

JOANNE BATTAGLIA WIESSNER

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
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HISTORICAL SOCIETY *of*
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**Historical Society of Hammonton Oral History
Joanne Wiessner**

Date of Interview	June 15, 2023
Interviewer(s)	Janet Hasulak
Interviewee(s)	Joanne Wiessner
Others Present	John Wiessner

This is Janet Hasulak and I'm here with Joanne Wiessner. We are doing an oral interview for the Oral History Projects for the Hammonton Historical Society. It's June 15th, 2023.

Question: Thank you Joanne for consenting to do this interview.

You're welcome.

Question: It's a pleasure to get to know you a little bit better. Can you tell me your full name including your maiden name?

Yes. Joanne Battaglia Wiessner.

Question: How do you spell Battaglia?

B-a-t-t-a-g-l-i-a.

Question: Wiessner is spelled how?

W-i-e-s-s-n-e-r.

Question: Very good. How old are you?

Seventy-eight, I'll be seventy-nine next month.

Question: When is your birth date?

July 21st.

Question: Yes, you're not so far off now.

Yes.

Question: Where were you born?

In Philadelphia.

Question: In a hospital?

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Yes. I'm not sure really which hospital, I don't know. I want to tell you the truth.

Question: Did you grow up there or did you grow up in Hammonton?

No. It may have been Jefferson Hospital, I don't know. But, no, I was just born there and always lived here.

Question: Your parents lived in Hammonton at the time?

Oh, yes. Right here.

Question: Right at the Whitehorse Farms?

Right across the street.

Question: Who owned Whitehorse Farms in your family?

Now?

Question: Who owned it back then?

The original owner and it was just a little farm, very little, was my grandfather, he had the ground. Then what he did, he gave the ground to my father, Joseph. Then he's the one that built up the Whitehorse Farm.

Question: Did your parents always live in Hammonton, or did they live elsewhere?

No, always in Hammonton. My mom was actually from 3rd Street in Hammonton, next door to Inferrera's.

Question: Yes. I know exactly where you mean. Close to St. Joseph's Church?

Yes.

Question: What was her name?

Anna Curreri.

Question: And then she became a Battaglia?

Yes.

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Question: Can you describe your surroundings when you were small? Do you remember living there in the house on the farm?

Yes, right. The house is right across the street from us here. It's a very nice house. The house, I understand, was down the end of Walker Road, so the house is at Whitehorse Pike and Walker Road. It was all the way down at the end. I think it was moved at least two or three times. My mother would tell me and my father that the last time the house was moved up to where it is now, they used horses to move it. That's how they moved it.

Question: That's no easy task.

Can you imagine?

Question: Did they just figure that there was a better place on the farm for it to be sitting?

My mother did not like being back where it was, it was more like isolated. She just knew that my father had the property up front, and she said she wanted to move.

Question: She wanted to be up closer to the main road, it sounds like.

Yes. I can't imagine them doing something like that though.

Question: What an undertaking, with horses.

Right, yes.

Question: That's something else. You must have a lot of memories associated with this whole area; you grew up right here.

Right. This is where my sister Eileen and I were raised. She was two-and-a-half years younger than me and my best friend.

Question: Is she your only sibling?

Yes.

Question: Her name is Eileen.

Yes.

Question: What is her surname?

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Paretti. Do you want me to spell Eileen because it is always spelled wrong.

Question: Yes.

E-i-l-e-e-n. And Battaglia to Paretti. P-a-r-e-t-t-i.

Question: Thank you. Where did you and Eileen go to school?

We both went from K to 12 to St. Joe's because I think at the time it was only Winslow and my parents decided that they would sacrifice because it was a sacrifice to send us, that we would get the Catholic education.

Question: That was important to them.

Yes, very. They had other friends that sent their kids to St. Joe's, and we had a very good experience there, yes.

Question: That's wonderful. You were happy with the education.

Oh, yes, very good.

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

Yes, sure.

Question: Who impressed you and who do you remember?

I remember Kindergarten, Sister Carmella; 1st Grade, Sister Nicolina; 2nd Grade I think was Sister Helen; 3rd Grade was Sister Irene; 4th Grade was Sister Antoinette; 5th Grade was Sister Emma. And then, 6th Grade we had a lay teacher. Then we must have had a nun too, and her name was Joanna Sulmonetti. She was good too. I can't remember 7th Grade now. At that time, we had three or four teachers. I remember the 8th Grade teacher, she was a real little person, Sister Theresa.

Question: She left an impression.

Yes, she was great.

Question: There aren't that many nuns to go around now.

No. Now, we don't have any.

Question: I don't think they recruit like they used to. The attraction isn't there.

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The whole world is crazy right now.

Question: Or if we have any nuns, they're foreign born.

Yes, right.

Question: Tell me about the house that you lived in. Can you still picture it?

Oh, yes. It was a great, beautiful house, a two-story building. My sister, we each had our own bedroom. We had one bathroom upstairs and then my father put on a bathroom downstairs and a laundry room added on. We had a very nice living room, dining room, kitchen. It was a very nice home, beautiful home to live in. They always kept it up, it was great.

