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Mr. Edward Girardi

[0:00:00]

Interviewer: This is an interview with Mr. Edward Girardi, 1131 Broom Street in Wilmington Delaware.

Mr. Girardi: South Broom.

Interviewer: South Broom Street. Okay, Mr. Girardi, where were you born?

Mr. Girardi: Where?

Interviewer: Where, yes.

Mr. Girardi: *[inaudible] [0:00:17]*, Italy. Provincia de Caserta.

Interviewer: Provincia de Caserta. In what year were you born?

Mr. Girardi: 1912, June 20th.

Interviewer: June 20th, 1912.

Mr. Girardi: Right.

Interviewer: Okay. What did your father do in Italy when he was in Italy before he came to the United States.

Mr. Girardi: More or less a farmer.

Interviewer: Right, okay. And what age did your father come to the United States, what year?

Mr. Girardi: I guess '80.

Interviewer: Now, what did your father do in Italy?

Mr. Girardi: He was a farmer.

Interviewer: He was a farmer and then...?

Mr. Girardi: Then he came over to this country in 1903. His father sent for him and he stayed here till 1907.

Interviewer: Then he went back to Italy.

Mr. Girardi: His father made him go back to serve the country from military service. He was obligated. All right, then he stayed in the service. He come out, he got married, he lived my mother three months and then he came back over here to the United States.

Interviewer: To the United State of America.

Mr. Girardi: And we never – we saw him anymore – in fact I haven't seen him till I arrived here when I was nine years old.

Interviewer: Okay now, when you were a little boy in Italy, what did you do? Did you go to school in Italy?

Mr. Girardi: I went to school to the second grade.

Interviewer: Okay. How old were you when you started schooling?

Mr. Girardi: About five or six.

Interviewer: About five or six. Do you anything about your schooling in Italy?

Mr. Girardi: Very little.

Interviewer: It's very vague.

Mr. Girardi: I mean it's more or less elementary.

Interviewer: But you remember the kind of school it was, public school or private school?

Mr. Girardi: No, no, it was public, public.

Interviewer: They supply you with servicing in the public school?

Mr. Girardi: Well it was the same, almost about the same. In other words, you're learning your A, B, Cs and adding and subtraction and stuff like that. But first year of school grade, you don't get too much anyhow.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Girardi: Then in the second grade – then when I came over here, I was nine years old.

Interviewer: And what year was that?

Mr. Girardi: 1921.

Interviewer: In 1921 when you came here in the United States?

Mr. Girardi: We arrived in Philadelphia, March the 6th, 1921.

Interviewer: Do you remember anything about your boat ride to the United States from Italy?

Mr. Girardi: In what way?

Interviewer: Do you remember that you – you got on board in the ship undoubtedly in Naples.

Mr. Girardi: In Naples, in Naples, right.

Interviewer: Do you remember how long the ship took to get here?

Mr. Girardi: Thirteen days.

Interviewer: Thirteen days?

Mr. Girardi: Thirteen days?

Interviewer: Did it stop anywhere along the way did you remember?

Mr. Girardi: It just stopped at *[inaudible]* **[0:03:05]** just for a short time and then we was on our way. It took us 13 days to come across.

Interviewer: Did it stop in New York before it went to Philadelphia?

Mr. Girardi: No. We were supposed to dock in New York, but then the county had some sort of a strike, a dock strike. Then we were – then they rescheduled the ship to dock in Philadelphia. And I remembered in the early morning of, I think it was March the 5th of coming up the Delaware Bay where we hit the break water, we know we've seen the current of water where it was intermixed and then we knew that we were near land, but it was so far that you couldn't see nothing.

Then coming up the Delaware River, we could hear trains whistling. And then when we arrived in Philadelphia, we docked. So we stayed overnight in Philadelphia. In the next morning when I guess started unloading the ship, the morning of the 6th of March, the tied was in. It had to be the tied that the ship would wave high and dry *[inaudible]* **[0:04:22]**. And then there was a force on the shore line and also on the boating region. So what I know is *[inaudible]* **[0:04:35]** we gone between Philadelphia and Kansas. So then my pop, he came over with a couple of his friends and he brought us, he get, took us off and he brought us home.

Interviewer: Do you remember what it was like in boarding the ship when you came over, what the conditions of boarding ship were like?

Mr. Girardi: I like it very much because I was young and I mingled with the sailors a lot.

[0:05:00]

The food was wonderful. A lot of times I used to take food to my mother sometimes when they had left over because in my rest we came in steerage and they used to take in people there was you had maybe four or five people you have to eat out of a dish pan. And see, when I went with the sailors a lot of time, they have leftovers and I use to give them to my mother.

Interviewer: About the people boarding the ship were they mostly all Italians?

Mr. Girardi: They're mostly all Italians.

Interviewer: Do you remember any nationalities aboard the ship?

Mr. Girardi: No, that I don't remember. I know there was mostly all Italian. I mean different provinces and they were gone different localities. It was only one woman that came to Wilmington, her name was Coco. She was from Madison Street. And that was the only woman that we knew that we met in Naples and then she came here to Wilmington too.

Interviewer: What were your first impressions when you first saw the United States, after you got off the ship and run your way to Wilmington?

Mr. Girardi: Everything is all new.

Interviewer: Everything is all new.

Mr. Girardi: Yeah.

Interviewer: But how did it seemed, did it seemed big to you, small, a lot different than Italy?

Mr. Girardi: Well it was a lot different than I was accustomed too. The only thing was the difference in what I had saw of the Naples and the port of Philadelphia, most about it was the same. Then when we arrived in Wilmington everything seemed new. I mean it was all strange land and we came – mostly we came from country side anyhow. So the way that the houses were so far apart and here everything was all close together. This new living entirely.

Interviewer: Well how about the difference in the country itself? For example the area that you came from Italy was quite mountainous, a lot of mountains.

Mr. Girardi: In?

Interviewer: In Italy.

Mr. Girardi: Well where we came from – where we came from, there wasn't too many – it wasn't as mountainous like it would be, like I don't know West Coast. Just some mountains but they were pretty well far away the north part of Italy where you could take and see on a clear day the snow caps, but we came mostly from the plain between Naples and Morrone, on the Mediterranean side. See it was Adriatic more or less is mountainous.

