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Luigi DiTrapano

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MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

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ORAL HISTORY

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Date June 10 - 1982

Luigi DiTrapano
(Signature - Interviewee)

7308 Kan Blvd E.
Address

Charleston, W.Va

Date June 10 1982

Amelia Di Crapanzani
(Signature - Witness)



MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY OF APPALACHIA

HUNTINGTON, WEST VIRGINIA 25701

The Marshall University Oral History of Appalachia Program is an attempt to collect and preserve on tape the rich, yet rapidly disappearing oral and visual tradition of Appalachia by creating a central archive at the James E. Morrow Library on the Marshall campus. Valued as a source of original material for the scholarly community, the program also seeks to establish closer ties between the varied parts of the Appalachian region—West Virginia, Virginia, Ohio, and Kentucky.

In the Spring of 1972, members of the Cabell-Wayne Historical Society joined with Dr. O. Norman Simpkins, Chairman, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, and Dr. Michael J. Galgano of the Department of History in establishing the program. The Historical Society and other community organizations provided the first financial support and equipment. In April 1974, the Oral History program received a three year development grant from the Marshall University Foundation allowing for expansion and refinement. In 1976, the program became affiliated with New York Times Microfilm Corporation of America. To date, approximately 4,200 pages of transcribed tapes have been published as part of the New York Times Oral History Program. These materials represent one of the largest single collections of Appalachian oral materials in existence. Royalties earned from the sale of the transcripts are earmarked for the continuation of the program.

The first interviews were conducted by Marshall University History and Sociology students. Although students are currently involved in the program, many interviews are conducted by the Oral History staff. Graduate students are strongly encouraged to participate in the program by taking special topic courses in oral history under the supervision of Dr. Robert Maddox, program director since September 1978.

The program seeks to establish contacts with as broad a variety of regional persons as possible. Farmers, physicians, miners, teachers, both men and women all comprise a significant portion of the collection. Two major types of interviews have been compiled: the whole life and the specific work experience. In the whole life category, the interviewer attempts to guide subtly the interviewee through as much of his or her life as can be remembered. The second type isolates a specific work or life experience peculiar to the Appalachian region and examines it in detail. Although both types of interviews are currently being conducted, emphasis is now placed on the specific work experience. Recent projects are concerned primarily with health care, coal mining, and the growth of labor organizations.

Parts II and III of the Oral History of Appalachia collection were compiled by Dr. Robert F. Maddox, Director, and processed by Ms. Brenda Perego.

Dr. Robert F. Maddox, Director
Ms. Brenda Perego, Processor

Luigi DiTrapano

JM: This is an interview with Mr. Luigi DiTrapano. The interview was conducted at the home of Mr. DiTrapano in Charleston on November 5th, 1981, by John Morgan of the Charleston Gazette. I have your birth date . . .

LD: October 1, 1989, 1889.

JM: And you were born at . . .

LD: Sezze, (Italy). At that time it was province of Rome and now it is a province of, they made it three provinces. So one was Sezze located in, geographically.

JM: Now the name of the place you were born is spelled Sezze?

LD: That's right.

JM: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

LD: Yes, one brother, Albert. He was in America a long time. He went back on account of his health. And then another brother, a teacher, used to be over here, a couple of years ago he was over here. Stayed about 40 days. We made us some wine then. He asked me to make the wine and we called that wine "John wine." His name was John.

JM: John wine?

LD: Uh, huh.

JM: Well now let's see, you have one brother named Albert?

LD: Then another brother, who died recently was Bob. He was here. He died about three years ago.

JM: Which one did you name the wine for?

LD: John, the one that is in Italy. His name John, Giovanni. So in America it would be John.

JM: How do you spell that?

LD: (Spells) G-I-O-V-A-N-N-I.

JM: And you named the wine for him?

LD: Uh, huh.

JM: I understand you are pretty good at making wine.

LD: Well I've been making it, well, let's see, since the time of prohibition, that was what year, 38, no, 1929. Since 1929. I wasted a lot of grapes before I learned it. I just tried to remember the way my father used to make it and of course the facility, the things the old time over there and I had to do the best I can. My bathroom washtub, use other container before I put them in a barrel. Anyway I made it and pretty good I finally the time every year. I always make it a little better.

JM: You make it once a year?

LD: Once a year. Every October when the grapes come from California, when they are ripe and the price, the price this year is sky high.

JM: You just make enough for family use?

LD: Just family use. Sometime make 50, sometime 30 gallons. And that's about, we give away what we don't drink.

JM: What do you call this wine?

LD: What's the name of the grapes we use? Muscatel grapes.

JM: Okay. Now you came to the U.S. in 1905.

LD: Yes.

JM: Why did you decide to come to the U.S. ?

LD: Well I was grown up and at home I didn't have any or enough finance to send me to school. I wanted to attend school, but they can't afford that so I better find another way to start life.

JM: You would have been 16 then?

LD: About 16 approximately. I wasn't quite 16 until October 1. Because I left there, it was in June, I was 15 then.

JM: Did you come with a group or on your own?

