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Mr. John Marra

[00:00:00]

Interviewer: Now the kind of questions that I want to ask you are very simple things, the things that happened to you, things that happened during your lifetime. And maybe you won't have a fresh recollection of a lot of things but you have impressions of them and a lot of things you'll remember.

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Now first I want to start with where were you born?

Mr. Marra: Castel Morrone.

Interviewer: Castel Morrone, now this is a village in the mountains.

Mr. Marra: That's right.

Interviewer: Near Naples?

Mr. Marra: Near Caserta.

Interviewer: Near Caserta, the city near Naples?

Mr. Marra: That's right.

Interviewer: Now did you go to school in Italy?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: How old were you when you started school?

Mr. Marra: Six.

Interviewer: Six years old?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Now how many years did you go to school?

Mr. Marra: Six.

Interviewer: You went to school for about six years?

Mr. Marra: Yeah up to 12.

Interviewer: Up to the time you were 12 years old?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Now while you were in Italy what sort of work did your father do?

Mr. Marra: Well we used to trim Laigobine trees and stuff like that, olives, trees and everything.

Interviewer: Pretty much general farm work?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Now before you went to school. Did you ever do any kind of work before you went to school?

Mr. Marra: Just when I was young kid, you know eight, nine after school I used to go pick up olives on the mountain.

Interviewer: On the mountain, now did you go with your father or would you go alone?

Mr. Marra: Well a gang used to go.

Interviewer: A group of young boys your age would go up to the mountains to pick olives?

Mr. Marra: That's it, yeah.

Interviewer: What did you do with these olives after you picked them?

Mr. Marra: We make oil, olive oil.

Interviewer: You make olive oil. Now when you finished school at age 12 what did you do then?

Mr. Marra: Then I went to work to learn trade with my father.

Interviewer: Now what was it that you were learning?

Mr. Marra: Trimming trees and like a gardener.

Interviewer: Like a gardener right, taking care of trees and how to trim them and when to trim them and so on and so forth.

Mr. Marra: That's it. Yeah.

Interviewer: Now when did you think about coming to the United States?

Mr. Marra: Well we first came 1916.

Interviewer: In 1916?

Mr. Marra: We got a navel.

Interviewer: Okay let's see now you say we, who do you mean by we?

Mr. Marra: Other family.

Interviewer: Your whole family?

Mr. Marra: Yes, father, mother, two brothers and three sisters. And we came 1916 but we got reject to Naples.

Interviewer: Are you sure 1916? Now Italy was in the middle of World War I in 1916.

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did they still have immigrants leaving Italy in 1916.

Mr. Marra: That's right, yeah.

Interviewer: This is a first I didn't know this.

Mr. Marra: Yeah see because I remember the mayor of the city *[inaudible]* **[0:02:50]** was bad and the ocean was sinking a lot of boats.

Interviewer: Right the journal *[inaudible]* **[0:02:56]**.

Mr. Marra: Then my father said well I've got everything ready no matter what happens I've got to go. Then we got reject at Naples.

Interviewer: Why did they reject you? Did you remember?

Mr. Marra: Well they find like, we brought a friend. They found an excuse on him that he was sick, but he wasn't sick. See in other words there was the mayor of the city didn't want my father to leave Italy on the count that he was doing a lot of work for him, see?

Interviewer: I see.

Mr. Marra: In other words he was his gardener.

Interviewer: Like his gardener.

Mr. Marra: So then we try again after this mayor die you know, we try again and we came in 1921.

Interviewer: Alright, now why did you decide, well I know your father decided sure. Why did he decide to come to the United States?

Mr. Marra: Because we were three brothers and sister.

Interviewer: Oh you already had three and brothers and sisters here?

Mr. Marra: Yeah, John, Rob.

Interviewer: Now what did they do? They write back to Italy and tell you it was good here that life was better here than in Italy and that you could make a decent living here?

Mr. Marra: That's right.

Interviewer: And it was a good idea to come here?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Now in 1916 which was here you first tried to come here how old were you then?

Mr. Marra: I was 16.

Interviewer: Then you were born in 1900?

Mr. Marra: Well I was 16 when we came 1921 in other words in 1916 I was about 11.

Interviewer: About 11 years old?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Now when you finally came in 1921, how did you leave Castel Morrone? Did you leave on a horse and baggie, did you walk? What?

