

JOHN BONO (and second interviewee, no name)

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE: -just a little wait.

INTERVIEWER: This was from taking his medicine? So what you say about the way they took care of problems, that was rather common.

UV: Yeah.

I: Okay. You mentioned the priest at the catholic church, what was the priest's name?

UV: We had all kinds of them. The one that I knew the most was-

JOHN: [unintelligible]

UV: Father Branco.

J: One that was teaching the Italian school?

UV: Yeah, that was...

J: What'd they name that guy?

UV: Gosh...

I: He had an Italian school?

UV: For a little while, just.

J: [Unintelligible]

UV: Michelini.

J: Michelini.

UV: Father Michelini.

I: How do you spell that?

UV: I don't know, I've never seen it spelled.

J: He was a Calabrese.

UV: How would you spell that, Michelini?

J: M E-

UV: M I.

J: C L E W L N E.

I: Here-

J: Write it down.

I: So that's Michelini, M I C H E L I N I?

UV: Yeah, and he was a Franciscan. He taught for a little while but kids didn't go. They wouldn't go. I was interested.

I: This was about what year?

UV: Oh my gosh, I must have been about 8 years old. And it didn't last at the time.

I: That would've been what?

UV: 8 years old, I was born in '05, so that must have been 13.

I: 1913? Were there any other attempts at doing that, teaching Italian?

UV: Not that I know, no. Not that I know of.

J: Then there was Father Greco.

UV: Afterwards, Father Greco. We changed a lot of priests. I mean, when they wanted to teach a little bit of Italian, there was Father Michelini.

J: I used to walk by the Italian church. Padre Greco [Italian]. Are you an Italian? I go to the mines, in night shift. [Italian].

I: Is there anything you can say about the Italian church?

UV: It was very nice, I don't know.

J: [Italian] The last father was Father Peralta.

UV: Yeah, the last one.

J: Father Peralta, he come in here, he offered to meet him. He come here and we meet another Romano. Did you know we had Italian program here sometimes?

I: '76.

J: Yeah, something like that.

I: The bicentennial? That one?

UV: No, it's earlier than that. Jean Rovarno, he's Italian.

J: Yeah, he stopped in 1976.

UV: No, I think that it was earlier than that.

J: No, no.

I: The dinner and the big banquet they had? The booklets?

J: [Italian]

UV: No, John, Rovarno died in 71 or something.

J: Yeah.

UV: So it must have been in the 60s that he had that Italian program.

I: You mean on the radio?

UV: On the radio.

I: On the radio, okay, I heard about that.

J: [unintelligible] italian program in the WDIF.

I: Down in Houghton-

UV: WHD-

J: [unintelligible] Calumet. Right there by the, what is that, [Italian]-

UV: Across from Burton's Store-

J: No, across from the praying church. What is that praying church.

UV: Scottsfeet.

J: I was up there, me and my daughter, we went [unintelligible] by Santa Claus. Right by the, you know where the praying church is, 5th street. And this side there, is [unintelligible] and then from there they brought [unintelligible].

I: What was this radio station? WHDF?

J: Yeah, WFDF.

UV: In Houghton. Hancock, I believe it was.

J: I mean Hancock.

I: So they had the station, though, in Calumet?

UV: They had it first, it started out in Calumet.

I: The same call letters?

J: Yeah. WIDF.

UV: I think it was.

J: WIDF.

UV: WHDF.

I: HDF.

J: Down to Hancock, first they went down, listen-

UV: Now they changed it to WICA, what is it... Now they have two stations.

J: WLPL. Ain't no more now, WLPL. Still is a WLPL in Hancock.

UV: Yeah, but they don't call it that.

J: I don't know, don't they still call it WLPL?

UV: Which is the other one then?

J: What recorded that WIDF down in [recorder error sound]

I: Did the Italians have- would they put on plays-

UV: They did in the Italian hall, but that was long before I ever... They actually had, the Italian hall, upstairs, actually had a stage. They used to have plays and sing songs and opera and everything. Those that had come from Italy. That was when my mother was still single, when they were young yet. I can't remember things like that, all I remember is dances.

