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Cecchini, Maria interview

Mary Wedegaertner

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Stockton Immigrant Women Oral History Collection

by Sally Miller

CECCHINI, Maria (Italian)

July 24, 1980

Interviewed by Mary Wedegaertner

Transcribed by Robert Siess

[TAPE 1, Side A]
[Begin Tape.]

MARY WEDEGAERTNER: Your first name, Mrs. Cecchini?

MARIA CECCHINI: Maria. Maria Cecchini.

WEDEGAERTNER: And what part of Italy did you come from?

CECCHINI: Adriatic. Close to Venice, on the coast of Venice. They call it Romania.

WEDEGAERTNER: And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

CECCHINI: I had five brothers and four sisters.

WEDEGAERTNER: And what did your father do?

CECCHINI: A fisherman. That's the work he had.

WEDEGAERTNER: Any particular type of fish?

CECCHINI: Any kind.

WEDEGAERTNER: Anything.

CECCHINI: Oh yes. On Adriatic, there's a lot of fishes, different kind. They made the living...

WEDEGAERTNER: Right. Doing that.

CECCHINI: Yes.

WEDEGAERTNER: Did your mother work outside the home?

CECCHINI: No. With all those children...

WEDEGAERTNER: Right. That's five brothers, and how many sisters?

CECCHINI: Four. Five with me.

WEDEGAERTNER: So there were ten of you, right? So did you live in the village, or outside in the country?

CECCHINI: It was a town. Now it's a big resort. Summer resort. But at that time it was, in fact, see those pictures? This was years and years ago. If you see it now, just to give you an idea.

WEDEGAERTNER: Those are beautiful paintings.

CECCHINI: Yes, it is. Well, here's our town today.

WEDEGAERTNER: Oh my, yes. It's quite a resort, isn't it?

CECCHINI: Yeah. And this, you see all the fishing boat? On Adriatic is a big ocean. That's our town, but oh, two, three hundred years ago, that's the way it was. And then in here, see, that's all. And all the kind of fishes they catch.

WEDEGAERTNER: It's a beautiful place.

CECCHINI: Yeah. You see, this is the hotel. They're only open in the summer. Those three months, starting in June, until September. And then everything is closed. Then it's just a little town. The people, because there's about a 12,000 population, but in the summertime, there's about 100,000 tourists.

WEDEGAERTNER: Oh my. It's a lovely swimming beach too.

CECCHINI: Oh yes. The water is clear and shallow, warm.

WEDEGAERTNER: Did you used to go swimming a lot there?

CECCHINI: We didn't go swimming. You know, we had work to do.

WEDEGAERTNER: Right. Did you have mainly chores at the house, or did you have jobs yourself?

CECCHINI: Well, we was working in bakery in the summertime to earn some money in hotel, or different places.

WEDEGAERTNER: Did you do both of those things?

CECCHINI: Yes. I work in the bakery and make bread, and then I work in a hotel in the kitchen, helping. So we all earned some money. You know, the best we could, because it was only those few months in summer.

WEDEGAERTNER: What did your father do during the wintertime then?

CECCHINI: He did go fishing too. Oh yes. That's all year-round.

WEDEGAERTNER: How long did you go to school?

CECCHINI: Well, you see, I was born 1906. So it was 1912 when I start first grade, but then 1914, the war started. And besides that, not only the war, but we had earthquake. Big earthquake. So I went four years, but really, I only had two years of school.

WEDEGAERTNER: But you went parts of four years, did you say?

CECCHINI: Yeah, but I mean, I graduated fourth grade, but I miss a lot of it, because between the earthquake, we couldn't.

WEDEGAERTNER: How did the earthquake affect your home and your family?

CECCHINI: Oh yeah. The second floor was... We had to live on the tents, and then in the wintertime, we had to go live in the boat. Because everything was stopped, and there's no fishing, because it was on the Adriatic. They didn't allow boat to go out, because see, there's a fight. There's a war. So all the boats, they couldn't go out fishing, and when we had the earthquake in the summer, my father took a big sail, you know, the sail of the boat, and make a tent. So we stayed there. But then in the winter time, we went and sleep in boat. Big boat.

WEDEGAERTNER: What did you do during those years of the war, when you couldn't go out in the boats? How did your father make a living?

CECCHINI: Well, see, the government, with those boats, where they were for sport and grain and stuff like that, were for the government. Then two of my brothers, they was in the service. One was 14 years old, because everything was racing, and we didn't even have enough to eat. And so that's why my father joined, to go work for the government, that we can have the share of his food. And my brother, 14 years old, he went, and there was fighting in big trenches. So we had an extra ration of bread, I mean flour, rice, or something like that. We were starving.

WEDEGAERTNER: Where were you in the children? Were you in the middle, or the youngest?

CECCHINI: The older was a girl, my sister. Then five boys came, and then I came. I was the seventh. Then I had three more sisters.

WEDEGAERTNER: Are there any other things you remember besides the food rationing and how hard it was?

CECCHINI: It was hard, because see, my oldest brother, we lost him. 21 years old.

WEDEGAERTNER: That's too bad.

CECCHINI: Yeah. He was dismantling those big torpedoes, and it exploded. So we had that, and it seems like in that town everybody was dressed in black. Because every family had somebody lost.

WEDEGAERTNER: So your oldest sister, did she sort of take charge of the rest and help your mother?

CECCHINI: Oh yes. Yes. So when I was eight, nine, used to go fetch wood, walk two, three miles up in a mountain, take those little stick, make a big planche, because see, even wood, because the men, they couldn't go in the forest and chop down wood because they was in the service.

WEDEGAERTNER: Right. So it was all left to the womenfolk to do things.

CECCHINI: Yes. It was a hard life, yes.

WEDEGAERTNER: When you started out working, did you start out in the bakery first?

CECCHINI: Well, in the summertime, yeah. We went to earn some money, but this was after the war.

WEDEGAERTNER: And you were about how old then?

CECCHINI: I was 16. And then I went in hotel, different place, or took washing, washed for other people. And besides the big family, I had to do all the, because see, when my sister got married, I was only 14.

WEDEGAERTNER: That's right. You had a lot of duties.

CECCHINI: Yeah. And my mother, her health wasn't too good. So a lot of the hard work.

WEDEGAERTNER: Did you do a lot of the cooking too?

CECCHINI: Yeah. Cooking, washing. And over there, see, you have to even go and fetch water two blocks away. You chopped the wood. And in the wintertime, the snow sometimes, you know, you couldn't get out without the shovel to go two blocks to go to the store and buy something to cook. But it seems like everybody in those little towns, just a few people, wealthy people, but we know that we're different, you know. So we didn't mind. You know, the family together, and everybody was pitching in, you know. To make the best with what we had.

WEDEGAERTNER: I know you had a large family, but did you ever have anyone besides your immediate family living with you? During the war or anything?

CECCHINI: No. Well, they couldn't, because see, the refugee from Venice, they came in our town, because they heavy bombing in Venice, so they brought refugee in our town. But you see, we had only three bedroom. We didn't have room to accommodate.

WEDEGAERTNER: You had a lot of people in the bedrooms already.

CECCHINI: Yeah. So we couldn't.

WEDEGAERTNER: What did your family do, when they did have a little time for fun or recreation, what did you do?

CECCHINI: See, the men over there, they go fishing all week, and they come home Saturday. And the girls too, then they put on their best dress, and in those little towns, they take a walk, two or three girls, and then they walk on plaza they called it. You know, the town. And then they meet the boys and walking together, and then there was dancing. And those they had a boyfriend, on Saturday night they'd go to a movie or go to a café, and dancing, things like that.

WEDEGAERTNER: Did you go down to the town for most of your dances, or did you have dances in your homes?

CECCHINI: In the town. Yeah, there's different places. Especially in the summertime, it's open. You know, outside, on carriage, and they advance in there. But I never had the time to. Because see, at that time I had four brothers, and when they come home, they been on the water fishing all week. So the women try to accommodate and do everything for them. So I had to have everything ready for them to change, because you know, from working clothes, then they have their nice suit when they go off like that. And then my mother, she say, "Now it's too late, because I have to fix dinner." See, because for twenty years, she had a baby. If he was in the baby born, it's two years old, every two years. You know, it's hard for somebody in here to understand, but I feel that that training, to me it help an awful lot. Because, you know, when you have to leave your country, which I wanna come in this country, see it was that my relatives, the Marengo. I don't know if you know Becky Marengo? They was my first cousin. And my aunt and my uncle and my cousin, they came over there. There was seven, because my cousin, her husband, the baby, and then my aunt and my uncle and the two [], because they had Marengo Store. So they came, and...

WEDEGAERTNER: Excuse me. Did they come before the war or after the war?

CECCHINI: No, after. 1922, they came. So, being they was a big family and they had the baby, and they asked my mother if she could spare me for half a day to go and help her. And so my mother, oh, she would do anything, because they was like sister, you know. So they was there eight months. And I came to be very attached and loved them very much, they were so good to me. And so the last month, I felt so bad, because the time, it was getting short.

WEDEGAERTNER: But you came to the U.S. with them?

CECCHINI: No. No.

WEDEGAERTNER: Oh, I see. They were staying in Italy and you were helping them.

CECCHINI: Yes. Yes. Helping this. But that's how I got the idea to wanna come in this country. And I remember that after they leave, they go on the beach, and I was there to do my work, and they sawing me. When it was closer to the time they was gonna leave, I had a good cry myself. I didn't want them to seeing me, you know. And so one day, my uncle, he just had forgot something, and they were just about three weeks before they was gonna leave, and so he caught me. "Oh, my dear," he said, "what's a matter?" "Oh, nothing, nothing." I didn't want to tell. And he says, "It must be something. You can't even tell me?" I had to, but couldn't say a lot. I said, "Well, I just feel bad that the time is getting short and you're all gonna leave," and he say, "You would have liked to come to America with us?" I say, "Oh, yes," and he say, "Well why didn't you say something before?" But you know, you don't ask something like that, because, you know. And he say, "Well don't worry. It's too late now," because they have everything ready, the paper and everything ready, "but don't worry," he say, "as soon as I get to America, I'll send the paper request and the money for the trip." 5,000 lira. At that time it was a lot of money. And they did. They did. They sent me the request, but the quota for 1922 was complete. So I had to wait for March 1923, see. But between that time, see, was when Mussolini went in power. And the quota before that was 40,000 that could leave. They leave from Italy, and went to go anywhere. But he changed to 4,000. And they give that privilege to somebody that is a citizen, like you send for the mother or send for the wife. You know, close family. I try everything. Go in touch with different people and everything, but it was impossible, because it was very strict. But I never give up, and I wait. And then, see, my husband, he live in the same street, and I know him. And when they finish the service in navy, he wrote to his uncle. He wrote to his uncle in America that if he could send the request, that he would like to come to America.

WEDEGAERTNER: And were you going together at that time?

