



## ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

An interview with  
Mrs. Emilio (Rose A.) Tait, 1922-1988

July 23, 1986

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 [MP3 Audio File](#) [Length: 1:40:46] (46.1 MB)

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### PREFACE

This interview had been scheduled with Mr. Tait, but he forgot, so we proceeded to interview Mrs. Tait, who said she knew whatever he could tell me anyhow, and she was born in San Diego while Emilio came when he was twelve from Italy. This interview proved very informative indeed, about the Italian community on India and Kettner Streets, both early days--1920's and 1930's--and the contemporary scene.

The shops and stores along India Street in the thirties are described in detail. It seems that when they could not make it fishing, the Italians tended to open shops, stores, butcher shops, and so forth.

Mrs. Tait describes the fetes and festivals, both Italian and Portuguese. She describes stomping grapes as a girl when her father made three hundred gallons of wine--with city hall permit.

She describes her schooling, at Washington School and Roosevelt Junior High School, and tells of social affairs, picnics, boating trips and clam gatherings at Coronado and La Jolla.

She names and tells something of other noted San Diego Italian families: the Ghios, the Tarantinos, the Riveras, and so forth. Toward the last of the interview she gets to remembering food, music, parties, and speaks of her son Anthony ("Tony Tait"), who is a lighting engineer with the Globe Theater.

Mrs. Tait speaks English with no trace of Italian dialect. When asked how this came about, she did not really know--she just does.

She tells of Our Lady of the Rosary Church and the church at the University of San Diego, which they mostly now attend. Their home is a simple, rather small house on a hill across Tecolote Canyon from the University of San Diego; she describes the natural wildlife there before the University was built, and speaks of how and when it was built.

Craig Carter, Interviewer  
July 23, 1986

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#### **INTERVIEWER'S NOTE**

This is an Oral History interview by Dr. Craig Carter. Mrs. Rose Tait, who lives on Plainview Road in San Diego, is a member of the Italian community. Her husband Emilio recently gave photographs of the Italian community to the Historical Society. She said she would be willing to be interviewed about the Italian community in San Diego. The date is July 23, 1986.

**CRAIG CARTER:** Mrs. Tait, what is your first name?

**ROSE TAIT:** Rose.

**CC:** What is your family background?

**RT:** My mom and dad came to San Diego in 1922 and I was born two months after they got here, so I was carried across the ocean. They came from Genoa, Italy, a little province of Genoa called Riva Trogisi.

**CC:** When you came over, did you already have relatives here in San Diego?

**RT:** Oh, yes, my mother had a sister in San Diego with her husband and family. Then she had another sister who was married in Santa Cruz, California. She came down to San Diego to visit but her home is in Santa Cruz. The auntie who was here in San Diego, her husband was a fisherman. They lived on Kettner, which was about a half block or so from where mom and dad settled.

My father had two brothers and two sisters who lived in San Diego. They were fishermen, also, and he had two sisters who lived in San Pedro. One was married to a merchant mariner and the other one was married to, I believe, a fish broker in San Pedro. They would come down occasionally, and the families would have reunions.

But getting back to my mother's sister, they helped mom and dad get settled. When mom and dad came to America they didn't have much so my father's brother rented them a small home and furnished them with the necessities, like furniture, clothing and things like that. This was on India in the 1700 block.

**CC:** Was that more or less the center of the Italian community at that time?

**RT:** At that time, yes. It started from where we were and going up another block or so there was also an Italian family that had the Perniy Mattress Factory. Right next door to them was the Kelley Laundry. Now it is something else and I don't know what they converted it to. Directly across the street from the Kelley Laundry was an Italian grocery store. I believe it was called Angelo's. They were Italian people. Right next door there were some Italian people, Lacacco. They were from Sicily. Next to them was the old Tower Theater where us children used to go on Sundays. Next to that was the old drug store run by a gentleman named Don. All the boys, when they came home from fishing, would congregate there because they had a beautiful fountain where they served ice cream and sundaes, and they used to whistle at the girls. Going across the street from the drug store there was another Italian family. They had a grocery store. The elder woman married a cousin of ours by the name of Julius Zolezzi, who was a fisherman. Zolezzi was my former name.

Next door to the grocery store where Julius Zolezzi lived was a tall building where some Italian people by the name of Zizio lived. From there., next to that, was the Adamo Shoemaker store, a shop where Mr. Adamo did shoe repair. I can't think of the father's name but they had three children.

**CC:** Was the Solunto bakery there at that time, or did that come later?

**RT:** That came later. Right next door to the shoemaker shop was a family by the name of DeSanti. The oldest boy, Joe, was a fisherman, and so was the father.

**CC:** Aside from the shopkeepers, were most of the Italian community at that time fishermen?

**RT:** Yes. Then next door to the DeSanti was a bar. All the Italian people used to congregate there when the fishermen came home. I wish I could remember the name but I don't. Right next door to them was a grocery store run by the Matteria family; next door to them was a tall building [and a shop for] washing machine repairs. Then next was where my husband's father had his butcher shop. That was about 1934 and 1935. My husband came back from Italy in 1936 at the age of twelve and a half years old. Next door to them was another grocery store ...

**CC:** When you say "came back" from Italy, was that when he first came to America, when he was twelve?

**RT:** Yes. His father had left him and his mother in Italy when he was a small boy.

**CC:** And his father was a butcher. And what was his father's name?

**RT:** Emilio, just like him.

**CC:** Tait? That is not a very Italian name. Where did that come from?

**RT:** Well, to give you a little bit of background on my husband's side of the family, about three or four years ago we had a family reunion in Italy with all the Tait clan. Come to find out they are from Scotch ancestry. Being that he was Scottish he belonged to the Tait clan.

**CC:** Do you know how far back? What century that would be?

**RT:** Back, maybe, to the sixteenth century; perhaps even further back from that. I think that was due to church persecution that they had to leave Scotland. They were mostly farmers who grew potatoes and whatever necessities of life in those days.

**CC:** So that was your husband's family. He came to America when he was twelve years old. How did you and he meet? Did you go to the same school, or what?

