

April 7, 1983

Iron Mountain, MI

Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi

Transcribed: March 12, 2003

RM: We'll start talking about your background and your family. Could you tell us your mother and father's name.

AF: My Dad's name was Mazerino Feruggi and my mother's name was Balagnia. My Dad was primarily interested in ??? work. My mother came from a family that was quite musical. She played the violin.

RM: what part of Italy did they come from ?

AF: They're from Gregia, Italy, which is not too far from the Rome area. As a result, we speak ??? which is weird Italian. If we visit Italy we wouldn't speak the local, we would speak real close to the real Italian. The real Italian is Tuscano. We're not too far from that. My mother constantly talks about Rome, ??? and cities like that. Rome is supposed to be quite a cultural center. Growing up they were in many ??? and spoke quite frequently. ??? (background noise) Milan. So it's pretty much northern.

RM: What is the town they were from ?

AF: Guppio. That would be the closest town.

RM: What did your father do in the old country?

AF: He was primarily in the vineyards. When he was still a relatively young man, for some unknown reason to me, he decided to come to America. My mother and my oldest brother Robert remained in Italy alone. Somehow or other he made his way to ??? and got associated with mining up there. Then after ??? for some time they came to Iron Mountain. There wasn't anything in Iron Mountain at that time. Quinnesec was the big town. My Dad lived in Quinnesec and commuted to the mining area in Iron Mountain, which is now what we call Iron Mountain Mine. Then of course he was here in Quinnesec. That was the metropolitan area. It disappeared like the Chicago fire. When that happened and the mine began to operate, a number of mining homes went up on the North side for miners and their families. After my Dad was established in mining, he sent for my mother. My brother would have been less than a year old. They came over.

RM: That would have been about what year?

AF: My Dad was a young man when he came over here. When he died he was 92. I can get those dates for you to be accurate. When they got to New York an epidemic had developed on their ship and a number of orderlies had died en route to America. My mother tells me that there was a German woman on the ship with her. My brother Robert...my mother was worried that he too would get this, whatever it was. So this German woman told my mother that she should give my brother a spoon of spirits. She had a little bottle in her purse. So she would give my brother a little swig of that liquor, whatever it was, you know. Fortunately enough, my brother never did contract anything.

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If they died en route, they would just bury them at sea. So when my mother got to New York, because of the fact of this epidemic on board, she was not allowed to go to Ellis Island where they normally are processed and get to her destination. She was bypassed and ??? until they were cleared. Mom knew no English language whatsoever. How she got to Wakefield I don't know.

RM: So they went to Wakefield.

AF: My Mom joined my Dad at Wakefield.

RM: Your Dad was originally at Wakefield.

AF: Then he went to Iron Mountain. My Mother joined him when he was still in Wakefield.

RM: I see. Then they came down to Quinnesec.

AF: They lived in Quinnesec and then established their home on the North side. They were there by the time I came along. I was the tenth child. There were seven boys and three girls. I'm the youngest of the family. My brother passed away in September of '91 was the oldest and he was 92. That's the one who would know all this stuff because he was there. Then after my Dad had been a miner one of the miners tried to defray expenses, then eventually my Dad knew a grocer in town here who owned two plots of land about 3 miles north of Iron Mountain.

RM: Do you remember his name?

AF: Oh yes, it was Suino. He has a son, he's a pharmacist here in Iron Mountain. Now that gentleman's son is a doctor. He was a former student of mine. The family moved to Iron Mountain because many of us were going to school. For quite a few years they would commute from the farm and on the weekends we would join them. After they got established out there with my Dad and older brothers, the younger ones stayed here in town with my older sister who was our guardian. My Mom took care of the men up at the farm and my older sister was in charge of the younger ones who were still going to school. Then when I had completed kindergarten here in Iron Mountain I was a little tike...

RM: That would have been about what year?

AF: Kindergarten? 43 years of teaching, 4 years of college, 4 years of high school, and 12 years of schooling, you can figure that out. 60 some years ago.

RM: You bought the land then. And the older boys...

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AF: Robert, John, and Lewis were with him. The rest of the boys and my sisters were in Iron Mountain year round except for weekends when we would join them. My Dad gave up mining...

RM: Did he continue mining then?