LD: Well I come with another fellow from Sezze too. At that

time there was a law that under the age, I have forgot what age you had to be before you could come by yourself, you had to come with another person. So he will be responsible for you to get to your destination, when you find which one you were going to meet.

JM: Now where did you first land in the U.S.?

LD: Sutton, West Virginia. That's where the railroad was the closest to Gassaway. Because I was to go to Gassaway. That's where my cousin was established.

JM: Well I mean your ship.

LD: Oh the ship come to New York. From Naples to New York. She took 21 days, 21 nights.

JM: You remember the name of the ship?

LD: It was a German ship and it was Hamburg, or something of that sort. The burger, I don't know which one would be the right one. It was a pretty nice size boat at that time. I believe the capacity was around about 15 or 20 thousand tons. The ship was just for carrying the immigrants from Europe to America.

JM: Did you come directly from New York to Sutton?

LD: To Sutton, West Virginia. There was my cousin meeting me there. Then we crossed a little, over there, walking. We got to Gassaway. I don't know what kind of route it was, a kind of short route from Sutton to Gassaway to make it shorter there.

JM: How did you go, did you go by train from Sutton to Gassaway?

LD: From Sutton to Gassaway, we walked.

JM: You walked? That's quite a distance to walk.

LD: Yes, but it was short. It wasn't like on the road. It was just kind of, you know, the Indian trail.

JM: You took a path through the woods?

LD: If I would go back there, I would never recognize it.

JM: Okay, now what did you do at Gassaway?

LD: When they was building the railroad there and there was a gang working there and so they gave me a job carrying water. I was the water boy.

JM: Did you work for a company or . . .

LD: Was company I think. I don't know whether it was Coal and Coke Company, or who it was, I was working under the contract. Someone had a contract and was working for the contractor. I couldn't much tell. I couldn't remember very much.

JM: A construction company or a railroad company?

LD: The people who were building the road at that time.

JM: Do you recall how much they paid you then?

LD: I believe it was \$1.40 cents for 10 hours.

JM: That wasn't bad then.

LD: No. \$1.40 cents was pretty good.

JM: How long did you work as a water boy?

LD: Well I have forgotten now exactly the period of the time. It wasn't very long. Because we, when this work was almost cut off, that when we come in, in Cabin Creek. I must have been there about six months, at Gassaway, then we come in Cabin Creek. There was building a short railroad over there in Cabin Creek too, and an Italian name of Dominecki had the contract, and went to work with him at the same line of job.

JM: You were still a water boy?

LD: Uh, huh. So when this work got finished, then we were looking for a job around the mine. So I went in a mine there, and I got hold of a shovel. The shovel was almost as big as I was. I couldn't handle it, so I have to look around for some other job. So I went over there and I got a job as helper on the tipple. You know they used to clean the coal, if there was any slate in it or level them up when the chute sometimes flat, you had to kind of level them up and them in the line and then in the switch. So I did that work and when

the man who was doing the job quit, so I was left to do that myself. So I had learned, just about the operation, so they gave me help and the help was a lot older than I was.

JM: Well, now let's see. You were doing mainly then, you were leveling up the coal.

LD: Filling the railroad cars with coal. You know how the mine is made. They have this bin with a dump and they mine the coal from the mine into the bin. Then right under there is a railroad that you drop the flat or whatever the car is under there and they have the chute, and you pull the chute there and dump the coal in the railroad car.

JM: Did you do that? Did you pull the chute?

LD: And sometime I had a hold of my foot under the rail to hold myself because it was heavier than I was. It wore me out.

JM: But now you pulled the chute, and what else did you do?

LD: Well when the railroad car was loaded, then drop them down to switch. They would switch, you know. To around about 10 cars, maybe more, 10 railroad cars. And that was the job. When they load one, they had made the railroad kind of slipped down so the car run itself and you guide it with a brake. When you got to the place where you want to stop, then you turn the brake back and stop the car where you are supposed to load it.

JM: Where was the brick, in under the wheel or . . .

LD: The brake, you know.

JM: Oh, the brake, okay.

LD: Sometime in the front of the car and sometime in the back. Whatever it come, you had a brake stick what they called and used that to guide the car with that stick.

JM: You did that? You got in the car and used the brake to guide it?

LD: Yes, to guide the car right on to the chute so I could fill up with coal.

JM: I see. They would bring it up there close and then there

would be a little slope that the car would run down.

LD: Run down, uh, huh.

JM: And you would fill it up and then you would run it down another little slope to connect up with the train of 10 cars, you say?

LD: Sometime we load 10 and sometime we load 15 and sometime when they screened the coal. You see this place where I was working, they had a soft coal mine. We called it No. 2 mine. Then a No. 3 mine was hard coal. And this hard coal, sometime they screen it, make a . . . coal, slack and lump coal, make three different kinds of coal. And when they are under that kind of coal there and with the soft coal, sometime we run about 20 railroad cars daily.

JM: Now how long did you work at that job?

LD: Well, I worked at that job until I went into business. I believe it must have been, let's see we went into war 1917, I think. I was already in the business about a month, a year and a half, I was in the business.

JM: Didn't you work with an engineer too?

