

Oral History Committee
Mill Valley Library Association

Mill Valley Public Library
Mill Valley, California

FRANK CANEPA

An Interview Conducted By

Jean Mosher

© 1977 by the Mill Valley Public Library

FRANK CANEPA

INDEX

Allen, Walter F.	28
Allen's Grocery	28
American Legion men selling apples on the street	10
animals wild (Marin County)	2
Arrigo, Tony (Barber)	9
assistance to family in Italy after the war	24
automobile with rumble seat	7
Bagshaw, Thomas Henry	27
Bagshaw's Grocery	27
Barvarian food and drink	23,24
"Be nice to customers. Treat them right. Tell the truth."	
Behrens, Edna	30
Belvedere trade	27
blacksmith shop	2
bribing Italian customs	25
Mrs. Bullard, customer	9,11
Mrs. Bullard's house	1
Bullard house and delivery of groceries	26
Bullard house and sale to Canepa's son Jimmy	26
Bullard house burned in fire	9
the butcher	2
buying what's scarce first	13
California Market	16
Canepa, Bobby	18,20,28
Canepa, David	29
Canepa, Dougie	29
Mrs. Canepa, Frank's mother in Italy	22
Canepa, James H.	1,14
Canepa, Jimmy	21,26,28,29
Canepa, Jimmy and wine assortment at store	29
Canepa, Jimmy (marrage)	23
Canepa, Marilyn	14,20-23
Canepa, Robert F.	14
Canepa Family, Riviera millionaires	35
the Canepas at customs house	25
Central Valley Ranch	33
Cervelli, Charlie	2,3
charging groceries	11
children	14

children's education in Italy	20
Chinese cook on Christmas Day	33
Mrs. Clinton	12
commuter costs	12
composting	19,20
Connelly, R.P.	12
convent at Florence	23
convent at Savona province	22
12 Corte Madera	2
rural preferences	7
the Cushings	12
customers	9,11,12,27
depression and Mill Valley	10
Dominican College	23
Dominican High School	22
"Don't bicker..."	28
"Don;t fall for prices... Keep quality"	28
"entertainment" on the vegetable farm in Italy	6
Europe, state after war	5
fame of Canepa produce	6,13
family in Italy	4,5
farm labor wages	30,31
farming	5
father's death	5
father's estate in Germany (Herr Thran)	21,22
fear and sickness of children on open deck, voyage back to U.S., outbreak of war	22
fire and store opening, 1929	8
fire burning for 3-4 days	9
firefighters delegated	8,9
firemen from Presidio, San Rafael and Corte Madera	9
flavor of produce	13
"foreigners" and "niggers"	31
Franceschini, Mrs. Robert	14
gardening	6
gardens in family	19
gardening	15
genersity of Italians	34
German depressions	36,37

getting paid	10-12
Mr. Gosser the butcher	2,8,9,16
grandchildren	26
grandparents	35
grandsons	35
green coffee sent to family in Italy	24
Green Frog Grocery	2,3,17
Gripsholm (ship)	21
grocery on Lytton Square	27
grocery stores in Mill Valley	7
Dr. Hartman	12
Mr.Hein, Herman (landscape architect)	15
"It can't happen here"	37
Italian restaurant, early Mill Valley	7
Italians in Marin county	34
Italy and postwar change	34,35
jobs in Bay Area	5
jobs in early days	30,31
Johnny the butcher	17
Keane, Frank (butcher at Purity Market)	28
labor in early days	31
Dr. Landrock	12
language problems	5
laundromat (loc.)	2
Leininger, Joe	17
location of store, first in Mill Valley	2
Locust Market	2
Log Cabin (Italian Restaurant)	7,8
89 Lovell Avenue	14
511 Lovell Avenue	1
33 Lovell Avenue	1
Lovell Avenue and the fire	9
The McNamaras	12
marketing in morning in SF	20
marriage in 1931	11
Mill Valley	6,7
Mill Valley covered by smoke of 1929 fire	8
Mill Valley Market	2,16,27
Mill Valley volunteer firemen	9

Miller, Henry, and Gentrall Valley Ranch	33
Miller and Lux Ranch	33
12 Miller Avenue	27
Morello, Jimmy and Joe	18
Morello, Jimmy's daughter	18
Mussolini and division of Italian provinces	34
the new suite and the fire	8,10
night school in Oakland	31
North Beach, San Francisco	6
nurse's training	30
277 Oakdale	14
Oakdale house	1
Oakdale soil	19
"of all the jinx!"	9
old cabinet shop	2
Oppenheimer, Gus	27
Oppenheimer's Grocery	27
parents in Germany and Italy	32
parking problems	13
peaches	13
People's Market	27
Perugia (Marilyn's education)	23
Poascchi, Ambrose (partner)	17-19
pollution of Italian beaches	34
"price is no objection"	27
produce	8
produce in North Beach	8
produce market, San Francisco on the Embarcadero	12
produce market, South City	13
Purity Market	27-28
Queen Elizabeth (ship)	5
quiet in Mill Valley	34
rasberries	14
Ray's coffee	27
Ray's Market	27
Ray's resistance to customers tastes	27
Red Cross boat, Gripsholm	21
sale of house and garden size	15
sale of San Francisco store	7
sandwich brigade during fire	8

school	5-6
selling techniques	16
services exchanged by professionals during depression	10-11
Spotorno and O'Brien (poultry dealers)	16
store, sale of (1955)	20,28
store atmosphere	16
store in Mill Valley, opening on day of 1929 fire	8
store in San Francisco	6
strawberries	13-14
streetcar down the middle of produce street	12
Suey Kee's market	28
Sunset Grocery	27
surgery, 1976	19-20
Tamalpais Market	28
telephone peas	14
Thran, Bill (Kaethe's brother)	21
Thran, Kaethe (wife)	21
118 Throckmorton	2
173 Throckmorton	27
106 Throckmorton	28
toll for grocery trucks	12
tomatoes	14
Tony the Pipe, gradener	19
transportation	8
trips to Europe	20
uncles in U.S.	5
unemployment	10
University of Florence (Marilyn's education)	23
Varazze, Italy	intro
Varazze farmers	32
vegetable garden, Varazze, Italy	6
vegetables, need for in Mill Valley	6
Venetian broccoli	27
visits to Italy	4-5
"We like peace and quiet"	29
welfare youth	30
"Where the hell has all the good peaches gone?"	13
Whippet (car)	7

Wife of the Belvedere broker (customer)	27
wife's graduation from Franklin Hospital	10
wife's nationality	20
wind change and the fire	10
wine convention, Monterey	29
World War II	21
world wars	4

Mr. Frank Canepa

SUMMARY: Frank was born January 1, 1896, in Varazze, Italy, between Genoa and the French Riviera. He came to America in 1913 at 16 years old, speaking no English, and worked for two uncles in San Francisco and Oakland. He soon took odd jobs at various farms, specializing in produce, and eventually owned a produce store in San Francisco with a partner. A difference of opinion resulted in his partner buying him out for \$1,000, and Frank decided he didn't like the weather in San Francisco and looked all around the Bay Area for a suitable place to start his own grocery store. When he finally came to Mill Valley, driving an old Whippet auto, he fell in love with the trees, the greenery and general ambience that reminded him of the weather in Genoa. He opened his first store in 1929 (in the current "Hat Box" location on Throckmorton Ave.) on the exact day of the Great Mill Valley fire and spent the time fighting the fire on Mt. Tam. Frank steadfastly insisted on selling only the finest quality produce and built a reliable and loyal customer base. He finally opened what is now the Mill Valley Market in 1951, eventually handing management to his sons Jim and Bob Canepa.

