

Maria Cavallaro

**Interviewed 6/28/2007
By Megan Zuba
Midway Village Museum**

Megan Zuba: What is your name?

Maria Cavallaro: My full name is Maria Santa [Laloja] Cavallaro.

MZ: Are you married?

MC: I am a widow. My husband passed away almost 10 years ago it will be in October.

MZ: Do you have any children?

MC: I had twin girls and one son. My girls they all graduated from Boylan, Carmen and [Vinni] Cavallaro, they're twins. That isn't their married names though and my son is Joseph Martin.

MZ: What country of origin?

MC: Sicily.

MZ: And how long ago did you move to the United States?

MC: Well, I didn't, it was my father that did. I was born here. My mother was born in Chicago but my father immigrated here in 1907 at the age of 21, and it was in 1907 that he came.

MZ: So why did your dad come do you know?

MC: It was terrible. There was nothing for them to, do, they farmed some but it was very, very hard to make a living and at that time there was an exodus from Europe to come to America and other places and he stayed until he was able to come. But I must tell you one thing at that time before they could come to America or before he could come because I have a document to prove this. He had to prove from the government from their city government, that there were no impediments why he couldn't come, criminal records or anything of that sort records of that sort that would prohibit him from coming, but it was cleared and I do have a document for that.

MZ: What did he do in Sicily?

MC: He would help herd the sheep, and they farmed and that was all there was and he comes from a very small village near Catania, and there was just nothing to do and it was very difficult for the people that lived an everyday life. So he at that time saved the little he could and borrowed what he couldn't and didn't have and did make the trip to the United States.

MZ: So did he meet his wife in the United States now?

MC: No. He came in 1907. He didn't meet her until 1916. He traveled around he worked around. My father was a very small man, 5 foot four, maybe, but he worked manually he worked very hard. He helped build bridges and build streets and all of this with a pick and shovel no big trucks and for \$.15 an hour when he came and he worked hard but he wasn't here too long before he realized that unless he learned because he didn't know the language; he did know how to read and write in Italian but not in English and didn't know the language. Furthermore, he had no relatives here he was on his own and he knew that he had to learn to read and write and he attended night school for a very short time. And then he self taught himself and he read it he wrote, and he learned the language all by himself.

MZ: How long did he take it to master it?

MC: Well that was over a series of years and he did many different kinds of work here. He couldn't seem to find his little niche. But at one point, in 1913 after six years of being here he thought it was time to go

see his family. He had a large family in Italy several brothers and a mother and a father and sister, and he did go. But before he left he was in a cart or a wagon and a horse and he was selling vegetables in Lincoln, Nebraska and he had to sell them to help get the fare to go back to Sicily and he did and he was there I don't know a matter of weeks from the documents I have, it was a matter of a month or so before he came back in 1913. The ship he came back on left from the south. He went from Sicily, and I wish I knew the route they took, but I don't, went to South Hampton England, and came to the United States to New York. He traveled on a ship that was called the, it slipped my mind that fast. It was a sister ship of the Titanic, and I do have the manifest of the ship, which lists all the ship all the people that were on the ship and where they were going and who was going and again he was alone and he did come back. And after working around again for awhile, he decided he wanted to be a barber and through the help of somebody who was mentoring him he did learn the trade. In 1916, settled in Hammond Indiana, I'll erase that, Calumet City, Illinois. Calumet City is on one side and Hammond, Indiana is right across the street so it was right on the Indiana Illinois state line and he had his own barbershop and in December of 1916. he was introduced to my mother. Now dating was not a question at the time it was unheard of. But you got people that you knew to introduce you and that was it and he got engaged to my mother on New Year's Day 1917, and they were married on April 29, 1918. My father was 31 years old and my mother was 17. She would be 18 on the Fourth of July 1918, yes. Not only was he an immigrant. He lived out of town, and she got married, and I'm amazed at myself at how they did this, but they did what they had to do at that time, and. They were married, they were married for 43 1/2 years before he passed away and they had seven children. One who passed away in infancy, so that I had four brothers and my sister. I had a sister. I was the oldest, and in 1940 my father, Calumet City at the time was a notorious city. It was not the place my father thought was a place to raise his four boys.

MZ: Where was this?