LD: Yeah, that's the beginning when we went in there, when this work was done with this fellow name of Domineck that had the contract to build this road. When that was finished, then some engineer over there. They were the engineers that opened this No. 3 mine, and I worked with them quite much. I remember one incident that when I was, telling me which way to go over the line toward the stake, I ran into a bunch of pheasants, scared the heck out of me. They flew all at one time you know. I didn't know what . . .

JM: This is, was out in the field somewhere?

LD: In the field, up in Cabin Creek.

JM: While you were helping the engineer?

LD: Yeah. I was helping the engineer. His first name was Roy. I have forgotten what his other name was. He was a nice fellow. In school I was quite much fond of geometry, and this fellow spy me and he took me in. You know I had an

intelligence to correspond with his whatever he was telling me to do. Even if I didn't speak good English, he know that I understand him, the meanness of all those he had. I worked with him quite a bit. I work with him measure inside the mine too. Because first they make the plan outside of the mine, then they make the plan to go inside to get the coal in. And then they do all this work. It was pretty hard to work with those engineers, new one, and have to make a path, have to watch for the snake.

JM: Well now about how long did you work with the engineer and with the mine?

LD: Well it must be I work with them about two or three months, then off and on he come and get me where I was working and take me, what I was doing and go with him.

JM: That was before you worked on the tipple?

LD: That was the same time when I was working on the tipple. If he need me he come and get me there. And substitute somebody else over there, then I go over there and take the job again.

JM: Now in all the time that you worked with the engineer and on the tipple, about how long was that before you went into business?

LD: Let's see, I went into business, I believe it must have been in 1916, just a little before the war broke out.

JM: That would have been 11 years after you got here?

LD: Yeah.

JM: That's quite a long time. You worked up there 11 years?

LD: Uh, huh. I presume about 10. Because the rest I was in the business. Precisely the number and the time is pretty hard for me to figure.

JM: Yes, but just approximately, it would be about 10 years.

LD: About 10 years.

JM: Okay.

LD: Then when I went into the business, I had to leave the business to go into the army.

JM: Yes, now I want to go back here a little. When you first came to the country, did you know any English then?

LD: No, I was anxious to learn. I know there is an Italian that speaks English, real broken. I can't understand that. They weren't talking good, so I got acquainted with a boy by the name of John Holmes and this boy didn't mock me when I make a mistake in talking. He correct me and he tell me how to say it. That's the way I learned it. That was a real gift for me to meet him because he liked me. He was a nice looking boy. He like to take me home and his mother fed a pie, gave me a piece of pie. They tried to make me drink buttermilk. I never drink it before. And after that milk was spoiled. I never could put it down. I can't understand how to drink spoiled milk. This lady's mother started making me understand that it was milk, and they used the milk to make biscuits and also good to drink. But that sour added in the milk, I can't put him in. I can't swallow it. John helped me a lot.

JM: Now when you left home and got on the ship, did you know any English then?

LD: None at all.

JM: So everything you learned was after you got here.

LD: Well I was thinking of an episode in the boat. I was in third class and a young man, a fine fellow, he was second class and every morning he come down and look for me and want to talk to me. He know I can answer his questions. And he ask me what are you going to do in America? I says well I'm going to do something. He says, to do something, what kind of business you go in? Well I ain't going into business because I ain't got any money. How much money you got? I got \$20, that's all I got. What are you going to do with \$20? Well I don't know, when I get there I have to figure out what I'm going to do. And he wants to know how I'm going to do in America, so little and without any money. And he says you not be able to work. He say you too little to work. I says I'm going to do something.

JM: But you, during those 10 years you learned.

LD: Learned the business.

JM: And learned English pretty well.

LD: In the beginning when I was in business, when the salesmen would come in, the salesmen come in once a year, he ask me to see my father. I tell him I am the father, I am the father, I am the son.

JM: You were so small.

LD: I was so small and young, you know. No piece of beard on my face. I get beard when I'm about 21.

JM: No beard until you were 21?

LD: No beard at all.

JM: Well now while you were working in the mines or while you were in that area, the mine wars were developing in West Virginia?

LD: Yes.

JM: You were aware of that, weren't you. There was a lot activity relating to the wars, was there not?

LD: Yes.

JM: Were you involved in it at all?

LD: In what?

JM: In the mine wars?

LD: Nothing that I understand in the proceeding.

JM: The union was trying to organize the miners.

LD: Later on, way late, I believe it was around my last two years that I work, that people come in and try to organize. And they had the mine guard, and they don't want you to sympathize with the miner. It was pretty tough.

JM: That would have been about 1914 and 1915, along in there.

LD: Along in that area.

JM: Did they approach you personally and ask you to join the union?

LD: Oh, yes. They come to you and you sympathize with them. That's all you could do. Because if they find it out that you sympathize with them, you are just out of a job right away. The company didn't want no union in there. They was fighting it pretty hard. So you had to make two-face. You had to sympathize with the union and sympathize with the company.

JM: Did they threaten you in any way?

LD: The miners?

JM: Well, the union people. Did they say if you don't join we might do this or that?

LD: No, there never was a threat.

JM: Did your employer, did he threaten you at all, or let you know that if you joined the union something might happen to you or . . .