The following manuscript is open for research purposes. All literary rights in the manuscript, including the right to publish, are reserved to Mill Valley Public Library. No part of the manuscript may be quoted for publication without written permission of Librarian, Mill Valley Public Library, 375 Throckmorton Avenue, Mill Valley, California 94941. Requests should include identification of specific passages to be quoted, anticipated use of passages, and identification of user.

FRANK CANEPA

Jean Mosher

We're talking with Frank Canepa today. This is November 26, 1977, and we've just had Thanksgiving. Where did you spend Thanksgiving, Mr. Canepa?

Frank Canepa

We had it with my son Jimmy¹

Mrs. Mosher

Is he the one who bought Mrs. Bullard's house?²

Mr. Canepa

Yes, that's right.

Mrs. Mosher

How long have you lived here at 33 Lovell?

Mr. Canepa

Twelve years.

Mrs. Mosher

And before that you lived on Oakdale?

Mr. Canepa

Yes, when we built these apartments we moved over here and sold our house on Oakdale.

Mrs. Mosher

What was on this land before?

¹James H. Canepa.

² 511 Lovell Avenue, Mill Valley.

Mr. Canepa

There was an old cabinet shop. Before that there was a blacksmith shop. The backyard, between our old store and the blacksmith's, was all covered with wild blackberry. It was the home of raccoon, skunk, wild cat, you name it!

Mrs. Mosher

Wildcats?

Mr. Canepa

Wild cats. Cats that was sort of wild.

Mrs. Mosher

And you cleared all that out?

Mr. Canepa

Little by little, I cleared it with a pick and shovel. I dug all the blackberry out and dump it on the dump. We was going to make a parking lot, but we didn't; we changed our minds. The only way we could enlarge the old store was to either build a new one, with no possibility to enlarge...

Mrs. Mosher

You mean when the Mill Valley Market was down here¹

Mr. Canepa

Yes, where the laundromat is now.

Mrs. Mosher

Was that your first location in Mill Valley?

Mr. Canepa

Yes, that was my first location. You see, when I first come here I open up alongside of Mr. Gosser, who was a butcher. One side was a butcher shop, and I rent the other side. You can imagine how much space there was there. You can look at the laundromat and see it's not very big. Gosser later moved out, and I took over his place; I get a little more room. Gosser moved down on Miller Avenue to the Locust Market, or what do they call it now? Then the opportunity came to buy from Charlie Cervelli, who owned the Green Frog. That's where the Mill Valley Market is now²

¹ 118ThrockmortonAvenue.

² 12 Corte Madera Avenue.

Mrs. Mosher

What year did you move to that location?

Mr. Canepa

I don't remember the date exactly.¹ It's been quite a few years. Anyway, Charlie Cervelli used to run the Green Frog Grocery, and another couple used to run the butcher shop. They didn't keep it up. Everything went to pieces.

Kaethe Canepa

The lease was up, and the Green Frog ••• Our son Jimmy was just grown up then, and he said we should move -either over there or someplace else.

Mrs. Mosher

Why don't you bring your chair over here, Mrs. Canepa, so your voice will be on the tape, too? You can help us out with dates and things.

Mrs. Canepa

I must tell you that Frank is a little hard of hearing.

Mrs. Mosher

Mr. Canepa, I should have asked you first of all where you were born and when.

Mr. Canepa

I was born in 1896. Next January I will be eighty-two years old. I was born in a little town on the Italian Riviera, on the Mediterranean between Genoa and the French border.

Mrs. Mosher

What is the name of the town?

Mr. Canepa

Varazze. It's sort of a summer resort, like Santa Cruz. People come for the swimming. Some years when it's good weather you can have a wonderful time. Of course today

¹Later in the interview Mr. Canepa says it was about 1950.

it ain't like it used to be. The beaches aren't as clean as they used to be. They're polluted. They get oil from the tankers. They got a big problem keeping the beach in shape. In fact, they even go over it with a net, you know. They try because, after all, that's the way they make their living. When I was a kid we had wonderful beaches. There was no such thing as oil in the water. You go swimming and come out and dress yourself up. The sand was clean. But no more now.

Mrs. Mosher

Could you swim there the year 'round?

Mr. Canepa

No, not all year 'round.

Mrs. Mosher

What is the climate like there, compared to Mill Valley?

Mr. Canepa

They're something alike, in a way. It's a little warmer.

Mrs. Mosher

Have you been back there to visit?

Mr. Canepa

Oh yes, seven times.

Mrs. Mosher

When did you come to the United States?

Mr. Canepa

I came in 1913. I was sixteen and a half years old.

Mrs. Mosher

Did you come with your family?

Mr. Canepa

No, I came by myself. There were two wars before I saw my family again -- the First World War and the Second World War. We couldn't even write then. Everything was shut down. Italy was mixed up with Hitler, you know. In

the meantime my father died. Finally after the war I got a few news from there. In 1947 I decided I would take a trip, at least to see the family once more. That was a bad time to go, because everything was disrupted. The trains wasn't running on time. Everything was shut. I remember when the boat arrived in Genova, everywhere you looked you see debris -- buildings burned down and blasted out. It was awful. Of course there was no food. Well, there was food, but black market. In other words, you had to pay twice as it was worth.

I stayed thirty days that time. Coming back, I had to go to France, then to England, to get the Queen Elizabeth. England was worse than Italy.

Mrs. Mosher

You came home on the Queen Elizabeth?

Mr. Canepa

There weren't many boats in those days, and you couldn't choose what you wanted. You go to the agents, and they give you whatever they have on hand. You go one way, come back another way.

Mrs. Mosher

How did you happen to come to this country by yourself in 1913?

Mr. Canepa

I had two uncles here. My father's brother was in San Francisco, and my mother's brother was in Oakland. I figure between the two, in case I need a job... They tried to help me out, but you know, a young fellow sixteen and a half years old who can't talk English... Many place they ask me for my school papers, ask if I graduate from high school.

Anyway, I finally got work -- a job here, a job there, in San Francisco, in Oakland. I went to Half Moon Bay, I went to Fresno. After I was here four or five months, on my own, I did a little farming. I never collected unemployment. I always find my own job. Before I quit one job, I see that I get another one.

Mrs. Mosher

Where did you learn how to garden?

Mr. Canepa

My folks back home had a regular vegetable farm. When I went to school I worked in the garden. In my house there was no such thing as play. There was no baseball, no football. The only entertainment was working! Everybody had to work. We had a cow, we had chickens, we had rabbits, we had all kinds of produce -no heavy stuff, but all kinds of vegetables. Lettuce, tomatoes, artichokes, you name it. It was a small farm, but you got to work. All the time work, work, work.

Mrs. Mosher

The Oral History Committee interviewed Helen Chesnut; do you remember her? She said she stayed in Mill Valley because of your wonderful vegetables. She remembered seeing them on a counter in your first store, when you had just started. Did you grow those vegetables yourself?

Mr. Canepa

Some of them, yes. That was my point when I first came to Mill Valley. I look around, and I don't see any store here with good produce.

Mrs. Mosher

How did you happen to come to Mill Valley?

Mr. Canepa

Well, I didn't like San Francisco. I was in business over there. We had a small store •••

Mrs. Mosher

When you say "we," It do you mean your wife?

Mrs. Canepa

No, he had a partner.

