

# LOIS GIORDANO (SMITH)

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
INTERVIEW DATE: APRIL 2, 2022



HISTORICAL SOCIETY of  
**HAMMONTON**

EST. 1960

**HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF HAMMONTON ORAL HISTORY**  
**LOIS (SMITH) GIORDANO**

<b>Date of Interview</b>	Sunday, April 3, 2022
<b>Interviewer(s)</b>	Janet Hasulak
<b>Interviewee(s)</b>	Lois Smith Giordano
<b>Others Present</b>	Carmen Giordano, husband Alex Giordano, grandson

**It's April 3, and I'm here with Lois Giordano and we are recording her history.**

**Question: What is your full name and your maiden name?**

My maiden name was Lois Ann Smith, a real Hammonton name.

**Question: I don't need to ask you how to spell that, that's wonderful. And your name now is?**

Lois Giordano.

**Question: Do you mind me asking your age?**

Eighty-one.

**Question: What was your date of birth?**

January 25, 1941. And I was born at the Swenson Nursing Home.

**Question: Is that right here in Hammonton?**

The building is still there. It's at the corner of Horton and Pleasant Street. The building is still there, I think my uncle owns it or did. I grew up in Hammonton and never lived anywhere else.

**Question: Where did you go to school?**

In Hammonton.

**Question: Hammonton Public School?**

Yes, I went to public schools.

**Question: Do you remember some of the names of some of your teachers?**

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Miss Wood and Mrs. Lobbley were my kindergarten teachers. I don't remember my 1<sup>st</sup> Grade teacher. We had Mrs. Cathcart in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, I don't remember. 5<sup>th</sup> Grade was Mrs. Parisi. In 6<sup>th</sup> Grade, we went to changing classes.

**Question: That was a big deal when you look back in grade school.**

Oh, absolutely, I had never changed classes before. And I had Mrs. Rose Arico, Mr. Perna, history teacher, Mrs. Maloney.

**Question: I'm impressed that you can remember that many of them.**

Wait a minute, there's another one, that little, short with the white hair.

Mr. Giordano: Mrs. Fithian? No, that was 8<sup>th</sup> Grade.

I didn't have - oh, shoot, what was the name?

**Question: Did you both go to the same school?**

Yes.

**Question: How long have you known each other then?**

Mr. Giordano: Too long.

**Question: Since 7<sup>th</sup> Grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, Grade School?**

I was in the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade, and he was in high school. He was I think a Junior?

Mr. Giordano: Yes.

Yes, he was a Junior in High School. I was a safety patrol and he used to come and hang around my post and annoy me. And I was so sophisticated, I'd kick his leg. Anyway, I can't think of that teacher's name, she was so sweet. Short and with white hair.

7<sup>th</sup> Grade I had Miss Strickland, who made me walk around the room and drag my feet because my shoes were loose, and it annoyed her. She was Mrs. Doran's sister.

**Question: Was that a punishment?**

I guess.

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Mr. Giordano: That was Mrs. Tomasello.

No.

**Question: Speaking of that, was there corporal punishment back then? How would it be handled if you misbehaved.**

I had my hair pulled in 8<sup>th</sup> Grade.

**Question: By a teacher?**

Yes, by Mrs. McDougal. She was the best; she was the best. I was turned around in my seat talking to Peggy (Porter) Ingemi who sat behind me.

**Question: So, apparently, you feel you deserved it?**

Oh yes, I was a chatterbox.

**Question: She got your attention, apparently.**

She taught us penmanship the whole year. We had a whole year of penmanship, using the Palmer method.

**Question: You don't see that nowadays.**

We had Mrs. McDougal. God, she's the main one I remember because she's the one I liked the most.

**Question: Good to know.**

The cafeteria was in the basement of the building where we were in Middle School. That building is no longer there. Along about 10:00 o'clock the smells from the lunchroom would come upstairs and smell so good.

**Question: I bet that would get your appetite going.**

The food was really good, really good.

**Question: Who were your best friends?**

Peggy, Meme - let's see, would've been Mimi (Yehl) Weisel; Peggy (Porter) Ingemi, Alice (Gottuck) Pfeiffer, Rosalie (Garafolo) Romano, Deletta (Sole) Pinto. I had others but these were the closest.

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**Question: Are you still friendly with them? Did they remain in Hammonton as well?**

Peggy, Mimi, and several others are still in Hammonton. Alice is in Little Rock; Rosalie is somewhere in Maryland.

**Question: Do you keep in touch?**

Up until two years ago, when all hell broke loose [*editor added for clarity, she is referring to the COVID-19 pandemic*] we were getting together every other month for dinner. Men and women both, with or without spouses – their choice. I've got an email list of everybody that has email and a phone list of those without. We'd have as many as 25 people from our class, which was not very big to begin with. We didn't have any more than 90 in our graduating class.

**Question: That's amazing to me. You do realize how unusual it is, in this day and age, where people travel for jobs and everything, to be born and raised and live your lifetime in the same town with the same people and family around.**

Yes.

**Question: It is very special.**

There are quite a few classmates that are still in Hammonton. Carol (DiDomenico) Sanfillippo; Chris Rehman; Rose Marie Sacco and Frank Reid, classmates who married; Marie (Sbarra) Scaffidi; Barbara (Valentino) Adams; George Banff; Dennis Foster and quite a few others.

**Question: The Sacco name sounds familiar to me.**

Rose Marie Sacco.

**Question: There are a lot of Saccos around?**

Yes.

**Question: Stopping at your high school years, how did the girls and the boys dress back then?**

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The boy's wore pegged pants, they were tight at the ankle and then were sort of not bloused, but they were a little bit fuller. The pants were like regular pants, but they just tightened around the ankle.

**Question: They had pleats around the waist?**

Yes, I don't know how they got them on. I know more about what the guys wore than the girls. They would turn up their t-shirts and if they smoked, they would have a pack of cigarettes in the cuff of their shirt.

**Question: That's a Jersey thing, of course.**

Mr. Giordano: In school.

Yes. Ducktail, they called it a DA for duck's ass haircut, the sharp looking guys had those. I got one after I graduated 8<sup>th</sup> Grade and had the DA, going into high school.

**Question: That was a big thing back then. Do you remember the group Sha Na Na Na?**

Of course.

**Question: They kind of epitomized - you can look up the group Sha Na Na on YouTube and you'll see the outfits of the time that you're describing.**

Yes.

**Question: That was a good example. He would wear the jeans and roll them up and white t-shirts or the black.**

We had a group of boys, they weren't really a gang as such, they were a group of friends/classmates who had jackets that said "Earth Angels" on the back. There was a song that was very popular around 1954, 1955 "Earth Angel". I can't remember who did it, but they were the Earth Angels with black jackets with white lettering.

**Question: I do remember that song.**

They were cool.

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**Question: I don't remember the words, I could probably hum it, but I'll spare you.**

[Singing] Earth angel, earth angel, will you be mine.

Mr. Giordano: Endure if I have to.

**Question: That's a dancing song. It's a very, very sweet slow-dancing song.**

We had dances at the Fire Hall every Friday night, there would be a dance at the Fire Hall.

**Question: Did you and a lot of your friends attend?**

Oh, yes. That was in the middle of town. That's where Adams, Rehmann and Heggan is now, isn't it? Wasn't that in that area?

Mr. Giordano: Next to it, the Fire House was next.

Next door. So that was in that center block on Bellevue Avenue. We loved American Bandstand. We lived for American Bandstand. You came home from school and immediately put on American Bandstand at 4:00 o'clock or whatever time it came on. That was so you could learn all the new dances because every week the South Philly kids made up a new dance.

Mr. Giordano: Yes, but you were lucky because you were the first house on your street to have a TV, remember?

Yes, we were. The TV screen was about this big around. (12" circular screen)

**Question: That's pretty cool.**

Black and white. "Don't sit too close, it'll ruin your eyes."

**Question: Oh yes, I remember hearing that as a child, as well. I remember practicing dances myself. You probably got about ten years on me, but I remember some of the things you're talking about. We looked up to the older girls and guys.**

The kids in South Philly were fantastic. A new song would come out and they'd make up a dance to go with it. And then, before you knew it, the whole country's doing this dance.

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**Question: And name the dance.**

The Stroll, the Cha-lypso, the Pony, The Mashed Potato.

**Question: The Jerk.**

One of our classmates taught me The Mashed Potato in gym class.

**Question: Those were important things.**

Certainly.

**Question: I remember going to a Sweet Sixteen party for one of my granddaughters and wanting to see, how do the kids dance now. There was no dancing.**

They don't.

**Question: They group dance, they all kind of jumped around to some interesting music. Am I right? Isn't that what is going on?**

Mr. Giordano: Unfortunately, yes.

**Question: There were guys and girls mixing a little bit, here and there, but they - I don't know how to describe it.**

Mr. Giordano: It's more so like a jumping up and down type thing.

**Question: Yes. It's like you and all your friends get on the dance floor and you're like 'Let's do our own thing to the music.'**

Mr. Giordano: Yes.

**Question: 'We get a little crazy and do whatever we feel like doing to the beat.' Very different than the described dances with names.**

Yes. For slow dancing, all they do is hang onto to each other and sway to the music.

**Question: When you were in Grade School or maybe Junior High, did you have any classes in ballroom dancing?**



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We had Square dancing in gym class, that's the only dance I remember. Do you remember any?

Mr. Giordano: No.

That was it. It was fun, but we never went anywhere where they did Square dancing. They could have taught us something a little bit more practical that we could do.

**Question: Probably the Ballroom dancing would've been a little bit more practical.**

Yes.

**Question: How did the girls wear their hair back then?**

Most the girls wore long hair, page boy, some would have bangs, some not, ponytail. Saddle shoes, white socks with dog collars.

