

Paul: This is Paul Alto interviewing Frankie Andriacci at the Venice. Could you please give me your full name?

Frankie: Francis Paul Andriacci.

Paul: Your birth date?

Frankie: December Eighteenth Nineteen-Twenty-Seven.

Paul: Your birthplace?

Frankie: The Venice Supper Club, in the apartment upstairs.

Paul: I take it's the same Venice you have right now?

Frankie: Yes.

Paul: How many children were in your family? Or how many people were in your family rather?

Frankie: Bruno, Tony, Dan, Joey, myself, Donny, seven. My mom and dad would be nine.

Paul: Were you the youngest in the family?

Frankie: No, I'm the one, two, three, four, fifth one.

Paul: Fifth one? Did you have any other relatives living here? Any aunts or uncles?

Frankie: Oh yeah, the Vallella family; Frank Vallella and his wife.

Paul: Alright, with the depression going on; were you a pretty close knit family?

Frankie: Oh very close.

Paul: Would a lot of that have to do with being Italian?

Frankie: Well that's the way Italian families were back then.

Paul: Do you know when your parents came to the U.S.? Just roughly?

Frankie: My mother was born in this country. My dad came over in, we just talked about that, nineteen-ten I think.

Paul: So they were pretty well established when you were born. Like, you were already in Ishpeming?

Frankie: Right.

Paul: Do you know the place in Italy where your family came from?

Frankie: Reggio Di Calabria. Cimbarillo is the name of the town.

Paul: Did, because you came from Calabria did you only hang out with other Calabrese? Or were all the Italians pretty...

Frankie: Everyone hung out. It didn't make any difference.

Paul: On that subject, what about the other nationalities? Were there any groups that messed with the Italians?

Frankie: In my day there was all; there was Frenchtown, Swedetown, there was all different sections with different people. That's the way it was. It was gangs, you know? Different gangs had different places they hung out, and that's the way it was.

Paul: When you say gangs you don't mean like today's type of gangs?

Frankie: No, never destructive. Gangs that were, what we called them. The Italians hung together, the French hung together, the Cleveland location hung together, the Swede location hung together. That's the way it was.

Paul: Did it seem like when you were growing up; you were obviously hanging out with other Italians. Was it friends of the family you knew or just the neighborhood?

Frankie: No, it was all. Well it was more Calabrese than anything. Like your grandfather, the Sarvello family, the Bulla family, the Bertucci Family, we are all from the same part of Italy. That's why we hung out, you know?

Paul: I've heard my Grandfather (Frank Sarvello) talk about Deigotown, Frenchtown. Did you kind of like it better that way? Instead of nowadays where everyone is just spread around?

Frankie: Well it was, I think it was better times then than now. People were more close-knit back then. We lost all of that, you know?

Paul: That's very true. What sort of things do you remember eating as a kid? Was it pretty much the stuff we have nowadays?

Frankie: You had a lot of potatoes, a lot of macaroni. It was stuff that wasn't too expensive, like you know; beans and potatoes, beans and macaroni, and potatoes and eggs, spaghetti and meatballs of course, and ravioli; that's what we ate.

Paul: Now getting back to your childhood. What sort of things did you do for fun around the neighborhood?

Frankie: Well they don't do this now. We used to go up on the bluff up here and....

Paul: Jasper Bluff?

Frankie: No, right up over here (pointing in a southwest direction)

Paul: Oh, okay I know where you are talking about now.

Frankie: Where the CCI's cottage is, up in that area. That's where we used to go up and play games, sleigh ride, all of that you know? You'd start up on the top of that hill there and you would end up on Division Street. Long ride; (Laughter) it was a long ride.

Paul: How did the Depression affect you? How did it change you now? Was it for the better?

Frankie: I think that the Depression brought everyone close together. Everyone helped cut the wood, saw the wood for five, six families. You shared everything and helped each other. But that doesn't happen today. But that's how everyone survived.

Paul: Do you think there is a good lesson to learn in that? Especially with today's economic downturn?

Frankie: Oh yeah. It'll never happen but that's how everyone survived. By helping each other, but that doesn't happen anymore.

Paul: Do you remember any memorable experiences as a kid? Any things that really jump out at you?

