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| Questions | Interviewee 1 | Interviewee 2 |
| Date of Interview:October 5, 2023 | Maria Naccarato | Franco Naccarato |
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| Name of Interviewer:Kelly Hughes  |
| Warning: this transcription contains an Ethnic slur. <start>(Voiceover)“This interview is part of a community-engaged living history project at the University of Guelph, interested in firsthand testimony and oral histories of Italian Canadian immigrants and documenting their personal in-depth narratives of their immigration experience from Italy to Canada in addition to the oral histories we have recorded the individuals’ families communities and organizations we have engaged with for this project have been encouraged to share historical items documents letters and photos that capture the experiences of Italians in Canada these artifacts will be used to create an informative textual and visual report to illustrate and preserve these personal stories specifically and the Italian Canadian immigration experience in general. In this way we can connect the events of the past with the livedexperiences of actual people the following interview took place on the 5th of October 2023 in Milton Ontario at the home of Maria Naccarato who immigrated to Canada from Italy in 1954 and her son Franco who was born in Canada.” |
| Age group of participants | Baby Boomer  | Generation X |
| Questions for Maria  |  |  |
| What first brought you to Canada? | My father had come over a few years before us to work and when he was settled then he called my mother my brother and myself to join him. |  |
| Do you have memories of when and where you arrived?  | We arrived in Halifax and then we took a train. I think it was a 3-day train ride to Toronto and I remember that first time that I saw my dad…and I'm getting emotional… |  |
| (Follow up): that'sokay so yeah tell me about that |  | I don't think I've ever heard that story…about where…where you saw him |
|  | He was waiting for the train and Ispotted him as the train came up Ispotted my dad outside Oh God yes….…four years. He was working on therailroads, right? He started in Vancouver…yes so yeah was a happy meeting…yeah, and the rest is history. | …you went to give him a hug?…’cause you'd been without him for over three years four years?I bet! |
| How old were you when you arrived in Canada? Which part of Italy did you come from? | I was seven and I immigrated from Altilia which is in the province of Cosenza and it's in southern Calabria, southern Italy.  |  |
| What means of travel did you use to come to Canada? | By boat. We came across and I think was a two week... took two weeks on the ocean to get us here. And my brother actually fell ill, and I remember now, on the boat and I didn't even see my mother for two weeks. I stayed with this other lady that my mother had made friends with ‘cause my brother was really ill so he nursed my brother the whole time and I barely saw my mother in those two weeks. That's about all I remember is I was I was with this strange lady, and I couldn't understand why. I mean I was a little girl myself, right? I couldn't understand why I couldn't go see my mom, but she was…nursing my brother so and I don't even think it was a doctor onboard ship so my mother kind of you know had to do the nursing herself.  |  |
| (Follow-up question: And how many people were on that boat with you?) | Oh gosh I would say maybe 5, 600 I would think. I would think so. It's a big, huge boat and I remember landing in Halifax and getting our trunks and everybody was saying “they're going to open them they're going to open them” because they did because Italians like to be really prepared, okay? So, they take their bottles they take their salami with them right and you're not allowed so they were open, and I remember my mother saying I hope she doesn't open I hope he doesn't open them, right? They didn't. Sopresata, and liquor Can't go, leave home without it | What did she bring?Can't go home, leave home without it. |
| What do you remember of your first impression of Canada?  | Just how big it was coming from a little small town and never really leaving that small town it just you could walk it in 10 minutes... just the vastness of it. |  |
| Did you encounter any obstacles/barriers as a new immigrant to Canada? | No, I don't. I mean dad had already got a house...there was a school for me to go to and we walked to school, and it was like four or 5 kilometers, and I can remember doing that walk and... because it was a Catholic school and that's we went to the Catholic schools, so everything was sort of set up for us when we got here. |  |