Interviewer: So you remember the area you came from as being rather with few mountains and would you say the country side was at all similar to what you were running to here, so say it was?

Mr. Girardi: No, not around in Delaware you mean?

Interviewer: Yes.

Mr. Girardi: Well Delaware is more...

Interviewer: Delaware is pretty flat.

Mr. Girardi: Yeah, pretty flat, that's right.

Interviewer: So in that respect, there was the difference.

Mr. Girardi: There, it's a little more mountainous.

Interviewer: Yes.

Mr. Girardi: Yeah.

Interviewer: When you first came to the United States, what were your impressions in the house when you first walked into the house that your father had for you? Can you remember back that far? Well I know it's all the...

Mr. Girardi: Well it didn't impress me too much. In other words, we know that we didn't have – that we didn't have to worry about running water. We had running water right in the house where in Italy we didn't. The woman, she always had me went out and gotten water maybe either a day before or maybe two days before we would sufficient water that will last for two or three days and that would be to do her washing, wash dishes for baking and so forth and so on.

Interviewer: Yes. So in that respect, you have plumbing in the house here which you did not have in Italy.

Mr. Girardi: Oh yeah, in Italy that's right.

Interviewer: Okay. Now how about the house itself? Now I supposed well in the United States, the houses you run into are usually framed or brick on the outside.

Mr. Girardi: Well the house that we first came to, it was framed, but the one I left in Italy it was built all out of stone.

Interviewer: Right, this *[inaudible]* [0:09:28]. I was wondering what...?

Mr. Girardi: Stone was a regular Spanish tile roof, you know regular.

Interviewer: Yeah, the red tile roof.

Mr. Girardi: Yeah, the red tile roof, that's right.

Interviewer: So there was quite a difference in the house itself.

Mr. Girardi: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you recall whether this made any sort of impression on you at all? Did you made this *[inaudible]* [0:09:47]?

Mr. Girardi: We didn't – see in Italy, as far as I can remember, we didn't suffer – now where we came from, we didn't suffer as much in the winter time because the climate was more milder.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's right.

[0:10:00]

Mr. Girardi: Outside where my mother and I, where we live, we have this one room and they had a big fire place. And that fire place kept the room warm enough. It was comfortable, whereas here, you have to have heat. But when we arrive in '21, you didn't have that kind of heat. So the only thing that my father had was an old coal burn stove in the kitchen. And that was it. Then they have – they used to have these small gas heaters oil stones that they used to put in the room to keep – try to keep the room warm a little bit. And then they use to have to take and put maybe a kettle of water to absorb some of the moisture.

Interviewer: Some of the moisture yeah.

Mr. Girardi: Yeah otherwise they would – it would be *[inaudible]* **[0:10:54]** at the house.

Interviewer: Now, what did you do when you first got here? Did you go to school here in the first day you first arrived?

Mr. Girardi: Yes.

Interviewer: What were your impressions of the school when you first started in school?

Mr. Girardi: Well it was a little hard because, I mean, I don't know how to speak or write English and then I had to start. I quite waited, I haven't start, I waited till – see this was – when we arrived in March, well we waited till September to start school. And that gave me a chance in the meantime to mingle with the neighbors, with the boys and you got to learn a little bit about the American language.

Interviewer: Right. When you first got here and you got here in March, right?

Mr. Girardi: Right.

Interviewer: So you got here in March. Now it was starting to turn a bit cold, right?

Mr. Girardi: It was cold.

Interviewer: Yeah. Now, where was your house, the first house you lived in here in Wilmington?

Mr. Girardi: Where?

Interviewer: Where was it, yes?

Mr. Girardi: 318 Eighth Avenue in Brown Town.

Interviewer: Okay all right. Now when you first started school, what school did you started?

Mr. Girardi: St. Elizabeth first grade.

Interviewer: In St. Elizabeth?

Mr. Girardi: In St. Elizabeth.

Interviewer: Then you started *[inaudible]* **[0:12:09]** school.

Mr. Girardi: The old school, yes.

Interviewer: Where there many Italian boys in the school with you who came up about the same age as you were?

Mr. Girardi: Well there were some friends, friends of my fathers – I mean children of the friends of my fathers, but then there were cousins of mine.

Interviewer: Were they the same school with you?

Mr. Girardi: They were in the same school and same – in fact the same grade. Even though I was a little older than them, but I started in the same grade with them.

Interviewer: Because you don't know the language yet.

Mr. Girardi: Yeah and then they helped me out quite a bit.

Interviewer: In other words you did have some children in the class with you who did understand Italian?

Mr. Girardi: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: So if you were having problems with your teacher, *[inaudible]* [0:12:50] right?

Mr. Girardi: Yeah.

Interviewer: They could help you out?

Mr. Girardi: They could help me out.

Interviewer: How did your aunt treat you? Did she treat you all right?

Mr. Girardi: Well it all depends on how you acted.

Interviewer: On how you acted. Okay now, how far did you – were you able to go through with school?

Mr. Girardi: Through the eighth grade.

Interviewer: Through the eighth grade? And then you went out to work?

Mr. Girardi: And then I went out to work.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you started on the trade thing or...?

Mr. Girardi: The minute I – in fact I didn't even graduate from the eighth grade. We had – my father had found an opportunity for me to start learning my trade and that's how I get out of school. It's a month ahead of time and then I had to fill in the rest of the month to go to a trade school to finish out the months. And then I started learning my trade.

Interviewer: And you started right in with plumbing?

Mr. Girardi: That's right.

Interviewer: Did you ever ran into difficulties because you were an Italian?

Mr. Girardi: No.

Interviewer: Now, the people you started in your trade with, are they also Italian?

Mr. Girardi: No, they were Irish.

Interviewer: But they did treat you all right then?

Mr. Girardi: They treat you all right. They treat me all right.

Interviewer: Now, this might have been – it must have been since you – you got here 1920 right?

Mr. Girardi: '21.

