

Oral History Project

Vincent Barcelona

I, _____, hereby direct that the interview
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by Ronald Barcelona by the Roosevelt University Oral
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Director, Oral History Project

Vincent Barcelona
Signature of interviewee

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Elizabeth Balanoff
Director, Oral History Project

Vincent Barcelona
Signature of interviewee

Interview with Vincent Barcelona

By Ronald Barcelona

October 1970

time - 1 hour

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Interview with Vincent Barcelona

October 1970

Interviewer: Ronald Barcelona

- I. My name is Ronald Barcelona and I'm a history student at Roosevelt University. I'm here interviewing my great uncle, Vincent Barcelona, who was involved in some of the early union activities in Colorado and in coal mining. Would you identify yourself please?
- R. I am Vincent Barcelona. I'm 84 years old I came to Hastings, Colorado in 1902. I went to work in the mines for \$1.10 for 10 hours. Then in 1904 we come out on strike. So we had to leave the place because the coal miners, the owners, they chased us out because you either go to work, or out. So we moved and we moved into a camp by the name of Starkville, Colorado. We stayed there for about four years. In 1906 we come back to Hastings, and then we start all over with the same conditions. Worse! They treated us just like animals in those days. There were no laws those days for miners. Miners were considered a skunk. So we went on and finally time came on. In 1911 my father died and we had to move. So we moved into a camp by the name of Berwyn, Colorado. We worked there five months. Then I and my three

brothers, we moved out of there, We moved to Valdez, Colorado. We stayed there all the time, until 1913 there comes another strike, The mine operator, boy, they were dogs. We had a union tent at the place at Ludlow, Colorado, which is north of Kendale. So on the 23rd of April, I happened to be in the battle with the scabs with the police, who came on the train on the flat cars. Then we all got out; I had a rifle and about 15 rounds of ammunition, so we chased them. I could hear the bullets flying all over me. I was lucky to get out of there. Then I come back after four days, and by the time I got back, the militia from Denver, the governor of Colorado, he sent the militia out and started battling the poor miners. They were in tents. So they burned the tents down, and they burned a family of five, him and his wife. I'll never forget that as long as I live, but I wasn't there.

- I. You weren't there when the tents got burned down?
- R. No, I wasn't there, But I was In Valdez at that time. Then after the seven months that I was out on strike I went out and I got married, with a beautiful wife that I married. So I went back to work with the same old conditions. Then we started, I borrowed a hundred dollars from my brother-in-law; he didn't

come out on strike at all. So on 120 dollars I got married. Me and my wife we bought a little stove and we started up. Then time went by, and in 1915 I moved up to Chicago, and we stayed to 1918. I come back, and of course, by that time the union got a hold, some good. Then later on I was in there with that President, John L. Lewis. John L. Lewis come over and took over and John L. Lewis, they got just what they wanted. Today the miners are their own boss. They control the company and the company don't agree to that, out they go,

I. Is that the way it is now in Colorado?

R. Yeah, Sure, Last year, not this year, in the earlier spring, I was in Trinidad, and I went up to Allen Mine, to take a look at the mine, to see what the situation, and the miners, they had two weeks vacation with pay.

I. They never had that before?

R. No, No, Now the miners they work, and they've got electric lights. Years ago when we had the main trip, you had to sit on the car loaded with smelt, and now the miners, they got a castle over the cars that they go in the mines, with the main trip, because the mine is so far in, about seven or eight miles in. And so the miners, they've got it made,

I. Okay, when did you come to this country? Do you

remember the year?

R. Yes, 1902.

I. In 1902 you came. You went right to Colorado and started working in the mines.

R. That's right.

I. Now, you said something earlier about a strike around 1903.

R. Yes, that's the strike we were in.

I. Was that strike organized by the union or did you just walk out?

R. That was organized by the president, John Mitchell.

I. A United Mine Workers strike?

R. Yeah. And after 18 months that we were out on strike, he left. The company bought him out, and he left the union and he disappeared. Nobody knows where he went.

I. Why do you think the company bought him out? What makes you think that?

R. They gave him so much money to get out. The union here, like they say, bribed him. That's what they did.

I. Is that the word that was going around then?

R. They did that. The company, you know, they all got together, they gave him so many thousand dollars and he left: he left just like a bunch of sheep.

- I. Did he just call off the strike?
- R. No, he just left, that's all. He didn't call off no strike, Then in 1913, the next strike we had, we had Mother Jones. She was the leader, you know, of the union. But still we lost, we didn't get anything. John L. Lewis is the guy who gained all what they got today.
- I. That was later on. In 1913, now that was probably called by the union too.
- R. But the organizer was Mother Jones. And then we all went back to work and she left. Hell knows where she went.
- I. I think they threw her in jail at that time. They put her in jail?
- R. That I can't tell you. She was old, she was eighty - past years old.
- I. After Ludlow, did the men still stay out of work? They didn't go back right after Ludlow, did they?
- R. No, we all went to work one-by-one, one today and another one tomorrow until we all went back to work.
- I. You couldn't stay out?
- R. Well, you couldn't stay out because you didn't get any pay. The union paid two-and-a-half dollars a week for men and one dollar for a wife, and so how

can you live on three-and-one-half dollars per week? And so everybody quit the union and went back to work.

I. Who owned the mines that you worked in, do you recall?

R. I recall the mine in Hastings, the name of the family was Victor American Fuel and the president was John Cappell. Then I moved out of there and went to work for C. F. & I in Valdez, which is a Colorado Fuel and Iron Company.

I. Now who owns Colorado Fuel and Iron? Didn't Rockefeller own that?

R. Oh, Rockefeller was part owner, not complete. In fact, in 1920 he came to Colorado because they had so many complaints that the miners-not everybody had a square deal. And so, he came in and visited the miners. But the superintendent and the foreman, you know, they didn't take him into the worst place in the mines. I had a beautiful place at that time, which I was driving an entry, and I was making good, so him and his son, and this superintendent, James O'Neill, and John Truesdale, he was the pit boss, they all came in and he had a son, I think he was 11 or 12 years old, he got a hold of one of my picks and he dug a hunk of coal just as big as

an egg. And he told his father, "Dad, I'm going to take this home and show It to Mama."

- I. He was right there In the mine with you?
- R. Yeah. He came Into that place. But, see, they didn't take him Into some places that they had too much rock, you know, where they weren't making so much. They took Mr. Rockefeller in the best place In the mine. That's the trick of the superintendent.
- I. You said you were In Chicago between 1915 and 1918, and you may not know about this too much, but In 1915 Mr. Rockefeller started a union in his mines and it was kind of a company union. Do you know about It?
- R. They didn't have no union at all,
- I. Wasn't there a plan If you had a grievance you could go to the company?
- R. No. No. Nothing. In fact, years ago, around 1907-08, my older brother was working in a room, and his partner got killed. Of course, he got hurt, not bad, and his partner got killed, and the company only gave him fifty dollars, you know, just to make a box to bury him in, and that's all.
- I. That's all they gave him?
- R. That's all. They treat you like an animal. In fact, they had more respect for the mules than they

did for the miners.

- I. Well, what was medical treatment like around there?
The company had their own doctor and everything?
- R. They had a doctor in Hastings, by the name of Doctor Curry, and that guy, all he knew was pills; if you had a knee-ache, he gave you pills; if you had a sore ankle, he gave you pills. Everything was pills. I didn't see no liquid medicine in that guy's office. Everything was pills.
- I. You don't think he was too good of a doctor?
- R. No. In fact, I got hurt and he made a bum job out of my hand. I got two fingers broken, split open in the palm of the hand, and he had in mind, he told my folks, that he was going to amputate my hand. My poor mother, she says, "Don't you dare touch his hand, Let him die with his hand. If he's going to die, let him die, let him die, but you're not going to cut." And you know, if you amputate anything on a miner, he gets fifty dollars. So he was after the fifty dollars,
- I. If he'd have cut it off, he'd get extra money?
- R. See. If he'd cut it off, I wouldn't get a dime.
- I. He'd get extra?
- R. He'd get fifty dollars for the operation,
- I. And the company would pay that fifty dollars?

- R. Yeah, the company would pay him fifty dollars.
- I. That's very strange. I wonder why they did that.
- R. Well, years ago, the company they were under control, election day if you didn't vote Republican, you were out of a job.
- I. You couldn't vote the way you wanted?
- R. No, you got to vote just Republican.
- I. How did they know how you voted?
- R. Well, they was all Republican tickets, you know. Wasn't no other way, just straight Republican.
- I. You couldn't vote a Democratic ballot?
- R. No, heck, no, if they voted they'd find out right away, see, because the company had all the secrets, If you voted Democratic or something else, out you go. And you had to vote.
- I. You had to put your name on a ballot?
- R. Oh, sure.
- I. And then they checked it?
- R. Sure. They used to have scrip money in those days, which If you changed into United States money, they paid you ten per cent.
- I. Oh, that was like company's money?
- R. Yeah, that was company money. You could only use that in the company stores, of that same company. Out of town you couldn't use it.