Question: When you were a young schoolgirl, what did you do for recreation? You said you were best friends with your sister, was she your primary playmate?

Not really, even though she was my best friend. I had girlfriends and I would be involved in school activities because my father was very strict, and my mother was a little more lenient. If it was a school activity, it was okay for us, so that worked. I had some good friends. Bridgett was one of them.

Question: So, you've been friends since you were girls.

Yes. We were in Campfire Girls together. My mother would take us down Pine Road to the Campfire leader and then her father or somebody would take us home or vice versa. Bridgett Demarco, she was at the time with the beautiful red hair.

Question: She's still gorgeous.

Isn't she pretty.

Question: She keeps herself so beautiful

She's a doll, yes.

Question: I wish she would sit down and talk to me, maybe you can work on her.

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I'll have to talk to her. I'll call her and tell her, yes. She would be interesting, too. I was friendly with Maryann Fricke, now she's Maryann Fricke Snell. As a matter of fact, I'm going out to lunch with her next week. She had moved away going away to college, got married, had children. Now she has moved back home and she's in her father and mother's house. That's Hammonton, see.

Question: Maybe she would want to be interviewed.

Maybe. She would be very good because she's a librarian.

Question: It's really a very easy way to preserve your memories and pretty painless, we just sit and talk.

Yes.

Question: They were some of your best friends during your school years?

Right.

Question: That's so wonderful and so typically Hammonton that you're still friendly.

I was friendly with Judy Sacco Watson, who just passed away. It was a shock to us. She and I went from K to 12, St. Joe's, then we roomed together at Glassboro for four years. We stayed friends up until she passed away.

Question: That's a lifetime.

Yes. We were friendly with the children and the whole nine yards.

Question: Even has married women and older, you were still friendly.

Right.

Question: That's very special. You're married?

Yes.

Question: Your husband is John.

Yes, and we're married 57 years.

Question: Congratulations.

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We have three sons.

Question: What are their names?

John T Wiessner, Stephan Wiesnner and we have Joseph, who's a realtor in town. I don't know if you've seen his signs.

Question: I've seen his signs. I was going to ask you if you were related to that Wiessner.

Joe, yes, he's our son. He has two children, Daniel and Karly and they both work with him in his realty.

Question: It's a family-run operation.

Yes. He has other agents, but they work with him, which is nice. I hope that they can continue to do that. Daniel is 25 and he went two years to ACC for computers and he's a crackerjack, he's really, really good. John and I, college graduates, would have been thrilled if he had continued but it was not in his wheelhouse, as they say, right? His sister Karly, she is 21 and she just did not want to have anything to do with college. She's working with her father, which is good. She's right now a waitress at Ricca's Pizza. She's had several jobs, so she's had quite a few experiences, which is good. College is not for everybody. I think she would have done very well.

Question: If she likes the family business, she probably can see the dollar signs there.

We're hoping that they may both definitely get – they haven't gotten their license yet. Grandpop and I encourage them whenever we can, quietly, so maybe someday they may.

Question: Education is an investment in yourself, so it's money well-spent.

It's the truth.

Question: If you can find what you're interested in.

Right. Since you said that, that's true because when my sister and I went to college, very few kids went to college at that time.

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Question: Most people had to get out into the work force.

The girls did not go to college.

Question: Girls in particular.

My mother and father, mostly my mother, were very steadfast on getting a college education, so both Eileen and I went to Glassboro.

Question: How did you get back and forth to school? You went to St. Joseph's, did they run busses.

School bus, yes. Actually, my friend Maryann Fricke Snell, her father was our bus driver. I think he was my only bus driver for all those years. He was great, he was a terrific guy.

Question: He watched you grow up.

Yes. Bill Fricke, yes, such a nice guy.

Question: When you were a teenager, how did teenager's dress? How would you describe how teenager's looked back then? Every generation has their look.

We had uniforms because we went to the Catholic School, which was great, easy, and I liked them, a maroon uniform with a tan shirt, a blouse. It was great and my mother thought it was wonderful, really. It was a lot easier than going crazy with the clothes. The clothes, whatever was popular at the time –

Question: Do you remember any particular fads that meant a lot to you as a teenager?

I really wasn't much into that. A big deal was starting to wear pants, I remember that, that was major, and sneakers. Usually, we'd wear the different like the Oxford or whatever.

Question: Sneakers were considered for sports.

Yes, sneakers and bobby socks and that kind of stuff. That's what you'd wear to go out. It's unbelievable now, you don't get really dressed up.

Question: Remember when the sneakers would've been considered a summer shoe? I remember you wouldn't wear a canvas shoe in the winter.

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No, never.

Question: It wouldn't be considered warm enough, my mother would've frowned on that.

Oh definitely, no way. I think the big deal for me was wearing pants.

Question: Even for recreation, women wore dresses and skirts.