**Question: What exactly was that?**

Dog collar went around your ankle. Not exactly an ankle bracelet but we wore them a little bit higher, it would be leather. I had a red one and it had little studs on it, dopey, but in style at the time.

**Question: It was a fad then everybody liked.**

Yes. Poodle skirts, that flared like a circle skirt with a crinoline underneath.

**Question: Did you ever wear slacks to school?**

Oh, no. I didn't wear slacks even to work until early '70s, late '60s, when it was finally permitted to wear pantsuits as long as the jacket and pants matched.

**Question: It would never be jeans.**

Oh, no. We only wore jeans to football games or on weekends.

**Question: This is definitely a slanted female question, but did you ever go without stockings on? What was it considered if you didn't wear hose?**

You wouldn't think of it.

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**Question: Was it considered trashy to not wear hose?**

You just never thought of it. We talked about this at work the other day with a co-worker who remembers wearing stockings with a garter belt. Those little clippy things gouged into your legs, front and back!

**Question: They were far from sexy, they were tortuous.**

Yes. Of course, you didn't have a short skirt, you had a long skirt, because if you had a short skirt, you'd see where they connected. Pantyhose, when did pantyhose come out?

**Question: I want to say mid-sixties.**

Could be. They were good. Well, they were an improvement, let's put it that way. But when they start to slip...

**Question: You better have the right size, right?**

They could be uncomfortable.

**Question: These are the practical problems that us ladies had to deal with. We've talked about your teenage years some. For entertainment, that dance hall that you mentioned, was that the popular thing to be doing?**

And we had a movie theater in town. It was on the corner of Bellevue and Third. We'd be at movies one night a week, didn't we? When we were dating. I started dating when I was 13 and he was 16 and we would go to the movies. He'd get a ride into town and my mother would drop me off. We'd go to the movies and then, would we go get something to eat afterwards, sometimes? No, couldn't afford it. You'd have to be home by 9:00 o'clock anyway.

Mr. Giordano: Yes.

I think my mother would take him home sometimes and drop him off.

**Question: You weren't even driving yet.**

No, he was too young, he was 16.

**Question: What is your spouse's name?**

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That would be Carmen Giordano. (My next husband's going to have a shorter name 😊.)

**Question: Where was Carmen born?**

In this house.

**Question: Right in this house, oh, my gosh, wow. Kudos to your mother, Carmen.**

Was the Swenson Nursing Home there then? Was that there? Or the Esposito Home? Were they there then?

Mr. Giordano: No, I don't think so.

You wouldn't remember because you were just born.

Alex: Well, they probably couldn't afford to, it probably cost money.

And they probably didn't have the money anyway, they were farmers.

Mr. Giordano: I think quite a few births were in the house people were living in at the time.

**Question: I'm just thinking it wasn't close to the pain medication, that's why I say kudos to your mother.**

No pain medication.

**Question: She wasn't close to the pain medication, so that's impressive to me.**

January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1938, he was the first baby of the year in Hammonton that year.

**Question: Did they give any prizes? Did your parents ever talk about that?**

Mr. Giordano: We got a year's supply of milk from La Rosa Dairies and there's a couple of other things that I've completely forgotten about.

**Question: A year's supply of milk is valuable.**

Mr. Giordano: Oh, back then, oh, yes. Tell me about it, yes.

**Question: Your parents must have been pleased.**

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Sam Pietrofitta on Chew Road – one street over - was born what, a couple of minutes after you?

Mr. Giordano: Yes.

Dr. Rubba was going back and forth between the two houses, both mothers were in labor. The doctor would come here and then go there and Carmen was born first before Sam. Carmen and Sam were buddies.

**Question: I used to work in labor and delivery, so I can relate, that's wild.**

That's why Sam and Carmen were in the same class in school.

**Question: So how old were you when you actually got married?**

Nineteen.

**Question: And how old was Carmen then?**

Three years older, 22.

**Question: And what year was that?**

1960.

**Question: How long did you know each other before you got married?**

Six years.

**Question: You grew up together.**

Pretty much.

**Question: You dated from such a young age. Did you get married in a church?**

Yes, St. Joseph's Church, the old one.

**Question: How many children did you have?**

Three.

**Question: What are their names and birth dates?**

David Sebastian, born October 23, 1961; Diane, born June 22, 1965, and Janis, born April 7, 1968.

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**Question: Did any of your children remain in Hammonton?**

David and Alex are right back there. Janis is across town and Diane is in -

Mr. Giordano: Forked River.

Waretown.

**Question: That's nice that the whole family's still here in the Jersey area. I bet that makes it nice for holidays.**

Yes.

**Question: Describe where you lived to me, as a child, if you could. How many siblings did you have?**

I had two brothers; I was the oldest. My brother was just here earlier today on his way back to South Carolina. Neither of us can remember all of us sleeping in one bedroom, but we must have because the house only had two bedrooms for a long, time until my father added on two rooms.

**Question: That probably would've been when you were younger.**

I got my room, when I think I was about 12, you'd think I would remember, but I don't. I just remember my father coming up the steps telling my brothers, "Don't make me get the belt." My brothers tormented each other in bed every night. We had an outhouse, as did most homes in this area.

Alex: Well, didn't this house have an outhouse until you got married, right?

Yes, it was still there. His father used it until he died.

Alex: When did you add the bathroom up here?

Mr. Giordano: Early 50s.

Alex: They had a doublewide out there.

**Question: That's impressive, a two-seater. How was that handled in the winter? Did you actually use chamber pots?**

Mr. Giordano: Run like hell.

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She said, did you use a chamber pot ever? You probably did.

Mr. Giordano: Yes, we did because at that time it had to be a pot, we had no plumbing at all upstairs.

**Question: What about getting water? Did you have a pump outside, or did you have water in the kitchen?**

Mr. Giordano: It was amazing in the house, and it was just located right here, at that time.

There was a small sink right there, where the refrigerator is.

Mr. Giordano: There was no central heat, there was a stove over there.

**Question: Like over in this corner?**

Behind this chair.

Alex: Do you think that's a cabinet? No, it's not.

**Question: I'll be darned.**

This is a cabinet, but that's just a door with a chimney behind it.

Mr. Giordano: So, when we bathed, a pot of water on the stove, we'd heat it up, ran upstairs in a tub, a washtub, and that's how we bathed back then.

**Question: I assume you didn't bathe more than once a week, that's pretty labor intensive.**

Mr. Giordano: If they could catch me.

My mother always said that when they were little, the youngest one got washed first and they all used the same water, because it was too much of a hassle. Did you do that too?

Mr. Giordano: I was the only one here, everybody else was out of the house. I was the youngest, all my brothers and sisters disappeared, they had their own lives.

**Question: How many siblings did you have?**

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Mr. Giordano: We were seven altogether.

**Question: I'm the oldest of seven, so I can relate to the big family.**

Mr. Giordano: Fortunately, I was the youngest on that. It was an unexpected birth. They thought mom was ill with a tumor and I was the tumor. I was called that for some years.

**Question: I can't imagine your siblings leaving that alone.**

Mr. Giordano: It was quite late in my mother's life.

**Question: They probably assumed that as opposed to her being pregnant, that something was wrong, as opposed to her having another baby.**

Mr. Giordano: Yes.

**Question: What's the age difference between you and your next oldest sibling?**

Mr. Giordano: Eleven years.

**Question: No wonder, your mother thought she was finished with childbearing.**

He had brothers that were older than my parents.

Alex: How old was your oldest, 20 years older than you?

Mr. Giordano: More than that. Firstborn passed away. Tony was the second born, he was given the same name as the first one that passed away. I'd say it was pretty close to 30 years difference between Tony and me.

**Question: He could've been your father, easily, considering his age. Were you raised more like an only child then, with that big of an age gap? Were most of them out of the house?**

Mr. Giordano: Yes, everybody was just about out of the house when they had me. They used to come back and visit every once in a while. Like I said, I caught all the abuse from everybody else and -

Your brothers, you mean?

Mr. Giordano: Yes.

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**Question: They were tough on you.**

Mr. Giordano: Yes. When I wasn't disciplined by Mom and Pop, I had a couple of brothers who took advantage of the situation and used to clobber me pretty good.

**Question: I get the picture. They thought they were your father.**

Mr. Giordano: They showed me the straight and narrow path.

**Question: I get the picture, yes. Back to you, Lois. I'd like to interview you, Mr. Giordano, separately if I could at some time if you'd be willing to sit down with me. I'll let you have the questions ahead of time, so you can think about them.**

Mr. Giordano: My life has been pretty uneventful compared to hers.

**Question: Everything I've heard sounds eventful to me. It's a different lifestyle.**

Alex: They're not that different in age but they grew up in different classes almost. They were the poor of the poor, whereas as they, Mrs. Giordano - well, I mean, they had a TV.

**Question: They were well off.**

Alex: They had a TV.

**Question: Yes, and that was considered a big deal.**

Alex: Yes. They grew up struggling with a farm back here.

Did you have a party line? Did you have a phone?

Mr. Giordano: Yes.

Yes. We had a party line, too.

Mr. Giordano: I think there were six people on the line.

**Question: I remember party lines. I remember those. It could be fun, though. Because you could eavesdrop. You could pick up and eavesdrop. And then, I remember when you had to make phone call -**



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Mr. Giordano: Just by accident if you picked it up, there was somebody on it. Can I use the phone for a couple of seconds, then you could get back to your - they used to back off.

**Question: Usually, people would be courteous.**

Mr. Giordano: And at that time, there wasn't that many houses down the street. It was fun. It was fun in a way on that.

**Question: It kept you in touch with your neighbors, whether you liked it or not.**

Mr. Giordano: Fortunately, like I said, we didn't have nasty neighbors on that. Some of them took a little bit longer on there. But they backed off and said, "Hey, sure, go ahead."