Mr. Marra: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: On a horse and baggie?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Now where did you go to? Caserta?

Mr. Marra: Caserta from there...

Interviewer: You got a train in Caserta, right?

Mr. Marra: That's right.

Interviewer: And then you went to Naples?

Mr. Marra: That's right.

Interviewer: Now when you got to Naples was the boat waiting for you?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Now the group that came, was it just your family that left the Castel Morrone at the time you came here?

[00:05:04]

Mr. Marra: That's it.

Interviewer: Just your family?

Mr. Marra: Well it was two more.

Interviewer: Two more families or two more?

Mr. Marra: No, two more persons. In other words they were neighbors but they didn't come with us, they got off in New Haven.

Interviewer: I see. Alright now who all came in your group? Now it was you, your father, your mother.

Interviewer: Three sisters and my brother.

Interviewer: And your brother Frank?

Mr. Marra: That's right.

Interviewer: Okay. Now when you got to Naples you got aboard your ship, right?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: What was the name of your ship do you remember?

Mr. Marra: I can't remember.

Interviewer: Was it an Italian ship?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: It was an Italian ship?

Mr. Marra: I think it was *Prairie*, something like that I remember.

Interviewer: When you left Naples how long did it take to get to the United States? Do you remember?

Mr. Marra: I think it was, let me see we left on the February the 17th we got in Boston March the 3rd.

Interviewer: February 17th and you got there March 3rd?

Mr. Marra: Yeah. It took us 16, 17 days.

Interviewer: About 16, 17 days.

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Now did the ship stop any place on the way? Did you stop at the doctor or anywhere else?

Mr. Marra: Portugal and...

Interviewer: It stopped in Portugal?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did it stop anywhere else besides Portugal?

Mr. Marra: I don't remember.

Interviewer: Okay who was in the ship? Were they mostly or all Italians on board ship?

Mr. Marra: Oh no they load some others in Portugal.

Interviewer: Okay did they have any people aboard ship before they picked you up in Naples?

Mr. Marra: I don't know.

Interviewer: You don't know. How was it aboard ship?

Mr. Marra: It was good.

Interviewer: Did they have you in little compartments your family in one compartment and did everybody have a compartment to themselves?

Mr. Marra: No the women they sleep on one deck and the men on a different one. In other words they separated us

Interviewer: Right, the men and women were separated?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Who did they let the children stay with?

Mr. Marra: The mother.

Interviewer: In other words all children stay with the mother?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Now you were what? About 11, no you were more than 11 now. How old were you at that time? Not 21.

Mr. Marra: 21 well I was 16.

Interviewer: You were 16, you stayed with your father then, the men?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Alright, now when you landed in Boston did anybody meet you there?

Mr. Marra: No, no.

Interviewer: Nobody met you there. How did you know where to go in Boston?

Mr. Marra: Well we met an Italian guy over there and he put us on a train and all. After we stopped from there we stopped in Philly and that's where they were waiting like Joe Rap but they saw we weren't coming so they came back home. And all of that same way another time and put us on a train and send us over.

Interviewer: Okay now when you landed in Boston though did you have to go through any sort of an inspection? Like public health?

Mr. Marra: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Did they hold you up very long?

Mr. Marra: No.

Interviewer: Did they help you get aboard the ship when you had to get on? I mean aboard the train in order to come through?

Mr. Marra: No, no.

Interviewer: Okay in other words you had an address, right?

Mr. Marra: That's right.

Interviewer: And you went and somebody looked at the address and said well this is where you get the train; they got the tickets for you, and put you on right?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay in Philadelphia when you had change trains in Philadelphia somebody helped you again, right?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Now when you finally got to Wilmington on the train where did you come in at the Pennsylvania railway station?

Mr. Marra: Pennsylvania.

Interviewer: And how did you know where to go from there?

Mr. Marra: We found a guy over there he was sweeping in the railroad station and he says hi I'll take you up where you go because he knew my brothers and sisters and he took us up on a trolley car.

Interviewer: On a trolley car?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay now all of you got on a trolley car, right? And you suitcases and everything? Just got on a trolley car right front of the Pennsylvania railway station.

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: And this took you up to where?

Mr. Marra: Athen Scott.