- I. How were the prices in the company stores?
- R. Only one place, one store in town.
- I. How were their prices, were they higher than usual?
- R. Well, they weren't cheap, I'll tell you that. Those days, things were cheap. You used to get a quart of milk for a nickel, and we used to get from Ludlow, they'd deliver milk to us. They'd give you twenty tickets, you'd give them a dollar. When that expires you'd give them another dollar. And the company didn't have no milk, but the Victor American Fuel camps-- they had lard; they had whiskey; they had grape drink belonged to that same company, Any peddler couldn't get in unless he was a vegetable man, then he could get in. But if he had a grocery out they wouldn't let him in. So you had to buy everything in the store.
- I. Why do you think the company only let you trade in one store? What do you think was the reason for it?
- R. Because there was only one store in their town. There was no other store.
- I. But couldn't a guy come in and open up his own store?

- R. No, no. Heck no! Not on the company's ground,
no.
- I. The company owned everything.
- R. The company owned the mine and the land. And
they built a bunch of houses. You could live
in the company house for ten dollars a month.
- I. Now I want to ask you a question about the
election. What if you didn't want to vote at
all?
- R. Well, if you didn't vote at all, then you didn't
count. But I know in 1920 I had a new Overland
car. It was a real small beautiful car, So the
superintendent asked me the day before, he called
me at the office, and he says, "Would you work
at the polls tomorrow?" "Sure". And he says,
"Take your car", And he says "Go and pick up
those Mexicans (there were nothing but Mexicans,
you know on the outskirts of the town) and tell
those Mexicans how to vote", which meant Republi-
can, see.
- I. Did you tell them?
- R. No, I didn't tell them. I didn't say a word. I
just went and picked them up and drove them back,
the bunch of them. But they all voted Republican,
because the company, they had everything cinched.

You were nothing but a schtuck that's all. We had some beautiful rotten superintendent, because every time somebody got killed in the mine, the mine stopped right there and everybody walked out. But that day that my brother's partner got killed, that louse, you know he didn't even stop it, didn't let nobody know. He kept it secret. They didn't bring the dead body out until six o'clock that night, see, and he got killed around ten o'clock.

I. Did a lot of guys get killed, a lot of accidents?

R. Well, there were a few. There was on paisano of mine, Jo-Jo, (his brother's in California), a guy named Jo-Jo, he got crushed in the mine. And who else? One Greek, I remember, he got killed.

I. What happened to the families of the people who got killed?

R. Nothing. All they gave them was fifty dollars to buy a couple of boards and make a box out of it.

I. Did they have to leave the company's grounds then? If they were in a company house would they have to go, since the husband wasn't working any more?

R. Well, if they didn't have nobody working any more, then they had to move, that's all. Because the company wants people in their house that work in the

mine. I had one paisano, John, he got killed but this mine exploded so many times. And the last time the mine exploded it killed two paisani, Vincenzo-- and John--they were brothers-in-law. They got them out, but the next explosion that happened in 1909, there were 75 miners that got buried. So the governor of the state, Mr. Anderson, he had the company to undertake to bring out those miners on the surface. The company says, "Well, it'll run about a couple of thousand dollars apiece." Well the governor told the companies, "I want you to give the families the two thousand dollars and celebrate the funeral service at the mouth of the mine." "Close the mine, and that's all." That mine is closed for good,

- I. And is that what they did? Did they give the families the money?
- R. They gave the families, they didn't give them all one lump. They gave them a payday, like the husband was working until they accumulated two thousand dollars.
- I. That worked pretty good?
- R. Well there was a good governor at the time.
- I. Ok, I'd like to go back and ask you a little about

Ludlow. Now how did you first hear that there was going to be a strike?

R. You know, they put the posters up, and they organized a president and a secretary and a trustee, so they organized just like a lodge, see?

I. Did they make like a committee?

R. And we all stayed home and didn't report to work. So we stayed out two days and the company went to call from house to house, "You either go to work or get out". So we got out, so the company couldn't bother us. And the mine was idle for 18 months. Of course, they went out South and brought in a bunch of Mexicans from old Mexico, and they started loading coal. Those guys, they were so green that they didn't know as much as an old miner, When I went to work I was driving mules. And when I came out and half past five, bring the mules back to the stable, and then go back in the mine and shoot shafts, and I used to get 40 cents an hour for two hours. That was over time and I had eleven men, all Mexican, and the most that they ever loaded was about 35 or 40 cars between 11 men,

I. That's not too good?

R. Well, a regular miner would load six or seven for two men digging up. That'd be about almost 100 cars. That's all I used to get. But the company they kept

them because they wanted to break the strike, which they did.

I. When you had to move out of the company town, where did you go?

R. We moved to Starkville.

I. That wasn't a company town?

R. We rented a cottage which belonged to a private owner on the county grounds, not the company's.

I. Where did all the rest of the men go?

R. They all scattered around--there's a little place close to Trinidad, called El Moro. A lot of people, they moved over there, you know. They rented a flat and they moved over there. It's orchard country. They raised vegetables.

I. Didn't the union set up some kind of---

R. Yeah, they set up a hall.

I. But the tents for people to live in?

R. That was at Ludlow. If you wanted to live in a tent, the company gave you a tent and you put it up. The only place around Los County, they only had that one spot, you know, at Ludlow.

I. That tent colony wasn't on company grounds, was it?

R. No.

I. Why did the soldiers attack it?

R. Because they figured that the miners were wrong to stay out and, of course, the miners they got their rifles, you know. They were out to keep the scabs from coming in. That's why the militia went against the

poor miners.

- I. When they started organizing the strike before Ludlow, how many of the miners left? Was it most of them, or half, do you know?
- R. That was 1913. About half of the miners didn't come out, you know, because they'd seen enough of the first strike in 1903. Like my brother, we were out 18 months, you know, the whole family. In 18 months we worked three days. In Trinidad they had a flood which washed away the Santa Fe depot completely. The river carried fourteen feet of water. It washed away a locomotive downstream for about a mile. They had a strongbox which weighed about two or three tons, and it washed it away downstream; And the whole building flopped because it was a wood depot at that time; now they've built a new one. What I mean is we worked, I, my father and one brother of mine, we worked cleaning mud out of the basements because they were all flooded-- dollar and a quarter for ten hours, that's shoveling mud. So that's the only money that we earned that eighteen months,
- I. How did the rest of the people stay alive?
- R. The only money that we earned in eighteen months was those three days. But the union used to give us grub

used to give us provisions every week. We'd get a pack of potatoes, a lot of cereal, and they used to give us a package of meat, packed in packages, So, they didn't give us cash, but they gave us grub every week. And, so we had to live on that. But that was a poor living in those days, I'll tell you that.

- I. You said about half of the miners didn't work?
- R. That wasn't at that time, That was in 1913, the second strike.
- I. Do you think that they just didn't have faith in the union?
- R. That's right. They didn't believe in the union, because they lost the first time, they lose the second time. So what's the use to go out there and stay out and nothing to gain? So half of the miners they stayed in. Ivy brother Bill, he and five boarders, and him and his wife they took care of the boarders and worked. After seven months that I was on strike, I got married in Trinidad. My wife's uncle, he took us to church; we got married, then took us to the depot which the train runs from Trinidad to Valdez. So at one

o'clock we got on the train and we went home. When I got at the depot there I find my brother and his boarders, and one of the boarders he was an accordian player. So I lead out and they all follow me through about 3 or 4 block, and he was playing. So we got in and I had a few bags of peanuts which amounted to about fifty pounds, and a keg of beer, and 3 cases of soda pop. So we celebrate that night, the people, my brother and his boarders, and the second bosses in the mines, they come over. They come over with cans, you know, chivaree, which they used to do in those days. And so, I called them in. I gave them a drink, what I had. So the people call me on the side. He says, "Vince", he says, "How much are you getting from the union?" I told him, I says, "I get two and a half dollars a week and a dollar for my wife, which makes it three and a half." And he told me, "What can you do?" I know the family of your wife, Can you support this girl on three and a half a week?" "Well", I says, "We have to make the best of it." When I left the job I was driving mules in the mine and I had an extra job shooting shafts, which I said in 2 hours, I used to yet 40 cents an hour, make 80 cents, and 2X80.

I was making about \$3.40 a day. So he says, "If you want to come back I'll hold your job, but make sure you come soon because probably next week I'll give your job away and then you're out". Well, I told him I'd think it over and let him know. So I thought it over and thought it over, I asked my wife what she thought. She said, "It's up to you", So I decided to go back to work Monday, which was after the Saturday I got married--Sunday we celebrated, and Monday I went to the main office and I talked to the superintendent. I said, "Have you got a house for me? I'm moving in". "Well," he says, "the only place I've got, I've got two rooms". That's the terms, which was four rooms split in two. There was about four apartments and each 4 rooms they split in two. So me and my wife had two rooms, and then my mother, she said she was scared of the union. She said, "No, I think you'll go back to work but I'll stay". "Well", I says, "Ma, it's up to you". Then I said, "**If you want to move, I'll move you". Finally, when I made the last trip, she decided, well, you better move us too. So it didn't cost me anything because I went and got the lumber wagon from the company with the mules and I moved. It

didn't cost me a nickel to move, Then I went to work, and like I say I started from scratch.