CECCHINI: No. No. And so a month and a half later, he got notice that he could leave for America. Because you see, he had already served the country. And he left, came to America. Well, a year later, he wrote to his family and wanna know if I was still single, you know, if I wasn't promised, or if I had come to America, so they say no. So then he wrote to me, and we got like engaged. And he told them, "Now firstly, if you can come, fine. If you can't..." Then 1927. No, 1928. Yeah, because it was almost 1924 when he left. He say, "I'll come back, and we get married." "Okay." Three years and a half, you know, a girl, when she's got a boyfriend, [something in Italian?]. So you don't see other boys, you don't go out, and that's the way it was. And then he came back. [break]

WEDEGAERTNER: Before you became so attached to your relatives, did you ever think about coming to America before that?

CECCHINI: No. No, we thought that it was impossible. There was no way.

WEDEGAERTNER: So your main attraction for coming, or intent, was to stay with your relatives.

CECCHINI: Oh yeah, because see, my aunt, she was... Well, the two boys, they was married already. Then she was alone, my uncle and my aunt, and I could live just across the street. And you know, I mean it would have been nice.

WEDEGAERTNER: Right.

CECCHINI: But it didn't work out that way, and so it work out the next way.

WEDEGAERTNER: Right. So he came back home...

CECCHINI: He came back, and we got married. In fact, he came Christmas morning. And then we got married in February. But still, he didn't have the citizen paper. He had only the first paper. So there was no way for me to come back with him. But somehow, I had that determination, and I was already pregnant with the baby, and so determination that... We had friends that they had very influence people in Rome. So we went, and talked to those friends. Well, they had three. And one, there was just the one that he could make it for me. He was in charge of all the Office of Immigration. And that's how. We left July 24. We left our town 19... Let's see. Yeah, it was 52 years ago, and it would be '28. Yeah. 1928. In February. Because next February will be 53 years we are married. Yeah. And so 1928, the 24th of July.

WEDEGAERTNER: I better put that down.

CECCHINI: Yeah. See, it's today!

WEDEGAERTNER: Right. That is the anniversary today. What were you doing while you were waiting for him? What type of employment did you have before you got married? Were you still at the bakery, or were you doing something else?

CECCHINI: On, no, no. Then I was home, and well, over there, the girls they sew their...

WEDEGAERTNER: Their trousseau?

CECCHINI: Trousseau, yeah, and all that, although it takes time. And then a family. I still have two brothers and two sisters at home.

WEDEGAERTNER: So you weren't employed.

CECCHINI: And then I had my grandfather that he live with us. My grandmother died and he live with us, and he was 80. And so it him to take care of too.

WEDEGAERTNER: In your family, would you say that your mother or your father made most of the decisions?

CECCHINI: For what?

WEDEGAERTNER: Oh, on how your children were brought up as far as discipline, or...

CECCHINI: Oh, it was my mother. Yeah. Because my father, see, he's more control the boys. Because see, they leave Monday morning, they don't come back from fishing until Saturday morning. But my mother, she was the one that...

WEDEGAERTNER: Did she control how the money was spent too?

CECCHINI: No. It was my father. Because he was very ambition, you know. He had four – well, one boy had died, and so to each one, to have their boat. Go out fishing. He had ambition. So in there too, we had to make a lot of sacrifice, because this wasn't too much coming in, you know.

WEDEGAERTNER: Did it turn out that your brothers all turned out to be fishermen?

CECCHINI: Yeah. But then you see, two wars. 1914 war, that took all what we had, the property, because the boat. And see, because four years they couldn't go fishing, and then stay there in the sun, they kind of...

WEDEGAERTNER: Deteriorated.

CECCHINI: Yeah. And the second war too. But the government then request a boat. Use it for his work. For his purpose. But then, you see, England. The America, they bombed. They lost in that too.

WEDEGAERTNER: So you lost a lot each time.

CECCHINI: Yeah. Yeah.

WEDEGAERTNER: So did any of your sisters or brothers go on, say, to high school or college?

CECCHINI: No. Nobody had college. We had college, but my sister, the one four years younger than I, she lost her husband one of my father's boat, because they was bombed. Because see, the government, he request, you know. And then he want the man to run the boat. But then they bombing and he lost his life. So she was a widow at 33, and she raised those two boys. She had two boys, and they managed. They have a nice hotel, and the other youngest sisters, ten years younger than I, they have a beautiful hotel. Because we've been over there. [away from microphone] Hotel Bucala.

WEDEGAERTNER: Oh, isn't that lovely?

CECCHINI: See, you see the room? But now it's even larger.

WEDEGAERTNER: That's lovely. I wish I was there.

CECCHINI: Oh yeah. We was there last year. We have went back five times.

WEDEGAERTNER: That's great.

CECCHINI: So they manage pretty good, and my brother, see, I have only one brother left now. Because they are all older than I am, and I'm 74, going 75. So there's just one, and his health is not too good. He's two years older than I am.

WEDEGAERTNER: But you're the only one that came to America.

CECCHINI: Yes. But they did pretty good over there.

WEDEGAERTNER: Were any of them able to come and visit you over here?

CECCHINI: Oh yes. Both of my sister, four years ago. And my brother came. And last October, we had my husband nephew and his bride. They came for their honeymoon and stayed here. You know, they got married on Saturday, they got on a train after the wedding, after the reception. Got on the train, travel all night to go to Milan. And then from Milan, got on the plane, travel all night to come to San Francisco, so on the third night, they spend their honeymoon, the first night in this room! In here! [laughing]

WEDEGAERTNER: Oh well.

CECCHINI: Oh yeah. Oh, we had a lot of fun.

WEDEGAERTNER: Wasn't that something? They were probably so happy to get over here though, for the trip.

CECCHINI: Oh yes. Oh, I think someday they're gonna come again.

WEDEGAERTNER: Okay, well back to you and your husband and your trip over here. Was it a nice trip over? An enjoyable trip over?

CECCHINI: Oh yes. Ten days on the boat, and in fact, there was other four women on that boat, and all five, we was pregnant. And the other four, we was just the first meal, all together at the table. Then they couldn't come at the table, because they got sea sick. But I was able to go to table and have all my meals. I didn't get sick.

WEDEGAERTNER: But you were the only five women on the whole ship?

CECCHINI: Well, on that table.

WEDEGAERTNER: At the table. Oh, right.

CECCHINI: Yeah, on the table. But you know, we laugh, and they say, "Oh, we envy you that you can go."

WEDEGAERTNER: Well I understand some of these ships from certain areas are quite luxurious ships. Was this a very luxurious ship?

CECCHINI: Well, see, this was 52 years ago. It was a nice ship, but they have better ship after that. Yeah. But it was nice. I was happy. It was hard when I had to leave the family.

WEDEGAERTNER: So what port did your boat come into?

CECCHINI: In Genoa. It was in Genoa today.

WEDEGAERTNER: And where did you go?

CECCHINI: We came to New York. And then from New York, see, we didn't came direct to California, because my husband, he had relatives. His aunt and uncle. And we stop there for a month.

WEDEGAERTNER: Where were they?

CECCHINI: In Sandusky, Ohio. And so we stayed with them for a month. Then my relatives, because they know that we was gonna come to California, so I was already getting bigger, and he say, "Well, being that you have relatives there, if you have the baby first." Because he say, "You just got a boat ride, and then get on a train for four, five days, we don't want nothing to happen." So that's what I did. We move with some friends where my husband used to work, in a mining town. He was making plaster, yeah. But just the simple. They had two bedroom and the kitchen, a little living room, but there was no toilet. We had to go like across the street. There was no bathroom. There was no washing train. And the stove with wood. I say, "Well, didn't make a no difference to me, because..."

WEDEGAERTNER: You're already used to it!

CECCHINI: Yes, I was used to that! So, and I had the baby, and when he was three months old, we got on the train and spend five nights and four days on the train.

WEDEGAERTNER: What about the language problem? Did your husband learn English when he was here?

CECCHINI: Well, he knew then when he came back. Yeah. Because he was here already four years.

WEDEGAERTNER: Right. So he learned it during that period.

CECCHINI: Yes.

WEDEGAERTNER: Did you pick up quite a bit from him then?

CECCHINI: Oh, no, not over there. No. When we was over there, because when he talk, and it's too hard. But then when I came here, he got citizen paper a year or two after. Then it takes nine months. Then I could take mine too. And I managed. So it wasn't easy.

WEDEGAERTNER: What were some of your first impressions, even the first day when you arrived in New York?

CECCHINI: Oh, it was just something out of this world. It was American, that I had waited for.

WEDEGAERTNER: Were there any things that happened those first few weeks, or even when you were in Ohio, that you were disappointed with?

CECCHINI: No. No, no. Especially the people that I knew, and I had lived with them when they was in Italy. I knew I was gonna come here, in California, because there is no place to compare with California over there. It's cold, and the weather in the summer is hot, and this is much better. But we spent six months over there, and then we came.

WEDEGAERTNER: Did you enjoy your trip across on the train, or was that pretty hard with a small baby?

CECCHINI: Well, I nurse him. And well, with the diaper, they didn't have Pampers.

WEDEGAERTNER: No, they didn't!

CECCHINI: [laughing] Well, we managed. And then we got a sleeping place, you know. And anything like the porter on that train, it was very concerned with that baby. And sometime they want to open the window, it was kind of too hot. "No, no," he say. "We have a baby in here. We don't want him to catch cold." You know, to me, those thing, it was nothing. I didn't mind at all. But when we arrived four o'clock in the morning, it was breezy a little bit. And when I look out the window, when we stop and started look at the window, I recognized my aunt and my uncle, and my cousin, and a friend. And I just started running to the door.

WEDEGAERTNER: So where did you live at first when you arrived in Stockton?

CECCHINI: Well, then you see, that's another thing. When we arrive in here, my aunt, she had everything. They rent a little house in Castle Street, and then they have extra furniture. They save it for us. Then my cousin, my cousin's husband, it would be Gaia de Lucci. You know, the grocer's.

WEDEGAERTNER: Uh huh. The deli.

CECCHINI: Guy, he was my cousin. So that's the reason that he told him, "If you can stay until after the New Year, there's a man that's gonna quit." That time, the job, they was scarce. "And I'll save that job," for my husband. So it work out fine, and then we stay a week with my aunt and uncle. Until we clean out the little house, and then move all the little bit of furniture we had. And, well, when we start working, you know how much? \$65 a month.

WEDEGAERTNER: He worked in the store itself?

CECCHINI: In the store, peeling chicken. And with those \$65, he would pay \$25 rent, and then with the baby and everything, and yet there'd be \$5 went in the bank.

WEDEGAERTNER: Great. Did you find any real frustrations with not knowing the language at first, or being home with your little baby, and were you able to make friends quickly?

CECCHINI: Oh yes. Because I had my relatives, and then there's a lot of Italian, they was anxious to meet me.

WEDEGAERTNER: So at first, most of your friends were Italian?

CECCHINI: Yes. A lot of here we had.

WEDEGAERTNER: What about your neighborhood? Were there a lot of Italians in the neighborhood?

CECCHINI: Some when we moved the first little house. Then again, that's... Then we in Sutter Street, because see, the people we stayed when I had the baby in the house, you know, with them, and my husband, he had the job that he had before. So they wanna come to America too. I mean to California. And so my husband, he found a part in a window wash, because then after he quit Gaia de Lucci, he bought a part in a janitor, the window washing. And so then, because they was nice to take us in that home, you know. So my husband, he look for to buy a part for him, share. And they came, and they move to California. So we had to move from the little house and get a bigger house.