MC: Calumet City Illinois. He just didn't think we lived. His barber shop just happened to be and we lived in the same place and he decided through a friend of his who begged him to come to Rockford so he moved the whole family here. It was the best thing he could have done we loved it here. We were very happy here, he didn't have a job and he traversed this town by foot and bus and eventually built his own building on 11th St across from St. Andrew's Church and was there until he passed away.

MZ: Was that the first time he came to Rockford?

MC: No, who me?

MZ: No, your father.

MC: Well, when he when we were in decision whether do we move or not this friend of his invited him to come to Rockford and that was in 1940 and that was the first time and he came back and told us what a wonderful place it was because it was nothing like where we lived, and we liked it very much. And the boys all graduated here. I had already graduated. My oldest brother had graduated high school, but the other three hadn't yet. So they went to school here, and established ourselves very well, very, very happy here.

MZ: What was the first city that your father came to in the United States?

MC: I think it was Canton Ohio, because in Canton, there is a little colony of all these people that came from the same village that he came from and so they kind of looked over the new ones that came in, just as my dad did when he lived in Calumet City. We always had people coming in just for a night or two because they had just come from Italy, and it was the same reason they all came there was no industry of any kind so they all came. Not that they all came here some went to Canada and other places, but there was a group that came and at Canton, Ohio there was quite a few of them. But he got out and he tried everything he was a hard worker, very hard worker, and he found his way. But, but nobody ever gave him a thing he just worked for it and then he and my mother had all these children. Our house was, we were poor at that time that was the 1930s we went through the Depression and that and our house was always full of music. My mother and dad didn't play any instruments, didn't know anything about music,

but they loved it, and consequently for my sixth birthday I got a piano and that started it. And that piano, one of my daughters has it at her home.

MZ: So how old were you when you move to Rockford?

MC: I was 22 and I was working for the J.C. Penney Co. and I had worked three years in Hammond Indiana and I continued 17 more years until I got married in 1954 and then my husband thought he would like me to stay home and I loved it and a year and a half after we were married I had twin girls and eighteen months after that I had my son so we had a nice family and the Loggia family itself. Now, you got to know that when I get married in 54 I was 36 years old I wasn't a young but I had a younger sister and two younger brothers that were already married. So the family was growing all along, but I lived through the Second World War. I was working downtown, and it was very vivid in my mind, on that and all in this interim my dad he was a gentleman. Now as we were growing up, he would come to our bedroom at night and lay across our bed my sister and I and he would tell us all about this little village that he came from. Now, we had no aunts no uncles, he was alone here. We didn't know them; these people were across the water. We knew they were there. My father and his family never stopped corresponding however, continuously and he told us the whole thing well I never thought I'd get to see them since it was such a long ways away, but in 1990. In fact, that's where we were when Amanda was born. We were in Italy that was my first trip I was 72 years old when I met my first relatives.

MZ: Really it took that long?

MC: And when I got to San Cono, which was the town that he came from it was as though I had been there before; because my father had my dad explained it so well. He never forgot them. My father was active in politics. Not that he ran for anything, but he helped out in different little ways that he could. My father was an avid reader. The newspaper was very important to him and my nephew Louis Loggia has several scrapbooks that my father kept he kept scrapbooks that he thought were current events of the time and he wanted to keep him so he has those. My dad had to red leather bound very large books that I was always intrigued with and they were a pictorial review, which is the news in picture form, and I have a nephew Michael. We call him big Mike, who has those two books. My father had a very set of religious books. My father's faith was very important to him. He was a man who said you take your children to church you don't send them to church and that was very important for him. And so another niece has those books, and so it goes on and on.

MZ: That's great. Did your father know anyone that had been living in the United States before he came here?

MC: He had some friends here but no relatives. Just those in Canton. That's all he didn't know anybody else.

MZ: I know you mentioned before there was a group from Sicily did he continue ties with them?

MC: Well we went to visit them, Adolph my husband and I and my dad came with one of his friends, and this friend had a son, who became our fifth brother, because they lived in Chicago, and we just kind of grew up together. And we were very, very close and even after I got married he and his wife were friends of my husband and me.

MZ; So where did you live when you were growing up?

