

EI-896/CASTAGNELLO

EI-896

VICTORIA OLIVETO CASTAGNELLO

BIRTH DATE: MAY 29, 1909

INTERVIEW DATE: MAY 28, 1997

RUNNING TIME: 41:21

INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME

INTERVIEW LOCATION: UNIVERSITY COMMONS NURSING HOME  
WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 10/1997

TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

BORN OF ITALIAN IMMIGRANT PARENTS IN THE UNITED STATES  
BORN 1909

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Funding for this transcript, one of many interviews conducted with Italian and Sicilian women, was generously provided by interviewee Elda Del Bino Willitts, EI-8. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of Oral History, 8/14/1997.

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. I'm Paul Sigrist from the Ellis Island Immigration Museum, the National Park Service. And today is Wednesday, May 28, 1997. I'm at the University Commons Nursing Home in Worcester, Massachusetts. And I'm here with Mrs. Victoria Oliveto Castagnello. I think I'm saying that correctly.

CASTAGNELLO: It's good.

SIGRIST: And Mrs. Castagnello said that she has some stories that she would like to tell, and so we've wired her up with a microphone, and we're going to

let her tell some stories. Mrs. Castagnello, can we begin by you giving me your birth date, your birth date.

CASTAGNELLO: May 29, 1909.

SIGRIST: 1909. And where were you born?

CASTAGNELLO: Uh, in, the biggest town was Clarksburg, West Virginia.

SIGRIST: You were born in West Virginia.

CASTAGNELLO: But my father was a coal miner. The little town that I was born was called Farming[ph].

SIGRIST: Farming[ph].

CASTAGNELLO: F-A-U-R-A-M, or something like that. That was the little, I was born in the coal mine cabins, that they had the cabins for the coal miners that they came from Italy.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what those cabins looked like? Do you remember as you, when you got older, or . . .

CASTAGNELLO: I don't. It was just a, a little place that my

father and mother would live in, because I was the oldest one of all of us.

SIGRIST: Do you, do you anything about, about the day you were born? Did anyone ever tell you a story about the day you were born?

CASTAGNELLO: I was born in Farming[ph]. But I been through it, through the town where I was born, but the cabins were not there no more. Oh, about ten, fifteen years ago.

SIGRIST: Now, did you grow up in West Virginia?

CASTAGNELLO: Yes. I grew up, then I left West Virginia and went to New York, because there was no work for me there.

SIGRIST: Well, let me talk a little bit about your parents. First of all, what was your father's name?

CASTAGNELLO: My father's name was John Oliveto.

SIGRIST: And what did he do for a living in Italy?

CASTAGNELLO: In Italy?

SIGRIST: Is that where he came from?

CASTAGNELLO: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yes.

CASTAGNELLO: He was more, he used to cut trees, and like that.

I think like in the forest. He used to cut trees. 'Cause when he was about twelve years old, I fell down from the tree and he, his bone, knees got broke, and then he was walking bowlegged. And everybody used to ask us, because we were thirteen children, my father had thirteen children, and none of us were bowlegged. And everybody said, "Your father's bowlegged. How did he get bowlegged?" He says he fell out of the tree, and then in Italy they couldn't straighten out his legs, and he was walking bowlegged.

SIGRIST: What part of Italy did he come from?

CASTAGNELLO: From Calabria.

SIGRIST: Calabria. Do you know the name of the town in Calabria?

CASTAGNELLO: San Giovanni en Fiori.

SIGRIST: San, say it one more time slowly for me.

CASTAGNELLO: San Giovanni en Fiori. That means St. John in, in Fiori means in Fiori, flowers.

SIGRIST: Flowers, right. What other stories did your father ever tell about living in Italy?

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, him in Italy? Oh, because my father came in America before he married my mother. Then he worked two years, and he made the money for his self to go back to Italy, and money to bring my mother here. And the first time he went back to Italy, he married my mother. Then my mother was pregnant, and she lost the child in Italy, and then she came, I think four years after he came in America.