Frankie: Christmas was a big deal then. It was only a week before when Santa Claus came to the tree and you know, it wasn't all this... Christmas is Christmas. And Christmas time was a great time because you didn't have fruit all the time except at Christmas time. Today you know, you can get fruit any day of the week. But back then Christmas was the only time that you got fresh fruit. And then when Bud Abbot and Lou Costello were here in forty-one, that jumps out. Of course, they were great then. They were in the movies and we saw that. When they came here, that was something.

Paul: Did they just hang around town?

Frankie: Most of it was at the Al Quall area. In fact there is a picture of it on the wall there. They came in town. That was quite an experience. Of course the theatre that was a big experience years ago. The Ishpeming Theatre used to be lined up from here all the way to Division Street waiting to get into the show. And it was five entrances, doors going into the theatre and there was a double feature. One night there was four features went on. You'd go there four o'clock in the afternoon and you would wait in line.

Paul: You were talking about how you had to help out. How all the families were really close; talking about Frank Sarvello. When his parents died did it definitely seem like everyone jumped in to fill the gap left by them?

Frankie: Oh yeah.

Paul: Do you see that happening today? Do you think the community helps as much when there is tragedy?

Frankie: Oh no, they don't help like they used to. It's there but it's not there. Not like it really was. When someone got sick people would be there with fruit and soups and they helped everybody. Of course

nobody had anything so you had to really help them, you know? It was more friendship and loyalty to each other than we have today, you know? Now it's dog eat dog. It's all about the money. Back then nobody thought about it.

Paul: It's weird now though, because now it seems like people have more but they are giving less.

Frankie: That's right.

Paul: Moving ahead, when you were a young man how were your responsibilities different from when you were a kid? Like at a certain age did you, at what age did you first start working?

Frankie: I started to work at the Venice when I was about eleven years old. I would come down and sweep, fill the cigarette machine and do things like that before I went to school. I never stopped working. I graduated from that to going behind the bar and washing dishes, then to going behind the bar.

Paul: That's a good point to bring up though. There was nothing wrong with that. You had a family business and you were helping out with the family.

Frankie: Right.

Paul: Nowadays with child labor laws...

Frankie: You can't do that no more. Nope.

Paul: It's terrible because I'm sure that was a very good experience for you.

Frankie: Oh yeah, and you're parents made sure you never got involved in anything. When you were there you were just working, working.

Paul: On a usual day what would you do? Did you get up and go to school? What was your usual day?

Frankie: Well, I would get up and come down to the Venice. If I had time I would sweep and mop the floor. I would come home at lunch and we always had a hot lunch at home. Your mother would have it out and set. Then go back to school, get done, come back down. At first it was hand fired coal, then it was wood and coal, and then the stoker. You'd fill the stoker and take the clinkers out and that's the way it was.

Paul: Did you play sports at all?

Frankie: Yeah, but not much because I had to come to work.

Paul: Did you see any difference in how the community is with sports nowadays, then how it was? Like are our sports more of a big deal nowadays or?

Frankie: Oh yeah, with T.V. and radio. Now it's more involved than it was then. But it was always basketball and football were always well attended and backed by the city, the people.

Paul: Alright, was there as much dating back then than nowadays?

Frankie: I think they dated more in those days. Today they meet, they go to the bar or the restaurant and they meet. But years ago you went on more dates, you know? It was controlled by your parents, you know? They watched who you took out. (Laughter) You couldn't, I don't know what else to tell you there.

Paul: When you were in high school, did you know what you wanted to do with your future? Or did you just plan on sticking around at the Venice?

Frankie: We never thought about that stuff back then, you know?

Paul: After you did graduate, did you take any time off or did you just jump into working?

Frankie: Well we went in the service, you know? We went in the army after graduation. We joined the army. Then when I came back, I came back to work at the Venice. Then it was, there wasn't much activity during the day at that time. So I became an electrician when I came back from the service. That's what I did.

Paul: How did you end up joining the service?

Frankie: Well me, your grandpa (Frank Sarvello), Norman Jacobson went to the Post Office and joined the army. We didn't say nothing to our parents or nothing. But they had to sign the papers of course. They were a little mad, but that's what we done.

Paul: Any reason why? Did you just want to volunteer?

Frankie: Well, that's when everyone was really patriotic in them days. Everyone was patriotic and our brothers had all come back and we said, "We really need to join the service." So that's what we did.

Paul: What was your experience in the service like?

Frankie: Well I went to Italy and I was in charge of the NCO club. I was in Headquarters Company all the time because of my experience here. They put me in the Headquarters Company. It was a great experience.