**RT:** To begin with, I lived right across the street from the butcher shop where his dad had the meat market. I had the duty every Saturday morning to go to do the family meat buying. Apparently he must have had his eye on me because I didn't know him that well at the time because I must have been about twelve years old also. In those days girls didn't think much of boys. We were still playing with dolls and houses. My sister and several of the other girls I grew up with would go to the grocery store that was right next door to our home by the name of Bernardini, where we would get crates and cans and all kinds of things and we would set them out in the street and pretend we had a grocery store. At that time automobiles were very rare. We could get out and play baseball or volleyball or basketball right in the middle of the street for hours. This would be in the early thirties, anywhere from 1931 until about 1938. Shortly thereafter Dad purchased a grocery store down on India and Cedar Streets. We stayed there up until I was married in 1946. So it was from the years 1938 to 1946 that I lived out on the 1500 block of India Street.

**CC:** What was your dad's grocery store called?

**RT:** Italo Grocery Store on India and Cedar which was about three blocks up from the Civic Center [meaning the City-County Administration building at 1600 Pacific Highway]. That was where my husband's father had a butcher store and another grocery store. Then there was another family that owned a grocery store on the corner. It seemed that every other block had a grocery store. There was a lot of shopping and they competed against each other very vigorously. That was the family called DeFalco, but they changed around 1937 or 1938 because they were in competition with my father, too. I'll start from where my dad had the grocery store on India Street and go down about a block or so. My husband put up the meat market business right next door to my father's grocery store, then from our store there was a motorcycle shop.

**CC:** What happened to the butcher shops? Did your husband go on being a butcher until he retired, or what?

**RT:** No. What happened was when India Street became a one-way street the traffic got real heavy and there were no parking facilities for our customers. They would come maybe a week or two after they had moved away from the neighborhood and after that they naturally got acquainted with the new neighborhood and they never came back. Business on India Street started to go downhill quite fast. We stayed there for another seven or eight years and then in 1952 or 1953 we closed the store.

**CC:** Incidentally, when your husband opened a butcher shop, was he now in competition with his father's butcher shop?

**RT:** Yes, he was, but his father's shop had his steady regular customers who had been going to him since 1924 or 1925. But before we put up our shop his father and mother and brother and sister went to Europe in 1947. That was right after the war. They leased the shop to us for a year. We did have

two other butchers but when the customers would come into the store they would keep asking for my husband and the other fellows would just be standing around doing nothing. A lot of the Italian people who came in could not speak English. I think that is the reason why they asked for him. I was the cashier. Occasionally I would help him cut meat, but I never did a real good job because I was not a meat-cutter.

**CC:** How did you happen to end up speaking English with such an absence of any Italian dialect?

**RT:** I don't know. I just did.

**CC:** Are you truly and completely bilingual; is your Italian just as plain as your English?

**RT:** Yes, it is. When I was a little girl we didn't speak English at all up until I went to school. I must have been about five and a half years old. Then I started to speak English. I'll tell you my school work was not very good because my father and mother could not help me with solving the problems in my homework because they didn't speak English. So I am more or less self-taught.

**CC:** What school did you go to?

**RT:** Washington School, which since then has been torn down. They have put up those single duplexes, I guess you could call them.

**CC:** Where was Washington School located?

**RT:** Up on State Street. It would be the beginning of Reynard Way as it became known.

**CC:** That was your elementary school. Did you go to high school later?

**RT:** I went to Roosevelt Junior High School and graduated in 1938. At that time Dad put up the grocery store and being that I was the oldest I was taken out of school. I used to go to Snyder's Continuation School three or four days a week, but that was not enough of an education to really graduate from high school. So later in my life I did go back to school but I didn't finish it like I was supposed to. I could go back and probably get my high school diploma but through reading and communicating with other people, as I said before, I am self-educated.

**CC:** Continuation school, that is interesting. Where was Snyder's Continuation School, and what was its purpose? Just to help people like yourself who could only go part time?

**RT:** Yes. It was directly across the street from the old San Diego High School. It was a city-run school.

**CC:** You didn't have to pay a fee for that?

**RT:** No. No fee.

**CC:** Well, that was a part of city school system then.

**RT:** Our transportation going to the school from where I lived to Roosevelt Junior High School, a group of us girls used to get together and walk down to Kettner. At that time there was a real big clock up there that used to light up and have the time of the day. It was a neon company that sold the

neon signs, the colored lights for the theaters and so on. The street car used to stop directly in front of that clock. Every morning four or five of us girls ... All I had to do was just walk around the block and I would be right at the corner. Then we would get off at the foot of Broadway where the old Tower Theater was located and we get on the street car and go up to Twelfth Avenue, make a left and go up to Park Boulevard over to Roosevelt Junior High School. We would get off the street car and walk down the tunnel under Park Boulevard and we'd be on the school grounds.

**CC:** Earlier you said that when you were a kid you liked to go on Sundays to the theater. Was that also to the Tower Theater?

**RT:** Yes, the Tower and Spreckels, the Broadway, the Fox, the Orpheum. Shortly after I was born we moved to a home on Kettner Boulevard between Hawthorn and ... oh, I can't remember the cross street. We'd get off the street car, my dad would have me by the hand, and we'd go up Broadway. There was a little jog and the street car used to go right in front of the Orpheum Theater. I can remember going and seeing a lot of vaudeville shows. They had a lot of circus acts and a lot of the entertainment live. I must have been around three or four years old, but the only thing I can remember seeing is the circus act with the trapeze artist and the balancing on the ball. They used to have dog acts and a lot of comics. Of course being three or four years old a lot of the things that they said I didn't understand. That was on Sundays that we used to do that.

We were given an allowance of fifteen cents a week. With that we would go to the show, either the Tower or one of the others, for ten cents we'd get into the show and an ice cream for a nickel when we came out so we could walk home.

**CC:** What did you do for your own recreation in those days, like when you were a pre-teenager and when you were of teenage? What kind of recreation did the Italian community have?

**RT:** We had a custom that all the uncles and aunts and cousins would get together in several cars and go off to a picnic.

**CC:** Where did you picnic in those days?

**RT:** In Balboa Park. Also sometimes we traveled to a place they called Poway. We would come down the Pomerado grade and just as you got to the bottom there was a park with trees and picnic tables. Everybody would bring their own things with all the utensils that they needed and us girls would get together and go hiking. I was very much afraid of horses; I never rode a horse, although I tried one time. But when I saw the height I got scared and got off.