**Question: I remember that a little bit. And my husband talks about pranking people on the phone with the party line that his mother had. He says he remembers his mother giving people holy hell because they wouldn't get off. She'd get on the phone and just give them holy hell for not giving up the phone line. We're spoiled now. Now, we walk around with these phones in our pockets. Everybody has one.**

My mother could talk on the phone for hours at a time. I hate to be on the phone, but she would talk to her friends all day.

**Question: I think back then the women didn't get out so much. You didn't have a second vehicle. Women rarely worked outside of the home. Most of the women did not work. The only way to stay in touch would be if you had a phone. That was a big time visit for them. That one important phone call.**

Mr. Giordano: If society was back then like it is now, we probably would've end up killing ourselves on who's got the line and who doesn't have the line on that. I'm going to say, "Everybody back off." They knew somebody else needed it and all that.

**Question: Do you think there was more common courtesy back then?**

Mr. Giordano: Yes, oh, definitely. Definitely, no question about it.

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**Question: I think we're just so impatient. We're so used to that immediacy with everything. Our phones, our TV, our screens.**

Mr. Giordano: Yes. We want it now. We want it now.

**Question: Just look at how the computers have advanced. We used to have dial-up computer and we were oh, so thrilled just to be able to e-mail somebody and not have to pay 50 cents for the postage stamp. We were impressed by that. Now, we've got the immediacy of the laptops. This is a small computer. We've been emailing on it. We're texting on it all the time. There's good about it and there's a lot of bad about it because the immediacy invades our privacy as well and our peace of mind, I think. I like the ability to turn it off when you need to and not be connected. That's a plus. But just goes to show you how much has changed over our lifetimes. Because you've seen things go from multiple party lines and needing to ask neighbors, "May I use the phone line?" to everybody carrying a cell phone in their pocket. That is actually a miniature computer that allows you to have all that immediacy. It's pretty phenomenal. What was one of your favorite places in Hammonton that's no longer there? I think you might have touched on this. Well, the movie theater. You did mention the movie theater.**

Yes, movie theater was good. Midway Diner isn't there anymore.

Alex: You're probably going to say the old Ricca's Bakery, right? It's still there, but it's not really -

Yes.

**Question: Where was the Midway Diner? I've heard about that. I heard somebody lecture that.**

It was where the Wawa is now. On the Pike.

Alex: The new one that they just built.

**Question: The new one there with the gas pumps?**

Yes. That had been there for years and years and years.

**Question: Was there a Silver Coin Diner?**

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That's still there.

**Question: Was the Midway there simultaneously with the Silver Coin?**

The Midway was there before. Midway was there forever. I always remember the Midway being there.

**Question: And Silver Coin?**

Silver Coin came later. What else isn't there anymore? What else isn't around anymore?

Mr. Giordano: Lots of little places there.

Lots of little stores that the people -

**Question: You've seen a lot of businesses come and go then?**

Yes. I think it's just because nobody in the family wanted to take them over. On Third Street, there was Piggy Lucca's -

Mr. Giordano: Bakery.

Was it a bakery or a store? He sold lunch meat and other things in there too.

Mr. Giordano: Principally it was a bakery.

Yes. And Mazzagatti's had a store across the street. That's been gone for quite a while. Was it Baglivo's on Second Street, Olivo's Market on Central Avenue, Andolora's on Fairview across from Ricca's Bakery, Amendolia, on 13<sup>th</sup> Street.

**Question: Another food market?**

That was pretty good size.

Mr. Giordano: Calderone's.

Calderone's was here on Railroad Avenue. The building is still there. The building used to be a macaroni factory according to my grandmother, so we always called it the Macaroni Factory. I think a Spanish store in there now.

**Question: What about Collins Dairy? Was that in existence?**

That was on Bellevue Avenue.

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**Question: Bellevue in Valley?**

Valley, yes.

**Question: I know some of the houses are supposedly on the property that used to be the cow pasture.**

I can't remember the name of the people. Mitchell. Mitchell's lived in Collins house. If they're still there or not, I don't know.

**Question: Would it have been Annabelle Mitchell?**

Yes.

**Question: That family? Oh, she lives two doors down from me. She just turned 91. She's amazing.**

I think her son went to school with your dad.

Alex: Who?

Mitchell, David Mitchell, I think his name was. Abbott's Dairies was on Horton Street, I think.

Alex: Abbott's Dairies. Cleaning out her mother's house, her dad was a milkman for Abbott's, right?

Yes.

Alex: And there was a whole bunch of old Abbott's metal containers, milk boxes, and milk jugs and stuff. We took them home.

**Question: Glass ones. They're unusual looking. And you don't see that anymore. I would like to ask some questions about your mother to know her history. What was your mother's name, including her maiden name?**

Matilda Rita Ford.

**Question: Matilda, that's an old fashion name.**

She went by Rita. She didn't want to be called Matilda. I wouldn't either.

**Question: Where was she born?**

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Alex: That's a tough one.

I don't know if she was born in Hammonton or not. I think so.

**Question: Do you know where she grew up?**

In Hammonton. When she was very little, I'm going to guess around two or three, they lived in Friendship for a brief time.

**Question: Where's that located?**

Alex: You don't know.

She doesn't know where Friendship is.

Alex: Hilarious, isn't it? It was a cranberry-picking town.

Very small.

Alex: The town consisted of about five houses. That's it.

**Question: No wonder.**

Alex: And it was the DeMarco's -

A.R. DeMarco.

Alex: A.R.DeMarco.

DeMarco family.

**Question: I know the name.**

Alex: Cranberry bog.

That's the big house across over the corner. That was Mark DeMarco's house.

**Question: The one you mentioned?**

A.R. DeMarco was his father, and he owned all the cranberry bogs up in Burlington County. He died in a car accident on New Year's Eve and his children took over the business and eventually, they sold out to Ocean Spray.

Alex: Granny lived there for a little while.

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The DeMarco's owned those houses and anybody who lived there I guess rented. Or maybe not. Maybe they worked in the bogs, and they got to live there for free. That sounds more like it.

Question: Is that a little company town?

Yes.

Alex: We went there.

We've been there. We checked it out.

Alex: Last summer, a couple of summers ago and none of the houses are still there, but the foundations are still there.

**Question: You could see and visualize where the buildings were.**

Alex: Yes.

Yes, the foundations are still there.

**Question: Now, that makes it easier.**

Alex: She was born in 1918. If she was three, four years old, that would have been early 20s and the roads are still dirt back there. There are no paved roads to get to Friendship. You can imagine how out in the middle of nowhere it used to be.

It is nowhere.

Alex: Right now. It's about as far away as you can get in New Jersey from anybody. Back then, it must've been really out in the middle of nowhere.

**Question: You know what amazes me is that - and this has not had anything to do with your history particularly. But people across the country, when you mention New Jersey, they consider it mafia land. They think of Jersey City, this big suburb or New York. Where you really are a farm country.**

Alex: Down south, yes.

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**Question: You were born on a farm, yes, South Jersey. I know we're going back a few generations talking about this town, Friendship. But even so, it's so not the stereotype that people have of New Jersey.**

Alex: I know. It's funny.

The Pines are the best.

**Question: Yes, they are. I would agree.**

Mr. Giordano: Everybody looks at North Jersey and they think the whole state is the same as what you see up there.

**Question: They do.**

Mr. Giordano: The refineries, all that mess up there.

**Question: The pollution.**

Alex: Yes, dirt.

Mr. Giordano: They think it's the same way down here.

**Question: Bristol's called the Garden State and that came from somewhere. They are the Garden State, and this area proves it as you drive further south. Let's see. We're talking about your mom, to get back on track. Can you describe her physically like what she looked like?**

She was my height, maybe a little heavier in her youth, not too much. She was pretty when she was young. My father was very handsome. She worked when they were first married. Both of them worked in one of the clothing factories. After I was born, she didn't work, and she didn't go to work until 1965. She decided she didn't want to babysit for me anymore. Two kids were too many. One was fine, but two was too many. She went out, despite the fact that my father said, "No wife of mine needs to work," and found herself a job at W. T. Grant.

**Question: I remember that store. Five and 10 cents store?**

That was on the Pike where the - what's there?

Alex: The AutoZone. I think now Sherwin-Williams is there.

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And Sherwin-Williams.

Alex: Well before though, when her mother was little, they would move around every year, every couple of months.

They had no money.

Alex: They had no money.

They were so poor, and my grandfather wasn't very ambitious. My grandmother didn't work, and they had nothing.

**Question: Did they rent? They went from one rental to another?**

Yes.

**Question: All in and around Hammonton?**

Alex: Yes. Well, a lot of their stomping grounds were up Pleasant Mills Road up towards Batsto area.

My grandfather was a Piney. When they first were married, they lived in Batsto.

**Question: What was his name?**

Ford.

**Question: His last name was Ford? What was his first name?**

Robert Stewart Ford.

**Question: Thank you.**

Not in those houses that are on that little street in Batsto. Sometimes they open them up and you can go in and look around. Not there.

Alex: All the way back.

It was way back. There's a road that goes way back along the lake here and the road goes way back here. It was back in there.

**Question: I can picture it.**



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Only one house. There was nothing around ever. God knows what year this would have been. In the 1910s or somewhere around that?

Alex: Yes, late 1800s.

It was the 1800s. And my grandmother was scared to death so that they didn't live there very long. Then, they came into Hammonton.

**Question: That was very isolated.**

Oh, yes. It's isolated now.