WEDEGAERTNER: Because they were going to live with you?

CECCHINI: Yes. We lived together, and they had a baby girl. So we lived together for a year and a half. But then the girl wasn't happy. She had the family, the brother and sister, back in Sandusky. So they went back again.

WEDEGAERTNER: Now your husband changed jobs. Was this a better-paying job?

CECCHINI: Oh yes. Because then that's more work you do, the more you make.

WEDEGAERTNER: He was in this by himself?

CECCHINI: Yes. That's what he had been doing for 52 years.

WEDEGAERTNER: Is that right? All the large buildings and things?

CECCHINI: Oh yeah. Wash those windows in the courthouse, in those building, the big, big building. Then he had a bank, and he had the thing that they do.

WEDEGAERTNER: He met an awful lot of people in his job I bet.

CECCHINI: Oh yes. And then what I did, see, I never had a day of training sewing. Only mending thing, or maybe remodel or something for the little kid. But I try and I try, and made a business in alteration. Fix clothes. And I fix dresses. And this, I make a business in the house. I had about 300 customers. Because it was during the war, and everybody was working a shipyard, they was making more money like that. And so I had all the work I wanted.

WEDEGAERTNER: You probably worked a lot of hours too.

CECCHINI: Uh! At two o'clock, and get up at five, because you know, then they had three meals. I had already the two kids, a boy and a girl, and they come home for lunch, and then at night and everything. Three meals a day had to prepare, and then the people come in anytime. Some, they didn't have the telephone to call me. And if they come, then you couldn't send it back because the dress was racing, you know. And many time, I said, "Well, just sit down, wait a little bit until I take care the meal, my husband, to put everything on."

WEDEGAERTNER: And were you in this house at that time?

CECCHINI: Yes.

WEDEGAERTNER: Did you move from Sutter Street to here?

CECCHINI: From Sutter Street, then we bought this. We bought \$3200. But we did a lot of remodeling. So it is 50 years that it was in here.

WEDEGAERTNER: Had you saved up for the home, or did you have a down payment?

CECCHINI: Well, we put – in fact, we didn't have it. A down payment. It was \$600. And my uncle, he had a lot in [Tuxedo? Tax something?]. So for us, they exchanged with the owner of the house. He took for a deposit that long. But then we pay, and we was paying \$500 a year until we paid the \$3200. So we paid.

WEDEGAERTNER: And then how many children did you have altogether?

CECCHINI: Two. I have a daughter, she's 46, but it's 26 years she's a missionary. Marion sister.

WEDEGAERTNER: That's what I had failed to ask you, if you were Catholic or what your religion was.

CECCHINI: Oh yeah. Yeah, I am Catholic. She's in Japan.

WEDEGAERTNER: How long has she been there?

CECCHINI: She's been in Japan 21 years.

WEDEGAERTNER: Is that right?

CECCHINI: She teaches at the university. Sophia University.

WEDEGAERTNER: Oh, what a beautiful girl.

CECCHINI: And the teacher there, they say, I think it was 16 years. "You in Japan, and you haven't took a picture with the kimono." So they loaned the kimono.

WEDEGAERTNER: That's a beautiful picture. She's a lovely girl.

CECCHINI: Yeah. She was supposed to come this year, but she goes for the doctor degree. She had a master degree, now the doctor in sociology. And at first of the month, see, she has to keep in contact and research. You know, work field in Japan, Philippines, and Italy. So on the first of August, she's gonna go for six months in the Philippines. She's leaving from Japan, from Tokyo. And then next year, the first of April, 1981, she's going to Rome for six months.

WEDEGAERTNER: What is it she does in these various places? Is she more of an administrator or a teacher?

CECCHINI: She's teaching.

WEDEGAERTNER: She's a teacher.

CECCHINI: Oh yeah. After she had the master degree, she work at the Sophia University, one of the biggest Jesuit.

WEDEGAERTNER: And she teaches sociology classes.

CECCHINI: Yeah.

WEDEGAERTNER: Lovely. Then what does your son do?

CECCHINI: My son is in the real estate business. It was 51 years we was in that house, my son. This is my son, and this is his wife, and this is the two boys, and this is the one that he took the picture, but he had the camera. See, this was the 25th jubilee that she's a nun. And I cut a little thing that she belong to the family too in here. And we have two grandson, but they couldn't have. See, the wife, she had an operation and everything, but she couldn't have children, so they adopted two boys.

WEDEGAERTNER: How old are the boys now?

CECCHINI: The old one is 19, and the second is 17.

WEDEGAERTNER: What a nice family you have. Back in Italy, was your family a very strong Catholic family?

CECCHINI: Yes. Oh yes. In fact, I have a niece over there, my brother's daughter too, she's a nun. They are very... Yeah. Oh yeah. They had a good training from my mother. Yeah.

WEDEGAERTNER: Where did your children go to school here?

CECCHINI: They went to El Dorado. And then the daughter graduate from St. Mary High School. The one next to the cathedral, you know, before. It's not that St. Mary. They didn't have that St. Mary High School. And the boy, he went to Stockton High School. Then they both went. My son, he got the master degree, he went to Humphreys for four years. But he could arrange that then he work at the bank. And my daughter, she had just for secretary. A year she went. Because that's what she wanna do. But she got the education now. Because she went to the Philippine for her master degree. See, the sister, they have a college in the Philippine, in Manila. That's about ten years ago. And now she's working on her doctor degree.

WEDEGAERTNER: Did you and your husband speak Italian at home when you were here? After you came here?

CECCHINI: Oh yes. Because we didn't know other languages.

WEDEGAERTNER: At some point though, you learned English. Did you have to go to any classes?

CECCHINI: No.

WEDEGAERTNER: You just picked it up along the way?

CECCHINI: Yeah. Picked it up, yeah. I went 18 nights at the Stockton High School to learn the history of United States.

WEDEGAERTNER: All in 18 nights.

CECCHINI: 18 nights. And you know, and then the teacher, used to be a group of women, we'd be going different houses, and she came for a while to teach us the history. Because, oh, they wanna know everything. And as I was doing my housework, you know, running the vacuum, my daughter was only

five years old. And to hear myself, I had to ask the question and answer loud. Because to hear myself with the vacuum cleaner. She had learned those questions!

WEDEGAERTNER: That's great. So when they were going to school in the elementary grades, did you still speak Italian at home, or did you start speaking?

CECCHINI: Well, see, I start sewing, and that's where I learned to speak, because I had a lot of Americans. In fact, it was the coroner's wife at our field, you know. At 60, and the wife of the captain, I had 'em all. And none of them could speak Italian! And you know, when you're dead [deaf?] it was... They understood, but see, you try, and that's when you have contact. When you try talk, you learn, because I didn't have no school.

[End of Tape]

[TAPE 1, Side B]
[Begin Tape.]

CECCHINI: ...the Japanese people, that she can learn so well, because the pronunciation, even the motion, you know, the women over there, they say is really, and she's been asked to give talk. In fact, in some, like the PTA, something at school, is the first foreign they invited to give talk.

WEDEGAERTNER: Is that right?

CECCHINI: Yeah. She's well-liked.

WEDEGAERTNER: So she speaks Japanese, Italian, English?

CECCHINI: Yes.

WEDEGAERTNER: That's great. How about your son's family? Do his children speak Italian?

CECCHINI: Not too good, no. He don't understand if we say, but no, no. Because everybody, it comes easy now.

WEDEGAERTNER: Have they attended any of these classes that they have at the Italian school?

CECCHINI: My son did. No, not the boys. No, they didn't. The oldest boy, he went for two months in Italy, and when he came back, boy, he had picked up language.

WEDEGAERTNER: That's what it takes, yeah.

CECCHINI: Yes. He was over there, but then they forget.

WEDEGAERTNER: Did he visit your area?

CECCHINI: Yeah. He stay in the Tucolin, the hotel with my sister. Oh yeah, wonderful time.

WEDEGAERTNER: Can you remember your children's early years at school? Did they have any particular problems, as far as the language or anything that they did different than the other children? Did they ever come home with any complaints, or were they ever coming home unhappy or anything?

CECCHINI: Well, not that I can... I remember one time, Miss Kay was the fourth grade or third grade for Joseph, and I had met her, you know, and I had Rosemary, she was small. And I guess she was concerned that a new boy, that he had move in in the neighborhood, they was going in that school, and you know, because he didn't have the mother, and the father, I remember he was selling ice cream on the street, and I guess that boy was in trouble a few time. She came at the house, and she say, "Well, I came to tell you that this boy, he want to be friends with Joseph, but I don't approve." So I thought it was very nice. Because see, I said, "I can't speak English good to teaching, whatever problems they had. Whatever you think is best in school." I say, "When I'm home, punish it or teaching, I'll do that, but in school, in class, you have all the power to do that." And she told me, she say, "Mrs. Cecchini, it's just like music in my ears, because usually we have a hard time with the mother." So they worked the cafeteria for their lunch.

WEDEGAERTNER: Did they ever take their lunch from home?

CECCHINI: Well, sometimes. No, because there it was close. But they liked to [be good?] too. That way they learn.

WEDEGAERTNER: When you and your husband were first here, did you join any organizations or clubs?

CECCHINI: Well, no.

WEDEGAERTNER: Especially any Italian organizations?

CECCHINI: We have the Catholic Federation, and we still belong in there.

WEDEGAERTNER: Which parish were you in?

CECCHINI: First we star with St. Mary, but then at St. Lou, because I don't think they have a denunciation. Because see, we take trip, and they have those group, you know, they organize a group for the Catholic Federation, and the fair is more cheaper.

WEDEGAERTNER: The Catholic Federation is made up of, what, adults, men and women?

CECCHINI: Yes. Yeah. Yes. Even the young people.

WEDEGAERTNER: And is it more like a club?

CECCHINI: Well, they have their meeting and they help people, and they do a lot of thing together, but we don't...

WEDEGAERTNER: Do they have large socials also?

CECCHINI: Yes. Oh yes. They have a communion breakfast, they have a dinner, potluck. We have been in some of that, but we haven't yet now, because my husband was sick. He had an ulcer. And so we stopped that. But when the kids, they was young, in fact, even when the boy was 16 and we was five family. And they all had children, and every Saturday, we meet in one of the houses. So then a man, he takes all the kids to the movie, and the men, they play card. And us women, we talk. And at midnight, they go and pick up the kids, then we have a table of, you know, eat.

WEDEGAERTNER: You eat at that time?

CECCHINI: Oh yes. We have a big feed. And sometimes we had those big party down in the basement. Dancing and all of that.

WEDEGAERTNER: In the basement of your house?

CECCHINI: No, no. We don't have. But some friends, they have a big basement. And so we had that, and then in the summertime, barbecue of Lodi...

WEDEGAERTNER: Micke's Grove?

CECCHINI: No. Lodi, it's the lake.

WEDEGAERTNER: Lodi Lake.

CECCHINI: Yeah. Lodi Lake. And we brought meat to barbecue, and then everything, you make torta, you know, and zucchini and stuff you bring. And then the kids, they go swimming. So we always had a group.