**CC:** What did the fellows play?

**RT:** The fellows played bocce.

**CC:** I was going to ask you. Bocce, that's a good Italian game. It is similar to English lawn bowl, isn't it?

**RT:** Yes, it is. They have teams; they have eight balls, plus the small one which they call the pin ball. I play it myself. It is very interesting. The larger balls are about the size of a baseball; I think it is a little bit larger than a soft baseball. It would be made out of steel--at that time it was steel. You would throw the big ball and try to get it as close to the little one as you could and whoever got it the closest got the points.

**CC:** Those balls were completely round, weren't they? Where the English lawn balls were kind of an ovoid shape and they have two sides to them. So there is a difference there.

**RT:** Yes, there is. My husband brought a set of the balls which they use over there when we came back from Europe about three years ago. My cousin is a bocce ball champion.

**CC:** Where do they play bocce here in San Diego?

**RT:** A lot of the men get together and go over to Morley Field. They have bocce ball courts there. That would be directly across the street from where the zoo is. You have to go down a canyon and then up again over to your right. A lot of the Italian men still do occasionally--my husband does go--in the playgrounds of Washington School, the grammar school off of State Street that I went to as a youngster.

**CC:** Oh, is it still there, then?

**RT:** No, they tore it down because of the earthquake factor but they still call it the Washington School.

**CC:** What other very typical Italian activities can you think of to tell me about? Bocce ball is very Italian. Is there anything else especially that you'd like to mention as being typical of the Italian community?

**RT:** I can remember as a little girl the Italian church, Our Lady of the Rosary. They would have processions. I can remember being in the Children of Mary. They would elect a queen with her attendants. May was the month of Our Blessed Mother. They would crown her with a crown. They would give a big picnic for everybody to attend. They would have dancing.

**CC:** You were telling me about the processions. Were you ever elected the queen?

**RT:** No, but I was elected to be one of the attendants. Many times we would carry baskets of flowers and as we walked into church we would put the petals on the carpet and the queen would walk over the petals. During the process of mass, or shortly after the gospel the girls would march to the Blessed Mother, climb the ladder and put the crown of roses on her head. They also had other processions of the Corpus Christi, the Portuguese festival, which they used to have on Point Loma on Corpus Christi Sunday and Pentecost. They would elect a queen and they would have a procession. They would go down to the waterfront and bless the fleet of the fishermen. They would then walk back to the church hall to have their Portuguese festival.

**CC:** Your mentioning both of these, did the Italian and Portuguese communities have a friendly relationship with one another's festivals?

**RT:** Yes, they did. At that time they did but there was a little bit of rivalry to see who would have the best of the food and all of that, but it was all in fun. There was never anything rough. They played beautiful Portuguese music and then the Italians would play their music.

The Italian people started a thing that is still going on these days. They call it the spaghetti dinner. They have that in the second week of November with a bazaar, getting things ready for Christmas. They would have the spaghetti dinner downstairs in the hall which would average, say about seven dollars for the dinner. You would get a nice green salad, a real large dish of spaghetti, plus a .glass of wine if you wished, and ice cream for dessert with the cookies and everything that they used. They had cakes and all that stuff. The girls upstairs would be working during the year to make up knitted and crocheted things. A lot of the merchants around the city would give them things to raffle off.

**CC:** During what decades or years did all of this go on? And is it still going on?

**RT:** It is still going on now. I think they started it in 1950 and it is still going on now.

**CC:** Is the festival for the Blessed Mother in the first of May? Do they still do that?

**RT:** Yes, they do, but they do not go out and walk the streets like they did in those days to bless the fleet.

**CC:** Incidentally, what church edifice was used at that time, where the girls climbed the ladder to put the crown on the Virgin, what church was that?

**RT:** Our Lady of the Rosary. That is still located on State at Date.

**CC:** So that is still the church that the Italian community goes to now?

**RT:** Yes, they do, although many of the Italian families, as I stated before, moved out. They moved at the time they built the highway which is now Highway 5. They moved at least seven hundred families of all races.

**CC:** Oh, you mean it was eminent domain so they had to move when their properties were condemned. Did they get properly recompensed for that, or do you know?

**RT:** I don't know. I know that a lot of the families were very unhappy to have to move away from there because a lot of them, like myself were born there. The house that I was born in is still standing. It is down on Kettner. The house that my sister was born in is still standing, also. That is located right next door to the Bernardini property. It is a two-story building and I believe that my sister was born upstairs in that house.

**CC:** Are there any members of the older generation still alive-any of your parents' relatives generation still alive in the area today?

**RT:** No, they are all gone. Now getting back to where we used to live, right next door there used to be an aunt of my mother's and an uncle, but I don't remember too much about them because they were rather elderly. I must have been about seven or eight years old when they died.

**CC:** Tell me about Mrs. Ghio. Did you know about that family?

**RT:** Yes. Her mother and another Italian, Rivera, when they came to America, there was my mother and my dad and the Rivera family which consisted of a mother and father and five or six children, plus there are still a couple in Europe now. They are elderly. In fact, Nina Canepa was a singer in St. Joseph's Cathedral with her niece, Marie Revetino, the organist at St. Joseph's Cathedral on Third Street. St. Joseph's is still standing to this day and if you want more information you would have to look it up.

**CC:** Where do the Ghios come in?

**RT:** The Ghio family were fishermen.

**CC:** You said there was a Rivera family who came over and I thought there was a connection there.

**RT:** They all came over at the same time. In fact, Henry Rivera still lives here on the hill with us, too. If possible, maybe I can set up an interview with him. He could possibly tell you more about my family because he is of that generation. He is in his eighties. His sister is almost ninety. There is



another sister; I don't know how old she is.

**CC:** Is their English good for interviewing?

**RT:** Yes, they are very good for interviewing.

**CC:** I still want to pursue what you know and what you can share with me about the Ghio family because everybody is interested in those Anthony's.

**RT:** Mrs. Ghio became acquainted with my husband and myself through the business. Her husband had the fish market down at the foot of the Embarcadero. He died and she had to raise three children which consisted of Anthony and Todd Ghio and the daughter is married to Roy Weber. They, in turn, have four children.

I believe they are all married and have children of their own, but they could also give you a lot of history on the Italian community.