I. When you said that your mother was afraid of the union, you thought that the union would come and try to hurt you because you went back to work?

R. Yeah, yeah that's right. My mother thought so. I told her, I said, "The union men they have their mouths, big mouths, "Oh, we're going to do this', but then they like to say, 'Let's get the gun and you go." That's how the union guys were that were there at the time.

I. Rut the union guys did do a bit of shooting. You were there when they were shooting.

R. Well, you see what happened, at Ludlow, at Majestic, they had a few tents, and so they called for help, and so thirty-one of us volunteered from Valdez to go through the mountains at night, We left at about ten o'clock and walked all night with the rifles and the provisions that we took. So we walked almost all night. When we got close to the camp Majestic up in the timbers, we took a rest, and somehow I dropped asleep and they all left and I was so tired and they didn't wake me up. And I had one guy long side of me. You think he'd wake me up? I woke up right away and I find out

that I was all alone, and I could hear the footsteps between the bushes. They were about a couple blocks. Then I came over a cliff, which, down the hill was a great big valley and it was all open, so I could hear them all walking. Well, the guy that was alongside of me, his name is Joe Barber. I hollered, "Hey, Joe Barber, wait a minute," So when they heard my voice, boy, they all scattered--and who runs one way, and who runs the other way. They all went back to Trinidad and go home to Valdez. So they went and told my mother that the police got hold of me. And so out of thirty-one guys that night, I was the only one who got into the Majestic Camp. So the guy that had the men stayed, where they bought lard, he come and meet me at the door and I told him, "I'm a union man". I showed him my card. He thought I was a police, see, because a few days before the police, they went to the machine gun and they shot through the place there. They hit a guy in the leg eleven times, one of the poor union guys . So I slept that night there and the next morning I asked the guy, I says, "I suspect that they went home and told my mother some story". So I looked for a place where I could find a tele-

phone. I found a place where I could find a telephone. I found a place and I called my mother and the saloonkeeper, his name was Sam, and I told him where I was and he hollered. I could hear through the receiver, "Hey", he says, "Vince Barcelona's still alive. What are you trying to tell us over here the police killed him?" So, I said I wanted to talk to my mother. He went and called my mother, and my mother said, "Hello", I said, "I'm you son Vincenze", "What is this?" No, you're not my son" my mother says, "you're dead." I says, "Like hell, I'm so much alive:" and I said, "I'll be home pretty soon", And I said, "Who the hell came over and said that?" And she says, "Everybody says so. The police killed you". "Well", I said, "thank all the union guys. That's how the union guys are, Courage", I said, "Bravery, They heard my voice," I said, "and they all run away", So then I find out that the union guys were nothing but bullshit. They say, "Oh, we're gonna do this; we're gonna do that". They didn't do a damn thing. They had no guts. And so when I saw guys like that, I got married in the meantime and I decided to go back to work.

I. Now when you say the union guys, do you mean the guys

who were working with you in the mine, or the union organizers?

R. The organizers.

I. Did you ever see the organizers? Did they come around and talk to you at all?

R. The only thing I saw was Mother Jones. And she came around. She didn't come in the coal pits but she came into Trinidad. They had a hall in Trinidad that they used to hold meetings every week. And I didn't go in that hall at all. But I saw Mother Jones, The police, they killed a union man, I don't know how, and so we all had to go to the funeral. I lived in Valdez at that time and the funeral was in Trinidad. And so when the order came that we all had to go down to Trinidad to attend the funeral, and I didn't have money to buy a ticket, we all had to walk. So we walked sixteen miles--I, my brother, and another, which was my compadre. And we walked into Trinidad. We attended the funeral, and that's the time that I saw my Intended father-in-law, which I proposed before the strike started. Then I lost his address and I don't know where they went. When he saw me, he recognized me, and he told me "You come up", which they had a house up on a hill in the camp of the name Ingot Mill which the miners

already shut down. Rut they had a few cows and they were running a dairy. So when I got over there he told me that my wife accepted me, and that's when I got married. That was 1913, on the 24th of December, 1913.

I. When you were at the funeral, now, you said you saw Mother Jones? Was she speaking there to all the men?

R. Yeah, she spoke out in public. She said that that's the time that they had the first rifles, and we can't get in one way, we're gonna fight them,

I. You mean the union was passing around rifles?

R. Yeah, they were passing around rifles.

I. Right in public.

R. Yeah, I got a rifle, each member of the union got a rifle.

I. Did you ever have a gun before that?

R. I had a rifle of my own, which was 32-30. But the one I got from the union was 30-30.

I. In other words it was just like a battle, they were arming union members.

R. Yeah, yeah, sure. Then from the Majestic, I got a ride, which was about five or six miles from Majestic to Ludlow. I got a ride on the second day, and I went to where the tent was, see? And so

the 23rd of April 1913 the scabs' train was coming in, seven flat cars with the engine loaded with the police and scabs to bring into a mine by the name of Berwyn. When we saw that they were bringing the scabs in, this Charley Foster, he was, like you say, the leader, and he hollered, "Come on let's get the guns," So we all got the guns and we went, and lucky thing the police in front of the engine, they set up a machine gun, you know, on the stand, and they started to shoot, So there was a great big log about ten foot long, and I lay under there and shoot. I could see them, But after a while, somebody said that our bullets put a hole in the water tank of the engine, and so they were losing the water and they backed away. They had to go back. They didn't get in that day.

I. Did the men keep fighting or did you go home then?

R. No, well after that battle I decided I'd better go home. I says, "I've had enough of this". So I went home, Then after I get home I went and got married and I went through all of that and so I decided to go back to work.

I. Do you remember any later strikes, like back in the 20's, the 1920's?

R. No. The only strikes I remember were in 1903-04 and in 1913, which I was out seven months. The

union guys, the members, they didn't come back right away-one today, another tomorrow. Finally they all came back,

- I. In 1903, did they have battling like they did in 1913?
- R. No. It was a peaceful strike. That's why everybody stayed to work there. They said, "What the hell, what's the use to go out there and suffer? You might as well stay at work".
- I. What nationality were most of the miners?
- R. Most Sicilians. Mostly Italians, they were all mixed up.
- I. Mostly Italians. Why do you think all the Italians came to the mines?
- R. Because in Italy at that time you couldn't make a living. Everybody that had a chance to come to America, come to better themselves, My father come to better himself because in Italy there was nothing but starvation those days.
- I. Were there any Mexicans working there?
- R. Yeah. There were Mexicans; there were American born people--all mixed--Irish, Bohemian, all kinds of people.
- I. English people too?
- R. American, there was some English, sure.

- R. For the whole house. But he didn't buy the lot, because the lot belonged to the company.
- I. So he didn't have to pay rent?
- R. No.
- I. So when he moved out, the company got the house?
- R. When we moved out and came back that house was still there, after three years that we were gone. We put a lock on the door. When we came back we were living in that same house. Then we had electric put in, because we had a kerosene lamp. I told my father, we live in a house just about half a block from the engine room, which was generating electric which runs the mine. And I said "What do you say if we get electric in this house?" He says, "Go ahead and ask". So I asked the superintendent. He said, "See the engineer". And the engineer said okay. They strung up lines. We had four rooms; they put a line in each room. It cost us twenty-five dollars for the whole works, and that's all. We didn't pay no more,
- I. When you were saying that all these nationalities were separate in their own little groups--why do you think that was? Because they didn't like each other?
- R. Well, you know, the Sicilians, like you said--- They all looked to stay close to one another, most

of the old Paisani, see? That's how it was,
We had next door to us other Paisani, and we were
between them, come from the same places.

I. Did everybody get along? Did the Mexicans get along
with the English?

R. Oh, sure. Nobody had any trouble. Those days you
had no trouble at all. The only trouble was that
there was a woman, and that woman, she was sexy.
What that woman did--this is another long story.

I. You were saying before that most of the miners
came over from Italy, and there were Bohemians, and
Greeks.

R. Should I tell you the story of how we came to Amer-
ica, how my father came to America?

I. Well, after we get this. Most of the people when
they came over, could they speak English?

R. I myself, I couldn't speak a word of English.

I. How long did it take you to learn? Did you learn
pretty quick?

R. I meddled around between the Americans. I never
associated with people, with kids, with anybody
like grown up men. I used to chum around and play
marbles, I was sixteen years old when I come here
and I used to play marbles with kids six or seven
years old.

I. How come?

R. Because I wanted to learn the English language.

That's how I learned. My mother used to tell me, "Aren't you ashamed a great big boy like you playing with little boys?" "Ma", I said, "I want to hear those kids speak English and I want to learn".

I said, "You're here in America, but your mind is over there in Italy, That poor Italy. What's Italy about?" "Well", she says, "Italy is Italy".

I said, "We come to America to better ourselves, and I'm going to stick to the American way", I says, "To hell with Italian".

I. Were there a lot of miners who couldn't speak English?

R. Oh, most of the Paisani, nobody could speak. My father he only knew three words, and he was in America about twelve, thirteen years.