Right. But then, we got into the sweaters and that kind of stuff. I played basketball, I was on the basketball team at St. Joe's, and we had the uniform for that.

Question: What would have been considered a wild look or wild hairdo or something back then? Do you recall?

If the girls colored their hair, that was not usually – a few of the girls would do that but not me and my sister.

Question: That wasn't something that was done so casually.

No, no way. We were pretty sedate, seriously.

Question: For entertainment, did you hang at your house? What did the teenagers do for fun?

I have another really good friend that I'm still friendly with, Phyllis Amedio Canfield. She's still working, God bless her. She works at Marcellos and she's still going, I don't know how she does it.

Question: That's physical work, too.

It is and she delivers the food. She's the takeout person, God bless her. I would go to her house and then sometimes I would stay overnight, which was a big deal, and my father did not like that.

Question: He didn't care for you staying out.

No. But my mother would say, "Oh, Joe, she's with Phyllis and she's with a couple of the other girls and her mom and dad are home," and all that. I don't ever recall having boys come over.

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Question: That would've been considered something illicit to do.

Exactly. So, now I would usually go to her house and then sometimes she would come to my house. Usually, since my father was stricter, it was a big deal for me to go, I was happy to go. But now my sister didn't come with me, she had her own set of friends. She was very vivacious, she had a really wonderful personality, so she had a different group of friends, still she and I were still best of friends.

Question: At that age, two-and-a-half years is a big age difference, you could have completely different set of friends.

Even though she was two-and-a-half years younger, I was ahead of her just by two years in school. They had pushed her ahead, which she struggled though, it was hard for her. When they say you're really now ready, but she was so cute and such a nice person, the nun said, "Oh yeah, we'll take her."

Question: And the rest is history.

Yes.

Question: Did you go to the lake? Were there dances that were popular back in the day?

What we did was I went to Hammonton Middle School dances, it was 6th, 7th, and 8th, I think, I would go to their dances. I can't remember at St. Joe's if we had dances or not. I did go to dances there; I definitely went to Hammonton dances. I never got asked to dance.

Question: Usually they're run by the school and organized.

I was the wallflower, and my father would say, "Well, did you dance?" I said, "Well, yeah, with the girls." But now, it's so funny, my granddaughter, 18, the youngest one, just went to the prom with the girls.

Question: My granddaughter did the same thing.

Yes, so they're doing that.

Question: Took pictures together and everything.

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Yes, they loved it. She said they had a good time. But this time around, she said to me, "Well, grandma, I did go with a group of girls, but I did meet a young guy there." Which was good. I said, "Very good."

Question: I'm sure that helped add to the fun.

Yes.

Question: You're married to John. When did you and John get married?

We got married April of 1966.

Question: Where is John from? Where was he born?

Where was he born? That's a good question.

Question: In Hammonton?

Yes. As a matter of fact, I think he was born at the Swenson Home, like a nursing home. I would have to really ask him to be sure.

Question: How long did you know each other before you were married and how did you meet?

I met over a bin of sweet potatoes.

Question: Did he come to buy produce?

No. I think he was driving his grandfather. His grandfather and his grandmother had Square Deal, it was a farm market, actually it was like one of the first ones, it was on the Whitehorse Pike. I think it was his grandfather that he came with, but they had Square Deal, the grandparents. And then his parents had Pete's Market, which is where Vegas is. So, we're close there.

Question: You were. You were in each other's circle.

John, I have a question, where were you born? I know Swenson Home, right?

John: Yes, in Hammonton. I think it's on Pleasant Street.

Then where did you live?

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John: At Square Deal Farm Market, yes. Down the Pike there's a brick house in back of the old Farm Market. My grandparents built a Farm Market in 1935, they were one of the pioneers. The Pike at the time was the major artery between Philadelphia and Atlantic City and the Shore. So, it was bumper-to-bumper traffic, I remember when I was a kid.

Question: It was the only means or artery to travel.

John: The main artery, yes. Then they built the Blackhorse Pike, Route 322, and then they built the Atlantic City Expressway. That took a lot of the traffic away and there was another Route 73 cut-off to the Expressway that took more traffic away, so that was around 1962. I lived there; I lived in Hammonton.

Were you living with your grandparents? How did that work?

John: There was a house next to theirs, it was bungalow that my parents lived in and then I would live in that house and then also in the brick house, where I'd rotate back and forth like that.

If you go back home, how could you describe where that house is?

John: You go by the high school and then it's right in back of Square Deal Market. The bungalow's no longer there, just the brick house is there now.

Question: It would be on the right-hand side?

John: Yes.

Question: I'd like to look on the way back home.

And that was a nice house there.

Question: How did you meet? Over sweet potatoes?

Over sweet potatoes. Were you driving at the time with your grandfather, am I right?

John: I can't remember. No, probably not because I got my license in the '50s, maybe I was.

I think you were driving your grandfather and picking up sweet potatoes.

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John: That's right, yes.