| (Follow-up question: Were there any other Italian children at the school?) | No not when I first started later on there was but when I first started, I remember I was in Grade two and I'm listening to them all right? Not understanding what they're saying not really understanding what's going on, but we were coloring and after about a month I had enough nerve to put up my hand and say we were taught by nuns by the way I had enough nerve to put up my hand and say, “I need green”. I needed a green color I never forgot that.Yeah, that was my first spoken sentence in English “I need the color green.” | That was the first thing you asked? |
| (Text Box)Maria shared some photos and artefacts of her family history with us. |
| Did you bring any items of importance with you when you came to Canada? (i.e., photographs,family heirlooms, mementos). | That's a picture of my grandfather, this is my dad's side of the family now…this is my grandfather lived 104 he did yeah she this is this is his wife, my grandmother… …she was 72 when she died....no, he was old.…and this is a picture of my dad when he was, I guess about 18 …1905? My grandmother's born in 1905.Okay this is my grandmother's birth certificate uh Romano Marietta she was Romano that was her maiden name Marietta was her first name, so this is my grandmother's birth certificate. And this is my father's mother, and it was she was born in 1905 and this is this was issued what did you say?1965 for us that's the only thing I have left of hers So, this was this is a 1940 when they got married 1939, I guess 1940 yeah that's my husband's parents and in Italy she's not dressed in white. But in Italy they had a custom that when the couple got married they went into seclusion for 10 days so when they came out they were dressed to the hilt and then they came out into society and had their party and everything right so that that's their coming out outfit trust me in those days you did not spend any time alone and I can vouch for that ‘cause I was brought up that way. This is my mother's mother and my mother's father, and this is him. | my great grandfathernow she died, he was young he was in his...?oh, I thought he was...okay.I don't know what this is, but I bet you this is another... the real birth certificate actually of what 1905.Yeah ‘cause it was issued 7th of March 1965 1965Isn't that fantastic? |
| Where is home for you? You came to Canada when you were very young (Age 7). Did you feel Canadian your whole life?  | Yes, I did but I still I'm still Italian through and through and we went back home in 2005 actually and I had never been back since I left in in uh 1954, I've never been back went back in 2005 and I'm standing in St Peter’s square and all of a sudden, the… and I and I thought to myself I'm home. This is home. So, it still pulls you know? I mean I love Canada I mean it's given me a future it's given me a family it's given it's given me a life more than I could ever have had in Italy I mean there's just no comparison, right? And I owe that to my father for being brave enough to do what he did you know? And my mother it wasn't easy for her you so yeah. Well, this is home it's always been home.I mean I grew up here and you know… |  |
| (Follow-up: But when you're... when you go there you feel…) | I actually felt… I didn't think I would, but I actually did and going back and seeing the house where I had been born into was really surreal to see that. |  |
| Did you exchange letters with relatives in Italy? | No, no. I was just my mother had her family there back home so she would write to her brothers and her sister yeah. |  |
| (Follow-up: Do any of those letters survive?)  | Oh, I don't think so no, no. That's me...and Joe yeah. It looks like I'm about 3 years old there. I was seven, so this was taken actually just before we came these were passport pictures done by professionals. You can see the difference in the photograph, 1954 right on the back it says. That's the ones we took for the passports, and this is with my mom. | Probably around the age you would have been when you came here?So, you would have been older when you came over? |
| (Follow-up: So, this was the first full generation of your family that lived in Canada? Your dad your mom yourself your brother?)Oh, they did? | Yeah, and then like my grandparents and my aunts and uncles are all here now they all followed after...They did. So, my mother's family, my father called over the older brother, my Uncle Tony and he brought came across and he came the rest of her of her family didn't want to come she…my dad was willing to sponsor them and bring them, but they said no they wanted to stay where they were.  |  |
| (Scrolling text) Maria’s husband, Genio Naccarato, also immigrated from Italy. He sadly passed away in June 2023. Here she recalls their close-knit Italian community in Canada, and his very unique marriage proposal. |
