**Florence (Flo) Marchione Nicolella,**

Daughter of Lucido Marchione

and Angelina Vertucci Marchione

This is an interview with **Florence (Flo) Marchione Nicolella**, who grew up with three sisters on Moore Avenue near East Maiden St. Her parents – **Lucido** and **Angelina** – were natives of Acquaro, Salerno, Campania, who met and married there. They had a daughter who died unexpectedly at age 3 before they emigrated to the United States. Several immigrants to Washington, PA, were natives of Acquaro. Lucido and Angelina’s friends and realtives from Acquaro – their “paisani” -- helped them obtain passage to the U.S. and get settled.

Flo recalled that her family’s home on Moore Avenue was a popular place for friends and relatives to stop by as they did errands on foot. “My mother always had a house full,” she said. To this day, Flo enjoys when people drop in unexpectedly. “I like surprises,” she says.

Flo also mentioned an Italian immigrant – Julia DiBello – who served as a “letter writer” for Italians who could not read or write. Like many immigrants, Lucido and Angelina kept in touch with people back home through letters. In many cases, it was understood that they would not see their loved ones face-to-face again. “When [my father] got a letter, he would run to [Julia DiBello’s] house,” Flo said.

Flo also reflects on the hard work that women did in the home – making do with very little and never complaining. Her mother, Angelina, gardened, canned, cooked, baked, made rugs from rags and fashioned all manner of clothing from grain sacks. “They had a use for everything,” Flo says.

Family of **Florence Marchione Nicolella,** b. 7-11-1928, Washington, PA

**Florence’s Father**:

Lucido Marchione, b. 2-7-1890, Acquaro, Salerno, Campania; d. Nov. 1963, Washington, PA

**Florence’s Mother:**

Angelina Vertucci, b. 9-19-1888, Acquaro, Salerno, Campania; d. 1968, Washington, PA

**Lucido and Angelina’s Children:**

Rose Marchione, b. Italy; d. Italy

Louise Marchione Rotunda, b. 2-2-1920, Washington, PA; d.

Amelia (Millie) Marchione Rotunda, b. 11-1-1921, Washington, PA

Vera Marchione Barbella, b. 3-25-1925; d. Washington, PA

Florence (Flo) Marchione Nicolella, b. 7-11-1928, Washington, PA

**Florence’s spouse:**

Carl Nicolella, b. 9-1-1917, Washington, PA; d. 2012, Washington, PA

**Florence and Carl’s Date and Place of Marriage:**

3-2-1957, Immaculate Conception Church, Washington, PA

**Florence and Carl’s Children:**

Carl Steven Nicolella, b. 10-26-1959; married to Dina West Nicolella

**Interview**

**Date, Time and Place of Interview:**

May 31, 2017; 3 pm; home of Florence (Flo) Nicolella, 17 Moore Ave.

**Interviewer:**

Tina Calabro

**Others Present:**

Diane Troiano

Caroline Deluliis

**Transcriber:**

Caroline Deluliis

**Tina Calabro**: Were you born in Washington?

**Florence Nicolella**: I was born right here in this house. That’s why I don’t want to leave. I want to die here.

**TC:** Where did you get married?

**FN:** IC [Immaculate Conception Church]. Didn’t want to. I mean I didn’t want a church wedding. I was too old when I got married.

**TC:** Well, you were only 30 years old, 29 years old. That’s not old. (chuckles)

**FN:** That’s old. My husband was 10 years older than me. He was 39. That’s old. Should have had a couple of kids by then.

**TC:** What was your husband’s occupation?

**FN:** Retail Salesmen

**TC:** Where did he work?

**FN:** Nickels Bakery, then he worked for the highway department [as a] surveyor. Nickels Bakery was originally from Ohio. Don’t you

remember when we were kids they’d come with the trucks house to house?

**TC:** With their white bread. (laugh)

**FN:** That was good bread then. Not anymore. None of the bread is good.

**TC:** So, what was your occupation or where did you work?

**FN:** I worked at the Bell Telephone. Then I worked switchboard at the hospital. I retired from there…when I got pregnant I quit.