Because my dad had peaches, tomatoes, peppers, sweet potatoes, and I think you came with him.

John: Yes, that's right.

I think you were the driver.

John: Yes.

I was like 14, 14-and-a-half and you were like 16, so you got the farmers license.

John: You were our competitors. She was from a farm market out there, and where you were was Vegas.

Question: It was another market, right.

John: It was a farm market that was my parent's farm market.

Question: You were very close competitors.

John: My grandparents were down at Square Deal, so we had two farm markets.

Question: I see, then those Whitehorse people.

John: Our nephew David Paretti, married Pasteur, Jennifer Pasteur down there, so they had that farm market. That's the only one that's in operation now.

Question: I know, that's the one that's left.

Right, that's the one that's still standing.

Question: How old were you when you married?

I was 21.

John: Yes. We both attended Glassboro State College.

I think I was 22 going on 23.

John: We were dating off and on in high school. She was a Prom queen at St. Joe's in 1961.

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Question: That's special. If you have any of those pictures, I can include them in this. I can copy them for you, I have an app that will do that.

I'll have to find them.

John: What do you do with this information you're gleaning.

Question: We'll have it transcribed and then I'll have it put together in a book, in a looseleaf. Then there will be a copy for you and a copy that stays in the Historical Society. If anybody is doing a report or research, wants to find out about the Whitehorse Farm's property or something like that, they might come in and look through our information.

Sure, that's great, yes.

John: Would you like some biographical information on me, I can give you a couple of copies.

Question: I will, I would. I would like to do that separately though. I would like to come back and interview you at another time, John.

He's very interesting. He's a writer and we're both retired teachers.

Question: Excellent. Did you teach in the school system locally?

Yes, I was in Hammonton for at least 11 or 12 years teaching elementary, mainly 1st Grade. Then, my sister got diagnosed with MS and I decided not to go back to teach to help with the farm. I stayed out for about five years and also raising the three boys, it became pretty crazy with three teenagers. We decided that I would stop and work just on the farm, which worked out.

Question: You were working on the Whitehorse Farm, your parent's farm?

Yes, working on the roadside market. I have never worked in the field. My sister, mother, and I never worked in the fields. We always worked up front. Then, when we looked at the finances, we decided that maybe I better go back to teaching, which I liked teaching, it was good. We could teach and then in the summer, we had the summer job.

Question: Then you could give your attention to the produce market.

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It worked, yes. Then I went to Folsom and taught there for 19 years. My total was 31 years of teaching.

Question: You had a long career.

Yes, and it worked.

Question: You mentioned the children, you have three boys? I don't think you finished naming them and their birth dates.

We have Joe is April 9, 1967, he just turned 56. Then we have John Thomas and he's 54, and he was born June 11, 1969. We are very happy that the three boys are all college graduates, which is great. We really pushed that.

John: Joey graduated agriculture at Cook College Rutgers University. And John graduated from Rowan, which was Glassboro where we had gone.

It just had turned Rowan, yes.

John: Steve graduated from Rutgers in New Brunswick.

John came out with a BA in Communications, and he went on to be an actor. He was doing fine but then he had a problem, which he still has.

Question: He couldn't do that any longer?

He couldn't do it because when he was about 20, he was out with a bunch of guys, and they were at a pit where the kids were using firecrackers and one –

Question: A mosh pit?

He dropped a firecracker right next to him and I don't know if they did it intentionally, we never found out, so John now has severe nerve damage to his ear. While he was younger, he was able to do the acting. As the years progressed, his hearing – he's so sensitive, Janet. For example, when he comes here, we have to use paper plates, we can't use ice, we have to disconnect the phones, we don't want any visitors.

Question: He's very sensitive to noise and stimulation.

John: He has a condition called hyperacusis, which is ten times worse than tinnitus. Having little sounds like if a motorcycle went by here now would just...

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Yes, we have to keep the doors shut and he actually has pain. Thank God that he has the communication degree. He's a writer and he's what we call a struggling writer. We help him and he's doing the best he can. He lives by himself in Woodbury.

Question: It's a lot to live with.

It's rough. It's very, very rough. As I said, it has just gotten worse and he has been to The House Institute in California, which caters to people with hearing problems. He's been to the Mayo Clinic and there's nothing that they can do for him. All they say is, "You have to go into a quiet place and deal with it." It's very discouraging. He's a very nice, he's got a good personality. It's a shame, he can't communicate with his friends, even though his friends know about the condition, they don't seem to get it. You look at him and he looks great, terrific. But he actually gets in very bad pain.

Question: People probably don't realize that this isn't just getting on my nerves, it becomes painful.

John: The only thing that kind of helps him is acupuncture he goes to a Chinese acupuncture doctor in North Jersey.

Question: I'll be darn, I bet he's willing to try anything.

John: He was doing really well out in California; he was on TV shows in secondary roles. You'd see him typing in the background in an office scene or something like that, you know. He was dating Suzanne DeLaurentiis, the famous film producer in California.

Question: I was going to say Director or Producer.