MC: Calumet City, Illinois, and it wasn't a very nice place. It was a place that you see, when you're on the Indiana and Illinois state line in Indiana you have the big factories, a lot of places, [(unintelligible)] Harbor, East Chicago but on Saturday nights they didn't sell liquor in those towns so these workers who had their Friday night free would all come to Calumet City. Now when they came here what I'm talking about was a three block length where there was one tavern after the other with houses in between. And my dad's barbershop in the middle of that, but my father was there 24/7 my mother was there 24/7, and there would be no hanky panky at any time with these boys but he needn't have worried because my

brothers all ended up all being musicians. And that's what my great love was and is but he was concerned that the environment just wasn't the place for raising children. And so that is why he moved.

MZ: How old were you when you moved?

MC: I was 22.

MZ: So how was your schooling?

MC: That was another thing. My father was definitely for education now when I grew up I graduated eighth grade in 1932 and in 1936 I graduated high school well in the little Italian community in Calumet City there were only three Italians that went to high school. Yeah, because at that time we had to help our parents go out to work and help our parents but my dad said oh no you're going to do it regardless of what we have to do without you will go to go to high school. Not that I fought it in any way but he wanted that and we all did graduate from high school.

MZ: So you mean most Italians didn't go?

MC: They were working, they were workaday people, and they had to have help from the family these large families and it started after I graduated. Then it seemed like everybody start going to high school, but there weren't many very many at the time of Italian heritage. They just didn't because they had to go to work and help the family. Just like after I went to work after high school I helped the family too so did my husband. Now he had immigrant parents too and he had the same background that I had except the difference was my father married my mother who was American, her parents were Italian, but she was American. They were immigrants too but in our house we spoke English because my father wanted to learn how to do it most of the time. If we got company his friends came over they would converse in Italian, and I loved it. I would rather listen to them talk and the very little Italian that I know today and am forgetting is when I listen to them talk. I didn't have any formal lessons in it. Now the difference between that and say my husband's family his mother and dad never learned to speak English, and so they spoke Italian all the time, while his sisters and he could speak Italian very fluently. So when we went to Sicily in 1990 I could never go to Sicily by myself because I couldn't converse but he was fine.

MZ: So when you were in school the people who were Italian, did you feel like you were friends with them?

MC: Yeah, there was no, no discrimination of any kind that I'm aware of, and even at that age we had black people around town that were no different than we were. There weren't very many of them and they went to school with us. There wasn't even a thought of it,

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MZ: Did you grow up with any cultural habits that your dad may have brought back?

MC: Just we kept all the especially the religious holidays that went on, and my dad was very active at church, my dad and my mother both. They were very active at church, and we celebrated the Italian Christmas, and in Rockford my husband and I were very fortunate in that we were volunteering at the Grange [unintelligible] museum and did the Italian Christmas and Christmas Eve use to be very big because we didn't eat any meat on that day. And then a big meal because families got together, we would have nine or 13 different foods, but no meat until after midnight Mass. Now in Calumet City where I grew up we didn't do this, but this was an Italian tradition and when we moved to Rockford we picked it up here. You went to midnight mass, and then you came back and you could have your Italian sausage.

MZ: So when you were 22 when you came to Rockford what did you do then, did you work?

MC: It was very difficult for me because I was out of high school. I went to work at J.C. Penney Co. as a clerk, but I wasn't a clerk very long before I went into the office where I didn't get to meet a lot of people. We had no car. There wasn't a time when there was a car that was the beginning of the rumblings of the Second World War were coming to and so the friends I made were the people I worked with and I walked

back and forth to work. It was too short a ride for a bus but a long walk for walking. But I did that and I made friends. And of course I was active in the church choir and that all the time and as I said, my brothers were musicians and they started playing at a very early age, and they were out all of them, but it was difficult for me. I didn't make many friends, they got to know a lot of people, but I had a job that I was office manager and I did, what is now called human resource work. I did that; I did all the reports I did everything and I loved it. I hired people for working and I just had a job that I loved dearly and even at the time that my two brothers then they had gone to war and came back and got married and my sister was married. I was home with my mother, there were still two of my brothers that were away at school so I was with my parents a great deal we didn't have a car. We went to visit anybody we get on the bus and go but I had a wonderful relationship with my mother and dad. It was great, and I just loved every minute my dad was so interesting. And I just clung to everything he said it was great.