I. And he could never speak English?

R. All he could do was ask for a job. You know, "You got a job for me?"

I. You said before about voting, that when these guys went to vote, if they couldn't speak English--

R. They made them put a cross on the voting ballot.

I. But how did they know who they were voting for if they couldn't speak English? They didn't. Or did they?

- R. No, my mother she couldn't speak a word in English, and she couldn't read her own name, but she used to go to the polls and vote because the guys showed her how to vote, see? Put your cross over here; Those days there were no machines like there are today, Everything was on the ballot. So they didn't need no names for those people. We'd go over there, "Put your cross over here", They used to vote mostly straight ballots, They'd put a cross on top.
- I. Tell us about when you came over here, from Italy?
- R. Oh, that's a long story.
- I. We don't have too much tape left. Okay let me ask you this question. You said before about boarders, people living in houses, did they board out with other families?
- R. Some of them. Some of them, like me and my wife, we had two rooms and we had three boarders, but they had their living quarters. All they did was eat at our house, and my wife fixed the lunch.
- I. Why did these guys board, because there wasn't enough houses to go around?
- R. They board because they don't like to cook for themselves. This way they come home, wash up, and the boarding boss has got the dinner ready, and they sit down and eat.
- I. And they paid you?
- R. They paid board.

Interview with Vincent Barcelona

November, 1970

Interviewer: Ronald Barcelona

I: How did your father happen to emigrate to America when he did?

R: My father, he went to South America years ago. I don't remember what year that was. He stayed there two years and a half. He had a friend of his, they were baching together. The work in Argentina, at that time, was only paying \$1.25 for ten hours. My father he went to work picking coffee for \$1.25 a day. His friend was too lazy. He didn't care. He used to go to this big chain store and so he stayed at the door and he asked, "Lady, can I help you home with your packages?" And he used to make a little money. So after two years and a half my mother used to write to my father, "Why don't you come home, because you're only

out there to spend your time useless?

My father had only one hundred dollars and the ticket was twenty dollars from. South America to Italy. My father bought a ticket and he was going to come home and his friend started crying, "Now you're going home and leaving me here." My father was soft-hearted, so he says, "Buy me the ticket and I have some land in Italy. When we get there, I'll pawn it and pay you." My father loaned him twenty dollars to buy the ticket. They came home, and what did this guy do--he pawned his land that he had and he went to America. He went to North America which was Colorado. Where he landed was Hastings, Colorado. He started to work in the mine and so my father, to make the story short, he waited twenty years before this guy was going to send him the twenty dollars.

After twenty years one pay day night he was going to go to a store and make a money order for twenty dollars to send to my father--not even interest. He met another friend that knew my father,

he was about the same age, they knew each other. He asked him, he say "Where you going?" So this guy says, "You know I owe the old man Barcelona twenty dollars for twenty years. Now I got it I'm going to send it to him." Well this guy says, "I'll tell you, wait a minute. The ticket for him to come over here costs fifty dollars. You give me the twenty dollars, I put thirty, we get him over here. If you send him the twenty dollars, he's got a large family, in a couple, three weeks he's broke." The guy said it's a good idea. Well, all of a sudden my father he receives a letter from his friend, saying if you want to come to America I'll send you the ticket.

I remember I was a kid and I used to see my father. He was so happy that he was going to come to America because he was slaving over there. All of a sudden he got the ticket. That was 1898 when he left Italy. So he came to Hastings, got a job, worked in the mines. 1900 he send a ticket to my oldest brother, Hill. Then 1902 we were four brothers and my mother. We all come together. They send us the tickets and we landed in Trinidad, Colorado, 1902, the eighteenth of July. So he come

and pick us up for the hack. There was no automobiles in those days so they come in with the hack. We went to Hastings. Of course, him and my brother they had a job, so three days after we landed over there I got a job as a trapper in the mine. Ten hours for \$1.10 a day. That's the story of how we got into America.

I: Now this man who told your father's friend to have him come over to America, was he just doing it as a favor?

R: Yea. He says he feel sorry for my father, because if you send him twenty dollars, of course, my father had four or five kids at that time and my mother, so twenty dollars is gone in no time. So this way he can come to America, he can get a job over here, and he says he can make a better living. That was the idea of that man.

I: Then your father came over and he brought his family over a little bit at a time.

R: Yea. First he brought my brother in 1900. Then 1902 between my father and him, my brother, they had enough money to get the whole family over, five of us.

I: When you stayed behind for those two or three

years, you would still work the farm back in Italy while your father and Bill were over here?

R: No, we didn't have no land, because our father had a piece of land, but he had a wealthy sister and he sold all his property to his sister in order to support their family, because their family was increasing on it. His sister, she was married but they had no kids. She was well-to-do and so we didn't have no land. We even had to rent a home, just like you do here.

I: He would send money over?

R: Every month he used to send us fifty dollars, sixty, forty, whatever he could afford. We live on that until we all come to America.

I: You said that your father was so happy when he found out he was going to come to America. What about the women, your mother, did they want to come, too?

R: Well, my mother she didn't like it, but being that my father improved himself by coming to America. My father he was working for some guy that had a mare and two mules and my father used to take the animal and work with it. The guy had land, they had to plow the land and in depression time

my father had to do all that. On top of that he had to stay five nights out of the week to sleep with the animals. He only came home to sleep with my mother once every Saturday night.

I: Why was that, because it was far?

R: No, because he was supposed to work with this guy and in the middle of the night you gotta get up and feed the animals. So he had to be with the animals. So they fixed up two bunks; they put a little mattress on that and cover. My father was sleeping there five nights a week. In the middle of the night the horse, the mules had to be fed because they eat all night. The animals they eat, they sleep standing up a couple, three hours, the most, and that's plenty. The rest they eat their straw. After he work all day out in the country where this guy's land was, he come home, the first thing they didn't have no water in the house. They had the water a little ways. They had to carry so many buckets of water; they had to get the straw, bring enough straw for the animals to eat all night, besides the hay. Then at night he come home and eat, and right away he leave and go stay with the animals. That was a real miserable life, I tell

you that.

I: You Said your mother didn't want to come over,
 she didn't want to leave but--

R: No, my mother was happy when we heard that we
 were going to come to America. Oh my mother she
 was tickled too. Everybody, when we heard, because
 in Italy in those days it was a miserable life.
 You can't even imagine how miserable it was. You
 had hardly any factories, no work, no kind. Only
 one doctor in town, it's a small town, you know,
 only one doctor and he wasn't much good at that.

Ii When you came to Hastings, did you think that
 was so much better?

R: Everybody thought we were in paradise, I tell
 you, as soon as we landed in America.

I: In Hastings?

R: In Hastings, yes sir.

I: That was paradise?

R: Yeah, it was a new home, a new life for all
 of us.

I: Did your father like the mine a lot better
 than farming?

R: Oh naturally. In the mine you work at those
 days, you work ten hours and you're through, but

when you work in the farm--farmer work is never through. Never through. you always work until you get ready to go to bed. That's the life my father led. When we lived in the cottage that my father paid \$125 for four room cottage. All we bought, the house, not the lot because the ground belonged to the company. But this cottage was already built. My father bought it from a guy that he owned it.

We moved in there, just about a half a block there was a woman that she was a sexy. That woman would rather have sex than eat. I was working at night that time and around about nine o'clock I got up. I eat breakfast and my mother, course I used to ride a bicycle, my mother said you better go to company store where we get the mail. We buy the food over there and get the mail. She says, "Go to the store and see if we got any mail." Well, I got on the bicycle and when I passed by there, she was outside her porch and she called me, "Vince, Vince." I stopped and said, "What do you want?" So she had the oven, the Sicilian people, at that time they all had oven in the yard, great big oven they bake the bread and cook it in the oven. so I

walk into her fence there with her, and she had a tubfull, I think, it was about five or six loaf of bread, great big ones---two, three loaves each. She says, "Will you help me with this tub?" "Sure." I help her inside the house. Then I was leaving and she says, "Wait a minute." In the middle of the big room she had, she was digging a cellar (because in those days nobody had any ice box, we didn't know what it meant). In order to keep things cool we each dug a cellar about four or five feet deep, seven or eight feet inside. The place had just about four or five feet deep. While she was digging I was shoveling in the tub. In the meantime she went a little the right way, she backed into me, and I'll tell you I was red hot.

In the meantime, my mother saw me stop over there and she knew this woman because she was no good. She come to the fence and holler, "Vince". I answer. I say, "What do you want?" "What are you doing there?" "Well," I says, "the lady asked me to bring the bread in; now she wants me to help her dig the cellar." I says, "I don't know." So I start to walk out and my mother told that-lady, "Dona Concerta (that was her name) you better

leave my son alone, don't bother with him. If you want anybody else it's all right with me but don't bother my son---just leave him alone." That woman, she was so sexy, that the first husband she fed him arsenic in the coffee. The poor guy he walks inside the mine, just before he started work, why he got the cramps, he come up and she give it to him so strong that before long he died.