Interviewer: In '21 there were around 1929 or 1930 you started on your trade?

Mr. Girardi: 1929.

Interviewer: Okay now, you were a young man then, I guess you're about 18 years old.

Mr. Girardi: Just about it. Just about it.

Interviewer: Just about it.

Mr. Girardi: Right.

Interviewer: Now, in your...

Mr. Girardi: Well I started learning my trade at 16. I was about 18 when the depression start hitting.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Girardi: So then that's when work start getting slack and we work maybe, one, two, maybe three days a week. So there wasn't enough work for everybody. So then that's why I made my mind, I thought I'm going to join the Navy. Of course my father he was after me about working and he couldn't find work and then it hit.

[0:15:02]

So I made up my mind to go in the Navy. And I joined up in 1931. And in August the 6th of '31, I went in the Navy.

Interviewer: August the 6th of '31?

Mr. Girardi: Of '31.

Interviewer: How was it? Was it easy to get into the Navy in those days or was it difficult?

Mr. Girardi: It was pretty hard.

Interviewer: It was pretty tough. I imagined a lot of people who did work at the Navy.

Mr. Girardi: Yeah. Well it did was. It was tough. I mean it was not only – the physical examination was pretty strict and some of the *[inaudible]* **[0:15:34]**. You had to use – one here in Wilmington and then we had to go to Philadelphia and take another one. And when you got to the training station, you took out another one. And then physical examination one way after the way is the same way.

Interviewer: How long did you stay in the Navy?

Mr. Girardi: Four years.

Interviewer: Four years.

Mr. Girardi: Four years and one month.

Interviewer: What was your Navy career like? Where did you go to boot training?

Mr. Girardi: I went to Huntington Road Virginia for my boot training. And from there I went, I board ship and they gave me the choice, they want to send me to the hospital course schools. You know, I had to put in for ship at a school and they told me that I hadn't passed that examination but they want to send me to the hospital course school and I didn't like hospital coreman.

So as well as I go to see a strike for ship fitting and that's what I've done. So then the – I came home in fact they were so strict in learning how to swim. I didn't know how to swim. So when I went – when I went to Huntington Road, I was in a platoon called number 12. So from there I got dropped back to platoon 13 because when my platoon broke training, I still didn't know how to swim, so they dropped me back one way you see.

So then after the boat training and I learned how to swim and I come home for the holiday which was Christmas and New Year. So when I got back, they – my papers were already in order to send me out to sea and I was put on board to USS *[inaudible]* **[0:17:19]** and I stayed on that the whole four years.

Interviewer: As a cruiser right?

Mr. Girardi: Cruiser.

Interviewer: Did you travel very often while you were boarding that ship?

Mr. Girardi: Well mostly when we left here – when we left the east coast, we went out to the west coast and our home port was Boston. So then at that time, they used to have what they call the battle force and the scouting force. The scouting force is on east coast and the battle force is on the west coast. So then they're united when they start foreseeing trouble with Japan, they united the boat fleets together. So they shifted mostly all on the west coast and that's just nothing but the stores out here on the east coast.

So any change after we arrived at the west coast and we come back to Boston for an overhaul period. When we went back to the west coast again, and this was the third time, they – our home program was San Diego and then we stayed in San Diego the whole time.

Interviewer: Now, during this time that you're in the service and even before this time, going back to the early '20, as a matter for fact shortly after, well by the time that you left Italy, of course you're just a little boy. But around that time Mussolini was starting to really get strong, the fastest in Italy was very strong.

Mr. Girardi: Yeah.

Interviewer: What was the reaction to Mussolini and to the fastest hear in the United States among young men in your own age? What did they say about it? What did you all think about it?

Mr. Girardi: I would say there is – I mean in the service we didn't – we didn't bother too much about it. I mean sometimes the Italian boys, we used to get rude a lot about Mussolini. And at that, I'll never forget, it was a time when Roosevelt was elected. And when they – when this fellow, this Italian man trying to assassinate him in Florida, Zangara. So being that I was small like him, they nicknamed me Zangara. And that was the only effect, but otherwise, outside of that, we never had no reaction. I mean, there was no misjudgment of Italian descent of collaborating with Mussolini or anything like that. In fact when my – when my time was young, I was on the verge – I was going to extend my enlistment for two more years.

[0:20:00]

So what I had done, I was always in hopes of taking a Mediterranean cruise. Well in those days every new ship that they commission, they always either went to the British Isles or up around the Stockholm and all the Mediterranean or down South America. So I had put in at that time there was a new cruiser that was being built, the USS Quintin. So I put in for it and it came back approved. And I was supposed to put that ship in convention, it was supposed to make me a Mediterranean crew. And at that time, they had a fire on it and it was going to be delayed about another year. So then I'm on a short time again.

So then I was home with my at that time and when I told her that I was going to take it and next time I'll enlist for two years. So she told me to get out. And when I did get out and I came on home and I waited three years and got married. But the Quintin at the same time, they never find, hide or **[inaudible] [0:21:08]** during the war. It just blew up somewhere in the Pacific and they never find it.

Interviewer: Now, when you did get out of the military and you came home, what did you do?

Mr. Girardi: I went back to my trade.

Interviewer: Did you find it easy to get work? Now this was around 1940s?

Mr. Girardi: Well I had promised I already worked before I come out. But still it was the same, you had learn about the boss, use the boss and you had to take in work whenever he wanted you to work and that was it.

Interviewer: Now, you lived in an area where there was largely Italians, right?

Mr. Girardi: Around Brown Town, yes.

Interviewer: Well they're mostly Italians there?

Mr. Girardi: Italian and Polish people.

Interviewer: So now what did you remember about the politics in that – during that period of time? Were the political representatives of the area where you lived, Italian or Polish and where they...?

Mr. Girardi: It was mostly Republicans. In fact we had a Republic Councilor how lived right next door to us.

Interviewer: Oh they lived very near where you lived then?

Mr. Girardi: Right, oh yeah.

Interviewer: But what was he, Polish, Polish descent, Italian descent or Irish?

Mr. Girardi: No, he was Irish. He was Irish.