Mr. Canepa

We had a small store, a two- or three-man store, one-- boy delivery. Before that I work maybe two years in North Beach, on Grant Avenue where most of the shopping centers of the Italian district were. Then I got a job in a store near Kezar Stadium. It was a pretty nice little store.

Mrs. Mosher

How did you find out about Mill Valley?

Mr. Canepa

I never knew Mill Valley was on the map. I sold my share of the grocery store to my partner. We got in sort of an argument, so I said, "Either you buy me out or I buy you out." So he bought me out. You know, in those days with a thousand dollars you could buy anybody out! Then I said to myself, if I go in business I don't want to go in business in San Francisco any more. I don't want to be in the city; I'm going to get out in the country. I started looking around in San Mateo, Burlingame, to see if I could find anything suitable. One day I came to Marin County. I knew Sausalito, San Rafael, and Fairfax but not Mill Valley. I saw a road to Mill Valley, and I said, "Let's take a look."

Mrs. Mosher

You were just driving around?

Mr. Canepa

Yes, I had an old Whippet, a little car with a rumble seat. Well, I came to Mill Valley, and I see all these trees. I'm a country boy at heart, really I am. I never did like a big city. Even when I go to Europe I don't care if I go to the big city to see this and that. I like lakes, mountains, the sea. So I see these beautiful green trees. The climate was so beautiful, the flowers. That was in the days when people take care of their yards. They had a gardener, a Filipino.

Anyhow, I say to myself, "This is the place I like to be." I look around and look around. At noontime I see an Italian restaurant that was here at that time. They called it the Log Cabin. I had lunch in there. I introduced myself to the lady, and I said, "Do you think there's an opportunity to make a living here?" "Why not?" she says.

I'll tell you one thing, there were a lot of grocery stores here then -- two or three stores to every block.

Mrs. Canepa

At one time there must have been more than a dozen here.

Mr. Canepa

So I took a walk and looked around. It seemed that every store I see, none of them put any effort into their

produce. Everything was just like they didn't care for it. I knew for a fact that produce is the main thing that draws the people in. When I was in the city we had a reputation in North Beach for good produce. The fellow I worked for was a mean guy, but his produce was out of the world. It used to draw a lot of people there. So I said to myself, "I'll keep on looking." But I couldn't find no empty store. Then I come to Mr. Gosser's. I went in and told him who I was and what I wanted. He didn't know what to say. He never see me before. I don't know him; he don't know me.

"Well, Mr. Gosser," I said, "you got nothing to lose.

You tell me how much you want for one side of your store, and I'll pay you the rent. If I make a go, it's okay, you benefit. If I don't, you don't lose nothing. After all, it's my loss." He says, "Fair enough."

I asked him if he had any customer who was a carpenter. He said yes, and named the name. I said, "Call him up." He was an old fellow, but he was a pretty good carpenter. His grandson used to be fire chief. I tell him what I need and ask how much it's going to be. He said, "I can't tell you, but I'll be fair to you." In two days I came back, and there was my counter. I bought a couple of secondhand scales, a small cash register, a secondhand truck -- and that was my start in business.

But -- the day I'm supposed to open up the store, the fire broke out on Mt. Tamalpais!

Mrs. Mosher

This was in July 1929?

Mr. Canepa

Yes. I was in the city that night, and I see in the paper that Mill Valley's on fire. I said, "My gosh, that's all you need!" Here I am -- half the stuff in the store and half on a little truck parked behind the Log Cabin. I didn't know what to do.

I came over by boat and by train, about eight or nine o'clock in the morning. As I arrived at the depot, all of Mill Valley was covered by smoke. There was a delegation at the train to pick everybody up. They said to me, "You've got to go fight fire." I said, "Jeez, I've got on a new suit." The man said, "I don't care. You've got to go fight fire."

Mrs. Mosher

You mean they just pulled everybody in?

Mr. Canepa

Oh yes. The women were making sandwiches. They got me up the Cascade with a hose. You can imagine! We were a bunch of amateurs. We didn't know nothing about fighting fire.

I remember Tony Arrigo -- used to have a barbershop here. It was the first time I met him. We were pulling the hose. He said, "Who are you?" I said, If Frank Canepa. If He said, "Italiano! My name's Tony Arrigo."

Mrs. Mosher

You had quite a dramatic beginning in Mill Valley.

Mr. Canepa

I said, "Of all the jinx!"

Mrs. Mosher

It didn't continue a jinx. You had the most wonderful business in town.

Mr. Canepa

And I had a lot of good customers. Mrs. Bullard was one. :Mrs. Bullard was a meat customer of Mr. Gosser.

Mrs. Canepa

Didn't the Bullard house burn in that fire?

Mr. Canepa

Oh yes. All the way up Lovell Avenue was black.

Mrs. Mosher

How long did the fire burn?

Mr. Canepa

Maybe three, four days. They had firemen from the Presidio, from San Rafael and Corte Madera. The Mill Valley firemen were all volunteer.

Mrs. Mosher

You weren't a volunteer; I'd say you were drafted!

Mr. Canepa

Fortunately the wind changed, and the fire went back out of here. If it hadn't been for the change in the wind, Mill Valley would have been off the map.

Mrs. Mosher

What happened to your new suit?

Mr. Canepa

It wasn't grey any more. It became black.

Mrs. Mosher

Did you two know each other then?

Mrs. Canepa

We knew each other for a long time in the city, for five years before we were married.

Mr. Canepa

She graduated from Franklin Hospital. I knew her when she was studying.

Mrs. Mosher

You were a nurse?

Mrs. Canepa

Yes.

Mr. Canepa

Nineteen twenty-nine was not a prosperous year. That was during the depression. Most of the people were out of a job -- American Legion men selling apples on the street.

Mrs. Mosher

Did that happen in Mill Valley?

Mr. Canepa

It happened all over.

Mrs. Canepa

It was bad, very bad. We had people charge at the store, professional men, doctors, lawyers. Everybody exchanged services. When my children were born, we

exchanged for doctor service. They couldn't pay us, and we couldn't pay them.

Mr. Canepa

When I go to the wholesale market, I pay cash. I try to pay cash so I can run the business the easy way. Then people start to buy and charge, and at the end of the month they don't pay. We had a heck of a time collecting. When we bought the first house, across the street from the Community Church, we got three or four carpenters who owed me money, and I made arrangements for them to fix the door, fix the window, put on a new balcony, and so forth, and I take it off the grocery bill. They were happy to do it. Fact is, they can't thank me enough, because at least they got something to eat.

I can tell you, some people in Mill Valley in those days were in bad shape. Nobody was paying; even the doctors couldn't collect.

Mrs. Canepa

They couldn't collect, we couldn't collect, nobody could collect. Then little by little it got better.

Mrs. Mosher

By what year did things get more or less back to normal?

Mrs. Canepa

We got married in '31. Even then it still was tough.

Mr. Canepa

You know, every time you pick up a new customer it's a big effort. To get good customer -- that was the problem. I figure, "If can add a little bit every week..."

Mrs. Mosher

How did you get customers? Did you search for them?

Mr. Canepa

I worked hard and gave them good service. Like Mrs. Bullard, for instance. That type of people wasn't easy to get. They been shopping at one store for many years. These are people who won't change unless they get something better. I get one good customer like that, then she tell her friend, her friend tell another friend.

There were a lot of nice customers in Mill Valley in those days -- R. P. Connelly, Cushings, Mrs. Clinton, McNamaras, Dr. Landrock, Dr. Hartman, all these people. Every time you get a customer like that you feel happy. You know that at least you get your money somehow!