WEDEGAERTNER: Your activities revolved around that group mostly?

CECCHINI: Yes. Revolved with the family, yeah. And that's another thing, my kids, I told 'em, made a rule, no matter how old they was, because even the girl, she loves to dance, and she prefers with a group of girls to go together. And when she, her turn to have the car, to drive the car, I say, "I don't care what time," but I say, "you're gonna come home to sleep." And the boy too. I say, "I know the dancing and stuff is late," but I say, "I want you at home." Because otherwise, after midnight, after one o'clock, I can't sleep anymore. And a lot of time, when they go Micke's Grove in the summertime, they dance up, you know. And so the girls, they go by themselves, but we took her. One of the parents took them. And then we go and pick them up. And if it was some place that we couldn't go, then I'll tell my son with his boyfriends, and I say, "Well, Rosemary with the girls, they're gonna be in certain place." Even the city or [Victoria], you know, when they had those dance. And he say, "But I'm going with the boys." But I knew he was there, because two, three times, they'd get fresh, they see two, three girls alone, and boy, he was right there behind. They say he just let go. He say, "That's my sister." And it was funny, because at Micke's Grove, when we went and pick up the girls, my husband and I, it was two o'clock. And you know, you have to walk that park. And we let the girls. We have four or five walk ahead, and usually they're singing. There was a bunch of boys on the side, like those vultures, you know. And they, zhoom, start going toward the girls. And one, he grab on the arm, and she didn't get scared. And she turn

around, she say, "Ma!" And he did the same, thinking she was fooling. He turn around, he say, "Ma!" "Here I am, son!"

WEDEGAERTNER: That surprised him!

CECCHINI: Oh yes! But you know, that time it wasn't bad like now.

WEDEGAERTNER: Yeah. It's a problem now.

CECCHINI: That's twenty...

WEDEGAERTNER: I'd hate for them to be anywhere by themselves now.

CECCHINI: No, no. It can't. I'm glad that I don't have young people to raise now.

WEDEGAERTNER: Right. Did you have any other particular rules for them, besides what we were just talking about?

CECCHINI: Well, work. Oh yeah. They started when they were eight years old. My cousins, he lived down the alley, and she had a big house, and so for a dollar, she paid him, so they clean the bathroom and clean the floor, so they have their dollar for his allowance. I never paid the allowance. They earned it. And then the boy, at twelve, see, he started working Gaia de Lucci. On Saturday and after school. From Stockton High School, he walked down Gaia de Lucci. So then, you see, when he left the job, my cousin over there, then the girl. Then she started working at Tad Marengo's. She was 14. And she worked there until she entered the convent. And the boy, the same thing. When he was, I think he was 20. Yeah, 20 when he start. He's a real estate and insurance business. So you know, they work.

WEDEGAERTNER: They know what it's like to work.

CECCHINI: Oh yes. Even when she was little, she wrote. Oh yeah. That's one thing I could see, that she wasn't that interested, I guess because he had a different vocation. Interest in the home. You know, some girl, they like to move furniture and things like that. Instead, I always had to tell her. And then when she was little, I say, "Just dust there." And she didn't like it. And then she wrote in a letter, because she was in the convent, she say, "God, he say the mother raise the children for somebody else. Because one Saturday that I had to dust the chair that I didn't want to, I had made up my mind I was gonna leave home through the bathroom window."

WEDEGAERTNER: At that age?

CECCHINI: Yeah. "And now," he say, "I dust 300 chair at the chapel." He say, "I don't think nothing of it." Because she was active in the Newman Club. A different club that associated with the young people. And she was very good in there. Oh, when they make those poster, you know, and they make those thing.

WEDEGAERTNER: She had a flair for the arts.

CECCHINI: Yeah, the art. But at the time, it worried me. You know, I was working, fine, but to do thing, show interest in the home.

WEDEGAERTNER: Were you all in favor of her decision to go into the convent?

CECCHINI: She didn't... She taught. In fact, when I was on Sunday morning, and we was doing the breakfast dishes, and she say, "Ma, I have something to tell you." And she say, "It's been two years" – see, because she was 20 – "two years that I think about it. I spent many night crying. I didn't want to accept it. But I came to the point that I can't go on this way. I have to try. And if God don't want me, I'll come back, but I have to try. I can't go on this way." And that's that. And then my son, he heard. He was in the back room, you know. Oh my God, he [], and I told him, I say, "Rosemary, first of all, you didn't ask my advice." And then I say, "If it was a marriage advice, I could say something, but for what you wanna do, I can't be... you know. And beside, you didn't ask me. You say you want it. You have given the thought for two years. My son, you didn't try to discourage." Oh, he felt so bad, my husband too. He blame me! So I say, "No, she didn't ask me."

WEDEGAERTNER: They thought she should, the stereotype of marriage and that type of thing. The family life.

CECCHINI: Oh yes. Oh yes. But she went off with boys. She was a good dancer. And you know, three boys told me, she say, "We know that that girl was for no man." And the girls, even when they was going dancing, Micke's Grove or the hall, something like that, he say, "Pretty soon, here we see Rose Marie. She's got two, three boys around, and dumping all their problems." So it was something. But she say, "I have to try, and if it's not for me, I will come home."

WEDEGAERTNER: Well, she certainly put a lot of thought into it.

CECCHINI: Yeah. And she had prayer, she would like to go to Italy and meet the family before she went to the convent. And we did, 1954.

WEDEGAERTNER: Did your whole family go over?

CECCHINI: No. The three of us, my husband and I. Because Joe, he had just got married in February. And we left in March. So it work out. We was over there for a month. We went all over, all over.

WEDEGAERTNER: It was a nice long visit.

CECCHINI: Oh yes. And then we reached all the big city, the historic things that for her was very interest. We went to Lourdes, in Rome, and all over. And she had come back already. She had been in Italy three times already. Yeah. And she was home. She was supposed to come home this year. See, every five years. Before, it was they stay ten years without coming back.

WEDEGAERTNER: Is that right?

CECCHINI: Yeah. The first time it was ten years. But we went to Japan and see her. But now they cut to five years.

WEDEGAERTNER: That sounds better!

CECCHINI: Every five years they come home. But see, this year she couldn't because she has to finish for the research she's doing.

WEDEGAERTNER: Well, it certainly sounds like she's happy in what she's doing.

CECCHINI: Yeah. Oh yeah. And next year she'll be in Italy, so she's got all the relatives over there.

WEDEGAERTNER: Were you and your husband pretty much in agreement as far as disciplining the children, or did you each have different ideas?

CECCHINI: Well, my husband was too concerned and busy in work. And see, because I was training. Because that's what my mother...

WEDEGAERTNER: Right. You had a lot of training.

CECCHINI: I have training, oh yes! Oh sure, they didn't agree with me, but I say, "This is the way I want. When you're old age and you don't live under this roof, then you can do what you want, but now, it's this way."

WEDEGAERTNER: Did you handle the finances too, or did your husband do that?

CECCHINI: Finances?

WEDEGAERTNER: The money, how you spent your money and things.

CECCHINI: Oh.

WEDEGAERTNER: Did you decide that together?

CECCHINI: No, no. He control the money. Yeah. Because see, grocery we ordered in Gaia de Lucci, and it was no problem.

WEDEGAERTNER: Did they deliver your groceries out to you?

CECCHINI: Yeah. Yeah, they deliver. So it wasn't, no. And you know, I could make with so little.

WEDEGAERTNER: You were probably very good at planning things too and economizing.

CECCHINI: Yeah. That's the best training. That's why I say people shouldn't... You know, when they have to make sacrifices, they should put everything they have, because through the determination and sacrifice, that's how they grow strong. Otherwise, if you give in, you want this, you want this, and whether you can afford it or not, don't you see, there's never a limit. There's never an ending. Because material thing, and get something too easy, you're never satisfied. I believe that. Because we went through a lot of thing, and if he wasn't the training, even my son, and even my daughter, because it's not an easy life. Because you know, when the assistant priest came out here a couple years ago, but she knew her vocation, she knew that God called her, and she faced those sacrifices. Oh yes. And my son

too. Oh, he could retire with a million dollar today. But you see, because the ambition, and in fact he had already all planned to the beautiful marina here, on the port. And it would have been something beautiful, because next to the Holiday Inn was gonna be the Hilton Hotel. And you know that building, that office building, four-story building?

WEDEGAERTNER: Yeah.

CECCHINI: He built it. They build it. But you see, it was the city. They didn't come through with the land. That land that Gunther, he had rented from the city. And they gave the okay. He say, "You go ahead." Because see, they had all the map. You should have see...

WEDEGAERTNER: About how long ago was this?

CECCHINI: That's about seven years.

WEDEGAERTNER: Seven years ago.

CECCHINI: And he had extended the lease, for Gunther. And the city council, they knew, and yet they give the okay. Go ahead. We'll get the land. That's where the Hilton Hotel was gonna be built.

WEDEGAERTNER: Instead of out on March Lane where it is now.

CECCHINI: Yes. But he had a trial with the city, and they gonna pay for, because they lost everything.

WEDEGAERTNER: That's too bad.

CECCHINI: Yeah. But you know, I told him, I say, "Before, it was your success. And what you are to be admired, your strength now."

WEDEGAERTNER: Oh, certainly.

CECCHINI: And a lot of businessman, they go to him and say, "Joe, how did you do it?" Because in the way he got caught. You know, anybody else, all they get, they run away or they kill themselves. Because you know, when you lose 25 years of business and success, it's not easy. But he stood, and he got everything, every trial has been not guilty. Free. In fact, the last one, it came, because see, he had the land for 50 years. The deed. That land. And the city couldn't touch it because you had it. But they try everything, even to find something to put him in jail. That way, they could take the lease. But they couldn't. And so we went to Sacramento, a trial, because this was the federal government. And he didn't have nothing to do. And so two trial. One trial, one judge, the second day told the government lawyer, he say, "You haven't present anything that I could hold Cecchini guilty, so I'll dismiss." At the first trial. The second trial, what he did, the lawyer, he got free. Took the one that he had 40 years, he was found guilty. He say, "If you admit that you knew what you was doing, I'll free you. And then I can reopen another trial against Cecchini." So they had that trial. And after ten days back and forth in Sacramento, the lawyer, until the last minute, it was [Wickywacki?] and Ozuma. Wickywack, he's the one that's got the money, Ozuma is the one that he give everything, but there was two. And the blame. Because Wickywack, he borrowed the money from Ozuma. His business burned down, he couldn't give it back to.