John: Yes, that's right. He knew DeLaurentiis' uncle and they did a film one before that called "Mutant Man". It was a horror movie. My son was one of the stars in that and she was director. She taught at the Weist (Phonetic) Academy or something in Atlantic City and he was taking acting lessons at the time.

Question: I bet he must have rubbed elbows with some interesting people.

Oh yes, he met a lot of people.

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John: He stood in for Vanilla Sky or something with Tom Cruise. He got to go talk to Cruise in New York and everything. Everything went well and then all of a sudden, he kept getting worse and worse and then he'd come East, and he'd try to drive as a limo driver.

Yes, that's a kid that's had so many different jobs. Now he stays in his apartment, and he writes, and he submits, and he hopes that some day he might have a breakthrough.

Question: I hope it works out for him, it's a lot to be dealing with.

It's tough, it's tough. Our third son, Steve, he was born January 7, 1972 and he's 51. He runs a nature center in Englewood.

Question: What was his major in college then?

He was an environmental – but he went on and got the masters.

John: It was about the wetlands, meadow lands.

No. He's a grant writer. He's got a very good degree, too, which has helped him. He has his wife, Michelle. She works at the arboretum in Montclair.

Question: She's in the same field with environmental things.

She has two daughters.

John: He's the Executive Director, is that what they call him there.

Question: You have how many grandchildren?

We have three granddaughters and one grandson. Joe's wife, the realtor, has been in banking for 34 years, Karen.

John: Her family is the Esposito family; they have the Maplewood restaurant.

Question: Yes, I've heard the name, absolutely. Another one of my favorites.

John: They have Maplewood 1, Maplewood II, and now they have Maplewood III is her brother's place in Vineland, and Maplewood IV is her cousin's place.

Question: I didn't realize there was a III and a IV, that's excellent. Wonderful top of the line Italian food.

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Excellent. Actually, that's what I'm going to have for lunch today, leftovers. When you go there, we always have leftovers, which is good.

Question: How long has that restaurant been there, has that family been there a long time? Has the family been there a long time?

John: That's been there since the 40s, I think.

Sixty or seventy years, it's been long.

John: In the 40s they started; it was a house.

Question: I talked to somebody older than me and they said they remembered going there as a girl, that's why I asked.

John: It was the house where the restaurant is now on the Pike here. They would just have people over for lunch or so and they liked the food. Then they made a dining room in the house and from that house, they kept on getting bigger and bigger.

Expanding, yes.

Question: I'll be darn.

John: That's the way it was back then. Women back then were supposed to be dependent on the men and they were the breadwinners. Her grandmother, Mrs. Curreri, had a feed store, because in those days it was the conversion of the horses to the cars to automobiles. Everything was feed, chickens, or horses, she had a feed store. My grandmother had the Square Deal Market, her mother had The Whitehorse Farm here.

Question: That's how they worked. Not that they were outside of the house working, it was different, it was a big deal.

It was unusual, yes. They were very independent women, yes.

John: We learned a lot from them in terms of business and eventually went into business for ourselves.

Question: How has Hammonton changed since you were young? What other changes do you recall? Other businesses that are no longer there?

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Oh yes, I miss Arlene's Dress Shop and Malinsky's was the shop where I would shop for the kids.

Question: Clothing store?

Yes, children's shop.

Question: All of that was downtown, how convenient to have it so close.

It was great, it was nice, yes.

John: The emphasis shifted from downtown now to uptown, the Pike is a business area now more so than the downtown. Back then, Friday and Saturday night was a big deal. They had the Rivoli Theater, we would always go there on Friday or Saturday night. The one on Third Street and Bellevue Avenue, that was the movie house back then. The kids would all cruise around Friday and Saturday nights would make the oval around town.

Question: As teenagers?

That's what I did as soon as I got my license. I got the farmer's license and I used to use my uncle's truck and I would pick up a couple of friends like Phyllis or Maryann, but we would drive around town, that was the big deal. Then we would go to the Central Café to have a roast beef sandwich. Eventually, Bruni's Pizza opened and then I was driving in a car, and we would pick up more kids. That's what we did.

Question: Just seeing who was out and about and going to get soda was a big deal back then.

Yes. Then eventually the girls started dating, so it was interesting.

John: She had a farmer's license, which means she didn't have a regular license.

Question: But you could drive the farmer vehicles?

The truck.

Question: Or the truck.

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John: She would drive around at nighttime, but she would always keep baskets in the back of the truck in case she was stopped by a policeman, she's coming from somewhere with baskets.

Question: Like you were taking care of farm business.

I never had a problem though, never.

Question: Was there ever any major News events in your life from around that time that you can remember which impacted you?

Certainly, I remember when JF Kennedy was assassinated. I was a Freshman at Glassboro. I remember I was walking; I think from gym class, and we found out about it, it was very traumatic.

Question: That was a tragedy.

Yes, that really impressed us.