Mrs. Mosher

Did you go to the produce market yourself every morning?

Mr. Canepa

Oh yes. Not every morning but every other day, three days a week.

Mrs. Mosher

What time did you have to be there?

Mr. Canepa

I used to take the 3:30 boat from Sausalito. By a little after seven I'd be back in Mill Valley.

Mrs. Mosher

You'd take your truck on the ferryboat?

Mr. Canepa

Oh yes, or across the bridge. It was expensive, too. In those days they used to weigh the truck. You'd pay \$30 a month for the commuter, plus the weight of the truck. First they weigh the truck when it's empty. Then when you come back, say the truck weighed 4,000 pounds, if it weighs 5,000 you pay the difference. Sometimes it was \$3.00 for the load.

Mrs. Mosher

Where was the market in those days?

Mr. Canepa

That was the old produce market on the Embarcadero. There were about fifteen or twenty blocks, all the way to the Ferry Building, nothing but produce stands.

Mrs. Mosher

It must have been very colorful.

Mr. Canepa

I tell you, it was exasperating sometimes. There was a streetcar running in the middle of the street. You were fighting to find a place to park. Today is actually much simpler. They got two markets now, one in South City and one in San Francisco. The best produce now is in South San Francisco; they got the better trade.

In my day you get there early in the morning and, first thing, you walk around and see what's what. You don't rush to buy; you want to see how much stuff is in the market. If you see a lot of tomato, you take your time. A lot of grapes, well, you take your time. If you walk down the street and, let's say, peaches are scarce, then that's what you buy first.

In the beginning you don't know the people. You get acquainted. I get acquainted with some of the good houses over there, and I start picking up the best fruit I can get, the best peaches, the best figs. In fact, I had figs in the store in those days, and there was nobody else in Marin County. They were beautiful, and they sell like hotcakes!

Mrs. Mosher

You've been famous all these years for your produce. But tell me, what's happening to vegetables these days? You buy lettuce, and it has no sand or dirt on it. It's as though it's made of plastic.

Mr. Canepa

It's not like it used to be. Everything that comes in is either too ripe or too green. No flavor. A peach has no flavor. I tell the boys the other day, "Where the hell has all the good peaches gone?" When I was in business, I'll tell you, when you had a peach -- talk about flavor! I eat one before I buy, see?

Mrs. Canepa

It's like everything else. The quality isn't like it used to be.

Mrs. Mosher

Is mass production the villain?

Mr. Canepa

Yes. Like strawberries. Today I see strawberries all

year 'round. 99¢ a basket. Raspberries \$1.22. How can you expect to sell them? You sell a few. In my day, strawberries were two baskets for 25¢, 15¢ a basket.

I used to get peas this long. We called them telephone peas. You shell those and, oh, talk about sweet! Today they're like bullets. It's not the fault of the buyer. There's no such thing on the market any more. Even the tomatoes ain't got no flavor. I bought a couple of tomatoes the other day; the skin was so tough you couldn't chew it.

Mrs. Mosher

How many places have you lived in Mill Valley? You lived across from the Community Church first?

Mrs. Canepa

At 89 Lovell. The house is still there. It's on the corner of Olive, right across the street from the old Christian Science Church. It's a grey shingled house, kind of overgrown.

Mrs. Mosher

That was your first house?

Mr. Canepa

First we rented, but that's the first house we bought.

Mrs. Canepa

In '44 we moved to 277 Oakdale, on the corner of Elinor.

Mrs. Mosher

And that was your family home? How many children do you have?

Mrs. Canepa

Three, two boys and a girl.¹

Mr. Canepa

That was a good location up there, nice and sunny. When we bought it, everything was overgrown. I had to

¹James H., Robert F., and Marilyn (now Mrs. Robert Franceschini).

start from the beginning. I dug pretty nearly everything out and planted new lawn and new shrubs. Everything was in the wrong place. We spent a lot of money. We put a nice patio in the backyard, all brick patio with barbecue. All around the edge was a big fence, with greeneries. There was no wind; it was sheltered.

Mrs. Mosher

Both of you worked in the garden?

Mrs. Canepa

Oh yes

Mr. Canepa

I loved so much to get up Sunday morning, eat breakfast first thing, then work in the yard. I used to smoke then, and I'd light my cigar and work in the yard. I loved it. Today I can't even lift the leaves.

Mrs. Canepa

We did have it landscaped by Mr. Hein.¹ It was nice.

Mr. Canepa

He made a good job. I figured I get somebody to landscape, then I can keep it up. But I can't take care of it and the apartments here; it got too much. So we sell the house. Today we could get twice as much. We had a hard time selling it even then because there was too much of a garden.

Mrs. Canepa

People didn't want it because there was too much yard work.

Mr. Canepa

I remember one day a couple came. The wife liked that house; she wanted it. She said to us, "I hope you can encourage my husband to buy it." The fellow got me on the side and said, "How many hours do you put in here?" I said, "I don't count them, but I know I can put in plenty hours." "That's all I want to know," he said. His wife was disappointed. She liked to garden, and we really had a beautiful garden -- rhododendrons, fuschias, camellias.

¹Herman Hein, well-known Mill Valley landscape architect.

I had three espaliered trees, one cherry, one apple, and one prune, against the fence on the side. The apples were Roman Beauties. Ah, those apples.

Mrs. Mosher

Let's get back to your store, which has been such a pleasure to so many people. We all have memories of going to the Mill Valley Market and meeting our friends. It's like a party to go there. You created a wonderful atmosphere in that store, somehow. How did you do it?

Mr. Canepa

Well, I tried. I tell all my clerks, "Be nice to customers. Treat them right. Tell the truth. When they phone in their order, if the fruit they ask for isn't good enough, don't brag about it. Say it's so-so. Don't mislead." Sometime in the wintertime, you know, you cannot get what you want. Sometime there's a big frost. Maybe cauliflower is scarce. You just say, "Mrs. Jones, I'm sorry but today they're not as good as par." They'll thank you. If sometime somebody complain -- maybe find an avocado that's no good -- give 'em another one.

Little by little I increased different things -- chicken, squab, Italian bread, ravioli, things that nobody had in town in those days. I stopped in North Beach at different places to pick up; put everything in the seat of my truck. Sometime I come home with twenty or twenty-five carton of ravioli. They used to bring ten cents a carton, five cents for the soup or the sauce. That paid for the freight, you know.

Mrs. Mosher

It provided variety in your store.

Mr. Canepa

I used to take orders. Like for chicken. I used to stop at the California Market or Spotorno & O'Brien and wait in line for chicken. I'll tell you, they had the most beautiful fryer. You couldn't get those fryer today.

Mrs. Mosher

After Gosser moved down to Miller Avenue, did you get another butcher in there? My husband said that in the old days you had somebody who made marvelous sausage.

Mr. Canepa

That was Joe Leininger, but the first butcher I had was Johnny. I can't think of his last name.

Mrs. Canepa

Ambrose Polacchi was a partner in the store. When he had to go in the army, he sold out to Joe Leininger. Joe stayed for a couple of years, and then Ambrose came back and bought him out again.

Mr. Canepa

Ambrose was about thirteen or fourteen years old when he started working for me. When he was in grammar school he'd come in the store and open up a few newspapers for us. In those days we didn't use no bags; we used newspaper to wrap the vegetables. He was such a nice kid, good worker. As he grew up, he stayed with me.