In the meantime, they had a ranch full of goats, I believe she had about six or seven hundred goats that they used to milk, sell cheese, sell the young goats. That's where she was making the money. She had a guy, that was supposed to be taking care of the goats beside her husband, because he needed the help and not only for milking. They used to milk each and every one by hand and they used to make cheese. Her husband and this guy, they used to stay there and they come home weekends. Well he used to send the guy weekends, sometimes, to get enough provisions for them for a week, but the, old man (that was the second husband that she married) he stay there. First thing you know she got tired of this guy and she had a guy that she used to pay him two hundred dollars for

each head. She had her first husband killed, she paid two hundred dollars. Then she had the second husband killed and she paid two more hundred dollars.

This second husband that she had, had a nephew that had a ranch with goats of his own in a different locality. While they were burying the second husband, this guy was the nephew of the second husband, while they were burying him, you lower him in the grave, she was crying, "Oh, my partner, oh my partner", but not a tear in her eyes. This guy, the nephew, he was wise to her tricks and so he hollered at her, "You bloody whore, first you have my uncle killed now you crying for him." She didn't even say a word. About three weeks later she got the guy, what they called the executioner, and she give him two hundred dollars to go get rid of the nephew. The executioner, he was really too close Of a friend with the guy, so he went over there and he call him on the side, "Mr. Sam (that's the guy's name) I got two hundred dollars that I'm supposed to get you out of the way, but you too good of a friend of mine, I wouldn't do it. For my consultation, if I were you I'd sell everything you

got here and move out of the state." The guy he says, "Well, let's study it up and see what we can do." He says, "I'll tell you, is my life worth two hundred dollars? I'll give you two more hundred and how about getting rid of her?" Well the executioner said, "It's all right with me". So the guy give him two hundred dollars. About, I don't believe it was a week, this guy he lived in a little town by the name of Aguilar, Colorado. It's eight miles apart through the hills, so one of those nights just before it got dark, he come in and soon as she saw him, oh, she was happy to see him. The guy he didn't reach in the house, when he pulled out his gun and shot her, and she died that instant. After they got rid of that woman there was no more murder, there was no more trouble in that county for long years.

I: This is the same woman you were helping that day?

R: Yes, it's the same woman. Dona Concerta, they said they were wealthy in their town. Her name was Jenny Moniscouco. I'll never forget her name. Great big woman, oh she was over 220-240.

I: And she was sexy?

- R: Boy, I never see a woman that she was so hot. I tell you that woman, like you say she screw a snake, anybody hold her head for her. The first husband that she killed, the law got after her because they found out he was poisoned with arsenic. They went in and searched her house. They found a little bottle of arsenic. They give her a trial and she was sentenced ninety-nine years. You know how long she stayed in jail? About seven or eight months. I don't know how she got out or how much money she paid there and she was free. Of course, those days, years ago, the law was not like today. The law wasn't so strict. That woman she paid her jail out after six or seven months.
- I: Do you think anybody who committed a crime could pay somebody and get out of it then?
- R: Well there wasn't no other crime committed except that woman. Of course, this Aguilar, it's in a different county.
- I: Was this woman well known in that area, around where this--
- R: For the sexy?
- I: No, the killings.
- R: No, she wasn't known for the killing, but she

was known for the sexy. Everybody knew her. Anybody that she liked, if you get acquainted with her, you get anything you want.

How old were you when you--

Well, I was about eighteen, nineteen years old.

I: Your mother didn't want you to go by her, she figured you'd get into trouble?

R: No, no. She didn't want me to have anything to do with her, with a woman like that because you don't know what she do. See?

I: Was your mother and father, were they very religious at that time?

R: Why sure, they were Catholic all the time.

I: Go to church every Sunday?

R: No, there was no church in that town until later. All the Italians got together, they pick up collection and they build up a church, in the company grounds. After the church was built priests used to come once a week, once every Sunday to celebrate mass. We all used to go to church. This was six, seven, eight or more years later, than when this happened.

I: Then before there was a church you didn't go

on Sundays?

R: No, no, we didn't go no church because there wasn't any. The only close church was about twenty-one miles, in Trinidad. That church that's in Trinidad it was built years ago. I got a letter last week from my sister-in-law that that church burned down, but it was arson. They say the church, course it was a frame, the church burn down to the ground--statue, everything burn down.

I: Now is this that church that you used to go to all the way back then?

R: No, there was a different one. There was a church where every time anybody baptise a baby girl, baby boy, we'd go down in Trinidad and baptise in that church. But in that church where they build it in the coal camp it was different all together, and was twenty-one miles apart.

Well, I was about twenty years old, this were paisani. Her father he was a widower. There were two sisters. The mother died just a few days before we come into Hastings. I think she died about the seventeenth of July--no, the fourteenth of July they buried her, this girl's mother. I fell in love with the oldest girl. I didn't propose, to

month we used to get paid. There was two saloons, one was north Italian people. The north Italian saloon was better. It had a better dancing hall. They had a piano player, a woman. Boy she sure played! Once a month we used to go to the dance. I come home one Saturday night, it was pay day, sick as a dog. I had a bad cold. My father went and called the doctor. He gave me some pills, he give me some to sweat. After a while I felt better so I got up. I told my mother, "Give me my good clothes I'm gonna go to the dance."

Later on there was another dance. The Calabra Saloon had another brother. They had a saloon farther east from us. There was a dance going on over there. I got on the bicycle, me and a friend of mine. He's not paisano, either, but he's still-- he's in Houston, Texas, today. Oh that guy--me and that other guy like to say we're always together. Any place we want to go hop on the bicycle and go. I went and told him, "Pete, there's a dance down at Tony Nicholai." "Yeah?" "Are you going?" "Sure." We dress up and get on the bicycle. We went only there weren't many people there, because it's too far from the camp, like on the outskirts

don't know how long. I heard some guy say that guy consumed enough booze in his system to supply the whole state of Illinois.

I: You were saying before, your father had to go speak for you to propose for marriage. Was that the custom in those days to match? The parents had to go?

R: That's the custom. The father and mother had to go propose for the boy.

I: To the girl's father and mother?

R: To the girl's parents. In Italy if you own land, like you say you got some kind of property, your father donates you so much. Sometime the parents of the boy they'll ask the parents of the bride if they give the girl some kind of land.

I: Like a dowry?

R: Yeah, that's right, even just as much. Like you say, "I give my son fifteen acres of land. Can you match this?" See, that's the parents ask the other, "Can you match it?" Well, if I have it to spare it, sure we'll match it. So the girl gets so much less, and the boy gets so much. I got a cousin today that he's close to 80. He was here six years ago in Chicago. He married the

second time. He was a widower and so his wife. She got so much land that belonged to her because her husband died years ago and he had so much land. They match together even.

I: You said that this girl you proposed to, she wouldn't elope. You could never get alone with her?

R: No, no chance at all. I tell you they used to keep her like a jail. That girl never went out to the store, never went out. She was in the house day in and day out with her step-mother.

I: Were most families like that or just her's?

R: Most of them.

I: There were a lot more men around the mining camp than women?

R: Oh yea, more men than girls. Italians mostly were all married. They left their wife in Italy and come to America to work three or four years, then go back.

I: Did they usually send for women from Italy to come over or would they marry American girls?

R: I was sixteen years old when I come from Italy. All of us, including my oldest brother, got married in America here. Of course, my oldest brother, my father had a little money at that time and my oldest

to get a woman who's so--" Well, I guess he was satisfied that he was wrong. So I got married and I got me a wife from America. That girl she had a grandmother and, of course, the old man, the grandfather, he died long years ago. But after the old grandfather died, the old lady went and lived with this girl's folks because they want it to appear that she was nuts from my brother. You know that the old lady, she liked my brother Bill so much, that she call him on the side, "Do you want to elope with my niece? I'll get her and you. guys go to Trinidad,, get married and come back." My brother wouldn't agree. My brother says, "I don't want to do that." You see, me when I want to do it, I couldn't do it. He had the chance to do it and he wouldn't do it. That something?

I. Let me ask you: You said the two women of the house couldn't get along. Was that because Bill's wife was from Italy? She was old-fashioned? Or they just couldn't get along?

R. No. Somehow, they started arguments. She used to come in and tell my mother things that didn't happen. Your grandfather, every night he used to drive mules and the house where we lived

America many years, but she still had the ideas of Italy, how they used to do, how you act, My brother Bill, as soon as my wife come in the family, he told my mother, "Ma, I don't want you to start trouble with Vince's wife." So she didn't say nothing. When I got married with the wife I had, we start from scratch. I even borrow a hundred dollars from him, because we were on strike. I didn't have no money. I had to get married and so I asked my mother? Ma, you got any money?" "All I had was forty dollars,." she said. I said, "Give me twenty." My God, I live in the house almost twenty-seven years old when I got married. In twenty-seven years, I said, what my father did--they sell out, when my brother Bill got married, they had fifteen hundred dollars cash money and they almost spent it all. Three days, they had two cooks, paying them five dollars a day for three days, the two of them-- five dollars each. The cook, the people come in just like a restaurant. They come in, eat, and get out. Three days celebrate. The music, that accordion guy, I think we pay him ten or fifteen. dollars. He spent all of his money and after my brother Bill got married the mine got set on fire, some

trouble, and so they shut down the mine. We had to move. Since that time we never accumulated any more money.