I: But you remember your mother talking about it?

UV: Talking about it. Yeah, that they had plays, because these younger people would be from Italy and they knew the songs and everything. They'd have plays and everything. Now the Italian hall is near empty, they're thinking of taking it down or something. Cause they had that tragedy in 1913. Terrible.

I: Okay, I think we got questions here.

[microphone cuts out]

UV: -in somebody's porch, or yard, in Italy they had flowers all over. He'd actually take a couple of his guinea pigs- I don't know if you know what they are, they look like a little rabbit but they're-

I: Yeah.

UV: They're called guinea pigs. He used to raise little things like that. He liked them. He'd take a couple of them with him and he'd knock on the door [unintelligible] he'd ask them "could I have a snip of that flower or this one?" He'd give them these guinea pigs, they'd give him all kind of snips and he'd plant them. He was interested already as a little child. But he never thought that he could make a regular business out of it or anything. If he had known that when he went to buy that farm, I bet he would've left with some money.

I: Started early.

UV: As it was, she was that with something, she didn't have to worry. She was pretty not rich, what you call it, wealthy, but really alright. She didn't have to borrow or her kids didn't have to do anything, so she had the means for everything. And you have to sell a couple hundred dollars apiece or something.

I: All from flowers. Yeah, all of this came from the flower.

UV: Because of the... he planted the flowers, and paid up everything while he was young. He just loved flowers. I know in Lawrence PD he actually had two like this facing north, I think. And he had geraniums which I never saw geraniums like that. They weren't those big things, they were just about this big and they were a bright pinkish red, not a real dark mix, and he had them climbing all over the windows. There was little red blossoms all up those- I don't understand what kind of a dream that was. He had flowers. And though he could hardly read English, he had flower books in the house. I was just a little bitty kid already sending for orders for him. He'd tell me what to read and write it on English and the address on the envelope.

I: Who were, do you remember some of the places he'd buy from?

UV: No, I can't remember. Catalogs. He had the flower catalogs, he had chicken- poultry catalogs, cause he also wanted chickens in there. He even had a bunch of chickens I think he sent for called Silver Champions. They were the color of a plymouth rock, black and white, they look like checkered.

I: Yeah.

UV: But instead of being big and heavy like a plymouth rock, they were more slender. And then their head down to their breast was all silver feathers hanging down like a peak. Called Silver Champions. They're pure breeds. He was interested in good stuff. [unintelligible] is interesting, I bet you Dominic would like to see that.

I: I'll make a copy for him.

J: Yeah!

[microphone cuts out]

I: Okay, interview with John Bono, Calumett, MI, December 10, 1982. Okay John, could you tell us something about your background? Where were you born and raised?

J: Alright. I was born in southern Castanovo. Wait a minute, what- [recorder error sound] Provincia Torino. [Italian]. Provence? Provincia Torino, Italia. 1902. On the 28th of February, 1902. Then in 1902, my father was in America- he wasn't in America, he was in Germany. Then when he come back, he come in America. 1902. I remember 1903.

I: So your father came to the United States?

J: Yeah, my father come in 1906 in America. And he left my mother with 4 children. One never born yet. And he leave all the... me- John Bono, Eugene, Mary, and Batista, he wasn't born yet.

I: What did your father do when he came here?

J: He come into build in Arizona. And then it happened to, they never arrived for 6 years. My mother and I [unintelligible] happened to be my grandmother [unintelligible] Then it happened to, he had a brother. He come in Butte, Montana. That brother I showed you the picture. John Bono. My father's name was Luigi Bono. Lui Bono. Well his brother, he happened got hurt in Butte in the mine. They cut the heart. They gave me a [unintelligible] and they went back in the Old Country. Come back in Italy. Well, in the same time, my father move away from Arizona. He come to Illinois, to build in Illinois. From there, then he see my uncle, he tell him send my family. He give money to send the family in America. And it happened he did send the family in America. But I was left. I was older, about 10 11 years old, I was left there with my grandma to take care of her. From now on, we was poor people. We struggled from top to the bottom. Do you understand? Sometime I used to go, when there was up in the [Italian], the mountain, to take care of the [sheep noise], you know what that is.

