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## Rivera, Theresa Interview

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# Stockton Immigrant Women Oral History Collection

by Sally Miller

## **RIVERA, THERESA (Italian)**

July 1, 1980

Interviewed by Mary Wedegaertner

Transcribed by Unknown

Wedegaertner: Theresa, you were born in Italy, right? Do you remember what part of Italy you lived in?

Rivera: Alessandre.

Wedegaertner: Del a Sandre?

Friend: No, Allessandre, that's up north near the [Peymonte] region.

Wedegaertner: Do you know why your family came to America - to the United States?

Rivera: I was the first one to come

Wedegaertner: How old were you?

Rivera: Twenty-two. [It was in November, 22]. I come to Stockton 17, October. It was [not ]exactly twenty-two. [I was twenty-two, not seventeen]. I come over here on the [ ].

Wedegaertner: Oh, just a little over twenty-two. Why did you come then to Stockton?

Rivera: To make money and I was more broke than over there.

Wedegaertner: You were more broke over here? You couldn't find a job?

Rivera: They wanted me to marry because I was a good...

Friend: They wanted here to get married because she was a good worker.

Wedegaertner: Did they want you to marry someone over here?

Rivera: Yes, but they [ ] at the same time.

Wedegaertner: Did you get married over here, real soon?

Rivera: Yes, in Stockton in 1911. Like I come here tonight, I get married tomorrow.

Wedegaertner: What did your husband do?

Rivera: Ranch. Work vegetable and then he get sick. Stay in bed fifteen years.

Wedegaertner: And you had to take care of him?

Rivera: Yes.

Wedegaertner: That was a lot of hard work then, wasn't it?

Rivera: Yes, and I raise two kids. One has passed away. The other is still living.

Wedegaertner: Boys or girls?

Rivera: Boys. Boys.

Wedegaertner: Two boys?

Rivera: Yeah.

Wedegaertner: Did you have any help on the ranch when your husband was sick?

Rivera: No, nothing. [There wasn't another people there at the time].

Wedegaertner: You did work all yourself?

Rivera: Yeah. Yeah.

Wedegaertner: What kind of vegetables did you have?

Rivera: Everything. Up to La Grange, and to Stockton.

Friend: She was in La Grange, then she came to Stockton.

Wedegaertner: Did you want to go back to Italy? Did your parents ever come over here?

Rivera: They died, little.

Wedegaertner: They died when you were little? Did you have any sisters and brothers?

Rivera: Yeah, sister one, brother, two.

Wedegaertner: Did they come to the United States too?

Rivera: My sister, yeah, but my brother no.

Wedegaertner: Did you ever have a job in Italy? Did you work?

Friend: Yeah, you had a job. You worked for the College of the Pacific, didn't you?

Wedegaertner: Did you work for the College of the Pacific?

Rivera: Eight months.

Wedegaertner: What did you do there?

Rivera: Wash the dishes and eat and dance inside the college. One colored girl we eat and dance and wash dishes.

Wedegaertner: Was that before you got married?

Rivera: No, no.

Wedegaertner: Of course. It would have to be after you got married.

Friend: That was way in her late years. How old were you when you worked at the college?

Wedegaertner: Do you remember how old you were when you worked at the University of the Pacific?  
Do you know how old you were when you washed dishes at the university?

Rivera: My boy, he was twenty-two.

Friend: Oh, around sixty.

Wedegaertner: Did you like working there?

Rivera: Oh yeah, the first job I...

Wedegaertner: The first job you ever had?

Rivera: The Orini. I work in the ranch all the time, there, there, there.

Friend: The first job she ever had [ ] a toilet. She always had to go out in the field.

Wedegaertner: Working in the field is very hard work, isn't it?

Rivera: I don't care for me for orini, you know. You can go out in the field.

Friend: She worked very, very hard. She was always picking figs and going out and go out and pick figs.  
You went to pick figs. She was very agile.

Rivera: Three years of steady picking. All around Stockton. The fig is there you pick, me and my two kids.

Wedegaertner: You went and picked figs at all the different ranches? Did you pick cherries too?

Rivera: Oh yeah, peaches, everything.

Wedegaertner: Did you ever work in a packing shed?

Rivera: No, I never like it. Too slow job.

Wedegaertner: But you liked to do the picking?

Rivera: Oh yeah.

Wedegaertner: You sang while you were picking, huh?

Friend: She used to love to dance and sing. Just a very joyful person. Within just the last month she [ ] a  
good deal.

Rivera: I fall down too many times.