After I got married I had kids already I think, we had our first boy. One Sunday morning I went to my mother because we live on the east and she used to live on the west side, and so we got to talking. She used to make fun of my wife. She used to buy that jello, three packages for a dime those days, She makes jello and we all like it. My wife, she was a wonderful cook I tell you. She cook American way. My mother, she start, "No wonder you can't save no money--your wife buy, (what she used to call) 'the trembler', (because it always shakes)." I says, "Ma," I says, "Sit down here I gonna talk with you right away. That 'trembler' you call, it costs three packages for ten cents. For ten cents she make three, three times. You can't get it any cheaper. My wife she's born and raised in America and she knows how to cook American style. You cook, like you say, when we were in Italy. You'll never change. That's where the trouble start." My wife she made bread. She let it raise. She makes loaves, raises it again

then cooks it--which was raised four times. The bread my wife made was real light. My mother, she made the bread. Soon as she gets through mix it up, she makes the loaf and let it raise once. The bread is hard, I tell you. Sometimes, I don't exaggerate, it was like concrete. Two-three days old you couldn't eat it, it was so hard. My mother, she start, "The bread your wife make is like a sponge. It don't stay with you. You get hungry right away." I says, "Listen Ma, one of these days my wife is going to show you how to make that bread." "Oh no, not me."

I made my mother sit down along side of me. I says, "Listen, you and Modesta", (that was the daughter-in-law of my brother Bill, your grandma. Her name was Modesta.) I says, "He's got in trouble. I don't know, nobody knows. We almost like to say we had to go to court, Ma." I says, "I don't want you to start the same thing with my wife. I don't want to hear nothing about my wife, and I don't want to hear my wife tell me anything about you. Because you're my mother and she's my wife and I got to live with her the rest of my days. So I want you to forget it, don't tell me."

I didn't have nothing to start married life. I started with a hundred dollars debt. If I save any money it ain't no chance to make it over here. The wage is too cheap." My mother never said no more.

Now we come to the bread. My sister (she's dead now) she was about seven or eight years old, and she had a bad tonsil. Well, we had a doctor, the company doctor, his name was Dr. Adams. He was a real nice doctor. He told my mother and my young sister that my sister needed a couple slices of toast. The doctor even told my mother, "Go to your sister-in-law and get a couple slices of bread from her. Not your mother's bread," he told her because he could see it was real hard, like a stone. He says, "Go to your sister-in-law and get a couple of slices. Toast it, put butter on it and feed your sister." After the tonsil was taken out she couldn't eat very much.

My mother realized that her bread was too tough. She decided to have my wife teach her. Before she didn't want to hear of it. I told her, "If you learn how to make bread like my wife, it will be some nice bread." "Oh", she says, "That's

sponge." I told my mother, I says, "Ma, since I've eaten the bread-my wife made compared to yours -- your bread if it falls on your toes, you have no toes left." For me my mother got sore, and she says, "You son-of-a, no wonder you got married and you got smart." I says, "Well, my wife she cooks and bakes the American way." After a while she realized that she was wrong., She says, "Vince, will you tell your wife to teach me how to make the bread like she does?" "Now", I says to ma, "I don't want to hurt your feelings but consider the bread you make. You remember even the doctor see that your bread is hard, because you don't let it raise like my wife." 'Now", she says, "I see."

She used to tell me, "Oh, your wife make pie, and spend a lot of money." Which those days making pie was the cheapest thing, even today. She learned how to make them. My wife taught her, let her raise the bread three times, then knead the loaf and let it raise once more. One Sunday after she learned, I happened to go in her house and she just come out, the bread out of the oven, you know, the stove. She show a great big loaf puffed up like that. "You see the nice bread." I says, "The

teacher we had when I went to grammar school, one day I needed to go to the washroom and you got to raise your hand, you know, 'Teacher!' And he never paid no attention to me. Every time I raise my hand, "Shut-up!" That's all you hear from that guy. I was nearly busting. I couldn't hold it no more, so I let it go on the bench. My partners they turned me in. He come over and some stupid guy they got a nice twig they got out in the country and bring it to the teacher's he can whip people. He wouldn't have got that from me. That louse hit me and he hit me on the ear. Boy did that sting! Boy, I left. I went downstairs (it was on the second floor) I run downstairs as fast as I can go. I went home crying. "What's the matter?" I says, 'That old son-of-a-gun of a teacher (you know I cuss him), I says, 'that dirty' (I call him al the names I can think). I need to go to the washroom and every time I holler, he told me to shut up and so when I couldn't hold it no more I let it go. What do I do, bust? I'm not going to go to the school no more."

My father was in Hastings at that time. That happened around 1899. I wrote and told him, "You

know I was going to the public grammar school", and I told him just what happened. I says, "I got the whipping of my life." I says, "I'm not going to go to that school no more." So my father wrote back and he told me, "See if you can get some teacher to teach you in private, I'll send you the money, I'll send you three dollars a month."

The house where we live, her father was a blacksmith and he had a great big apartment house, the basement and the first floor and the top floor. He had a daughter, she was about eighteen, nineteen years old, and she was going with a guy, which they got married, a barber. My mother asked her, "Do you want to teach my son?" She says, "I got three or four others. If he wants to come, okay." We were five of us. She used to give us lessons three nights a week. We used to pay her three dollars a month. I started with the first reader in second grade, then with the third grade. I was going to go longer but she got married with the guy and she quit.

Then when T come to Hastings there was a Daisano who was studying to be a priest twelve years, and somehow he got kicked out of where he was study-

ing. For some reason, I don't know. He asked his father, he bought him a ticket and he come to Hastings. There was no other work in Hastings but the mine work, and this guy never worked in his life. He was studying. He was just like a priest, which he was going to be. He asked most of the paisani if they help him to send some of the kids to teach school, Italian. My father says, "You got to go to school." I said, "What does anybody want with the Italian school in America? I'm in America to stay," I said. "I'm not going to go back to Italy. I know enough to write you letters and to understand." I says, "I don't want no more. What I want to try to learn the English language." "Oh no, you got to go there", he said. "I promised the guy." I'm not very anxious to go, you know he give me the damn whipping of my life. He got a hold of his belt, boy, he give me a few leather straps on my back. Then I says to myself, "I'm going to fix you." This guy, you know, I went four months with him. I didn't pay no attention. I didn't care to read Italian any more.

In the meantime, I asked a couple of friends (which one is in Houston, Texas today and one we

used to go together, named Pete). "Pete", I says, "do you know anybody that can teach us to English school?" "Yea," he says, "I know little Rob Wilson." He was a little bit of a chap. Me says, "I'll talk to him." So he talked to him. In the meantime we got two more guys--four of us. He was teaching us two nights a week. Around the mine, he used to have the school. In the meantime, I'm going with the guy. After four months the guy said he was going to have an examination. Everybody pass except me. I tell you I didn't put any attention. I didn't care to read, or he tell you to read and write a paragraph, write it out, and then you got to memorize it. Not me. My father didn't pay any more attention after I went. After a while I quit and that guy, I don't know what happened to him. I went to school with him just to satisfy my father. I tell you I didn't study nothing. The other guys they study and pass, but not me. I knew enough.

I went a little sometime with this, then we moved. After I got married we lived in Valdez. They built up a great big nice YMCA. The secretary comes over there to stay a year or two. After

two years the secretary must have quit, I don't know. Comes another one. This other guy he says, "Anybody volunteer to come to school, I'll teach you two nights a week." Mostly to get your citizens papers, you know, to understand. Even, maybe you never see him, your father's uncle from California, Bejanso Ruscarino--your father ever mention?

I: Yeah, Joe Buscarino.

R: Well, the old man Buscarino, he even come with us to that school that time.

I: Was that for English?

R: Yeah, yeah, he used to teach us to write and read nice. It was a good teacher. Of course, my father was naturalized in 1904, October the 12th.

I: He passed the test?

R: Yeah, everybody passed the test. After we passed the test the teacher give us this certificate. All we had to do was present it to the examiner, the kind that came from Denver. He give you the full paper. First you had to pay ten dollars for the full paper. In the courthouse I used to know the County Clerk, a Mexican. He was writing, initialing the American papers. Get your name, address, where you live. When he come to a Barcelona

he says, "Aren't you a citizen of this country?"
I said, "I heard that I'm a citizen through acting of Congress." "That's right", he says. "HOW old were you when you come?" I says, "I was sixteen years old." Well, he says, 'You're an American citizen through your father's paper. You don't need no paper of your own." He says, "Why, when you got here, why you need it? You have to spend ten dollars anyway." "Well, if that's the case", I says, "give me one of my father's copies." So he give me. It cost me a dollar. My brother Bill was twenty years old when my father was naturalized. He was the oldest one. I was eighteen. Carmen, he was about fourteen or fifteen. Angelo, he was eleven. When we come to America my brother Sam was four years old. Sly mother used to carry him, in fact she was nursing him yet.

I: We were talking before about your grandmother and some of the other women having arguments. Was the woman the boss in the house at that time?

R: Most of the time. Like my house, my mother was the boss.

I: Why wasn't the man?