One day I said, "I've got to have somebody I can depend on when I go to the market." That was too much work for me. I said to Ambrose, "You want to become a partner here?" He said, "Yes, but I haven't got no money." I said, "Forget the money. You give what you can, and the rest you can pay me so much a month." I think he gave me \$1,000. I took it and used it for the business. Instead of getting just a wage, he was getting each month a check, plus a little extra money.

The difference to me was that when I came back from the market the stand was already prepared for the stuff that comes in. Produce you can't just throw. You've got to change the counter every day. I didn't charge him no interest at all. He got maybe an extra \$100 a month, plus his wage -- something like that. It got a little better, a little better, a little better. He stick with me. We were together about thirty-five years, and we got along beautifully. We were together when we moved to the Green Frog in about 1950.

Mrs. Canepa

Then he wasn't feeling good, so he retired.

Mrs. Mosher

Is he still in Mill Valley?

Mrs. Canepa

No, he's up in the country somewhere.

Mr. Canepa

It's some lake up in the mountains. I can't think of the name. He likes fishing.

Mrs. Mosher

When did the Morellos come onto the scene?

Mrs. Canepa

When Ambrose quit. Jimmy was in it already. I think you sold out to them in 1955.

Mrs. Mosher

You sold out to whom?

Mrs. Canepa

To Jimmy and Joe Morello...

Mr. Canepa

...and Polacchi. There were three there together.

Mrs. Canepa

And afterwards they bought Ambrose out.

Mrs. Mosher

So now the owners are ...

Mrs. Canepa

Joe Morello and Jimmy and Bobby, our youngest son. My boys grew up working in the business, you know. Both of them started working in the store when they were about nine years old. When they went away to college they were in the store during the summer, so they both knew the business. Bobby had a teacher's degree, and you couldn't get a job nowhere as a teacher. A couple of years ago they asked him if he would join the business, so now there are three of them in there. Jimmy's kids work in there, too.

Mr. Canepa

I'll tell you, they've got two boys ... Even the little girl, Jimmy's daughter, she works in the bakery shop two or three hours a week, a little blonde girl.

Mrs. Canepa

They're good workers.

Mr. Canepa

Very pleasant, very polite.

Mrs. Mosher

You're a family of hard workers. Have you had time to do anything else besides your store and your garden? Have you needed other hobbies?

Mr. Canepa

I wish I had, but the way I feel today it wouldn't help me if I was a golfer or fisherman. Since I had this operation, everything is not the same anymore. In my life I was pretty active.

Mrs. Canepa

If he wasn't doing our yard, he would go to the daughter's. They have a big yard. He did all their gardens.

Mr. Canepa

My daughter move three times, and three times I work in the yard. Our yard on Oakdale, the soil was red clay. You had to break everything with a pick. There used to be an Italian fellow who did garden work. They called him Tony the Pipe, because he lived on the pipeline. I know he like his bottle of wine, so I see him and say, "Tony, you want to put in a few hours?" He say, "Oh yes." A lot of people they want him, but they don't give him the wine so he don't go! I forget how much we pay him, \$2.50 a day or something, and I used to give him lunch. I'd give him a few drinks while he ate lunch, then I'd give him a bottle of wine while he was working on the garden. Little by little he broke the ground. I started getting peat moss and vine leaves. Then I put some manure with them. My gosh, that soil got so you could dig it with your finger!

Mrs. Mosher

Did you keep your own compost pile?

Mrs. Canepa

Yes, we saved everything.

Mr. Canepa

I had a place underneath the tree where I used to throw them in a hole -- coffee grounds and all that stuff.

You'd be surprised at the difference it make in the soil up there. I had a lime and a lemon tree. The lime was so loaded that I give them away to everybody in the neighborhood.

Mrs. Mosher

What year did you retire?

Mrs. Canepa

He sold out in '55, but he still kept working for a few years. In fact, he worked until he got sick. He still went down to the market early in the morning to open up. Even after he had the surgery he went back.

Mrs. Mosher

Your surgery was a year ago?

Mrs. Canepa

A year ago in May.

Mr. Canepa

Even after I sold out I did the marketing for them, went to the wholesale market, for a while •

Mrs. Canepa

Just to keep busy. He'd work until maybe ten o'clock in the morning and then come home.

Mr. Canepa

We took trips to Europe -- sometimes two months, sometimes three months, six months. We leased our house on Oakdale and rented a house in Italy.

Mrs. Canepa

We always did rent an apartment, and we would take the children. Our daughter went to high school and college over there, and Bobby went to college in Rome.

Mrs. Mosher

Are you Italian, Mrs. Canepa?

Mrs. Canepa

I'm German.

Mrs. Mosher

What was your maiden name?

Mrs. Canepa

My name was Thran, Kaethe Thran.

Mrs. Mosher

Are you related to Bill Thran?

Mrs. Canepa

That's my brother. I have another brother in the city.

Mr. Canepa

One time when we were in Europe we bought a car and drove all around. We landed in Bremen. That's where she came from. That was a beautiful trip because the traffic wasn't as heavy as today.

Mrs. Canepa

I went over in '39. I had been back before that, but in '39 I took the two children. After my father died, we got notice that we had to go over and settle the estate. Otherwise the government would take it over, Hitler would take it over. I took Jimmy and Marilyn with me.

Mrs. Mosher

How old were they then?

Mrs. Canepa

Marilyn was three and a half, and Jimmy was six. We were there one month and war was declared. We were given notice by the consul to leave. First we went to Denmark. Then the border was closed in Denmark, and we had to go to Sweden. We came home on a Red Cross boat, the Gripsholm. Frank was supposed to meet us in Italy.

Mr. Canepa

I had my ticket and everything. I was supposed to go to Italy and meet them there.

Mrs. Canepa

Instead, we came home on the Gripsholm, and he met us in New York.

Mrs. Mosher

That must have been frightening for you.

Mrs. Canepa

It was, very. We went by Greenland and Iceland. We stayed on the open deck all day and all night; I hardly went to bed. It was awful. We were afraid of mines, you know.

Mrs. Mosher

Were the children frightened?

Mrs. Canepa

Very, and very sick. The food was poor. Naturally they had a new crew, inexperienced help. It was very bad. Frank said, "I never want to go back." Then his father died, and I coaxed him. I said, "Go back and see your mother." So he went.

Mr. Canepa

This was in 1947, after the war.

Mrs. Canepa

He went by himself, and that trip wasn't too good, either. He said, "I'll never go back." But we still had our house in Germany; the estate never was taken care of. My cousin was staying there. It had to be sold some way, so I went back in '52. I took Marilyn then; she was fifteen. Actually, what happened was that we were supposed to go over with some friends of ours, but Frank couldn't get away. So our friends (they were from South San Francisco) took Marilyn along with them. She had never met anybody over there. She couldn't speak a word of Italian. The family met her at the boat in Genoa. The woman from South San Francisco could speak Italian, so she was the interpreter.

The family was just thrilled to have Marilyn come. Frank's mother was alive, and he had three sisters and two brothers living. After a few weeks Marilyn wrote, "It's so beautiful here, and I like it so much I'm going to stay here. I want to go to school." She had been at Dominican High School, and they arranged for her to go into the convent in Savona province.

Mr. Canepa

It's about half an hour from Varazze, where I come from.

Mrs. Canepa

She went to the convent there, and she learned perfect Italian. She was the only foreigner. She stayed that summer and winter, and then the following summer we went over and brought her home. We spent all summer there.