And so Joseph, he was left 275,000, accused he ran away with the government money. So when we was getting ready that trial, because see, then the jury got all mixed up, because the last minute it was supposed to be Wickywack and Ozuma to testify the way it was, and our lawyer, he say, "But where is the Wickywack and Ozuma?" "Oh, I don't need them." And it was time, the jury to [retaliate?], and to give the answer. Well, every time, they start six and six, but they got eleven and one. But the one, he was for my son, and it was a Chinese. But he never met, and so they couldn't bend him down. And so what happened, that the judge, he say, "Well, this thing, it went long enough, and it's dismissed." And so then we found out that was one that they couldn't make him change. Well, then they set date for another trial. And it was a couple of months later then, he getting ready to go to the trial. Well, the lawyer that he had defend the case before, for the government, he went back, he got sick. And it was time for reopen the new trial, he was still sick. So they have to get another lawyer, the government, from Washington. So this lawyer, more conscience and more honest, he examined both our lawyer's group and the government. And he could see that what kind of trick he had played. So he call the lawyer, my son's lawyer. He say, "You know, you present a good report, but our lawyer wasn't fair." And he say, "If you're beating the government, they don't wanna admit. If your client would only admit that he was aware of something that it was wrong..." And boy, our lawyer say, "My client has nothing to admit of wrongdoing." And he say, "Certainly I'll wait for you in Sacramento." Because see, if you admit, they would have dismiss, but still it wasn't free. So three days later, our lawyer, he called my son, and he say, "I got a letter here from a judge in Sacramento." That he receive a letter from the Attorney General in Washington. Because see, this lawyer, then he went to the Attorney General, and he say, "This case in here, it's not right." And I guess he explain. And the Attorney General gave order to Sacramento, and he say, "Free Cecchini of all the charges."

WEDEGAERTNER: Oh, great. That was really a long, drawn-out affair though, wasn't it?

CECCHINI: Oh! Because that, it would have been jail. But in fact, my son, he say, "If I have a choice that somebody would tell me, 'You wanna be the way you want or what you went through,'" he say, "I'll take what I went through. Because I became a stronger man. A man with more vision, and I know my strength." He say, "Others, it would just money for what I have now." Because he is recognized now, big company. They make him president of all the marina in California.

WEDEGAERTNER: Oh my. He is president now, did you say?

CECCHINI: No, no. He's here. But they wanted him to be the president of the group of all those they have the marina in California. So I say, "Well, before you was known for your success, but now you got something better."

WEDEGAERTNER: For integrity and strength.

CECCHINI: Yes. I say is worth much more.

WEDEGAERTNER: Right. I'm glad it turned out that way.

CECCHINI: Yeah. Yeah. Now we wait for the report from the judge. The city has to pay all the damage and all the humiliation they cause him. So it's in the hand of the judge. But what they present, you know, he can't get away.

WEDEGAERTNER: Right. Well I would say based on your experience with these court cases, you would pretty much be in support of at least the United States court system, the way it works.

CECCHINI: Yes. Yes. Very much. Very much, yeah. It's justice. But some of the people, they control the law. Because those lawyers, this was really for their own purpose, to win the case and maybe get a little bit higher, better position. But in our courts, yeah.

WEDEGAERTNER: Are there some other things that you particularly dislike about the way things are in the United States? The political system or welfare system or any of these areas?

CECCHINI: No. I think it's good. Well, the thing, maybe because the way it was raised, and the way I see that they got away from the most important thing, that too much, like family. There's not that close union with the family. The children. To us, it was something that a woman, a mother, that the children, it's their responsibility. And they learn get to free. Give everything in material thing except their time and their love and their sacrifice. It's not easy. I can see if you're not raised with that, you know. But it's very easy to miss the most important thing. Because when you get a certain age, at my age, and if I was to earn some money too, because we didn't have it. And like I say, I learned sewing. It's not easy, when you have to remodel a dress.

WEDEGAERTNER: No, it's not.

CECCHINI: And it's not easy. I made a business. When I quit too, because then after, I had to have an operation, I had to quit, but I had a good 15, 20 thousand dollars in the bank. And I wash for the money, but never with the expense or the neglect for my children.

WEDEGAERTNER: With your job, you could provide for them.

CECCHINI: Oh yes. I had Mrs. Nobby, you know, they had the store, and she wanted me to work in the store. And that's how it's done. I said, "No, I'm not gonna leave my family." I had two children, they come home for lunch, and my husband comes home after that. He say, "Then you don't mind if my customers, I send it to you." I say, "No, I wanna work." And so from there, all those they was gonna buy their clothes and they didn't fit, because that time during the war, they bought anything. They bought it was just like set[?]. And with me, it's a gift with me. You can put on a dress that had to be from top to bottom, they model it and just pin it there and there.

WEDEGAERTNER: That's quite an art to be able to do that.

CECCHINI: You know, that's what I have. So then it cost more, the alteration, than the dress, but they didn't care, because at that time, it wasn't like now, where they can get what they want. So, but it was a sacrifice. But otherwise, my children wouldn't be trained or be taken care of, and that would be my guilt. I feel good about it.

WEDEGAERTNER: You've probably already answered my question, but maybe you want to add something to it, as to what do you feel was most important to you in raising your children. What has been most important to you about being a mother?

CECCHINI: Well, Mary, to be a mother, to me, it's a gift. And it's worrying, because as they grow up, the children do things that you worry about, or when they are sick, it's the same. But you do your best and you are there. You're not at work. See, that's the thing the women miss, I feel sorry for. You know why? Because they want what they want now. It's more important to show off their beautiful home, their new car, clothes, and those things, there's never an ending.

WEDEGAERTNER: They just want more and more.

CECCHINI: Yeah. [She bought her home fifty years ago and remodeled it?], but I won't trade it.

WEDEGAERTNER: Oh, no, it's a lovely home. Lovely decoration.

CECCHINI: You know why? Because I feel like it was a house when we bought it, but now it's a home. I can spend time in here and think about the good time we had, the people that have been in here, and all the things that, you know, this has put down the root. Instead you move one place to another one, what do you have? And when you get old, what you have? Instead I've got those beautiful memories.

WEDEGAERTNER: You've got a beautiful investment here.

CECCHINI: That room over there, my daughter, I'm telling you, well, it's international. Japanese, from Italy, all over. That room there, and it's a bedroom that it cost me a hundred dollars, and I pay a few dollars a month when I was sewing, because our bedroom, my husband and I, well I was working in that room. And besides, I didn't have room for the sewing machine. So you know what? When we came to Stockton, my relatives with a table, a few chair, then they are the same. That chair over there. And a piece of rug, something like that, but things they could use. So then I could buy a bed. Our bedroom cost 26 dollars. Ten dollar iron there, sixteen dollar dresser, that one drawer, and the mirror. In that room, my aunt gave us the mattress, and it was the feather mattress, and so twenty years, we made that set. And the customers, they sit down on that bed, they tell me all their problems. It was funny that she always had time, you know. I say, "Every time you come, you have a big one, a little one." She say, "I'm gonna bring my box one of these days." She's got a box like this full of clients. They felt so ease and so full of comfort and praise, and they were satisfied with the work, and satisfied with the price, because I didn't try to charge it. Where I was making, to me was enough. And so make mistakes in the name when I had to pronounce the name. When I see someone was trying to talk Italian to me, you know, [] worse than I did, so they didn't bother. But that's what I mean. Then little by little. So the furniture, this one here, we bought it when we remodeled, because it was more old-fashioned. There was the French door and everything. We closed the door over there, we opened the hall, we did quite a bit in here. Well that is 1920... 1928, at least 38 years that we did the remodeling. And this is still the set. The chesterfield no, because it was already worn out. We covered the chair. But this is all the same thing. And to me, the thing is that anybody come in feel comfortable, and they come back because they feel comfortable. This is [already a disgrace?], but at least people enjoy it. See, my two children, the girl was three and the boy

was eight. That's my son and his wife and then my daughter and the two boys. And then this one here is the fifteenth anniversary. And look what I did, because the daughter was in Japan.

WEDEGAERTNER: Oh, I see. You put them in like that.

CECCHINI: She send the picture and I brought to the photographer. This is my son and my daughter-in-law. That's two, three years ago when he was going through all those problems.

WEDEGAERTNER: That's a nice picture though.

CECCHINI: Yeah.

WEDEGAERTNER: You called that your international room. Did you ever have an exchange student living with you?

CECCHINI: Oh, yeah. We have a Japanese girl, she was here for four months. I got this room here, [away from microphone, describing room]. We have beautiful memories. That's what I mean. There's a lot of things that aren't necessary, you know. I just believe to make what you have, enjoy it. When you can get something better, yes, but not to go and buy everything in time, because you don't know if something happen, and then what? You lose everything. It's worse.

WEDEGAERTNER: And of course the interest rates are so ridiculous now.

CECCHINI: The thing is, you have it, you take good care. Instead you bring something in the house and still you have to pay, you don't know if you can keep it or not.

WEDEGAERTNER: Right. That's not a good feeling.

CECCHINI: No, no. I wash by hand. Well, when I had the operation, then I couldn't go down in the basement, but otherwise, I always wash by hand.

WEDEGAERTNER: Did you do a lot of your own baking?

CECCHINI: Oh yes. Oh yes. Even now, all the Italia reini, you know, those noodles? I got in the freezer box. Ravioli, pesto sauce, cake...

WEDEGAERTNER: Pesto sauce, is that how you say it?

CECCHINI: Pesto, yeah. Oh yeah. I have in my freezer all these, because you never know who's coming. Cake, Italia reini, sauce, bread, all the stuff like this.

[End of Tape]

[TAPE 2, Side A]

[Begin Tape.]

WEDEGAERTNER: Okay, you were telling me about your canning.

CECCHINI: Well, especially during the Depression, we had friends in the country, we used to go, they let us pick fruit, you know, peaches, apricots, because they couldn't hardly even sell. We pick our own, and then I can every year about 300, all kinds of fruit. And then all the preserve, so fruit all year long. And then I used to even make a fruit salad. When you can peaches and apricots, and can like a...

WEDEGAERTNER: Like a fruit cocktail.

CECCHINI: Yes. Fruit cocktail. And then when it comes that there is grapes and cherries and what else? Then, you see, you put everything together, [you boil it?], and one year I make 40 quarts.

WEDEGAERTNER: Oh wow. Did you have your own garden also?

CECCHINI: No. No. Well, we had friends, they had a garden, and you brought things. Kill the pigs. You know, we go on the farm, buy a pig, then you have salami and stuff like that. Oh yeah, everything. And then I take one day, even when I was working, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday and sometime Thursday night, I was up all night to press all the clothes that I had fixed. You should've seen the room. And my cousin used to say, "You sure you don't get a nightmare because all of those clothes?" Twenty-five, thirty dresses a week. So you start Monday, and then Friday... [telephone rings, break]

CECCHINI: I came because all the complaining that, oh, they couldn't get the butter, they couldn't get the meat they wanted, they couldn't get this and that... But for us, because it was only a couple of years we was here. And over there, we didn't have those things. We don't miss anything! When you don't have it, you never miss it. In fact, we don't have much, but never I let anybody go away without a sandwich or a cup of coffee. Because I know I could do that. But I made my bread and made all the fruit, and so that's what I mean. Then I had Friday, Saturday, and Sunday to do all my baking, clean the house, the washing, and iron. Then started again. It was four days a week to do my work, because with the children, it wasn't slow.

WEDEGAERTNER: Did you still continue to get together with these five families even through your children's teenage years?

CECCHINI: Oh yes.

WEDEGAERTNER: And are some of them still good friends?

CECCHINI: We still get together. Oh yes, we have picture, and when we saw those was the good times, because they're married, they have children...

WEDEGAERTNER: Do you still get together as regularly though?