I: Sheep.

J: I suppose your dad, your grandpa know what they are. And sometime I work at the [italian], one dollar a month, [italian], in that day it was [Italian]. You spend by the penny, you don't spend by the dollar like they do here. You understand? And then a little bit of struggle back and forth, back and forth. And then one of my family now here in America, they come to be a United States citizen. They all come to be citizen. In that day the father make the wife a citizen, and all the family. [unintelligible] I was in the family, I could be a citizen of the United States.

I: I see.

J: You see what I mean? Then it happened to be they want to send me back when I got older. But the war come, 1918 war. Couldn't do it. While I thought the war was finished, they send the money to become united here in America. I lose a brother around the same time.

[microphone cuts out] Like to have the cow, and the milk, and cheese. My mother used to make cheese. She was very good. And then 19, after war, I got united 1920. I can't quote way back everything exactly. I struggled there with her. I was 11 years old when they come in America, struggled way out til I was about 18 years old. The war won, finished, then they send the money, and I come.

I: How did you feel about your family leaving that way?

J: Well I was about 11 years old, what did I feel? You know I cried a little bit, what are you gonna do. My grandma won me because mostly she raised me up. I was in love with my grandma, more than my mother. I don't tell you why. That's kind of dark. I'll tell you. I don't like to put it there- [microphone cuts out] -I have a look for the passport, and I went got my passport, the same week that it came, and I got a passport, they say they were American citizens. Well I was an American citizen. Then some way or another, they let me come through. I was young yet, I wasn't quite 18 years old. Then I got here, and I was-

I: Okay, wait a minute. Where did you leave from?

J: I leave from Provence Torino, Italy. That's the provence. I leave there, by myself- with another lady, because I was young, and from then I had my passport. They had a consul, the American consul, had to sign the passport. And then they told me my passport was in Genova, leave from Genova- Genoa. And then by myself I went down there and I say where's my passport? Well you get to Genoa, [unintelligible] official.

I: Go get it, a teenager.

J: [unintelligible] I got in town that day, it was kind of late, the boat is supposed to go at four o'clock. I got in there, there were so many people, it was about 1 o'clock afternoon. The boat's supposed to go. But it's only from here to the house, the boat that was waiting for us. And I wait, I wait, I wait. People come and people go. And at last I heard the boat go [foghorn noises], I say gee, the boat is going to go, and I'll be left here! And I run in the office, I give them hell in Italian. [Italian] You understand that?

I: Oh yikes. Mmhmm.

J: [Italian]

I: You were mad.

J: [Italian]

UV: Were you mad.

J: I was mad! And then I got out and it was only me. I grab my basket, and then they got a bridge there. And with the guard there, I got in there and show [Italian] He got up with me, off we go to the bridge. I worked a line with that boy.

I: The drawbridge down.

J: [Italian]?

I: Yeah. What was the trip like when you came across?

J: Every night we was about, from the third of January, [unintelligible] the third of February.

UV: A month.

J: One month. It was an old boat. They used to call it a Cristoforo Colombo boat. Before America, Cristoforo Colombo. Then he had some paint all over, some Catalan, you know about that Catalan paint?

UV: Tar.

J: Oil paint, some kind of paint. It was pinking that boat. Well it went alright, we went and got together, we all sleep in the third class. One day we got in New York. Now I jump in New York. Once we got to New York, they used to say while we drew through the boat, everything else, you meet people here that were [unintelligible] that boat. [unintelligible], Tuscany, each type of quite a many places. And then they stop by Gibraltar about 3 days, load the coal.

UV: Gibraltar.