MZ: How long did you work at J.C. Penney's?

MC: 17 years. I got married, and then I had my family, and that the time my girls were getting ready to graduate from Boyle and I thought I should go back to work to help little bit. And I worked part time again at J.C. Penney Co. and I was there, but in the interim from 1954 to 1973-74 things had changed so very much technology came in when I made out the payroll I had to figure all these hours that all these people worked by hand. There were no technical machines, all of that I prepared and when we paid people we didn't pay by check. I had to prepare all of the cash for all of these envelopes that had to be filled. It was a different time so when I went back in 73 it was a whole new ball game completely new. I had quite a time adjusting, but I was only working part time and after awhile I changed jobs and went to Montgomery Ward's and I was in the corporate offices of the advertising department, which was divorced from anything I had done before. And again it was a new career and I loved every minute of it. I was at that six years and it was time for us to retire.

MZ: So, you said you didn't meet that many friends when you were working at J.C. Penny?

MC: No I couldn't make too many friends, because it was a different time today you into get in a car in high school and when you don't go to high school here that's where you get to know most of your friends and I didn't see but it didn't bother me because I was and am an avid reader and that took me any place that I wanted to go. I love to read.

MZ: So do you have any friends maybe from high school that you are still in contact with?

MC: I did but the town is gone now. It isn't even there anymore. It's there but nothing is there. All of my friends are gone. There isn't anybody there that I know however I have cultivated friends through my family. I have met a lot of people and then when I got married my husband was very social. We did a lot of entertaining. We loved doing that and cooking for everybody and we always had a lot of friends.

MZ: Are a lot of them Italian or from the same culture?

MC: No at the time that we got married my husband and I his very best friend was Swedish and mine was Swedish and we've always run the gamut we've worked with everybody. We've had all kinds of people at our house.

MZ: Did you share each other's culture?

MC: Culture and everything. Yes, it's so interesting. It's too bad that people in the world can't get along; people on a one to one basis can't get along.

MZ: So you never felt unwelcome?

MC: Never at any time. However I must say that early on the Italians had a very hard time in general here in Rockford and that was before we came had a very hard time. They were not accepted. They got menial jobs. They were always hard workers and yeah there was some but I didn't see it. I never did

personally and like I said our family we had friends of every denomination and every religion and every nationality and we embraced all of them.

MZ: Were there any things that you disagreed with your parents about? Maybe what to wear?

MC: My dad and I had a very unique well maybe it wasn't unique most girls go towards their dad anyway but he and I had so many things that we agreed on. We would sit down and not on paper exactly but we would change the town around downtown. He would like this to be that place and I would like it to be the other place. Being an architect has always been interesting to me. I will take even now my son has given me several books of nothing but houseplants and I will change them. There is nothing there but I love doing that. That's the other thing. I am 89 years old now and I thank God first of all but it's active. I cannot just sit. I have to be doing something.

MZ: When did you start having children then?

MC: Well as I said I was almost 38 years old when I had my girls but I didn't get married until I was 36 but in the interim I wasn't just sitting home doing nothing as I said my parents and I did a lot of things together.

MZ: What did you do for fun?

MC: Well we had picnics that we went to. Socially my dad and my mother loved to dance. We did that, went to different social events and as the family got bigger you were getting a lot more people into your circle and events that would happen and we would take care of and as we got older Joe and I volunteered as I said at the residential home for Italian Christmas and St. Joseph. Have you seen an Italian altar?

MZ: No

MC: You haven't? You see that's the Sicilian tradition too. We celebrate that. The church is very important in our lives and has always been and that's where you do a lot of work too. My husband always said that when you don't think that you have anything to do you have too much time on your hands you go to your church. You'll always find something to do and my father was always exactly the same way but my dad and I would do a lot of dreaming together.

MZ: So do you pass on all of this special ...?

MC: Oh yes definitely I have and as I said until 1990 I knew there was Italy and these people I didn't know. Well since then with the computer I am almost computer illiterate but I can write a letter to my cousin on my computer, push a button and it reverts it to Italian so they can get it over there.

MZ: Do you keep in contact with them?