Alex: I remember her telling me the story that her parents would go by the riverside and by all the lakes and stuff in the Batsto area. I think there's Mullica River that runs right down there too. Once you go further up north towards New Gretna. They lived up in New Gretna too for a little while. I remember her telling me that. On the banks of the Mullica River, her parents would dig up moss and sell at the funeral home because they'd lay it -

**Question: Why would they -**

No, no. That was Aunt Jessie.

Alex: Yes, but she told me her parents and that she was -

Funeral directors. They used it to line the coffins.

**Question: Oh, I had no idea.**

Alex: Maybe it was her relatives when she went back up there.

It was Pop Ford's, sister, Jessie.

**Question: They had a good market?**

Yes.

Alex: Yes.

**Question: People are always going to be being born and passing. They had a good little business going for themselves.**

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She lived on Washington Street, and she remembered as a child going along the railroad tracks and picking dandelion greens for food that her mother will cook then.

**Question: Foraging?**

Yes. Her parents would go into the woods during huckleberry season. Not blueberries, huckleberries.

**Question: They grew wild?**

Yes.

Alex: Yes, before they were blueberries.

All over the place. I remember going. I was about five. I remember going. They had bushel baskets with a rag tied to the basket so it could hang over their shoulders with the basket in front. They called it knocking. They'd knock the berries off the bushes into the baskets.

**Question: Oh, I'll be darned. They weren't hand picking. They were knocking.**

They were knocking. They were knocking. That's how many berries there were in the pine woods.

**Question: I can only imagine.**

The soil has a different smell where the huckleberries grow. I'll never forget it – I love it.

Alex: Wherever you go in South Jersey, almost every single wooded area you see about, I don't know, between one to three feet off the ground is how tall they grow are wild huckleberry plants.

**Question: That's not very tall.**

Alex: No.

**Question: You could recognize the huckleberry plants yourself?**

Alex: Oh, yes, absolutely. We have a million of them back there. If they grow old enough, they'll grow up like a real blueberry tree. They also do control burns now.

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After every couple of years, they get dwindled down and then they'd grow back up and then they burn them again, so they don't get a chance to get tall. But back there, where there are no burns back there, they're the size of a blueberry bush.

Huckleberries this year.

Alex: All right.

Get me some.

Alex: They're about this big. They're about an eighth of a blueberry. Very, very small. Same taste, if not better, honestly. They're a little bit more sour. But same overall taste. They look the same, just scaled down.

**Question: I can picture them. I don't think I've ever eaten a huckleberry.**

Alex: They're good. Well, you can't just have one because you won't taste it. You need a handful of them because they're so small. That was before blueberries. That's how they made blueberries. How they got blueberries. They started breeding.

A woman doctor was it? I'll be darned. Was it a woman doctor?

Alex: I forget. Yes.

Up this area somewhere, she developed the cultivated blueberry. And it's probably in that book.

Alex: Yes, the Hammonton book.

No, no. That book I bought a Batsto.

Alex: Oh, that one.

It's probably in there.

**Question: Alex, have you done a lot of research on your family?**

Alex: Yes.

**Question: For a younger person, you're pretty knowledgeable about your family's history.**

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Alex: I listen, when spoken to, which a lot of people don't do. Even when I was little, I was always asking questions and I remember everything. When her mother, my great-grandmom was alive, I would always be picking her -every Sunday, she'd come over for dinner. I'd be picking her brain every single time she come home.

**Question: A pleasure to see a young person that's that interested in what the family has to say and the history of their own family.**

Alex: Yes.

She lived to be 102.

**Question: God bless her.**

We just lost her last year.

Alex: Yes.

**Question: You have good genes.**

We'll see. But after they picked those berries, they brought them home. They lived on Washington Street. They had a contraption that they had built in the basement. It was a conveyor belt, hand driven. It was on an angle like this, and it had carpet on it. They would pour the berries on the top, crank the handle so that the carpet would rotate. The berries would roll off into a trough at the bottom. The leaves and twigs would stick to the carpet.

**Question: That was how they cleaned them?**

That's how they cleaned them and then they took them to the market to sell.

**Question: Do they have to be flushed with water or anything like that?**

If they did, they didn't do it.

**Question: But that was a way to get the other debris off.**

Just separate it from leaves and the twigs.

**Question: Got you. That was probably all the cleaning that was necessary that time.**

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There was no fertilizer, or anything sprayed on them. They were out in the woods.

Alex: Yes. All natural.

**Question: You could just pick them and eat them.**

Yes.

**Question: Wow. Did people make jam out of all those?**

Sure.

**Question: Jam pies?**

My father remembered having one summer where they had nothing to eat. They were so poor. They had nothing to eat but blueberries. That's all they ate all summer.

**Question: Wow. We're so spoiled nowadays. And that's a good thing. We've come a long way from people being that destitute or that poor.**

Living through the Depression created a need for my father to accumulate. When he died, he must have had 15 brand new shirts still in the packages. They would go shopping and he would buy all kinds of things that they just put in the attic just to have.

**Question: Because they were a good price?**

Yes.

**Question: It was their backup, so to speak.**

Yes.

**Question: In case who knows what happened, the stock market fell or whatever.**

Yes.

**Question: It was a different mindset. Very different mindset than we see nowadays. Did your mother finish school?**

She graduated from Hammonton High School, Class of 1936.

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Alex: I have her yearbook.

My father only went to eighth grade because he had to go work.

**Question: When did your parents marry? Did they marry young also?**

I think they married right after she got out of high school. They were both 18 and were married about four years before I was born. I think they got married in 1936 in November.

**Question: It was your mother that you said lived to be over 100? What cemetery is she in then?**

Alex: Greenmount.

Greenmount.

**Question: How did she die? If you don't mind me asking.**

At 102? Everything gave out.

**Question: Yes, I would assume.**

Just faded out. She wasn't sick.

**Question: It's the way to do it.**

Alex: Yes, she wasn't sick.

She had never been sick.

**Question: That's a blessing. It's really a blessing. And what was your father's full name?**

William Harvey Smith.

**Question: Did he have a nickname?**

Wild Bill.

Alex: Wild Bill.

**Question: Well, that tells me something about him.**

Alex: Oh, my God.

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**Question: Can you tell me any stories about him? Any of you?**

Let's see.

Alex: Well, I have one from Philip across the street who would have been a great

-

I think they did do Phil.

Alex: Did you do Philip?

**Question: I did not. Someone else from the Historical Society may have.**

Alex: Maybe Eileen did?

I think Mike said that they did Phil.

Alex: Well, that's good then.

Question: I'm going to look into that.

Alex: Yes. Philip Barbagallo. Live right across the street in the house right over there.

Right across the street.

**Question: What's his wife's name?**

Jean.

Alex: Jean.

Question: No, it's not that person I'm thinking of then. Philip.

What did Philip tell you?

Alex: Philip told me everything and anything. I'll tell you as soon as you're done writing it down. Philip was a little bit younger than granny by about six or seven years, right?

Something like that.

Alex: He was in his 90s when he passed. He was 92, maybe 91. But when I was little, I would always ride my bike right outside here and he'd be sitting

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underneath his tree every single day. Every day, in the summer, every single day. I'd stop over there every single day in the summer. I was only between 10 and 13 years old.

He was very old. But he and Philip got along real good.

Alex: And he loved me.

**Question: You were buddies.**

Alex: And he would tell me everything about everything. And he was friends with Wild Bill, with her dad.

Well, they worked together.

Alex: They worked together at Abbotts.

**Question: He talked a lot about your great-grandfather?**

Alexys talked a lot about him. And one of the cool stories I remember him telling me is that one day, the boss pissed him off somehow. I think in the beginning of the day, they work on the conveyor that brings down the bottles of milk out into - it's like a thin conveyor and then it brings it out onto a big round conveyor like a big circle. A huge, huge circle that rotates so when the milk goes from the long conveyor to the circle one, the people on the circle one picked them up and placed them on a pallet or on a -

The crates?

Alex: Yes, the crates to be placed. It doesn't matter if you miss one because it's going to come around again. That's what the circle was for, you know what I mean?

**Question: Right. Got you.**

Alex: He was on the line one day towards the end of the long conveyor right in front of the circle and the circle was huge. The boss was also working, but the boss was on the circle part. He was picking up the crates. He picked up the milk and put them on the crates. He said something to my great-grandfather, her father, that pissed him off, which I can't remember. But he started throwing the



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milk all over. He started getting them and throwing them on the circle by the 10s, by the 15s.

**Question: More than they could keep up with?**

Alex: And overwhelming them and he got in a fight with the boss and everything. The moral of the story is, Philip had about a million of those stories about him where he was just ornery. Wild Bill, he was just ornery. He would do things on purpose to get under your skin.

**Question: And that's how he entertained themselves?**

Alex: Yes.

**Question: He earned his nickname.**

He dished it out much better than he could take it. One of the things he did when he was a kid was - he had two brothers and he would move the bed in the bedroom and call his brother up and the brother would jump in the bed that wouldn't be there.

**Question: Oh my gosh.**

Stupid things. He was ornery, but a real softie at heart.

**Question: Brothers have no mercy sometimes. I've learned that from having grandsons and my own son.**

He had a store after he left the milk company. He drove house to house first delivering milk.

**Question: He delivered?**

Yes. Then, the business started changing. I guess more stores were carrying milk in the stores or whatever. He was doing wholesale driving a big truck. Then he had a used car lot. That didn't pan out very well. Then, he opened a gun shop, gun hunting and fishing. That was down in Elwood where the Elwood Post Office is now on the White Horse Pike.

**Question: I've heard of Elwood.**

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Yes. And he had a dog, Pepper and Pepper was his watchdog. If somebody came in the store that looked a little shady, he'd say, "Pepper, watch him."

**Question: That would just be enough to keep people on their toes, I bet.**

Yes.

**Question: What type of dog was Pepper?**

German Shepherd.