Wedegaertner: You fell down many times?

Friend: Yes, she fell. Not picking, but in these late years she fell. She fell outside against the fence one  
time. Remember outside?

Wedegaertner: And you hurt your wrist. Did you ever sing in a choir or a chorus?

Friend: She never had that opportunity.

Wedegaertner: Did you sing lullabies to your children? Songs to your children at bedtime?

Rivera: Oh yeah.

Friend: She said she can't hear, but she...

Rivera: Everything bad with me.

Wedegaertner: You have everything bad with you. You're not feeling too well, huh? You look very well  
though.

Friend: She says you look good. She just had her hair done, see, today.

Wedegaertner: You used to like to dance a lot too?

Rivera: Oh yeah, oh my.

Wedegaertner: Where did you go to do your dancing?

Rivera: In town. Where I was born, right there.

Wedegaertner: In Italy?

Rivera: Yeah.

Friend: Well, you danced here, too. Yeah, they had parties, you know, at home mostly. I remember we danced in your living room when I was a little girl, remember? We took all the furniture out. It was four chairs and one table. Yeah, her husband was a good dancer too.

Rivera: He was special.

Wedegaertner: He was special, special dancer?

Friend: I have known them since I was a little girl.

Wedegaertner: Did you live out near them?

Friend: Yeah, I lived out on Waterloo Road near where they lived there for several years. They moved around, but we knew them. She was the best of friend my mother had.

Wedegaertner: Do you remember her mother? What do you remember about her most?

Rivera: Everything.

Wedegaertner: Very nice person?

Friend: They used to call each other up and talk about their boyfriends which they didn't have any.

Rivera: That to be special. "[Oh] [ ]." [You know, joke like that].

Wedegaertner: When your husband was so sick for fifteen years...

Rivera: Then he go back to Italy.

Wedegaertner: He went back to Italy?

Rivera: Yes.

Friend: And he died over there.

Wedegaertner: But he did get well and went to Italy?

Friend: No.

Wedegaertner: Did get well. You had the ranch to yourself?

Friend: No, the rent it most of the time. They raised cattle. They had calves, chickens and he was sort of a trader. He used to be, what we used to call horse traders in the old days and bought calves and they had a butcher shop for a while. She did anything, you name it, she had it, huh, Theresa. You even had a butcher shop at one time.

Rivera: Yeah, I do everything to make ends meet. [Everything].

Wedegaertner: Did you raise chickens?

Rivera: Yeah, a few. Sell a dozen eggs to buy bread.

Wedegaertner: Where was your butcher shop?

Friend: It was down south along the, I forgot the name of the street, it was...

Rivera: Center Street.

Friend: It was down south either Monroe or one of those streets. It was on a corner, in fact, I think the building's still there.

Wedegaertner: What was the name of the butcher shop? Can't remember, huh? Did you work in the butcher shop too?

Rivera: No, just the two partners. Used to eat the meat.

Friend: She's telling you how my dad used to buy from them and he used to use to buy enough for a week, you know. They said they ate more in one night than we ate in one week. No, she had hard times, but they always had enough to eat because she saw to it that they did have enough to eat.

Wedegaertner: Did you bake your own bread?

Rivera: Sometimes. In Italy, I used to make it in the baking place.

Wedegaertner: You worked in a bakery?

Rivera: No. On the ranch, I make it in a brick [ ].

Wedegaertner: How long have you lived here in Crestwood?

Friend: She's been here about a month. Not quite a month.

Rivera: Ten, twelve days.

Friend: You've been here longer.

Wedegaertner: Where did you live before you came here?

Rivera: Sonora with my niece.

Friend: No, you didn't live there, you just went there to convalesce, but she lived with her daughter-in-law on Meadow Avenue. You just went up there when you got out of the hospital to convalesce, you know.

Wedegaertner: Did you like it up there in the hills? It's alright?

Rivera: When you're sick, you're sick and anywhere you go you're sick. Nothing nice nowhere.

Friend: Since she fell at home there, oh I guess about a year ago or more. She fell and she cracked some ribs, you know, and they give her trouble, you know, and she had no help and she had to cook for herself and she got so she wasn't eating that well. They weighed her when she came in. I'd like to see if they weighed her. Did they weigh you anymore [Theresa]? Did they weigh you two times or one time? You were 110.

Rivera: 100 ½ lbs.

Wedegaertner: 100 ½ lbs?

Rivera: Yeah.

Friend: She was up to 125-126, then she started going down 120-118-115.

Rivera: I want to stand up a little bit.