

FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY
ITALIAN-AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVE

NARRATOR: Dan Pichney	INTERVIEWERS: Vincenza Iadevaia, Viviana Pezzullo, Federico Tiberini
Place: <i>Multilingual Language & Cultural Society</i> , West Palm Beach (FL)	Length of registration: 08:27

Date: February 17, 2017

- **Name:** Dan Pichney
- **Place and date of birth:** East Elmhurst, NY, February 21, 1950
- **Generation:** 3rd
- **Family origin:**
 - **Maternal grandparents:**
 - Francesca Vitti from Putignano, near Bari (Puglia, Italy)
 - from Castellana Grotte, near Bari (Puglia, Italy)
 - **Fraternal grandparents:**
 - From Ukraine
 - From Ukraine
 - **Spoken languages:**
 - English (native language)
 - Some knowledge of Standard Italian
 - Some knowledge of Southern dialects / Barese dialect
- **Relocation in Florida:** West Palm Beach, 2005.

TIMING	TOPIC OF DISCUSSION
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00:01- 00:41	DP's origins
00:43 - 01:08	DP's visit to Putignano, Bari
01:12 - 01:46	DP's identification with Italian culture more than the Ukrainian one
01:47- 02:25	The Italian Sunday dinner
02:52 - 03:29	Learning Italian: a way to stay in touch with his past
03:54 - 04:46	DP's grandparents' stories
04:55 - 05:30	The use of the Barese dialect
05:50 - 06:26	Similarities between South Italy and South Florida
06:27 - 06:53	Pictures and objects from Castellana Grotte
06:57 - 07:16	The Italians brought their idea to America
07:28 - 07:53	The description of Italian-American basements
07:58 - 08:27	The Italian expression "La bella figura"

Key Words:

Florida Atlantic University; Migration; Italian-Americans; Putignano; Bari; Puglia; South Florida; Oral history; Customs; Folklore; Tradition; Ethnic; Microhistory; Legends; Memory; Barese dialect; Italian food; Italian Saints; Italian Language

List of the Italian Expressions and Traditions Mentioned in the interview:

Manicot (Neapolitan word for the Italian-American kind of pasta)

Professo' (Neapolitan words for professor)

La bella figura (an Italian saying that means "make a good impression")

Italian-American Oral History Archive

Interviewers: Vincenza Iadevaia, Viviana Pezzullo, Federico Tiberini

Interviewee: Dan Pichney

DP: Ah, my name is, ah, Dan Pichney. I'm a third generation Italian-American on my mother's side. My mother's, ahm, ah, maiden name was Vitti. Ah, she was Fra—, she was born Francesca, ah, Vitti. And, ahm, my grandparents, ah, came from, from, from Puglia. Ah, they spoke a Barese dialect. My, my, my grandfather came from Castellana, where, where there is, ahm, caves and grottos. And, and, ahm, my grandmother came from, ah, Putignano, ah, which I believe is famous for their Carnevale e—, e—, e—, e— each year. Ahm, I was fortunate enough to, to visit there three, uh, three years ago, and, and, and thanks to my, uh, my lovely Italian teachers I was able to communicate enough to be able to obtain a, ah, a tour of the old part of the city where my grandmother lived. And, ahm, from the president of, of the, uh, tourist association there. So it was, uh, so it was pretty wonderful.

Anyway, ahm, like I said, my name is, is Pichney. My, my, my father was, ah, ah, Ukrainian. And we actually lived with my Ukrainian, ah, grandparents. But I did not as—, ahm, identify with that culture at all, okay? Even though I lived there, I did not identify with that culture. Ahm, I was actually, uh, born in the, uh, in, in a, in a home, a two story home owned by my grandfather—built and owned by my grandfather. And up until the fiv—, the time I was four years old, five years old, um, I lived there with my Italian aunts and uncles, and then from then on, every Sunday, nearly every Sunday, we would go over to nonna's for, ah, for dinner. And I would be there with my, what came to be twenty-eight, cousins. My, uh, uh, my, my mother was one of, uh, of seven. They had one bachelor uncle, but, but all the others had, you know, families of, of three and four children, so it, it, it, uh, came to be pretty good. And, uh, we're all about the, the same age, and I was very close to them. And, uh, it was wonderful. We were totally immersed in this It— Italian culture on, on, on, on, on a, on a weekly basis. My grand— uh, parents had passed away back in the, uh, back in the Seventies. And, ahm, my mom only passed away two years ago, she was, she was ninety-four years uh of, uh, of age. And, um, we third-generation people were, we, we tried to kee—, stay together for a while, but we all sort of, um, d— dispersed. And I would always have, um...you know, at, at, at least once or twice a month, I would, I would have dreams of going back to the house where my, my grandparents were, and, and, and looking, looking down the, uh, the basement window. Ah, there would always be a little pot of, of, of, um, um, basil there in the window that she had. But, um, and I would always want to go back and, and, uh, talk to them. So, I thought that a good way to, uh, be in touch with them again is, is to, to learn some Italian, learn that part of my heritage, and then maybe in my dreams I could say a few words of, um, ah, Italian to them. So I thought that was, that was a good idea to...to make that st—, um, sort of connection. And even wi—, when my first teacher was, ahm, a, ah, a woman na—, a young woman named Marianna. And Marianna, wh—, es—, when I first looked at her, I said, "Boy, you could be part of my family," you know? Her face was, uh, was very much a, a face that I would see a— among my cous—, she could be my cousin. That, that was a, uh, a nice thing.