In '55, when Jimmy got married, she said, "I want to go again." She was in her junior year at Dominican College then. One of the nuns said "If you want to go, we'll work it out." She went first to the University of Florence. She was so advanced, because she could speak and write fluent Italian. Then she went to Perugia and finished up. We went over again in '56 and toured Europe the whole summer and brought her back again.

Mrs. Mosher

This interests me because I'm studying Dante at Dominican College right now, and he came from Florence. It makes me sick that I don't know Italian and must read him in English.

Mrs. Canepa

One of the nuns said to Marilyn, "If you want to study Dante, Florence is the place."

It was such a wonderful experience for her. She met very educated children. At the convent in Florence she roomed with a girl whose father was an Arabian sheik. The mother was a German lawyer. They're still friends. In Perugia she roomed with a girl whose father was chief of NATO in Naples. The advantages, the friends she made, were fabulous.

Mrs. Mosher

You really have kept in contact with your homeland.

Mr. Canepa

Yes, but things were different when we went over on the first trips we made. Then I could see the trend get worse.

One particular trip we had a car. We would get up early in the morning to avoid the traffic, get out on the big highway. If we feel like eating, we stop and eat. If we're not too hungry we just go in a delicatessen and buy a few pastrami or salami. Then, when we get down to the Bavarian country and Switzerland, they got these cold

cuts. Jeez, they used to give me a plate as big as this. It was out of the world. steam beer! I drank more beer that year than I ever drank in all my life. And fresh rye bread, hot from the oven.

Mrs. Canepa

It was wonderful because all Frank's family was there.

We rented an apartment, so we could come and go. One brother, for instance, would pick up my daughter at the convent every Saturday and take her back Monday morning, so she was with the family and the grandmother every weekend. We got very close with his family. In fact, his sister came over a few years back.

Mr. Canepa

I paid the trip for my sister.

Mrs. Canepa

They were so poor after the war. They had nothing; everybody lost everything.

Mr. Canepa

We sent a lot of packages. I used to buy coffee from Brazil in 125-pound bales. There was a limit, and you could send just twenty-two pounds in a package to Italy. We put in five pounds of coffee today and the rest clothes and things. Another package next week with five more pounds of coffee and different things. We'd send green coffee, and they'd roast it themselves.

Mrs. Canepa

It cost us a lot of money to support the family, but it was worth it. His youngest sister wrote she was going to have a baby, and they had nothing. I took \$50 and bought a whole layette and mailed her. At that time you could buy quite a bit with \$50. The baby is grown up now, married to a doctor and lives in Genoa. We're still very close.

Mrs. Mosher

You must write a lot of letters.

Mrs. Canepa

We do. It's been very nice.

Mr. Canepa

To tell you the truth, when I first went over in 1947 there was so much red tape it would drive you crazy -- diplomatic business, visa, stamps, this and that. When we were waiting to disembark from the boat we were supposed to get a stamp on our passport. While I was standing in a big line a guy paged, "Frank Canepa, Frank Canepa." It never really dawned on me that he was hollering for me. Pretty soon I turned around and said, "You asking for Frank Canepa?" He said, "I been hollering for you for half an hour." I said, "What's this all about?" He said, "You go up on the top deck. There's a long line of people, must be relatives of yours, and they want to say hello to you." You can imagine! Here I am in line, and if I move out I lose my place. The guy behind me was nice about it. He heard the conversation and he said, "Go ahead. We'll hold your place."

I went up on top, and there must have been twenty-five or thirty people, all crying and -- you know. The funny part was they were all dressed American. They had on all the clothes that we had sent. I said to myself, "Those aren't Italians, they're Americans!" You remember the GI pants the soldiers wore at the end of the war? We had bought a lot of those and sent them. Everyone was wearing those pants, the shirts, the jacket, and cap.

Anyway, we got to the customhouse. I had a trunk full of stuff -- cigarettes, prosciutto, salami, cheese. And two suitcases full of stuff. One guy says to me, "Frank when you get inside the customhouse, just take a five-dollar bill and put it between your fingers like this, and don't worry about a thing." He showed me how to hold it, like a cigarette. So I did. There were about four or five people we knew, all of them with five dollar bills like that! The guy grabbed my five dollars, and in five minutes I was all ready to go.

I heard a commotion at the door. It was my sister. She wants to come in the customhouse, and the guy won't let her in. She dives in between them and says, "I got a brother here I haven't seen for thirty-five years; ain't nobody gonna stop me." It was all such a commotion that it took me a day to get over it. They told me all their stories. They'd been through bombings and this and that.

Right now I've only got two sisters left over there.

Ms. Mosher

But you still identify with the place, don't you?

Mrs. Canepa

Yes, we even took two granddaughters over -- Jimmy's daughter and Marilyn's daughter. I think that was in 1970. We took them all through Europe. They were thirteen and fifteen then. We took them to our home in Germany; my cousin was still living in the house. Whenever we went over, we had our own place in Germany and a place in Italy.

Mr. Canepa

We had an apartment in Varazze about thirty stories high. You could see all the bay. There was a television, washing machine, radio, everything complete, all furnished.

Mrs. Mosher

What a wonderful way to travel.

Mrs. Canepa

Well, when you have a family it's hard to stay in a hotel.

Mr. Canepa

Sometimes we did some light cooking. We didn't do no heavy cooking. Sometimes my sister makes some ravioli, some gnocchi. She's a good cook. She brings us hot minestrone.

Mrs. Mosher

I think it's an interesting story that Jimmy used to deliver groceries to the Bullard house, liked the house so much, and then got to buy it.

Mrs. Canepa

I think Mrs. Bullard kind of took a fancy to Jimmy.

Mr. Canepa

She really liked him. She told him, "If I ever sell it, if you want it you're first choice." That Bullard family was nice people. The old man died many years ago, and then the son died. He was a fine man. It was too bad. I knew the family well.

Mrs. Mosher

I think you know everybody in this town.

Mr. Canepa

In the old days we knew pretty near everybody. Like I say, we had very good customers. My best trade was from Belvedere, believe it or not. One customer was a broker. He had a house in Chicago. His wife would come out for certain months of the year, for four or five months. Her first telephone call was to Mill Valley Market! For her, price was no objection. She wanted something good. She wants gooseberries, she wants huckleberries, she wants squab, crenshaw melon that big. "What have you got good today?" she'd ask, and I'd tell her. Venetian broccoli, she used to like that. You don't see it any more. It's purple. I was the only one in town that had it. The fellow I used to buy from, he only had a few crates and he used to save them for me. I'd tell her I had Venetian broccoli, and she'd buy a whole crate. She'd send the maid for it in the car. She'd charge everything, and at the end of the month -- bing, bing, you'd get the check.

Mrs. Mosher

Did you ever work in the store, Mrs. Canepa?

Mrs. Canepa

I helped in the beginning. It was very different then. It's changed quite a lot.

Mr. Canepa

You know the funny thing about the Mill Valley Market? With all the competition we had, it's the only one left in Mill Valley of the original grocery stores. There was Oppenheimer's¹ and Ray's Market.² Ray had a beautiful market, everything fancy. In those days he was one of the best. The only trouble with him, he used to specialize in coffee and peanut butter. Those were his specialties. A customer goes in for a pound of Hills Bros. coffee, he says, "Why do you want to buy Hills Bros. coffee when I can give you Ray's coffee which is cheaper and better?" He used to grind it himself.

Mrs. Canepa

Then there was Bagshaw's grocery,³ and the People's Market, Purity...