**CC:** Anthony is the one I suppose the restaurants were named after? Is he still around?

**RT:** Oh, yes. He is just a little older than I am. Getting back to Mrs. Ghio, she used to come into the store and buy hamburger and things to mix in with her meal. She started a very small-I believe it was twelve stools--she used to serve fish on Friday. Her chowder is well known and her cioppino and all the other Italian dishes that she makes. In fact, she still supervises. She is close to ninety. I was down at Anthony's about eight or nine weeks ago and she was still directing customers to their seats. She is a very young person. She is just like her mom; her mom lived to be almost one hundred years old. Then from there--I guess the lines on Fridays got very long--she came into the store one day and talked it over with my husband if he thought it was a good idea for her to put up another restaurant. He said, "Sure, why not? You have two boys who could carry on." So from that, that is how Anthony's has grown, to be a large concern that it is now. I believe they have four places now: Harborside, Anthony's there on the Embarcadero, another one in La Mesa and another one under construction in North County.

**CC:** I would like to get back to something you mentioned a moment ago. You say that certain people live here on the hill with you. I should mention that the home where we are having this interview is on the hill up above Morena Boulevard. It is just a fence away from the University of San Diego campus. So we are right up on a hill, a different hill but a next door hill, so to speak, from the University of San Diego. Is that one reason, because of the Catholic connection, that the Italians sort of began taking homes in this area?

**RT:** Yes. There are a lot of Italian families living not so much on this hill where I am living, but down off of Linda Vista Road there are several Italian families that have moved there. Although I couldn't tell you where they live I do see them occasionally in church.

Getting back to the Catholic Church when my husband and I were married, we moved into this house in 1946, where we are now. At that time the university was not there. It was just brushes and coyotes and skunks and birds and quail, rabbits, foxes. Many a time we would come home from work and we would have a bunny rabbit sitting on our lawn: Down in the canyon there was a Dr. Ischam who had a farm with cattle and horses. Many times we would come home and find cattle and horses nibbling on our lawn. The Ischam place would be down in Tecolote Canyon.

The university just celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. They had a real big celebration. We were not able to attend because we were out of town. I can remember when my son was born, when he was five years old I took him over to the college. They had kindergarten classes. He was five and a half years old and the Sisters taught him his first schooling. One was called Mother Guest and the other was Mother Davidson. I understand that both of the nuns are now in the San Francisco area in their rest home. They taught him a little bit of French in his first schooling. After that, Bishop Buddy

built the college and I can remember shortly after the college was built, they built the church which is called Immaculata. They had the helicopter carry the cross and put it up on top of the dome. In fact, I have slides of the cross being put up on the cupola. Also, of the procession of them going around the church before they landscaped it. Where the helicopter landed to pick up the cross is now the parking lot of the church. At that time the college was for women and the seminary was for men. Then they built the law library and they also had on the corner of the campus the Fathers of the Sacred Heart.

**RT:** They had their own building which at Christmas time they would have the little diorama of Bethlehem. It was run by electricity and all the characters would move, the animals would make their sounds. At night they would show the twinkling of the stars and of the twinkling of the lights inside of homes: In the daytime the sun would come up and everything would get lighted: They had a place where they had running water that I believe would go through a pump ...

**CC:** They don't do this anymore?

**RT:** No, because shortly after Bishop Buddy, who was up in years, a new bishop, Bishop Maher, came to San Diego. He divided the parish into four different parishes. At the time Bishop Buddy was there we had over a thousand families. Now there is a mere three hundred. That is, in the university church.

**CC:** Is that the one that you and Mr. Tait go to now?

**RT:** Yes:

**CC:** But many of the Italians, you did say, still do go to the Church of the Rosary. Is the university church here then on the campus, is that largely Italian now?

**RT:** No, it is mostly American, but there are a lot of Italian women who do participate into the church.

**CC:** That has been very interesting. You know, you started to say something, and we got to talking about something else, and I wonder if you would like to finish it. You had taken me down one side of the street remember on India and you had gotten over across the street and we were about to go up the other side of the street and you were going to remember the things that were there. Your husband's butcher shop and then the motorcycle shop and that is where we stopped.

**RT:** Oh, yes. From the motorcycle shop next door to that was a bakery. It was run by a Frenchman by the name of Taix. He came from France and he used to make one of the most wonderful French breads that you could ever ... none of the breads they make this day could ever compare, but he would not reveal his secret to anyone. He married a Spanish woman. Her name was Hortensia. She had a daughter and two boys. One of the sons worked at Convaair and the other one at the bakery. The daughter married a rancher from Mexicali. She in turn had two children and I believe they still live there in Mexicali. Going from there, there was an old rooming house. Underneath this rooming house was like a little old warehouse. That is the first place that my dad put the grocery store in. Upstairs were bachelors and spinsters who used to rent rooms. From there they had a marine hardware shop where they sold supplies to fishing boats, the nets and all the hardware that the fishermen used, the anchors and all of these. Then on the other side of there was more of the marine shops. There were two rival companies there. One was called San Diego Marine. Then there was a German grocery store and meat market on the corner. Up above that was also another rooming house. Across the street from there was another building that used to have a barber shop. His name was Frank Asaro and his wife and he had two or three children. From there, going down were other businesses but they

were not Italian. They were other mechanics and all different things. That is as far as I can remember the Italian neighborhood going down towards Broadway.

Getting back up to the Bernardinis and the house where I was born, next to that was my aunt, my mother's and father's aunt and uncle that I told you about earlier, and next to that was a barber shop and the gentleman's name was Tony Adamo, his wife and several children. They converted that building into a house and now it has been converted back into a butcher shop and a meat market. Next door to that is a house that used to belong to Victoria DeFalco's mother and dad. They were Zolezzis, also. Next to that one was another small house that a Mexican family used to live in. Next door to that was a house that belonged to my uncle. That is the first house that my mom and dad lived in when they came from Italy. It belonged to my uncle, Steve, and his wife ... No, at that time my uncle was a widower. He had two daughters whose names were Rose and Antoinette. In back of that house was also another smaller house and another Mexican family lived behind them.