**TC:** Did your husband have any military service?

**FN:** World War II and then he was called back in during the Korean War…Air Force.

**TC:** Did he have any particular rank that you wanted to mention?

**FN:** He was a Staff Sergeant.

**TC:** What are your sisters’ names?

**FN:** Louise Rotunda and Amelia Rotunda, they married two brothers. And Vera Barbella, all those musical names.

**FN:** I had one who died in the old country. I was the youngest. I got stuck with everything.

**TC:** The one who died in the old country, was she the oldest?

**FN:** Yes

**TC:** Do you remember her name?

**FN:** Rose. You know we forgot about even putting her in any obituaries cause we never knew her.

**TC:** Your parents, Lucido and Angelina, they must have met in Italy.

**FN:** Oh yeah. They were sweethearts. How mature those women were compared to the kids today! Our parents, when they came over, they had to make do with nothing.

**TC:** So they were married and had a daughter over there?

**FN:** Yeah

**TC:** But the daughter died young?

**FN:** Well, she died when she was about three years old, but she died suddenly. They never did know what happened.

**TC:** When your parents came here, did they come together?

**FN:** No, my dad came [first]. The men came first, then they sent for their wives…

but she came after World War I because my dad was drafted. Couldn’t even speak English.

**TC:** So he came here, he worked and got drafted?

**FN:** I still have his discharge papers. They said his character was excellent. So, the only thing is, he got gassed in France. He used to tell us stories. He would be drunk and I got so tired of hearing them, I just shut him off.

**All:** (chuckle)

**TC:** Do you know what year he came [to the U.S.]?

**FN:** Well the war was over in 1918, wasn’t it? Maybe he came over in ‘16 maybe.

**TC:** Then you are saying that your mother, she had to have come over by 1919 because she had Louise in 1920.

**FN:** They got together right away…. then Millie followed fast.

**TC:** So your Dad came here. Did he come right to Washington? He knew people here?

**FN:** That’s what they did. One would come, and then they’d [follow]. He came with… probably a couple of paisans came together. How they got their money, I think all the paisans or relations pitched in for the voyage. They were poor when they came in. They had nothing. A trunk that I have upstairs. They brought food with them too, you know that?

**Diane Troiano:** No

**FN:** Yeah, my mother said they were down in the bottom of the boat with the animals. They had animals and all. That’s what they did.

**TC:** And so when your dad came here, what kind of work did he find when he got here?

**FN:** Well, they worked those foreigners like mules. They did anything they could for a dollar. His discharge papers said that he was a bricklayer.

**TC:** And did they ever tell you why they decided to come here, to the United States?

**FN:** So they could have a better life. They were poor over there, but they were happy.

**TC:** Did they ever talk about what life was like over there?

**FN:** My mother used to tell me that her mother would go begging on the doors for a crust of bread to feed her and her sister. They were poor, but they survived.

**TC:** Did your parents come thru Ellis Island?

**FN:** Yep.

**TC:** And did your dad talk about his experience coming over on the boat?

**FN:** All he talked about was the army.

**TC:** Did they have any relatives already living here in Washington?

**FN:** Oh yeah, they had the Aloias, the DiBellos, there were lots of them. The D’Augustinos, Macarolas -- you will need another sheet of paper. And then they had a lot in Pittsburgh also.

**TC:** Oh, and they had some in Pittsburgh also.

**FN:** Yeah, I liked it when they used to come to Washington. They’d talk about when they were in Italy and talk about certain people, in a good way.

**FN:** Marchese, they were all around here. You don’t have enough room on your paper.

**TC:** And they all lived around in this area?

**FN:** Um huh, and they walked around everywhere. We were like, I used to call it the relay station. They’d walk from Prospect Avenue, up the A & P, and go grocery shopping and they always stopped and visited one another. My mother always had a house full. So I like it when people drop in. I don’t like it when they call. I like surprises.

**FN:** But every Sunday they’d go to church and then they would stop. My mother would be making pasta or whatever.

**TC:** Did your parents, except for your dad going back in World War I, ever go back to Italy?

**FN:** No, my dad said he never wanted to go back.

**TC:** He never wanted to go back.

**FN:** He had a brother there.

**TC:** Did he ever get to see him again?

**FN:** No. Talked on the phone, that’s about it.

**TC:** So, they kept in touch with each other.

**FN:** Um huh, my dad couldn’t read or write, but there was a woman who wrote the letters for them, which was nice. And when he got the letter he would run to her house. It was the same thing. Everybody here is good.

