

PAUL CONTRATTO

INTERVIEWER: Contratto. Bessemer, MI. August 23rd, 1982. Okay, could you tell us a little bit about your family arriving in the Bessemer area, their names and-?

PAUL: My grandfather was named Andro Contratto and he arrived in Bessemer in the late 80s, or the mid-80s. He ran a saloon, you'd say at that time, and he was in the coal and wood business. Hardwood business. He bought this 40 acres over at- one mile west of Bessemer. There, he built his home there, and the barn, and from there he would have men that was boarding with him go over and work on the farm. And he was also a cattle-buyer. He used to go to Fort Atkinson, WI and buy cattle and all the horses that we used on the farm, he had bought and sent to Bessemer. Like, crates at that time- carts.

I: Did he- just to go back a bit, where was he from in Italy?

P: He was from Castellamonte. In...

UNIDENTIFIED MALE VOICE: Piemontese.

I: Piedmont?

UMV: Yeah.

P: Castellamonte, I can remember where he always mentioned.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE VOICE: It's in Northern...

P: Northern.

I: Yeah.

UFV: Close to the border of France. Close to the mountains.

I: When he bought these cattle, did he sell them?

P: Yes.

I: Bring them up here and sell the cattle? Or did he just use them for the farm?

P: No, he would have his cattle that he would pick for his herd at the farm, and then he would sell cattle in the area.

I: He didn't butcher them or anything?

P: No. These were all dairy cows. He would milk cows, dairy cows that he would buy, then sell.

I: Did he have any other, anything else on the farm? Did he grow anything?

P: Yes. Because Uncle Pete, that would be his son, was the man that was working on the farm at that time, and he had the team of horses. And then later years... My dad, we all lived with my grandfather and grandmother in Bessemer. Then in the late 1920s I think, right after the First World War, my dad then moved over to the farm. And that's where I was raised, on the farm.

I: I see, so then your father got into farming full time?

P: My father got into farming full time, yes.

UFV: His name was John.

P: John Contratto.

I: Okay. Now did your father ever mine?

P: My father went and worked in the mines too.

I: In the beginning?

P: Yes.

I: Did he continue working?

P: Yes. Until he... from blasting, he got to be hard hearing, you know, from all the

blasting in the mine. And then he had to leave the mine. Then he worked always at the farm.

I: when he was working in the mine, was he also farming?

P: Yes.

I: He did both. How would he-

P: At that time, they worked. Like on the night shift or graveyard shift they call it. He'd work in the mine and then in the daytime, when he had the time, he would work on the farm.

I: How would that work in the wintertime then?

P: Well, of course in the wintertime, it was much easier because we didn't have all the summer work, like the haying and the gardening, making wood, and all he had to do then was just mostly the milking. Taking care of the cattle.

I: How many cows did you have?

P: He had as high as 25 cows, milk cows.

I: What would you do with the milk?

P: We used to deliver milk. We used to peddle milk in the city of Bessemer. I was the milk boy.

I: I see.

P: We had at that time, we always had 3 horses, a big heavy team, and then a single horse that was doing all the- could be used for delivery. And I used to deliver. We were a family of four boys and one girl, and of course at that time, the two eldest- Peter and Andro- they got jobs in town and they lived with grandpa and grandma. When we moved over, it was my brother John, myself, and my sister Mary- we were staying at the farm. So we had our chores, Johnny and I and my sister, and we used to be the ones that worked on the farm.

I: You said your father farmed and didn't go into mining, I mean he stopped with the mine.

P: Well, yes. I was pretty young at the time when he was working in the mine, but then I can remember after that he was always, his job was on the farm.

I: At that time, was the farm productive, did it give you good income?

P: It was a livelihood, as far as the family. My dad then would get work for the city at that time, during the wintertime. Then Uncle Pete. Those days they would hire farmers with their teams. Years ago Bessemer, with our heavy snows, they'd hire farmers and they'd use them for our winter plowing.

I: I see.

P: They'd hire four, five teams from the area and they had the great big plows, they'd hook em all up. And of course, he used to get jobs like that. And then during the summer, he'd get a few weeks, give a few weeks to the farmers.

I: Doing the roadwork?

P: Well, road work, that, a number, yes. He'd work on the roads, grating, stuff like that.

I: Did they have to clear the land when they went out to the farm?

P: Yes, originally, when grandpa bought the... it was all timber. Then he kept clearing. Originally it was the 40 acres. Of course now, with the plot, there's 60 acres.

I: So they bought additional land?

P: They bought additional afterwards. Then grandpa had 4 40s of timber in Ramsay. That's when Uncle Paul then went after the 1st World War, Uncle Paul and Joe Mikkala,

a buddy- they were buddies during the war. When they came back home, Mikkala, at that time had the coal, I think it was. He had the coal and grandpa had the 4 40s which had the cordwood. Then they went into the coal and wood business.

I: You said your grandfather had a saloon.

P: In fact, yes. He always had the saloon. First, well, in the early days when he came.

I: He started- he didn't work in the mines?

P: No. Grandpa never worked in the mines.

I: Do you know why he came over?

P: I couldn't say. I don't know. Grandpa was one of the first ones. Because Uncle Pete, my dad, and uncle Paulie, and Aunt Mary, [unintelligible], they were all born in Italy. He had quite a family that came over.

I: That's interesting.

P: Yes.

I: Did you get into, did you farm out there?

P: I lived on the farm until I graduated. Well, until my dad died. In fact, before that, when I got married is when I left the farm. But, yes.

UFV: He delivered milk.

P: And I raised turkeys. Dante... I think he'd remember.

UMV: Sure.

P: I raised turkeys. And I had a saddle horse.

I: Then after your father passed away, did you move back to the farm and operate it?

P: No. After dad died...

I: Then what happened to the farm?

P: Well, we still had the farm, but then Uncle Pete went to live on the farm. But he didn't do any farming.

I: Did he [unintelligible]?

P: No. They were both bachelors. Uncle Pete and Uncle Paul never married. So then, after dad died, Uncle Pete still worked the farm. Other words, he made hay and he planted oats, and he always had a team of horses.

I: But then they'd gotten rid of the dairy cattle?

P: Yes. The dairy cattle.

I: Did they ever make cheese out there and sell it?

P: Yes.

I: What kind of cheese did they make?

P: It would be the brick cheese, we'd call it now, I think. And then I can remember mother making, like what we have... yogurt.

I: Did they make... what is that... [Italian]?

P: Yeah, [Italian].

UMV: [Italian]. The big ones.

P: Yeah, mother made the great big ones. Then down in the basement we had a big rack that was revolving. It was made on revolving shocks that you could turn, and she'd go down and turn the cheese and salt them all the time. Cheese, lots. In fact, we had everything- almost everything we needed from the farm. We used to have calves, we used to take them at that time to the butcher. The butcher would take in calves and we'd get whatever-

UFV: Pigs, too.

P: Yeah. Every year, we'd have two pigs and one steer that we'd have for butchering, and then we'd make salami. That was a big day, when you make salami. You'd have all the three rooms, whatever it was, in the house, and we'd have our great big tubs, all the tubs, and then the basting of the meat. Two pigs and one steer.

I: Then you'd process it into sausage and salami?

P: Yes. We'd have the big grinders and everything. And the sausage.

I: And then you could keep that through the winter.

P: Yes.

I: Did you store it in lard?

P: The only time that would have to be done was when... if it didn't season right. I can remember him putting them in the crocks.

UMV: Yeah.

P: Because when you make salami, you have to make sure you have a dirt floor. The basement, it would be dirt. We had a portion for that. But there were times where, when you watched your sausage or salami, if it was not ripening, or seasoning right, then he'd put them in great big crocks of- we'd have all our own lard.

I: Did he keep any sheep?

P: No sheep. Never had any sheep.

I: How about chickens and-

P: Yes, chickens. Rabbits.

