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Helena Venturino Howell

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RS: The name of the person being interviewed is Helena Venturino Howell, a resident of Huntington, West Virginia. Bir--, date of birth 9, 19, 1913, the date of the interview July 8th, 1974 and the name of the interviewer Roberta Smith (break in tape). Okay I'm going to address you by name at first so that they'll know and then I won't anymore / HVH: Um, mmm. / and I'll call you Mrs. Howell. Okay Mrs. Howell, start anywhere in your life and tell us anything you want.

HVH: Well I think I'll start with my father, uh, he came to, uh, New York when he was about sixteen, uh, he didn't have a mother cause she had died when he was about three and so his family life wasn't very good in Italy. But he came to the United States and stayed with, uh, some relatives in Brooklyn and worked as a pin boy in a bowling alley and somehow or other, this I never did get straight, uh, I think there were, uh, men that were gathering up these foreign people for work on the railroad so he worked, uh, and traveled oh through the greater part of the United States, I think as far west as Helena, Montana, and uh, cause he has talked about, uh, Montana, and uh, he worked, uh, laying tracks and they use to, uh, talked about, uh, their food they each, uh, either brought bought food or they'd cook I think over open fires, and uh, there was alot of Italian men and I'm sure other foreigners too. But there from the way he talked they was alot of, uh, uh, comradeship among the people. And then he went back to Italy, and uh, after he was here I think maybe a couple of years, and uh, went back home and didn't find things any better there so he came back and when he came back he went back to work on, as, uh, on the railroad gang and met my mo--, my mother's brother, and uh, in their talks over the camp fire he kept kidding my uncle that he was going to go back to Italy and marry his sister. And this is actually what happened, although at the time he met my mother he didn't know that she was Tom's sister but when my mother, when they had been married, see bout, uh, eleven months, a month before their first child was born he had to come back because, uh, he was on the list, you know, for, uh, oh what do you call it,

you know, they only allow so many people to come,
 [RS: Through immigration?] uh, huh for immigration.
 And he had to come then or [RS: Lose his . . .]
 go to the bottom of the list again. So he left her
 when she, uh, before the baby was born and he came to
 the United States and he worked and he sent her money.
 Well she wouldn't come to the United States until he
 threatened to not send her any more money so she came,
 and she arrived in Williamson with my sister, uh,
 the first child on, uh, in November of nineteen and
 twelve, as a matter of fact she arrived in Williamson,
 West Virginia on, uh, November the nineteenth, no, no
 December the nineteenth, nineteen and twelve. And
 they stayed with, uh, friends cause there was a number
 of Italian families in Williamson at the time and
 they were all very close and helped each other and
 we lived, uh, my mother and father lived with this
 family, uh, until he found her, uh, one of these
 little railroad shacks that they were renting
 [RS: (Laughs).] to the workers, uh, at the rail--,
 in the railroad. And I was the first child born in
 the United States, uh, we let--, now these people,
 these friends, Italian friends, uh, really were very
 helpful toward one another. The women acted as
 midwives when I was born, one of my mother's friends,
 uh, was midwife to my mother and mother was midwife
 to her when she had some of her babies.

RS: So having a baby wasn't a doctor type thing?

HVH: No, yo--, no you didn't have a doctor at all, uh, well
 see now when we lived in Williamson I was born there
 and a sister and a brother of course we were all
 just, uh, fourteen, fifteen months apart so we weren't
 there too long but, and then we moved to, uh, and I
 don't remember this too well, uh, I think it's just
 heresay. I know that we moved to Gary, Indiana and my
 father went to work in the mill, there again through
 friends, uh, of his, you know, and uh, and I don't
 remember much about Gary but I do remember when we
 moved to New Boston, Ohio. The first thing that I
 remember was, uh, my godmother, uh, I can still see
 her in the door of her ho--, of her home, and uh,
 she was washing clothes in a washtub and a washboard

and she had a chair laying down across the front of the door, I guess to keep her children in and I remember her picking me up and hugging me and kissing me. And I couldn't have been very old maybe three, three and a half maybe but I remember that I guess cause,

[RS: You can remember that?] yeah, I remember that, and uh, and I remember that we stayed with her until fa--, my father found a house. Now my godfather was working in Detroit Steel in New Boston, and uh, my father and my godfather, I guess laid alot of the cement there. They were good cement workers, and uh, now there was a number of Italian families in, uh, New Boston and I remember that we were all very close. We, uh, I remember my godfather coming on holidays, and uh, always giving us a money gift. See they did, they didn't [RS: Yeah.] give gifts it was either,

I can remember a little gold piece bout the size of a dime I think it was worth two dollars and a half, uh, else a silver dollar or, uh, never a gift like a new dress or anything like that, you know, and uh, they never, uh, we did not celebrate Christmas like, uh, wa--, what we would call the American people did with gifts, we never had any, uh, gifts or Santa Claus because mother always said there wasn't any Santa Claus there was, uh, uh, on the epiphany the good angel came and if you were a good girl or a good little boy he might leave you a little something but I can't remember that he ever did, you know,

[RS: Hum.] uh, and I, I can, really can't remember that we missed not having gifts like the other children did because we had such a, a good time at Christmas time, you know, it was a time of alot of fun course my mother at the time and my godmother they all lived under one roof. We had six rooms on one side of the house, they had six rooms on the other. It was completely separate but it was under the one roof, you know, and uh, see there was eventually there was

nine of us and there were, uh, my godmother had nine but she lost two (baby crying) so there were [RS: Okay.] seven of them. And, uh, my, uh, my god--, my godparents and our family were very close. We children fought but our parents never did. That, that was one thing, they never did fight, never got mad at each other and I can remember, uh, my godfather, you don't want their names

do you?