John: My cousin Tommy, his father was killed in 1956, there was a plane collision over the Grand Canyon. At the time, TWA, and United Airlines, they were big planes going from coast to coast and they collided over the Grand Canyon, and he was killed in 1956. It was a big, big international thing on the News and everything.

I was still, I think, in Campfire Girls and I remember that, that was horrible. We're still in touch with the son, Thomas Sulpizio. The ironic thing about that crash was that that's what his father was investigating.

John: They were trying to set up the national corridors for the planes to travel on. For safety.

Question: Wow, and he was involved in all that.

John: He was involved in that. What happened was both planes took off from the same airport in Los Angeles at 10-minute, 15-minute intervals. But one of the pilots, it was a cloudy day, decided well, we're going to fly, how would you like to see the Grand Canyon, so he went off-course and went over the Grand Canyon

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and that's why he clipped the other plane in the tail. I think 150 to 200 people were killed.

Question: Who was it that you knew was involved?

It was my mom's cousin's husband, yes.

Question: What was his name?

Tom Sulpizio.

John: Very smart, too. He was the Speaker at Villa Nova University.

You're talking about me; we're talking about the son now. But the father was very, very intelligent, the fellow that died, that was very traumatic, yes.

Question: You mentioned your mother, what was your mother's name, her maiden name.

Anna Curreri.

Question: Where was she born?

In Hammonton.

Question: Right here in Hammonton as well?

Oh, yes.

Question: She grew up here in Hammonton then?

Yes. Next week, she'll be gone five years and she would have been 99, but she passed away, yes.

Question: She had good genes, she lived a good, long life.

Yes, she did. She did very well up to about the last couple of years, not even.

Question: What did she look like? How would you describe her?

Beautiful, yes. She was really pretty, yes.

John: If you look up there, that's her wedding picture there.

No, no, that's my grandmother, that's not my mother.

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John: We're talking about your grandmother, right? Ms. Curreri?

No, we're talking about my mom. We have a picture of her, too.

John: That's her on top of the refrigerator.

That's my mother there.

John: The two girls with the baskets of peaches there.

I have a really beautiful picture in the bedroom I'll show you of my mom, yes. She was very pretty.

Question: Did she have brothers and sisters that you were raised with?

Yes, she was the baby of the family. Who was the oldest?

John: Laura was older than her and I don't know where Philip was.

Uncle Nean .

John: Uncle Nean, too, yeah. I never knew him; he died after the W.W. II.

I knew him, you didn't. I'm trying to think, I can't recall if he was the older one or not. She had two brothers and one sister, Laura.

Question: The brothers were Anthony and what was the other brother's name?

Philip.

Question: Philip and Anthony. Her sisters were?

Laura.

Question: One sister?

Yes. What happened was my grandmother was a widow, my mom was 13. My grandmother raised my mother, my Aunt Laura, Uncle Philip, and Uncle Anthony by herself. Like John said, she continued with the feed store, she needed to work, and she was a really good worker, that's the genes there.

Question: That's what she did.

Yes. The feed store was right on Third Street.

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Question: It was your father's side of the family that had the Whitehorse Farm.

Right.

Question: Do you have a lot of Uncles or Aunts living?

None.

Question: A lot of cousins in the area still?

No. I had my cousin Anna, Raab. She's in Ocean City. I have a cousin Roseann Esposito, she's in the Folsom area and so is her brother, Cousin Frankie Sceia.

John: And Cousin Ann Klein.

Well, she's my second cousin.

Question: What school did your mother go to?

She went to Hammonton High, and she did not graduate. What happened, my Aunt Laura, the older sister, decided she wanted to be a hairdresser. So, my grandmother said, "Well, if your sister Laura is going to Philly to be a hairdresser, you're going too." So, Anna, my mom, I think she got through 10th Grade. She went with Aunt Laura. And what happened, Aunt Laura got married. My mother's the one that had the beauty salon. She did it for five years. When she got married, my father did not want her to work in the beauty salon or whatever. She was doing very well, too. She worked very hard on the farm, she was the terrific on the farm market, she was great.

Question: She had that where she applied herself.

Yes, she was very assertive. You see her up there working.

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

Sicily, Messina.

John: The Messina area. A lot of the people, the Sicilians in Hammonton, came from outside Messina. There's like a triangle of three villages: Gesso, Calvaruso, and Sera, those three villages. Mostly from Gesso and Calvaruso, your great grandparents came from Calabrese, my grandfather came from Calvaruso. It's all

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like religiously significant, like Calvaruso probably means "Calvary" and Gesso means "Jesus".

Question: It sounds like it. I've heard a lot of people are from Gesso. Do you know any stories about your mother's ancestors and the people that came over? Which generation actually immigrated?

Who came over first?

John: I don't know about your family that much.

It's a shame that we didn't do this, it really is.

Question: We'll try and preserve what you do know.

I'm trying to remember.

John: Your father, they came from near Calvaruso and Gesso. Strada al mare, Road by the Sea, that was the name of the area.

Who came? It was my grandfather from Italy.

John: Probably so.