LD: Well, the superintendent mostly, his name was Quarrier. He once found out something from me. And I tell him as little as I can tell him and he say what do you think about. I say well I don't know that I can pass my judgment and they had been working pretty hard to organize the place. I tell him the truth.

JM: But you let him know that you weren't really interested in joining?

LD: Joining, no I didn't tell him just the exact way I felt about it, I just tell him the large, just think to be peaceful with them. So I would give up my job, so I had to work there. Because it was the only thing, resource I had. I had to work, I didn't want to run around the country without a job because no experience and I still was too young to go around with a gang looking for jobs. I was pleased with the job I had and I tried to keep it, even if it was hard on me but I was pleased with what I had.

JM: Did the miners go on strike while you were working there?

LD: No, when they come in that they, they shot up, they had some shooting. I think, so we got kind of scared. I just left the place, left the place and went around to Logan to look for a job and I see the place around there was worse than ever, even the people that I was associated with were no good and the place was no good and I went to try to work in the mine and was no good. So I went back.

JM: How long did you stay in Logan?

LD: Oh, I think about a couple of months.

JM: Tell me again, why did you go to Logan?

LD: Well to get away from trouble. That shooting that was carrying on.

JM: Was there actually some shooting right close by you there in Cabin Creek?

LD: There was shooting, local.

JM: Did anybody get killed or . . .

LD: Well some got hurt and some got killed, but none that I know of them. Because it was a bunch and the company had this mine guard and you know they was well equipped, the only way they could get the advantage of the miner, because the miner had to do like the Indian used to do, get them in surprise as they come in while they was pushing to also well organize and the poor people had a pretty hard time there.

JM: Well now as I understand it in April of 1912, there was strike in the Paint Creek area and this spread over into the Cabin Creek area.

LD: I believe it was later than 1912, as far as I can remember. Because World War broke in '14, and I remember that good because when, was with me, he went back there because he wanted to serve his duty there, soldier duty. You know, when a certain age you have to, in the time of war they have to serve the army. And I put him do not go, but he went but got killed and never did come back. And that was in '14. And this strike business come into work around there, around about '15 I think.

JM: Was it fighting between the guards and the union people?

LD: The union people.

JM: And there were some killings you think.

LD: Yeah, there was some killings.

JM: Did anybody that you know get killed.

LD: No, nobody I know. They just what the rumor was, to see the people or the shooting, I never did see it. I never did see it because I never went out to expose myself to the danger.

JM: Did you ever see any marching on the part of the miners? You know they would march here or there to try to demonstrate what they were trying to do?

LD: No, I never did see them marching. I remember when I was in business one time the, I believe come in from distance, this man. They was rebelling against the contract. The union was already in possession. But they had a pretty good scrap, come in the store there, and got a couple of guns from my window. I remember that incident.

JM: Would you repeat that again?

LD: They come in from outside Cabin Creek, not people from Cabin Creek, and I knew it. They come in there, well, asked for something to eat. I gave it to eat. But they got in the showcase, and they got the gun out of the showcase. They made me kind of mad about it, because he was a robber. Anyway he took the gun.

JM: This was in your store?

LD: In the store.

JM: They came in and took a gun out of the showcase.

LD: That's way after. I forgot what year was that. They had a pretty good dispute between the contract and the miners and the company. They had, it looked like the company was wanting to abolish the contract. And the union was fighting pretty hard to keep in possession of that. But they had a pretty hard time.

JM: These were miners who came into the store and took the gun?

LD: As far as I could acknowledge. Sometime you know the bad people get into a crowd like that, the robber, and blame the organization. It might have been a real miner that did that. But anyway they robbed the store.

JM: Was this before the war or after it?

LD: I believe it was after the World War I. I remember because I had to come back.

JM: Do you remember any time when they had martial law?

LD: Yes, I believe I remember that too.

JM: I think Governor Glasscock declared martial law. Do you remember that he was governor then?

LD: I remember this happening, yes.

JM: What did you have to do then, under martial law?

LD: Well, personally I did a lot of thinking, did very little action, I did a lot of thinking. And you have to obey the law, and when the law was that, you had to do that.

JM: Were you scared?

LD: Not really afraid, but it wasn't worth living under all that pressure all the time. It wasn't pleasant either.

JM: Did you have to stay off the streets, or stay off the main road?

LD: At certain times.

JM: You have to be in at a certain time at night, in those times, of course you were still single at this time.

LD: Yes.

JM: Where did you stay, in a boarding house or . . .

LD: No, after we got married we built an apartment on top of the store, one apartment for myself and one apartment for

for my partner. That was after we got married. But before we got married, I bought a house there, I still own the house, and we got a housekeeper, and she did the cooking and the cleaning, and it was along time until I got married.

JM: Did you take in boarders?

LD: No, just me and my partner, and we had this lady that she cooked and she cleaned. She washed our clothes and keep the house clean, just a housekeeper.

JM: He was your business partner, what was his name?

LD: DeGeorge.

JM: Okay, now tell me what kind of business was this?

LD: Well in the, we used to call them general merchandise. Of course we handled shoes, we handled piece goods, we handled hardware, we handled meat, we handled groceries, we handled all of that stuff.