RS: Yeah, if you want to give me um.

HVH: The, the Kirsheos, [RS: Kirsheos?] uh, uh, huh, Kirsheos, they, uh, Mr. Kirsheo and my father built an outside oven. It was a huge thing because they would bake maybe three sacks of flour into bread, and uh, they fired it, uh, with wood ash, with wood and then, uh, dad and Mr. Kirsheo had made their, uh, their wives these great big long paddles, they looked like wooden rakes and they'd rake out the ashes. Then there was great big long wooden paddles, but you put the bread on, on that and stick it in this oven and the aroma was delightful [RS: I was just thinking of that (laughs).]. But you know when we were children, uh, the bread, we didn't like our bread we liked store bread, that was like cake to us, you know, really we, we really, you know, it wasn't, it was a treat for us to have, uh, a load of bread. And of course the children in the neighborhood use to make fun of us because, uh, mother baked bread outdoors in the oven but their parents use to come and buy it from us, uh, and I remember that there was alot of prejudice against the Italian people. For one thing my parents didn't speak English, uh, they thought, uh, our, the neighborhood children, uh, our friends, uh, were welcomed in our house but I can't say that we really had very many friends. I think that in that neighborhood everybody was so busy raising these large families, you know, that, uh, they really didn't, the children didn't neighbor among themselves. Now the Kirsheo and us, we lived in each others homes, you know, and Mrs, Kirsheo would if we needed a spanking when we were over there she spanked us just like my mother did her children, you know, it was just, and do you know that until my mother died, I mean when, uh, my mother died they were still very good friends. And, uh, my godmother's still lving and she's, [RS: Still living?] uh, huh, and she misses her very much but they had been friends all their lives and I mean closer than sisters or, you know, uh, than most families are. But, uh, but the children have never intermarried and that's odd but, no--, with their, their seven children and my mother's eight living

children that not a one of us married, you know, now I remember as a young girl the, uh, the Italian picnics we use to have where, uh, there must have been I would say thirty families, Italian people [RS: In New Boston?] in, in New Boston now we did not live on one street, you know, [RS: Yeah.] like you would, like, uh, I've seen in, uh, in Brooklyn, [RS: Yeah.] uh, we scattered all over New Boston, you know, but, uh, uh, I remember that we would get together at least once a year and go to, uh, Turkey Creek for our picnic and what would they do but they would build a big fire and take those big pots and have spaghetti and meatballs (laughter) outside, you know, now mother would cook the sauce and she'd have the rolls baked and the meatballs but they always cooked the spaghetti outside in those great big open pots, you know, and then they always had a spaghetti eating contest and a watermelon contest and, oh we use to have a wonderful time those were the days that, you know, that I can really remember cause everybody, uh, seemed to have a good time. Course they brought their homemade wine because everybody [RS: (Laughs).] made their wine this was, uh, uh, going thing, you know, but and they made their home brew and they took their ho--, course it was illegal but they did bring it and they did use it for their own purpose.

RS: They made their own brew at home too?

HVH: Oh yes, and bottled it in, in uh, bottles.

RS: Now they used grapes, right?

HVH: Now, now the, the wine was made of grapes, the home brew was made with this cans of malt, you know, that, [RS: Oh.] uh, uh, beer [RS: Yeah.] and we as children were always allowed to have, uh, a drink of beer and on holidays at Christmas time and Easter time we were allowed a little glass of wine to, uh, to drink, you know, as a matter of fact I remember one time my brother, Tony, uh, finished all the glasses on the table (laughter) everybody had left and he got sick but, uh, you know, it was just, uh, beer and wine and even a liquor was nothing new to us and there wasn't, uh, I don't think there's, uh, one of my brothers or sisters have, well my sisters won't even touch it and, uh, I

have two brothers that won't touch it and one will drink beer. So, uh, it's something that was common place [RS: Yeah.] and we didn't have to go out and, you know, hide drinking it because we had it at home if we wanted it. But, uh, I don't know, uh, do you want me to tell about our school life?

RS: Yeah, I'd like to especially if it's on a teacher (laughs).