I have, um, a, a couple of stories, wh—, a— about, uh, my, uh, my, my, my grandparents. Ahm, my grandfather told me once a story about, uh, in Italy, that the serpents would, would, would, would come at night, and if you were sleeping with your mouth open the ser—, the serpents could go inside you. So if you suspected a person of having a serpent inside them, you would sprinkle flour on the floor, and you could see the tr—, the next morning you would see the trail of, of the serpents there. And then my, my, my grandmother, ahm, she would have these, ahm, visions. She would, she would see Saint Theresa, she would say, see, she would tell me these stor—, I would be sitting there, she would be telling, she'd see women in beautiful dresses coming by. She was like, uh, w—, w—, *Giulietta degli*, uh, s— s— *spiriti*, right? Juliet of the spirits, right? Um, so that was, that was very, uh, interesting. Ahm... [laughter]

[Sound of voices in the background, off microphone]

DP: My, uh, my grand— [laughs] My grandparents used a lot of dirty words which I can't repeat here.

Interviewers: [laughter]

DP: But my grandfather used to call me, ah, Professo', you know? *Professoro*, you know? But in the dialect, he would drop off, ahm, uh, the, uh, the last, uh, vowel. So the same thing, you know: uh, *manicotti* is manicot. Ah, all, all of that sort of thing. And we thought that that was proper Italian.

Female Interviewer: [laughter]

DP: Okay? And wh—, and you know, as we, as we grew up, you know, you would, you would, you know, you would hear on, on TV they would be selling Italian products, and, "Why are they calling it manicotti?" [using a childish voice] You know? "It's manicot!" And [laughter], you know, they, we thought that the dialect was proper Italian. Yeah. And the fact that, ahm, my teachers—um, um, um, Marianna and Enza—are from the south, as soon as I hear their voices I am taken back to, to being a child again, and I can, I can hear that, that beautiful language again.

Female Interviewer: Do you think are there any similarities between south Italy and south Florida?

DP: Well, the, uh, the, the fact that we, we, that now we have, um, uh, a number of, of, of, of good restaurants and, and, and so forth, and, uh, and, and food stores like Doris's, ah... But oth—, oth—, other than that, I think, ahm, what reminds me most of, of Europe in general is, is Worth Avenue in Palm Beach, with the Mediterranean, ahm, ah, architecture and the, ah, the, the *Vias* in, in between the, the buildings. That is, that is, that is very r—, uh, European, and that k—, that reminds me of, um, would remind me of Italy, yes. Yeah.

I have—. My grandfather, ahm, worked the crane in a, in a, in a, in a stone yard, okay? And, ahm, [laughs at an unidentified sound off microphone] Every—, when he built this house, every—, everything possible was made of, of either marble or limestone, okay? And where he was from, from, from, ahm, ahm, Castellana, ahm, that's, that's, that's what they used. So we—. Actually you see that a lot with Italian-Americans, they, they brought all their ideas from Italy over here. You would have, like, fruit trees with lime painted on them just like they did in Italy.

They would bring their culture over here, and you would see it, you know? Ah, in New York City, in the, in the, in the backyards of Brooklyn and Queens, you would, you would be reliving their, their um, um, their life.

So, um, but the object I had was a, um, was an ashtray. Ahm, they were kind of like a, uh, stereotypical, uh, It— It— Italian-American family, where all the life took place in the basement, okay? In the second floor was beautiful furniture, m— marble fireplace, ah, marble, ahm, ah, ashtray, and I have one of those little, ah, ashtrays. So it reminds of that—, where, where, where we wouldn't allowed to go. Nobody was allowed to go. I don't know who went there, or when, but all the life took place in the basement.

[Long pause] You know what, the, the, the, the, the, the ex—, the expression that I think of, you know, is, ah, *La bella figura*, okay? Ahm, my grandfather was a sh—, ah, was a sharp dresser. Ah, on Sundays, ah, goombah John would come over—sharp dresser—and that's what it reminds me of: beautiful people. Beautiful, cultured people who, um, dressed beautifully, spoke, uh, uh, beautifully. Everything about them was, was, was, was, was, was beautiful. And that's, that's what I think of, of Italy.

Audio file transcribed by Angela Riviuccio, FAU Digital Library