MC: I do to a point I am still computer shy is what I am but we still oh yeah and when they call usually I have this one cousin who I can't explain to anybody the feeling that came over me when I met them. All of these wonderful people and they embraced us in every possible way. This one cousin calls and I think she thinks because Sicily is here and America is here she has to shout on the telephone and she will should and she is speaking to me in Italian and I have the worst time but I get a telephone call. Now I have one granddaughter who studied in Florence, Italy her last semester, her junior semester and one morning at four o'clock the phone rang and I thought oh there's my cousin what will I say. Well I got so excited I didn't even turn the lamp on and I hurt my foot, got there and I said hello, nana it's my granddaughter. Nana don't say anything just listen. She was a St. Peters at the Vatican and she said the Pope is giving his Sunday morning address to all of the people in the square. I get the child when I even think about it. What a wonderful thing that was and to think that my father couldn't go back the years from the time he was 27 till he died he never got to see his family. It hurts me terribly even today but I thank God and since then when Robin got through with her semester my daughter and her husband and her other daughter who was already out of college and working in Chicago went to meet her but what they did

was to meet my relative first in Milan, Italy and they with my daughter and her husband went to meet Robin off the train. She came in from Florence, Italy and they were in Milan and so my daughter got to meet my cousins and to me that's wonderful. Now in Milan and [Brasia] they do speak English so it's easier there and Vinny has been back another time afterwards and I just feel so blessed but I do feel badly that my dad never did get to go back. I'm sure that he is looking at all of us right now.

MZ: Do you think that you will ever go back to Italy?

MC: Not at this point I have too many physical problems that would prevent that but if I could I would, yes but there is too much traveling and I can't even stand long enough.

MZ: How long did you stay when you went?

MC: We were there for 31 days, the whole month of May. It was shy a few days.

MZ: So you still keep in touch? Do you talk to your cousins?

MC: Yeah, they will call. I usually get there calls at 4 o'clock in the morning which is about noon on a Sunday. They'll get done and they will decide to call. It's the middle of the night.

MZ: Is there anything you want your children to know about your culture?

MC: My children have been exposed to everything possibly Italian. We have in our home a ceppo which is an Italian Christmas tree. I don't know if you have heard of it. Amanda can tell you about it. My husband saw it for the first time. I never heard about it when I was growing up and even as an adult. St. Peter's school has started to expose that and it's an Italian Christmas tree, it's a pyramid, a wooden pyramid and it has four shelves in it and each shelf has a meaning. The first shelf is the manger, God's gift to man baby Jesus and the shelf above that is man's gift from earth. It's your wheat, pasta and your wine and your fruits all of that goes on your shelf. On the third shelf are gifts from man to man. These are special gifts. My cousins give me gifts from Italy. That goes on that shelf and on the top we have a pineapple which is; maybe you'll have to come next Christmas to see it. I had all of my great nieces and nephews come this Christmas and I introduced them to it.

MZ: Where is it at?

MC: At my home. My husband and my son put it together, labor of love. So that's one thing we keep constant. All of the holidays, we are all aware of those and we just keep on. The traditions go on and on.

MZ: Have you talked to Emily since she has been in Italy?

MC: No, she won't be back until next week. I talked to her she was at the house getting some information on a relative about two weeks before she left and then we had her graduation party. We went to her graduation party and that was it.

MZ: Are there any hopes that you have for your children and grandchildren?

MC: Oh I certainly do. I feel as though America is made up of all immigrants. It's how these immigrants accept us and remember how they [unintelligible.]. As I said my father knew that he wasn't here on a free ride. He knew he had to work and he worked very hard. He wasn't part of any group that was demonstrating which you get today. He wouldn't demand or ask for things. He went out and pulled his boot straps up and he worked for it. You can't give them that. They've got to earn that and he was very proud to be a citizen. I'm working very hard right now to see if I can find out when he got his citizenship papers. I have so many things at home but the children know this. The children know all of this and the stories are endless and even now I will talk to them and I didn't know that. Well, I have a wealth of knowledge and that's all I've got. I cling to it. I changed when I went to Italy. I saw my father and what he went through and what he left. His father never saw if after he was 27 years old. He lived to be 72 and