**TC:** Was it a lady who wrote for a lot of people?

**FN:** Yeah, Julia DiBello, did you know her?

**TC:** No

**FN:** She used to cook the meatballs for the spaghetti dinners and that.

**TC:** So, she was the letter writer for the Italian families?

**FN:** Um huh

**TC:** That’s nice. And then did your dad keep in touch with anyone else over there? What about his parents?

**FN:** No, they were dead.

**TC:** Your mom’s parents were dead also?

**FN:** Same thing

**TC:** Did she have any brothers or sisters over there?

**FN:** She had a sister.

**TC:** Was she able to keep in touch with her?

**FN:** No, I guess when you wrote one letter it was [for the whole family]. It would say “say such and such to so and so.”

**TC:** This was the first house that they had?

**FN:** No, they lived on lower Prospect. They rented then they decide to buy. They bought this house. It’s about 100 years old.

**TC:** Do you remember what year they would have moved here?

**FN:** Let’s see. It wouldn’t have been 1925 because I was the only one born here. I’d say maybe 1927.

**TC:** What was the neighborhood around here like when you were growing up?

**FN:** Oh it was nice. We weren’t rich, but everybody took care of their properties. There were mostly Italians and they always helped one another.

**TC:** And a lot of your neighbors were from the same town in Italy?

**FN:** Just two, the woman here (pointing) and there (pointing), but there were other Italians up the street.

**TC:** From other cities, other towns. And what was the name of the neighbor who lived here (pointing) who was from the town?

**FN:** Her name was Arena, her maiden name.

**TC:** And what about the one over there (pointing)?

**FN:** Uzzo, she was a good Catholic. Those are the ones that you need to watch.

**TC:** (laughs) Do you still go to IC Church?

**FN:** I never go to church anymore. Taking care of my mother, I couldn’t go. And after she died, I thought well I would try to go back, but I got nothing out of it. I pray.

**TC:** People in the neighborhood, what did they do when they got together? Did they have parties? Did they go to each other's houses?

**FN:** They’d visit, but we had a Sons of Italy right half a block up where that transmission garage is and those apartments. And the men would go up and play cards and drink.

**FN:** Then the men would get drunk and bring their friends here like one or two o’clock in the morning. Then they had their wives get up and cook for these drunks. (chuckles). I don’t know how my mother did it. They would bring a guitar or a …

**FN and** **TC:** mandolin (laugh)

**FN:** Then my mother would get up and cook for them. They would be all drunk, getting some more wine. They made their own wine.

**TC:** The relationship between the men and the women of that generation, there was a hierarchy. The men were the breadwinners.

**FN:** They were the boss.

**TC:** The women took care of the home. Was your dad that kind of a father? Was he in charge?

**FN:** Oh yeah. He was in charge of the whippings we got. That’s what the kids need today, I think. I don’t know.

**TC:** And what about your mother? What was she like?

**FN:** Quiet, she had a hard life. All those, most of those women, had a hard life. [They’d] never have garbage to throw away. [They’d] never throw old clothes away. They had use for everything. We’d tear up old clothes and she would make rugs out of them. How she ever sewed those and washed those, I’ll never know. They were like hooked rugs, but I used to rip them and she would wrap them around the chair. And when she had enough she would make nice throw rugs. They had use for everything. No, canned stuff. They had everything in the cellar. They had a hell of a life, the women.

**TC:** You took care of your mother after she had a stroke.

**FN:** My mother always had company. [Her friends would] come up every night.

**TC:** What was a typical day like growing up in this neighborhood?

**FN:** I went out and played all the time. I was the youngest. I didn’t have too much to do.

**DT:** What did you do when you went out to play?

**FN:** Oh, we would make baseball bats, played baseball, hide and seek, hopscotch, jacks, tormented the neighbors. We always had something to do. We were never bored.

**TC:** Where did you go to school?

**FN:** Over here at 5th Ward. We would come home for lunch.

**TC:** When you went to school, did you speak Italian in the early years of going to school?

**FN:** My oldest sister couldn’t speak English when she went to school.

**TC:** What was that like for her?

**FN:** Well, it was, I don’t know, [at school] she went to the cupboard and asked for something in Italian but the teacher wouldn’t open the cupboard. She wanted bread and jelly. But when I went I could speak English. But I always spoke Italian to my mother. She never spoke good English.

**TC:** So in the home you spoke Italian primarily.

**FN:** Yes

**TC:** And your father probably had to speak more English because of his work.

**FN:** I spoke English to my father, sometimes. But he went out and worked. He picked it up. Where my mother didn’t. She had four children. She loved doing embroidery, making sheets with cut-out work on them, crocheting, but I never heard my mother say I’m tired or I’ll do this tomorrow. They just did what they had to do. They were content. Worked in the gardens, made big gardens.