J: Yeah, across to Gibraltar. And they line up, before they go to the Rock of Gibraltar. And down through the Mediterranean Sea and Genoa. The last thing is way up in Genoa. They stop there 3 days. They carry in the coal from another boat, load the coal from another boat to this boat, from a basket. [unintelligible] take them 3 days to load them up. Then after a while we went, we got to New York. And when we got to New York it was a Sunday morning. Everybody [unintelligible] the port, they stay behind. Then we see the little motor. It come up in the boat. Exams- it was the doctor, examine everybody. They line them up, [unintelligible] everybody. And then after 1 o'clock, they passed over the immigration people was coming in the boat. The one who had the boat in Genoa was kind of long because somebody maybe gotta depart. I went in there, they said "give me your passport," I show the passport, they asked me, where are you going in America? I show them the piece of paper. I never say much. They give me the immigration paper, talk in Italian. Pass. Pass. Out. And that woman who's supposed to take care of me, she couldn't get [unintelligible]. I was a citizen of the United States. That's why. And then they find in the card, the card say that. They have to be claimed. [Italian].

I: You didn't land at Ellis Island?

J: No, no, that's what I told you.

I: The rest of the people did? [unintelligible]

J: I never land in an island. And then they said [Italian]. I said [Italian]. And then at land they throw me out, and I went up there and I see big building, that New York. And then I meet one guy and he's Italian, I know he was Italian. See at immigration a lot of Italians. And I had to sleep for my trip, so what do I do? I only had the ticket: from Genoa to New York, I didn't have any directive to where I was gonna go. They couldn't find the town where I was gonna go in Illinois.

UV: Small little town, little mining town.

I: Oh boy.

J: They couldn't find it! What are you going to do? A guy take my name, I said yeah, I give my name. I was supposed to sleep at the immigration motel. [Italian]. Rather, I figure out, somebody told me lots of lies in there, and I take my guy in [unintelligible] [Italian], I told him what he'd lose to me to sleep in there. And no train here in New York that goes directly to Chicago? I know you can get to that ticket in a little more time. When I get in Chicago, I'll find it. There's only more time [unintelligible], find it. [Italian] You understand? Everything. And not these fine company people that want to go out. You give me the money, I give him the money, I'll trust him. He said you got American money? I said *si*, I got American money. I have \$55 American money. I bought it [unintelligible] me American money. I told him, I said yes, \$54. I had it right there in the pocket. And they find the ticket, [unintelligible] the train come the same night. Come from Illinois. I land to Buffalo, New York. You know Buffalo, New York? I land there. Chicago- no unintelligible] railroad. I land to Buffalo, New York and then I get off there. Same train. And I go [unintelligible] told me to get off. Kind of understand. You go to America, you don't know the language, what're you gonna do?]

I: Isn't that terrible? Now how did you feel about that? Not knowing the language.

J: I feel alright. I don't know what to tell you.

I: But did you feel lost?

J: Kind. But you know why? I travel in Italy a lot. I went down to Genoa before. Some of them people I told you about, some of the rich and my grandma, the one who took my mother. They were rich, they want to make a tunnel up the mountain for electricity. What a tunnel! See? They had this.

UV: Lots of money.

J: And they give all the money at once. Some want it. They could have given me 50,000 liras if I wanted it.

UV: I suppose they were glad to get rid of him.

J: It's ambition.

UV: There was some kind of trouble-

J: Some kind of [Italian] there. I didn't even want to bother. I was getting kind of mad. And then that guy in Buffalo couldn't understand me. I got off in the station. And then I follow this guy like I was a Japanese [Italian], I got off and he said you were gonna tell me the train, you were gonna come 1:30, I was 11:00. I don't understand. There was a guy there washing windows, he was Italian, he went and talked to him and they explained it to me. See? Explain it to me.

UV: Ask him what he went through.

J: And then that's fine. And then you know what he did? He's looking for a policewoman. You remember they had policewoman in Chicago? They still got it, I don't know, that day they had a policewoman. It wasn't the police, but a guard, I don't know. And he asked to take care of me. To lead in Chicago. This one here, he put me in the train that was here in Buffalo. He got me a cup of coffee, and then after my train time was, he put me in the train. And then from Chicago, at about 3:00, the same night we got in at 3:00 in the morning. Then I had to wait at a train depot. Then he make me understand he had to Parmalee, you know they got the Parmalee.