SIGRIST: Do you know what year that was?

CASTAGNELLO: All I know is my father was born 1895, no, '75.

SIGRIST: 1875, yeah.

CASTAGNELLO: 1875.

SIGRIST: So he was, he would have been in his thirties when you were born. Let's see, '75, '85 to '95 to '05. Yeah, he'd be like thirty-three or thirty-four

years old. What was your mom's name?

CASTAGNELLO: My mother's name was Theresa Mazzie.

SIGRIST: Theresa, and can you spell Mazzie, please?

CASTAGNELLO: M-A-Z-Z-I-E, I think.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

CASTAGNELLO: I don't know if it's right or not.

SIGRIST: And what do you know about her life in Italy?

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, her life, that, uh, her mother died when she was eight years old, and she had a stepmother, and taught her a lot of things, taught her the Bible.

The stepmother had read the Bible, and she was telling my mother a lot of stories about the Bible. And she knew a lot of good words, clean words, and beautiful. And she said she would never have known that. Then she got married when she was eighteen years old, and then my, uh, my father was in America, and she was in Italy, and he went to Italy for the first time. He worked in a coal mine in, I don't know the town he worked in when he first came, in a coal mine, I guess where

I was born, because then he went back, and he left my mother pregnant with a child, and the child died in Italy, and then she came in America, uh, I think it was, I think it was nineteen, '03, '04, or '05. I don't know what year.

SIGRIST: 1903, 1904.

CASTAGNELLO: Because she said I was born four years after she came with the boat or ship in Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever talk about being on the ship?

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, yes, oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Or on Ellis Island?

CASTAGNELLO: She told that many times.

SIGRIST: Okay. Can you tell me the story that she told you so many times?

CASTAGNELLO: Then she came in in a boat or ship, I don't know which one it was, that they, after they got at Ellis Island, they asked the people that was coming out of the boat, and had doctors there, three or four doctors, and the ones that were sick that had diseases that were contagious, they were

back on the ship back to Italy. And the ones that were good, they says, "Okay, you go here." So she said, she was fourteen days on the ship, or the boat, I don't know, and her hair all fell out, and she thought she'd never have no more hair. And after four years, her hair grew in, and then I was born in 1909.

SIGRIST: When she got to Ellis Island, did anything happen to her? Did she ever talk about anything, what her experience was?

CASTAGNELLO: I seen the picture there. If you see in the picture that the boat came in, I saw, I went to Ellis Island, not when it was opened, the spring of the next year. I seen the picture.

SIGRIST: That's right. You told me before we started the interview that you were there in 1991, I think.

CASTAGNELLO: Yes, I think, '91. It was in March some time.

SIGRIST: But I was wondering what your mother might have told you about her experience there.

CASTAGNELLO: Her experience, that she had lost all her hair, and she was afraid she was never going to have no

more hair, and she said that it's just too bad that he had passed away before she came here, and then, then I think after she came into New York, four years later, I was born. Then, I think, it would have been 1905.

SIGRIST: Well, let's talk a little bit about your early childhood. What's the first thing you remember?

CASTAGNELLO: What I remember?

SIGRIST: Yes. When you were a little kid, what's the very first memory that you have?

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, first memory of my father and mother, they always tried to do their best, and then my mother had thirteen children. I was the oldest one of all of them. And three sets of twins.

SIGRIST: Wow!

CASTAGNELLO: Two was one after another where the doctor told her to stop having children. But no, she went ahead. And I, and then it was Catherine and Tony, a boy and a girl first. First it was me, then it was my brother Pete, then I had a sister Mary, yeah, there was four of us, then the fifth was the

twins, Catherine and Tony. They were the fifth, and then about eighteen to twenty months apart.

SIGRIST: Your mother had her hands full. All those kids!

CASTAGNELLO: And, you know, she very seldom slept, 'cause in the night she used to mend, all the clothes, made all our clothes, tried to make all our clothes and everything.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me, did you live in the same house for a long time when you were growing up?