**TC:** Did you have a garden out here?

**FN:** I had a little one here, but out by the railroad they had a big piece of land out there and [my father] would have a farmer come out and plow and put horse manure on it. My mother and him would go out there and work in the evenings. And my oldest sister had to watch the rest of us.

**TC:** The food that they grow, would you just use it in the home or would you sell it?

**FN:** Canned. She canned everything. With shelves galore in the cellar. Never went hungry. She made her own bread. The only thing they want to the store for was staples like flour, sugar, and they bought big [sizes] of everything.

**DT:** What was the closest store where she would shop?

**FN:** We had one, we had two here. A Paul’s and a Marino’s and then 2 blocks we had J.A. Rungos, all kinds of grocery stores.

**TC:** Albano’s?

**FN:** I never went to Albano’s too much.

**TC:** And you went to Wash High?

**FN:** Yes.

**TC:** How did you like Wash High?

**FN:** Didn’t know any better. Had to go to school. Never said I didn’t like it, just went.

**TC:** A lot of your friends would walk there together with them?

**FN:** Mm Hmm, the ones from farther away would be at the corner here. We’d go to school and would have to go back home for lunch. And then you would need to go back again in an hour. But my mother always had your lunch for you.

**TC:** So, everybody would go to their different houses to have lunch?

**FN:** Yeah, our legs would turn purple from the cold walk. Didn’t have a nickel for a street car. That’s all it cost. She’d come home and she’d bake bread. She would have pizza or she would make pizza fritta for something different. And we would grab I guess bread and pepperoni or something. Then we would be back on the road again, I used to call it.

**DT:** Yeah, that’s a long walk.

**FN:** It was. It was cold back in those days too.

**DT:** The snow too

**FN:** Yep

**TC:** How did your teachers treat you as an Italian American?

**FN:** Oh, the Americans, they treated better.

**TC:** They did?

**FN:** I think they were mostly Italian foreigners here. We never had any Polish, but they were all like Italians. You can imagine what they said about us, but I used to hate to say where your parents were from. I used to be ashamed to say Italy. I was ashamed to say I was Italian, I have to admit it.

**TC:** Why were you ashamed?

**FN:** Well, the war was on with Mussolini and they just looked down on you. We didn’t have nice clothes like the rest of the so-called Americans wore. And I remember we went to the bathroom, there was no doors on them and those little girls would have little silk panties on. I would have ones made out of sacks. I said someday I’m going to get me a pair of those silk panties. I did. Yeah, we had everything made out of sacks. There was a feeding mill over here. I still have some of those sheets in a trunk my mother had. She’d order them, they had lace around them. They were pretty.

**TC:** Made from sacks?

**FN:** Flour sacks, feed sacks. She used to boil them in lye water and they’d be like a decal on them like the one had a, I remember it had a goat on the heel. She’d bleach them in lye water and cut them up and then they would make them into night gowns. I’m not sure about what we did for brassieres, I can’t remember if I wore one early on or not. Now, I just let them hang. Nothing there anyway. But, when you got a job you went out and buy all that stuff the American way.

**TC:** How was your dad raising daughters?

**FN:** I don’t know cause we never had a brother.

**TC:** Yeah.

**FN:** He was strict.

**TC:** He was strict with you.

**FN:** When he said you be home by 9:00, you better be home. He’d come looking for you. I think they didn’t want, being that we were foreigners so called, they didn’t want their kids to get in trouble, you know. They watched the girls.

**TC:** And this was the house you grew up in? Where you actually born in here?

**FN:** Uh huh, I was born in this bedroom upstairs.

**TC:** How is your house today different from what it was like?

**FN:** Well, we have modern conveniences. We always had electricity, running water, a bathtub. I have a bathroom upstairs. There’s a shower in the cellar. There is quite a difference.

**TC:** When you walk around your house today, do you, in your mind’s eye, do you see things?

**FN:** Not anymore, I only have one sister left and she is in a home. She has dementia. We used to talk about the old times, but I can’t even talk to her anymore. Sad. She’s 95. Then, my other sister died 3 years ago. She had Alzheimer's. She was up at Southminster. That was $7,300 a month. It’s expensive. And same thing with Millie. She’d never go out to eat or anything. Saved all that money and now she is paying for a [nursing] home. I have nobody left, but we used to talk about the old times and the good times we had…

**TC:** You had an Italian neighborhood here in this part of Washington. Did you call your neighborhood by any name?

**FN:** No

**TC:** There were three different areas of Washington where Italians settled. Did Italians mix together?

**FN:** No, they sort of stuck with their own. Now if you had a foreign name in East Washington, you couldn’t buy a house in East Washington. They didn’t want no Italians over there. The old people who died…they didn’t like Italians. The doctors and the attorneys live up there … when the Americans went to Elmhurst Pool, the [Italians] had to go home. They couldn’t join the club. They couldn’t swim in that pool.