Paul: Seeing Italy must have been really great.

Frankie: Oh yeah.

Paul: Did you get much time off to see much of the country there?

Frankie: Oh yeah, I was in specials. I was in Headquarters Company so I got more time off than most guys. (Laughter) I was in the right crew, see? So I went to Venice, Valencia, Naples, up north in the mountains, and went to Switzerland. I was all over there. You know I had money and a lot of connections. (Laughter)

Paul: That always helps. When you were around visiting all those places, did you always want to come back here?

Frankie: Oh yeah, you can't beat home. You can't beat home. No matter what you do, when you're pulling in the train coming home, there is nothing nicer than that. Nothing.

Paul: Talking about the trains actually? When the trains were coming through Ishpeming did more people take them than like the Greyhound?

Frankie: Oh yeah, everyone took the train. Grab it right here and go to Green Bay. Or go see a football game down in Chicago. Then stop in Chicago and go to the Notre Dame game. You just traveled by train. It was fun because it was relaxing; they had a dining car, and a bar. It was a great way to travel. Biggest mistake this country made was stopping the trains.

Paul: Especially with the price of gas.

Frankie: They should have never took them out.

Paul: When you came back to Ishpeming did you notice a big change? Did you notice anything that changed from the time you were in the service?

Frankie: No not in the time that I came back from the service. It stayed about the same for a long time before these times when it got bad. You know? But it was, I don't think it changed that much in that period of time.

Paul: On a separate note here. Obviously you are a member of the St. Rocco's St. Anthony Society.

Frankie: Oh yeah.

Paul: Did you join that right away?

Frankie: Oh yeah. When you were old enough you joined that was it.

Paul: Has that changed a lot in your lifetime?

Frankie: Oh yeah, it's a lot more mellow than it was. It was rough times there; with arguing and fighting. It was St. Rocco's and St. Anthony was separate. Then when they joined together there was fights.

Paul: I can imagine.

Frankie: Oh yeah, it was. (Laughter)

Paul: You were talking earlier about the way things used to be. About how everyone was more close knit, more trusting. Did you ever think at that time that it would end up like it has?

Frankie: Never, in my wildest imagination. Never, I thought it would stay the same. From the time I was a young kid until I was a teenager everything did stay the same, you know? But it changed. That's what wrong with the world. It changed too much.

Paul: When did you start to notice that change? Was there a particular time? Or was it little by little?

Frankie: No it was so gradual that I couldn't tell you. I couldn't really tell you. I'd say, the best thing I could say was when the "old-timers" started to, the patriarchs and the matriarchs started to pass away. That's when it got lost in the shuffle. And that's how it happened. When I think about it that's how it did, you know?

Paul: So you were an electrician for many years. Did you end up retiring with them?

Frankie: Oh yeah, I had fifty years in.

Paul: Geeze, that's a lot of time in. So did unions seem as big? When you were growing up around here than today?

Frankie: Oh yeah, they were stronger and bigger. Oh yeah, they were tough. Now they kind of went the other way. Well, like we were talking about before. The closeness, if the electricians went on strike, nobody went to work. They don't do that no more. That was it. If you put a picket line there, no one crossed that line. Nobody. It's not that way no more.

Paul: Okay, so when you came back to Ishpeming you got a job in the electricians. What made you decide to come back to the Venice? Or were you always involved in it?

Frankie: I never got out. I would work as an electrician than work the Venice at night. I never got out of here.

Paul: How has the tavern scene changed?

Frankie: Before everyone went to the bar and drank. But now with the way the laws read nowadays they don't do that anymore. Late at night there is nobody around. But they can't afford to drink with the driving laws now. Can't blame them.

Paul: Back when everyone did come. Before the laws were so harsh, were there as many accidents? Or as many deaths? Or did it stay about the same?

Frankie: Well you can't really compare the two, because now there are so many cars. Then there was one car in the family. Now, myself I have four cars. That's insane. There are only two drivers and I have four cars. It's nuts. But there are more accidents because there are more cars. But there was always accidents. Drinking and driving isn't the way to go but they went too far.

Paul: Seems like most people would know when they had too much to drink.

Frankie: Right, right. They didn't drive. Or their friends wouldn't let them drive.

Paul: Going back to the closer knit families or society really. That was probably part of it too.

Frankie: Oh yeah, they would take the keys away from you and you wouldn't drive. That was it.