Interviewer: But you said that most of the politicians when you were coming out were Irish?

Mr. Girardi: Irish, right.

Interviewer: In this area?

Mr. Girardi: Yeah.

Interviewer: So you have very few Italians in politics?

Mr. Girardi: Very few.

Interviewer: When you were a youngster, do you remember any Italian policing?

Mr. Girardi: The only one that I actually remember was *[inaudible]* [0:22:42].

Interviewer: He's the only one?

Mr. Girardi: Yeah, that's about it, he's the only one.

Interviewer: Did you every run into as a young man any problems from the police they would harass you at all because you're an Italian? Are you ever into anything like that?

Mr. Girardi: No.

Interviewer: Did you know of anybody who did feel that he was harassed because he was an Italian?

Mr. Girardi: No, I don't know. I don't remember. I wouldn't say that. I don't know. I was always on the side where I knew a few Polish and Irish and I always got by. So I never had no conflict. I never came in to contact with anybody that was having any trouble with the laws.

Interviewer: Right. Did you ever feel that life was a little more difficult for you because you were an Italian extraction, because you were Italian? Did you ever

find that life here in this country was a little bit more difficult? Did you ever feel that perhaps, say, you were an English or Irish that life would have been easier for you? Did you ever feel that way?

Mr. Girardi: I don't know. No, I never gave it a thought.

Interviewer: You never really gave it a thought at all?

Mr. Girardi: Never did, never did. The only thing when we were small, the way they used to make fun of us, they called you a whap, or dago or genny and things like that. But that was the only thing I know of.

Interviewer: It was just kid stuff.

Mr. Girardi: Yeah, it was all kid stuff. And I mean actually, I don't think, it was up to the person itself.

Interviewer: It's up to the individual to prove himself, is that it?

Mr. Girardi: That's the way I feel.

Interviewer: In other words, the point I'm trying to get on you, you never felt that you were discriminated against because of what you were?

Mr. Girardi: No, no, no, no, I don't think so. I'd pushed it on the end.

Interviewer: Okay. Now when you first came to this country, prohibition was in effect. In Italy, there is no such thing as prohibition. If a child wants to have a drink, he could probably have a drink or if his parents go out to eat at a local restaurant or *[inaudible]* **[0:24:56]** sit down a table and everybody can have wine, the parent the child, everybody can have a drink.

[0:25:02]

And nobody thinks any of it. If you're having a drink just far from me, it's not a matter of sitting down to prove the point. I mean over here a very frequent fine youngster will all drink because they want to prove something, they want to prove they're a ma.

Mr. Girardi: Yeah.

Interviewer: Because when you're 21, you're allowed to drink. This seems to mean that you're an adult. How did this impress you? Certainly coming from Italy, a drink is just a part of you meal. It's like being enjoyed as refreshment or a part of the meal. And then suddenly nothing else

attached to the act of having a drink of wine or drinking beer or anything. There's nothing attached to it.

Mr. Girardi: My father and grandfather of course, they always had wine on our table. So now the only thing it was beer *[inaudible]* [0:25:52]. There was no – there was no such thing as beer. They had new beer, but to me it was bitter. So I couldn't drink it.

Now they used to have, what do you call, like whiskey that you make your own, you either went to a bootleg and bought mushon and you dilute it with water and you adopted it and make whiskey out of it. Well then we used to drink it, maybe once in about holidays where they had, they made liquors out of it. And they'd either had – they either add or you put it with whiskey, I mean with coffee. And that was the only thing.

Interviewer: What was the *[inaudible]* [0:26:36]? Just unflavored alcohol? Is that what it was?

Mr. Girardi: Yeah, that was. Yes, that's right.

Interviewer: That's exactly what it was, I guess.

Mr. Girardi: It was pure alcohol is what it was.

[Cross talk]

Mr. Girardi: Then you cut it down. That's the one.

Interviewer: Yeah and this is the *[inaudible]* [0:26:55].

Mr. Girardi: I couldn't have it otherwise. I guess it was running about 110, 120 proof. And then by diluting it, then they cut it down.

Interviewer: When you came out of the Navy – when you went into the Navy, it was right in the – at the heart of the depression and things were kind of tough. Now, when you came out, what were things like? What differences did you notice in civilian life after you came out of the Navy?

Mr. Girardi: Well, it was a little – depression was still – well it was just about almost over because they had – of course Roosevelt had changed a lot of things. In fact the CCCs had been done away with and work was starting to come out. And then work start coming out pretty good. The building trade and talking about that.

When three year after I come out and I went down to work for *[inaudible] [0:28:02]* anyhow. I went to the Navy R and from the Navy R, I went to the post office. From the post office, I went back to the Navy R and I stayed when them after the Second World War.

Interviewer: Okay now when the Second World War started, but first well before we go into that, in so far as getting in job was concerned during – jobs were tight during the depression and right after, did you hear many people say that you have to have a high school diploma in order to get a job of digging ditches. Is there any truth to that?

Mr. Girardi: No. It all – I always shared it all depended on what you knew. In other words, I've changed a lot of jobs and if I quit one job and I had it throw it up to me, knowing my work and where a man, a boss trying to threatened you, "You quit me and you're not going to be able to find another job." I quit, right, say around noon time and before the night was over, I went on and got my tools, I had another job to go to the next day because he was a mechanic and you knew that you have to prove that he was the mechanic.

Interviewer: In other words, you couldn't get a job at all?

Mr. Girardi: Oh I think *[inaudible] [0:29:21]*.

Interviewer: So all the jobs are available if you could do that job.

Mr. Girardi: Yeah. As long as the building was going on, and we'll put it that way.

Interviewer: Okay now, in so far as the Italian community in Wilmington is concerned, the Italian community was broken up pretty much into three areas. There was the area right up here that's called Little Italy around St. Anthony's church.

Mr. Girardi: Yeah.

Interviewer: And then there was another area down in Madison Street, right? That was mostly a lot Italians.

Mr. Girardi: Italians town, that's right.

Interviewer: And there was the area in Brown Town that constitutes Italians?