**Question: That would put the fear of God in you.**

Somebody came in and made a remark about Pepper. That dog's going to get me or something. My father says, "That dog will get you before you get out the door. Don't test her."

**Question: Pepper lived up to her reputation at that point.**

Yes, she did.

**Question: That's so cool. There was no fancy ring doorbells or security cameras?**

No, no.

**Question: All a person needed back then was a German Shepherd. back. Life was a lot simpler. How old was your dad when he passed?**

Mr. Giordano: 80.

Was it just 80? I can never remember.

**Question: Is he over in the same cemetery as -**

Yes. They're next to each other.

**Question: And what is the name of that cemetery again?**

Greenmount.

**Question: Greenmount. How did he pass? How did he die?**

He worried himself to death.

Mr. Giordano: Well, he had a heart attack on the operating table.

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Yes. He had worked at the shipyard as a young man.

**Question: That's quite a physical job.**

Asbestos. He was diagnosed with asbestosis. The minute he found out he had it, it was like it's an automatic death sentence to him.

**Question: It got to him mentally then?**

Yes. And he just worried. He was a worrier anyway. He worried if he didn't have something to worry about. That's the kind of guy he was.

**Question: I know the type.**

He was at the hospital, and he ended up having a heart attack in the hospital.

Alex: A good place to have a heart attack, but not for him.

And the thing is, he came from family with long lives- his mother lived to be 94. He had aunts and uncles that lived over 100.

**Question: That was considered the ripe old age back then and that was living a long time back then.**

Yes.

**Question: When you think about it, antibiotics weren't on the scene for a lot of these people. Just to have lived that long and survived various infections was really saying something.**

Yes.

**Question: Did your parents ever talk about how they met and fell in love?**

They were neighbors. They both moved around a lot.

**Question: Your mother married the boy next door?**

Yes.

**Question: Tell me more about your mom. What were her likes and dislikes and her hobbies?**

Well, she's a good baker. Made the best pie crust.

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**Question: You remember that, Alex?**

Alex: Every Sunday, she'd bring her pie. Something different.

**Question: It must have been good pie. You're still talking about it today.**

Alex: Yes.

Did a great apple pie. I think her apple pie was the best.

Alex: Her apple pie and her pumpkin pie.

Her pumpkin pie was good too. I have her recipes. Her eyesight started to go. She had macular degeneration. It was getting harder and harder for her to see. I took all her favorite recipes. I made a cookbook for her, and I made them in as big a font as I could get so that they would fit all in one page.

**Question: That's nice of you.**

She was able to read it and baked well into her 90's. And of course, I still have them because they're saved on my computer. She liked to bake. She sewed my clothes when I was little. Loved the casinos. Once the casinos came, she was hooked.

**Question: She lived in the right place for that, close enough to get there.**

Yes. She'd like to go on the bus trips. She liked those. She and my dad loved to play pinochle with aunts and uncles and friends.

Question: Did your father ever cook?

No.

**Question: The kitchen was your mother's domain.**

Oh, absolutely.

**Question: And your dad, did he have a garden?**

Yes.

**Question: Raised animals?**

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At one time, he had beagles. He had a couple of beagles in his older years after he wasn't a milkman anymore. After he had his own business he started - he could never do anything halfway. It always had to be crazy. A little garden ended up into

-

**Question: He threw himself into everything.**

Everything he could fit. Did he have corn? I don't know. He had everything.

Alex: He had put irrigation, actual sprinklers.

Yes, he had it irrigated.

Alex: He had a field about the size of this, back here.

**Question: A large area.**

It was jam packed.

**Question: Did he work that all by himself?**

Yes.

Alex: Canned tomatoes.

**Question: That's a lot of elbow grease.**

Alex: Yes.

Yes, my mother did the canned tomatoes. More so when I was a kid. She did peaches, pickled eggplant, tomatoes.

**Question: You'd live on through the winter months?**

Yes. When she died, there were still canned goods down her basement from 1965.

Alex: No joke. We had to clean them out.

**Question: Were they still edible?**

Oh, who checked? We got rid of it.

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Alex: They didn't look bad. Genuinely, they didn't look bad. But I wouldn't have tried it.

**Question: How many children did your mother have?**

Three. Me and two boys.

Question: Yourself and two brothers?

Yes.

**Question: And what were your brother's names?**

Robert William and William Harvey Smith, Jr.

**Question: Do you recall their birth dates?**

Bobby's is August 13 and Billy's is April 14.

**Question: What was the birth order then?**

Bobby was first. Bobby was the older one. He was here a little while ago. And Billy was in April. Billy's, I think was April 14. Bobby's, I can't remember his. Bobby is about five years younger than me. And Billy is nine years younger than me.

**Question: Do you have any other stories about your brothers from when you were growing up when you were younger? From when children's still at home in your parents' home?**

One day, we had a screened-in porch. I was outside with my grandmother, my father's mother where my mother was. The two boys were on the back porch. And they had blinds that came down.

**Question: Like venetian blinds?**

No. Those -

**Question: Oh, the pull ones.**

Yes. You really couldn't see them. They couldn't see anybody out there. They're on the glider and they're practicing their cuss words. Laughing, just being silly, right? They weren't very old.

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**Question: They're trying the words for fun.**

I looked at my grandmother, and she looked at me, "They're going to get it." I don't know if it was my father or my mother that came up and they didn't see her coming.

**Question: Your parents overheard them?**

Yes. They got in trouble. They were having a good time.

**Question: What was the usual course of punishment back then for children? Because now, all the parents are usually big on timeout-type stuff.**

I don't ever remember getting punished.

**Question: You were the good child.**

I was good. I never did anything that was bad.

**Question: You took the line.**

And they'd get the belt. My mother was good with a wooden spoon, too. She was wicked with a wooden spoon.

Alex: You chased me a couple of times with that when I was little.

Yeah, it works.

**Question: My mother's favorite weapon was a hairbrush. I should relate to that. She didn't come after me with it too much because I was a good child. I took the line. I was sneakier. I just got away with stuff more.**

His mother has a broom and a shoe.

Mr. Giordano: Anything she had in her hands.

Alex: Remember your father threw a rock at you and then you thought -

Mr. Giordano: It wasn't a rock.

Alex: What did he throw you? He was going to run them over with the tractor. He thought he's going to run them over with the tractor and he threw something at you.

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Mr. Giordano: My father was a very laidback man.

Oh, he was so quiet and gentle.

Mr. Giordano: Took mountains to really get him upset. One day, I got him upset. I was fooling around with a baseball bat, and I laid it over the steps over here. And I ended out in the middle of the street, and he threw the baseball bat at me. And if I didn't jump, I wouldn't have no legs.

**Question: He was just pissed off you left it there? Because it was by the steps?**

Mr. Giordano: No, no, no. It was something else that I said.

Question: And the bat just happened to be within reach.

Mr. Giordano: Yes. That was the only time he ever got mad at me. I'm telling you; I did so many other things that he could have killed me. He wasn't a big man. He was 5'6", 139 pounds.

**Question: It sounds like he earned your respect.**

Mr. Giordano: Yes, no question about it. No question about it.

He was still alive when we got married. His mother had died in July. We were getting married in October. We were looking at apartments to rent.

**Question: She died relatively young then.**

She was 65.

Question: That's young by today's standards.

He was a lot older than her.

Mr. Giordano: He was 11 years older than her.

Yes. He was here by himself so we decided we better move in here so he wouldn't be by himself.

Question: Right after you got married, you moved in here?

We moved right in.

Question: And you raised your whole family here?



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Yes.

**Question: For forever. Wow.**

Yes. He was here when Janis was born. He lived for a while.

Mr. Giordano: 75.

He was older than 75.

Alex: No, 1975.

Oh, 1975. Yes.

**Question: That sounds right.**

Yes.

Mr. Giordano: He was 85 when he passed away.

**Question: Do you remember your grandparents? Were they around when you were little?**

Oh, yes. My kids had all four great-grandparents alive at one time.

**Question: They were very lucky.**

Yes.

**Question: How would you describe your grandmother? And what was her name?**

My mother's mother was Anna Vessella Ford. She was the oldest and pretty much the most neglected. She only went to school till third grade and had to go work. She said at one time she worked at the shoe factory in town. There was a shoe factory on Front Street.

**Question: I've heard about that.**

Where Stockton is. She had two sisters that got to go to college.

**Question: She went to third grade and her sisters went to college?**

Yes. Make sense?

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**Question: No.**

And they lorded it over her, her entire life. One became a nurse, and one became a schoolteacher. Now, in those days, that was very unusual for girls to advance like that.

**Question: To even go to college.**

Yes. They didn't approve of her husband. I'm wouldn't say he was a loser, but he wasn't very ambitious. He was sweet man, but he just didn't want to work. She never had anything, no extras. She made the best iced tea in the world. And her potato salad was to die for.

**Question: Isn't it funny what you remember?**

Yes. But she never had a thing. Never had a dime. Never had any money.

**Question: Do you think she had a happy life? Regardless of not having much money. Not so much?**

Who knows? You're working to survive, she lost two children. That's got to have terrible effect.

**Question: That changes a person.**

Yes. Both at young ages. Clarence was probably in his late 20s and Mark was only about 22. He had brain cancer. I don't know what Clarence died from. But she loved to dance. If an Italian song came on, she'd be singing along, it didn't matter if she didn't know the words, but she'd be singing along and she'd be dancing. A little short thing, a little Roly-Poly.

**Question: She enjoyed music.**

Loved music, loved to dance, especially the Italian songs. And she loved being Italian. Even though, she was half-Irish.

**Question: Took a lot of pride in the Italian heritage.**

She spoke a few words.

**Question: I would have leaned toward the Italian too if I'm partially Italian.**

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Alex: Her parents came over from the Potato Famine, right?