UV: They got the buses.

J: To change you from one depot to another. I take the Parmalee that day and there was no cars. It was a buggy, like horses, to take you from one station to another. And everything was paid. Then I got in there, and we sleep in the bench. And the money, the time was we take the Parmalee before they put in [unintelligible] the Parmalee. And then we got to Union Depot. That's the place I want. And then he told me it was a woman like this one here, a [unintelligible], you see them and they take care of you. And they did take care of me, take care of me, everything. America. And she was nice, and she pay everything, take me to breakfast, everything she paid. [microphone cuts out] Don't know why, don't ask me nothing. And then when the time come, they put me on another train that station I want to go, they find everything out, she went and got my ticket. Everything. Then they told me how much money, I don't know, she paid, I don't remember how much she paid, but they put me on the train. Then I went and got home. Then my dad, he wasn't there waiting for me. He wasn't there- he told God all ready then, when he see me come, to call him up in the farm. After a while, he come an hour after too, he call him up and he come with a buggy. They put a coat on me and then we went in the farm. I meet the [unintelligible].

I: Now what town was this?

J: Gerard, IL.

UV: Gerard.

I: Gerard?

UV: Gerard.

J: Gerard, IL. From then, in the farm we didn't stay very long in the farm, because it was a renting farm. From there we sold out the animals and everything-no, we sold some out, my mother keep three cows. Was a little mine right close to that, and my dad could work in the mien. The other mine was far from here in Gerard, it was a full five mile. Put a horse and the buggy and the money, you go [unintelligible]. And we went living there int he mining camp. They had a barn there and we keep the cows, and we work in that little mine. I remember the first pay I make was \$80. 1920, \$80, four day a week, it was working. That's all. Was quite a pay, hey?

UV: For then.

J: For a young man, 80, in that day in 1920, was quite a bit.

I: So what'd they do, just put you in the mine to work?

J: Put me in the mine, what are you gonna do? Nothing. I mean, it was cool. I was 18, [unintelligible] I come to be 18. But really the true [unintelligible] coming was 17 in America.

I: When did you come up here?

J: This is quite a long story. I work in Illinois for quite a long time. And you know in Illinois they had strike. The first time I come in Calumet it was 1928. Got some friend up here. What is it, [Italian]

UV: Brocco's?

J: A friend of mine. You know my dad told that, they come down and see him, and it's [unintelligible].

UV: You mentioned Mary Brocco, she married one of those Broccos. The dads and grandads were here years ago, and they were from the same town that John had come from.

J: Yeah.

UV: So they visited down there.

I: They would go back and forth then?

UV: Yeah. Then he said if you're home just on strike and just doing nothing, come up to Calumet, we got a new union there, you can work all you want. So he'd come up and then this mine would start up again and go back, so he did that about 2, 3 times-

J: 2 times, I did.

UV: -until the Depression struck.

J: Then the last time I meet her. I meet her and then I never went away [unintelligible] here. See, I was a good worker. The Captain, he said. I had one of my brothers up here for a while, and he's not much a worker. And when my uncle come up here, he got a job. He said my

nephew John Bono likes to come back, come here. It was kind of short already. "Yes, I give John Bono anytime the job. Call him up." I got the job. I got here, I got the job, same night. In the mine. From there 1930, [unintelligible] no more, to lay me off. They would've went away, I would have married her. [unintelligible]

UV: We went together 8 months. Then the Depression struck, and they started laying off, they laid off all the single fellas. So what is he gonna do? He went back to Illinois, cause he thought maybe the mine would open up-

J: Back in Illinois.

UV: And then we went [unintelligible] Almost 3 years we were left corresponding.

I: You were separate.

J: You know that I would have had a right to go down there because we bought that place and my dad was at mining camp, that mining camp I told you. Then we [unintelligible]. We bought a place there. In the mine down there, we got a job down the mine and bought that place, \$2000, [unintelligible] land from the Build and Loan. You know a Build and Loan? Used to pay \$16 a month, I don't know, I pay 4- 500 dollar. Done. And they never had no money. So then we struggle, we got find the money, we find it. And so I went and worked in the mine. I had [unintelligible] that pay the bank. Sometimes we couldn't pay it for 6 months. I had to pay a 10% fine. After that we pay it, I pay mostly all of it.