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Can you describe that house for me?

CASTAGNELLO: After my father, after we got out of the coal mine . . .

SIGRIST: Well, how . . .

CASTAGNELLO: I was about four years old.

SIGRIST: Your father was still working in the coal mines until you were four.

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Can you talk about, before we talk about . . .

CASTAGNELLO: He worked for forty-eight years in a coal mine.

SIGRIST: Can you talk about his work in the coal mine and what he had to do, and the effect it had on him?

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, uh, he worked in the coal mine. And then I think when it was the depression they were working scab, no union. And then my mother used to get us, all the children, and pray to God that he'd come back the way he went. And that, that was great to me. And he, oh, and, and if he had an orange, when we were fifteen, he'd divide that in fifteen pieces. He wouldn't have nothing for the girls or the boys, because a lot of Italians, they favor the boys and everything. No, not him. He served everything that was on the table. It was equal, who wanted what. They got what they wanted. So he, he treated us all equal and everything.

SIGRIST: Do you remember just what your father's duty was in the coal mine? What was his job specifically?

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, he had, had the coal mine hat, and he used to

wear coal mine clothes, and then he'd come home all dirty and black, and, because he had a light on his cap, and then, and he worked on a hill, like, and he wouldn't take no lunch. We used to bring his lunch in a pail, one of us children, after we all got larger, because he, they had what they call the coal mine bucket, and we brought him water, whatever was in there. And I remember, up there, we had to go up a hill, and on the hill, it had an apple tree. Then when it was apple time, we used to bring bags to get apples, and bring them home, to have apples. And then my father, his duty was that in the mine they had to dig the coal out, and then they had to be, see that the room they had built, dug out, would be safe. And he had to put posters, wooden post to hold it up to see that it wouldn't cave in.

SIGRIST: Oh, to like support the inside.

CASTAGNELLO: Yeah, supporting. And when I was small, and I think it was, oh, in the First, the First World War, one time something happened, the thing caved in, and my father was in the hospital for a long time, and they gave him medicine and told him,

"Don't chew it." They were pills. And he chewed, and then all his teeth came out. And he was toothless all his life till he was, until he was about seventy years old, then my brothers and sisters all got him teeth.

SIGRIST: So from chewing that medicine, he lost all his teeth for the rest of his life.

CASTAGNELLO: All his teeth. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Wow. Do you remember any other accidents happening in the mines?

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, in the mine. At that time, it was during the First World War that happened, because a lot of people used to go see him in the hospital, and they used to bring my mother there.

SIGRIST: How did you find out that there had been a, there had been an accident in the mines?

CASTAGNELLO: Well, Popi told, used to repeat it all the time.

SIGRIST: He used to tell you the story.

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, he told . . .

SIGRIST: Do you remember it?

CASTAGNELLO: I remember it, but not my brothers and sisters, because they wouldn't, they wouldn't listen. And I always listened to Popi, and they always used to say, "Popi's pet, Popi's pet." Because Popi was more strict than my mother, and they didn't care. They used to say I was Popi's pet and everything. All through my life, anything was broken or anything, who did it? Vicky, Vicky, Vicky.

SIGRIST: Did, when there were accidents in the coal mines, was there a way that, that they alerted the town that something had happened up in the mine? Do you remember? Was it some kind of an alarm system, or . . .

CASTAGNELLO: I remember my father going to the hospital. I mean, they were saying that he had went to the hospital, and I never seen him in the hospital until he came home, and that was the time that he had lost all his teeth.

SIGRIST: How did, how do you think it made your mother feel to have her husband work in this kind of an environment?

CASTAGNELLO: Well, he couldn't do anything else. I mean, he couldn't find anything. And you couldn't find a job. When I was a teenager, I left Clarksburg to go to New York to work, and I was a seamstress for over forty years.

SIGRIST: In New York?

CASTAGNELLO: In New York.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

CASTAGNELLO: And I lived there a long time.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about growing up in West Virginia, what you remember about being the oldest child with immigrant parents, you know, what language did you speak at home?