Coming back to the house my uncle owned, next door lived a Greek family. They had a grocery store up on State and Hawthorn. It seemed like the Italian people when they came to America because of the fact that they did not have much food in Europe, decided that the best business they could go into was the food business. If they didn't sell it, at least they'd get to eat. That is the way my father worded it to us children when he first put up the grocery store. He tried being a fisherman but he was not very successful at it. Then he joined his brother running a pool hall at the corner of Broadway and I believe it is where the gas and electric company is right now. They ran a pool hall there for many years and then in 1938 Daddy put up the grocery store. He said, "Well, that is the best thing I can do because that way if we don't sell the groceries at least we will be able to eat very comfortably."

**CC:** Tell me something now; you mentioned the fishing fleet and some of them succeeded and some didn't as fishers. We always think of the Portuguese community on Point Loma and the tuna fleet, but are there still quite a bit of an Italian fleet these days?

**RT:** Not so much any more since they've gone into purse-seiners and with the canneries closing. We used to have Van Camps, the Westgate, where many of my girl friends used to go and pack tuna. Since then they have closed those factories and they have moved them down to Samoa, New Zealand, Puerto Rico. All these boats are now purse-seiners. They are very large; they carry anywhere from 15,000 to 18,000 tons of fish.

When my dad was fishing they had these small boats that now they use them as yachts. But at that time the families used to go out with their fish nets. In fact, my mother's sister's husband was a fisherman. I can remember him bringing the lobsters and the sculpins, barracuda, and all the different types of fish. Then going from a small boat my uncle built a large boat called the *Pacific Queen*. My father's sister's husband built a boat they called the *Ranger*. His two sons ran the *Ranger* and the two sons of my aunt ran the *Pacific Queen*. In fact, I have pictures of the *Pacific Queen* the day it was launched with all the Italian families who were invited to the christening. My sister is the one who broke the bottle of champagne across the bow of the *Pacific Queen*. At that time forty tons of fish was considered quite a bit and they paid them \$175 a ton.

**CC:** About what years was the Italian fleet, so to speak, sort of lessened down and sort of petered out?

**RT:** In the 1970s. I can give you the names of a few of the tuna boats that they used. One was the Castagnola family, they had the *Conte Bianco*. They also built a large one they called *Biano Mono*. A lot of the Portuguese boats which my husband supplied meat to were run by the Virissimo family.

**CC:** The pictures that you just told me about of the christening of the *Pacific Queen* were they among the pictures that you gave recently to the Historical Society? How did you and your husband come to give these photographs recently?

**RT:** My brother called my husband, or one of the Italian people that we know, called my husband and told him that they were going to have a meeting of the San Diego Historical Society that someone was trying to bring back the old community as it was at the time.

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## **INTERVIEWER'S NOTE**

This is the second tape (side 3) of the interview with Mrs. Emilio Tait.

In the first tape we were just talking about possibly the Historical Society's interest in getting into the restoration, as it were, of the old Italian community on India Street. We will go on talking about that and see what else we want to talk about.

**CC:** So your brother called and brought this idea up. Through that somehow you got the idea of giving a collection of photographs to the Historical Society. Is that correct?

**RT:** Yes. I brought the pictures in to the Historical Society there in Balboa Park and had an interview with one of the ladies ...

**CC:** Would that be Jane Booth perhaps? She and her husband Larry are at the photo department there.

**RT:** I believe so. We talked for over an hour and I gave her a lot of background which I have given to you on the tape. There might be a few things that I told her that I've forgotten to mention today. When you go back, Dr. Carter, you might ask if she remembers my husband and I going in and talking about all of this.

**CC:** Unless she set up a tape recorder, they probably didn't tape it.

**RT:** No, I don't think she did because we talked for a long time.

**CC:** What did you get to talking about?

**RT:** Just what we've discussed here. Maybe a few other things that I have forgotten since then.

**CC:** And what did your husband have to say?

**RT:** He was just generally talking about his father putting up the meat market on India and his uncle ... Oh, yes, I've almost forgot. His other uncle by the name of Charles had a meat market up on State and Hawthorn where the Greek people bought it from him. That is where my husband learned the meat trade. When Emil came to San Diego the very day that he arrived his father sent him to his uncle to learn the trade. He told him he wanted him to earn his keep. That is a typical Italian custom.

**CC:** That was at the age of what? Twelve?

**RT:** At the age of twelve, yes. The reason was that the parents wanted the children to have some kind of a trade, even though they went to school and got a good education they would have something to fall back on in case whatever education they had would not pay off, they would go back to being a butcher, a carpenter, or whatever. In fact, many of my friends, some of them went right back to the trade that their fathers had. For instance, one girl

that I know of became a beauty shop operator and several of the other girls became secretaries. Lot of them have married well and lead a life of luxury, which some of them do. You know, what I mean by luxury, they go on vacations and take trips, which I am very fortunate to do, also.

**CC:** I was going to ask you about something else in the Italian cultural life in San Diego. One always thinks of the Italian community in terms of music. What can you say about that interest? And in your own family have you had any interest in music? Have you produced any kids that play musical instruments and stuff like that?

**RT:** When my son was about eight or nine he played the accordion but he got to the stage where he did not want to play it any more so we didn't force him to. My nephew used to play the accordion. Whether he picks it up now and then, I don't know. His mother bought him a set of drums. I don't know whether because they were so noisy, but he never did continue that line of expression. He is now working in Scripps Memorial Hospital as a therapist for breathing.

**CC:** Has the Italian community in the years that you have been here, which is all your life, produced any widely known names in any field at all that you can think of: well-known people? Politicians, artists, whatever?

**RT:** Yes. There are a few but just like I said my memory isn't as good as it used to be and I cannot remember the names of some of the artists who came up from Italian ancestry and became famous. There might be someone, but like I said before, I cannot remember their names.

I was thinking about that this morning. As I said, my husband had the wedding of Prince Charles on this morning and before I fell asleep I thought, "Well, we are going to have that interview; let me go over in my mind some of the things that I can tell him." Just about everything that I've told you is about all that I can remember. I wish I could give you more information on some of the famous artists that grew up in our neighborhood.

**CC:** Maybe that will come to you and we can talk again. Or maybe I'll come back and interview Mr. Tait. At that time perhaps you will have time to think about it and maybe you and he together can think of some of the people.

**RT:** Like I started to tell you about the Rivera family. Her niece is in the Webber's musical group. I believe they are in Beverly Hills now. In fact, Marie and my sister went to school together and she keeps in touch with my sister quite a bit.