AF: He commuted. He did what he could at the farm with my brothers. My brothers worked here in town and then after work they would go to the farm and do what they could. They had to improvise a lot. Most of the work was done with oxen or horses. The thing I can remember is primarily oxen. We were poor. Then we would match them up and we would do the plowing and tilling of the land with the oxen. In fact we had oxen for many, many years. We would bring merchandise right to town with the oxen. That was quite a sight to see oxen. They were matched so if you saw one without the other you would know which one it was. They were black and white. We had wagons and sleighs and equipment on the farm. They would til the 2 40s and

RM: Did they have to clear the land?

AF: It was partially cleared. Not to the extent that it is now. But there was a small area around the yard. Of course in those days the animals were not too far from home. ??? As I recall we had 2 cows, chickens, and we had geese, animals of that type. We grew a little more and developed more. Finally we had horses and they cleared more and more land. We're approaching...my Dad was a Road Commissioner for quite a while and it was his responsibility to take care of the roads and he would grade them and do that kind of work. That was done primarily with oxen. Later on when they were established up in there...we had this farm house since 1904. That puts us back quite a few years. In fact in not too many years from now we'll have a centennial. The farm has been in the family for approximately 100 years when that date comes about. Besides being a Commissioner he was also responsible at a later date for transporting the children to school. We initially went to Brighton Township. We were in Iron Mountain but up there we were at Brighton Township we call it now. There's a location up there near the hydro-electric plant...it's west of here, it was Michigan Power Company at that time. There's a power company there. Before they were there it was a one room school. I and my older brothers and a couple older sisters went there for quiet a few years. We had to walk to school and back home.

RM: That was about how far?

AF: About 4 miles to and from school. ??? I couldn't keep up with my brothers and sisters. About mid- way between home and school there was a farm there and an elderly old woman and an old man and she would stop us when we went through and she'd warm me up. She'd take my shoes off and warm my feet and take my gloves off, warm me up. She would make it possible for me to go the rest of the way. When there's that much snow, we went cross country, there were no roads. We went through swamps and stuff

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like this. There was a path. I'd be wandering along and here they didn't know if I was coming, I was about half a mile back. When I'd get to school my teacher was always wonderful. They'd do the same thing and make sure your ears weren't froze. But I remember in 1918 all of a sudden we heard bells and whistles and everything imaginable in the area went off. We didn't know what it was. My teacher asked me, I must have been in the 7th grade. She asked me would you run down to the hydro-electric plant, because they have a phone. Call the superintendent and ask what this is all about. He told me, you tell my teacher that Imersons??? And she is to dismiss you. So I hurried back to school anxious to be off school. I remember when I told the teacher about it, she told the students and in a couple seconds everybody was out of there. I remember my older brothers and sisters ran all the way home reasonably happy about it. I got home about a half hour after they had gotten there. When I got home I found my Mom and Dad in tears. The reason is because my older brother was in the army serving in the 32nd division, which was the aero division for Michigan and Wisconsin and they received notification from the army that he had been moved and for a couple weeks we hadn't hears what his status was. He had poison gas and we didn't now if he recuperated or not. Because of that anxiety we found my Mom and Dad in tears. Shortly after that we received notification that my brother had been released from the hospital. It wasn't really a hospital, it was a station on the battlefield. Of course, shrapnel hit him on the breastbone. He had a scar here where they removed the shrapnel. If it wasn't for a ??? if you remember the first World War uniforms they had a pocket here and a pocket here. My brother had a ??? in his left pocket. The outer one was completely shattered. The inner one was bent. It saved his life because that corner was responsible for just letting the shrapnel go onto his breastbone, which was easily removed. But then finally, in the meantime we moved from that little log cabin and built the basement for our new home. But my Dad always had the philosophy that the barn builds the home. So we made the best of it living in the basement of that home and the barn. Much of the lumber was gotten from the timer that was on our grounds. We had a big 48x84 dairy with all the equipment, a beautiful setup. It took ??? It's still there. It's just as nice as when we built it. Then when my brother came home, between one brother and the other, they picked up enough to put on the superstructure. We built a two story home with enough facilities to accommodate a family. It held just about all 10 of us. Eventually my sisters married. My oldest brother Bob never married. My other brothers that were younger than Bob but older than I, they eventually married. My brothers wives were quite instrumental for helping out on the farm.