CASTAGNELLO: I spoke Italian. When I was about eight years old there was (?) boy, I think it was Johnny Scarshell[ph] and Dominic Sclerio[ph]. They were trying to teach me English. I didn't go to school.

SIGRIST: How did they try to teach you English?

CASTAGNELLO: They'd tell me English words, and I had to repeat them.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what some of the first words were that they . . .

CASTAGNELLO: They used to, they would say in Italian first, then they'd tell me how it was in America. But I lived in Nutterfort, West Virginia, and the school wasn't too far, just a block away, and then, then when I was about ten, eleven, twelve, like that, then Mr. Hayman was the teacher, and his house, he lived, he had to pass our house. When he saw that I wasn't going to school, he'd bring me a pencil and paper and sit with me on our, we had a porch on our house, and we sat on the porch, and he started with pushups, up, down, up, down. He brought me paper and pencil until the next day, three o'clock, I was supposed to have that page full of push ups. Then the next day . . .

SIGRIST: You're talking about pushing up the pencil?

CASTAGNELLO: Pencil. Up, down, the line.

SIGRIST: Just so you can learn how to . . .

CASTAGNELLO: Like in first and second grade, you push that up. Then the next day he'd give me another page, and I had to make ovals. Then the next day make all A's, the whole page. A, B, C, D, E, the whole alphabets, I had to make them. And, and then, and I was trying to work to get my high school diploma. I didn't get it, because it was always, I missed a few words. I didn't catch on all that. Because I didn't know the nouns, the nouns and pronouns and all that. I didn't know them. Today I don't know them.

SIGRIST: Why, why didn't you go to school?

CASTAGNELLO: I had to stay home and wash diapers.

SIGRIST: Oh, because of all the kids.

CASTAGNELLO: Because, uh . . .

SIGRIST: What were your duties at home? What were you responsible for doing when you were growing up?

CASTAGNELLO: I made cheese, I made bread. I made everything.

SIGRIST: When you, when you were growing up in West Virginia, you had to make cheese and bread and

. . .

CASTAGNELLO: That was, when I, a teenager. Instead of going to school, I had to stay home. Because my mother had all her children between eighteen and twenty months apart. Then she had twins.

SIGRIST: And you're the oldest, right?

CASTAGNELLO: And I was the oldest.

SIGRIST: You were the oldest.

CASTAGNELLO: And then I remember her putting the blanket on the floor, and then she used to either feed Tony or Catherine, and I had to feed the other one. I would spoon, and she used to nurse the other one.

SIGRIST: She would breastfeed . . .

CASTAGNELLO: She breast fed every one of us. She breast fed all of us.

SIGRIST: What do, do you have any memories of any of your brothers or sisters being born?

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about that experience?

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, that, I had a lot of it.

SIGRIST: How were babies born back then?

CASTAGNELLO: They didn't go to hospitals. They had midwives.

SIGRIST: Midwives.

CASTAGNELLO: The midwife would come in and take care. And I used to hear my mother screaming and everything, like that, all that. I didn't understand it and all that, but I heard her. And I used to cry. I'd go to the room and cry for her. Yeah, I remember when, the two, she had two sets, one after another, and I heard both of them. The first set was a boy and a girl, Tony and Catherine. The second one, it was, the girl passed away in her before she was born, and my mother had a rash all over. They had to give her quinine to clean her insides out. But then, the girl died, and the boy was born. And the doctor, the, I think I was about seven, eight or nine years old then, I used to know the date and everything, but I forgot them now.

SIGRIST: You're doing a great job. You're doing a great

job. You've got lots of good information.

CASTAGNELLO: But, anyway, I remembered everything, because the midwives had me making hot water and all that the way, and then they told me to go back in the kitchen and stay there. I wouldn't. When she went in, I went and listened. And so . . .

SIGRIST: Were you allowed to watch the baby being born?

CASTAGNELLO: No.