¹Gus Oppenheimer's, 12 Miller Avenue

² 173 Throckmorton Avenue.

³Thomas Henry Bagshaw owned the Sunset Grocery on Lytton Square.

Mrs. Mosher

Frank Keane was the butcher at Purity, I remember.

Mr. Canepa

Then there was Suey Kee's and the Tamalpais Market.

Mrs. Canepa

On the corner was Allen;¹ where the bar is now.

Mrs. Mosher

Mr. Canepa, do you remember telling me that when you sold the store everybody came here for a party?

Mr. Canepa

A party? No, I don't remember that. We did all come up to the house. We had a few drinks, and we talked things over. The subject came up as to how to operate the business. I said, "You've got a good business. Please keep it up. Don't fall for prices; don't fall for the competition. Just run the business like we always did and keep quality. That's the main thing.

"Another thing I want to tell you: Don't bicker about how much water or light you use or the butcher uses, or things like that. Same way with the garbage bill, the gas bill, the telephone bill. If you start that, you'll never agree on anything. If you compromise, it will all work out." And they did. Never had any argument.

Mrs. Canepa

I don't know why, but Jimmy and Bobby just don't fight. Jimmy has never talked back to his father, never. They just don't.

Mrs. Mosher

Maybe he was always fair.

Mrs. Canepa

We never spanked the children, we never hollered at them. You don't hear Jimmy holler at his children, either.

¹Walter F. Allen's grocery, 106 Throckmorton Avenue.

Mr. Canepa

I can remember years ago when we were at Jimmy's place for Christmas or New Year's. David and Dougie were little then. When it got to be nine or ten o'clock, I noticed that Jimmy said, "Maybe you'd better go to bed, boys." And that's that.

Mrs. Canepa

They'd say goodnight to everybody and go. And that's the way it was in our house all the time.

Mrs. Mosher

It sounds as though you have a happy, close family.

Mrs. Canepa

We try to do the best we can. We like peace and quiet, and we try to work it out.

Mr. Canepa

Let me tell you one thing: Jimmy knows the grocery business! And the wine -- they've got the most beautiful assortment of wine in town.

Mrs. Mosher

My husband found that out. He was phoning around for some special wine for Thanksgiving, and he said the Mill Valley Market was the only place where people were interested and helpful and knew what they were talking about.

Mr. Canepa

Jimmy goes to wine conventions. They had a big one in Monterey. Eight thousand people were there. The best wineries in the United States participate.

Mrs. Mosher

Is buying for a small market difficult these days? Most things are set up for supermarkets.

Mr. Canepa

Well, of course they have their own associations. In the old days we used to sell a truckload of produce. At today's prices -- cauliflower 99¢ -- I won't buy it myself. The other day I was at the store and strawberries were 99¢. Forget it! But you'd be surprised at today's young people. I saw one lady with four baskets of strawberries.

Mrs. Mosher

The food stamp people often seem to be the ones who have the most expensive items.

Mr. Canepa

It's ridiculous.

Mrs. Canepa

I believe in charity where it's deserved, and I don't know why we support these young kids. They don't want to work; you can't get anybody to do housework or yard work anymore. I think if these young kids really wanted to work they could find work. I could find work!

Mr. Canepa

Some of them have no training whatsoever -- and they're too lazy and too dirty.

Mrs. Canepa

When I came to this country I didn't have anybody. I worked and put myself through nursing school. We worked twelve hours a day at the hospital, and I had to make my living besides. We got \$5.00 a month spending money in training.

Do you know Edna Behrens who lives up on Myrtle Avenue? I went in training under her. She later got my cousin into nursing. She said she'd take anybody by the name of Thran. When we got married she told Frank, "Any time you don't want her any more, you send her back." She's quite a wonderful person. She was a surgical nurse at Franklin Hospital for many years.

Mr. Canepa

She knew more than some of the surgeons.

Mrs. Mosher

You've had a lot of experiences in your life.

Mr. Canepa

Well, I've never had any problems. I've done more dirty jobs than Quaker has oats. My first job was in a Del Monte cannery in Oakland. My aunt worked in the cannery, and she got me a job there. The women were making good money; they were working piecework. Do you know how

much pay I got? I got 15½¢ an hour. In ten hours I made \$1.55. I came in at six o'clock and washed the floor. One guy would work with the hose and one with the squeegee. All day we work in the damp. I tell you, that was a good place to get rheumatism! Of course today everything's changed, but I was supposed to take the fruit from a machine to each woman, with a big bucket-like thing. One day I ate some of those fruits and got diarrhea. I said to another guy, "I have to go to the toilet. Will you take my place?"

Mrs. Canepa

You shouldn't be telling that.

Mr. Canepa

Why not? It's funny. Anyway, the guy forgot all about it. I came back, and the fruit was all on the floor. The foreman come around. He remind me of a lion. He had curly hair sticking out. His eyes were ••• I tried to explain, but oh, did he give it to me! "This had better not happen again." There I was, sixteen and a half years old. They never treat you like that in the old country.

I want to tell you -- the way they used to treat the workers in those days, that was incredible. They'd hire fifteen men today, and before the day's over they fire twenty. "Come to the office and get your check. You're off, you're finished, the season's over." This is what happened to me. I worked three or four months in there, then one day I was through.

In the meantime I got me a job washing windows, janitor work. So the minute I quit the cannery I start getting up at one o'clock in the morning. Had an old bicycle, a bucket, and stepladder. I had four or five places where I had to wash the windows, clean the spittoons.

In those days a foreigner was treated just like a nigger today. But -- if you don't speak English, what can you expect? To be a president in a bank? You've got to improve yourself. So, like I say, I worked on an artichoke ranch on the coast, then when I came back to the city, to Oakland... You see, I didn't work very much in San Francisco; I work mostly in Oakland. As soon as I got back to Oakland I start going to night school. I work in a lumberyard eight tough hours a day. Then I eat supper, take a shower, change my clothes, and then go to school a couple of hours. I had no fun, I'm telling you.

Mrs. Mosher

What did you study?

Mr. Canepa

I study English, to be able to understand.

Mrs. Canepa

It's a good thing you don't know ahead. When you're young, you have a lot of guts, and things don't bother you like when you're older.

Mr. Canepa

Oh, I had plenty of guts!

Mrs. Canepa

If I had known what I had to go through! I was very homesick when I got here. Europe was better in those years than it was here.

Mr. Canepa

Everybody gets homesick. To tell you the truth, the first few years I was here everything was so different - the life, the customs, the family, the children. In the old country in those days you had respect for your folks. You couldn't just talk back to your father. He'd kill you! But here...

Mrs. Canepa

They were stricter. I was raised differently than he was. My father was in the German army in the Kaiser's time and was very proper. If you'd come home with an "A" it was wonderful, but he'd say, "Next time I hope you get a star on top." He was that type.

Mr. Canepa

My family was religious, strict religious. Sunday you had to go to catechism, then mass. In the afternoon they had a guy preaching, then the benediction. As a kid, once in a while in the summertime I sneak away and go to the beach -- until my father catch me.

In Varazze there were mostly farmers. They had a co-operative. They used to ship a carload of tomatoes (or whatever it was) to different cities. If something happens to one family -- say somebody gets sick -- everybody goes

in there and works. They don't do this today. The women would bring sandwiches and bottles of wine. They work four, five, six hours. They pick the grapes, and they sing. It's not like this today, even over there.