Mr. Girardi: Right, that's it. Well there was around down in Brown Town they never spread on Italian and Polish. Madison Street were mostly on Italian. And up there was all Italian there too.

[0:30:04]

Interviewer: Now, in the early middle or middle '20s, Father Tucker found the St. Anthony's church here in Wilmington. Did this have an effect on your living down here round town that it effect you at all in anyway in one way or another?

Mr. Girardi: Well, I like Father Tucker, when he first came to St. Anthony's I was still going to St. Mary's School. And I started going up there and I became an honor boy under Father Tucker up until I went in the service and even after I command the service.

Interviewer: Tell me what you remember about Father Tucker those early days and what kind of man was he and what sort of an effect that he have on people who are here?

Mr. Girardi: Well he loved the children, I tell you that and I think he loved the Italian people. He just felt like he was just one of them and he was out in this world. To my estimation he was out in this world. He'd do anything for you.

Interviewer: Would you say that he brought a degree of self respect to the Italians in this area even before he came?

Mr. Girardi: Right, to the Italian people.

Interviewer: Can you tell me some of the ways in which you did this work?

Mr. Girardi: Well I would say that mostly all the boys are toughies, when they got in trouble they always depended on him. He'd go down city hall and then get them out. And this was the effect that he had, the influence that he had down city hall.

Interviewer: What other things did he do for the Italian boys in this area for either for all boys? I don't think he ever turned down anybody, but what other things that he do for the boys? What programs that he start? What other things that he do?

Mr. Girardi: While I was in the service, I didn't know too much about it. Of course, whatever he'd done, he couldn't do it all by himself. Then he had his

assistant, Father Fordie and helped him, went along with him 100 percent. And then between the two, they got 28 club started.

Interviewer: Now right after prohibition stuff, Father Tucker founded the man's club at St. Anthony's right? Did you know anything about that?

Mr. Girardi: I was in the service then. And that's when he started the St. Anthony's club and he used to have the club down in the church basement.

Interviewer: Right. Now he got one in the first lecture licensed in the state of Delaware after prohibition. So he had a bar down he basement of the church.

Mr. Girardi: I know, down at the basement yes.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Girardi: Just to take – he'd done that to keep the boys together and keep them off from people from getting in trouble. And this way here, either on a Saturday night or a Sunday, they went over there and they could play card, they could drink and whatever they wanted instead of going out bothering somebody else for getting in trouble.

Interviewer: Did you say he was successful in this effort?

Mr. Girardi: He was what?

Interviewer: Successful when you say he was successful.

Mr. Girardi: I think he was yeah. I mean he was tough with it in order to be successful. I mean a lot of times he had to take the boys and take them down the notch where he had to threat them or either punish them or either threat and hit them. And then they sort of behaved.

Interviewer: How about the Sea Lion, do you remember anything about Sea Lion when they started?

Mr. Girardi: I don't remember too much about that.

Interviewer: I think he started a boxing program there for the boys.

Mr. Girardi: He did, yeah.

Interviewer: Started basketball teams and baseball teams for the boys.

Mr. Girardi: See when – while *[inaudible]* **[0:33:57]** was going on then, after I come out of the service, I went to work again and I gone with my wife Staddy. Of course then I got married in '38. And from Brown Town, I moved down the east side. In fact Father Tucker was the one that got the week on all the Italian people down the street together. And before I went into service, he had already started this little flower, the church where they had – they used to have this public school and they got that from the city and they start having mass there. Well he start getting all the Italian people to go back to church again who had never been to church God knows how many years. And they start getting together again.

Interviewer: And tell me about this little flower because I never heard of this.

[0:34:54]

Mr. Girardi: Well the little flower and then they started the ball club, the baseball club and this was all – that's all down the bay. See there used to be a lot of – the ones that really – that really followed religion, they started going up St. Anthony's. Well then why do we have to take every Sunday morning, not everybody have cars. So they use to even have to go on a street car or walk. So then that's when he got this little church, *[inaudible]* **[0:35:26]** the church, this school from the city and built this chapel which may well then, the bishop took it from St. Anthony's and turned it over to St. Patrick's. Then it came under the jurisdiction of St. Patrick's Parish, but Father Tucker was the one that really started that. And that was 1717th in Fletcher.

Interviewer: Where there many Italians who become protestant that you can remember.

Mr. Girardi: Well yes. And then they came back again. Well some of the pop I'll tell you that. There was a lot of it that they didn't – they didn't want to hear about religion at all. And Father Tucker was the who used to go around and dig them out their house and made them go back to church.

Interviewer: So he really that – he did a lot at that time he got them back and go to church and he started various programs, one of them. And so far as giving financially and other types of help to people, what were some of the other things Father Tucker did? How about people, for example, when it was time for child to make his first communion and the parents come out to buy the clothing for the child, did he ever helped them in *[inaudible]* **[0:36:53]**?

Mr. Girardi: Well now, this is only – this is by hearsay that he helped quite a few of the families, in other words in clothing for the children and then help the families themselves either in food. And of course he did help them pay for the house. But for providing the food on the table and clothing for the children, he did do that.

Interviewer: He did quite a bit in helping. Okay now we'll get back to you then. You were working, you say at the start of the Second World War, you're at the Naval yard, right?

Mr. Girardi: At the start, well, before we – before we got into it, see I was working at the post office. And when they – when they come out, it was the occupation of questionnaires that everybody was requested to fill one out. So then being that I had military service and I had my trade behind me and I had already served as a ship or crew in the boardship, so then they took me out of the post office department and sent me in the Navy department and throw out in the Navy for work.

Interviewer: And this is when? Did you spend the duration up there?

Mr. Girardi: The whole, up to after the war was over.

Interviewer: Now, after the war was over, you left the Navy

Mr. Girardi: I left the Navy. We got the *[inaudible]* [0:38:29]. In other words we got laid off. And the work was done, finished and the only one actually then was the one that was coming back that had worked in an Navy before then we had two or three years in the Armed Forces too. Well then they had more seniority over us, you see, then they let us sack.

Interviewer: I see. Now shortly after that, you went to business with yourself or did you...?