SIGRIST: No.

CASTAGNELLO: No, they wouldn't let me go in. No. I never saw any baby born, but I have one daughter, and so I remember . . .

SIGRIST: What about the baby that died inside her?

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, inside of her.

SIGRIST: What did they do?

CASTAGNELLO: She had a rash, she had a rash all over. Then my brother was born. Then when my brother was born they says, any medicine, they had to give her quinine. I think it's quinine. To clean her body

out, because all the poison inside. Because all the rash was like, she had the measles. And so to clean her out they give her quinine. Then they told my, the doctors told my father that the boy, they wouldn't guarantee, they couldn't give him any medicine to clear his body out, because it would just kill him. So then they said he may die within five years, that he was born. So, anyway, I seen the doctor. Then I was more older, it was five years later, or five or six years later, we seen the same doctor. The same doctor said, "How long did that child live?" And I says, "He's still living." And we showed him who he was, and he couldn't believe it. He said, "No, it's not that. Then what did your mother give him?" "The feeding." Then they took her to the hospital with the baby. Then when they brought her home with the baby, she didn't do anything in the house. She fed the baby, and once she fed the child, the Nabiscuit crackers, those blue boxes, Nabiscuit cracker, she'd put it in water, because he couldn't digest milk, and they put, she would put it in the water until it grew big and spread and biscuit in another plate and put olive oil on it,

because he couldn't drink milk. They found that he was throwing up everything. So then my mother used to put olive oil in it, and then mashed it up and everything and made it liquid, like, and then, then she used to spoon it in his mouth. And then, to make it digest, she used to give him Minesa[ph], Brioschi[ph], a bottle, it's Brioschi[ph]. It's Italian neutralizer that any time you have indigestion you put the spoon of that in water and you drink it.

SIGRIST: Oh, like Broma Seltzer, or something like that.

CASTAGNELLO: Yeah, something like that, but it was in a blue bottle, and it would come from Italy, I think. I think, because you only could get it in Italian stores, then later it went into the grocery store.

SIGRIST: Were there other Italians who lived in this town?

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, that's, one brought the other one, one brought the other one, all talked the same language, when I was a child.

SIGRIST: Were there any other immigrants other than Italians, people from other countries, that you

were . . .

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: What other countries do you remember?

CASTAGNELLO: Bruno, Bruno, it's a little town in Italy.

SIGRIST: But you . . .

CASTAGNELLO: Because I have a friend that's from Bruno.

SIGRIST: But do you remember there being other, other nationalities other than Italians. There were Italians in the town, but were there Polish . . .

CASTAGNELLO: First, when I was little, when I was little, when a family moved in, we all went and helped. Then for about a week she wouldn't light the stove, they would bring them dishes, dishes to eat, and things like that. And we welcomed them all in. Then they started coming, then they had the colored people, because there was a stream of water, was on the other side, and then we lived over here. And on, in my father's house it said should never sell it to colored people. And I was brought up like that. But my mother used to say,

"We're all God's children. We've got to treat each one, every one the same."

SIGRIST: Did the colored people work in the mines also?

CASTAGNELLO: I don't remember. I know they had their own school. They had separated the white with the colored. Then after a while, and they had their own schoolhouse up there, then the, then after a while they made the colored come in.

SIGRIST: Tried to mix everybody up.

CASTAGNELLO: Tried to mix them up and everything. And some of those teachers, the colored teachers, they were so nice. We'd talk from a distance with each other.

SIGRIST: What about when you were growing up in this town, what kind of food did you eat?

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, food.

SIGRIST: Yeah, what kind of food?

CASTAGNELLO: We ate a lot of vegetables.

SIGRIST: Where did they come from?

CASTAGNELLO: My father had a garden.

SIGRIST: What kind of vegetables did he grow in the garden?