I think so, he came. Then my grandmother, if I recall, was born in America, I think.

Question: Your mother's mother?

Yes. Anna Curreri.

Question: Your mother lived to be into her nineties, you say?

Yes, my mom would have been 99 and then my mother's name, like I said is Anna but then, her mother is Annie. She lived to be 97 and she was hit by a car on Third Street, yes. That was pretty traumatic, yes.

Question: Is your mother in one of the local cemeteries?

Yes.

Question: Which cemetery is she in?

My mom and dad and John's family, they're in Oak Grove right here. My grandmother's in Greenmount with my grandfather.

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Question: That would be Annie.

Yes.

Question: What would Annie's last name be then?

Curreri.

Question: Curreri.

Yes.

Question: Let's talk about your father a little bit. What was his full name?

Joseph Dominic Battaglia.

Question: Did he have a nickname?

No, Joe. Then, when he had the farm, the emblem on his produce was JDB.

Question: Was he born in Hammonton also?

I'm not sure, that's terrible.

Question: Did he grow up here?

Yes.

Question: He did grow up here. So, he was here from a young age.

Yes.

Question: How would you describe how he looked? Dark hair?

Nice looking, thin, always in shape and he had curly hair. Our youngest son, Steve, has the wavy hair, right? And then my sister has two sons, but the one son, David, that we see all the time, David Paretti, has got that beautiful curly hair.

Question: It reminds you of your father's hair?

Yes. My mother had five grandsons and one granddaughter, my niece Lori. Lori has the beautiful hair. Girls go to the salon to get their hair like that. She's got it all natural and long, it's beautiful.

Question: It sounds beautiful, they inherited that.

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Yes.

Question: Did your father have brothers and sisters?

Yes. He had Aunt Kay Nordo, was it Dad, then was it Mildred Caggiano and Jennie LoBiondo and Uncle Dick Battaglia was the baby?

Question: They were all Battaglia's.

Yes.

John: And her father and Dick were partners in the farm.

Yes, for quite a few years.

Question: Any cousins still around from that branch of the family?

Cousin Joe, who would be Aunt Jenny's son. He's in Lewes, Delaware. We talk to him on the phone. We hadn't seen him since my mother's funeral, which was five years ago. Joe LoBiondo.

John: His brother was Congressman in the area, Frank LoBiondo for a few years. He had a big trucking company at one time. LoBiondo Trucking would go to New York and so on, but Joe's the owner.

Then I had an Uncle Dick, he has a son, Richard, who we have not seen or heard from since Uncle Dick passed away, which is about 13 years ago. We never heard from him again. You know how that is.

John: He's in Georgia.

Question: You get separated.

Yes. Who else? Aunt Kay had no children.

John: Your cousin JoAnn died, remember?

Yes. Who was the next one? My father. Eileen passed away. Then was it Aunt Mil next, and her son passed. Aunt Jennie and then Uncle Dick, yes.

Question: Not too many people left.

No. Aunt Mil's son, Anthony died as a result of a brain bleed.

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John: Aunt Mildred married Tony Caggiano and they had a big farm in Salerno, in Bridgeton called Sunny Slope Farm.

Question: It sounds familiar.

Is that still in existence?

John: Yes. A big peach and apple farm, about 1,000 acres they have.

Question: Did your father ever tell you any stories about his childhood?

I remember him telling me that he would have to go to school and wear his sister's shoes. They would have to walk. They would walk from the end of Walker Road, where the house was to the school, which is under that overpass.

John: It's on Fleming Pike down there. They have the River Bridge and it's on the left, the building looks like a school as it was back then. Back then, Hammonton had a lot of four-room schoolhouses. There was that one down there, there was one where Rizzotte's farm is.

Near your grandparents, yes.

John: That's where my grandmother went to school. And there was one on Middle Road also that I remember. There used to be one on I think First Road, there were like five four-room schoolhouses. In fact, Folsom was a 4-room schoolhouse before they built that school there in 1965. I did my student teaching there.

My father used to tell us that he would have to work before he went to school.

Question: Wow, that was just expected.

Yes.

Question: They weren't that well off if he was wearing his sister's shoes, they were just getting by.

Oh, no, it was rough, yes.

John: No safety nets.

But they always had food to eat but they struggled. My grandfather had a horse.

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John: He would butcher his own animals.

He did a little farming. But then, like I said, the little grounds that he had, I think 20 or 30 acres, he turned it over to my father. My father just expanded it gradually. They were hard workers, all of them. The sisters used to work.

Question: It sounds like they reinvested any profit in their business and the family and their farm.

Yes.

Question: That's just what they did.

Yes.

Question: When did he pass away?

My dad passed in 2001, he was 87.

Question: You have good longevity in your family.

Yes. He was good up to the last two or three years, then he had Parkinson's and that was hard to watch. He was a very dynamic person; he was a spit fire. Seeing him like that was rough, yes.

Question: It's not an easy thing to witness.

No.

Question: Which cemetery is he in?