Mr. Girardi: No. After I – after I come in and come out from the – in the Navy, I'd say about two or three years afterwards then I went to work for myself. I went to business in 1950.

Interviewer: Okay, now this all reason – there are a couple of things I would like to ask you going back a little bit more and starting from beginning again. Now when you first came to this country and the first house you're in, I assumed like most houses at that time rent a simple house, bare wooden floors, minimum furniture, one cold burner or a wood burning stove in the kitchen.

Mr. Girardi: In the kitchen

Interviewer: And that was going to heat the house.

Mr. Girardi: Yeah, the only heat.

Interviewer: And probably the only were that you had in the house was *[inaudible]* **[0:39:40]**.

Mr. Girardi: We got a stove. We got a heater and a stove.

Interviewer: Right. Okay now, what changes did you know that's taking place and at what intervals as you progressed in your life as you went along? Now, certainly there are various points where you can notice very definite changes occurring. Perhaps you can't know some at that time.

[0:40:00]

But when you look back on it, you can notice that certain things happen that change the way you live even though at that time that it happens, you don't noticed it. You just accept that something new is coming out and you take advantage of it. Now, when you look back on it, you can notice that something is happening and started changing that you way live.

For example, I can look back and I see when the television first started to come out. But I didn't think too much of it that television was out of reach. Everywhere now you see television. But then gradually we got to the point when I could buy television and everybody can buy television. In some way everybody's life was changed because some of you noticed that the neighboring movies, they're all going out *[inaudible]* **[0:40:38]** television. Before, you still have to visit with your friends and everything else. Suddenly you don't do that anymore. You don't notice it when it's happening, but when we look back you can see that when it did happen.

Now, the thing I would ask you is what changes did you notice occur in the way that you lived as the years went by and what were the causes of the changes?

Mr. Girardi: Well, I would – I would say that television and radio did have quite a bit.

Interviewer: Yeah, well now they haven't changed. I'd say I'm thinking about something before that. For example when you first came here...

Mr. Girardi: Oh, I see what you mean.

Interviewer: You know the way you lived was different than – gradually perhaps you got a screen door on the door. Before, you didn't have a screen door. Then you put a screen door on the door and then you get screens on the windows you see.

Mr. Girardi: Well I see that, from – when we lived on 6th Avenue, I believe, how long did we live there like two years?

Unidentified voice: A couple of years.

Mr. Girardi: A couple of years. And then from there, they had a fire right next door and mom she got scared. And so we moved from there and then we moved on to 6th Avenue. We moved in a better – it was a brick house and no frame. Of course we still had the floors down the basement with dirt. So my father, he had to have a semi contractor to cement floors in. We remodeled the house. There was gas, no electric. The other places were all gas, no electric. So then we electrified the southern place on 6th Avenue.

Well, say maybe a year or two years later, we turned around, we put heat in. We didn't have no heat in that place.

Interviewer: What kind of a heater was you put in there?

Mr. Girardi: Hot water heat.

Interviewer: You have hot water heat?

Mr. Girardi: Hot water heat with radiators, but still coal fire. So...

Interviewer: The reason I asked is that – so the first – the first furnaces that they had, it's right at the top that came right in the middle of the house.

Mr. Girardi: No, it was hot air.

Interviewer: It was hot air?

Mr. Girardi: No, we didn't have – we didn't have that all *[inaudible]* [0:42:43]. No, we didn't have no – there were no heat in there whatsoever.

Unidentified voice: We only have coal heat.

Mr. Girardi: Now, we still had – we still had a coal stove that we brought from 8th Avenue, we put it – we brought it up to 6th Avenue. And in fact, we carried, how to carried the nut coal that they use to use for small stove we'd carry that up with us. So then the following year we put hot water heat in, in the house. We humidified the floor, we put the hot water heat in with radiators, it was with coal fire just the same. Then that went on, clean up till when I was in the service.

Then he changed – the boarder went bad and he put – he had to put a new water in. And it was till – it was still coal fire running. In fact it was still coal fire. Even after we sold it.

Interviewer: Did you put in the plumbing in yourself in those days?

Mr. Girardi: No, no, no. The only thing I've done was we had hot water as is another thing that my father did. We had an old raise boards in the kitchen. So then we took that out and put it down the center alongside of the heater down the basement. And we used to have the old copper tunnels. It was all copper lines and we took that out. I put the regular top on maze in the bathroom. No *[inaudible]* [0:44:10].

Interviewer: Okay. Now tell me something about this old copper tub now. Was this a bath tub?

Mr. Girardi: Yeah, it was a bath tub?

Interviewer: It was all copper?

Mr. Girardi: All copper. Yeah all copper lined.

Interviewer: Oh really?

Mr. Girardi: All copper lined. And in fact I think...

Interviewer: Well then you did have a bathroom inside the house?

Mr. Girardi: The bath tub, yeah.

Unidentified voice: Yeah.

Mr. Girardi: A bath tub and a toilet inside. And then they use to have the one outside, but then puppy he knocked that down and buried the old backhouse that they used to call it. So then when we toured the week on this – the old copper tub bath, I think about 10, or 12, 15 pounds of copper out of it.

And that almost paid to buy a new tub, *[inaudible]* [0:44:52] and that's what we put in there.

[0:44:57]

Then he put laundry tub down the center within that. My mother used to wash clothes by hand and we bought an automatic – now an automatic driver, but something like that, washing machine.

Interviewer: A washing machine right. Well what year did you get a washing machine. Do you remember?

Mr. Girardi: That was about 1930.

Unidentified voice: *[inaudible]* [0:45:16].

Mr. Girardi: The first one.

Unidentified voice: Yeah, you were in the service.

Mr. Girardi: No, the first one, you bought it before I went in the service. And then you bought another one after I come out. The first washing machine – no, no the washing machine.

Unidentified voice: Oh, no *[inaudible]* [0:45:30].

Mr. Girardi: The non-tub you put in then when you put the new heater in.

Unidentified voice: Oh, yeah the laundry tub.

Mr. Girardi: That's it, that's it. I was in the service then. And in fact he even wrote to me. He told me that the heater went bad and they had to bought a new heater. He brought it in. The stove was coal fire.