CECCHINI: No, no, no. Because they got older too, the parents, and then they have children, they got married, they move out and they got children their home. Well, we call once in a while, and when we meet, it's just the same.

WEDEGAERTNER: Are most of your friends still Italian?

CECCHINI: A lot of American, oh yes. But this group, because see, it was easy for us to talk Italian. Five families.

WEDEGAERTNER: That's a nice size.

CECCHINI: Yeah. They had two or three children along.

WEDEGAERTNER: Did any of them come from the same area of Italy that you came from?

CECCHINI: No, no. Just one. In fact, they grew up together with my husband, you know, from the same town. But there's only one. Him. Not the wife. She was born here.

WEDEGAERTNER: When you look back, even after you got your citizenship papers, did you still consider yourself first of all Italian, or did you think of yourself as Italian American? If somebody had asked you then.

CECCHINI: Well, I was happy to be a citizen. And even when there was sacrifice to make and everything, you have to manage the best you can, but I always was up and never complained. No matter how it was during the war, during Depression. But it was still better than what I had.

WEDEGAERTNER: So neither of you ever wanted to go back at any time.

CECCHINI: No, no. No, no. In fact, we wasn't able, because it takes money, and until 26 years after we had left. And in fact, it was because my daughter was into the convent, and she expressed that she would like to go and meet the family.

WEDEGAERTNER: That was your first time back, huh?

CECCHINI: Yeah, first time. Because that time they entered the convent, they wasn't allowed to travel many months, but now they go all over. She went back twice after that.

WEDEGAERTNER: It doesn't sound like it, but did you or your husband ever work for the canneries in town?

CECCHINI: No. Because that would require me to be away from the children. That's why I manage. Even when I was sewing, I made cutwork, you know, linen. Beautiful tablecloth, all embroidery around, all the cutwork.

WEDEGAERTNER: You did that for a hobby or for sale?

CECCHINI: No, no. Yes, some for my aunt, for a three-dollar loan. And then she pay me, because she know I didn't have. And then if I didn't get the money, they bought me glasses, they bought me set of dishes or a piece of material. Make a dress for the material. Always I've been paid. But then it was just before the war when I really started to make a business in sewing.

WEDEGAERTNER: Did you ever do any specializing in reweaving of materials? I had a card one time, a business card of someone that said, "Will reweave holes in your wool."

CECCHINI: No, no. Not professional. But I can knit. Because we used to make all our stocking and our sweaters and everything. In fact, Stockton, because [], then you pick up the stitches and you had the piece just like new.

WEDEGAERTNER: Did your brothers learn to do any knitting when they worked out with the shepherding?

CECCHINI: Oh, no, no. They have just a [something about fishing?].

WEDEGAERTNER: Because I know some nationalities, the boys in large families learn to knit...

CECCHINI: No. No, no. Because there was enough girls in the family.

WEDEGAERTNER: What particular customs or traditions have you tried to carry on in your family that perhaps you practiced as you were growing up? As far as baking or holidays?

CECCHINI: Well, I had a little sister, ten years younger. I always had me sewing, if I could have the time to go, because they go over there and be trained. See, they learn, they start from little stitching, and on and on. We need to learn the trade, then they have a business. But when my aunt was in Italy, then she saw that we didn't have much, they start sending package. Clothes that didn't fit them or was a little bit worn out. And I used to rip those dresses and make for my sister. Oh, she was dressed. You know, when she went to school, everyday a different dress. And so that's where I felt that I love sewing. Because I couldn't do it during the daytime because I had other chores to do, and there was a lady, a neighbor, she had a big family, I used to stay up with her until two o'clock. And I was sewing and she was knitting and crocheting, and I like that. That's why it's easy for me. I had that gift that I could see what had to be done.

WEDEGAERTNER: But there are no special ways of celebrating holidays that you can think of that you do now that you used to do there?

CECCHINI: Over there, see, there's a big dinner that we look for Christmas, for Thanks—no, they don't have Thanksgiving over there. Christmas, New Year's, and Easter. Those holidays. So we had really a big dinner. Turkey or other things. And that's what we look for. A dress. My mother, for Christmas, always something new. Not new, but even hand-me-downs. We always had something for Christmas. But I remember one year, I was four years old, and my oldest sister, she had a little grey coat, but then it was down and down to the other, even the boys when they was little. But for me it was getting a little bit, so what my mother did, she put a little velvet collar. You couldn't find anybody more happy than I was with that coat! So we was satisfied like that. There was no Christmas tree, no. We go to church, we had all that. Nothing big, but meaningful.

WEDEGAERTNER: Were there any special stories or songs, or games you played when you were little that you still played with your children?

CECCHINI: Over there, even some little thing you have, and then you threw the little stone and all. Just simple. I used to make my own dolls with rags, because see, I like to sew. And I used to make the little

dresses for them. And another thing. We didn't have the little potter for your dishes and things like they have now. So the first rain we had, we gather all that mud. And then we make little pots and little dishes and all those little things, and then we put it in the sun and let it dry.

WEDEGAERTNER: So you didn't have to pay too much for your dishes!

CECCHINI: No. In fact, one time my cousin, the first doll, I was eight years old. Because my cousin was in Italy, 1914. And she bought a little doll, one for me and one for my cousin. Then we had people, they came in the summer and stayed, and we even rent the rooms, slept on the floor to rent those rooms to earn some money. She gave me a little hat that fit on this doll. Well, my cousin, we lived together there. She got sick and she didn't wanna take the medicine, and I felt sorry for her because there I can't pretend. And see, the only way that we made her take the medicine was if I take the hat, because I felt sorry for her, and I say, "If you take the medicine, I'll give the hat to your doll. We'll both have the same." And I gave her the hat, but then when she got better, I could see that her doll looked so nice with the hat, and mine didn't have one. I wanted back! [laughter] But you know, I remember the thing that at night, because they all learned to knit, and they're just little girls. In the wintertime it was cold, and my mother, she had the little pot with the charcoal. And they use those long skirts, you know, so us kids, it was all around her sticking our feet under her skirt to get warm, and she was telling us stories. Back then, I was too little, and to me, I didn't realize the stories she was telling us, until I was in this country and I was sewing that I had the radio go on, it was the story of the Bible. When they sewed Joseph to the... And all those stories. I say, "Oh my goodness, that was the story that my mother, when we was small." See, this is the picture. It's 1914. This is my aunt from America. This is my grandfather and my grandmother. This is my father and my mother. This is my aunt and my uncle. This is my godmother.

WEDEGAERTNER: That's a lovely picture.

CECCHINI: Oh yeah. They was dress up, because my aunt, she bought the material there.

WEDEGAERTNER: They all look pretty happy here!

CECCHINI: Yeah. But this one here, 1914. So I was eight years old when she was in Italy. And at that time, I got the doll.

WEDEGAERTNER: Do you have a lot of pictures of your family?

CECCHINI: Yeah. Oh yes.

WEDEGAERTNER: Did your parents live for quite a while after you came over here?

CECCHINI: No. My mother died a year after. Only 55 she was. And my father lived even through the war. Last war. He was 82.

WEDEGAERTNER: But he was never able to come over here for a visit.

CECCHINI: No. In fact, he died just a year before we went back. He say, "Oh, and my sister, please say hello. I can't wait to see Maria. I can't wait, after 26 years." Instead he got like a stroke.

WEDEGAERTNER: Did your parents correspond with you very much, or did you have sisters or brothers that wrote?

CECCHINI: Well, with my parents, yeah, but they're both sides of my family. And my husband's family, you know, parents. They are gone. But I have one brother now living and two sister. And my husband's got a sister and two brother.

WEDEGAERTNER: Did you mention that at one point your grandfather lived with your family for a little while?

CECCHINI: Yeah. In fact, he lived with us, and it was the largest family. There was another two boys. My father had another two brothers. And there was two daughter. And he wanna live with us.

WEDEGAERTNER: Was this a problem having him live with you?

CECCHINI: Well, in fact, I was the one that I had to take care. I shave him, I cut his hair...

WEDEGAERTNER: Was he in bed?

CECCHINI: No, no. But he didn't wanna go to the barber.

WEDEGAERTNER: Oh, I see. Okay.

CECCHINI: Or have the hair cut. Oh no. He didn't wanna spend that money, so I had to learn to do that too. And he live until he was 82. I was over there before I got married, before I came back the first time.

WEDEGAERTNER: Was he much of one to tell stories to you?

CECCHINI: Oh yes. His stories, what it was his life. We didn't have nothing us kids, but oh, we thought we had a lot compared when he grew up.

WEDEGAERTNER: Was he a fisherman also?

CECCHINI: Yeah.

WEDEGAERTNER: How would you feel about living with your children, or how do you think they would feel?

CECCHINI: To live with the children? I don't even think about that. No, no. Because there's too much different now. The generation. You know, there's different ideas. You see, my grandparents, they was there. We was on the same. In fact, when my grandfather lived with us, and sometimes we was at the table, my brothers and sisters, and it's something that, you know, go fishing, and they was telling my father something, and my grandfather called my father something that he didn't think it was right. Rather than give him an answer, to his father, he left the table. See, they had that respect for older

people. Never argue with him or disagree with him. No, it was different. See, we grew up, we had the grandparents, and they tell us their story, we just, "Tell us this! Tell us that!" But now, you go tell something, "Oh, that was 100 years ago. That was your time." You know, things have changed.

WEDEGAERTNER: So your grandchildren have never come to you to ask you to tell them what your life was like or anything.

CECCHINI: No. No. They love the book, the pictures, and sometimes we talk about that, but you can see that my children, my son, yes, they listen the story we say, but the grandchildren, they don't have an idea.

WEDEGAERTNER: Have you seen that your children get more interested the older they get? In your past and in their roots?

CECCHINI: Oh yes. Yeah. Because when they was young, maybe they thought it was old-fashioned, or maybe too strict, but instead now, they say that's where... When my daughter arrived, even my son... That's for Mother's Day. [break]

WEDEGAERTNER: That's great that the communication is so free between you and your daughter like that.

CECCHINI: Yeah. She writes a letter that everybody can read, and they profit. They wanna read it.

WEDEGAERTNER: That is a real gift.

CECCHINI: I don't know. Maybe it's my fate that you can draw so much strength. So much strength. For 32 years, I go to church every day.

WEDEGAERTNER: Every day?

CECCHINI: Every day. 6:30 mass. Now, I get a ride and friends pick me up, but I had walked. When I started 32 years ago, I used to go at the chapel at St. Joseph.

WEDEGAERTNER: The chapel at St. Joseph's Hospital?

CECCHINI: Yeah. St. Joseph Hospital. But they tear it down, the one I used to go. They have another.

WEDEGAERTNER: I know they have one up on the fourth floor now, and I was going to go up and look at it, but I forgot to.

CECCHINI: But there's the chapel separately. But the one they had before, they tear it down. So that's where I started. That to me, because I had a lot of sickness too. I had seven operations. I've had six years heart problems. I had two operation on this here, deteriorated here.

WEDEGAERTNER: Did you have any new parts put in?