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, escarole, leech, all, anything you find in the store, he had in the yard. And every spring he used to hoe his yard, he had a certain amount, because he bought a lot of land with the house, and that land was always full of tomatoes, peppers, anything. And we had escarole all winter long. One batch would be finished. The other batch was, what he used to do, he used to take all the, the dirt, when they pulled the peppers and tomatoes, all them leaves, he'd sow the escarole, then he'd put the leaves on, and the leaves protected it. Then when that batch was finished, he had another batch. Then when that was finished, he went to another batch until the spring. Then in the spring he had them all the time. And we had those Roman lettuce that grew, and then when I, I was, when I was a teenager, I had to carry, though my brothers had to carry the water, we had a pump. Now, the boys did the pumping and filled tubs full of water, and they had to carry the water in the yard, and then when my father, my father used to plant the tomato

plants the week of Mother's Day. It was one day of the week. Then we had to save tomato cans. After I'd watered, soon it got daylight. My father used to call me up and say, "Come on, then you can go back and sleep," and water the plants, and we had the cans. I'd water it, then put the can on. Then in the night we'd take the cans out. And if there was, the ground was a little dry, we'd have to water it again, till they caught on. Then when they caught on he always had post. He used to put it in, and then he used to tie the tomato and the bottom leaves, he used to take them out and throw them away.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: And this was your father's job. He did all the gardening.

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, he, my father's life was working in a coal mine and doing in the yard. In the yard, he'd go in the yard just as it got daylight, until seven o'clock, seven o'clock, eight o'clock he had to be at work.

SIGRIST: Eight o'clock in the morning.

CASTAGNELLO: Yes.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

CASTAGNELLO: So he'd work there as long as he could, then he knew what time he would go to work. Then as soon as he come back, he'd wash up. He was all coaled and dirty.

SIGRIST: How would he wash up? How would he do that? Did you have a, did you have a shower in the house? How would he . . .

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, no. My mother used to have, had to warm the water in a pot in the kitchen. Then we had a shanty, like, and my father used to wash in there. My mother used to carry the water and fix the water for him, and the towel, and he'd wash in the shanty. Then my mother used to wash his back, and he would be clean and everything. It was, it was a chore.

SIGRIST: When you say a shanty, you mean like a little, a little . . .

CASTAGNELLO: No, it's like a garage.

SIGRIST: Right. That's not attached to the house, but separate.

CASTAGNELLO: No, no. It was away from it.

SIGRIST: I see.

CASTAGNELLO: Then, then later on, and then when I was a teenager, he used to butcher hogs, two of them a year.

SIGRIST: Oh, my goodness. Can you describe for me how he did that?

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, he used to raise, he would get the pig right after Christmas, a little tiny pig, and anything, then instead of throwing it out, anything was edible, they'd put it in this bucket, but bread. Bread, my mother never did throw it away. She would like it get so hard, get it into croutons. Then when she would chop it up, break it up, then she'd put olive oil and garlic on them, and made croutons out of the stale bread. And . . .

SIGRIST: What did your father do with the pig? How did

he . . .

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, then, but then everything that was edible that, no, it was not edible. For us, we'd put it in this big pail, and we used to feed the pig twice, once in the morning and once at night, with that food, and that's what, then they would, then around Thanksgiving they'd see who had the biggest pig and the heaviest pig, and my father always had the best pig, and they'd butcher it.

SIGRIST: How did they butcher it? Did you ever watch?

CASTAGNELLO: Huh?

SIGRIST: Did you ever watch?

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Okay. Describe for me how they did it.

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, my father had a gun. My father would shoot it in the head, try to get it in the head. Then my mother would have a pail and collected the blood and made blood pudding. You should taste that blood pudding. It was beautiful. It was wonderful.

SIGRIST: Right. So she collected the blood. Then what would happen?

CASTAGNELLO: To collect the blood, it would get clotted right away if she didn't put her hand in it and kept stirring it till it all meshed out. Then she took it in the house and she strained it in cheesecloth. And then she, then she could have wait a day to make the, the blood pudding. Oh, and then the blood pudding, we used to go pick blackberries. Remember, they used to make blackberry jelly, jam, to put it in the, in the blood pudding. It was delicious.