HVH: Well, uh, course, uh, I had an older sister the one that was born in Italy, and uh, mother and dad didn't, uh, start her in school course my mother and father did not have any formal education at all neither one of um, uh, got to go to any school. And, uh, at that time I think going to schools didn't really mean alot to them of course they were from the southern part of Italy, and uh, only the people that had money really, uh, uh, let their children took school, but uh, they were very intelligent and they got along very well even without the formal knowledge that they had. But, uh, I remember when my sister Teresa started to school we lived like I said in New Boston right across the street from Staten Avenue Elementary School well my sister started to school I cried so that mother said, "Well go," because I wanted to go with her. So I wasn't quite four years old when I started to school, [RS: (Laughs).] and uh, in the second grade I remember that, uh, Mrs. Monis, uh, took me home across the street to my home and told my parents that she could not promote me because I was so young they were afraid they were going to get in trouble and I cried so because I really wanted to go to school that the following September, uh, my father had to take me by the hand, take me back to school cause I didn't want to go back in the second grade. But I graduated then in nineteen and twenty-nine and if you don't mind I'll inject this I graduated as valedictorian in the class at the age of fifteen, [RS: Wow.] but uh, because now I, and I think really it was because I started to school so young, you know, now the rest of my brothers and sisters of course by that time the law had been passed that you had to be five, you see that's why

they kept me back. As a matter of fact I remember one time, uh, the school nurse examined me and she asked me my age I told her, she said, "Well did your mother, uh, take you off the bottle and send you to school," (laughter) but uh, now of course the, most of the Italian people did not believe in, uh, much education for their daughters but they did for their sons, now my three brothers did graduate from high school my, uh, three younger sisters did not. My older sister married when she was, uh, in the seventh grade course she was older she was, uh, well they took her out of school before she got married, but she married and she was about seventeen and she married the son of, of a family in Williamson because the boy's parents, uh, his mother especially, uh, liked my sister Teresa and had decided from the time that they were young children that they would marry when they grew up and they had always made it a point to stay in contact with us because, uh, even after my parents lived in Portsmouth and they lived in Williamson when any of the children were born, uh, Mrs. Pasqualie came to the, be there for [RS: Really?] yeah, oh yes and mother always went there to, uh, because Mrs. Kirsheo would take care, uh, you know, my parents, uh, my brother, me and my brothers and sisters while mother would go to the Pasqualies to visit. Of course by that time my father had left in the mill and had gone to work for the N&W and they had passes which made it easier for them to go back and fourth but, you know, it use to be in, uh, the early days that parents did make, set up the marriages for their children but starting with me they didn't, [RS: Your's wasn't set up?] no, but the funny thing was that my sister and, and this, uh, young man really fell in love, uh, because my father had, uh, set up a marriage for her with an older man and she wouldn't because she had, uh, really was in love with this young Pasqualie boy and they were married, and uh, and had two sons that are doctors as a matter of fact, [RS: That's the uncle that you know?] yeah, uh, course this sister is dead, uh, now when my mother, uh, and Mrs. Kirsheo, uh, you can't talk about one if you don't talk about the other because, you know, we were just together all the time, uh, in these six rooms, uh, three rooms downstairs and three rooms upstairs, uh,

Mrs. Kirsheo kept boarders, my mother kept boarders and they not only washed their clothes but they cooked for them and each morning or the evening before the boarders would tell Mrs. Kirsheo and my mother what they wanted to, to eat the next day and [RS: And they . . .] they would buy their own food and their food was made, was cooked separately they never ate with the families like you do in the boarding house, you know, [RS: Yeah.] where the food is all put out no, that was never done [Unknown voice: Take too long.]. But, uh, uh, I think it was either two and a half a week or something like that but they got all of this and this is the way they, uh, more or less got their income, you know, by baking bread and by, uh, keeping boarders, and uh, and I can remember mother with (baby crying) all of this she still crocheted lace curtains for all our windows. She crocheted, uh, the old fashion yokes that we use to wear on our slips, she use to sew make our dresses they were very plain little dresses but at least she did do um and how she found the time I don't know, cause they washed on their little board, you know, washboard, boiled their clothes on top of the stove and then took um down, took um out and washed um again, had the whitest washes in the country (laughter). And that's the truth because people use to stop and they'd see the clothes hanging out on the line and want to know if they would wash, you know, if they took in washing course they, they saw so many clothes hanging out there, from the boarders and the family, (laughter) you know, [RS: Yeah.] that they thought that they were taking in washings, but uh, they never did it was just their own that they, they really knew how to get the clothes pretty and white without a washing machine. I guess mother had about one of the first washing machines that, uh, but she didn't like it she still boiled her clothes and rubbed her clothes, uh, on the board. It was the kind that you attach to the sink and draw water, you know, pump the water in, in that way, [RS: Yeah.] washing machine.

RS: I think they're still around, they're antiques now.

HVH: Yeah, I wish we had some of those antiques that we had, I can remember some of the tables that we had, uh, one especially it was a round table with up high like boarder

and then it had, uh, these claw feet with the crystal ball, I don't know whatever happened to it, you know, but the old flat irons I can remember ironing by the hours clothes with the iron that you heated on the stove, you know, but now Bobby is there anything that, I'm just more or less just talking.

RS: I know, I'm enjoying it (laughter).