CECCHINI: Yeah. I went down to San Francisco. The UC hospital. Because the first time, it wasn't successful, because the doctor, they didn't have yet. It was only experiment yet. And a few doctors, a few hospitals, they use it. It took me nine months before I could have this operation. I had to wait. But it come out alright.

WEDEGAERTNER: How about your husband? Is he pretty well?

CECCHINI: No, no. He had a little rupture. It's a little incision like that. It's the stomach, because he's got more nervous. With all the sickness that I have.

WEDEGAERTNER: You look awfully healthy now.

CECCHINI: Well, I had for a long time crutches and canes.

WEDEGAERTNER: You've been through quite a struggle.

CECCHINI: If you have that power, that strength, you can make your life more easy.

WEDEGAERTNER: Right. And we sometimes underestimate the amount of strength that we have and we can draw.

CECCHINI: We went through all the problems with our son, what he was going through. Sometimes I wake up, three o'clock, couldn't stay in bed. And I go in that chair and pray. And a couple of times, believe it or not, I guess the prayers was needed, because I go to bed ten o'clock, and I woke up, and that clock there showed twenty minutes to five, and I thought, oh, it's time to get up. And the first thing I go in the kitchen, I make coffee, because when he gets up he wants coffee. Well, I get dressed and then make coffee, and I come and start my prayer. And I say, the coffee is done, I'm gonna have a coffee. I look at that clock, it's eleven twenty! And I didn't go to bed anymore. I spent that whole night. But then I was so at peace, and you come so closer to God.

WEDEGAERTNER: Have you ever had people tell you the next day that they knew or felt somebody was praying for them at that time?

CECCHINI: Yeah, they need it. And that's another thing, I remember the first trial we had in Stockton, it was charged in five account, and it went on, oh, ten days, two weeks. Well, the day that the jury retired, so the lawyers say, "Well, let's go across the street, have a cup of coffee, because now we don't know alone." And we was there. He said, "Well, I gotta tell you, with all those account, it might take even a couple of days before they can decide to give an answer." I don't know, it was in my words. I say, "No Jim. The jury, they go through today, and maybe in our favor." He say, "Maria, I hope you're right." And it happened. He say, "Well, go home," because then it was getting closer to noon. You know, have a bite to eat, and then Joe, my son, he say, "I'll call if I hear anything, but don't wait." Well, we just got through with lunch, the phone rings, and it was the lawyer. "Joe, come down," he say, "the jury are out." And us, my daughter-in-law, myself, and my husband, we was about fifteen minutes later, because you know. When we got there, first of all, where we sit down, it was reserved for us. And then the jury, they was there waiting with the report in their hands, but they didn't give it until they see us get in the court and

sit down. Then they present to the judge, and you can imagine when they say they read the first charge, "Not guilty." The second, and on and on. Well, it was going so fast, and me with my heart in my hands. And the fear, I didn't understand, but what I saw was my son and the lawyer embraced like two brothers reunion. And I told my husband, I say, "What's going on?" He say, "Joseph is free." Well, he was the last one to get out of the room, because first is the jury, and then all the people that was there. You know, when we went out, the jury, they was standing there at the door waiting for us to embrace us, to tell us, "We knew that your son was a good Christian man. And they try to fill us with lies, but they couldn't." And the judge, he lived close to a friend of mine, Judge Pathis[?]. That night, he went over, he say, "Nineteen years as a judge, I never experience a thing like that. The jury waiting for the family, and embrace like it was a family reunion!"

WEDEGAERTNER: I'm sure it must be unusual.

CECCHINI: And then the lawyer, the other thing had happened, and I felt it something to talk, you know. And he say, "What do you have, Maria, that you can anticipate it?" I say, "Jim, it wasn't my work. It was the Spirit." Even the last trial we had, because then after the trial, because there's no jury, the judge takes three months to examine the answer. But it was before Thanksgiving, and they got through the trial. He say, "Well, there's two innocent parts." Because there's a company, and then it was my husband involved because he had loaned money to my son. And my son, when he saw that everything was crumbled down, that's all he had. He had a share of a building in El Dorado, a mine in El Dorado. Cancun, you know, that Mexican place? That's our building. So my husband start demanding, he say, "I loaned you the money for the company, but where I'm gonna get it?" And he say, "That's all I have that is clear and is mine." So he get it in his name. Then the other party that he had dealt with this construction company, he left the country, and everything was dumping on him. Well, there was a trial because they was trying to get from that, but my husband, he had all receipt, all of the check, everything, the money they were loaning. It wasn't a fraud or something. So the judge, Judge Dozier, well, we had the trial there, but when he got through everything that was presented, he say, "Well, there's two innocent party here, the company and Tulia." He say, "I favor Tulia, because I can see that the money that he saved in his old age, he had loaned it to the son for helping him, and the company" And for me, it was the message. I told him, "Didn't you get the message? He want us to have a good Thanksgiving." And he say, "Oh, you know," just brush off like that. And so he came for Christmas, brought a bottle of brandy, and he say, "You know, I haven't heard from the judge yet for three months." And I say, "Jim, didn't I tell you that already we got the answer?" And he say, "Yeah, but sometimes they talk." I say, "No. I got that for the sure answer." Sure enough, he called and he say, "I got the answer from the judge, and he favor us." I say, "I told you." But you know, when he say, "What will you have?" I say, "You know Jim, through all the worry, the sacrifices, when you go through something like that, you come closer to God. And you come face to face to him and he knows you." And I say, "You not concerned anymore, because my prayers, I never pray, 'Oh, save the business.' No. I don't care about the business, the money they lose, but God give him strength that he can survive through all this injustice. That's all I want. Strength." And that's something about hope. I told him the other night, I said, "You know, I got a phone call, this girl, with you." And I say, "She, Dianne, I give my

name, and she wanna come and talk and interview, but I'm almost confused because I feel like I cannot speak that good."

WEDEGAERTNER: Oh, you can too!

CECCHINI: "Oh," he say, "what are you talking about? I have seen you put down and give the answer to people that you..." [laughter] And that's the strength, even my son, because even we was in a group and some people friends, he say, "Joseph is like a son to me." This man that was a businessman. "Joe is like a son to me." And he say, "This injustice that they done." "Don," I say, "yes. He has to carry the cross as far as Calvary. But they're not gonna crucify, because you'll be resurrectioned for carrying the cross." He say, "That's the first time I've heard it like that!" Carrying the cross, then there's crucifixion you know. But, "No, I skip that." [laughing] When he sees me, "Oh," he say, "you know, I never heard that before!" But for him, he's gonna be the only one that is crucified. And bless our Lord, then he knew. But I say, "Not for Joseph."

WEDEGAERTNER: So you lived through quite an experience with all of that."

CECCHINI: Oh yes. But I feel that all this made us even stronger and better people.

WEDEGAERTNER: Probably even closer to the family.

CECCHINI: Yes. Yes. Because you see, when everything down, everybody, we pitch in. Because I have a little money saved. And you know, you have to, because this lawyer, he was recommended from somebody else, so they didn't never met before. And he could see in what [proper something?], so he want a little advance, you know. But in my account I left nineteen dollars. And I say, "I don't care." Because there's this spirit in you that that is just a little money, but you gonna be rewarded from the liberation when it comes. You feel like you go through agony, those trials, because lies, the way some testify. And the lawyer, the way they twist the thing, you know. I don't know if you ever heard about Jim Simonelli, the [seminary's brother?].

WEDEGAERTNER: I don't know if I know that one particularly.

CECCHINI: Jim.

WEDEGAERTNER: Is he the one that's the lawyer, you mean?

CECCHINI: Yes.

WEDEGAERTNER: Oh, okay. I know the family then.

CECCHINI: Yeah. And I used to say, "Jim, you are very intelligent. You know your business. You pour everything you have in that court, because behind you, you have God. Get the spirit of God that supports you, because you was chosen. God sends you to liberate Joseph. Because no lawyer would ever free him." In fact, even the judge, Judge Cecchini, he say, "Those cases, no one would have touched with a nine-foot pole." And you know, he give him advance, fine. Then there was the other half to pay. And when it was time and we was thinking about how to pay the rest, before we see him again, he was in the

office, they see he has this note, the lawyer. And he say, "Joe, this is the note that you signed for me. We have to free you. Forget about the money now."

WEDEGAERTNER: Wasn't that nice?

CECCHINI: And then just like that. He came over here, we had dinner together, you know, it just enrich your life when you come in contact with other people like that. Sometimes it takes a moment like this. That's why I say, I'm not educated well, but the education I got through people. Through contact. Because with me, I don't know, people, to me it's life. Even sick people I went and take care of. There was an old man, he lost his wife, the daughter was working. For three years. His wife died. He had a stroke, the doctor didn't give him more than two weeks. And I used to cut hair for him and his wife. And so when I heard he was like that, every morning for three years, nine o'clock, I was there at breakfast and fix it, you know. Just spent an hour and talk. And in our talk, because we was talking about his wife, I say, "Well, Marinis is waiting for you, but God, they don't want you yet. They wanna give me a little job to come over and visit you." And he had crutches because he was crippled. We was talking about everything, and God, well, it is beautiful to just talk. And I say, "Stevie, you realize you don't need those when you're up there. You'll fly." And you know, he was scared before. But he say, "You explained Heaven in a way that I am anxious to go."

WEDEGAERTNER: So you've done a lot of counseling essentially in your lifetime.

CECCHINI: Yeah.

WEDEGAERTNER: Just listening to people, which is so important.

CECCHINI: And to me, I feel like I have nothing in the bank, but my husband, he say, "She's got a treasure!"

WEDEGAERTNER: He's right!

CECCHINI: "She gives all her wealth away!" I say, "That's right, because in here I'm gonna leave it, but up there I'm gonna find it. And I'm gonna send what I'm gonna find up there." I don't know. I can't say I have anything to regret. Because even the mistakes, or the things I'd do a different way, that I could do better, but that was just a little ignorance because I didn't know better. It was through those little mistakes or those feelings sometime, if somebody says something, you get hurt, something like that. That was all to get stronger, and to get a better person out of it. You know, you pick everything, you don't let go, then when you are by yourself, you think "Well gee, why I had to feel that way toward that person?" But this is to you and your conscience. Then the next time you happen, then you remember, "No, let it go." So you make more friends, you have better conscience, and you come closer to God.

WEDEGAERTNER: That's a very good philosophy.

CECCHINI: That's it. And so I have many, many friends.

WEDEGAERTNER: I'm sure you do.

[End of Tape]

[TAPE 2, Side B]

[Begin Tape.]

CECCHINI: But I mean, I learned those little trade because I could come close to the people and help them. I had, you know Dianna's boyfriend?

WEDEGAERTNER: I didn't, no.

CECCHINI: Oh. Well the mother, she's in a rest home, but at the time she was here, see, she has a sickness in the brain.

WEDEGAERTNER: I think I remember her telling me about herself.