RM: Did they live...

AF: In town. They commuted. My sister-in-law helped my mother with the chores. She was the type that wouldn't hesitate to do anything. She would be right out there working. She was employed for 20 some years. We sold milk. W had a heard of ??? (background noise) cattle and sold 22 cases of milk. All those bottles had to be washed and sterilized and the milk cooled and all that. That really required a cooperative venture. My oldest

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brother Bob, he delivered the milk with the help of a hired man. The two of them would leave relatively early in the morning and in sell cases of milk.

RM: How many bottles were in a case?

AF: 12 bottles per case. But you see, right on our property was a little lake. We owned the east shore of that little lake. During the winter months we would make ice. We had a little building, which is still around, there's a door just inside the entrance here. That opens into a basement. During the winter months we would move ice. We would line the basement on this little building with bricks of ice all the way around. In the center there was a carrier. We would put cases of milk on this ratchet and lower the milk on this thing. By moving this ratchet, we would lower the milk into the basement, completely surrounded with ice. Then in the spring of the year the ice was still pretty much there. In the morning when my brother was ready to leave, by means of this ratchet, he would raise these cases of milk. He'd chip some ice around the bottles. Then the milk inspector would stop my brother on the road. If he found the milk had ice on it when he picked it up, he would on ice. If it didn't have ice, he would just put it at room temperature. The reason for that is a precaution to reduce the bacteria. He didn't want to do anything that would raise the bacteria count. So he would try to keep it cold when they checked it for bacteria. They would send it to the lab and check it for bacteria. You're only allowed a certain level of bacteria. If you're over that, you couldn't sell it.

RM: Your father got into the dairy...

AF: We raised that barn and increased the heard you know...

RM: What did they do before, when they first started out, what did they grow?

AF: They grew crops, potatoes, oats, and hay, alfalfa, clover. Then we had animals to feed. We had oxen and by that time we had horses and some cattle. But then over a period of time we had a heard of 40 some head of cattle. We had quiet an establishment.

RM: When did you start with the dairy? About what year?

AF: Shortly after the war. We were in the dairy business during the '30s. I can find out if I ask my brother. I've got an idea of where they are, but either way I probably wouldn't hit it.

RM: So most of the chores were done by family. You didn't have a...

AF: We only had one hired hand. He was usually a relatively young fellow who did good work.

RM: Was he Italian?

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AF: Not necessarily. During one period of the time we were contacted by Marquette State Prison, they had a young man that they trusted well enough. I remember a gentleman coming down from Marquette. Mr. Tuner. He was originally from Lower Michigan and that's where he went wrong. I don't know what he was put in for, but he stayed in a home there. That was the only one of that type we had. It was all boys from Iron Mountain and families we knew. They had horses and we spent hours out in those fields. Every year. Just trying to get the stones out. We just worked and worked. After I graduated...when we lived on the farm that was 5 miles from Iron Mountain and there was no bus service. So I had an older sister that was married. She and her husband lived in Kingsford Heights. Brighton Township Schools would give me a nominal amount to reimburse my sister for expenses. During that time I attended Kingsford High School and graduated from there. After that I went to Northern. All the while, the rest of the family is financing this.

RM: Then you got into teaching?

AF: I graduated from Northern...

****SIDE II****

AF: '33. I was a ??? just like the rest of them. One of my sisters was a beautician and she operated a shop upstairs of the First National Bank in Iron Mountain. Since I had nothing to do I would go up there to work in the morning. They use a lot of towels and all that. I'd do all that work at home. She went up ahead of me and she opened her beauty shop. She went up the steps and said Amerigo there's somebody on the phone for you.