JM: Now you went into this business, was that about 1916?

LD: Just about the time when I went in the army. When I went in the army I was in the business. I left my partner, DeGeorge, in charge. And another boy, he was an Italian boy too. His name was Lardens. He knows more about reading and writing than DeGeorge did. And so I left him and I went in the army. When I come back, I had to work almost a year before I got out of debt. They got me in debts real big.

JM: Well now you were in business something like a year before you went into the army, weren't you?

LD: Yes.

JM: Can you tell me about, can you remember any of the prices you charged then for beans or whatever you sold?

LD: Yes, the beans were averaging right about five cents a pound. The sugar about six cents a pound, the coffee, you can only get out-of-pocket coffee at that time, was about 19 or 20 cents a pound. A sack of flour, a 25 pound sack of flour you could get for about \$1, 25 a \$1, 40 or 50, we used to handle them in the hundred pound bag. We had a lot of Italian trade. They used to make their own bread. We

used to get them in the 100 pound sack. And we sell this 100 pound sack, oh round about \$4 or \$4.25 in that time. We used to handle 25 bag and 10 pound bad and 50 pound bag and a 100 pound bag. We used to sell a lot of flour, because I had a lot of Italian customers.

JM: Did you say a 100 pound bag of flour?

LD: Uh, huh.

JM: That's a lot of flour, isn't it?

LD: That's a lot of flour. They used to buy that much.

LD: They didn't sell it in the barrel?

LD: They used to buy it in the barrel, too, but it was too heavy to handle. So we had a wagon at that time, a horse and wagon that we used to deliver stuff that was pretty heavy.

JM: You didn't have a cash register?

LD: Oh yes, had a National cash register, I believe I paid \$175.

JM: So you would ring up the sales?

LD: Uh, huh.

JM: You had no trouble asking change?

LD: No.

JM: Even when you first came here you could do that?

LD: Oh yeah. I knew my mathematics because I was real good in school, in mathematics.

JM: How much education did you have?

LD: Fifth grade.

JM: Fifth grade, but you had that in Italy?

LD: Yeah.

JM: Then after you came here . . .

LD: I just had the books. I never quit reading. I read all books I come across, I read all of them.

JM: Fiction or . . .

LD: Fiction or nonfiction, business, all kinds. Even I read a book that I was interested our church to read. I even knew them books. Whatever book I get hold of, I read, I was very interested in learning.

JM: Well now most of your customers in this business were miners, weren't they?

LD: Miners and railroad too.

JM: About how many customers would have in an average day?

LD: When I think business was real good, I must have had around about 500.

JM: Really, one day?

LD: 500 customers.

JM: In one day, how much, what would be an average intake for one day?

LD: Well the cash generally run about \$20 or \$10 sometimes. On a payday I would get about \$100 or \$150 cash. People pay on the counter then.

JM: Everybody paid cash?

LD: No, there was credit. I had my cash register, you know that with a number one it, and every customer I had a number and we had to be the books would duplicate you know. We put one, and give one to the customer.

JM: Were there many Italians up there?

LD: At that time there was a lot of Italians. There was Italian, Hungarian, Spanish, all of the . . .

JM: Would you say there were more Italians than other nationalities?

JM: There were quite a few . . .

LD: Kayford was full of Italians, Kayford, Acme, then up at Carbon, wasn't very many. Up in a place where they called it Republic, they had a few. And on this outside where they call it Wevaco, they had a few, but they were scattered all around. With the wagon we go out in the morning early and come back in the evening, because I deliver and take order for the next day. And I used to work one day on the Kayford side and another time on the Wevaco side, make it to Republic and Carbon and Wevaco, we make all of those with the horse and wagon. It take us all day. It was hard to work, no road either.

JM: What did you use the horse and wagon for?

LD: To deliver the groceries.

JM: Oh that was part of your service, to deliver the groceries?

LD: Uh, huh.

JM: Well, you didn't deliver on a house-to-house basis, did you?

LD: Sure, house to house.

JM: Really, oh I see, you didn't take orders. You just went around and . . .

LD: No, I take orders. When we deliver, we take orders for next week or next month whatever.

JM: So these places you were naming there . . .

LD: Sometimes they come in the store and put in an order. Then we would deliver when we could. We had a schedule, you know. We had the schedule and would go deliver.

JM: All these places you were naming were right there in the Cabin Creek area.

LD: In Cabin Creek.

JM: Okay, now while you were out with the horse and wagon delivering groceries, who was minding the store?

LD: Generally, I had the people employed to drive the horse and deliver, and I always was in the store. I go there occasionally, to somebody who didn't pay their bill promptly, and I want to

find out what's that all about and I go to investigate it and see why they didn't pay it, what was the trouble and getting acquainted with some you know, they enjoyed to see me and I rode out once in a while but not very often.

JM: Now there were a lot of people living up there at that time, weren't there?

LD: Oh a lot of people.

JM: A lot of workers, working there in the mines. Do you have any idea of how many people there might have been living in the area at that time?

LD: No, I believe I be making am mistake if I say. Because I didn't take any interest. I know every house was full. Every house was full on either side, all the way to the school.