I: Did people come out and buy cheese at the farm? Did you have that? Did people come from town?

P: No. We'd have friends that would come out but we never had it that we made sales on the farm like that. We had it for our customers, when we peddled the milk, we'd have- whenever I'd remember- bring in rabbits if they wanted rabbits.

I: Did you sell these live?

P: Well, whatever. Yes.

I: However they wanted.

P: Yes.

I: Did you sell chickens?

P: Not too much.

[microphone cuts out]

P: I can remember grandpa when we made cordwood, [unintelligible] over there, we'd sell cordwood to the bakeries. Those days, they bakes all their bread that was baked was all from hardwood, all hardwood, their ovens. That whole street, we got down here, and grandpa would need to buy cordwood. Cordwood stocked from one whole block long, used to have it. Remember, [unintelligible]?

UMV: Yeah, so it would dry out. Year's supply in advance, all the time.

I: And this was all for the bakery?

UMV: Yeah.

P: All for the bakery.

UMV: See, our bakery was right over here.

P: It was on the corner.

I: Where did your grandfather have his saloon?

P: It's just half a block from the main street.

I: So it'd be downtown then? That area?

P: Yeah.

I: Did he live above the saloon? Where did he live?

P: In the back portion of the saloon. Of course, all the rooms would be... it was a pretty good sized building. All the rooms upstairs were bedrooms. He used to have as high as 15 boarders.

I: And then who did the cooking for them?

P: Now that's a big story too. See, my grandfather used to send money to the Old Country, to Italy. That's Lucana, my mother. I don't know how, what connections they made, but my grandpa would send the money to Italy for the fare when my mother came, and she worked. That's how she came to Bessemer. My mother was 18 years old when she came to Bessemer. Then she worked for grandpa. And of course, it wasn't a few years after until my dad and my mother got married. And then there were... There's 3 that I know that he sent... Callelia, Mrs. Sultano, and that would be from the same town, same city or town that my mother was from, and Mrs. Filli. They were all... grandpa had sent for them, and they all worked for a certain time.

I: To pay for their fare?

P: They did work to pay for their fare.

I: For their fare.

P: And of course, after whatever time they worked, they got married and then they left. As far as I know, I think he sent for about 4 or 5 different girls that had come from Italy.

I: You said you didn't run the farm, what has happened to the farm now?

I: When Uncle Pete lived on the farm, he was the last of the Contrattos that was on the farm at that time. And then there was 30 acres that was supposed to have been going for a convalescent home, he had wanted to have a convalescent home built there. But we had a lot of trouble with water and the sewer, they couldn't get the project going, and it was pending there for 68- 10, 12 some years. So when Uncle Pete passed away, he deeded the farm to my brother and I. We have the farm.

I: But you don't use it.

P: Oh well. It's rented, I rent the farm now, but I did have one tenant there that raised cattle, he raised beef cattle on the farm.

I: Are they using the farm now?

P: No. There's a tenant there now that is just gardening. And he did have 2 or 3 pigs last year, he had them. This year there isn't.

I: The barn that's out there, with the bicentennial decoration on it, that's the barn, is that the original barn? What's the history of that?

P: The original barn, yes.

I: When they constructed that barn, it's made of logs-

P: That's right.

I: -was that some special construction? Do you know?

P: It's [Italian], they call it. At that time, he was living down on the 40s, where all the-
UMV: Wood.

P: Wood was. He built a great big camp there, he had a camp, he was living there. And he was a handyman. Carpentry work. He's the one that built the barn and the house.

The lumber, the timbers, they're all from the 40s.

I: When did they build the barn?

P: That would be.. Well, Andro was born in 1901, I guess way before that I'm pretty sure that grandpa had that... 1900s anyway, or before, that that barn was built.

I: I thought it was a lot more recent. That's interesting.

P: No, that... I'm going by Andro's age, that's my oldest brother.

UMV: Sure.

P: And Grandpa already had the farm.

I: Now how about the house that's there? Was that built at the same time? The house was after. There was a few years that no one was really living there. The house was built, I'd say, two years after.

I: What would they do then, just go out and work in the day, send somebody out to do work on the farm, and then-

P: That's it.

I: -come back to town. That's interesting because that's what they do in the country, is- live in town-

UMV: Yep.

I: -then have a farm- about a mile or so- walk out to the land and work.

P: Grandpa, that's why he had the farm, so that when he had these cattle, he would have the farm there.

I: Just have them graze, and be a place to put them?

P: That's right, yeah. That's why the barn was built first.

I: I see. How many cattle would he bring in?

P: He'd get them- at that time, they'd come in by carloads. He'd have 35, 40, whatever. I can remember going with Grandpa, hooking up the single horse, and tying 3 cows behind the rake and walk all the way to Wakefield. And by the time we'd come home in the evening, we had the 3 cows sold. Because at that time, you'd have to switch- I was small, and I'd have to switch the cows to keep them going. Same with the fair. We brought cows to the fair. There was no big vans to transport them with you have today. We took the wagon, tied 2 or 3 cows behind the wagon, and Ironwood is 7 miles.

I: How would he sell the cows then, just sort of peddle them? Would he take orders, people who want them just-

P: No, we just buy... In those days, we'd go through the areas, through the locations, and we'd sell them.

I: Did people keep cows in their backyards at that time? Individuals?

P: Yes. You take this street right here, we had practically on this... there was the Pinettis, and DiMarcs, they all had one or two cows. And then the mining company up here would have a big area for grazing- all mining land- that you could go, and they'd rent, pay so much a month. And you could see in the mornings, the evenings- [unintelligible] knows.

UMV: When I was living here, yeah.

P: The boy or the girl, whoever, would see him here in the morning, have to bring the cow to the pasture up there, and then the evening go get them.

I: Was this area that you're living in here, was this an Italian area?

P: Pretty much so, yes. Fourth Ward, yes.

I: How many- were they just on the street here, or were they throughout the area?

P: Every street. This street there were quite a bit. There was the Pinettis, there was the...

UMV: Galinatos.

P: Galinatos, yes. And there was the... across the street, I can't remember. Big family that they had there.

UMV: Pastoris.

P: Pastoris! And DiMarcs.

UMV: DiMarcs were over here, and Timperios.

P: Timperios.

UMV: Sofios.

P: Sofios, yes.

UMV: And Baloni was over there.

P: And the Cavosis.

UMV: Cavosis.

P: Baritonis.

UMV: Baritonis.

P: [unintelligible]

I: Where were most of these Italians from?

UMV: There was a mixture. A lot of them were Trivolins. From-

P: The two DiMarcs, and the Sofios-

UMV: They were from the Naples area.

P: Naples.

UMV: Then Pinettis and Galinatos and Pricos-

P: Baloni.

UMV: -And Balonis...

P: All Piemontese.

UMV: And then you. They were Piemontese.

I: Did most of the people work in the mines? Most of the italians?

P: Yes. yeah, that was the big industry, was the mines.

I: Are there any stories you can tell about work in the mines and problems they had?

P: I don't think they had as many problems as we got today. Because in those days we had the area from- I'd say Wakefield- from Wakefield to Iron Belt [unintelligible] that were all mining. And people were coming from Old Country at the time, or from Finland- lot of Finn people. They could get jobs anywhere- they could quit one mine and go to work the next morning in the next mine, all they had to do was take their clothes with them. It had work for them. And at that time of course, I'd say, a lot of boarding houses. All our area here. Puritan. Puritan Yale location, angle location. They were all single- well, lots of married men, too, as far as that goes, that had come from Italy to come here. That would be with the Italian and the Finn people, the Polish people, sure. They'd all get jobs right away, and of course they'd have to board with someone.

I: Did they have any special celebrations that they...

P: We had, every Sunday there would be a celebration. We had, north of Bessemer, it'd be the Saint John's farm there. They called it the-

UMV: German Park.