Paul: Did you notice, we were talking about the different laws. Did you notice a change in the Police at all?

Frankie: Oh yeah, they were more friendly. It was family oriented. They would help you out. They wouldn't put you in jail. They would get you home, or do what they have to do. Now it's they grab you and throw you in....it's not the same. They were the police and you listened to them. When they said that was enough that was enough. So it went both ways. You know?

Paul: There have been a lot of robberies, break-ins in Ishpeming. That never really happened back then?

Frankie: No that was very rarely. But now we have more, people that aren't from this town that are here, and they don't belong here. That's where it's coming from. You know? The low rent and, they're here and we never had the element. We had a couple that were bad but that's...

Paul: But everyone knew who they were?

Frankie: Yeah, everyone knew who they were and, very few. Well we had, in my lifetime, four little robberies we had in those years. Nothing, you know? But, it just wasn't that way. I think the drugs have lots to do with it you know?

Paul: Those kids just robbed that lady for all her bingo money.

Frankie: That's ridiculous.

Paul: Do you think a lot of that has to do with the not close community? Do you think if we were more close knit we would keep those ruffians out?

Frankie: Right.

Paul: Do you even think it's possible for us to get back to the way it was at all?

Frankie: I don't think so. I hope so, but I don't think so.

Paul: Kind of backtracking a little bit along the economic lines. I know everyone is worried today about the recession, and different deficits, and Michigans unemployment...

(At this time two children walked up and thanked Frank Andriacci)

Paul: That's a good sign for us huh?

Frankie: I give them candy bars, they always thank me.

Paul: Do you think with today's scares... Do you think people are just blowing it out of proportion? Do you think that the economy is as bad as it was then as it is now? Or are people just blowing today's economy out of proportion?

Frankie: Oh no, it's bad. I think it's bad. I think we are in trouble. The country is in trouble.

Paul: On that subject about the country being in trouble. Do you think that the government with all of it's different programs, do you think that it's better? Or worse?

Frankie: Worse. We don't need all of that. We need to get the people back to making their own living. That's what I'm firm about. I'm a firm believer in that.

Paul: It almost seems like it's easier for people not to work.

Frankie: It's much easier. And the people that are in those programs they want to keep their jobs. They want to make sure that there are people not working. That's what it's all about. They don't like to hear that, but that's a fact.

Paul: I suppose if people were working they wouldn't have a job.

Frankie: Yeah, they wouldn't have that good job.

Paul: In your lifetime did you ever expect to see an African American president?

Frankie: Never, never. I didn't think that there ever would be. I didn't think there ever would be.

Paul: Actually on the subject of different races. Did it seem to be as diverse up here when you were growing up? More different ethnic groups?

Frankie: Oh yes. Yeah there were quite a bit more.

Paul: I've heard that you and my Grandfather were the first ones baptized in....

Frankie: Yup. In St. Johns Church.

Paul: Has that affected you a lot? Knowing you were the first two...

Frankie: Well we've been friends our whole life since then. You know? But that's quite an honor.

Paul: We discussed earlier about the direction our country is going in and how it probably wouldn't go back to the old ideals. Do you think there is any hope?

Frankie: Well, I really think that I met a lot of boys like you. That have got a better thought about what should happen. I got a little more faith in younger people than I have for a long time. I've got quite a few good young people working for me here, and you're good, and some of your friends are nice boys and good people. So that could be a trend going in the right way. As a compliment to you. But I think that we could be on the right track. I hope so.

Paul: While we are talking about that. Was there as much, with the Iraq War, and the Afghanistan War, was there as much talk about war?

Frankie: Well we had the Vietnam War, the Korean War. War just never ends. I don't know if it has something to do with the economy or what. But there is no end to it. You know they don't fight the war to win it like they did during WWI and WWII, they are pussy-footing it. I shouldn't say that over the...

Paul: It's okay.

Frankie: (Laughter) But I mean, they aren't fighting a war how to fight to win. They are pacifying this one, and pacifying that one.

Paul: I don't really count the Persian Gulf as a war, but I don't think we've really "won" any for awhile.

Frankie: No, not since WWII. (Laughter) We might as well have lost that one because we built all the other countries up. (Laughter)

Paul: Well I guess I can end this interview now. Just with asking is there anything you would like to say?

Frankie: No, I think I've said enough. Maybe too much.

Frankie Andriacci

Interview Four

Andriacci