JM: There were lots of children?

LD: Yes.

JM: Lots of breadwinners, too?

LD: Yes.

JM: But were there other stores in the area?

LD: Oh yes. Eskdale, I believe we had about six, a lot of competitors.

JM: Was your one of the larger stores?

LD: Yeah. Mine and Joseph was pretty large store. Sch . . . they had a pretty large store.

JM: Now did you go to the army in 1917?

LD: Yeah.

JM: You went overseas?

LD: Uh, huh.

JM: Where did you go over there?

LD: Well at first I went to the infantry, 314 infantry, company

C I think. Then one day they made the unit to create a hospital for, and I was picked for the hospital force, then I went in the army and I was in the base hospital 59 in France. That's where I passed most of my time in France.

JM: Where in France, at the base hospital in France?

LD: It was hospital 59. We had a base there, we had about six hospitals.

JM: Did you get an opportunity to go home while you were there?

LD: When the armistice come in, then I got the word pretty quick. Our commander in the hospital was a Mr. Abel. He was a colonel and he was Catholic. And the only way he want me to take the Italian boy to the church on Sunday, to go to church and I did my best but somehow couldn't get him in. But I did a pretty good job with some of them and as soon as, I didn't go to the sergeant or captain, to get my permit. I went to him, I says I want to go home because I haven't seen my family for . . .

JM: If you came in 1905, that would seem like about 12 years?

LD: It was along time and so that way he gave me the permit. I left the company, nobody knew anything about it and when they find it out, boy they all were jealous.

JM: This was after the war was over?

LD: After the war was over.

JM: How long were you able to visit?

LD: Well I went to the, used to give 10 days, but it takes about 10 days to get there so I spend about, I got 31 days because in France from the way it was to Italian frontier I went to the French train and the MP when I got over there at this big express train, he told me to watch now they put you off. You're not supposed to ride this train. Because the military is not supposed to travel it. So when they put you off one coach, you jump on the other one. Because you never get there if you don't do that. So he gave me good advice and I got to Italy pretty good. When I got to Italy, they had the similar rule that night. When I got round about in Italy the conductor put me off and because the price of the express train was pretty high, I didn't have that money.

So one passenger over there, he must have been pretty wealthy, he got all mad at this man, people coming in fighting the war, and he wanted to put them out. He took the money out of his pocket and paid me the fare to the room.

JM: Great.

LD: I got there all right.

JM: What was he, a Frenchman or . . .

LD: The conductor was Italian.

JM: No, the one who paid your fare.

LD: No, the one who give me the money was an Italian.

JM: So after you visited there then you came on back to the states?

LD: I come back. Coming back same thing for me. Anyway, I met another Italian boy, he had been on vacation, he was broke. He didn't have a penny and we got to Genoa, I think. We went to the YMCA, the American YMCA. Son-of-a-gun they won't give us anything to eat if we don't have any money. They wanted money and they wanted, that we were supposed to get bread with. We didn't have to use that. But anyway I had about I believe something like about 400 or 500 lira, but then it was a lot of money. That's all the money I got. He says you ain't got nothing. He says we are going to eat at a restaurant, and now be careful, don't you order anything that's too costly. Because if it is too much, they will put you in jail if you don't pay for what you eat. Anyway we eat. We eat a pretty good dinner without bread. When the bill come, it took every penny I had in my pocket, penniless. Anyway I manage it. When I got in France I got in there and there was a French woman who had a basket with a sandwich and fruit, they know I was hungry. They gave me something to eat. And I began to feel good.

JM: Well after you had your visit there and then you came back to your base and then came on home.

LD: Come home, I believe it was around about the month of July, I think.

JM: So about how long were you in the army?

LD: We was there, my time I believe was around about 16 or 17 months.

JM: What rank did you have as a medic?

LD: Plain buck.

JM: Buck private?

LD: First class.

JM: First class private. They didn't give many promotions in those days.

LD: No, I didn't get a promotion. They, sergeant and the captain. I didn't like them and so they didn't like me either. This was when I had a job, a sergeant's job, top sergeant's job, I just get paid for soldier. I believe it was \$37 a month.

JM: You say when you got back, the store was deep in debt.

LD: Oh, it was real in debt.

JM: Do you recall how much?

LD: Oh, I took almost a year to get out of debt. But when I got out of debt, I begin making money.

JM: You continued to operate the business there for how long then?

LD: Until, you see I retire. Forgot even what year now I retired. I retired but I rented the store to somebody. But I go there, so I can get the money. Because they couldn't pay me the money, a lump of money. They can't pay me so much a month. And I got there, stop by once in a while. But what year . . .

JM: You remember approximately how old you were when you retired?

LD: Well I was, to get the pension.

JM: When you were about 75?

LD: Around about that, I think.

JM: Now I don't want to forget that about 1927 you made an important trip back to Italy.

LD: Yeah.

JM: Why did you go back then?

LD: That's when I got that woman over there.

JM: You knew what you were doing then, did you? Now, of course before you went back in 1927, you had known the lady to be Mrs. DiTrapano.