| (Follow-up): Would you be comfortable telling us your husband’s name and a little bit about him? | Okay so his name is a Genio Naccarato, we call him G or Genio, whatever. During that immigration business...they …when we came here my husband's family went to Belgium to work so my father-in-law and his brother um went to Belgium they worked the coal mines they moved the whole family over right so one of his brothers Dino came to Canada before they did and before my husband did and they live with us ‘cause my mother at that time then was taking borders to help to make some money right so he lived with us for I guess about I would say a year before my father-in-law came across so the families kind of knew each other No.“Yeah, but tell me something we sent them the water, okay? But water doesn't go uphill it goes down this is this is a generational fight my husband and I used to argue about that all the time he says no we gave it to your town I says really the water went uphill to my town  | Did they know each other back in Italy? So, their hometowns are like 2 km apart my mom's town is up on top they're on the mountains and my dad's Town's at the bottom of the mountain and they always battle who's the best right? So, the Altilians say “we're on the top we're the best” the… say “but we have the water, so we have the we're the best.” |
| (Follow-up): So, you didn't know each other even though you grew up so close? | No but the families once they came, the families stayed really really close together in fact when my brother Lee was born my husband was his Godfather for his christening so that's how the family got really close and together right? Yeah so, it's a pretty funny story we were living on Woodland Hill which is Eglinton near Caledonia and they lived on McRoberts which was about 3 or 4 streets over and families visited back and forth constantly right? I was 13 14 at the time well I was in grade 10 so figure it out, do the math. Yeah probably 15.I was 18. Anyway, we were out and…We had gone to visit somebody. My father and his father were in the backseat of the car I was in the front with him so we're talking away, and this is just when the Beatles had just hit, and they were famous and everything right? And I was I was crazy about the Beatles so we're talking about them, and I and I said to them you know I'd give anything to see them you know they are just phenomenal blah blah blah back and forth back and forth and he says well if you give me the right answer to a question, he says I'll take you to see them. That was his proposal. I never did get to see The Beatles (laughter) He Welshed on that.  | I'm in my late 40s and it was only a year ago that I found out how you guys got engaged.You were older than that you were, like 15, 16?Cause you were about 17 18 when you got married?Where were you?They got too busy and everything else.  |
| (Voiceover)While Franco's Mother Maria did immigrate from Italy Franco did not. He was born in Canada and as such his experiences as an Italian Canadian are unique from Maria's  |
| Franco’s Questions  |  |  |
| Do you identify with a cultural background and heritage? |  | Well, I didn't always. So, I think my mom I remember my mom telling me the story that I was actually if they if she said I was Italian I refused, I refused to acknowledge that I was Italian. I’d actually say, “no I'm Canadian”. That changed after the World Cup in ’82. So, I don't think I had associated… I was too young I maybe I didn't understand what it meant to be Italian, but I think the World Cup changed that for everyone…and I could remember that day to a tee, it's so clearly in my mind what happened  |
| (Follow up): And you were how old? | 300,000 and not one window broken, not one arrest just lots of fun for everyone | ’82, so I would have been born 75, seven, seven years old, and I remember all the kids, all my cousins all the were in one room watching the soccer game and at one point we had to go outside to go next door ‘cause all the parents were in the next door's house we needed food or something I don't know what it was so we ran outside and we had to run because we didn't want to miss any of the game and it was it was intermission I think but I remember running outside I was running around and I stopped…it was complete silence on the street our street was never silent, there was always people outside it was a very Italian Community…was completely… you could hear a pin drop and I just remember stopping, like “this is weird”… didn't understand it then but afterwards as I realized what it was so anyways goes on Italy wins the World Cup, we're all happy and then my uncle pulls up in his van and said “everybody get in your cars we're going to St Clair” and I had no idea what St. Clair is even though I'd been there a thousand times um and I remember going down the street and the streets are lined from one end to the other of people walking celebrating. Complete joy. 300,000 three or five…I remember looking up at the stores and I don't know if you know St Clair, you know how tall they are people were lined across the rooftops all the way down the street and I remember just saying “wow this is what Italian is.” That was my moment.  |