they didn't come here and we didn't go there. Money was a big factor when we were growing up. They couldn't. Today I would have done it different; I would have begged, borrow or do something to get him there to see them but my mother never had the desire to go there. Yeah she didn't; not that that kept my dad from going but I don't know what she was afraid of going there but she didn't want to go but after I went in 1990 I came back and I told my family, my children I've got to go back and I don't know why. Now Sicily is where our roots and relatives are I named on tape. Many of my pictures are on video and I call it roots and relatives and I said I've got to go back and I couldn't tell you why. Well then we went to Sicily. We went to Milan; we met cousins. They left San Cono for the reason my dad did and they we have cousins in [Brasia]. They're all first cousins and it was wonderful meeting them and I am so happy my children got introduced to them. But in 1992 for the first time one cousin and his wife did come and they were with us for only two days because they traveled from New York to California and came back to Chicago to leave and we went back to Chicago to meet them when they were leaving for back to Italy. It was wonderful but they invited us to their son's wedding in 1993 so my husband and I the two of us went.

MZ: Where was that wedding at?

MC: In [Brasia]. It was wonderful. Just when we got into the Italian wedding where all of the relatives happened to be there from Italy and Milan. I get the chills just talking about it and everybody was so happy to see everybody and we had never met and it was great.

MZ: What was the wedding like?

MC: It was very similar to ours. It was a beautiful mass. They don't have a bridal party like we do and they had a witness, a girlfriend and something for the male. They aren't dressed up in finery like our bridesmaids are but they have that but their weddings are beautiful and this wedding was at the church and it was very nice then we went to a very nice, it was way up in the mountains over Lake [Garda] in [Brasia] and the food was excellent. It was a 4 hour dinner and in between you took time out and then went back to finish eating and then we all went to the groom's house and finished the party there and I've got that on tape and I go over that; I'm there when I do that so yes I don't think that will every die because I get excited about Italy and I think how much I talked to my father and I wish I could talk to him even more now but I was very fortunate to have him as long as I did.

MZ: So you said you guys ate a lot of Italian food. What's your favorite Italian food?

MC; Well my husband was an excellent, excellent cook and we tried everything. We didn't stick to Italian food though. We did many things. One year at Italian Festa, have you ever been there?

MZ: Oh yes.

MC: we demonstrated how to make [milke], spinach [milke] and we did the basic part at home on video and then finished them at the festa and my grandchildren passed out samples. That was one and we were great for trying anything Italian and any other good food. That's what we enjoyed doing, entertaining and cooking for friends and relatives. I had a lot of friends.

MZ: So do you feel like you made Italian food more often?

MC: No we did it and when I was getting married my sisters-in-laws, my husband's sisters said you are going to have pasta at least twice a week but then I thought we didn't do that. Sunday dinners were usually pasta but we varied that. We didn't do that. Not that we didn't like it because we loved it. We were game to try anything. I must have 5,000 recipes at home. We did a lot of cooking.

MZ: What about the current debate about immigration that's going on in this country now do you have any opinions on that?

MC: I have. I was born during World War I. I was born in April and the war ended in November. I lived through Desert Storm and all of these and Viet Nam. World War II is very vivid because I was working

downtown and I feel it I know what it was like, I had 4 brothers that went into, not all during the war but even in peace time. One of my brothers was at Iwo Jima and it was very close to home. He was gone for three years and two days and I wrote him every single night. I still remember his dog tag numbers. The other boys went into the service and again my brother [Cono] did play his instruments during war time so it was very difficult then. But my other brother, my one brother worked on RR they called it for soldiers that had been in service and they came back and put them on at Puget Sound in Washington and they would be on water and he would be in the band and they would play for them and at night they would play for dancing for the soldiers. That's what he did. My other brother was in the Marines and after boot camp he did nothing but travel around with the Marines playing for the Marines. They were all musicians.

MZ: What instruments did they play?

MC: Well they all four played base. My oldest brother, [Cona] plays everything. My other brother Vince plays only base tuba, my brother [Ange] played clarinet. He sang. He had a beautiful singing voice. My brothers all played the base. They didn't all play together. They played with different orchestras. Our house was always filled with music.

MZ: Do you still play the piano?

MC: Yes I do. I don't have a piano now. My piano is at my daughters but if I get a chance I play. I don't play for anybody else but me though. The boys play for people; I don't.

MZ: During World War II did you feel that being Italian affected you?