LD: When we got married in '27, when we got married it was in '27. It was the year before, two years before.

JM: You met her something like two years before you got married?

LD: You know where I married her, in Rome.

JM: In Rome?

LD: In Rome, on two other years, the people from Sezze, they had in a bunch, you know they went a whole year in Rome. Each parish, you know, they get a priest and parish, to go there. She wasn't Rome then. She come into the station to meet the, people, you know, and besides it was the first time I saw her. So even when I would take them home in the car, and the people began to think something was wrong. So then in 1927 when I went back we got married.

JM: Where did you marry?

LD: In Sezze. The judge's name was St. Angelo.

JM: Of course you and your wife have been Catholics all of your lives?

LD: Yeah.

JM: Then she came back with you in 1927.

LD: Yeah.

JM: And you established your home in Cabin Creek.

LD: Cabin Creek, Eskdale.

JM: Eskdale. And that's where you lived for many years and reared your family.

LD: Yes.

JM: Now Mrs. DiTrapano's name before she was married was, I have it spelled here, Amelia Filigenzi.

LD: That's right.

JM: And you became the parents of four children?

LD: Four.

JM: Rudy and Evelyn and a daughter who is now Carla McGoldrick, who lives in Charleston also?

LD: Yes.

JM: Okay.

LD: Rudolph.

JM: Yes, Rudy is the lawyer, or Rudolph. What do you think about having a son for a lawyer?

LD: Well I wanted him to be an engineer. But the dean over there told me that he maybe make one, but he make a poor one. So let him take what he wants. So I asked him what he wants. He told me he wants to get the law, so I say go take what you want.

JM: He didn't have your love of geometry or mathematics.

LD: No, he didn't have that much math. That was my wish. I wanted to be one myself. And I couldn't make it because of family finances.

JM: You wanted to be an engineer?

LD: I wanted to be an engineer at any cost.

JM: Did you ever hear of Mother Jones?

LD: Yes, I met her.

JM: You did meet her?

LD: Oh, she was a wildcat. She cuss like a man, and bang her feet down when she talked.

JM: You met her personally?

LD: Well just like the rest of the crowd, you know. She speak . . .

JM: You heard her address the miners there at Cabin Creek?
What did she look like?

LD: Well you know, rough woman, rough woman.

JM: Was she a big woman?

LD: No, she was about the size of Amelia. I believe about the same stature.

JM: About average size?

LD: Yes.

JM: But she was tough.

LD: Tough. She had even the expression in her face that she was tough.

JM: What did she say when she talked to the miners?

LD: She always gave heck to the coal company. She never called them by name, always called them some devilish name.

JM: Did she ask them to form a union or urge them to form a union?

LD: Oh yes. She asked them to be united, to be together.

JM: Can you think of any other incidents around that time of Mother Jones and the mine wars that you would like to tell?

LD: No, because as I told you, if I didn't stay good with the company, why they won't let me go there with a wagon to deliver stuff to my clients. Even they wrote me a paper you know. They had a paper permit . . .

JM: Oh really. You had a paper from the company?

LD: Company. So I could go there and deliver the stuff.

JM: So you could go around with your horse and wagon.

LD: That's before they organized. Of course after they organized why the thing was over.

JM: Well at that time in Cabin Creek it was pretty dangerous.

LD: Yeah, it was pretty dangerous.

JM: Did many people carry guns or . . .

LD: I presume. I don't know for sure. Most everyone had a gun I think.

JM: Did you carry a gun?

LD: Never did have one in my life, I had one, too. Some robbery going on at one time and didn't have a gun in the store. Finally I got one. And so I had him in the store there, under the counter by the register. And at night I take him home with me. One time they were stealing my chickens and I had an old gentleman of Polish stock you know, come in and warn me they were stealing chickens. So I got out and I got a gun and went over and I didn't have no heart to shoot anybody.

JM: You could shoot the gun?

LD: I could shoot the gun but I didn't have the heart to hurt anybody. So I let that man get out. After he got out I shoot in the air to scare him. Finally when I saw that I wasn't a gunsman, I loaned this gun to a woman. She used to live upstairs at the store. She said she had a prowler, and she never did want to give it back to me. Said somebody stole it. I believe she's still got it.

JM: Did you actually see the man stealing the chickens?

LD: Yeah, I know who he was. I know he was a very good fellow. Wasn't worth a . . .

JM: You think he needed the chicken to eat?

LD: He must have been, needed it.

JM: You had a yard?

LD: Oh, I had a big yard. I had the chickens, and I had a goat.

Of course I raised all my children on goat milk. She never had any milk for the kids.

JM: Did you own your horse and wagon.

LD: Yeah.

JM: When were you naturalized as an American citizen?

LD: When I was in the army.

JM: Did you feel good about that?

LD: Oh yeah.

JM: Have you ever had any regrets about coming to this country?

LD: Never one minute.

JM: Do you feel like you are in pretty good health now?

LD: Well to my age, I can't complain. Of course I've got that black lung.

JM: Really.

LD: I got. Because I remember we were married in '27. I remember this particular point. When I was at Venice in the bathroom, I was still spitting black. In '27. Let's see that was about how many years, from '16 to '27.