| Did you grow up speaking a language or dialect other than English or French at home? How often was the language spoken or was it only spoken at holidays with extended family or grandparents? | I was on the PTA | I did learn Italian at school and that was something that my mom made sure of that they that Italian I think you even played a role in making sure that when the school came over, so my mom was actually involved in getting my school open...…there was a school further away was too far and she kept lobbying the government to get a school opened and when she did she wanted to make sure that there was an Italian teacher so that we could learn Italian so we actually learned it in school there was a class you'd have French class you'd have Italian class and so I got to learn Italian and I didn't realize how valuable that was until I go to Italy and uh in my teens and uh I could actually communicate with my friends and people that we met there while my cousins that didn't speak a word of Italian they were like lost they were like ah uh so I've lost most of it because you don't use it right but when you hear it you get used to it I went to Italy in 20 when was I there on my own? 2001? I went to go see my cousins and there I had cousins that were the same age, and we were talking, and they were giggling and I what's so funny like “you talk like a school child it's so cute” because that was the level of my vocabulary was a I learned till grade 8 which is probably their grade too right? So, my vocabulary was very basic and very simple.  |
|  |  | So the last few months of my Dad's life he spent in the hospital and this was one of his favorite things to do he would listen to the radio and I got it was I'd giggle and the and because he'd be serenading the nurses he'd be sing along with it, door’s wide open I'd be walking up and I could hear my dad singing to whatever song it was it made him happy and made him smile he the last thing we did together was we played bocce together.  |
| (Music plays) | So, this is another one by Rosso and the reason I want you to hear it is because that's my ringtone and I created it! I created my own ringtone from that song. I love this song. Love it.  | That song's played when the father dances with dances with the bride, for a wedding, and every time they…that that was played my mom would grab me at the wedding and she'd be like hold on to me, she’d get all emotional. She loved it. |
| (Text box): We ended our time together talking about some of Maria’s family recipes from Italy that remind her of her culture and celebrating holidays with her family.  | So these are called…which is like an Easter bread and so it involves yeast and flour and eggs it's very plain and it's made just at Easter time and what you do is, you mix all your ingredients you put them in a bowl then you roll them out and you braid them and at the top of you bend it and at the top of the braid there where it forms a circle you put an egg so it becomes like an Easter egg for the kids and then the Easter morning they have that egg so that's the Easter one this is like this is *polpette*s which are like a big meatball and they are done, you know how you have pancake Tuesday for Lent right? So we in our town we do this and uh you do these on uh what's it called the Tuesday carnal the carnal so it's either on the Tuesday or the Sunday of that week but Lent, okay and it opens up Lent for us and what this has is it has a lot of pork meat it has eggs it has ground meat it has cheese and then you boil…pork bones and you boil a filet of pork or something a loin or something and you make this broth so then you put the broth in there as well you form them and once you form them then you boil them in the remaining balls so you make a great big pot of the broth right and you cook them in there. These are little Tarts well I you had the recipe in your hand this is the little tart we're talking about that you put the jam in, but you make your own Jam for it… |  |
| (Follow up): And we have some to try? | We have some to try you have the jam to try yes so, we should try it and I'm going to play Lauretta I was going to play Lauretta for you.You’ve got to stir it first… |  |
| (End Credits): Many thanks to Maria Naccarato and her son Franco Naccarato for sharing their stories and Italian Canadian Heritage with me for this interview. Interview conducted and recorded by Kelly Hughes Technical assistance was provided by Duncan HillMusic used throughout is Ciao Bella, by Trabant 33 used with permission from Epidemic SoundPhotographs are from the private collections of Maria Naccarato and Franco Naccarato and used with permission for this project. To view more stories, visit the Italian Canadian Narratives Showcase<https://www.italianheritage.ca/list-of-projects/italian-communities-in-canada-heritage-cultural-and-ethnographic-studies/><end> |