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Three Generations of Italians: Interview with Emilia Destefano by Susan McGuire

Emilia Destefano

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COVER SHEET FOR INTERVIEWS

NAME OF INTERVIEWEE Mrs. Emilia Destefano

INTERVIEWER Susan McGuire

DATE OF INTERVIEW February 24, 1979

SUBJECTS COVERED

Family

Parents

Italian Influence

Traditions

Social Issues

Education

Oral History Interview

with

MRS. EMILIA DE STEFANO

FEBRUARY 24, 1979
at her home

by Susan McGuire

INTERVIEWER: Mrs. De Stefano, where did you live as you were growing up?

INTERVIEWEE: In Providence.

INTERVIEWER: Whereabouts in Providence?

INTERVIEWEE: In the Annex section near Webster Ave.

INTERVIEWER: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

INTERVIEWEE: One brother and no sisters.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me the town your father came from in Italy?

INTERVIEWEE: Salerno.

INTERVIEWER: How about your mother?

INTERVIEWEE: Istga.

INTERVIEWER: Did they ever discuss to you anything about Italy? Did you learn anything about Italy from them?

INTERVIEWEE: My mother came here as a child, she was only 5 so she had all her schooling here. She was just born in Italy and was brought here when she was 5 years old. My father was about 17 when he

came here and then he sent for his mother a year after he was married to my mother.

INTERVIEWER: Did you learn anything about the town, did he ever talk about it? Did he ever talk about why he came here?

INTERVIEWEE: Well his father was here years ago and had gone back to Italy. He passed away very young so he thought he'd venture over here.

INTERVIEWER: What did your father do for a living?

INTERVIEWEE: He was a trained shoemaker so he had a shoe repair shop all his life.

INTERVIEWER: What did your mother do?

INTERVIEWEE: Well she was a housewife and she also went out to work in jewelry.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me what was expected of you as a daughter?

INTERVIEWEE: Well I had the chores to do, go to school and be a good citizen.

INTERVIEWER: Did your parents want you to have a good education?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, they would have liked to have sent me to college but they were hard times so I just graduated from high school.

INTERVIEWER: Was Italian spoken in your family or was it just English?

INTERVIEWEE: When my grandmother was living, my father's mother, we had to speak the Italian language to her. Other than that we spoke English.

INTERVIEWER: Did your parents know how to speak English before you started school?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, my mother didn't know how to speak Italian she had all her schooling here. My dad could read and write Italian.

INTERVIEWER: Do you still live by certain Italian traditions that your parents taught you?

INTERVIEWEE: I guess I'm a little old fashion in some things. I can't seem to accept certain things now a days.

INTERVIEWER: How about the holidays?

INTERVIEWEE: They were terrific when I was a little girl. The family all got together. My mother had two sisters and three brothers and we all had the holidays together.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel close family ties are important?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes I do.

INTERVIEWER: What do you feel the roles of a husband and wife are?

INTERVIEWEE: Keep a good home, be a good wife and a good mother.

INTERVIEWER: And what about the husband?

INTERVIEWEE: He should feel the same way. It's a 50:50 proposition.

INTERVIEWER: What do you feel about divorce?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, I think it is better to divorce than to live in a home where there is no harmony and your your worse off. If your going to have trouble

it isn't good for the children and your better off being separated.

INTERVIEWER: How do you feel about abortion?

INTERVIEWEE: No.

INTERVIEWER: What is your religion?

INTERVIEWEE: Catholic.

INTERVIEWER: What is your parish?

INTERVIEWEE: St. Bartholimew's.

INTERVIEWER: Have you been going to this parish for a long time?

INTERVIEWEE: I was going there when I was a little girl and after we bought this house here we wew going to St. Mathew's. I felt that I wanted to make a change so three years ago it was better that we made that change. I received my First Communion, Confirmation, and I got married at St. Bartholimew's. I felt that is where I belong.

INTERVIEWER: Did you want your son to have a good education?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: In what ways?

INTERVIEWEE: I wanted him to have a good education so he could make a good life for himself for the future. I think it's important.

INTERVIEWER: Did it hurt you in any way when he dropped out?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes because he was a good student, that hurt.

INTERVIEWER: Do you expect the same things from him that was expected of you or say your brother?

INTERVIEWEE: Well I know there are changes but I would like him to be closer to the family the way we were and still are. I don't like him drifting. Be able to confide in your mother and father, I feel that is important.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any views on politics today? Say if an Italian was running for an office, would you vote for that Italian or would you vote for the best man?

INTERVIEWEE: The best person, I don't care about nationalities.