JM: '16 to '27, 11 years.

LD: Uh, huh. I was still spitting black.

JM: But you never worked underground, did you?

LD: No, I never did. You see when they screen this coal. You know why even sometime we had to take the coat to shake the dust off of it. Get so much.

JM: Now you worked in the coal-cleaning place. That's where you loaded up the cars and everything?

LD: Then when you are chuting the coal in the car, you are at the brake there when the coal come in and make a lot of

dust, and you breathe that dust, too.

JM: Does that still seem to bother you?

LD: It bothers me very much, it bothers me all of my life.

JM: In what way?

LD: In breathing. Dr., he has been keeping me pretty good shape. He's been doing a real good job. It was sometime before I had this medicine I had to get up and put my face out the window to get some fresh air. It looked like I need real bad to breathe. Sometime she is a cold person. She put the thermostat at 70, I have to go down there and put it down at 65, because I cannot breathe at 70.

JM: Can you walk a long distance without getting tired or anything?

LD: Oh, yeah, I get tired, tired very much.

JM: But other than that, you feel like you are in pretty good shape.

LD: I still raise my garden.

JM: Can you eat anything you want?

LD: Almost. One thing I learned in the army. Don't eat too much. I can eat no cucumbers. I can eat no fried food of any kind. That's what the doctor told me, I got a card of things I cannot eat. But sometime I'll eat a little bit, eat a little bit, but it will create a lot of gas.

JM: How tall are you?

LD: Five-one or five-two, five-two I think.

JM: And how much do you weigh?

LD: 145 pounds.

JM: A little bit overweight.

LD: Sometime I go down to 140. But right now I weigh 145.

JM: Can you drink as much as you want to?

LD: No, I never did in all of my life. I never drink more than half a glass of wine. Sometime I drink a glass in two drinks. But I never did. And the liquor, maybe I'll take a, just about three-fourths, if I break in with coca-cola, something, I can drink about half a little glass.

JM: When you say half a glass of wine, you mean your wine or . . .

LD: My wine, yes.

JM: That's all the wine you drink?

LD: That's all the wine I drink.

JM: Do you think maybe that's had something to do with your living a long time?

LD: Well, it might be. Of course, your body, you know. That will help you in a way, but if you are the master of your body. If you know what things to go on, what things hurt you. If you would eat all of those things, you get along good. Any time that you go over that, like sometime in the summer I see a lot of things to be done in the garden and overwork myself. I get so tired I cannot make it to the house. Now I promise myself, but I forget. I didn't do it on purpose. I just forget to quit. But I ought to quit before I get tired. Sometimes I get so tired, I can't make it to the house.

JM: What do you raise in your garden?

LD: Well, we have beans, green lettuce, we have lettuce all the year around and squash, tomatoes, this year I didn't have much luck with tomatoes. I don't know if I got the wrong plant, but it didn't do so good.

JM: Is the garden right here close to your house?

LD: Uh, huh. Right in the back. In the front, I am real fond of flowers. I've got a lot of fondness, especially for the rose.

JM: Well do you think it's entirely possible that your continuing to be active like that and drinking a little wine along is

helping you to remain in good health?

LD: To live a little longer. I think it does, but just eat what you ought to have to eat and eat light, it's healthy.

JM: Three times a day?

LD: Three times a day.

JM: Can you think of anything else that has helped you to live a long time?

LD: Well to be patient. I don't get mad. I have a lot of patience. I know lots of times I used to get mad with Amelia but I don't get mad with her anymore. Whatever she say I let it go. Right or wrong. I just let it go, I won't get mad anymore.

JM: Does she tell anybody what her age is?

LD: Amelia? I believe she does.

Amelia: Oh yes, 79.

LD: You can't deny your age.

JM: Your life has been a happy life, has it not?

LD: Well, I don't regret a bit, since I've married. We had a pretty tough time in the business. We had a good time in the business. We had a good time with the family all the way. The family never gave me no disturb at all, except Virgil, he didn't take to school. I spent more money, twice as much on him, as I did Rudolph and I didn't accomplish anything with him. He just didn't take to school. He come eight years after Evelyn. When he come, everybody baby him too much, spoil him. Nothing he ever asked but what he got. And we just ruined him. And we spoiled him, we just ruined him.

JM: But he works doesn't he?

LD: Yeah, he works, oh he works.

JM: Where does he work?

LD: He works with some beer company. I think, got a truck

and delivers stuff. Once in a while, I have to help him a little bit, but he get along pretty good.

JM: Can you think of anything else, Mr. DiTrapano, that I haven't asked you about and perhaps should have?

LD: I think we celebrate our silver anniversary in Italy, and we celebrate our golden anniversary here in this house.

JM: It was in 1977 you had your 50th anniversary.

LD: So I don't regret it at all and at 92, I'm still marching on. So I just thank the lord that he took care of me.

JM: Would you like to live to be 100?

LD: I don't know. If it's God's will, I'll go along.

JM: Well, I certainly thank you for taking this time to talk to me.

LD: Well if I did any good to you with my questions, why I don't regret about it at all. It was a pleasure to talk with you.

JM: Good, well thank you again.