P: German Park. They'd have a picnic every Sunday. There'd be barbecued lamb, there'd be games, there'd be the band. And the whole town would be there.

I: These were put on by Italians?

P: No, no. Well, at that time, I don't know that the city was involved. But it was-

UMV: Was the different organizations-

P: -different organizations! Yes, because I remember that up on Colby Hill there that used to barbecue the lambs, Jerokovicz-

UMV: Jerokovicz.

P: It'd be different organizations.

I: Were there many Italian clubs and societies?

P: My mother was- I don't remember the name of these, the Lodge. And then the men had their organizations.

I: Do you remember the names of them?

P: I can't recall now the names. In those days, the societies- when there'd be a funeral- they'd all have to march, and if they didn't march they were fined. Remember, they were fined...

UMV: So much.

P: So much for not going to the funeral. But there was quite a few societies at that time.

I: Did they celebrate any particular day like Columbus Day? Was that a big-

P: Yes, Columbus Day used to be a big holiday and-

I: What would they do for the celebration?

P: They'd have the picnics, and of course lots of them had their- right in their own homes, that they would celebrate- they'd have picnics and friends that would come. Like at the farm, this was a celebration there.

I: They would just have a group of friends go out to the farm-

P: [unintelligible] some occasion that was there, someone's birthday or whatever it was. They'd all, in those days, were close. They'd all like to celebrate and have their picnics. And it would be with the Polish people, the Finn people, all of them.

I: How did the various nationalities get along?

P: No problems that I recall. No problems. We'd all work together at the mines and these picnics would be the same thing. Bessemer, I'd say the three that would be the most... Italian, the Finn, and the Polish. That was Bessemer.

I: Down here at St. Sebastian's Church, did they ever have an Italian priest?

P: Yes, while they- Not the regular. Father Svoda was German.

UMV: But he spoke Italian.

P: Yes. And then we had the assistants, a lot of his assistants that were Italian.

I: And so they would give the sermons in Italian?

P: At that time- One. Wasn't it? One of them?

UMV: Yeah.

P: Gino, wasn't it? I can't remember the name now. Marhgritte, do you remember? The Italian priest that we had in Bessemer?

UFV/MARGARITTE: [unintelligible] Father Valerio.

P: Yeah.

M: And Father Marc Antonio.

UMV: Yeah.

P: But I was thinking of-

M: [unintelligible]

P: Yes, previous to that though.

M: What previous?

P: That... Gino was the name. ... 'course they were all the same distance though.

UMV: Originally it was-

M: -can't remember? [unintelligible]

UMV: Originally it was a Polish parish. It started off as a Polish parish.

M: Where are the names on the list?

UMV: And Father [unintelligible] used to give sermons in Polish.

P: Polish.

UMV: And read the readings in Polish, too, but he'd also read it in English.

M: Where's that list of all our previous priests? Where'd we get it- from church, not that long ago, they had something printed up that listed-

UMV: Most of them were assistants until-

P: But they were all assistants.

UMV: Until Father Svoda died.

P: And then Franczek.

UMV: But we never did have a... except, right now we've got an Italian priest.

P: Braquet.

I: Braquet.

UMV: Father Braquet.

I: He's older?

UMV: He's about-

P: Now he's about late 50s.

UMV: In his late 50s. But he's just recent. About 5, 6 years now. But that's the only parish Italian priest that we had that's in charge of the parish. Before that we had some assistants.

I: So then the assistants would have sermons and so on in Italian?

UMV: Not too much.

P: No.

I: No? But there was enough familiarity with the priests that the Italians went to church? Because in some cases, you have them not going because the priests didn't...

UMV: Well, that's right, there was a lot of Italians that didn't-

P: The best time I can recall was when Father Swid was here.

UMV: That's when he got-

P: When he organized the choir-

UMV: It was all italians.

P: We had practically all Italians. And they were the old-timers.

UMV They were the old-timers.

P: The old-timers-

UMV: Not the younger generation. My dad-

P: Dad, and Macconi, and-

UMV: Macconi, Markelo-

P: Markelo.

I: And that was kind of a big upsurge in interest and activity, and so on, with him.

UMV: With him. And Father Swid here had [unintelligible] go to school in Rome and he knew how to speak Italian fluently.

P: Yeah.

UMV: I don't know if he was of Italian descent or not. Father Swid. he may have, maybe his mother was Italian, I don't know.

I: I see.

UMV: But he studied in Rome and he was fluent in Italian.

I: And this would've been about what year?

UMV: Twenty years ago, at least. Maybe before that.

P: Yes... In the 40s. No?

UMV: Yeah, I would say that. About 40 years ago. I can remember the Italians all started going to church when Father Swid came.

P: That's right.

UMV: The older ones.

P: The older ones. He got 'em.

UMV: Most of the Italian women went to church, but it was the husbands that didn't go very often. No, the menfolks didn't go to church too often. But when Father Zryd came, they all started going at that- they used to have 1 mass, then, for the Italians, because they got up there and they were in the choir.

I: What was it, just his personality that draws them to-

UMV: His personality. Yes.

P: That's right, his personality. Yeah, he was well-liked. Got the old timers to go back to church.

UMV: He was from Marquette, Father Zryd. From that area there.

P: He went back to Marquette.

UMV: Yeah, he went back to Marquette afterwards.

I: How do you spell his name?

UMV: Z Y R D, I think...

I: Okay.

UMV: He was assistant to the Bishop. He got that high after having an accident, remember? I think his leg was amputated.

P: Yes. He lost a leg.

UMV: And I think it kinda destroyed his career as a priest. He's passed away by now, anyway. But he-

I: Wasn't he a Monsignor?

UMV: He was a Monsignor, he became a Monsignor. You're probably familiar with...

I: The name, I'm trying to place it in this... He did something in Marquette.

UMV: Yeah he did something in Marquette. But he was right under the Bishop for quite a while. Under Bishop Noah.

I: Maybe he was at the cathedral-

UMV: Cathedral, I think he was. He probably was-

I: That was before Capo.

UMV: Capo. Yeah, quite a long time before that. Capo's there now, yeah.

M: Wasn't he pastor of that Catholic church near the college?

P: Near the college.

M: Is that St. Michael's?

UMV: That's St. Michael's.

I: Okay, that's the one!

UMV: That where he is?

P: On the corner there next to the college.

I: That's right. Cause that-

UMV: That's where [unintelligible] is.

P: The pastor there-

I: Yeah.

M: My brother married an Italian girl from Marquette called Calassanti and we went to the funeral and Father Zryd did her father, Mr. Calassanti's funeral.

UMV: I see.

I: Okay That's where the name's familiar.

UMV: Probably, cause I've got a church there- at the time-

M: -cause we had difficulty while altar boys had to help him up and down the steps with the... he had an artificial leg but he couldn't manage it very well.

I: So he was fluent in Italian and he-

P: Yes he was, very fluent.

I: -got things going up here. Interesting.

UMV: He was very well-liked, very well-liked in our area here.

I: Were there other- that was the other thing I was going to ask, getting back to the farming there- were there other Italian farmers around here- in the immediate area?

P: The Montesis.

UMV: Montesis.

P: The Montesis. That's about 3 miles, 2.5 miles north.

UMV: North of Bessemer here.

I: What did they farm?

P: Well they were dairy too, they were dairy. And they delivered milk.

I: How large would their farm be, do you know?

P: Well... they had about 15 cattle.

UMV: I don't know how many acres he had.

P: Well that piece, that's about... you count, 30 acres.

M: How about that Pat Spagnoletti's-

UMV: Spagnoletti?

M: own that farm?

P: The Spagnolettis had ... the father!

M: Didn't they own that farm in Marquette?

P: Yes. No, not where... No. Because the original farm was more south than...