She married a contractor by the name of Wier. He is the gentleman who built those adobe homes on the old 395 [Highway], which since then has become Rancho Bernardo.

As I say, as far as music is concerned Marie and her family are very talented. They all play instruments. I don't know whether Marie sings or not, or whether any of her children became artists on their own, but I do know that Marie's aunt, Nina, used to sing in the choir and also solo a lot at St. Joseph's Cathedral. But I can't remember the year. Almost every day Henry goes by and we talk about things like when he came over from Europe and how he went to work for the furniture company and became involved with several old furniture companies which since then have been closed. They were the kind of companies that stood behind their products. When something went wrong with it they would either fix it or give you a new one. Nowadays they don't do things like that.

**CC:** One other angle we might think of for a few minutes here, as long as I have another tape going--we might work out one side of it anyway--and that is the Saludo Bakery, the Chez Pulos. Do you know that family?

**RT:** My husband would know more about that than I would, because a lot of the Italian families were of Sicilian ancestry. They were customers of his father and customers of ours, but I never had too close a contact with them personally. All I would do, after my husband gave them the meat, I would either deliver it or get the money from them. Another thing that comes to mind. A lot of the customers who came in our store were, as I said, of Sicilian ancestry. They, in turn, have families here, also, but they are scattered all over San Diego now and I wouldn't know any way of getting in touch with them, to help you out with more of the history of San Diego.

**CC:** Do the Italians kind of distinguish between families from mainland Italy and families from Sicily?

**RT:** Yes, they do; they are separate. I was talking about our Italians, the Genovese festivities that they had in church. Now the Sicilian people have two feasts that they celebrate. One is called "Our Lady of Light" and the other one is "Mother of Sorrows." They come in September and October. They elect a queen; they have a special mass and they still, I believe, make a procession down to the Embarcadero and bless the boats. But not so much for the blessing of the boats as a congregation of the Italian people getting together and having a good time. They have music and dancing, and they have food in the hall. I believe they did have years ago; whether they still do it or not, I don't know, because I haven't gone to one for several years.

Getting back to another festival that comes to mind, as I was growing up, they had a society called "Our Lady of the Rosary." That took place in October. They also crowned the Blessed Mother and they put a rosary around her neck and a crown of roses on her head. At the time they have the mass on the first Sunday in October they give away red roses to each of the parishioners, or anyone who goes in to witness the mass. This is also at the Church of the Rosary. They have the blessing of the Blessed Sacrament, they sing hymns and I don't believe they go out of the church; they have a procession in the church itself.

**CC:** Is all of this in the Italian language or is it in English now? Was it in Italian in your day when you were going?

**RT:** When I was young it was in Latin, but the gospel and the sermons would be in Italian. Now they also have an Italian mass, I believe it takes place on Sundays at twelve o'clock.

**CC:** There is also a Catholic church in Old Town. Do you know anything about that?

**RT:** That is the Immaculate Conception. That is the first church that I used to go to. At that time I didn't drive a car and I used to walk on Sundays, go to mass there and then walk back.

**CC:** Do we still have a chance to see any Italian colorful tarantellas and dances these days?

**RT:** No, not unless somebody organizes such a thing. As far as I know they don't have those things any more.

**CC:** Speaking of tarantella, the Italian dance, how about the Tarantino family who has the Tarantino's Restaurant. Did you know any of them?

**RT:** Yes. Getting back to the Zolezzis who lived next door to the barber shop, in back of the Zolezzi family they built a duplex and in this duplex John and his brother, Joe, and his mother and sister lived--the Tarantino family. They are the ones who built the Tarantino Restaurant on North Harbor Drive, towards Loma Portal. I believe that John runs the restaurant now. He used to go to school with my brother. He could probably give you more information on the Tarantino family than I could.

**CC:** Are they a pretty old family here? Do they go back as far as the twenties when your family came here?

**RT:** I think so. His father was also a fisherman. A lot of the Sicilian people are fishermen.

**CC:** Are the Tarantinos Sicilian, also?

**RT:** Yes. They had fishing boats, also. They also have the rivalry to see who would bring in the most fish. Oh, I just happened to think of something. You asked me what we used to do for entertainment. I must have been around ten years old. My uncle and several friends who had small boats used to get together on the Fourth of July with their families and we'd all get on the boats down at the Embarcadero. At that time the civic center was not there. It used to be the Robbin's mechanic shop where they used to fix the tuna boats that broke down. We'd get in the boats there and go over to Coronado on the Strand. At that time Hotel del Coronado was built and they had a place they called Tent City, where all the movie stars used to come to. Us children, my cousins--there would be about fifteen of us--would get into two or three rowboats and the boys would row over to the island and we'd peek over the fence to look at all the movie stars that we could see. Some of them were very nice to us; they would wave And maybe drop by and say hello, but I cannot remember the names of them. I was much too young--it was quite a treat. What we would serve on the boats would be barbeque with all the trimmings. There were several of the fellows who would play the guitars and they'd sing and we'd have a real old good time.

**CC:** I told you the Italians like to make music.

**RT:** Speaking of the fishermen it brought back to my mind the things we used to do. We used to do that on the Fourth of July and I believe at night time they would have fireworks over the Hotel del Coronado. Another thing that we used to do, too, on the Strand--you know they had the rocks that they put to keep the water from breaking over on the San Diego shores--we would land there and my father, uncles and aunts would also go among the rocks and pick up mussels. There was a miniature abalone and they would eat those raw. What we would do with the mussels, they would bring them on the boat, wash them real well by getting buckets of fresh salt water to get all the sand out of the mussels. Then they would get real big pots and put these mussels in them and put the pots on top of the barbeque fire and cook them until they steamed open. Besides the mussels they would have the small sea urchins, abalone, lobster, steak and all your other foods that go with steak--potatoes and all. There would be another pot on another barbeque fire on another boat and they would cook spaghetti. That is the staple food of the Italian people.

**CC:** Do you make your own spaghetti sauce?

**RT:** Yes, I do. I make about two gallons and put them into quart jars, or containers, and put them in the freezer. If I should get unexpected company and I don't happen to have anything ready for them I serve them spaghetti, antipasto, a salad and ice cream or cake or pie for dessert.