Her mother was an orphan.

Alex: From the Potato Famine.

Her mother was orphaned in Ireland during the Potato Famine. Got adopted by two schoolteachers.

**Question: What was the family name that was Irish?**

Barrett.

**Question: Barrett?**

Her father was known as "Snowball" Vessella who was somewhat of a Hammonton character. I think he had a fish store on 12th Street. Her mother was Mary Virginia Barrett.

**Question: How are they related? I just didn't catch that. How was Snowball related?**

Snowball was my mother's grandfather. And my other grandmother was my partner in crime.

**Question: This would have been your father's mother?**

My father's mother.

**Question: Her name was?**

Clara Collins. All of her friends were always 30 years younger than her. She never had friends her age. She would go anywhere at the drop of a hat.

**Question: Spontaneous.**

Yes. She said she wasn't going to leave any money for anybody to fight over. She was going to spend what she had. Which wasn't much. Even in her 80s, she'd call me and say, "Can we go shoe shopping?" She loved shoes. Loved to go clothes shopping. Halloween was her favorite holiday. The two of us would get dressed up every Halloween and go somewhere. Scare people and just cause trouble.

**Question: She sounds like a fun personality.**

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She was. She was fun. She was a writer and that's where we all get the writing skills from. Her mother wrote and I think her grandmother wrote also.

**Question: That's a gift.**

We all write.

**Question: Fictional things or what type of writing?**

I have written a lot of silly poems, narratives, newsletters, minutes a few articles as a stringer writer for the Hammonton News. Other than the news articles, most of my stuff is humorous.

Alex: But you're good at it. She's good at writing things down that have happened to her and the most boring thing and making it something you want to read.

**Question: That's a skill. It really is.**

I said I worked for Mark DeMarco for 28 years. The day I quit and came home, I sat at my computer and started writing. I wanted to get it all down before I lost any of it. It's about this thick. I have lots of stories from that.

**Question: Is it similar to journaling that you did?**

That was a tell-all. Everybody says, "Why don't you publish it?" I said, "Because I'd get sued." This family wouldn't let that go.

**Question: You have to wait till everybody died.**

I'd rather not take the chance.

**Question: No. That's not going to go over well at all. That would not go well. I see what you're saying.**

Hello, David.

David: Hello.

**Question: Hi there.**

This is number one son.

**Question: Hi.**

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David: How are you? Nice to meet you.

**Question: I'm interviewing your mom right now for the Historical Society.**

And Alex is putting in his two cents.

Alex: I'm just hanging in here.

**Question: Alex is a great historian. I can tell. I can see.**

Did you have any contact with Earl Cain when he was alive?

**Question: Yes, I did. I knew him. Not well, but we'd go to meetings together.**

It turns out that Earl Cain's mother was my mother's cousin.

**Question: Oh, for heaven's sake.**

We were cousins.

**Question: It really is a small world.**

I found him on Facebook when he mentioned some names of his relatives. I said, "I know those names." "Are we related?" We exchanged a few messages and learned we were in fact related. We got to meet one another, and he and Fran went to my Mom's house so he could "interview" her for his genealogy.

**Question: You think back who was married to whom.**

Yes.

**Question: Wow. He was quite a historian.**

Oh, tell me about it.

Alex: Oh, my God. [crosstalk 01:09:56].

Do you have that at home?

Alex: Yes, it's at home.

Because I went to look for it the other day. It's this thick, his genealogy of the Ford family.

Alex: Going back to?

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Mine and Earl's fifth great-grandfather, who was at the Battle of Chestnut Neck in the Revolutionary War.

**Question: That's going back. Revolutionary War, wasn't that his favorite time period?**

I think so.

Alex: Yes. Oh, my God.

**Question: I heard a lecture one time.**

Colonel Summers, SAR.

Alex: Richard Somers.

Down in Somers Point, whatever.

Alex: But he had the genealogy book going back from the Ford side to Ireland back to - I forget what castle. It's in the book. There's some castle that our family owned, and the furthest back that he dated a full name was to like 1356, 1353.

**Question: That's amazing that all that could be documented.**

Alex: I know. Absolutely insane the amount of work he put in.

**Question: I'm just going to say think of the research. I'd like to see what he put into that.**

And typing it all up.

Alex: And make it look good too.

With all of those little - and then over here and then this column. That's time consuming.

**Question: A flow sheet trying to trace who was married to whom.**

Yes. It's not Excel. Looks to me like it's actually typed.

**Question: He drew it, or he typed it?**

Yes, that's what it looks like.

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**Question: Wow.**

Alex: He loved it. That was what he wanted to do. He just loved finding that stuff out.

**Question: Apparently, he did. That's great to have that preserved. The family's really lucky that he put in those hours.**

Alex: Well, her father's grandfather - no, your great-grandfather, right?

My great-grandfather.

Alex: Yes. His grandfather was in the 118th Regiment of the Pennsylvania volunteers during the Civil War.

The Civil War. This is the other side of the family.

Alex: This isn't the Ford side. This is the Smith side.

**Question: Smith side. Father side.**

Alex: Which followed back to the Collins side. Lewis Collins, he was a private in the Union Army. I just came back last week from Gettysburg. He fought at Gettysburg. He fought at all the major civil war battles. Appomattox.

**Question: He survived.**

Alex: He was at Lee surrender. Out of 936 or 939 original members of the 118<sup>th</sup>, by the end of the war, there were 130 left. And he was one of them.

**Question: He was good at what he did.**

Yes. I don't know if he was good at what he did or just good at hiding. He was a good hider.

**Question: We have one or the other to survive all that. He has to be a good soldier.**

I had it. You took it home, didn't you?

Alex: No, it's right here.

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Of this reunion. That's a great picture. I had it framed for Alex. He's supposed to take it home and put it in his bedroom.

**Question: Oh, look at this. Oh my gosh. Survivors of the 118th Regiment of Pennsylvania volunteers for union. Shepherdstown, Virginia.**

Alex: He's all the way over here. That's him right there with a stick.

**Question: Wow. Looks like a tough one.**

Alex: Oh, yes.

Does it have the year?

Alex: 1897.

**Question: This is a reunion?**

Alex: Yes.

**Question: The survivors. They look like tough old men.**

Alex: Oh, yes. They were old by this time though.

He was only 16 when he was in the -

**Question: But they just have that look in their eye. That strong, cantankerous constitution to survive war, and that many battles. That impresses me. Look at the caps they all wore.**

Alex: I know. Every single one of them.

**Question: This still looks like from the war.**

Alex: Yes, that looks like his work cap.

**Question: Exactly. And derbies?**

Alex: Yes. There's the cook.

**Question: She was snitching a few rations it looks like.**

Alex: Yes, off her own supply.



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**Question: I've asked you a lot of questions. And I really appreciate you letting me come here and pick your brain, so to speak and just fire questions at you. Can you think of anything else you'd like to add or any other relatives that you'd like to speak about?**

I don't know. If you want, I can take this and go through anything you didn't cover.

**Question: That would be wonderful.**

Give me your e-mail address and I can e-mail it to you.

**Question: Okay.**

Alex: We're planning on going to Petticoat Bridge, which is a tiny little bridge up here in Columbus, New Jersey.

**Question: I think I heard Earl lecture on that place. He had a slide presentation.**

Alex: Because that is their seventh great-grandfather, Steven Ford.

He was at that battle too.

Alex: He was at that battle too. He was actually one of two to get wounded at that battle. He wasn't too lucky that day.

**Question: I'd say not. I'm just going to put my name off to the side.**

How long have you been with the Historical Society?

Alex: I got to run home. I got to get some things ready.

Okay. Go then.

**Question: Nice meeting you, Alex.**

Alex: Yes, nice meeting you too.

Kelly Haas [Phonetic] is your last name?

Well, Kelly is my maiden name and then Haas-Lack [Phonetic] is my business name. Any other details you could give us would be great. We'll get this typed up. When I get the whole thing typed up, I'll run it by you for your approval. If there's

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something you don't want mentioned or if there's something you want to embellish a little further, we can do that. And then, we'll get the whole thing put together and then when we get the copy that you approve of, then I'll make a copy for you as well. What's nice about this is you'll have a little mini memoir. It sounds like your family has really been conscious of preserving history, so you have a lot already. It's still nice to have everything all in one place. If you want a copy of the digital information, I can give you that.

**Question: Did you and your parents move to other states, cities, or houses when you were young?**

As a newborn we lived in a bungalow on the corner of Broadway and Liberty Street – it's still there. My Dad worked on the railroad and the Shipyard in Camden – not necessarily in that order – and we moved to Philadelphia for a short time when I was about 2.

My Mom always told the story that it was during the war (World War 2) and each night there were blackouts, and everyone had blackout curtains. I was being potty trained and needed to go to the bathroom so she put on a light so we could see. The wardens came to the door to warn her to put it out!

After a couple of years, we came back to Hammonton and they bought a house on Fourth Street (still standing). After my Dad died my Mom stayed there until she couldn't care for herself any longer and went into assisted living a few months after celebrating her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. The house was sold to someone who re-did the whole house and sold it.

That was the only house I lived in until I married Carmen and moved into his house on N. First Road, where he was born. We're still here.

**Question: Can you describe your surroundings when you were a child?**

Fourth Street only had houses on one side of the street. The other side was John D'Agostino's farm – he was known about town as “Slow John.” Yes, he drove slowly. So did our neighbor, Carmelo Calderone. Carmelo would crank his car up to about 30, then take his foot off the gas until it slowed down to 15, then he's pick up the pace and repeat.