HVH: But is there anything especially that you want to know about, uh, see all I know the, our people came from the southern part of Italy it was just a little farming, uh, area their home, this village that they came from was really on top of a mountain and they, uh, mother and dad had a little vineyard there which they eventually just turned over to some of my mother's family but, uh, I've often wonder why they didn't settle in vineyard country, you know, something like California, / RS: Yeah. / I don't think my father got to California I think the farthest west he got was, uh, Montana, you know, and of course they followed the railroad any, any, any place that they could get work as laborers because that's all they could do, you know. Now I'm sure that later as, uh, people from the so--, from the northern part of Italy that had more education came to the United States and I think they settled in, uh, parts of the country that was more like Italy but, uh, the people, our relatives and our friends really, uh, settled wherever they could get just hard old laboring work, uh, I can remember as a child that we lived in a neighborhood, uh, well just an ordinary neighborhood, alot of children in that block there was, uh, which is really about two city blocks long, uh, there was over a hundred children, and uh, we use to have fights everyday because we not only were Italians and they called us honkies which we objected to very much, and uh, we were Catholic and of course this was the little town that had no Catholic church, no Catholic school, uh, our parents could not afford to, the nickel a piece for the, the, uh, streetcar to go to Portsmouth to school so we went to public school. And, uh, like I said these children, uh, our neighbors, uh, were throwing it up to us all the time, you know, and the fact, uh, uh, that our parents could not speak good English and we

were in fights all the time over it, you know, but, uh . . .

RS: Were those mostly city people or were they people that had come from the country?

HVH: Uh, these were, uh, well as my father use to call um, he use to call um Kentuckians, [Unknown voice: Kentuckians.] yeah and said they didn't know any better, "That's what," he says, "They're from Kentucky they don't know any better," (laughter) which, uh, was prejudice in a way too, but uh, they were just people that worked in the mill, their parents worked in the mill because that mill in, in Kentucky that was the two main things there. There was a few that worked in the shoe factory but they were, uh, Italian people that had done that type of work in Italy and there was quite a few of them that worked in the shoe factory and they were expert, uh, shoe man I guess you would call them beca--, er, uh, [Unknown voice: Cobblers.] cobblers, uh, huh, because they, uh, as a matter of fact we had a distant cousin by, uh, whose name was Jim Terino that, uh, was a very good cobbler and worked, uh, at Selby's shoe factory, uh, my, I had two brothers that worked at Selby's, uh, when they, when they were young, uh, then of course Selby's closed and I had three brothers that, uh, served their country, uh, in the, uh, second World War. One landed at Iran and was in the African invasion and then he was, uh, at Anseo, uh, on the beach at Anseo he, uh, had planned to go see, try to find his relatives, our, our relatives in the southern part of Italy but he got to come home on a rotation furlough and he either had to stay there and look up his relatives or come home and he decided to come home [RS: I don't blame him.] (laughter). He had, uh, he had, uh, won the silver star, no I'm sorry not the silver star, was a, was a bronze metal of some kind, I've forgotten what it was but he did have the oak leaf cluster. He had, uh, he was injured three times [RS: Um, mmm.] and not seriously he was in the hospital one time that I remember, uh, a few weeks but, uh, I know that he has the oak leaf cluster, two of um. And, uh, then my brother, Tony, uh, enlisted before the war and he was sent to Panama, Panama before the war and he was there all during the war. And then my brother Joe, uh, see he left in July after the war was declared and he was with Patton, and uh, thank

God they all came home safely, as a matter of fact I think that was due to my mother's prayers because she had, uh, made a pledge that if the boys came home safely that she would go to all of the Italian people, uh, her friends and, uh, not so close friends and, uh, to beg for money to be sent to Italy for masses to be said and for a donation to their little church in this little town where they lived and she kept that pledge and she did do it, and uh, I'm sure it was her prayers and that and, and we children course, uh, we children weren't raised up, uh, raised as Catholics, you know, we were baptized, we went to church at Easter time, at Christmas time but we really did not have a good background, not a religion. My mother when she was a young girl she said she never went pass the church in their little town what she didn't stop in, you just dropped in made a visit, you know, [RS: Yeah.] but when you're in a foreign country you can't afford to go to church, you know, and nobody had cars in those days, you know, you, you went by streetcar and it cost you money to go and you just couldn't make it that's all, but they did make it for baptism, we always had a big, uh, uh, celebration for baptism, and uh, a big celebration for weddings as a matter of fact my sister, my older sister when she married the Pasqualie boy from Williamson it was three days and then the whole family went with her to her new home in Williamson [RS: They went with her?]. They went with her, (laughs) that's true, uh, huh, course we stayed with the elder Pasqualies but can you imagine taking on the train both fares both those trips, and uh, (baby crying) and I can remember as a young girl the good times that we had with the boarders that mother kept, they were mostly young men that had come here from Italy see. Most of um went back to Italy and married there but they use to play the mandolin and the guitar and my daddy he'd sing just with his mouth he could make sounds like he, uh, like a trombone and all and he had a pretty good voice and, uh, on these, uh, holidays they would get together and they would play and we would dance, the children as well as the grown ups, you know, [RS: Yeah.] and really they, they were the fun times, you know, [RS: Makes you . . .] and I can remember in 1918 I was only five but I remember this very well because it was Armitise see, and uh, everybody was shooting guns and in our house and in my godparents house there was dancing

going on all night because they were so happy that the war was over because there was a lot of prejudice against the Italian people even, [RS: Now that was World War I?] World War I, [RS: Yeah.] yeah, you know.