**CC:** Do you make your own spumoni?

**RT:** No, I don't know how.

**CC:** Where do you get good spumoni?

**RT:** There is a new shop that has just opened its doors on India and Washington Street. They claim they have the best spumoni in San Diego. I have not gone there to try it out but you might give it a try.

**CC:** Now you were speaking of your natural feast that you got off the rocks. I don't suppose you ever got squid. You usually have to go fishing for squid, don't you?

**RT:** Yes, you have to fish for squid. They also had another way of entertainment--everything is coming back as I talk about it. My father, my uncles and their boys would get a package of salt and would go to La Jolla. At that time La Jolla was all rocks; now it is all covered with sand. These sand places would have holes in them and they would have the small octopus in there. They would put a little bit of salt on their fingers and throw it into these holes and the octopus would come out. They would grab them, put them in sacks and bring them home and cook them. They would either boil them, or make a cioppino out of them.

**CC:** Would the octopus come out to taste the salt, or did the salt bother them?

**RT:** The salt bothered them. It would hit them in the eyes and they would come out. Another thing that comes to mind for recreation when we'd go on these picnics we would go to the La Jolla shores, not the Shores, but on the other side of the shores where these big rocks were. Daddy would get a fishing line and he'd go throw his fishing line and he would catch fish. We would barbeque them over a pit which we made in the sand. We would have barbequed fish, plus all the clams and the different types of seafood that you could get right off the rocks. This custom comes from where my mother and father came from. The fishermen no longer go for these things because they have made them almost extinct and the government has put a ruling on them that they are not to take them. They would not give them a chance for them to mature; they would take them when they were much too young. That is what happened to all the abalones, the lobsters and the rest of the seafood.

Now there at La Jolla most of the rocks where I used to go they used to have beautiful tide pools. They are trying to bring them back. They have succeeded in some of the things but some of the things have become extinct. We used to get some of the most beautiful shells. We called them cornathi. They are like a little snail. Mama used to get those and boil them until they were tender. Then to get out the meat you'd get a long straight pin or a safety pin of good size and you'd put it inside and pull it out. You'd take the back end off and eat it just like you would an hors d'oeuvre. The cornathis were the size of a snail, like your garden snail. They would boil them the first time to get the salt and the sand out; then boil them a second or third time to get all the residue out that the animal would have.

**CC:** What do they taste similar to, clam or abalone, or do you remember?

**RT:** They have a very distinctive taste; it is very hard to describe. You would place it between a scallop and an abalone.

**CC:** You know people call the squid the poor man's abalone. I am very fond of that and like to go to local restaurants and have squid steak, calamari, it is called.

**RT:** I fix those.

**CC:** Where do you go to buy your Italian food now that you bring home and cook?

**RT:** I do down to the Mona Lisa. That is on India and Hawthorn. They sell all different types of Italian food, Italian cookies. For my spaghetti sauce I use dry mushrooms. You can get all your different types of pasta.

**CC:** So it is easier to go to the Mona Lisa and buy it?



**RT:** As I said the Mona Lisa is an Italian store. They have a restaurant right next door; you can get all kinds of Italian food there. Then going down about two blocks there is another place that sells Italian food. It is called Filippi's. They have a restaurant where they make pizza and all the Italian foods. Right next door to them where the old washing machine repair shop was, is also another restaurant. All of this is on India Street.

**CC:** Well, we are halfway through this tape now and I've been just really getting a lot of wonderful stuff out of you and I expect you are getting a little tired. You could visit with your husband about this and we will make another appointment for me to come and see your husband.

**RT:** And in the meantime, if I think of anything else I will try to jot down notes to remind myself.

**CC:** That is a great idea. I certainly want to thank you for pinch-hitting for your husband. I think you did fine; I am delighted he wasn't here. This has been wonderful. You've just given us a real good picture of that Italian community in those days. I thank you again on behalf of the Historical Society.

**RT:** Oh, you know, one thing that I forgot to mention, now that I think of it. The store that my father bought used to belong to a family called Pidgeon. We found in doing some remodeling a room that was hidden. Inside this room we found some school papers that date back to the 1800s. There were other things, but right now I can't remember what, but we were told that there is a possibility that this gentleman might have smuggled. Now I'm not accusing, but he might have smuggled Chinese, or workers into the states, from ships that came into the harbor and the men did not want to go back on their ships. Something like jumping ship, they used to call it. Whether this is true or not, this is just hearsay from friends and people who we have known through the years.

**CC:** Whatever happened to those papers?

**RT:** I think my brother has got them; I think so, I'm not sure.

**CC:** Why don't you check with him. That might be an interesting thing to follow up.

**RT:** That secret room; it is still a mystery to this day what they used that room for. My dad opened that door. He used to make wine. He had friends who had ranches in Escondido and he would buy a ton of grapes from them. Now, I am going into something else.

**CC:** That is fine, because Italians are used to wine, too.

**RT:** As I started to say, Dad used to buy the grapes from friends of his in Escondido. We used to have an old garage and he had this great big vat where he used to throw the grapes and he would set me up on one of the small barrels--I must have been about seven or eight years old--he would wash my legs and tie up my dresses, or else he would take them off and I would be in my slip. He would slip me inside the vat and I would have to stomp the grapes. To this day, I can't stand the smell of the mash. It got so involved in my nose, I can still smell it even though I am just talking about it sixty years later. I don't like to drink wine; maybe once in a while I will take a little bit of wine rosé, that real light wine. To even not smell it too much I even mix it with 7-Up or seltzer water.

**CC:** How about your husband, does he like wine?

**RT:** Yes, he has a glass of wine with his meals. That is an old Italian custom; they have wine with their meals.

**CC:** Do the Italians give their young children wine like the French do? Do they water it down with a little water, or something?

**RT:** Yes, they do. No, sometimes they give it to them just straight as it comes from the gallon. I can remember when we were in Europe the first time in 1968. We were at Emil's cousin's house having supper together. She had a little girl who must have been about a year and a half old, she was sitting in her high chair, and she was eating spaghetti just like we were and her grandmother, who was Emil's aunt, was sitting in a chair a little further down and the grand-daughter was on the other side of her. The grandmother would look at her and say, "I know what you want, you want your little glass of wine." She would get a small glass, a tumbler that serves water to children, she would fill it half full and give it to the little child and she would drink it.