M: It was? It wasn't the same-

P: The farm that he was on is from his wife-

M: -we used to go to Pat's-

P: His wife's folks. But the Spagnolettis were towards the dam.

UMV: Yeah.

P: That number 2 dam, they'd call it.

I: So that'd be south of town?

P: South of Bessemer.

I: And they have dairy cattle?

P: Dairy cattle.

I: How do you spell those names now? Spagnoletti...

UMV: S P A G N O L E T T I.

M: [unintelligible] There's a Habushman living on that farm. She had-

P: That would be-

M: -She's Italian, or her husband was.

P: -the Jacarios then.

M: She was. She's been living there many many years.

P: And the Rays up here. Johnny Ray.

UMV: Johnny Ray, yeah.

P: Johnny Ray was...

UMV: Tilled it.

P: Tilled it.

UMV: That's spelled the same way as Myron Ray's name.

I: And that's his uncle?

UMV: I don't know if they're related to Nicky Ray.

P: No.

UMV: No, it's a different family altogether.

I: But they had a farm, similar farm, with cattle?

UMV: Dairy farm.

P: They had a dairy farm. In fact, at that same time, the Rays- remember, the Rays used to deliver.

UMV: Yes.

P: They Rays were delivering milk, and the Montesis- Freddy, Alfred, his name was- and I was delivering milk. That's right.

I: How do you spell that, Montesi?

P: M O N-

UMV: M O N T E S I, isn't it?

P: And this Montesi, he raised steers, steer, you know. Then he'd break them in. Oxen, he had an oxen team. He was a big- in the parade-

UMV: You're right.

I: Did he-

[unintelligible]

UMV: He used them on the farm, didn't he?

P: Use them on the farm. For pulling. He'd raise his own steers. Then he'd train them, break them in for pulling. Oxen, he had an oxen team.

I: Did he sell the oxen to the lumber companies or anything or just for his own use?

P: No, these are for his own use. He used them on the farm. And then he used them in parades, he had them. How about a glass of wine?

[microphone cuts out]

UMV: They farmed in Italy-

M: We have some wine glasses.

UMV: -in the countries where his folks came. Cause when I was over there in 1925, I know my dad's people, they had oxen, and they pulled them on these 2-wheel carts. Holy god they were rough riding. That's where the Montesi-

P: Montesi-

UMV: [unintelligible] he used the oxen-

P: That's the only ones that I can remember.

UMV: -for a long long time until the kids got up, and they got up to modern equipment and horses.

I: I guess the big problem with oxen is you have to... when you shoe them, you have to raise the animal up, and you can't shoe-

UMV: I know.

P: I don't think they bothered with that here.

UMV: No, I don't think so.

P: I don't think so. Summertime, no problem.

UMV: No, that's true.

P: And in the winter, we'd always have that deep snow. Nothing on the hard roads or icy roads.

UMV: The roads weren't that good around here in those days.

P: No. It was all deep snow.

I: Were there any- let's see.

[microphone cuts out]

I: Who were some of the Italian businessmen around here? Were there any special businesses?

P: Yes, we had our grocery stores. Joe Ogas...

UMV: Joe Ogas. That was the oldest one.

P: Joe Ogas.

UMV: I think you met his daughter the other day. Gloria Tusenaf?

I: Yeah, okay.

UMV: Her dad. Had a grocery store-

P: Not married or nothing. The grocery store was just next door to my grandfather's saloon.

I: On Mary-

P: On Mary Street. Mary Street was the big saloon...

UMV: Area.

P: Area.

UMV: District.

P: District. There used to be Scobarda, no... Michela, Goda...

UMV: These are all Italians.

P: Contratto, and Scobarda. Joe Scobarda.

UMV: You said Scobarda.

P: No, I mentioned Scobarda but I'm thinking from the corner. That was Michela. Then Goda, and then Grandpa's...

UMV: Then Ogas.

P: Of course Ogas was a grocery store.

UMV: Grocery store.

P: Then there was a Covossi there, with the candy store.

UMV: Candy store, that's right. Covossi.

P: And then Cordiet with the shoemaker shop.

UMV: Shoemaker shop. Cordiet.

P: You talk about the business places. And James Micheli- Jimmy Micheli. Tailor. And then Scobarda, the tavern. And then the People's State Bank. All Mary Street.

I: What was on the other side of the street?

P: That's still the old fire hall. Across the street is that railroad tracks in that open space there.

I: So it had just opened.

P: Just the one street.

I: Were there any other Italian businesses around town?

UMV: Maroni and Muncher.

P: Maroni and Muncher, that's the next block up.

UMV: The next block up.

M: This street.

UMV: This street. Longyear Street.

P: That's here, that's Longyear street. Longyear.

I: What were some... were there other stores?

UMV: And then they had Marchello and Camili. That was a quick store. Shoe and clothing store. That's where-

M: Gastino's?

UMV: Well, that was later, yeah.

M: Later.

P: That's later.

UMV: This was in the early years. You're right, Margaritte. Maroni and Marchello was right next to the funeral home there, remember Paulie?

P: That's right, yes.

UMV: Right next to the First National Bank.

P: The big big department store.

UMV: They were big. And then he also handled Bear's steamship tickets in those days.

P: And then this Marchello, both I think, and Camili-

UMV: Yeah.

P: -they used to order carloads of grape. Used to have as high as- in one day I can remember we unloaded two cars of grapes. They used to get, I'll bet you, 15 carloads-

UMV: From California.

P: -of grapes from California.

UMV: It was all ordered.

P: All ordered.

UMV: That was Marchello too?

P: Marchello and Camili at first.

UMV: They'd go out and get all the orders and then they would order the grapes according to the orders they had. And then, like he says, he delivered.

P: I worked for them. I helped deliver to the different homes. And we have locations here, see? There's the Yale location, Puritan location, and Ando location, and they were-

UMV: Lots of Italians.

P: Lots of Italians.

UMV: They were working the mines.

P: And homes. They're all gone now, they moved all the homes. There was regular locations.

UMV: Big settlements.

P: Big settlements. Right behind the mine. Right close to the mine.

I: What did they- what would an average family buy, in terms of grapes?

P: They'd buy by the ton.

UMV: By the ton. Some more, some a little.

P: That's right.

UMV: But usually it was a ton.

P: Oh yes.

I: That was kind of a standard minimum?

UMV: Usually minimum.

P: About a ton.

I: What would that produce in wine? Gallons.

P: A ton?

UMV: Every 24 pounds, you used to get a gallon of wine.

P: I would say they'd have a couple of 50- that would be the big barrel. That was over 50 gallons.

UMV: That was... yeah. 50 gallons.

P: 50 gallons.

UMV: [unintelligible]

I: There was a lot of activity about this time of year?

P: Then after the wine, they'd have the *grappa*.

UMV: Yeah, we were talking about that here.

P: Yes. That's another thing grandpa used to do. Grandpa one time bought... he was a promoter, Grandpa was, I tell ya. He come from Old Country, he had- I don't know how much education he had, but boy. One time he had a carload of grapes that went sour here in Bessemer. I can remember, the main street wasn't paved, it was all mud. I can remember when we unloaded. He bought that car load of grapes, it went sour, the grapes, and he made vinegar.

UMV: Then he sold it.

P: Then he sold it, sure.

UMV: Didn't your... somebody in your family deliver beer and wine too?

P: No.

UMV: No. Thought it was yours.

P: Uncle Paul was the bartender.

UMV: I see.

P: Uncle Paul. My grandpa had him to be a regular barman. Then Uncle Pete was more the farmer. He was a [unintelligible]

I: So your grandfather kind of supervised, he was the brains behind the whole operation?

P: Yes.

I: He sounds like quite a character.

P: Yes. He had... I can remember one home up at the First and Last there, then they had the house down at the sand pit, then they bought the one next to Maroni Muncher, then he had the saloon, he had 4 40s in Ramsay, and...