Another interesting character, not exactly in our neighborhood, but close by, was “One-Eyed Salvi.” He lived on Fairview Avenue, close to Third Street and, as his name reveals, only had one eye. Not being sure which eye he did have, if you were driving on Fairview Avenue in the vicinity of his house and saw him backing out of his driveway, you allowed him plenty of time to do so.

I had two neighborhood playmates – Anna May Calderone, next door, and Anthony Pino, on the other side of the Calderone's. Anthony's house was on the corner of Fourth and North Streets. At the other end of the street was Donny Gibase and his cousin (can't remember her name) but they were a couple of years younger than us. Don didn't move very far – he's at the corner of Fourth and Fairview. His house sits where woods used to be – the very woods we loved to walk in because there was a very small “ditch” that ran from North Street, behind the Fourth Street properties, through the woods, across Fairview to the other side, then across Fourth, across Liberty, and out across the Pike. We rode bikes and roller skated (with clip on skates) in the street, lounged in the hammock in Anna May's back yard, picked mulberries and gooseberries and made “ink” from inkberries. There was hardly any traffic on our street so we were fairly safe playing in the street.

When I was in high school, we had a surprise April snowstorm that snowed us in for almost a week. We're talking serious snow here. I'm guessing the town had a bare minimum of scrapers as they didn't get to our street for two days. My aunt and I walked into town for supplies and

the snow was knee high. Like I said – serious snow. We had such fun sledding and playing in the snow. By that time, Carmen and I were “going steady” and he walked over to sled with us.

**Question: Can you picture any particular room in your house as a child?**

When purchased the house had two rooms downstairs and two rooms upstairs, with the typical outhouse out back. My brothers and I can’t remember sleeping in one room, but we must have. At age 12, my Dad added two rooms on the side of the house – a living room downstairs and a master bedroom upstairs. I had my own room at last!

I remember coal being delivered through a chute from the truck, through the cellar window, into the coal bin in the cellar. Upstairs between the kitchen and living room, on the floor, was a metal grate for the heat to come through. No way did you want to step on that grate in your bare feet – it got very hot.

**Question: Where did you go to school and how did you get there?**

School was Hammonton Public School from Kindergarten through High School graduation. I can’t remember going on the bus, but my brothers did. I remember my Mom driving me to school in high school.

Students were permitted off school grounds at lunch time and many times we ate lunch at the 5&10 or the Gem. The Gem was more of a “cool” place where the popular kids hung out and danced.

I missed a half year of school in Kindergarten, due to illness. My Mom took me to the doctor because I’d lost a few strands of hair. I had ultraviolet treatments on my head but I wasn’t getting better. I don’t think it was ever diagnosed, but it sounds to me like it might have been a staph infection that raged through my entire body. I had blisters all over my hands and feet and head. Dr. Elliott was new in town at the time and wanted to put me in the hospital. There was no hospital closer than Camden or Philadelphia and my Mom said no. I’m not sure if my hair fell out or if it was shaved – I kind of think it may have been shaved. Dr. Elliott came to our house every single day to peel the scabs off my head, which could explain my high threshold of pain. I had to take two LARGE penicillin pills – the kind without any coating on them that stuck to your tongue and made you gag. I still have repercussions from that whenever I need to swallow a pill. In any event I eventually recovered, but not without scars on my head where no hair ever grew again.

**Question: Do you have grandchildren?**

25. Alexei (Alex) David Giordano is our only grandchild and, needless to say, the sun rises and sets in him. He’s ever so much better looking and smarter than any of our children ever were. 😊 Alex is half Russian and half everything else. He speaks and reads Russian, has a phenomenal memory, and can pretty much teach himself to do anything.

**Question: Do you have any particular memories about Hammonton when you were young?**

The **16<sup>th</sup> of July** (not the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Festival) was the highlight of every year. We'd have a large carnival, sometimes with hootchie-kootchie dancers, and gypsies. "Oh my, be wary of those gypsies, they steal children." The gypsies usually camped on the corner of Fourth and Pratt Streets, which was very close to our house. We weren't allowed to walk past there because of the possible danger of being kidnapped!

Visitors came by bus from several states around to walk in the Procession on the 16<sup>th</sup> and every year on the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> my Mom always said, "Let's go count the busses" and we'd jump in the car and she'd drive us down to see how many people were there.

You could tell the progress of the Procession because they would set off firework "bombs" when they left the Church, and each time the Procession turned a corner.

Then the last night of the festival, the climax would be wonderful fireworks that we usually watched from our back steps because they set them off in a field not too far from our house. Almost every year at least one of the fireworks wouldn't die out before it hit the ground and a fire would result. We always waited anxiously for the sounds of fire engines rushing to put out the fire.

### **MOTHER'S HISTORY**

**Question: Do you know where your mother's ancestors came from ? If so where?**

My mother's mother (Anna Vessella Ford) was Irish and Italian. Her mother (my great grandmother, Mary Virginia Barrett) was orphaned during the Irish potato famine. Her father, Anthony "Snowball" Vessella, was Italian (of course) and had a fish store on 12<sup>th</sup> Street.

My mother's father, Robert Stewart Ford, was a "piney" descended from Stephen Ford, who fought in two battles in the Revolutionary War. His name is on a monument at Chestnut Neck and he was also in the Battle at Petticoat Bridge.

Robert and Annie's children were Clarence, Irvin, Matilda Rita (my Mom), Esther Rose, Leon and Mark. My Mom lived the longest, at 102. Esther made it to her late 90's and Leon was well into his 90's.

### **FATHER'S HISTORY**

**Question: What did you father look like?**

My Dad was very handsome.

**Question: Did your father have brothers and sisters?**

His siblings: He was the oldest, Robert, Edgar, Donald, Earle and Patricia – all deceased.

**Question: What school did your father attend? Did he finish school?**

Daddy went to 8<sup>th</sup> grade in Hammonton, after which he boarded with the Haggerty family on First Road, across from the cemetery. He worked for them in exchange for room and board and was very fond of them. I remember visiting them as a child because he kept in touch with them.

**Question: What religion was your father raised in? What church did he attend?**

I don't know if he went to church as a child and I never remember my Dad going to church as an adult (except when we were married). However, he was adamant that all of us go every Sunday and that we get Communion and Confirmation.

**Question: Was your father in the military?**

No military for my Dad.

**Question: Do you know any stories about your father's ancestors?**

His ancestors came from England and Ireland. The Eastburn family dates back to the Viking era.

**Question: Do you know any stories about your father's ancestors?**

His grandfather, Lewis Collins, lived in Mill Creek, Delaware and enlisted in the 118<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Volunteers Regiment in the Civil War at age 16. He was in two skirmishes in Gettysburg and has his name on two monuments there.

**PARENTS**

**Question: Did your father play chess or cards?**

Dad was a fantastic pinochle player and knew every card each player was holding.

**Question: Did he have hobbies? Was he handy with tools? Liked to build things?**

Dad's father, Cardon Smith, was a carpenter and my Dad had many carpenter skills himself. He built his gun shop in Elwood (present site of the Elwood Post Office) and did much of the carpentry work at the house on Fourth Street. He had a drag car, a 1957 Chevy called "Snakebitten" that he paid for and my brothers raced at Atco Dragway, Englishtown and other dragstrips. I raced it myself in a Powder Puff Derby at Atco once.

**Question: Were either of your parents artistic?**

Not really artistic – my Mom sewed clothes for me when I was young and Dad watched a TV artist teaching painting, and painted a few pictures.

**Question: Were either of your parents actively involved in the community?**

Not at all.

**Question: Did either of the belong to clubs or organizations?**

Mom belonged to the Folsom Ladies I.O.M. Lodge that met every Tuesday night. Oh, how we hated Tuesday nights. Dad was a milkman and needed to go to sleep early, so that meant we all had to go to bed early too. You can't imagine all the creaks and spooky noises an old house can make when you're trying to fall asleep earlier than you need to.

**Question? Did your mother and father have a good sense of humor?**

My Dad was a pistol and loved needling others. He just wasn't as good as being on the receiving end as he was dishing it out. If something tickled my Mom, she'd laugh uncontrollably. Example, Mom and I went to Jamaica to visit my son who was working there at the time. Four of us went out to High Tea at the Ritz Carlton. Neither Mom nor I had ever been and didn't know what to expect. Two teas were ordered and we glanced at each other. There were four of us. The waitress brought out two tiny trays with a total of 8 teeny sandwiches. She looked at me. I looked at her. She got the giggles and couldn't stop. I knew exactly why she was laughing and joined her. Even though the food kept coming, and we ended up with plenty, we continued to laugh the rest of the afternoon.

**Question: What skills or talents did you learn from your mother and father?**

I question everything, just like my Dad, only I try to tone it down. He could really get on your nerves with his questions sometimes. I learned sewing from my Mom and, while I haven't master her pie crust (it's so much neater and easier to use pre-made) I'd like to think I've got her baking skills.

**Question: What do you think was the greatest tragedy your mother and father suffered in their lives?**

I don't think they suffered any tragedy at all, unless you consider living through the Depression a tragedy. They weren't hoarders by any means, but I guess living without, or during a shortage of just about everything, they always had extras of everything: food (home-canned goods in the basement); blankets, sheets, pots and pans, glassware, you name it. Whenever there was a sale at one of the stores, off they went and came home with all sorts of things to save for Christmas gifts or whatever because in Daddy's words, "They don't eat."

When he died, he had over a dozen brand new dress shirts, still in the cellophane, that he never had any intention of wearing! 😊

### PATERNAL GRANDMOTHER

**Question: What kind of person was your grandmother?**

My paternal grandmother, Clara Collins Smith, was my partner in crime, and most definitely had an influence on me. When she moved from Philadelphia to Massachusetts we engaged in letter writing. She wrote many poems (I have them) and fortunately, or unfortunately, depending on how you view it, I think I've got her writing "skills." My poems tend to be on the silly side and are usually about something that happened that I felt should be memorialized by a nonsensical poem. She loved shopping, especially for shoes and we were partners in crime at Halloween. We dressed up every year and went out to fool family and friends who never seemed to know who we were, even though we usually didn't wear masks.