If I could tell you some of the stories that happened to me when I was working on the ranch! I worked on one big farm, Miller and Lux.¹ Most of the fellow who worked up there were hoboes, tramps. They don't give a damn for nothing. I got a job as a stableman -- take care of the horses, clean out the manure, this and that.

About two weeks before Christmas, the boss says to me, "You have to go to the other camp." There was another camp where they were harvesting, with big mules. He says, "You go up there and feed the sheep. The fellow that feeds the sheep now is gonna go on vacation for two weeks." I went up there, and I realize what is going to happen. Sure enough, on Christmas Day I got stuck in the corral with thousands and thousands of sheep. The mud was like this; I couldn't get out. I had to go down and get some brush and stick it underneath the wheels. I got back to the camp about two o'clock in the afternoon, Christmas Day. And the Chinaman, he wouldn't feed me. "Too late," he said. "I don't feed you." I was so mad! I said, "You're gonna feed me or I'm gonna choke your head." He started running away. I go after him, but I couldn't catch him. I was gonna beat the life out of him!

The boss heard the commotion. He come up. He was Italian. "What's going on?" he said. "What's going on?" I said. "Here it is Christmas Day. Look! Mud up to here. My shoes are full of mud. My shirt's full of mud. And he won't feed me. What do you want me to do?" In those days, a Chinese cook was more precious than gold. The boss says, "Well, I can't do nothing." He got the key from the Chinaman, and he opened the cookhouse. He sliced a few slices of roast beef that was full of grease and a couple of slices of bread and a cup of tea. Italians don't drink tea, you know.

I went to sleep that night in the bunkhouse. The light there was an old-fashioned lamp like they use in the stables. I tell you, the tears come down my eyes. I was crying like a baby. In the old country, maybe they're starving to death, but on Christmas or Easter or any holiday -- you name it! I don't just say this, but if you go to their house, at least you get a glass of wine. When

¹Huge land company founded by Henry Miller, whose holdings extended the length of Central Valley and beyond.

I went back to Italy for the first time, sometimes I used to hike through these villages in the countryside. You meet some of the old folks, and you talk. You tell them who you are. "Oh," they say, "your father's Jimmy Canepa." (My son has my father's name.) "Come on and have a drink." And I never met the guy before.

Mrs. Mosher

There is a generosity about the Italian people I've known. Are there lots of Italians who have come to Marin County?

Mr. Canepa

Yes, but not from my part of the country. We call ourselves Genovese -- from what used to be the province of Genova. When Mussolini came up into power he cut up the provinces. There are a few families left here, but not very many. There are a lot of Milanese in Marin County, from Milano. There are not very many Sicilians. I don't know any Sicilian in Marin County.

Mrs. Mosher

It seems to me that the people you see in produce sections in the grocery stores are often Italians.

Mr. Canepa

No, I wouldn't say that. Myself, I didn't care if they're Russian or German or Chinese. As long as I could get what I want, I don't give a damn. I did a lot of business with Chinamen. I think they were about the nicest of all. Those Chinese in the produce market were so nice. You go early in the morning, and you say, "How's your lettuce?" They used to specialize in green stuff. "It's good, Frank." They'd take the order, and that's it.

Mrs. Mosher

We have only a few minutes left on the tape. Is there anything special you'd like to say?

Mr. Canepa

I could say a lot of things. In forty or fifty years' experience you're bound to have some good and some bad encounters. The thing is this, like I say from the beginning. I fell in love with Mill Valley at first sight because I was away from the noise of streetcar, ambulance, and all that. I like to be quiet. Even when we were in

Italy, you know. One time I went by myself; I stay with my sister. We do a little shopping in the morning, down to the different store, buy this, buy that. I rent a cabin on the beach and two folding chair, umbrella. I smoke my cigar, buy a paper, and lay down on the beach. After I lay down for maybe an hour or so, I take a swim, then come back. I spend most of my time in the sand. Then I go for lunch. It takes two hours for lunch. If it's nice in the afternoon, I go back again. That's all I did. I never feel better in my life than that time.

Mrs. Canepa

When we first went to Italy I used to sleep so good. It's the ocean air.

Mr. Canepa

In the nighttime you don't sleep over there! Everybody go for a walk!

Mrs. Canepa

The nights are warm, and the gardens are very beautiful.

Mr. Canepa

To tell you the truth, they're very strict about their gardens; they're like a park. They got a lot of men working to keep it up. God help you if they catch you stealing one flower. Oh, do they give it to you! You don't see anybody touch a flower. And there are very few dogs over there.

Mrs. Canepa

Our children have really been fortunate that they had a chance to go over. Frank's mother came from a very big ranch, a beautiful place, and the children could see this. Frank's family are millionaires now, because the place where they grew up is right on the Riviera. His mother didn't get nothing out of it. The oldest son gets everything. My mother came from a big ranch, and she didn't get nothing. The oldest son got it. But we'll still close with my cousins who run the ranches now. We go and see them, and our grandchildren see the places where we came from. We even went to the cemeteries where our great-grandparents are buried.

Mr. Canepa

My grandfather on my mother's side was a very stern

man, with whiskers. He was almost a hundred years old when he died. He was the boss of the family. In the morning he'd go boom, boom (pounding the table), and everybody get up. He had a big farm, beautiful home. When he die, they sold all the land.

Mrs. Canepa

Well, not all of it.

Mr. Canepa

They still got the hillside.

Mrs. Canepa

It was a beautiful valley, almost like Mill Valley. Now the land is covered with hotels and what-not.

Mr. Canepa

Last time we went over, with my daughter and son-in-law, we went visiting to my first cousin. My daughter looked at that house, that big kitchen. You should see that kitchen! She said, "Oh, your poor relatives!"

Mrs. Canepa

It was the first time that my son-in-law went over. He said when he got home he felt like he was living in a barn. They have a pretty nice house, but he was comparing the luxury.

Mr. Canepa

Over there the kitchen is almost as big as this room here. All kinds of cabinets, inlaid floor of some kind of composition.

Today, in Europe, they've got the Common Market, you know. You can get appliances from all different countries -Germany, Switzerland, Holland, you name it.

Mrs. Canepa

There's nothing you can't get. Even an Electrolux you can buy over there. In every country there are refrigerators and things. So one tries to compete with the other. They dress beautifully, really out of this world.

Mr. Canepa

You don't see children going to school in a pair of jeans like they do here.

Mrs. Canepa

They may be living from today till tomorrow, but they do live now. What' s going on may be partly due to inflation. We went through it twice in Germany. I was fifteen when the banks went broke the first time. When my father died he held eight mortgages -- people who owed him money. There was a 20,000-mark gold bond that we just tore up; it was worth nothing. With millions of marks, all you could buy was a loaf of bread. The only thing we saved was the house we lived in and the lot next door. And at one time he was a well-to-do man. The same thing happened to the country again after Hitler.

Mrs. Mosher

What do you think is going to happen to us?

Mrs. Canepa

Frank used to say, "It can never happen in America." Now where are we? But the whole world is in it now. It isn't just one country, like it was in Germany.

Mr. Canepa

There's no such thing as, "It can't happen here." Look in Italy. When my father used to hire some fellow to work for him, do you know how much he used to get? Twenty cents a day -- one lira. That was a day's wage: one lira. Now with a hundred lire you buy a newspaper. In those days, you'd work a hundred days to make a hundred lire.

Mrs. Canepa

I don't think nobody knows where the world is going. You might as well make the best of every day.

Mrs. Mosher

I think we can end on that note. I thank you both, very much.