RS: Did you feel that prejudice during the war in New Boston?

HVH: Uh, yes, well I was too young, the only thing I remember about that was, uh, uh, I, uh, here as a matter of fact when (break in tape). Now is this . . .

RS: It's on, yeah.

HVH: We moved to a new home, and uh, I had a hard time making up with the neighbors and, inside of it, uh, and later I found out that they were afraid to make friends with us because, uh, I was Italian and we were at war and they thought that I might be an enemy agent and you wouldn't (break in tape).

RS: Okay, let's see . . .

HVH: Where was I (laughs)?

RS: We were talking about, [HVH: The prejudice.] yeah.

HVH: Well I told about the neighbor, [RS: Yeah.] we didn't get to be friendly till way after the war was over. Because, uh, she thought I could be a spy, yeah, with three brothers in the service I could have been a spy. But anyway, uh, would you like to hear about, uh, our feasts, [RS: Uh, huh.] our holiday feasts?

RS: Oh yes.

HVH: You know, uh, it was a funny thing, uh, we, uh, on Easter or on Christmas it seems like our parents went way out, you know, uh, had everything. I can remember our Christmas feasts. We would sit at the table for two hours or longer because, uh, seems to mean like I remember mother cooking for days, you know, and uh, we would have first of all minestrone soup made with, uh, chicken and pork, little meatballs, endive, cabbage and just, oh it was delightful. Then you had your spaghetti and your meatballs and you had

the rolled steak, you had stuffed eggplant, You had, uh, french fried cauliflower and broccoli and in those days, you know, you didn't get cauliflower and broccoli like you do today, uh, these were, uh, that, my father bought them at, uh, an Italian market and they were very expensive but this is it see, you didn't have toys and things like that but you had this feast, uh, and uh, all different kinds of, uh, salad ingredients and fruits. After the meal was over, see the, the table was cleared and that's when you got your, your, uh, nuts and the Italian fruitcake and your little glass of wine and you would sit at the table and crack the nuts and eat the fruit and eat the cake and just sit there and talk for hours. And I can remember the first time that, uh, my husband to be, well my husband now, but he was a young man I was going with, uh, first time I, uh, invited him to my home to dinner was Easter Sunday, and uh, there was so many of us because mother had invited other guests. We had two big long tables, one in the little dining room and one in the big dining room. All the grown ups set in the big dining room and the children ate in the little dining room, (baby crying) and uh, one of the first things (laughs) that we had on the menu was, uh, these different little hors' d'oeuvre like and there was anchovies, [RS: Anchovies.] anchovies, and of course my husband, uh, my boyfriend at that time, uh, didn't know, even know what they were but he was, uh, willing to try anything and he kept telling me later he had a terrible time getting that anchovy down (laughter). And then of course we had chicken soup now he liked that fairly well. And then spaghetti, (baby crying) and of course he was handling his fork and everybody was watching him and watching how he was going to eat that spaghetti (laughter) and he didn't miss the bowl (laughs) but, but he, uh, is a great big spaghetti eater now. But, uh, he always talks about that first time that he came to my home for dinner and had to eat spaghetti in front of all those Italian people, (laughs) uh . . .

RS: Now he was in a whole different ethnic origin.

HVH: Oh yes, he's, uh, his, well of course his people, uh, had, uh, I guess they had been here for generations, uh,

his father, uh, course being Howell is English, there was a little indian blood somewhere along the line, and uh, his mother was German, uh, origin cause she was a Hoffman, and uh, and of course they were very, uh, talk about prejudice, uh, it was great there because they, uh, he was, their, their family was not Catholic, they were Protestants, and uh, I was the first Catholic person they knew and the first Italian person they knew / RS: Oh wow. / they were very much against the marriage. Uh, as a matter of fact I think the morning that we were to be married, uh, why my husband's father tried to talk him out of it. But, uh, we (baby crying) were married in, uh, St. Mary's Church in Portsmouth, uh, my husband, uh, did not have any religion really, uh, he did not, had never been baptized and he did join the Catholic church and this is one of the reasons they were so against it, uh, and the fact that they just did not understand Italian people, you know. And, uh, but my father-in-law, uh, changed his views because he, before he died he told me that, uh, he thought alot of me and I'm very proud of that cause, uh, I think and my mother-in-law did too, or she just died, uh, well a year ago this month, and uh, she, while she was ill she, we went to see her quite often, and uh, she always asked about me and wanted me there. So, uh, see I think when people learn about people, uh, other people I mean oth--, different countries, different religions, uh, they change their views really. It was hard at first and I could have, uh, probably, uh, caused alot of trouble between my husband and his family because he really didn't want, did not want to go back, but uh, I thought that that wasn't the thing to do and I'm glad that I made that decision because, uh, my mother-in-law was very good to me after she got over the initial shock, (laughs) you know, and got to know me better really because you really don't get to know a person, uh, that well before you're married, I mean we use to go to her home but everybody was on their best behavior, you know, and uh, not until I married her son and she saw that he was happy and that, uh, I gave her two lovely granddaughters well then, you know, she changed her mind, and uh. I don't know is there anything else you want to know about me?