R: Because my father was, like you say, too chicken

hearted. You know, he hated to mix in. So whatever my mother said was the law.

I: Did the woman take all of the money and spend it?

R: Sure, every pay day you cash the check and turn the money to the wife. That's what we used to do. After I got married, right away I didn't wait to find out if my wife was too extravagant or nothing, I brought the check, I went and cashed it, and I give her the money. I took a couple of bucks for me and give her the balance. Woman - she handled it.

I: When a mother, father and their children all lived together and the children were all grown up, would the oldest woman usually be the boss? Like the grandmother, the old one, she'd be the boss of the whole house?

R: No, a family like we are, six brothers and two sisters, the brothers, in turn, we worked and give to my mother and father. When I first come from Italy we used to get paid every month. I used to get twenty-six, twenty-seven dollars for the whole month. I give to my father--he give me fifty cents for my spending money. How far can you go

with half a dollar? Over there, there was no chance like in the city, like here, to spend your money. The only place you could spend it was to go to the store or go to the saloon to get drinks. I wasn't old enough to drink and when we went into the saloon if you ask for a drink they give you pop. They wouldn't give you beer.

I: How old did they have to be to drink?

R: Twenty-one.

I: Had to be twenty-one?

R: Yeah. Until I was twenty-one I couldn't get a drink at the saloon. They used to serve those great big schooners; you know, for a nickel. You couldn't drink it all, they'd give you so much.

I: Didn't Colorado go dry then after a while?

R: Yeah, 1920. Then during the war the whole country went bone dry. That was the worst thing they could have done. There was so many people making moonshine, white mule. They didn't make it like the still does, and they'd drink that poison. Lot of people die off from drinking that. When you make white mule or moonshine there's certain scum that they float, you gotta take off--that's all poison. If you don't take that out you're in

trouble. Yes, one guy, he was a bootlegger, one day we went out. I needed some whiskey. I had to warm my brother, he was sick. That was close to that influenza that started.

So, I'm pretty good acquainted with this guy and he told me there's a lot of Mexicans in Colorado. He said, "Do you know what I did yesterday?" He said, "I had two calls, two guys that come over for whiskey, and I didn't have the amount that they wanted. You know what I did? I pee in both of them, just to fill it up." I says, "You did?" "Yea." I says, "Damn you if I had a gun I'd shoot you right now. You mean to tell me you're going to sell me whiskey? Buy from you? I wouldn't buy whiskey from you if I couldn't get a drop all over the state. You're a dirty rat," I told him. "After all Mexican--they're human like you and me. G pee in the bottle!" I says. "Well, " he says, "What they didn't know didn't hurt them." He was kind of a bootlegged.

I: He was?

R: He liked to talk so much he'd talk against himself. I was going to buy a bottle of whiskey, but when I heard that--no. I went some other place,

I saw another guy. Last June 6th, I left here to go to Colorado for vacation. I stayed there until June 26th. Around the twentieth, me and this guy that I bought the whiskey from, we were together. During the day he had a car and he used to go to Ratone to get a load of whiskey. Half a pint he used to sell for a dollar. Half a pint, mind you. All of a sudden, I think it was the 21st, we heard that this guy, he lived in the outskirts of Trinidad. He owned his home there. He lost his wife years ago. He was living with one of his daughters. He went out in the yard to pick some greens, I guess pick some string beans or lettuce. He come right by the house. There was an arm chair like that. He sat there and he left the greens along side of him. He lay there, he was dead four hours before somebody find out that he was dead. He died instantly they said. My sister-in-law says, "You know who died today? Joe Coro." "Yeah," I says, "How's that?" She told how he died. I says, We worked with that guy together for about a year and a half. That guy was a bootlegger. He used to go to Ratone with his car, would get a load of whiskey and peddle it."

I lost my brother. Carmen died Armistice Day. He died just before the whistle blew. I used to buy the whiskey to give it, because the company had two men that they were paying company wages. They used to go take care of these sick people. They had so many. They opened the YMCA over there as a hospital. They had, I think, about fifty or sixty beds in there, and they were all full.

I: With that influenza?

R: With that influenza. There was a family (I got hired) one night I come out of the mine, go work all day, and I was driving that day. "The superintendent want to see you at the office." I went over there. I says "What is it?" He says, "Would you go and take care of Carl?" We work together before that--Carl something. Anyway, he had a wife and four boys. They were all sick with the influenza. I went there about seven o'clock that night. They were all in bed, and his wife, she had a bottle of castor oil, a great big bottle. She says, "Will you give us each some of that castor oil?" "Yea." She had two, three glasses. I put some in the glass. I said, "Are you going to drink it plain like that?" Straight! That castor

oil you don't drink it. The kids, her, and her husband, Carl De Marco, that's what their name was.

Boy, after a while, you know, they didn't have no toilet in the house. They had a great big chamber. Each one I had to give them, every time they needed to go I had to give them the chamber. When they get through, boy, the next morning I was so sick. My stomach upset, the smell. Soon as I'd get through, they had the water outside the house, I had to go get a pail full of water and throw it in there and go clump it in the creek. I had a one hell-of-a time that night. After that I went and told them I don't want no more. The company pay you double the night that time.

I: This was during World War I, 1918?

R: Yeah, that's right. The first influenza, right after the World War, that's when it started. My brother Carmen he died of that. He got hurt in the mines, and he had his right ankle broke. We took him to the hospital. The influenza was just starting at that time. Me and my brother Sam took him to Pueblo. We didn't take no overcoat for him. His wife had two boys. The oldest one, I think, was about four years old. The other one, two. tie

was in the hospital seventeen days with a broken ankle. His wife wrote and told him that one of the boys was pretty sick. Right away this guy told the Doc, "I want to go home." After seventeen days! The doctor says, "With the leg in a cast, you want to go home?" 'Yeah, I gotta go home", he says. Well, he was supposed to collect unemployment compensation. The doctor told him, "You're not fit to go. You go home when I release you." "No, I want to go home now", he says. So he went home. The doctor told him, "You go on your own, blister". He didn't get a dime from the company.

I: The company would have paid him?

R: Sure, he was supposed to get paid unemployment compensation, at least. Thirty-five, forty bucks a week he should get, what he was making in the mines, 'cause he was a motorman. No, he wants to go home. When he come with the train that pass by Ludlow it was snowing. He had no overcoat. He had a suit, not even a jacket. He had a shirt and a pair of pants and a cap. When he got to Trinidad, when he got off the depot, what he should have done was call. It was near zero. If it had been me, when I got in Trinidad I'd get a cab and go to

some hotel and sleep there. Next morning at nine o'clock there's a train used to go through Valdez. Next morning I'd go to the depot and get on the train.

No. Right after he got off the train, there was a guy with one of those cars that you had to crank it from outside, one of those 1917 Model T Fords. It wasn't even sedan, it was a touring car with the curtains. That's what I bought, one of those touring cars. He asked the guy, "Will you take me to Valdez?" "It will cost you five dollars --sixteen miles." "Okay;" he says. The guy, he had the curtains down, no heater in the car--nothing. No blankets, nothing. When he come home, I tell you, he was half frozen.

I didn't know he come in driving the night. That time I was digging coal. Today you load five, six cars and tomorrow morning before you go inside you go get the checks, because your check number--otherwise you'll be short. You make about seven, eight checks. So that morning I had two checks left for the day, I went by the tipple where the weigh boss weighs the coal. I got my check and I was getting ready. It was cool, too, drizzling,

snow. The weigh boss, he knew everybody there. He opened the window. He says, "Say, your brother come in last night." I says, "Don't tell me!" "Yes, he did", he says, "come in last night." Well, what could I do, I says, "I got to go to work." I went to work that day.

When I got home I went in where we had the wash house, to wash, to change clothes and go home. When I got home my wife told me, 'Your brother Carmen is back.' I says, "Herman Shay told me (that's the weigh boss) this morning.' After we eat supper, my wife and I guess I had one boy, so we were going home. I says, "Boy, are you crazy or something?" His wife says, "He come in last night and he was half froze." I says, "How did you come in?" He says, "I hired a guy with a flivver." I says, "What's the matter, was there no hotels in Trinidad? What did you accomplish? You come in here sick. You're cripple. On top of that you didn't have no holy cross or no clothes and you come in." "Oh", he says, "I didn't die. I'm a tough guy." All right.

After we left, two days later we heard my brother Carmen has got a fever--104. He says, "I

didn't die then, I don't think I'll die." Well, he got the influenza. Then he couldn't go to work. He was sick about seven, eight days. I guess the doctor allowed nobody in the house, just him and his kids' his wife, and they had two men taking care of him. The company was paying. I had to buy whiskey for those two guys. That's why I give that guy (I told you) eleven dollars at one time, So, he got sick, then he got pneumonia, then he got the double. The last day that he died the doctor told my mother that she could stay there. These two guys they used to stay at night. In the morning he stop in my mother and he told her, "You could go stay with your son today. He's pretty bad."