UMV: He had a lot of property.

P: Yes.

I: When did he pass away?

P: In the 30... 36, 35, 36 I think.

UMV: How old was he, Paul?

P: 84 years old.

UMV: Do you remember how old he was when he came to this country?

P: I can't.

UMV: He must've been pretty young.

P: Yes. I can't...

I: Let me see. 30s then... He'd have been about 50-

P: 50?

I: 40 or so-

P: 40.

I: In 1900. He was probably in his 30s if he came...

UMV: You said he came around in the 80s.

I: So he must've been one of the first Italians in this area, because they opened the mine, this area opened up in-

P: Well, we're gonna have our centennial in... [unintelligible] Bessemer now-

UMV: 84.

P: 84 will be our centennial. So...

UMV: He probably was here then. He must've been here, then, in 1884.

I: Or soon after.

P: Soon after.

I: He was probably one of the first Italians to-

UMV: Yeah.

P: Soon after.

I: -to come into the area.

P: Soon after, because the Burts were here, and they're about the same age. Hergie Burt, remember? Morris Burt.

UMV: Morris Burt.

P: In fact, I think they have a record here we could... Morris Burt was the first child born in Bessemer.

UMV: Bessemer, yeah.

P: Uncle Pete and Uncle Paul and [unintelligible] Uncle Matt, they were there all in that same age.

UMV: There was no highway going where the farm is now. You had the highway when they want to go to Ironwood was the old road-

UMV: They go through the location-

P: The locations.

I: I see.

P: No highway.

I: And that highway is new?

P: It was all after.

UMV: It was all after.

P: That's where we worked, my Uncle Pete worked a team on the highway. They hired all the horses. And they made the new highway from Bessemer. In fact... they would be now from Ironwood to Wakefield is all new.

UMV: All new.

P: To go to Ramsay you couldn't- you had to go to the new- old location.

UMV: Up through Wico-

P: Wico, Plymouth, and-

UMV: Go through Ramsay.

P: Ramsay. So all these roads-

UMV: That's where the mines were. That's why the road was there.

I: Sort of passed through the mines [unintelligible]

P: Location. You go up this way, you go up to Anvil. That's the Tilden, go to Tilden road. Then from there, they called it the Old Anvil. And that's where the highway- go right down this road, you'd go to Ramsay. And then from Ramsay, you take the one that goes across the river, and it's the old road going to Wakefield.

UMV: Wakefield.

P: And the Wakefield Iron Mine is on that same road. Mines-

I: Is that the big open pit?

UMV: Yeah.

P: It's the open pit. You take the open pit mine- Hennesco, or something, was the name of the people that had it. He came up to the saloon where grandpa, and my dad at that time, were, and my grandfather could've bought the property that the open pit is on. He wanted to sell the farm. And today look at the open pit. But that's what they did years ago. Notice, they'd all make trips-

UMV: That's right.

P: -to Bessemer, to Ramsay. And they'd visit, they'd all come to Grandpa's, they'd come to Scobarda's, they'd come to all the- Micheli's, all these-

UMV: That's cause it's the county seat.

P: Sure.

UMV: Which, I mean, it still is, but the county seat in those days too, Bessemer was.

I: Were there Italians over in Wakefield and Ramsay?

UMV: Lots of them.

P: Lots of them.

I: And what's happened today, I mean, are there still descendants there?

UMV: Yes.

P: Sure. Anvil, lots of Italians. Wakefield, the Valasenos. Very good friends.

UMV: There's still the old Italian families like Valasenos and Jacquerios and some of the other ones... Perolero.

P: The Peroleros, there's quite a few-

UMV: Quite a few in Ramsay. And Giovagios. Remember the old Giovagios?

P: The mason.

UMV: Yeah. He was with a mason.

P: The mason Giovagio. We have Giovagios here. And our masons at that time were all rock masons. Mostly all Italians.

UMV: Mostly all Italians.

P: Pinetti over here was a rock-

UMV: Pinetti.

P: All our homes at that time were- you build a foundation, it was all rock. We'd have people that wanted to build a home, they'd come over to the farm and we had the rock piles. They'd come over- in fact, they'd hire Uncle Pete with the team. Uncle Pete worked many summers for Colosi hauling rock for different Italian people, or whoever, who was building a foundation. Haul rock.

I: And he was hauling it from the farm-

P: Hauling it from the farm, sure.

I: Do you know when they built this Italian hall, here in Bessemer?

P: That was built in the 30s.

UMV: 30s, yup.

P: I remember, I just graduated. Tony Goda- that's John Goda, we'd call him Tony- that was the Italian, the Lodge that built it. The Italian Lodge, they built that and we were working on it.

UMV: On that building?

P: On that building.

I: Could you zero in on a year? What year it would've been?

UMV: You know, I came across that article... I did some research for our class reunion. I graduated '32 from high school, and I did some research on different things that we did in high school, from '30, '31, and '32. I came across an article for one of those years where the Italian Lodge is- decided to build that Hall. I read it, but I don't remember from which [unintelligible] at the moment.

P: That's why I can sort of remember, it was along that time period.

UMV: Yeah, it was that time.

P: I graduated too. I did, and rural times were rough.

UMV: Yes.

P: And we were lucky to get work.

UMV: Work, that's right.

I: So then, about '30, '31?

UMV: I think it was right around '32.

P: 30s.

I: Then how long did it remain in use by Italians?

P: Quite a few years.

UMV: Quite a few years until the Masons bought it.

P: Just in about, what, the last 10 years?

UMV: I think so, something like that.

P: The Lodge is disbanded. They weren't like the old timers, when they had the Lodges.

I: So you'd say, probably about 1970 or so, they finished off as viable organizations? Before they had that hall, where would they meet? Did they have a special...

P: They used to meet upstairs of Hansen's...

UMV: The Odd Fellows Hall.

P: When they had the Odd Fellow. I can remember. Upstairs of Hansen's...

UMV: Lumber company.

P: Lumber company. They had their offices downstairs. And they had a big- it was a hall upstairs, remember.

UMV: Some of the Lodges met right across the street.

P: And then right across the street-

UMV: That was the Odd Fellows Hall.

P: That was the Odd Fellows.

UMV: They'd meet up there too.

I: You said offices. Offices for the lumber company, or-

UMV: Lumber company.

P: Yeah. They had the office downstairs.

I: Earlier I'd seen a picture of some kind of a patriotic presentation put on by an Italian women's club during the First World War where the women were all dressed up in the flags- their dresses were the flags of the Allies. Remember?

UMV: I saw that. I remember that occasion.

P: That, you'd probably recall, was down in Calumett.

I: No, this was in Bessemer-

P: In Bessemer?

I: -because Mrs. Ray, Myron's grandmother, was dressed up as France. She had [unintelligible] across the...

UMV: Was that during World War I?

I: Yeah. And it was a patriotic thing to get everyone involved.

UMV: I was pretty young then. I wouldn't remember, I was only 4 or 5 years old. No, the only one I remember was a big celebration when the [unintelligible]

P: I can remember Uncle Pete and Uncle Paul left for the First World War. From the Northwestern [unintelligible]. I had some of those pictures too from the Italian Hall where they had these meetings. Remember when they used to have these meetings?

UMV: Yeah, that's what he's interested in, too. That's what he's really interested in. [unintelligible]

P: I gotta look up those pictures, cause I know I have them.

[microphone cuts out.]

I: Did you ever hear of or run across anything about the Klu Klux Klan in this area? I don't know if I asked you this.

UMV: I remember when they burned crosses here. I was pretty young then. I remember-

I: It left an impression on your mind.

UMV: It left an impression on me. And they were burning crosses up on the bluffs here. Paulie probably remembers more about that, he was a little older than me. Paul? Do you remember when we had the klu klux doings around here?

P: Sure.