Interviewer: Yeah. Now this was another change. How many more changes can you...?

Mr. Girardi: From there, then they I guess, till I got married. And now this came – now, wait a minute, before I got married, you know, when I was learning my trade, doing a lot of jobs, did have no car, I used to log tools on my bag, put them and load them on my way home, come up 6th Avenue wait for a street car either going south or going out at towards Ridgeton Part, rode them on the street car and take my tools on the street car on jobs.

Even if I was changing from one job to another where I had to log my tool box and some people that were mechanics that were making pretty good money, they called a cab and had their tools taken out where we used to depend on street cars. And the poor motor, when he – he always waited for you to unload everything on and take you on.

Then after I got married, of course, I went – I went to work for the government, civil service and then it didn't bother me too much because I was more or less salaried. I knew that my – I was stabilized and my salary was permanent. And I didn't have to worry about too much about it. If I made an extra dollar, maybe a little extra job, it was mine and I didn't have – I didn't have to worry about it. If I wondered and make it all right if I didn't, I didn't have to. And of course, when I went up and maybe I did the same thing and I kept it on up. This was after I got married.

Interviewer: Okay, well, I'm not finished yet. I'm at the half of *[inaudible]* [0:47:35] houses now. He had plain wooden floors rose the houses.

Mr. Girardi: Right.

Interviewer: And just like a sort of pile, really, a soft pile really of course.

Mr. Girardi: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: It's what generally I guess is used today, not even used for consumption anymore but *[inaudible]* [0:47:51] for floors, right?

Mr. Girardi: Yeah.

Interviewer: Now, these floors are used with a scrub, just like that, scrub them.

Mr. Girardi: My mom used to scrub it.

Interviewer: Or hang it.

Mr. Girardi: Mop. He used to take in varnish him or paint him that way. Mom used to scrub them. Then later on as work progressed with him, then he bought rugs.

Interviewer: Okay, was linoleum first, linoleum first and then later on maybe rugs?

Mr. Girardi: In the dining room, but we always had some sort of provision for a woolen rug in the living room anyhow. But most of the bedroom they were all linoleum rugs and the kitchen of course it was the same.

Interviewer: Okay now, when you say that one of the biggest change that occurred on that I believe had to be one of the biggest change after the World War II?

Mr. Girardi: After World War II, yeah.

Interviewer: The mode of living really changed then.

Mr. Girardi: I think it did. I think it did. See then after that it seemed like that people, they drifted apart to my estimation because before you could take in, if you had some work to do, you could, you depend on asking somebody, "Give me a hand and I'll do the same thing for you someday," and then you could have it done. But after the Second World War, it seemed like people just drifted apart and you couldn't get too much of that no more.

Interviewer: What would you say – sorry for asking, what would you say was the cost for this? When you say that people become more prosperous and possibly *[inaudible]* **[0:49:34]**?

Mr. Girardi: Well money had – and money had a lot to do with it.

Interviewer: They were more prosperous, perhaps a little more self-centered?

Mr. Girardi: More self-reliant as well.

Interviewer: Self-reliant and more independent underneath the *[inaudible]* **[0:49:44]**.

Mr. Girardi: And everybody start getting like we say a TV. And the first of all the war and most of the farmers that were married, they were working and then the wives went out and worked.

[0:50:01]

So they got so used to having the better. And this is my estimate, they got so used to having the better things of life by both of them working and they just continued on working. And this is what's been bringing out most of the majority of the house today. As a matter of fact, husband and wife both worked to keep up with the other person. I have heard it and the way I think, yeah. And when I first went in business, I could ask my brother in laws to come and give me a hand, they'd be willing to do it. But I didn't feel that I could ask them to do it for nothing. I had to get

them something even though if they'd say, "Well no, I want to do this." And it was okay. If it comes time for them to pay me, I would say, "Well no, you don't owe me now because you'd help me to do this and I didn't give you enough because I'd figure I'm going to help you out another way." And that's how we – but then since then we can't get nobody give you a hand for nothing.

Interviewer: Now if you were to look back on your life in this country, now we talked about a lot of changes that have taken place. What would you say was the one biggest change that occurred since you've been in the United States?

Mr. Girardi: The biggest in my life?

Interviewer: In your estimation yes. And so far as you're concerned, if you were to pick out the one thing that has caused the biggest change or perhaps those made the biggest difference in life in general, in this country, what would you say it was? I mean this is tough. We got so many things that happened that we need to figure out.

Mr. Girardi: Yes, it's pretty hard. Yes, it's pretty hard to say.

Interviewer: Will you say that – well let me make a suggestion. When you say that possibly the biggest change that has occurred is the relations of people to other people. And this is one of the things you were talking about, that people changed a lot, it might be television, it might be the prosperity that person doesn't feel that he needs anybody else anymore, he can buy whatever he needs. Would you say that?

Mr. Girardi: Well that had got a lot to do with it. But it's pretty hard to exhibit that. I actually think that whether Hitler had anything to do with his philosophy, in other words, you know yourself and in this country that Jewish people they ran the country, they ran Germany and I'd say on this country, they dominated. Without them, you would be nowhere.

Now whether a lot of the people have come to the conclusion, they start realizing this and they're trying – they're trying to make themselves that they don't have to depend from them. So they try to better themselves. They're not satisfied with maybe – and they want to take a move away from one neighborhood and go into another neighborhood whether it's – taxation is one thing. Taxation is driving most of the people out of the city. But yet now, they're coming right – it's coming at a time were that people that had moved out in the suburb, they're coming right by because the suburb is getting just as bad and maybe worst.

But they came – the money itself monetary is the biggest – is the biggest problem because in other words, there's plenty of money around. The unions or in other words, everybody was unionized where it wasn't before. Today, no matter what – no matter what happened, everybody is unionized.

Interviewer: You would say is one of the biggest changes is the fact that people have more money?

Mr. Girardi: More money, oh yes, sure they have more money.

Interviewer: And this you would say is the biggest change and the one that affects life in this country more than anything else?