RS: I'm really interested in, uh, what the schools were like, you know, the type of classes.

HVH: Well the schools, I remember the first grade, uh, as, as I said my mother said to me, uh, to me, "Go to school," not thinking that they would keep me, you know, she thought probably they'd send me back. But the first grade, uh, was very crowded. They was two children in a, in a seat, you know, and I can see now why after my first year there that they had started this law that you had to be at least five before you could go to school, and uh, the school was crowded. We had, uh, I ca--, the teachers was strict. They carried, uh, either a ruler or a paddle, and uh, you learned everything, you know, you had to learn everything by heart that, uh, I don't remember the classroom being that crowded and I don't, uh, but there was only one, uh, class to a room, you know, we didn't have two first grades or three first grades, / RS: Yeah. / and two second grades. We had large classes and the school that I went to, I went, uh, to Staten Avenue School through the sixth grade. As I said I stayed in the second grade two years. When I was in the fifth grade they wanted to promote me to the seventh, but uh, the principal wouldn't allow it because I was as I said young. Then we went to, uh, I went to Glenwood High, uh, my junior high, now this was seventh and eighth. High school consisted of ninth, tenth, eleventh, twelfth. Now when I was, uh, uh, in nineteen and twenty-eight we moved to, from New Boston to Portsmouth well that meant I had to leave high school and go to Portsmouth High. Well I enrolled in Portsmouth High and I didn't like it I'm sorry to say and I cried and begged so to go back to Glenwood that, uh, my mother allowed me to go and live with my godparents. And I would go on Sunday night by, uh, streetcar, uh, to my godparents home and stay there till Friday after school and I went home again by streetcar. And uh, mother told me I could do that. Well we moved in April so I finished that school year at Glenwood and then the next year mother said now you can go one more year and that's it. So when I told my teachers that they checked my record and I had enough credits that I could, uh, if I doubled up I think I had two classes to take. And everybody all the teachers were so kind they, uh, I had, uh, I can't remember how many periods. I think we had seven periods, it's been a long time ago and I did not have a class, you know, study hall period at all, had all classes. And so I was a junior

and got to graduate with the senior class because mother said this is it, if you don't go to Portsmouth next year, Portsmouth High School, you, uh, quit, you know, and I did want to graduate. And so, and the kindness of my teachers they were very good to us, uh, and I thought it was very, I thought it was great that they would take the time cause we had, uh, I remember Mr. Rankin he was the coach, he had a special class for, there was three or four of us that were taking this one class in American History so, and I had to have it to graduate. Another one was a civics class and I had to have it to graduate. I had enough credits or points but I had to have these two classes, and uh, you know, that, uh, it took their time, [RS: Um, mmm.] uh, to see that we got these so that I could graduate and I did graduate in nineteen and twenty-nine. Then because I was so young I couldn't get a job and it was during the depression, you know, uh, I remember that I wasn't sixteen, and uh, I couldn't find work anywhere so I finally landed in an orange store. I worked from eight o'clock till, uh, I think it was six or seven and I worked for a dollar a day. I worked six days a week I made six dollars a week. Then when that little place closed down I worked for the A&P store. We worked from nine o'clock till ten o'clock on Saturday for two dollars a day and after the store closed we had to restock the shelves, tear down the windows, you know, the display window, sweep the store before we got to go home and we weren't paid any extra for the overtime. And that was two dollars for working on Saturday, and uh, then I got full time work and I started at ten dollars a week and when I got married I was making twelve dollars a week. But, but, uh, I can, uh, remember that, uh, the store manager always said that, uh, no one could sweep the floor like I could and I told him that if he had a mother like mine he would've learn to, (laughs) [RS: Yeah.] to sweep well too because I can remember that was my job to sweep the dining room because we had, uh, linoleum on the floor had, and we ate at, uh, like a tressel table with benches, it had benches on either side because, uh, and you just set on the benches and ate. And of course with that many children you had to sweep that floor every, (laughter) everytime you ate, you know, and if there was any crumbs on the floor I had to sweep it until it was swept clean. So, uh, even though we were a big family, you know, we, uh,

mother saw to it that we knew how to do things and do it, do it well, uh, I can remember . . .

RS: Were you courting at this time?

HVH: No, we were not allowed to date. I can remember (laughs) but, uh, I was working but I wasn't allowed to date. When I was in high school I could never go to any of the parties, uh, Italian people didn't allow their children to do that, uh, I remember that I got to go to the junior-senior prom because the son of an Italian family, he went to school with me, uh, his name was, uh, Bleshie, uh, they, this boy had been in Italy, he'd gone to school there he was an only child and his father was a foreman in the mill. And he had been to Italy, he'd studied in Rome and when he came back, uh, home they, he, to finish his high school, uh, they asked me to help him and he would come over home and I would help him with his, uh, well he come over to my godparents because at that time I was with my godparents that last year of school, you know, and the, uh, when I got to graduate, uh, Sam went to my parents and asked them if, uh, if he could go to the prom, uh, not to the prom because we did not have proms then. We had a banquet and then we all got to go to the movies, you know, that was our, uh, junior-senior prom as you call it today. But, uh, uh, and so he took me, uh, to the dinner and to the movie, and uh, that was the first time I ever ate strawberry shortcake and I'll tell ya I didn't like it (laughs) then because it, to me was just soggy cake, you know, but uh, uh, when I was in high school, uh, I said we were poor but really I don't think we realized that we were poor, you know, as such because we always, uh, had enough clothes, uh, I'm sure they weren't, uh, very modern clothes, uh, in, even in those days because mother made some of our clothes, and uh, uh, we always had enough to eat and we had alot of love, you know, so we really didn't realize and then we were in a neighborhood where everybody was more or less, uh, on that same order. Why I remember when I was in high school my junior year which turned out to be my senior year I had three dresses, uh, I had made them myself, and uh, that's all I had to wear and you washed um out and wore um and you wore a clean dress everyday, but uh, then when, uh, I graduated I was valedictorian, and uh, I guess my godfather went to my