Interviewer: Athen Scott. This is where your brother lived?

Mr. Marra: Well they used to live on 7 Delinga but then we walked from Athen Scott up to 7 Delinga.

Interviewer: Okay now when you first got here where did you live? Did you live with your bother?

Mr. Marra: Sister.

Interviewer: With your sister?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay now how long did you stay with your sister?

Mr. Marra: I'll say about a couple of months.

Interviewer: A couple of months? Now you were 16, your father was working age and how about your younger brother?

Mr. Marra: Frank he was 14.

[00:10:01]

Interviewer: He was 14?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you all find work when you got here?

Mr. Marra: No.

Interviewer: Did any of you find work when you got here?

Mr. Marra: Well yeah my father did and I found a job but at six months.

Interviewer: What sort of work did you do?

Mr. Marra: Labor *[inaudible]* **[0:10:17]**

Interviewer: This seems to be where all the Italians went huh?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: How long did you work at that?

Mr. Marra: I'd say for about a year.

Interviewer: About a year? And did you go to any other kind of work after that?

Mr. Marra: Then after that I went *[inaudible]* **[0:10:35]** after that I went bankrupt and so on.

Interviewer: Now you got here after World War I was over? What would you say the conditions were like over here?

Mr. Marra: Well they were better than over there.

Interviewer: In other words you were pretty happy about being here?

Mr. Marra: That's right.

Interviewer: You would much rather be here than back in Italy?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you ever run into any kind of prejudice at all you were here?

Mr. Marra: What did you mean?

Interviewer: Did anybody treat you, for example well you hear how people treat the colored person today?

Mr. Marra: Yeah, no.

Interviewer: They don't treat... they call names and treat them too, did the Italians ever run into that sort of thing here?

Mr. Marra: Not that I know of.

Interviewer: You don't know, that's good.

Mr. Marra: No, no.

Interviewer: Okay now did you go to church when you first came here?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Which church? Was it St. Anthony's founded? Did they have St. Anthony's in 1921?

Mr. Marra: Not 21 but they built that I don't know when it was 1923.

Interviewer: Was it 23 I think it was, wasn't it?

Mr. Marra: Around 23, yeah. Because I got married in 1927 and that's where I got married.

Interviewer: Yeah. Now in 27 it was a big church, right?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Where did you go to church? The St. Thomas's during that time when you first got here or was it St. Peter's?

Mr. Marra: I don't remember that far back.

Interviewer: Did you ever run into any trouble in church at all?

Mr. Marra: No.

Interviewer: Were they only one Italians who go to a certain mass and not to any other mass?

Mr. Marra: No.

Interviewer: You never ran into that sort of thing? Okay. Now when you got here, probation was in effect, wasn't it?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: What was it like? Do you remember what it was like during that time?

Mr. Marra: Well they had boot leggers at that time...

Interviewer: The Boot legging?

Mr. Marra: Yes, boot legging stuff.

Interviewer: What sort of stuff did they sell up here in Little Italy did they sell wine or whisky or?

Mr. Marra: Everything, yes.

Interviewer: Everything? Beer the works?

Mr. Marra: Yes, of course I wasn't drinker you know?

Interviewer: Yeah. Do you ever remember any FBI or treasured police running by pulling raids or the local police pulling in raids in surrounded area?

Mr. Marra: No.

Interviewer: You never had any of that?

Mr. Marra: No.

Interviewer: Was there ever any difficulty or any trouble because of this boot legging up in that area?

Mr. Marra: No.

Interviewer: Not at all? You don't remember any of that? How about the depression when the depression started? How did that affect the Italian community at Wilmington?

Mr. Marra: Well it was the same as any other people.

Interviewer: It was a pretty hard hit, would you say a pretty hard hit?

Mr. Marra: Oh yeah. It was 1929 until 1932, or 33 it was tough.

Interviewer: Now when you say 32 or 33 why do you mention that year as maybe being the end of this really tough period time?

Mr. Marra: I'll tell you when Roosevelt came that's when it started getting better a little bit.

Interviewer: How did they get better? Were there more jobs?

Mr. Marra: More jobs, yeah.

Interviewer: That sort of thing? That's it.