MC: No. We were Americans and that was it. You see I worked downtown at that time. We were effected greatly by it we had to have these stamps that we had to give out because we couldn't buy coffee; we couldn't buy rubber products but the whole I use the word timber because it's shaking, nothing was like it is today. We were very proud if our boy was in the service. We never heard of anybody going out and complaining about it nobody marching for this. They march for everything now and everybody was on the same page. We honored them when they came home and we had Gold Star Mothers. They had gold stars in their windows when they lost a son in the service. It was different. The joy that we experienced when the war was over was another great thing and when the boys were in the service the USO use to have dancing for them; it was great. I use to sing in church. My greatest recollection is Christmas Eve singing Ava Maria at Camp Grant with all of these soldiers at midnight mass. It was the most dramatic thing that I have ever been that. The choir from St. Anthony's church sang and I was part of it and I sang sol and I will never forget that. The Second World War is very vivid to me. I think the country today is in terrible shape. Nobody can do anything right. No matter what they do it's the wrong thing. There's greed. There's lies; people cheating all of the time and the worst part is that it doesn't bother them. Today it's not good I feel very badly because I've lived through it. Now a lot of people haven't lived through it don't know the difference. I can see the difference, absolutely I can. The demeanor of the people and the way the media is wrong so many times. It's sad to see what they did to New York and 9/11. It's terrible. We shouldn't have to live that way and today everybody depends on somebody else for something. Everybody's got their hand out. Nobody seems to work for anything or they work and they are spinning their wheels. I don't know which.

MZ: It seems that when you grew up everyone was so unified.

MC: Yeah but you know as I said before we were poor but you know what all of our friends were poor so nobody was trying to keep up with the Joneses. What we had we enjoyed it and that's the way it was. But it was a better time. I don't know who I was telling very recently I feel badly and now when I went to Italy in 1990 new cousins. No they weren't new cousins they were old cousins I just met them and they wanted to know all about how I liked President Clinton and how about Chelsea and what's his wife's name?

MZ: Hillary.

MC: Hillary, yeah that's right. I said you know I didn't vote for the man but I said he's my President and I will stand behind him. They don't do that today. If you can knock them down, you knock them down. You can't do that. You can't do that. They are still all human beings and I always feel if I can go to bed at night with a clear conscience and not have a bad thought in my mind I've had a good day.

MZ: Overall living in Rockford

MC: My children are all living in Rockford and now at this point my siblings, I was the oldest, then I had a sister. The sister is two years younger than I and she's living at River Bluff. She's been there six years and doesn't know anything. It hurts me so much to even think about it because we were very close and then my four brothers my next one will be 85 in August and he's still trying to play his music like he's been for 70 years he's been at it. My brother Vince passed away. My brother Angelo passed away and then my brother Sal is still here so it's my brother Sal, my brother [Cono] and I and my sister and now we see each other and we embrace and we are just happy to see each other. We're very close and their grandchildren are mine too. Yeah, we are all one.

MZ: So you've had an overall positive experience?

MC: I had a wonderful growing up during the Depression. I remember a lot of things about that. Yes it was hard and I say things that the younger ones didn't see but we were united. We all stuck together. I had a wonderful marriage. I had a terrific husband, just a terrific husband and 3 great children and my grandchildren I have 7 girls and 1 grandson and all of these people I just love them all and I think God gives them to us for a very short time but I say they are my prized possession. I don't mean possession in that way but I love every one of them. Now I have 2 granddaughters living and working in Chicago. I have one going to law school at Carbondale and Mark is working in the theater and he's in Pennsylvania right now, a dinner theater where he does the staging of it and so they are all finding their little niches and it's interesting to see all of them.

MZ: They're going to keep their culture.

MC; Yeah, it will always be there. Eventually I think by the 3rd and 4th generation it might leave.

MZ: I hope not.

MC: I hope not too but you see my family the six of us we all married somebody of the same ethnic background and the same religion. Those are two things that cause problems so many times in marriages. Well that didn't happen because we all married the same so we didn't have to explain those things we lived them. And we all lived it together. Now when the 2nd and 3rd generation who's married here and who's married there. I don't think it's bad. They bring their culture in with ours. Now when we have our picnics you don't know who is going to bring who. It's fine; come on up.