SIGRIST: Excuse me. We're going to pause for a moment. ( break in tape ) We're now resuming. You were talking about your mother making blood pudding, and your father slaughtering a cow, or a pig. What other kinds of food did your mother make to serve all those children?

CASTAGNELLO: It was always one pot dish. But, but, you see, the pig had this here under the head, this here. My father used to salt it down.

SIGRIST: You're talking about like under the, around the

neck?

CASTAGNELLO: Around the neck, and he used to put salt on it and pepper and everything, and he used to hang it up and dry it. Then any time we had to cook vegetables with potatoes or macaroni or whatever she did, she got a slice and she melted.

SIGRIST: A slice of that meat?

CASTAGNELLO: It was, it was just to flavor it, to flavor it. She'd fry it, and then put garlic in it, and leech and everything. She used all the herbs, a lot of herbs. I know a lot about herbs.

SIGRIST: Well, where did she get the herbs?

CASTAGNELLO: They had them in the garden.

SIGRIST: What kinds of herbs?

CASTAGNELLO: Leech, leech, fennel. I don't know if you've seen fennels with the head like this.

SIGRIST: Yes, a round ball.

CASTAGNELLO: And that green stuff? That green stuff, you're making me hungry now. ( Mr. Sigrist laughs )

That green stuff, they'd cut it, and they'd put, then we used to dry it, and then crumble it up and put it in a jar, and we had some for all year. And then, and we ate spaghetti once or twice a week, but we had potatoes and beans, and they, in the garden he had one big batch of that big, flat pinto beans that we had, that they got dry, and they got dry, and then we used to hang them up in the, in the garage or shanty. We used to call it the shanty, a little shed away from the house. We hang them up on there in the fall, and all winter I, one of us had to open the shells. The shells were so dry that we got the pinto beans, like the cranberry beans. That's the way they turn when they get dry. But those are the flat beans. I love the Italians beans. They cook over here once in a while. I love them. I could always go for a second.

SIGRIST: What, was your mother the only one who did the cooking in the house?

CASTAGNELLO: No.

SIGRIST: Who else cooked?

CASTAGNELLO: I cooked.

SIGRIST: Yes? What kinds of foods did you cook for all your brothers and sisters?

CASTAGNELLO: My mother was always on me. She was behind me. She prepared it. Then I'd have to watch it and everything.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did she teach you how to cook?

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, everything she cooked, I could cook. And then, uh, we had a cow, and I milked the cow.

SIGRIST: How did you milk a cow?

CASTAGNELLO: Sit on the stool. Because when my mother was pregnant she couldn't milk, and I, a teenager, I milked the cow. I had to watch my nails, that they wouldn't go on the teats, so it wouldn't hurt her. I had to cut my nails so short, and, yes.

SIGRIST: Did the cow have a name?

CASTAGNELLO: Yes, Bessie.

SIGRIST: Bessie the cow.

CASTAGNELLO: Bessie the cow. And then what happened, then the cow had a heifer, and we'd raise the heifer, and the cow, my father one time, that was my pet, that was my pet. My father sold it, because it would go in the neighbor's yard and eat their vegetables, and then he had to sell it. And I screamed, I cried. That was my pet. And I milked the cow.

SIGRIST: Let me, because we just have a couple of minutes left. Let me ask you what you did for fun. What kinds of things did you do for entertainment when you were a little girl in this mining town?

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, we had every church you can mention. The Protestant, the Lutheran, all that, all around us.

SIGRIST: And what was your religion?

CASTAGNELLO: Huh?

SIGRIST: What was your religion?

CASTAGNELLO: Catholic.

SIGRIST: You were Catholics.

CASTAGNELLO: But we didn't have no church in our town, so then

what happened, all those churches, in the summertime, they used to have Sunday school, and they'd teach the people to make embroidery.

SIGRIST: Embroidery, uh-huh.