father and said you know that's quite an honor for her and so my father borrowed the money to buy my, uh, uh, the banquet dress and my graduation dress. And I really thought I was something but now, you know, for a man with a fam--, with nine children to raise, uh, you know, that he, how highly he felt about to go and borrow the money because that is one thing my father always taught us, never make a bill that you can not pay for, and uh, practically the last words he told me before he died is, uh, to see that all my bills are paid and he said I don't want to die owing anyone, and uh, this is one of the things, well one of the many things that they taught us, uh, was to be kind to our neighbor and to our friends and even to everybody and I don't know that my mother and father ever turn anyone away from their door they use to, use to feed everybody that came to their door, they never went away hungry. As a matter of fact I remember one time, uh, this, uh, man came to our, came to our back door and mother had fixed him a plate of food and homemade bread and my brother, well my older brother happen to come home and saw the man sitting out there eating and he went in and he says, "Why are you feeding that man, mom?" And she said, "Well he was hungry." Said, "Hungry, he's drunk and he lives right up the street there," (laughter). And he was, he was a man that lived on, uh, the same street that we lived but she could not turn anyone away, uh, she had only, one brother, and uh, he was a bachelor lived in Chicago, and uh, when he broke his leg she sent two her children to Chicago to go and get him and bring him home. And, uh, she took care of him, I mean this is, everybody, you know, they took care of each other, and uh, I think mother and dad would have given anything they had to anybody that needed it. And, and I, you know, really mean that because I've seen um do that, I've seen um, uh, take in, uh, as a matter of fact my mother wanted to, to uh, adopt, uh, a godchild who had lost her mother. Now she had nine children of her own but she was willing to take, she wanted this little godchild, uh, when her brother was killed in Italy and left a little boy, uh, she wrote she wanted them to send her the little boy she was going to raise him, they wouldn't do it but she would have done it. And, uh, when she came from Italy her father came with her, uh, because, uh, in those days times were very hard, and uh, my god--, my grandfather could not make a living in Italy

cause he had, uh, they had, uh, he had remarried, my mother lost her mother when she was two years old and then he had remarried and he had a bunch of children with his second wife and to make a living he came to America with my mother and he worked in the mill with my father and he lived at home with my mother and father, never paid a penny, you know, but sent his money to Italy to his wife and his children. As a matter of fact my grandfather died in our home and I can still, well as a matter of fact I use to go, and uh, there was a special kind of money order that you could send to Italy, and uh, they use to send money there to the family all the time. Even [RS: Yeah.] with the family that they had of their own, uh, course we've had some hard times. I remember when my brother, my youngest brother, uh, the one we lost when he was eight years old, he died of lockjaw, and uh, at that time, that was in nineteen and twenty-eight, was just a few months after we moved in, moved to Portsmouth, and uh, at that time lockjaw, uh, I think tetnus was just out, it was just being used because I remember, uh, that the doctors told my father that they would give him a massive dose of this but it would be very expensive and of course he said anything and I can remember for months making that long trip, which must have been at least two miles, I was bout fifteen or sixteen year old girl to that drugstore to pay for that antitoxin but I can't remember now how much it cost. But it, I know that it took them months to pay that bill, and uh, ev--, every payday just as faithful as they could be Helen had to go to the drugstore (laughter) to pay that bill, but uh, this was the type of people that they were, uh, most of the Italian people that I knew, you know, and was brought up with because in their own way they were very proud, they didn't want to, uh, owe anybody and they were always willing to help anybody that needed help, uh.

RS: When you came to Huntington, when was this?

HVH: In nineteen thirty six.

RS: Cause it, was it alot different than it is now?

HVH: Oh you tell you, I was, uh, the eldest my older sister

had been married for a number of years, I was the eldest of, uh, eight children at home and here I come to Huntington and lived in two rooms like housekeeping rooms I nearly died, uh, you know, I, my husband didn't want me to work and I, well I just, I walked the streets actually, (laughs) you know, and, / RS: For something to do? / uh, huh for something to do, uh, I really should've gone to work but, uh, uh, or gone to school, you know, because that's what I should have done but I didn't, uh, I, uh, didn't go to work till after my children were in school and then I went to work after seventeen years of married life and I'm still working, but uh . . .

RS: Did you, uh, I can't picture Huntington in 1936.