UMV: You probably remember it more that I do. I remember seeing the burning.

P: Sure, I do.

UMV: He'd probably remember-

I: What were some of the things that happened, could you tell us?

P: I can remember the one they burnt up at the first block.

UMV: Yeah, this is what I mean.

P: They... Klu Klux Klan, that time.

UMV: They never were too strong.

P: But they were dressed, though.

UMV: Yes, they were all dressed up in their-

P: Dressed, sure.

I: Besides burning the crosses, did they cause any problems to people? Hardships, or anything?

P: No. That's the only thing I can recall, was-

UMV: It was just that you saw-

P: -that we knew that they were organized-

UMV: -that everybody was talking about it.

P: Sure.

UMV: It was a big, big talk in town about it. I don't know how much of a backing in town here they had, I don't know how many there were in that organization in this town at that time. I don't know if they were that strong. But they never caused no trouble that I remember.

P: No. I do remember that burning the crosses on the bluff.

I: Did that happen many times?

P: Well, on time that I can remember.

UMV: That's all I can remember too.

P: One time.

I: That would've been about what year?

P: Well, I was in school then.

UMV: It was in the late 20s.

P: Sure. 20s.

UMV: Something like that.

I: 26?

P: Yeah.

UMV: Something like that.

P: We were in school. [microphone cuts out]

UMV: I know that that happened in town, like Paulie says.

I: Did you ever hear of it happening in like, Ironwood, other places?

UMV: Well, we couldn't-

P: We were, like I say-

UMV: We were pretty young and couldn't get to Ironwood-

P: They may have [unintelligible] throughout the whole UP, and we know that it was-

I: Around here?

P: It happened in Bessemer.

UMV: Probably did happen in Ironwood, too. We don't know. I don't know for sure.

I: Back at that time, was there a lot of interaction of the Italians from like Wakefield and Ramsay and Bessemer? Would they get together for picnics or doings and stuff? Ironwood and these locations?

P: Sure.

UMV: Different families. [unintelligible] relations. There were relations that lived in Bessemer, that lived in Wakefield, and they were related to each other, too. Different families that came from Europe. Some settle in Bessemer, some in Ironwood, Hurley, Wakefield, Ramsay. And they all came from certain provinces like people that came from Castellamonte and that area in Piedmont, they used to know each other but they're from different towns there in that area.

P: They used to have them up in Pence and Connorville.

UMV: Yeah, there was a lot of them there, too.

P: When they'd visit, they'd come, well they probably had a streetcar then. I can remember the Alice family.

UMV: Yeah.

P: The Alice family were very good friends.

UMV: Of your people?

P: Sure. And she'd come down to visit Grandma, she'd stay for two or three days to visit. Stay right with Grandma, and then take the streetcar right back, or whatever transportation, and go back. We'd do the same thing. I remember going to visit the Valacenos, over in Wakefield. Of course that time we'd go by horse and cutter.

UMV: Yeah, there were no streetcars that way.

P: Buggy. No streetcars going east here, came as far as Bessemer, right over here on the corner.

I: Between Bessemer and-

P: Bessemer and Gile.

I: In Gile?

P: Gile. It was from Bessemer to Gile. Her dad used to operate the streetcars.

UMV: That's right, too.

M: My dad was a motorman on the streetcar.

P: Motorman on the streetcar.

M: From Jessieville to Montreal.

P: But he had his from Jessieville. He used to come up to Bessemer, to Jessieville, Ironwood, Hurley, and up to Gile.

I: And then you's-

M: Montreal they had-

UMV: Montreal.

P: In Montreal!

M: Montreal-

I: Okay.

P: A lot of the miners used to ride on that in those days.

M: Sure.

P: To get to work.

M: My dad-

P: After they got the streetcar in here.

UMV: I remember the streetcar being here when I was a kid. So it must've been in the 20s. You know.

P: Yes. Earlier than that.

UMV: Yeah, it was earlier than that.

P: I remember that streetcar.

UMV: I remember we used to hook a ride in the back to get downtown.

P: Her dad came up from Negaunee in 1917.

M: 1917.

UMV: [unintelligible]

P: That's what I said, 1917.

M: My dad-

P: He came up to build the tracks.

M: -was the boss on those tracks.

[microphone cuts out]

M: -took the street car off in Negaunee, and he asked my dad if he wants to stay with them, he could move up to Ironwood and be motorman on the streetcar.

I: They didn't close that streetcar line, did they?

M: Yeah, they terminated the streetcar line between Ishpeming and Negaunee.

I; 1917.

M: 19... it must have been. No, 1927.

I: 1927.

M: That's when we moved. Shortly before 1927. I had just started my senior year at the Negaunee High School. So my dad chose to come up here. That's how he came here, and he operated the streetcars here until they took them off here in 19... 34...

P: When was that year, do you remember? Something like that.

M: 1934... I'm trying to remember exactly. My dad retired in '48 from the power company. It was a branch, Lake Superior was a branch of Michigan Gas.

UMV: Yeah, that's right.

M: And, it was in the 30s, I think. Then he worked for the company but he worked in the store room downstairs, all the electrical appliances, [unintelligible] That's Mr. Herpeset from Wakefield. I think you remember the Herpeset family. They worked down there.

UMV: But, originally, the purpose of that streetcar was for the transportation of all these laborers.

M: I imagine.

UMV: To get to the mine.

M: In fact, that's how my dad lost his leg.

UMV: Yeah.

M: Working for the Michigan Gas company.

UMV: I see.

M: He was ran over by one of those cars, and his leg was on [unintelligible].

UMV: I see. I remember-

M: But he worked all the time, had a family and everything. I wasn't born yet when my dad lost his leg. They were only married two years when-

UMV: Because prior to the streetcars, most of these people had to walk to the mines.

M: I suppose.

UMV: That's the only way they got there.

M: When we lived in Negaunee on Sear Street, my dad had to walk from Negaunee to the car barn.

UMV: Because I remember-

M: Do you know the Syrtals from Negaunee? They invited our [unintelligible] Lucy, they were good friends of Lucy's, the Syrtals in Negaunee. And we used to go visit them too. I don't know, we had a lot of Italian friends.

UMV: Friends.

M: In fact, we had an Italian friend that lived close to my grandmother. When I was four, [unintelligible]

UMV: Close to the-

M: Tusi's, the barber there, who cut my hair.

P: Do you remember Tony that had the [unintelligible] store? Tony, that's a good friend of Lucille. Tony Kekkak, we called him.

UMV: Yeah.

P: He moved to Negaunee, and Lucy used to go down and visit him all the time.

UMV: Yeah, I know Lucy always went to the-

M: Was she a Sytral?

UMV: I think it must've been a Syrtal.

M: Was her name Syrtal?

P: He's the one that stuttered, remember?

M: And the Patronis.

P: The Patronis!

UMV: The Patronis, too!

M: Mr. Patroni and my dad were very good friends!

P: Sure, Dominic Patroni.

M: Sure.

P: Originally from Negaunee.

M: Ended up at the car barn there.

UMV: Sure. He knows everybody down in Negaunee there.

M: Sure.

UMV: That's where he was born. Then they moved to Wakefield after.

M: That's right. They moved up here before we did.

I: So there was a lot of- then, between the various families, there'd be a lot of movement, people visiting.

UMV: Yeah, that's right.

P: That's right.

M: Yes.

I: Between Negaunee, and Wakefield.

M: After we moved here, we went to Wakefield to visit the Patronis and they'd come up to Ironwood and visit us.

UMV: But like I was saying, I don't know if you've got anything in the... this Russo was telling us a lot of stuff about the... almost like the mafia up there. Like, some guys would come and say... I think they came to his dad, too, wanting so much money from him.

M: Really?

UMV: Yeah, that's what this Russo was telling me last night.

M: Maybe my aunt would remember that. But you see I wouldn't, cause I was only 17 when we moved from there. I don't recall anything like that.