****SKIP IN TAPE****

AF: Can you come to work? I said not today. They said how long would it take you to get in? I had to drive home and shower and get cleaned up. An hour or so. They said to report to Westwood School. Then they switched me to ??? and I remained there for a year teaching junior high mathematics and science. The principal came over one day and said they wanted me in high school. I said to Mr. Davidson, I'm just getting started here, I like junior high. I like that age group. He said you're coming over to the high school. I said, I'll come over next year. So I went to Kingsford High School. Finally I got into biology and mathematics. The biology teacher left when I got into biology. I taught biology and got the department all established with the equipment I thought I'd need. Then the principal came down one day and said Amerigo you're going to Chemistry next year. I said oh my God. Don't tell me I have to move again. I just got the biology department the way I want it. He said the chemistry department has gone to pots and I want you in there. I said okay. I love it here in the biology department with everything I needed and everything in order. I went in to the chemistry. I found the department in

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very bad shape so I went in and ordered new equipment and got up to date. I taught for quite a few years. Advanced chemistry is all laboratory work. I taught for 43 years. I hadn't taught very long before I went to grad school. I began going to Ann Arbor in the summer for graduate school. I got my masters and I pursued another masters. One in teaching and one in administration.

RM: You said they had courses here, were they offered through Northern?

AF: No, they were through Michigan. You had to pick the ones that were in your area. I would always write in to graduate school and ask them if this would apply to my curriculum. But because of the fact that I was pretty heavy in science, they encouraged me to go into humanities. They didn't want me to be too heavy in science. But I got my double masters from Michigan. I was really...??? (voice too soft, and background noise) Not monetary.

RM: Getting back to life on the farm, did your family have any special holidays they celebrated?

AF: Oh yes. The one I remember most is Christmas. Having been on the farm and church in Iron Mountain, that's a very old church. The architecture is there. My Mom and Dad were members of that parish from the time they were established in Iron Mountain for years and years. What we used to do, Christmas was special. There was my brother Frank and I and my sister and my Mom and Dad primarily. We had horses to harness and use for pulling the cutter and stuff like this. So we went to midnight mass and that was quite a ceremony to see. They would have these fire bricks, early in the afternoon they would put these in the oven and heat them up. They remained there until we left for church. By that time they were pretty hot. They wrapped the bricks in the blankets and put them on the floor of the cutter. My mother and sister would keep their feet on them and had the blankets on their lap, they always kept real warm. When we got out of church they were still warm. My brother and I would ride the runners, one on either side. My mother and father and sister would ride in the cutter. You can get a bang out of that. But the horses were harnessed with bells. In December we had soft clean snow and it was real crisp. Driving down those country roads with that cutter and the bells, that was an experience I'll never forget. They had hitching poles by the church and we hitched the horses by the church. We put blankets over the horse and we went to services. When services were over we were on our way home. My dad was so generous, he'd say well boys it's kind of late. By that time it would be about 2:30. He'd say you can sleep in an extra hour or so. Our home was a Mecca for just about everybody in town. Because of the fact that we had so many brothers and sisters. Almost everybody in Iron Mountain remembers the Feruggi farm. ??? (background noise) My dad and the old miners, they were mining at the time and some were retired...??? They came over and played botchi. We'd get salami and cheese and sometimes a couple bottles of wine and beer. It was all laid out on this table. We'd play a couple rounds of botchi and have dinner. Every Sunday, I can remember my Dad had 8 or 10 men up there and we played

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botchi. I was younger then. But I'd be around and I'd watch them and sometimes I didn't. That was when I was in high school and college. I stayed in Marquette naturally. I went home during the summers and did counseling at a boys camp. Then finally I worked in ??? and I was through with my graduate work. ??? 222 feet on the lake. That lake is connected to 14 others. There are 270 miles of shoreline. We bought it in '47 and ??? and we got most of our lumber from Trout Creek. We built cottages and they were going to be dormitories for 7 boys and a counselor. ??? (blurred and background noise) We got boys from Green Bay, ???, ???, ??? and I used to have some of my students there. They had just got back from the Service or had just got married and they were looking for something to do in the summer. ??? It was a terrific program. ??? I corresponded with the University of Okalahoma and there was a gentleman there in attendance there who was looking for this kind of work as a counselor. He was from Okalahoma and taught Indianlore. The loin cloths and the dress and headgear. Many of the boys stayed 8 weeks. They could complete a whole uniform, head gear, mokasins, loin cloth, the whole works. By the time they left they had a full thing. The little ones quite didn't. They had one or two feathers.

RM: What was the name of the camp?

AF: The camp was Hiawatha. But then these young men who were eligible for GI privileges were married and they did other things during the summer rather than counseling and they took advantage of their education opportunities. When I found out I that I couldn't have that caliber of counselors, I switched over to a resort. I've had it 5 or 6 years, converted cottages from dormitories. They have kitchens and the whole works.