CASTAGNELLO: They taught me to make big stitches. Then my mother, she says, "That I don't like, big stitches. You've got to make them the way I make them." And she knew how to make embroidery and all that. That cut out work and all that, she taught it to me. I've had a lot of things. I lost, in New York.

SIGRIST: What did she do with that? When she embroidered something, what would she do with it?

CASTAGNELLO: Make pillowcases, make pillowcases. And for a long time they had sheets that they, that was all embroidery and cut out work, that when you make the bed, you fold it over. And you've seen all the embroidery, cut out work. And I used to make a lot of cut out work. I left a lot of it behind. I could cry for it.

SIGRIST: Well, what did you do, were there games that you

played as a little girl?

CASTAGNELLO: No.

SIGRIST: I mean, did you have any fun when you were growing up?

CASTAGNELLO: Yes. I, when those churches come in, they all had Sunday school for the summer.

SIGRIST: Oh, and, I see, and you would go to the Sunday school?

CASTAGNELLO: I would go Sunday school. That was my play.

SIGRIST: I see.

CASTAGNELLO: But before they came in, and when I was a tiny girl, I worked in, when it rained, went out, and we had little toys, and we cooked. We played like that.

SIGRIST: Like a little place . . .

CASTAGNELLO: Yeah, my friend Cora Oliverio[ph], Laura Massey[ph] and, oh, sometimes they come to me.

SIGRIST: At least you can remember the names. Did your parents ever go back to Italy after they settled?

CASTAGNELLO: No, they never did go.

SIGRIST: Did they ever want to go?

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, yes. My mother had said to us that before she left she left her trunk up in the attic.

SIGRIST: In Italy.

CASTAGNELLO: In Italy. She said, "Some day I'm coming back and get all my things," and she never did. And then there was some people that came from Italy. My mother used to invite them over and they used to tell us stories about Italy, about where my mother lived, and all that. And I understood what they were saying.

SIGRIST: Did your mother leave family over in Italy? Like were her parents still alive?

CASTAGNELLO: Her father. Her father. Then after a few years when I was a little girl, her father died, and she started wearing black, and then she mourned for him. And that's all. Then we had some, Mr. Sheloworth[ph] lived across the street, and Mrs. Sheloworth[ph]'s father, or mother, I forget

which, and I had to babysit with the babies. She had three children, and I used to babysit, and she'd go visit her father. Every Thursday she'd be all day with them, and I was taking care of the kids, because her father was very sick.

SIGRIST: Did she pay you for taking care of the kids?

CASTAGNELLO: No.

SIGRIST: Oh.

CASTAGNELLO: We never, my father would never want me to take money from nobody. And if I tell you the story, how I went to New York, that's another day.

SIGRIST: Okay. We'll do that at another time. I think this is probably a good place for us to end, because you've got to go eat lunch, and I have another interview I have to do. But thank you very much. You've got a great memory, and . . .

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, I can still tell you more and more. I've got a good memory. My mother had a good memory, and I did, too. But now, lately, since I've been sick, that's why I'm here, I, I forget a lot.

SIGRIST: Well, you did a great job and I appreciate it.

CASTAGNELLO: I can answer questions more than I can tell you.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Victoria Oliveto Castagnello, and today is Wednesday, May 28, 1997, and I'm at University Commons Nursing Home in Worcester, Massachusetts. And I think tomorrow is your birthday. You said your birthday was May 29th.

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, Thursday, Thursday, yes.

SIGRIST: Today's Wednesday.

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, yes. Thursday, I'm glad you reminded me.

SIGRIST: That's right. So you're going to be eighty-eight. You'll be eighty-eight tomorrow, on Thursday. So, anyway, happy birthday.

CASTAGNELLO: I can remember '95, '96, '97, I remember all those birthdays.

SIGRIST: All those birthdays.

CASTAGNELLO: But we was in my daughter's summer home.

SIGRIST: You're saying 1995, 1996, 1997.

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Okay. Thank you very much.

CASTAGNELLO: Oh, thank you.