P: Did they have anything like that around here?

UMV: I don't know, there was something going on out in Hurley, but I'm not too familiar with it.

I: That didn't spill over?

UMV: No.

I: You didn't have people taking a cut of the percentage here?

UMV: But Lucy Winkoski, her maiden name was Pedanzi, but do you remember that Scutella?

M: Yeah, that lived with them?

P: Uncle.

UMV: That lived with them, that uncle.

M: Yes.

UMV: He was the black hand.

P: Black hand.

M: Really.

UMV: Yeah.

M: Wasn't he, was it his wife, didn't she die?

UMV: Yeah.

M: Then Allison- wasn't she supposed to have poisoned herself?

UMV: I know. There's something-

M: We were already married, living in this house I think, when-

P: The location had them, [unintelligible]. I don't know if they would, had the organization some way...

UMV: Some way they had some kind of an organization. Of course, our businessmen in town were never threatened by them.

P: They would sort of threaten different families.

UMV: Different families, yeah.

P: Scare them or whatever.

I: What would they want, them to pay protection money or something?

P: No. It's just if they didn't like the family or something, they'd threaten them. Some way. I remember the Black Hand-

UMV: Lucy-

P: They call him the Black Hand.

UMV: Lucy tells the story about...

P: Scutella.

UMV: Scutella didn't want Lucy's mother to marry Pedanzi.

P: I see.

UMV: And there's a story in back of it, but she knows more about it, but she mentioned something about it. Scutella was a bugger. I think, as a matter of fact, he slashed somebody's face.

P: Face.

UMV: That's what she says. Most of that was the Southern Italians; that's what this guy was saying, from Negaunee, too. They were all Southern Italians that... Calabrese...

P: Calabrese.

UMV: And Sicilians.

I: So then your Northern Italians wouldn't get plugged into that?

UMV: No.

I: Never had-

UMV: We didn't have that trouble, the Northern Italians.

P: We just make wine and have picnics. And eat good.

UMV: That's for sure.

P: We were the polenta-eaters. You know the polenta-eaters?

I: Sure. That was a question I want to ask here. You make polenta now.

P: Sure.

I: What do you use for flour?

P: Cornmeal.

I: Just the cornmeal?

P: Just the cornmeal.

I: Not a special polenta grind?

P: No.

UMV: Well, it's-

P: They got different- now it's easier.

UMV: It's a lot easier.

P: Now, with what they got now, it's nothing to make it.

UMV: Nothing today.

P: Where my dad, we used to have the big cast-iron. And my dad would be- and my mother both, she'd probably start it- and my dad would have to be- you'd have to keep turning and turning for an hour, more. Because-

UMV: It was a different type of meal.

P: It was a different type of the cornmeal. Now they got that blend where 15 minutes, and you heat it and let it boil.

UMV: Yeah.

P: You just let it so it just don't burn.

M: Yeah, but it doesn't taste the same.

UMV: Okay, well... I know what you mean.

M: I make it once in a while but it doesn't-

P: My dad would take the big cast-iron-

M: -seem to taste the same as when his mother used to make it.

P: -or the big platter, or the board, and tip it, then he'd have to strain it.

M: To stir it up like a cake.

P: You'd stick it up like this, you'd have the string-

M: String, they'd always have the string. [unintelligible]

UMV: That's right, I remember that.

P: -and it cut it.

M: My mother always used a clean string.

P: And then go the other way.

M: Cut it in squares.

P: All you have to do- you get it a little bit cold, you'd cool off a little bit, all you'd have to do is you take one of your pieces, two of your pieces of polenta... Now we eat polenta, it's all soft.

M: Take it with a spoon!

P: You gotta have a spoon. Course I like it, it's good. But there's a difference.

I: Because out in California they still sell the polenta grind. And this summer I took 3 flours: cornmeal, grits, and polenta, and when you like them up you can see the 3. The polenta is not ground as fine, it's little-

M: It's coarser.

I: Yeah, it's a lot coarser.

M: Grainy.

I: Yeah. That's why you have to cook it so long-

P: Yeah.

M: Yes.

I: You have to cook each of those little things.

M: Sure.

I: There was the golden pheasant brand. Somebody in San Francisco is selling polenta flour. Or meal. But it's not just that, the cornmeal.

M: Not just cornmeal?

I: Yeah. But it's a special...

M: Course, grits are made out of corn anyway.

I: Yeah. That's a little rougher grind. Then you have, the next one is polenta. But they're all different. And the meal is almost like flour. Then I bought some in Sault Ste. Marie, I thought maybe they would have the real stuff. And that was cornmeal as well.

UMV: I see.

M: The one that you buy in the 5 pound bag, you know you can buy a little sack like a 5 pound sack of sugar, I think is a little coarser even than the one you buy in the boxes like Quaker.

UMV: I don't like the Quaker myself.

M: The Quaker one I think is 5.

UMV: I like the... King Midas used to put out a good one.

P: King Midas, I remember.

UMV: It was in the bag, wasn't in those containers.

M: My mother used to make- that was the French- used to make hominy out of corn.

UMV: Yeah.

M: Just chicken corn! She'd go down in Negaunee- even when we moved to Ironwood she still used to do it- but you had to save the ashes from hardwood. Those days, [unintelligible] but they had to be the ashes from hardwood. And she'd make a lye out of it, she'd take water and put it on the stove in a big boiler. And then she'd take this corn, and of course wash it, and she'd put it in this water and let it come to a boil and all that corn would pop in there. Pop, just like popcorn.

UMV: Jesus.

M: Only it was wet, and it would pop in this water. Beautiful. And then she'd strain out that water and she'd have to wash it of course.

UMV: Yeah.

M: It was lye water in there. She'd have to wash it many times in cold water. And then they would freeze it in the winter in blocks. We'd freeze it in blocks. And that was our snack at night, if we were sitting around playing cards-

UMV: Yeah.

M: -and we wanted a snack, she would go out and she'd have a knife or something. She'd cut off a hunk and put it in a saucepan and heat it up on the stove and put butter and salt and pepper. Or just salt, even.

UMV: Yeah.

M: It's delicious.

UMV: Delicious.

I: And it's like popcorn.

M: Just like popcorn, only it's wet instead of being dry, popcorn. It's wet. We'd prefer the yellow corn to the white.

UMV: I see.

M: In Florida, we were able to buy hominy, yellow hominy, in Florida in the can. Down South, they use a lot of grits.

I: Yeah, grits.

M: Up here you can only buy the white. Once we came back from Florida, we had half a dozen cans of the yellow kind [unintelligible] because we liked the yellow ones. I've never made it myself, because it's a long process.

UMV: I suppose.

M: And where are you going to get hardwood ashes of course, plain?

UMV: That's right.

I: That's true.

M: Sure. I remember my mother doing that every year. And my grandmother, yes.

UMV: That's traditional, then, for you.

M: That was a tradition. Everybody thinks it comes from the south because they have hominy grits down there, with every meal practically.

UMV: Yeah.

M: But hominy, when you order it-

IMV: Hominy is better. Breakfast or dinner or whatever.

M: -after you always get a [unintelligible] of hominy on your plate, you can write this down.

UMV: You get hominy.

[unintelligible]

M: Actually, my mother cooked it when I was a kid, and I'm 72 years old!

I: I wonder, what if- would there be any market if they would bring some of that polenta flour in? You know, the real coarser grind?

M: I imagine-

UMV: I imagine you'd have-

M: -there would be.

UMV: A lot of people still making it.

M: Where would you get it? I don't know. The coarser ground.

I: Closest would probably be Chicago. I imagine in the markets in Chicago. Next time I'm down there, I'll have to look.

UMV: Because there's a lot of these [Italian] that polenta is a tradition with them, too.

M: I see.