RM: Then you changed the name of the place.

AF: Then ??? (background noise) The reason I called it the Vacation Land Resort is because when I was in college I would go down to Ann Arbor and there was a place called Vacation Land Resort. So I changed the name from Camp Hiawatha to Vacation Land Resort. I like the name. There was art and Indian heads in the lodge but I reduced it. ??? I sold it 3 years ago.

RM: Is it still operating?

AF: Sure. I own all this. Because of a land contract. But they have ??? rights.

RM: On the farm, did the family speak Italian?

AF: No. My Mom had a thing, if anybody was around that was not a member of the family, she'd say something in Italian.

RM: What did your Mom do? Did she have a lot of chores around the farm?

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AF: Cooking and a tremendous amount of gardening. She never did barn work. Her main chores were keeping the family together, the laundry, gardening, stuff like this. The income we had... we made a lot of our own, the best we could. We had a couple hogs that we slaughtered every year and make various cuts of meat, salami, ???, and ???.

RM: Your Mom did that.

AF: My Mom did that, yes. After the boys butchered, my Mom made the sausage and preserved the ham and all that. Then of course she did a tremendous amount of baking. My sister-in-law helped her. She had a huge garden and canned everything. I can remember in those years, Sears Roebuck had a huge catalog. You'd get a food catalog just like you'd get one for equipment or whatever you want. We'd be like Bees around a hive making out the order. We did that for quite a while. Every time we'd get paid, we'd make out an order. It came in a ??? bell? We'd get sticks of salami and things that were preserved and didn't need refrigeration. When the order came in everyone came around. Lunch meat and stuff like this. It was the Sears Food Catalog. You could order anything from there. Cheese...

RM: How long did they operate the dairy farm?

AF: We operated up til about 10 years ago. For some reason or other ??? another farm. Our cattle got it. At that time they made us dispose of all those animals. Then they said the virus is in the ground. They said you're not going to be able to have cattle on this land or they're going to get it. We kept the farm for a number of years and a couple of my brothers were working for Ford in Kingsford. I was teaching then and I helped out.

RM: This would have been in what year?

AF: I think it's about 15 years ago. Now we've started up again because my brother is older than I, Lewis, is 83 now. He has a son who lives in Ralph and he's not able to draw unemployment. He works, but he can't go out and work like us. He wouldn't pass the exams. He and another brother Vincent were interested in starting up the farm. They have 15 head of adults and about 19 babies. They have tractors and all that stuff. The main crops are corn for silage, oats for dairy feed and hay. We've got an orchard with many apples.

RM: It's a working farm.

AF: It's a working farm. There's a big silo. It's a big setup. Herferds and ???, that's a white breed. Now we're expecting two more. They're in the barn, they don't go outside. But this little one was born outside in the woods. The mother will go away, she won't stay with the other cows. Then after they give birth they come back. We came back from church one Sunday morning and went along side the barn and here's a baby.

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RM: Did your family make cheese?

AF: Oh yes. We made cottage cheese, we did all that.

RM: Riccota?

AF: Yes. After you make your cheese, what's left, you boil it and ricotta comes out.

RM: what other types of cheese?

AF: When we came home from the dairy we'd have maybe 10 quarts left over, what you would do is make cheese out of it right away instead of carry it over til the next day. ??? They'd set up on another ??/ that had a big trough in it. They had all the material for curding the milk. That's in the stomach of a calf. My mother knew exactly what to do to get the material in the calf's stomach for the material to make the cheese. You can buy it in the drug store. My mother would remember that secretion from the calf's stomach, then she would make her own. The calf vomited and you got it to a certain temperature and then she'd put the milk in and it would curd. She had a thing, almost like a colander, with a handle on it and she'd put the curded milk in this form and she'd keep working it to get the wey out of there and over night she'd move it to another platform.

RM: So she made the cheese.

AF: She made the cheese. She had a responsibility for all that stuff.

RM: Did you sell the cheese or was it just for home use?

AF: No, just home. When we were making hay and stuff like this, it was a Godsend, cheese and ham. It's like when you come in from the fields at 9:00 at night, we'd go down to the basement and have a banquet.