Mr. Marra: Yeah. More money and everything. In other words when Hoover was in there you had to work for a dollar a night, as soon as Roosevelt came in she was making \$14 a week. So it was a lot of different from 5 to 14.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Marra: **[Inaudible] [0:14:04]** put that NRA you know, maybe a lot of people that had two jobs and some of them didn't have any so by putting this NRA the government would know if you had two jobs you just should have one.

Interviewer: I see. And how about Roosevelt position on Unions would you say this also had a very definite effect on the betterment of the working man? He favored you.

Mr. Marra: I don't think there was any union then.

Interviewer: I know but didn't he come up and say something to the effect that the working man should organize in order to have a position from which he could bargain.

Mr. Marra: Yes. I think that was good.

Interviewer: That helped the working man a great deal because he did give some sort of official backing?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

[00:15:00]

Interviewer: Now, when World War II started, the United States and Italy were on different sides?

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Now during World War I we were on the same side so it really wasn't too much of a problem in this country. You know as far as the Italians is concerned.

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Now when World War II started the United States and Italy were on different sides.

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: How did this affect the Italians in this country? How did the Italians feel about this? What did they say to one another?

Mr. Marra: Well as I figure if I may I should have fought for this country.

Interviewer: But didn't the Italians feel pretty bad about that because you had relatives, you really had roots of some sort.

Mr. Marra: Well I imagine some of them did, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah they'd feel pretty bad about this sort of thing.

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: How were the Italians treated in general during this time? Was it possible for somebody who was not an Italian to say, so you're an alien now, we're fighting against Italy? Did you run into much of this sort of thing?

Mr. Marra: No I didn't because I was a citizen and I figured I'm the same as anybody else who was here.

Interviewer: Well this is true I mean you were the same as anybody else but I'm wondering if you ever ran into anybody that was a little bit ignorant.

Mr. Marra: No.

Interviewer: That made comments of one sort or another?

Mr. Marra: No.

Interviewer: They never went into any of this sort of thing? Did your life change at all during World War II? Would you say?

Mr. Marra: No.

Interviewer: If you were to look back on everything that happened say in the past year since you came into this country since 1921, do you think that you could pick out any particular point of time where the greatest changes took place in your life?

Mr. Marra: What do you mean? What...?

Interviewer: Well could you point to any one particular thing say since 1921, you've been in this country say 47 years.

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Could you point out one thing and say now this particular thing or this incidence changed my life more than any other thing in the past 50 years? For example Roosevelt was elected.

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: His election and his policies created such a change in this country that my life has never been the same since. So before he was elected I couldn't get a decent job. But since his election, since he was elected he changed things in such a way that I was able to get a better job than I ever had before.

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: And that nobody discriminated against me because I was a different nationality or anything like that. Do you think that you could point at any one thing in the past?

Mr. Marra: That it was a happy day or happy life or something?

Interviewer: A happy life, your life became better.

Mr. Marra: The only thing I could say when I got married.

Interviewer: Your getting married really changed your life so that...

Mr. Marra: Yeah, because before I used to run around all the time then when I got married I have settled down.

Interviewer: You had to settle down and really plant your roots?

Mr. Marra: That's right, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. Have you ever wanted to go back to Italy to stay?

Mr. Marra: Oh no, of course I went there in 1948 for a visit.

Interviewer: Right, you went there for a visit. But you've never thought that you'd want to go back and stay?

Mr. Marra: No.

Interviewer: Now the world had changed a lot in the past 40 years, 50 years.

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Our mode of living, the way we live has changed a lot.

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: A lot of people you hear talk about the good old days,

Mr. Marra: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you have any comment about that? Do you really think that there was such a thing as the good old days, would you like to go back and live the way you used to live before or do you think that right now is the best time in your whole life?

Mr. Marra: I'll tell you, unlike before what they someone talking about did you have more fun before not like at 4th July, the shooting of firecracker and everything, now you can't do that no more. I think it was a better time before.

Interviewer: Do you think it might be because you were younger that you had more fun or because...?

Mr. Marra: Could have been that too?

Interviewer: It's a possibility.

Mr. Marra: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: But do you ever long for the good old days do you ever wish that you'd go back in time and...?

Mr. Marra: No I don't think so, no.

Interviewer: John do you have anything more to add to this?

Mr. Marra: That's all.

Interviewer: You know, about your experiences here and so forth? No, okay.

[00:19:55] End of Audio