She was always "Grandmother" to all of her grandchildren, at her request, although when my children got older they called her Clara.

It's funny, when I had children, my mother also asked to be called Grandmother, and my children called her that for many years until daughter, Janis, became a hair stylist and one of her friends and co-stylists called my mother "Granny." It stuck and for the rest of her life she was referred to as Granny by all of us.



Lois (Smith) Giordano – Addendum



Mary Virginia Barrett – Maternal Great Grandmother



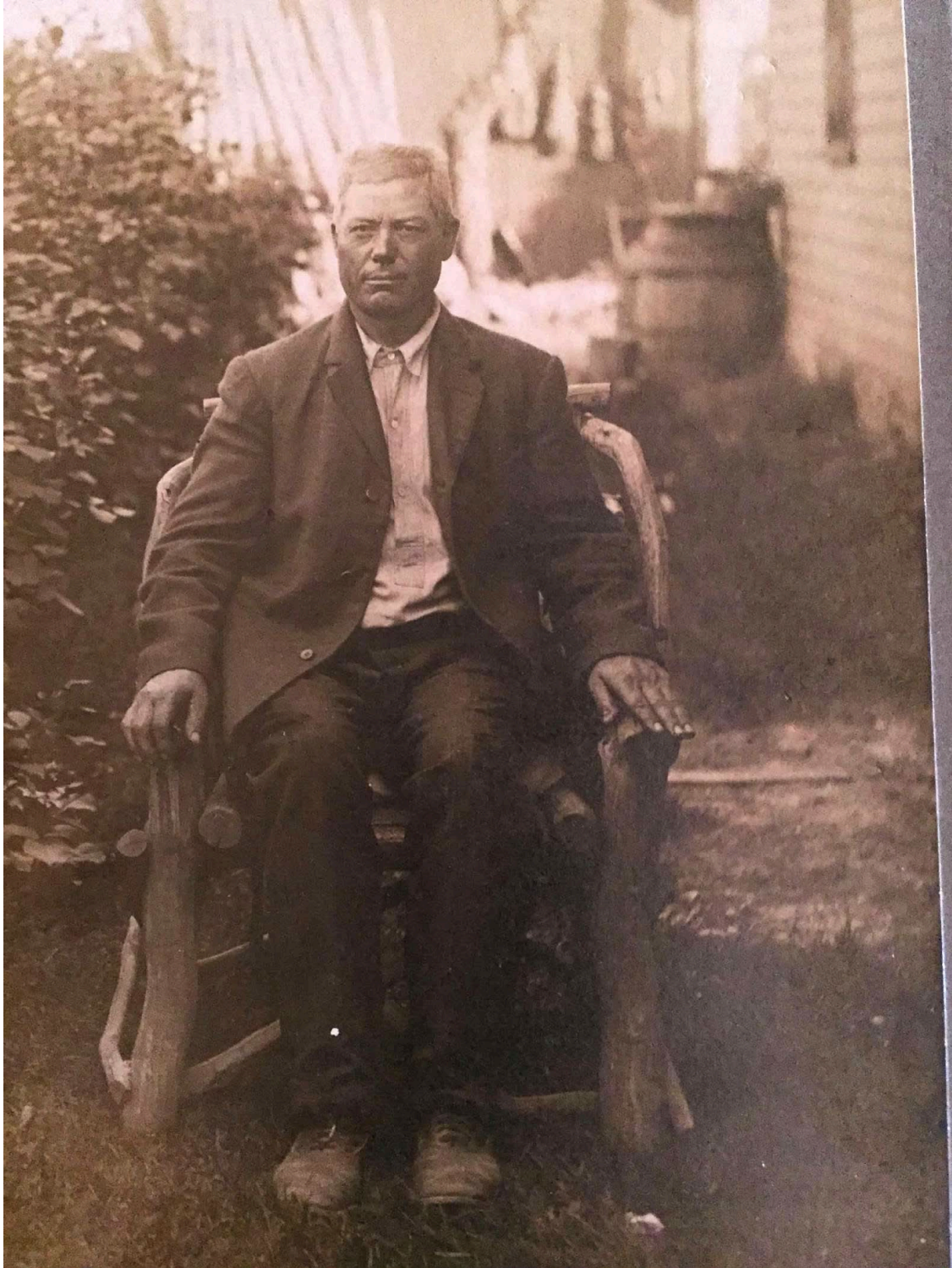
Maternal Grandfather, Robert Stuart Ford – wedding picture



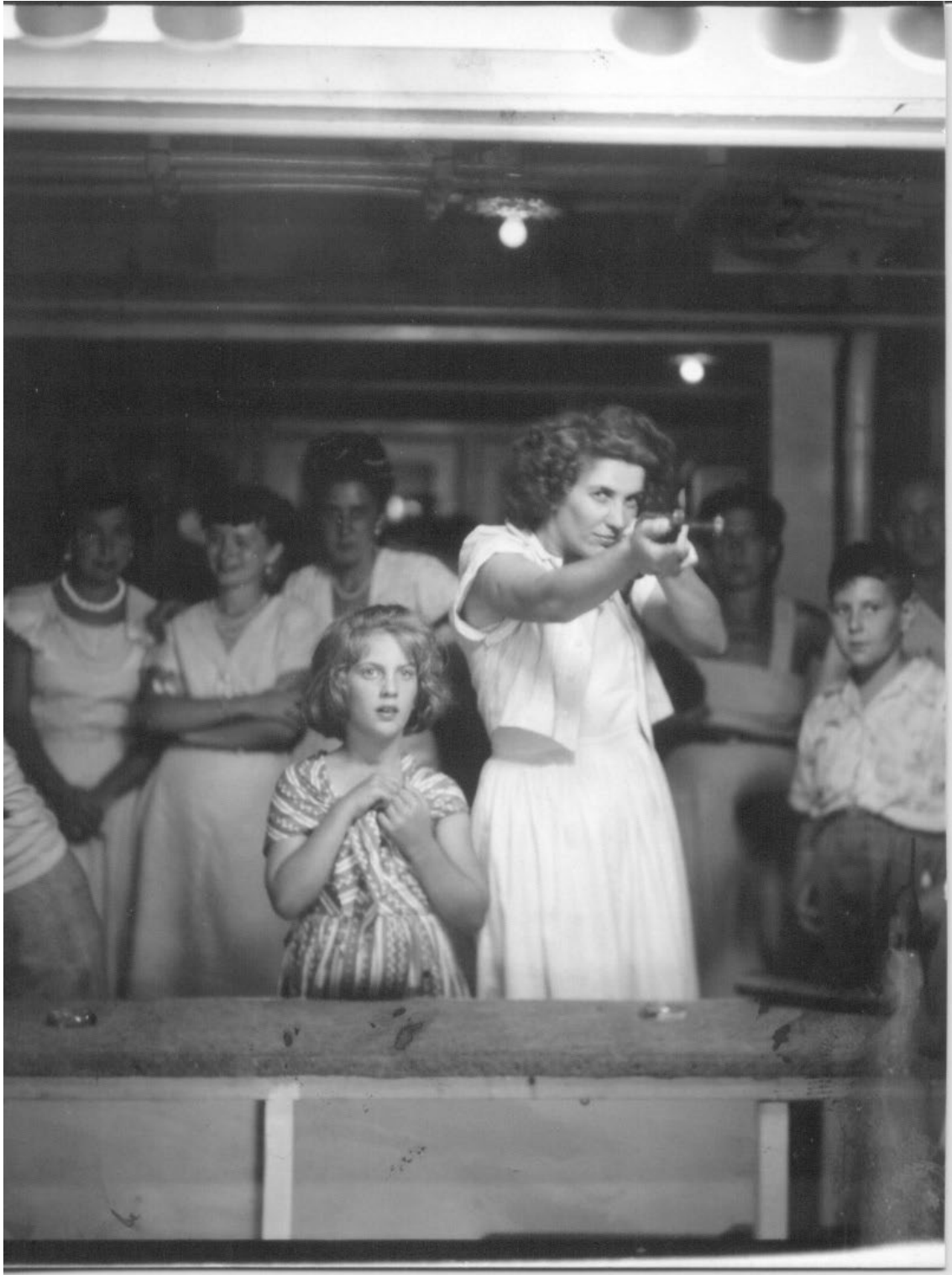
Maternal Grandmother, Anna Vessella Ford – wedding picture



Maternal Great Grandfather, Antonio “Snowball” Vessella



Antonio “Snowball” Vessella



My favorite picture of my Mom, Rita Smith, and me – taken on the Steel Pier in Atlantic City. If you hit the bullseye it took your picture. I'm wearing a green printed dress that she made for me.



Paternal Great Grandfather, Lewis Collins – Civil War Uniform



Paternal Great Grandfather Lewis Collins – far left, front – Civil War Regiment reunion.





Maternal Great Grandmother, Martha Jeanes Collins



Paternal Great Grandmother, Martha Jeanes Collins, holding my Grandmother, Clara Collins Smith.



Paternal Grandmother, Clara Collins Smith, being a peasant in her son's garden.



Clara Collins Smith as she usually looked.

Lois (Smith) Giordano – Addendum



Left to right: Rita Ford Smith (mother); David, Janis and Diane Giordano (children); William Harvey Smith, Sr. (father).

Lois (Smith) Giordano – Addendum



Lois Ann Smith and Carmen Giordano – wedding day - October 2, 1960





Lois and Carmen Giordano 30 years later.



The two of us now – being silly.