. That's why they had more people die, because the Germans didn't want to quit.

C: Do you remember hearing anything about the Jews in Italy? In 1938 Mussolini had the Manifesto of the Race. Do you remember that? He had laws against the Jews.

S: I remember a little bit.

C: Were there any Jews in your town?

S: Some.

C: Did you treat them like anybody else?

S: We spoke whenever we saw people.

C: There is a phrase that Mussolini uses, "Insieme ma senza confonders;" together, the same, but yet different. He uses that in his books when he talks about the Jews. Do you remember any of that?

S: No.

C: Do you remember any of the raids in October of 1943 when they rounded up some Jews in Italy in Florence, Rome and the big cities?

S: Yes, I can remember that.

C: When you were in Italy what kind of propaganda did you receive? Did they keep the truth away from you?

S: I don't think so. In the news they said everything that was happening.

C: Tell me more about your experiences when you had to go to the farm?

S: They were really bad. Sometimes we couldn't even stay in the farmhouse because they would bomb the kitchen. We had to go underground in caves. We would stay about a day and sleep on the ground. We would have blankets and would first take care of the kids. A lot of places closed up, but that didn't happen to us. The people that that happened to had to go outside.

C: Did you see some of your friends die?

S: One.

C: Did it affect you a lot?

S: Yes, sure. You would go and search and see a lot of people who were half dead calling for help.

C: Everyone worked together?

S: Yes, sure. We tried to help one another. It was really bad.

C: We never lived through anything like that over here.



What happened after the war? When did you start getting back in to your life style?

- S: At the end of 1945, or 1946. My husband was very worried because he didn't have any news from his parents in the U.S.A. during this time.
- C: What year did you get married?
- S: 1945.
- C: When did you come to the United States?
- S: I think in 1957, but my husband came in 1953.
- C: What did you think about coming to the United States?
- S: I like the United States. My husband was over here, but nobody else from my family was over here that I could speak with. I had a rough time.
- C: Do you want to add anything else?
- S: Italy has good people, but sometimes you find good people all over. They were good people and there were no drugs to be found there. It was a nice time back then.
- C: One last question: In Italy when you ask an Italian, "What are you?" they will say Italian. If you ask a Sicilian, "What are you?" they will say Sicilian. Did you have that growing up? Did you think you were Sicilian and not Italian?
- S: No, we said we were Italian.
- C: Are there problems with the south and the north understanding each other?
- S: Not really. A long time ago there was difficultly understanding Sicilians, but not today. Regional dialects were more or less abolished in the late 1950's and now everyone speaks formal Italian.
- C: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW