

NPS-10
ROSE MILAZZO
BIRTH DATE: 1894
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AGE AT INTERVIEW: 79
RUNNING TIME:
INTERVIEWER: MARGO NASH
RECORDING ENGINEER:
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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: MEG MAHER
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: IRV SILBERG

ITALY, 1901
AGE 7

SHIP: AGORDIO [ph]
PORT: NAPLES
RESIDENCES
ITALY: MELITIA [ph], POTENZA
US: NYC

HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mr. Milazzo is present.

NASH: Today is September 4, 1973. I am visiting in the home of Mrs. Rose Milazzo who lives on Thompson Street in the -- would you call this the Village? -- in Greenwich Village in New York City. I am looking outside and I can see a nice old lamp in the street and there is a very modern sculpture gallery. And it is an area where around the corner there are many factories, and also a lot of artists live in the New York Soho district. Mrs. Milazzo came to the United States when she was seven years old, today she is seventy-nine, and she is going to tell us her story. Mrs. Milazzo, tell us where you came from and what it was like.

MILAZZO: I came from a little town in Melitia [ph] which is part of the -- the -- I don't know if it's a city or a bigger town of Potenza, that's between--near Naples or not very far from Naples. We left on a ship from Nap-- Naples, and I was on the shi-- we were on the ship about fourteen days.

NASH: Tell me something about Maliterno [ph].

MILAZZO: It was a small town with goats running around in this little village there, and we had chickens right in the house. And we had to go get water about a mile away, big casks of water. The mothers used to put them on their heads and bring them home and that was for cooking or dishwashing or clothes washing and it was a very hard life. Also we had no stoves, they had to go pick up wood in the forest and they had a little hearth and that's where we did our cooking.

NASH: You must have been very healthy.

MILAZZO: Well, I don't know if it was healthy, but I didn't seem to relish it. (laughs) I knew that there was better things even at that age. I didn't care for the clothes, you know, those big long husky dresses and so I found a big difference when we got here finally.

NASH: So your father came first, is that right?

MILAZZO: Yes, he was here seven months before he brought the family in.

NASH: And why did he come?

MILAZZO: To better ourselves -- because he was a sheepherder there and he had tried Brazil and he got yellow fever there. So he came back without making a fortune.

NASH: Came back to --

MILAZZO: To Molifin [ph]. And then he was there a little while and he didn't feel that he was doing any better there so his brothers were here, and his sister, and his father and mother, so he came here. And they tried it out for seven months if he liked it, and then he called for us.

NASH: Did he always have yellow fever after -- is yellow fever the kind of thing that you keep or it just comes once then --

MILAZZO: No, it comes once and most people die -- well there was an epidemic and people died then, but he didn't. He was a strong, healthy, you know, young man at the time, maybe about thirty years old. So he overcame it and he was all right after that, very strong and healthy. He died at eighty-four.

NASH: Well, let's go to your trip now. Tell me, how did it start and where did it start?

MILAZZO: It started at Naples and we boarded the ship, and like I said, my -- my last meal was in Naples and I got seasick. Then I didn't eat another meal till we got to Ellis Island. So, I don't know much what went on on the ship. I don't know at all.

NASH: You mentioned that your mother took certain measures, what were those --

MILAZZO: Oh, yes. They had funny ideas that if they caught me being seasick they would throw me overboard. So she hid me from the authorities or even from a doctor, which maybe he could have helped me a little bit. But she didn't and --. So, of course, it was in December

NASH: How did she hide you?

MILAZZO: Well, under a blanket because it was in December, was very easy, you know, it was easy. We used to be pushed on deck because they

had to clean the - the steerage where we come from, so it was easy to hide me under a blanket.

NASH: How long was the trip?

MILAZZO: The trip was fourteen days. It was supposed to be thirteen, but something happened to the ship and we were, you know, we just stopped for a day while they did repairs. And then it took fourteen days. So we spent Christmas on board.

NASH: What was that like? Would you remember anything or were you under the blanket?

MILAZZO: Well, I was under the blanket, but I could see that they gave out figs and they gave out extra delicacies that we wouldn't get ordinarily.

NASH: Was it an Italian ship?

MILAZZO: Agordio [ph], yes.

NASH: What does that mean, Agordio?

MILAZZO: Good luck. (laughs) So we landed at Ellis Island, and we got a delicious soup with white bread.

NASH: Do you remember any of the people at Ellis Island?

MILAZZO: No, no. I just remember my father, you know, seeing my father, it was -- we was separated with a little gate of some kind. And, you know, the minute they called our names everything was in order and we came home. We came home on a trolley car run by horses, the South Ferry up to Spring Street. My aunt took us in for a few days 'til my mother and father found an apartment.

NASH: I guess it wasn't too hard finding an apartment in those days.

MILAZZO: There was plenty. All kinds and all shapes. Of course, there was no heat in any of them. We had to go around looking for wood, chopped it up, put it in the stove.

NASH: You're talking about the year 1901, is that right?

MILAZZO: 1901. In September then I went to school. Started school and I loved every minute of it because like -- in Italy there was no such thing as a free books or free papers, and in this school they gave us books to take home and I was in heaven. I thought well, now. I couldn't get enough of them. I could read two or three a week.

NASH: Do you remember any of the books that you read there, that you took out of the Library?

MILAZZO: Oh, yeah. I read all of the "Little Woman" there.

NASH: Nice.

MILAZZO: Yeah. And then I, you know, went on to Dumas and oh, I did quite a bit of reading in my time.

NASH: Were most of the children in the school Italian?

MILAZZO: Most of them. There was a very few Irish. The rest were all Italians.

NASH: I think we should say again that you lived almost all your life in this neighborhood --

MILAZZO: All my life. I am sixty years in this apartment alone and seven years on Spring Street and the rest on Sullivan Street and that was it. I have been in this neighborhood all my life.

NASH: And what about the churches, have you been going to the same church?

MILAZZO: Same church.

NASH: Same church, only one church all these years?

MILAZZO: Saint Anthony's on Sullivan Street.

NASH: Saint Anthony's. Well, can you tell us something about the difference between the neighborhood then and now?

MILAZZO: Well, over here it hasn't changed much. You know, like all along here there are some families that I know from sixty years. But the building has changed quite a bit because our landlord will not take in families anymore. He wants transients so that he could get a lot of rent.

NASH: So he wants like single people then?

MILAZZO: He likes single people or people don't -- that don't intend to stay long. So this way he could raise his rent every time somebody goes out.

NASH: Well, let's go back to the first, when you were here, the first few years. Was your father able to find work?

MILAZZO: He ha--. Yes. He always worked, but his salary was very low so we sort of had to help out. We took in -- we made - made flowers.

NASH: You made flowers, artificial flowers?

MILAZZO: Yes, artificial flowers.

NASH: Out of what did you make them?

MILAZZO: Well, they would give us the printed leaves of flowers, just big sacks of leaves, and we would pull them apart and form them into little violets with tips in the middle.

NASH: And your whole family did that at home?

MILAZZO: Oh yes. When we - when I came from school there was the table all laid out with all these flowers to be made.

NASH: And how late into the night did you work?

MILAZZO: Eleven, twelve o'clock.

NASH: How did you feel when you did this, did you feel angry?

MILAZZO: Well, yes, I think I felt angry that we had to do it.

NASH: Were some of your other friends playing?

MILAZZO: Yes, and you always saw that there was, you know, girls playing in the street and I was -- you know, there was always work for me to do. And also the -- you know, we start getting' children. My mother got a sister and more brothers and I always had to help out either to diaper them or --

NASH: There was always work.

MILAZZO: There was always work, there was never play.

NASH: And later on when you were a teenager, where did you go to -- did you go to high school?

MILAZZO: No.

NASH: No, you didn't go. You had to stop and --

MILAZZO: No, my mother, they took -- they said this is it, you've had it, and the principal tried to induce them to send me higher because they felt that I was intelligent enough to do better. They couldn't see it. I had to go to work.

NASH: How did you feel then when they made you go? Did you want to stay in school?

MILAZZO: Oh, yes, I tried to beg them. I loved school, but they says, "No, this is it. You have had enough." You know, those days if you went to -- they didn't read or write so they thought that if you went until you were fourteen --

NASH: What else did you need than that?

MILAZZO: Yes.

NASH: Especially if you were a girl.

MILAZZO: Yes.

NASH: Did you have brothers?

MILAZZO: Yes.

NASH: Did they stay in school?

MILAZZO: No one stayed in a school. But I made sure my sons did. I believe very much in education. I feel if you want to get anywhere, you have to educate whether you are white, colored or yellow.

NASH: So what happened when you dropped out of school? What happened to you then?

MILAZZO: I went to work for two dollars a week.

NASH: Two dollars a week.

MILAZZO: Yes. So I worked until I was nineteen, but then at nineteen, I was making nine dollars a week. In those days, nineteen dollars in 1913. It was like a fortune.

NASH: You were making nineteen dollars a week?

MILAZZO: Nine dollars.

NASH: Oh, nine dollars.

MILAZZO: Nine dollars a week.

NASH: How did you meet your husband?

MILAZZO: We come from the same town, but I didn't know him there. Our families were friends. So, that's the way --.

NASH: So you have been married how many years now?

MILAZZO: It's gonna be sixty in October.

NASH: When did you have your first child?

MILAZZO: Nine months after I got married.

NASH: Nine months. (laughs)

MILAZZO: Of course, what else.

NASH: How many children did you have?

MILAZZO: I had three. One died when she was three months old. I have two sons.

NASH: Can you tell me why she died? What did she die of?

MILAZZO: She had whooping cough and she got pneumonia and she got measles at the same time. There was no hope.

NASH: What did you do in those days when you got sick?

MILAZZO: Well, we always had a doctor that would come to the house and he lived right around the corner.

NASH: Was he Italian?

MILAZZO: Yes, Dr. Perelli.

NASH: How much did he charge?

MILAZZO: If you went to the office it was 50 cents. And one dollar to come up five flights.

NASH: If you didn't have to come up five flights, what if you had to come up two flights? Was it less?

MILAZZO: It was a dollar if he came to the house. It was a dollar. But they - they worked in different ways then. When my little girl had pneumonia and she was very, very sick, he would come twice a day and he would only charge me once. So the dollar took care of two visits. He would say, "I have to see this child tonight," and he would come again and he wouldn't charge me.

NASH: Did people die in the hospital as much in those days?

MILAZZO: No, no, they didn't. But when my second child was born, they formed a clinic, the Judson

NASH: Like up in Judson Church?

MILAZZO: Yes, there was a clinic right there on - on Thompson Street, and they - they brought it further down. They had -- right up here a block, just one block, they formed a little clinic that we used to take the children to. It was a godsend because we didn't pay anything and the children got the best of care for free.

NASH: Well, what did your children grow up and do?

MILAZZO: Well, they went to school. First they went here to the same school I did and then they went to 95 and then they went to high school in Stuyvesant, and then one went to Columbia and became a pharmacist in chemistry, and one went to CCNY and he is an engineer, chemical engineer.

NASH: Do they live in New York City?

MILAZZO: No they don't. No, one lives in Bloomfield; one lives in [not understood]

NASH: Bloomfield

MILAZZO: New Jersey, both live in Jersey.

NASH: What did you do when you were a teenager for recreation?

MILAZZO: There was no such thing, no such thing. The most I ever did was take a group of children like my brothers and sisters and we would bargain with a - with the movie house right here on Thompson. I would take maybe five or six children from the neighborhood and tell the man, "Well, all I have is 50 cents. Would you let us in?" And he was glad to - either was -- he would take the 50 cents or he wouldn't get the 50 cents and we'd go home. And he usually chose the 50 cents, but which wasn't often. Once in a while we would go to Central Park.

NASH: Did you walk there from the house?

MILAZZO: No, we took the - the trolley. It was only 5 cents.

NASH: Was it fun to take the trolley? Did you enjoy the trolley?

MILAZZO: Yes, yes.

NASH: Much nicer than the bus.

MILAZZO: There was no such thing.

NASH: No bus.

MILAZZO: No, no. There was no such thing. There was no bus. I got married with a carriage, with horses.

NASH: You mean they took you to the church?

MILAZZO: Yes.

NASH: Saint Anthony.

MILAZZO: Saint Anthony.

NASH: Did you have a honeymoon?

MILAZZO: Honeymoon? (laughs) We never had a honeymoon.

Mr. M: Around the block.

NASH: Mr. Milazzo says they went around the block.

MILAZZO: No, we didn't have a honeymoon. We never had a vacation.

NASH: Never?

MILAZZO: No. We're very happy because I feel I did a lot. You know, at least my children are in a much better condition than I ever could dream of.

NASH: Thank you very much, Mrs. Milazzo.

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