**CC:** Of course, there are those who say if alcoholism is a disease, as some of them say it is, then of course that might get a youngster who had an inclination towards alcoholism, it might get him started drinking. That would be too bad.

**RT:** Yes, that would be too bad, but most of the Italian men that I saw in Europe when I was there would have... Well, just like everywhere else, there were several who were winos, as they call them, but most of them were very moderate [in their drinking].

They had a very different custom from the American gentlemen also in regard to their activities. This is in Europe, not here in America. The men became Americanized when they came here to the states. They would come home from work, their supper would be on the table, they would sit down, eat their supper, go into the bathroom, clean shave, change their clothes and go out, leaving the women at home. They would never take them anywhere.

I'll give you an example of what happened when I went with my husband to Europe. As I say they sit at the table, eat their food and then they get up and they leave. My husband got up also that evening and he turned to me and said, "Rose, do you want to go with us?" And I said, "Where are you going?"

"We are going to go down and visit friends, would you like to come with me?" I said, "Yes," and these gentlemen's mouths dropped open and the wives looked at me as if to say, "Goodness, you mean to tell me you go everywhere with your husband?" I said, "Yes, except fishing." I can't take the ocean because I get sick. Several of the other ladies said, "All right, we will set our dishes aside and we will go with you." They were very surprised because my husband and I go everywhere together, as any other couples do. But over there in Europe they don't have the custom of taking their wives with them. They usually leave the wives home for children and household chores.

**CC:** Maybe you got something started over there, an American custom.

**RT:** I don't know if they picked it up because the last time we were there they were still doing the same old thing.

**CC:** Now, let's get back to the wine making. This is another cultural activity of the Italian community, let's talk more about it in a minute. Your daddy made wine, up in the Rancho Bernardo area, I think you said.

**RT:** No, he used to buy the grapes from the Rancho Bernardo people.

**CC:** Was that during Prohibition days?

**RT:** No, because he would go down to the city and they would give him permission to make 300 gallons of wine, non-commercially.

**CC:** What did he do with all that wine?

**RT:** For family, divided up. Drank it up at parties which we had at Easter. At Easter time in my family, my mother used to go to my husband's father's butcher shop and order a baby goat. That was the staple dinner of Easter. He would fix it for her, cut it up into pieces like she wanted it, and she would bring it home and make a delicious meal out of it. She would have all the trimmings with that. At Easter that was baby goat.

At Christmas time we used to make raviolis which I learned from my mother and still make to this day with my sister. In fact, my sister and I make them two weeks before Christmas. We put them in large packages and put them in the freezer. About a week or so before Christmas we make up our spaghetti sauce and put that in the freezer. That way Christmas morning we are free to go to church and when we get home from church we get everything ready, the table set and all the trimmings that we have with raviolis which are, we use a piece of rump roast with the bone in it--at that time that is what my mom used to do, she would get a big piece of rump roast, say, seven or eight pounds. She would cook it all in one piece and when it was cooked she would take it out of the sauce, slice it in pieces and put it on the table and have a little bit of the gravy to go over it because rump roast by itself is a little dry. Maybe at times she would fix chicken, or maybe a small turkey, or a small ham. Sometimes there would be as many as fifteen or twenty people at the table. By the time you got through you wouldn't want any supper because there was so much food.

**CC:** How did they cook the goat?

**RT:** Mother used to make a stew and then she would put eggs in it and fix it just like the Chinese fix their soup. You have had the Chinese soup that looks like little strings in it? They would beat the eggs and put them in a separate part of the pot where the gravy was and then they would get a fork and run the fork through the eggs to give you the kind of string effect. Then they would serve it with vegetables, potatoes and maybe they would put in carrots, and make like a regular stew out of it. Or else, if they didn't stew it, they would roast it in the oven. If it wasn't too large it would be almost like a roast lamb.

**CC:** Do they still do this? Do the people still make wine for themselves in the Italian community now?

**RT:** Yes, they do. There are people who still do it now.

**CC:** And they get their little girls to stomp the grapes?

**RT:** No. When I absolutely refused to go in the tub to make the wine--I didn't mind the white grape as much as I used to mind the black, because by the time I got through stomping all that ton of grapes my legs would turn black: The only way I could ever get them clean was to use straight Purex. And in those days that thing really stunk! Sometimes I would stay home [from school] for a couple of days because the smell got so bad I didn't like to go near anyone.

**CC:** I hope you never did that to your kids. We didn't mention your children; you have a family, I presume?

**RT:** Yes, I have one son and two grandchildren. Marissa is seven and Christopher is two. My son works for the Old Globe Theater as the head sound man. He is Anthony Tait, but everyone calls him Tony. He installed the sound system of the Shakespearean Theater that burned down several years ago. He is in the process of re-sounding the Globe Theater with the new computer.

He just loves his work. He says it is very interesting because never two shows are the same. Sometimes he works very long hours. He will go in say around eight o'clock and doesn't get home--especially in between shows--until midnight or one o'clock. There is also another young woman who works there. Her name is Jan Rollins. I don't know if she works with the costumes or if she is a cashier or if she is at the door letting people come into the theater. Fortunately, being that my son works for the Globe Theater once in a while we get complimentary tickets to the plays that they have there.

In fact, we have seen several very nice ones. Before my son worked for the Globe Theater he was affiliated with the Fox Theater. He worked in the sound department there, and set up the lights for the Fox Theater. He got in this work through a coordinator by the name of Mary Crosby. She introduced him to the theater by sending him up to the Shakespearean Festival in Ashland, Oregon. The reason why I say Medford is because that is where we went up and stayed and then we went over to Ashland to visit him at the theater. There with another buddy, they installed the sound system in that theater. They were very happy to have both boys there.

**CC:** Does your son still go heavily for Italian food, being raised in your family?

**RT:** Oh, yes, he loves it. And my grandchildren, every time they come over they ask me if I am going to give them spaghetti for supper, or lunch. Raviolis--they are just crazy for them.

**CC:** Mrs. Tait, we've had a nice time and once again I will thank you for letting us have this nice time together.

**RT:** You are welcome, more than welcome. I am sorry I can't remember more.

***END OF INTERVIEW***

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