UV: Shall I make some coffee?

I: Okay, yeah.

UV: We got pop in the house.

I: No, coffee would be fine.

J: What do you think? I'm paying mostly all. What I got, about a hundred dollars.

UV: Well that's alright, you did it for your family, John.

J: I did it for my family. Now nobody own them, my brother Batista, my brother Pete, he's did-that's the one, they got him. He did now that this woman got him. Then he got another house in east Saint Louis. My brother Pete was a carpenter. He could build a house.

I: In east Saint Louis?

UV: Yeah.

J: What?

I: In east Saint Louis.

UV:- Saint Louis-

J: No, in Staunton.

I: That's close, Staunton is close to east Saint Louis.

J: It's about 30 miles.

I: 30 miles, okay.

UV: S T A U N, Staunton.

J: You know about east Saint Louis? That ain't very far. Edwardsville, Staunton, Grand City. It's all that wood part of Illinois- Wood River, IL-

I: Wood River, yeah.

J: You know that place?

I: Yeah, I went to school in Saint Louis.

UV: You did?

I: Yeah, so I know all-

UV: You know Edwardsville?

I: What?

J: Edwardsville?

I: Edwardsville, sure.

J: Yeah, that's the place I come from.

I: Right around there, okay.

J: That's the place I come from.

UV: We get the paper from Staunton yet.

I: Really?

UV: His sister-in-law, she's still in Staunton.

J: I got the paper- my sister-in-law, she pay for the paper. I say why you want to pay, I don't know nobody down there.

UV: Anymore.

J: I don't know nobody down there, why you gonna pay it?

I: Yeah.

J: I said, "you want to pay it," I said "if it wasn't for you, we'd never have the farm." My dad pass away and then they leave a book. [unintelligible] make it pay.

I: I see.

J: I never know I had that book. They find it when my mother pass away. Never paid by me, everything. They feel kind of guilty.

I: How did you like working in the mines?

J: Now, I'm finished. But I like it better when I work in the coal mine.

I: Why?

J: Only the coal mine is not so danger like this copper mine because the coal mine is mostly danger for gas. But the danger, the loose rocks, some places there are loose rock, but not very many. The coal is only 5 feet in the solid rock. But here it's different, this is a vein about

15, 20 feet high. And you don't know what you see; some places it cave in, some places... it's a danger more in the copper mines. This mine, I don't know about the Butte, Arizona, whole thing. But I know that much, I worked this 30 years, in this mine.

I: Now who did you work for?

J: For Calumet and Hecla.

I: What kind of a company were they to work for?

J: Tell you the truth, I don't want to say much, but not so bad for the working people. Only never had the union before.. They wasn't so bad, they're alright. But you have to work. Some company, you don't work, you gotta work. That's all I know. But they pay. They leave me here, this lot, it belongs to them. I can buy it. They sold off, but they give me a house for 25 dollars, to a year. But I got hurt for this company. Did you know I got hurt? I got hurt in 1960. I was still the same age til Calumet Hecla. I never sue, I should have done, but I never sued nothing. And they still paid a little bit for my medicine. But an infection, I got here, the groin a little bit. It still bother me once in a while. But they still pay an insurance for me. Pay an insurance. And they give me 60 dollar pension for that. Because I got hurt, they give me an insurance. So I go in the hospital, they pay entry- that's all I got. American. But if I go away from here, they might cut that insurance. Well it wasn't so bad to work in this mine. Only a lot of danger, you gotta watch yourself. That's all I can say. That ain't no bad thing to- some people say the company... A company's a company, you gotta work. The boss, you gotta work for the boss. Right? They give you the money, you gonna work, you know that.

I: Here, you want me to...

UV: John can help.

J: You good boy.

I: Here you go.

J: [Italian]

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