HVH: Well really there were, well there's been alot of changes but really not that great, Marshall has grown alot and, uh, we have grown out just all these new additions, you know, to Huntington just like the one that we live in, and uh, of course I'm working right around the corner from the very first, uh, little apartment that my husband and I lived in when we first came to Huntington. Course he was from Sciotoville which is a suburb of Portsmouth, and uh, he came to work here in Huntington in June and we were married in November. We didn't know anyone in Huntington, I didn't know a soul here, and uh, he was working long hours and of course, you know, in thirty-six that's when, uh, social security went into / RS: Uh, huh. / effect, as a matter of fact I never worked under social security cause I think it went into effect, uh, January thirty-seven and I, uh, no, uh, quit work in November of, uh, thirty-six so I didn't work under social security until, uh, nineteen, and uh, fifty-three when I went to work for Andersons and I worked there for a year and then I, uh, went to work for the doctors that I'm working for today, but uh, there's been oh a number of changes I remember that we lived in this little apartment and it was so hot and we would go to the cemetary and (laughs) put our blankets out and the ground, / RS: On twentieth street? / huh, / RS: On twentieth street? / uh, huh, and uh, you know to get a breeze because it was just so terribly hot. Now here in Huntington I have not met, uh, many of the Italian people, uh, and I don't really know why, I think it's because, uh, you really don't know the Italian

people because just like myself how, who would take tha--, you know, take me to be Italian as a matter of fact I tell people that I'm Italian they wouldn't believe it [RS: Yeah.] you know, and uh, but now I can remember oh that just reminds me of when I was a young girl, uh, the old--, the elder Italian people, uh, the men had what they call the Italian American Club and it is still, you know, it's still running course most of the old men are gone, their sons are members of the club. But I remember that the, uh, the girls my age, uh, we decided that our fathers had this club we would have a club of our own so all the young girls got together and we had what you would call a minor club and this club, now the older club, uh, they would have, uh, picnics and dances with all the Italian people got together, and uh, it really was great. Now I understand there's an Italian American Club here in Huntington but we have never, uh, well I don't know that we've ever been asked because I've never really mixed much with the Italian people course here in Huntington again, you know, a few of um but you live in so many different parts [RS: Yeah.] of, uh, Huntington, you know, that we just have never, uh, we don't belong to the club and I know, uh, a few of the Italian people but I know there's alot more and especially since the glass factories, you know, cause many of the Italian people have come with Novamont and [RS: Yeah, that's Italian born, isn't it, Novamont?] yes, Novamont is Italian born. Now I have met a few of the people there socially, you know, and uh, I'm sure that if we belonged to the American Italian Club that, uh, that we would meet alot more of them. I know a number of Italian people but like I said I really don't know them that well (break in tape).

HVH: . . . high school mother and dad did realize that it was an honor for me, of my being valedictorian as a matter of fact they didn't even come but my godfather went and the boy that took me to the prom. But years later when my brothers graduated from high school mother made it a point to go because by that time she realized [RS: Valedictorian.] that it was an honor and education meant alot to them, see they realize because when, when my, uh, older sister's sons went to college, see her

oldest sons, uh, graduated from high school when he was fifteen, he was valedictorian of his class, he went to medical school, he graduated at twenty-one got his MD at twenty-one, he has the key, he's a surgeon now. The other boy graduated from high school with honors he is, uh, a gynecologist and a, an obstetrician see, well by this time they had realized the importance of, uh, education. Oh and I'll have to tell ya about mother, is this on, this is on, well I want to tell ya about mother when, uh, during the war, you know, uh, she decided that she should become a citizen of the United States, [Unknown voice: Which war?] the second World War. Her sons were over there in service, and uh, she decided that she better become a citizen so she went to classes. She learn to write her name, she learn to read, uh, a first grade reader, she learn to read, and uh, she, we gave her out these questions, you know, oh so many questions and she did a very good job. But when she, uh, when it was time for her to go to the courtroom to get, you know, to be examined for, uh, citizenship, uh, Judge Vernon Smith was the judge, the presiding judge. And Vernon Smith was my seventh grade teacher and he had taught my brothers, he knew the family, he had eaten some of our bread, had eaten some of our spaghetti and probably some of our wine I don't know, but I, I think so. But anyway, uh, he was so proud of mother when he knew that she was there and he had known the family for so long that he called her up and he seated her to his left, when he was on the bench. And he asked her one question, uh, the colors of the American flag and of course she said red, white, and blue, and she passed. And then he gave a little talk about, uh, the family, he talked about mother and dad and the fact that they had three sons and two son-in-laws in the service, and uh, how they, how well they were thought of in the community and how much, uh, and how, uh, their children never got into any trouble and all of this, and uh, we always thought that was great that Judge, that Vernon Smith, uh, did this to her and asked her the one question and said that he thought she deserved to be a citizen of the United States and she was so proud of that, she was so proud [Unknown voice: Grandma and grandpa both were proud of their citizenship.] citizenship, oh yes cause they had [Unknown voice: Framed.] um framed with their, with that little picture and it was, both of um looked like convicts, (laughs) really they did, they (break in tape).