UMV: And there's lots of them in the Jessievile/Ironwood area and they go for that polenta more than even the Piemontese.

M: I didn't know that.

UMV: Sure, but they make it a little different, too. They put potatoes in it.

M: Well Paul's mother always put potatoes in hers.

UMV: Well, my mother never did.

M: She always took at least one good-sized potato-

UMV: Gives it a little firmer.

M: -and she'd cut it a little smaller and boil it in the water first until it was mushy and she'd mash it-

UMV: It becomes more firm.

M: -she'd put it in her cornmeal.

I: Then you weren't eating pieces of potato at all?

M: No, you didn't even know the potato was in there.

UMV: No. All mashed up.

P: The potato was just...

M: You didn't even know it.

UMV: Good taste too.

M: Blended into the water.

UMV: Gives a good taste, yeah.

I: Didn't even know it.

M: Yes, and she always claimed it made your polenta better.

UMV: Well it firms it up, too.

M: I don't know what it did to it.

UMV: Did you ever make the polenta grassa?

M: I have never done it.

P: We did.

M: The one with the cheese in it.

UMV: A lot of-

P: Grandma would have the polenta, I can remember.

UMV: Lot of ways to make it.

P: We'd probably go... We lived on the farm, but actually we were one family. Grandpa, grandma, and my mother and dad, we were all- in fact, my grandfather was more bossy than my father was to us.

M: Oh sure, he was the monarch.

UMV: Grandfather, eh?

P: And Grandma, she used to be the card dealer in the saloon.

I: Really?

P: She was the card dealer.

M: His grandma always had on a big apron with a big pocket in it.

P: Apron.

M: And she always had money-

P: Money.

M: -and a deck of cards in that big pocket. I always remember his grandma.

I: She was the house dealer?

P: She was the house dealer.

M: She was the house dealer in that saloon. Where is that picture, that saloon with your-

P: I got to find them, I was trying to look for them-

M: -with your uncle in it.

P: -but they're upstairs someplace. Just not too long, we saw. I'll give them to you.

UMV: Yeah, well, if you'd like them-

I: Yeah.

UMV: -cause I can send them to him and you'll get your pictures back again. He brought some pictures back to me today.

I: And if I'm not coming, I'll just mail them. As long as they're not big.

P: I've got the scene, or the picture, of the saloon, regular saloon, with Uncle Paul behind the bar-

M: Beautiful bar.

P: -and my grandmother standing there, and 3 others.

M: They're someplace around here.

P: They're here.

I: Good, yeah.

P: I'll have to go right through- they're upstairs. I'm pretty sure now.

M: We got boxes upstairs that we haven't looked at in several years.

P: Cause I got the one from City Hall, then I got those from the farm.

UMV: You'd remember the Italian Lodges when they'd have these parades over here all the time.

P: Sure.

UMV: Well I had four pictures of them. And he took them, made copies, and send them back.

M: Where are the-

UMV: I didn't even want them-

I: Yeah.

UMV: Didn't care for them anymore.

M: Where's that picture of the crowd over at the Hall when the-

P: That's the one I was talking about.

M: What's his name? That man came from [unintelligible].

P: Garibaldi.

M: Garibaldi was here.

P: Garibaldi was-

UMV: Garibaldi. Have you got a picture of that one?

M: Yes he's got a picture, and his mother is on the picture.

UMV: Well that's a good picture. That was in 1920... 8?

M: Lot of others of them come, there was Russo and Rena, are on the picture.

P: Garibaldi isn't there, in the picture.

M: I didn't say Garibaldi was.

P: That's the time he came, you mean.

M: It was at that time.

P: The day they had the big meeting or the group at the Hall.

M: This group of people are there. And Florence, Rena's sister Florence.

P: Sutanos.

M: And Sutanos are there. It's a big crowd of people.

UMV: I wonder if that's the same picture I had.

M: And it's easy to distinguish.

UMV: I don't know.

I: Is that the one in the Hall?

UMV: Yeah, right in the Hall. But I couldn't recognize people, see?

P: Yeah.

UMV: Maybe yours is a different one.

P: The Botrella girls-

UMV: Maybe you got a different picture, which would be nice.

I: Was this the one in the Hall, see, with the band in the back and all the people sitting-

P: Yes.

M: Band in the back? I don't...

I: That's the one, because Ray had one I didn't take because I-

UMV: You know, in those days all these people used to get a picture.

I: So that was what, then?

P: That's the time I think Garibaldi came here.

UMV: It was on Columbus Day.

P: Columbus Day.

UMV: 1928.

P: We had... [Italian], or Prima Carnera here, too.

UMV: Prima Carnera here, too.

M: He came.

P: He came to Bessemer. I'll tell you where the big deal is: up at Piagi park.

UMV: Yeah, he's been there.

M: [unintelligible] Italian.

P: Piagi park is where the Italian [unintelligible] to have lots of Bocce ball up there.

I: Up there, yeah.

P: And [Italian], the game [Italian]. We used to have a back room in the saloon where they used to partner- they'd match partners and play.

I: What would happen if somebody got caught cheating?

P: Oh boy, look out. The fists were always there- ready. Did they ever go. I was raised right in the bar with those boarders.

UMV: That's right.

I: So that was kind of a social center for the boarders who lived upstairs? They'd come down to the bar-

P: Downstairs, with their rooms upstairs.

M: When he was 2 years old, his mother made a trip to Italy and took him with her.

UMV: That's right, I remember that. He told us about that.

M: When he was 2 years old, he went to Italy with his mother. And you know, in those days, her family over there wanted her to leave him there.

UMV: Yeah.

M: They said she had three other sons here.

P: Those days- [microphone cuts out]

M: -They used to do that! And she says I don't care if I had 9 sons back there, I'm never leaving my son here!

I: That was interesting, because they used to do it and I guess they didn't think much of it-

M: No, they really didn't.

I: They would do it from that side, over.

P: We had family that- Maconi, Alfred.

UMV: That's right.

P: Alfred Maconi went to the Old Country, the mother, and left Alfred here-

UMV: Alfred there.

P: Alfred was-

M: Can you imagine that, leaving your child over here?

P: -he started in the [unintelligible] school, put you in the 6th, 7th grade when he came back.

I: Oh my word, he couldn't speak English then.

P: No. I can remember when he came back, and all of the sudden we'd play baseball, get together, with him, and by golly-

M: Didn't he ever come back?

P: No, well-

M: Didn't he?

P: He went to Detroit.

UMV: Yeah. He came back.

P: That time he stayed.

I: Did you speak Italian?

UMV: Sure, yeah.

P: Yes, always. At home.

UMV: That's all the folks spoke to you, was Italian.

M: You know the Piemontese Italian is very much like French.

UMV: Yeah.

M: His- many of your words are almost like a mixture.

UMV: Only we have a little different pronunciation.

P: My mother-

M: You say [Italian] and we say [French].

UMV: [French,], yeah.

M: Horse. No, that's cow.

P: [Italian].

M: [Italian]. We say [French], you say [Italian] for horse.

UMV: How do you say milk in French?

M: [French]

I: [French]

UMV: [French] and we say [Italian].

M: [Italian]. Say [French]. L A I T.

UMV: Yeah, that's right. And egg.

M: [French]

P: [Italian]. We say [Italian].

M: [Italian]

UMV: Almost similar.

M: Yeah.

UMV: A little bit different. Remember when Varda was on his speech?

M: O E U F.

UMV: Yeah. O U-

M: O E U F. [French] in French.

UMV: Yeah.

M: Only my mother used to say "you want some eggs?" Eggs is Z for sound. [French]?

For do you want some eggs?

UMV: [French] was it?

M: It's interesting.

I: Yeah.

M: It's interesting to go back, because the years really have flown.

UMV: Well, you know that town where your folks came from-

P: Lucana- [microphone cuts out]

-----END TRANSCRIPTION-----