Fly mother was there when he was dying. When she saw that he was dying, the whistle was blowing, the Armistice Day. She says, "You come in now." I went in and found him there. He was taking his last. I stayed there until he quit. He asked my mother, "What's the whistle about?" before he died. My mother told him, she says, "The war is over." He says, "I think I'm over, too." You see, he asked for it. If it had been me, the kids is sick, I'd go in the middle of the night freezing

especially when the transportation was poor, I'd say, "What the hell am I going to do after I get there?" What did he do? Nothing. So, might as well rest, room in town, and next morning come home with the train. The train is nice and warm.

I: Did many of the miners get taken into the army for the war?

R: Oh, sure there was a lot of guys drafted. brother Andrew was drafted.

I: For World War I?

R: My brother Andrew was nearsighted and he didn't go across. The last. we heard, first, for a short time he stayed in the states, in New Mexico. Then I guess there were more that went right along. When my brother died he was in San Francisco. I sent him a telegram that Carmen was dying, but I didn't send him another one and tell him that he's dead. So, they didn't let him off. They wouldn't let him off because they wasn't sure that his brother died. He's dead or alive. So they think that he was still alive. After he died we sent a telegram, "He's dead and buried." We buried him like a dog. We buried him. His casket cost \$80. and \$10 for taking him over from the undertaker straight

to the cemetery. No church, nothing. Me, my brother Angelo, and one cousin and another guy, four of us--that's all.

I: I wanted to ask you, I guess that there was probably a lot of mine accidents back then? What happened in the town when a mine would cave in?

R: Caved in 1910 and 1911. The whole country, every state, had explosions in the mine. Hastings, they had about six explosions before the mine was ordered to close down and close them out of the mine entirely. There's still seventy-five miners dead in the Hastings' mine. They never were taken out.

I: What did the town's people usually do? How did they react? Did they all rush to the mine?

R: They cried. You'd see ladies, wives and children, all crying, grieving over what happened. It's a pity, I tell you, to hear those people the way they cry. They make you cry whether you want to or not.

I: Were they very often able to get people out that were caught in there? Did they dig them out?

R: Well, in Lawson, New Mexico, there was one explosion there that killed a hundred and eleven

miners. They got them all out, too. Relieve me, some of those bodies they'd be unrecognizable, all burnt like charcoal.

I: Is that what usually happened in the mines, an explosion?

R: The mine, like you say, gas explosion, burned. Then the fire start, see? Right after the explosion.

I: What would burn? The gas would burn?

R: The gas. The dead air. That's what it is, dead air, I guess. In the mine-there's four kinds of gas: carbon monoxide, that's the gas that will kill you. Mostly there's blinden, stingdeen, and blupen. When there's some gas in the mine they kill you. With that your whole body, in about a day, turns blue. It's kind of a gas then, that it's in the mine. Not all mines though. Certain mines.

I: Did they have persons come around and test for gas all the time?

R: Yea, I was authorized to test for gas. Got to have a certificate from the state of Colorado to handle one of those jobs. I went through an examination and was up to what they call a fire boss. Of course, I didn't go in the morning. The

fire boss he goes in the mine around about 1:30 - 2:00, after midnight. He goes and examines all the places. If the mine is too big, there's two of them. So they take half a mine each. They examine for gas each place. Then some places they got gas that the air can't drive the gas out. You've got to have air to drive the gas out. As you go by inside the mine, you ask the fire boss, "How's the mine?" Each got a number in the entry, number one, two, three, or four, whatever room you in. So, you ask them to tell you okay.

Sometime there's gas there., they tell you stay out on the edge until T come over. So when he comes over he stretches a curtain. You know, he hangs it up like a partition, from the top down. Of course, the mine in some place it's four feet, five feet, six feet, some higher. So they stretch the curtain in order the fresh air comes in, so they get that fresh air through there and push that dead air out. That gas, it's all dead air. But you put a lamp there it'll light.

I: With a plug?

R: Sure. Lights and feeds it, and it moves until gets thicker spots. Then that's the time it explodes.

One time I was working in the cementry. The rooms, they're fifty feet apart. Two men work in here, fifty feet more there's another room, a room next across. After they drive a hundred feet, two hundred feet, two-fifty feet, they quit. They can't go any farther. Then they pull the rails out and that place is a bed. I was working in cementry. In the mine when you got to go to the washroom, you go one of those holes--place that's worked out, nobody works there. Some people, they do it right where they work and put it in the shovel and throw it in the car, send it out. Lot of people do that. That's the proper way to do it because then you go in one of those all-worked-out places, there's been so many going there, boy, the stink!

The room next was all loaded with old--they brush the floor because the roof is so low and some were at the mouth of the room. It was just like that. The anchor was here. I inclined and moved down. We had open lights that time. All of a sudden, while I was crapping, I heard, "Ruff", so I leap again. I know, I turn around, I've seen it, a streak of flame go towards the end. Now, I says

it's going to leap out. Right away I went to hold my pants up and I went over the little hump. I lay on the track. All of a sudden I heard great big crash, "Poof", and push smoke, slack, anything. Boy, I was lying on the track, and I got the back of my hair singed. It didn't explode because it wasn't too much of a gas. If there was some more gas there that day, I'd have got it. Not only me, the rest of them that were in that entry.

I: Well, what about cave-ins, didn't they happen too?

R: Yea, well the last I worked in Valdez, they give me--after they drive these rooms, they'll fit two hundred, two-fifty, three hundred feet, then they come back. They take the one side. They call it killer. That's called killer work. The coal is easy. Then we take so much coal here today and leave that opening. After a while that empty--of course you set timbers, you set props, to hold the roof. But some time the roof is so easy crumbling, it start decaying. At night, you work today, you know that you got so much space that's going to cave in--you pull the truck out, pull the tires, pull the rails. out in safe places.

I remember me and your grandfather were working in cementry (we were both driving) and there was two Greeks, they were working in the killer works, and the roof started to crack and you could hear the timbers. The weight come down, breaks up heavy timbers, tell, twelve inches in diameter, about five, six feet long. Boy, it breaks them down just like a piece of trash. You hear "tung", you know they're cracking. The two Greeks, they had a car, but it was kind of down hill. From the entry instead of being this way, it was down hill. The empty car rolled down but the loaded car had to pull it with a mule. It couldn't move. Me and my brother were coming in with the empty cars. We met one of the Greeks. "Hey, hurry up, hurry up", he says, "my place was working is going to cave in. I got a car in there you got to pull out." So, I says, "We get there."

When I got there I unhooked my mules and I drove them close to the place. I could hear the timbers go, "Poom, poom, poem" constantly. They says, "Go get that car." I says, "You go." They used the mules. I said go, I don't want my mules killed. If you think you can push that car out,

go ahead. I'm not going to kill myself and the mules. Boy, no more than I told them that I heard them, "Uh , boy." I tell you, I don't know how many times a roof fell. T told them, "you say you're going back to get that car?" That car got covered up--never got that car out. I told them, "Listen, don't tell nobody because the company will charge you for that car."

I: They would charge them for it?

R: Sure, they charge because when they saw the danger like that they should never push that car in there. Of course, it wouldn't be my fault because you can't be there waiting to pull that car out. That'd be their fault. So me and my brother Bill, we kept still. This is the first time I ever talk. The car was left there and it's still there forever. If I had went in there I'd have got it one-two-three. Before I'd turn my mules, and hooked up and pulled out, we'd have got buried.

I: Did that happen quite often?

R: Very often. You, know who got killed like that? I don't believe you heard about him? The name is Chu-chu. He was an old man working in the mine. His partner was from the same town but he was only

about a year and a half in America. The old guy, he was in America for many years. He had the killer work like that, so they loaded a car--so the car that they pull out belong to the old man. The younger fellow was the guy that come in last. The driver, what he do, he brings an empty car and it picks a load up. He takes the load out and the miners push the empty in. All of a sudden the place start to work. It was threatening to fall. They couldn't push the car, it was hard to push. The old fellow told him to leave that car there because we'll both get killed. If we try to push that car out, we'll both get killed. The other guy says, "Just because it's my car you don't care." He says, "I tell you, stay away." So he went in back of that car and tried to push it out. All of a sudden she turn loose. The car got buried, that guy got buried, that's all. He just want to die. I don't care about the car, He was afraid to lose that half a dollar. That's what they used to get, half a dollar, for each car they load. Just to save that half a dollar he lost his life. Stupid! When the guy told him, because the guy was an old pro, like you say, he knew what would happen. No,

he won't listen. He started with his back, pushed the car and all of a sudden big boom--bury the car, rails, everything. And him with it.

I: Did you have to report every incident like that to the company? Did they tell them?

R: No.

I: No?

R: No. The boss he knows who you are, if you are working in the killer works. They have to visit your place daily. The foreman does. I know, I was working in the killer works and that night I lost two pieces railing, two short pieces. We used to use those short pieces; when it's too far to shovel you put a little track, you know, ten feet along the rail. They give you a chance to roll the car closer. That night I didn't figure after quitting time that the place cave in. That night it cave in and cover the two short rails completely. When the boss come around he ask me, "Did you lose any rails?" "Heck no. I took the rails out last night." "You sure?" "Absolutely, I'm sure." I make sure that he couldn't see, because one side the one inch stuck out.