CECCHINI: When she was here, day and night, you know. It was a work for me, because all of those things there. And I had to give her a bath, and sometimes she comes over, things like that. Then she was in a rest home closer, about five blocks from here, but every week, I go and get her, I wash her hair, I cut it, then I comb it, she had lunch in here, her nap, she spent the day. When I brought her back over there, there's three or four men because there was only eight patient in there. "Hey! You look so cute!" And she loves that. I put a little lipstick and comb her hair and look like a doll, you know. And now she's at the Chateau rest home. They had to change her because she required more care. And I had her Monday. On Monday, I go here. On Friday, I go down and fix hair and cut her hair. Then, what else? Every week, something. Oh, I have somebody over for lunch, when I can. Then, after my daughter, she went in a convent, I belonged to the Legion of Mary. It's a religion group. They go visit.

WEDEGAERTNER: That's just a women's group?

CECCHINI: Men too. Yeah. We used to go at San Joaquin General Hospital. That time they kept the old people there. And then rest at the house, and visit those people like that. And you know, there was a lot of Italians at San Joaquin General Hospital. And the father, because we meet every week at night and report the work we did. And Father Allen was a Franciscan priest at St. Mary, knowing that I speak Italian, all of those Italians at the hospital, he gave the names to me. So I go there, and when they hear the language, you got better contact. But oh they was stubborn. First I ask how long they been here. They have a story, you know. In fact, two or three, they was taken by the orphanage as children. Because then the orphanage paid the family. But those poor kids, the way they was treated. One, he say he not even have a room in the house in a stable. And he had a lot, poor thing, and on and on like that. And then they came in this country when he was 16. He was in a ranch working, never got married or anything. And this man in there, I would visit him for two years every week. We talked and everything, but then I begin to bring them clothes to their religion. Because they told me, oh yes, the people want to go to church every Sunday. But anyway, this one here, he was in bed, and one time, after two years, he say, "What God ever done for me?" Oh, I don't know. Like I said, maybe that's worse, but I had to react like that. I say, "What God has done for you? He died on the cross, and if he was to

save you, he would have gone for you alone. And he didn't have a soft pillow like you have under your head. He had a crown of thorns." I was telling this, and I was crying. And I look at him, he was crying. Then all of a sudden, he said, "Get out of here and don't come back no more!" I guess I give it a little bit too strong. So I left. But then I saw the chapel at the visit the sick, the week after. I talk to him, I said, "You know, Mr. So-And-So, I put a little bit heavy. He told me to get out and not to go back anymore." He say, "Oh, didn't they tell you?" I say, "What?" He say, "After you left, he called the nurse, and he say, 'Next time that the priest come, you send to me.'" He received communion and everything. But you see, another man, he was blind. And you go slow and talk at first because he didn't wanna hear. I say, "Gee, you had a good mother?" And he say, "Oh yes! Good mother. If we didn't go to church on Sunday, she say we wouldn't eat that day." "Oh," I say. "I hope that God won't let her see you and the way you feel now toward God, because otherwise she won't be happy. If she was a good Christian mother, she's in Heaven, but she won't be happy, not even dead, if she see you." And then, because he was blind, I say, "You like to be blind, to be in the dark?" "No. I'm mad at this." I say, "I have news for you. You'll be in the dark even after you die, because you're not gonna see God. And if you don't see God, we are in the dark. Would you like to be in the dark even the rest of your eternity?" Because God is light. I say, "If you refuse him now, you're gonna be in the dark." He say, "Gee, if you put it that way!"

WEDEGAERTNER: Well, you've done a lot along that line in your life...

CECCHINI: There was thirteen. One by one, they all came back. It was all good men, work hard, and just when you start neglecting your religion, going to church, it's easy after. You forget. And so when they're sick, see, we was visiting them, and I had it.

WEDEGAERTNER: I think that sounds like a great organization, the Legion of Mary. They do a lot of wonderful things.

CECCHINI: Yeah, they do. And I always pat myself. When I was sewing, I had enough, but we had conversations with all the customers. They sit down on the bed and tell me their problems.

WEDEGAERTNER: Like they do to their beauticians.

CECCHINI: Yeah. And that's why I feel like I have a full life.

WEDEGAERTNER: Right. A very rewarding life. Therer were just two minor questions I wanted to go back and pick up on. One was, in this group of five families that were good friends, what kind of occupations did the men have at that time in their lives? What did they do?

CECCHINI: One was a janitor, like my husband. In fact, they grew up in Italy. And one, he work in a grocery story. Another one, he had a bicycle shop. And the other one...

WEDEGAERTNER: Did he have his bicycle shop for a long time?

CECCHINI: Yeah. In Main Street.

WEDEGAERTNER: It's not still there though?

CECCHINI: He sold it, because he had a brother, and so he had to retire, and I think he still owns that bicycle shop. You know, that time it was a small town. And they had a daughter. So they lived in Cleveland Street, not too far from here. We are very good friends still. The Ciaggalupe, the Guena, the Piuma, the Priholli, the Cecchini.

WEDEGAERTNER: Did any of these women work? Any of the mothers?

CECCHINI: No. None of them worked out.

WEDEGAERTNER: The whole time that you've been here in Stockton, have you, or do you think your children have felt discriminated against in any way?

CECCHINI: You mean my children discriminated against?

WEDEGAERTNER: Or even you and your husband when you first came to this country. In any way.

CECCHINI: That we was discriminated? That other people looked down on us?

WEDEGAERTNER: Yeah.

CECCHINI: No. No. Surely you had to do a job, you know, janitor is not...

WEDEGAERTNER: That's needed though.

CECCHINI: But he found his job. And in fact, I taught the kids, like I said, starting at eight, they was cleaning the bathroom, mop the floor. [break]

WEDEGAERTNER: When your kids were in elementary school and high school, did you get involved in any of the activities there?

CECCHINI: No. See, I didn't have the speech to speak English. But I kept doing things in the house and with the people, with the neighbors. Always good contact with people.

WEDEGAERTNER: Did your children ever encourage you to speak English more? Or did this bother you?

CECCHINI: No, I tried. You see, I started when I was so new.

WEDEGAERTNER: But maybe you felt you couldn't speak well enough.

CECCHINI: Well, I knew my limit, but I was trying to learn a little bit better. And I didn't have time. You see, Sunday there was night school to learn, but how are you gonna go when you have children? And my husband, he wasn't home because he worked at night. So I was tied down.

WEDEGAERTNER: Well you learned it very well on your own.

CECCHINI: I can't write though. I can make myself understood, but I can't write, because the spelling is different. Because see, in Italian, you write like you speak. The more these things in here is different. If I had a good education in Italian, it would come easy, but I didn't even have...

WEDEGAERTNER: Well, I don't think it's so important how much formal education you had, you had so much experience and all.

CECCHINI: Well, that's maybe time that I would have liked to have more education, you know. But no, to me I don't see that it was that important to my way of living. Because I couldn't go work and leave. See, that's the way I felt.

WEDEGAERTNER: Looking back on your life, do you consider one age to be the best age? Or one age to be any better than any other age? A better period? Or was there some time that was one of your worse periods?

CECCHINI: I think it's when your children's small. Because you take care of them, you close the door at night, they are in bed, then one night they get that age. The teen age. They go out. Then I know that until midnight, I didn't, before midnight. But then after midnight, I was over there by that window. And see, especially that boy, but no, I never worry about her. Even when she get the car and she had to pick up other girls because they take turn.

WEDEGAERTNER: I see. You didn't worry about her as much as you did the boys.

CECCHINI: No. No. But the boy. The boy, you know, more. Because the girl, she's more closer, she tells you more thing. But the boys, "Don't worry about, don't worry about that."

WEDEGAERTNER: I get that now.

CECCHINI: You have children?

WEDEGAERTNER: I have two teenagers. One is 18 and one is 16.

CECCHINI: Boys?

WEDEGAERTNER: Yeah.

CECCHINI: Uh huh. Yeah.

WEDEGAERTNER: What do you think about the Equal Rights Amendment for women? The ERA?

CECCHINI: You mean the rights?

WEDEGAERTNER: That each of the states are trying to pass?

CECCHINI: Yeah.

WEDEGAERTNER: Are you in favor of that? Equal rights for women?

CECCHINI: Yes. Oh yes. Because I grew up that the man, he always was superior. But I believe that this is something, you know, we are equal. We are human, and we should have that recognized. That's what my daughter's doing in Japan. To give more right to the women. Because we was in Japan, and I seed those poor women, especially when it rains, they have water under their feet because they put that rice,

those plant, the rice. And the water is way up to their waist, and then it rain. They got something like a tent in here. Oh! Those old one, they can't even walk straight. They walk stooped down. And the men, see, they go and do what they want. Even in Italy was like that. See, because they go out fishing, and they are in the ocean all week. Then they come home, they go out in those cantina, and you know, they have a good time. The wife have to wait until they come home, and with the dinner and everything, and it change over there too. Oh yes. It's no more like the time of my mother or you know. No, no, no. It change over there too.

WEDEGAERTNER: In Italy, did the men always eat first? Did you always serve the men first?

CECCHINI: No, no. No, no. All together, yeah. Even when they was home, unless it was an urgent, you know, that they had to go back out fishing, then you prepare for them. But otherwise, no. No. It changed, but I could see that, oh my goodness, that they have prepared dinner, but when the husband was home, everything more. And us children, we had to make the best. Even buy a meat. My father and my brother, they was home from fish, because when they was fishing, it was only fish they can eat, and it we had buyed meat, we buy on Sunday when they are home. Well, they had the men a little more authority, and respect you can say, but in here, I don't think it should be like that. But I believe that a woman should know her place and her commitment. Because for men has to come home and clean the house and do the washing and all those thing like that, I think the woman should. Even if she works, then you do it together. But if she don't work, I think she should have those things in order and waiting. Because that is benefit the woman. Because you know, it's really a woman job, because the home and the family, to me it's a privilege. To take care of your home, to take care of your family. But sometime, you know, condition they can't, that the woman has to go out and work. Because even on my time when I came here, a lot of women, they took to the cannery, work, but then maybe the husband, he watch the kids at night, because some they work at night. But I could never do that, because my husband, he wasn't home. He work late at night. Come home two o'clock, but I was there on the sewing machine. So we both... And I felt that I couldn't let nobody else raise my children. I say, well, you know, they need. If you wanna punish, they know. They understand better. Instead some stranger, they don't take it that way. And so I don't know. I always felt, maybe because the way I was raised. My mother, she had ten, oh yes. We had to take care, you know, the older girl take care of the little baby. Help like that. To me, I feel that is a privilege.

WEDEGAERTNER: Does it bother you to see women in jobs that are traditionally men's jobs?

CECCHINI: If they are capable, that's fine. Yeah. Why not?

WEDEGAERTNER: Like the ladies that are... Well, what I can think of are the PG&E workers. The girls that have gone into that.

CECCHINI: Yeah, I know. They are capable. So maybe there's a lot of man that they're not able to do that job. There's a woman, okay. But that's up to the woman. If she can keep the job and be fair to give herself to the family. Because I'm not saying that neglect in the family, okay, is wrong and this. But it's yourself that you leave something that is locking you down. You feel something, a little guilt. That's the thing. It's not because, well, they manages the same.

WEDEGAERTNER: Some of them do, anyway.

CECCHINI: I feel that the woman, most of her part is the family.

WEDEGAERTNER: Okay. I think we've just about covered everything that we needed to. I really enjoyed talking with you this afternoon.

[End of Tape]