**TC:** You said your dad would go to the Sons of Italy. Did your parents belong to any other organizations?

**FN:** Well, my dad belonged to the American Legion.

**TC:** What about reading Italian newspapers or listening to Italian radio?

**FN:** My parents couldn’t read or write. My dad learned how to write his name, but he was smart though.

**TC:** Did your parents become involved in politics?

**FN:** No, strictly homebodies

**TC:** Did your parents go to church?

**FN:** Yeah, but my mother couldn’t understand. My dad, he was an altar boy in Italy. He would have mass here at home sometimes when he was drinking.

(laughter)

**FN:** Veterans Day, he celebrated Veterans Day. He didn’t need much to celebrate, him and his friends. (chuckles) His dad died on Palm Sunday, but you know Palm Sunday is not on the same date. So I go over and said how do you know what date your dad died? And he said Palm Sunday. I would say they are different dates and he’d get mad. Same thing when you said Mussolini, you better make sure the path was good to run. You couldn’t say anything [bad] about Mussolini. They liked him. He said [Mussolini] put nice streets in and everything. I said, “They hung him by the heels, too.” (laughter)

**TC:** Did your parents become citizens?

**FN:** My dad did and my mother automatically became one because he was.

**TC:** Sounds like your mother did a lot of the traditions of Italy like the cooking and gardening.

**FN:** Always, and the saint days they had. My dad was named after Lucido, the patron saint of their town. It’s the 28th of July and they had a certain type of pasta that they made with thin wire and it had a hole in it**.** But it was all homemade. They’d pull it off that wire. We had to cook that every Saint Lucido Day.

**FN:** When I [visited Acquaro], you’d hear the people calling their kids. They were still naming them “Lucido” ….

**FN:** They have a big feast there on July 28. [Someone local in Washington] would collect money from all the paisans from Acquara and send it over there and they would buy their fireworks with the money. They’d do it big time with a big parade.

**TC:** Did your parents encourage education?

**FN:** Just go to work. Go find a job, go to work. Who would have money to go to school then? Now I have three nephews and a niece who are attorneys. Times have changed.

**TC:** Is there anything else that you wanted to add about growing up?

**FN:** No, but they worked hard those people. My dad would walk from here to Canonsburg for a day’s work. He worked at the factory and I said they worked those men like mules. Worst job there was. They couldn’t speak English. And I can remember my dad going to work and the boss would take him up and they’d go up there an help build this superintendents’ home and the factory would pay for it, but I forget what they call that now.

**DT:** Illegal, that’s what they call it.

**FN:** But they’d go and work on that superintendent's house. From the factory, they would go there and punch out. But they worked them like donkeys. They looked down on you. My dad was a laborer. All of them were.

**FN:** I had girlfriends who weren’t allowed to associate with me because I was Italian. They hated Italians. [The local newspaper recently ran a series] about black hands. I knew some people who belonged to that. I used to hear them talking…. I know this one man when I got older. He murdered someone in Washington and took off for South America. He never got caught. He came back to Washington. He died here, but they talked broken and they’d say ‘Blacka’ hands. A little mafia that’s what it was.

**TC:** Did you have a little corner grocery store in our neighborhood?

**FN:** Marino’s just right across the street. Then there was John Yanni’s. Those people used to walk to A & P in town. They’d go to Yanni’s store on Jefferson Ave. They always walked and they’d stop here to rest I think. But, they never complained.

**DT:** Was there a restaurant? An Italian Restaurant? Maybe down this way?

**FN:** Cozy Cottage?

**TC:** Cozy Cottage, that was Nicolene’s (Nicolina Nicolello)

**FN:** She had the white house on Beau Street. There was a white house hotel. There was a Kroger’s and she had the White House Hotel and she built that little place over here.

**TC:** Was she a widow?

**FN:** No. Her husband died first and then she died.

**TC:** But she did a lot of things of her own, it sounds like.

**FN:** Like what?

**TC:** Like you said she started a restaurant.

**FN:** Her husband helped her. But those women worked hard.

**TC:** They did.

**FN:** I could never do that.