Mr. Girardi: Sure, even though – even though they don't have it in their pocket, but they have the potential. In other words there were in a better fix.

Interviewer: I know because you can buy things on credit that you could never buy credit before.

Mr. Girardi: Before, right.

Interviewer: More credit did not exist.

Mr. Girardi: They did have a certain amount. Now credit has been extended so much and you don't even have to finish paying for one item and you can take and trade it in and get another one.

Interviewer: Well and that's something where we'll never finish paying for all of them.

[0:54:59]

Mr. Girardi: That's right, sure.

Interviewer: It's like paying for the rent.

Mr. Girardi: Sure, that's it.

Interviewer: Okay now, have you ever regret coming to the United States?

Mr. Girardi: No, I don't think so. I don't think so.

Interviewer: Has there even a time that you want to go back to Italy?

Mr. Girardi: I did go back.

Interviewer: I mean stayed, remain for business, I mean go back and stay?

Mr. Girardi: No, no.

Interviewer: You never had? Okay now, one other question, this will be the last question I'm going to ask you and that is if you want to add anything else, feel free too. You've heard a lot of people talk about the good all days. You've heard people say that and that things aren't like that used to be boys and the good old days.

Mr. Girardi: Yeah.

Interviewer: Tell me something, do you ever feel that you want to go back to these good old days that people talk about. Would you swap your present life for silence you have maybe 30, 40 years ago?

Mr. Girardi: No, I don't think I would.

Interviewer: In other words, your good old days are right now.

Mr. Girardi: Well no, we'll say it this way here. If we had to take and go back, I mean everything in general go back, fine. In other words, funny.

Interviewer: This is what I'm talking about, would you like to have your life right now to be the same as it was maybe 40 years ago and of course it's not only yours but everybody would be the same.

Mr. Girardi: Yeah, I think I'd like it.

Interviewer: You really do?

Mr. Girardi: I think I would. Now, I probably wouldn't have a house like I have today.

Interviewer: Well you wouldn't have anything that you have today probably.

Mr. Girardi: Yeah, that's right because I mean well – but yet, you'd be living just as good.

Interviewer: You had a feeling that you would be living as this?

Mr. Girardi: Your wages would be less but your living cost would be less, see?

Interviewer: True, yeah.

Mr. Girardi: And then here again, you could – you could exchange help in so many ways. This is the way I look at it. So in other words even though you would say you'd have one job, I'll get another job, well, you would help me today, and I'll help you tomorrow. They do that in Italy and they live day in and day out that way. When one person needs a help, "Sir, well how about come in and help me for a couple of days." Sure. Then when you need help, I'll come over and help and work with you for a couple of days. And that's the exchange that they had.

Interviewer: How would you define progress/

Mr. Girardi: In what way?

Interviewer: Just in general.

Mr. Girardi: The progress here?

Interviewer: Yes. What would you say progress, now what is progress?

Mr. Girardi: Well, better living.

Interviewer: Better living yeah.

Mr. Girardi: Better living, you got more money.

Interviewer: Better health facilities.

Mr. Girardi: Well houses are sanitary.

Interviewer: There are sanitary facilities in the house.

Mr. Girardi: Right, sanitary facilities, well the clothing is the same.

Interviewer: How about nutrition, you say nutrition is better?

Mr. Girardi: Which?

Interviewer: Nutrition, the type of foods that you eat.

Mr. Girardi: That's about the same. The only thing that you have more stuff in cans today than you did before.

Interviewer: When you say you're able to eat more meat today than you are able to eat 40 years ago?

Mr. Girardi: Well that's true.

Interviewer: Probably more eggs than before?

Mr. Girardi: Well this has got a lot to do with on account of your money park.

Interviewer: Well it's not about money.

Mr. Girardi: My father, I remember at time he used to buy meat once a week and that we just like for all Sunday.

Interviewer: Yeah. Well there were other things too then that make it possible for you to have more meat than before. Meat now is an industry. It's not just farmer having a bull and a cow and make a calf and then a calf grows up. And the same with the chicken laying on an egg. They had chickens I mean *[inaudible]* **[0:58:58]** line.

Mr. Girardi: Right.

Interviewer: And they raised them in a matter of a month. They'll raise the chicken before they can sell it because before it will take you months and months to raise a chicken to be big enough to sell it. And the price was out of reach of the ordinary bread.

Whereas today we'd probably – we'd probably pay less for meat than most of the other people in the world with lower income, lower state of living. As you go to Italy for example where their average pay when you take a teacher on a school, a professor who might make 100, \$200 a month tops. And if it's \$100 a month, he's really well paid and yet their meat cost about the very same price that we pay for meat in this country. Chicken over there is higher than what we pay for it here. And I'm not taking it on a comparative basis, I think of it in a dollar basis. They'll pay more per pound than we pay for chicken here. And they make money even half as much as we do.

[1:00:00]

At least there's a progress.

Mr. Girardi: You're going by now. You say the one that live in the city.

Interviewer: Yeah, well of course the ones who live in the country I mean if they're raising kids that would be...

Mr. Girardi: They're a little more reserve because they – whenever they feel like eating a chicken, they can go ahead and kill them, that's it. The only thing – all I'd know they'll kill that chicken then they won't get no more eggs.

Interviewer: That's it, right.

Mr. Girardi: **[inaudible] [1:00:27]**. Now I noticed – I noticed one thing when I **[inaudible] [1:00:32]** of course she had a pretty big farm. He might have learned while I was there almost six week but in every other day, she was killing the chicken. They don't kill the young, they kill the old. They don't want to kill the young because the old never docks down and that's it. But now here's another thing too you take the old timers, your father probably remembers, when mostly all the Italian people here, they've still done the same ways they did years ago when they use to go down out in the country and contract a farmer to raise them a pig. And then maybe around, say, the month of – end of October and November, they'd be all nice and fattened up. The farmer would kill it and they'd bring it home and make their own salad in their own hand, their own fat, everything.

Today – now this is just bringing out what you were just saying, you can buy so much cheaper but you don't have to take and worry about getting on hold pigging and have all that work to do, see? And then there's the same thing years ago when...

[1:01:51]

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