They are here at Oak Grove.

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

I don't know how my father – I know it was a short romance.

John: He told me he would drive by on Third Street and see your mother on the porch there. He stopped one day to have a conversation.

He knew about her, and they had a short romance. Originally, my grandmother and Aunt Laura did not want my mother to marry Joe because he was a farmer. They were from the other side of the town.

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Question: There was a stigma there.

Yes. But my mom's two brothers, Uncle Nean and Uncle Phil told my grandmother that he was a good guy, a hard worker, a good family man – from a good family. They thought that it would work.

Question: So, she got permission.

Yes. My mother said she was marrying Joe and that was it.

Question: It was happening regardless.

Yes, and it worked.

Question: What was your mom's likes and dislikes? She obviously was a hard worker, too. Did she have hobbies? Did she like to cook?

She was an excellent cook, which I can't say that I took after her, I did not. But she was a very good cook and an excellent mother. She did it all. She was a great wife, a great mother, a terrific worker. What else can you say? She did everything.

John: When you were a small toddler like that, she would put baskets out, they didn't have the farm market at the time, baskets out under a tree. There were peaches and Joanne would call her mother in the house and say that there's a customer that stopped.

That was my first word.

Question: That was your job to alert your mom when there was a customer.

That was my first word.

John: Doing housework and then come running out of the house and wait on the customers. She was like a little girl.

That's the reason why my mother told my father that she wanted the house moved up front.

Question: They would know when there was customers around.

She saw potential for retail. My father was just like into wholesale. She was ahead of her time, my mom, yes.

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Question: She was. She was using the head on her shoulders.

Yes. She was very business minded.

Question: What about your dad, did he have any hobbies? He obviously worked his farm; he was very business minded.

He was a was a workaholic and he did like my mother, they both belonged to a couple of organizations.

Question: Any specific organizations?

My dad was instrumental in building Kessler Hospital, he was one of the Directors. When was that John, in the sixties?

John: Around the seventies, I think or early seventies.

Late sixties, I think.

John: I guess when they had the Committee meetings to build it.

Yes. He belonged to the Rotary and that's how they got involved backing Kessler Hospital. He also belonged to a couple of farm production credit that have to deal with farming. I remember mom was in Catholic Daughters and she was very active in the PTA when Eileen and I were in school. She did it all. She worked and she really did a lot.

John: Your father also belonged to that group that would go to Puerto Rico and recruit the workers to work on the farms.

Right, Glassboro. I forgot they had a special name there. That was big. When I was young, I think my teens, we always had Puerto Ricans work for us.

Question: They worked the fields?

They were very, very good, yes. We had Jamaicans also.

Question: You had to recruit people from other countries to come over.

Some of those men stayed for their lifetime. They stayed on the farm for 20, 30 years.

Question: They just continued to work for your family.

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I do remember though the Crowders from here lived in town. I remember George and Dora.

Question: Was there Art Crowder?

Yes, Arthur.

Question: I've heard of him; he played Little League ball.

Yes. Old George and young George worked on the farm for years. They would come in and sit down with us, they were like family members really. It was nice.

Question: You had a long history together.

Yes.

Question: What traits do you think you inherited from your mother and your father? Do you resemble either of them physically?

I don't know. They say I look like my Aunt Kay.

John: A little bit, yes.

And my mom and dad, it's like a combination. I don't know really. But traits, I guess, I'm hard working, conscientious, helped other people. My mom was very good, and my dad helped people that were in need. They would be quiet; you wouldn't even know they were doing that.

Question: They would be in the background helping if somebody needed help.

Right. And we would do the same thing. Like I said, we had a good work ethic and our three kids, too. They're all conscientious, thank God.

Question: They instilled in you important ethics for life.

Yes. My mother made sure we got to church; we went to church every Sunday with mom. Dad didn't make it, but mom did. He was out there working like an early bird all the time, early riser.

Question: For your father, that was still a work day for him.

Yes.

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Question: He would get up when the sun came up, an early riser?

Yes, for sure.

Question: That's typical of farmers.

We would have the phone calls, I recall, when different farmers at times, they had to ask questions at 6:00 a.m. To them that was nothing.

Question: That was business hours for them.

Right.

Question: What do you think was the greatest tragedy your parents suffered? Anything in their lives?

What do you think, John?

John: I can't think of anything, no.

Question: That's wonderful

We had the loss of my grandmother. My mother was very close to my grandmother, that was hard for her. Very resilient, she was.

Question: Your mother was resilient.

Yes, and dad. That's how we are too, you have to keep going.

Question: What do you remember of your grandparents? What can you tell me about them?

My grandfather passed away when I was 16 and he lived across the street. Our other house is across the street.

Question: Is this your father's father?

Yes, my father's father, Dominic. When I was about eight or nine, there was a little road across the street, and I used to take the car and bring food to him. My sister and I used to go, and I used to drive the car.

Question: He was a lucky man; he had his own Grub Hub delivery service.

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I loved doing that, so I did that for quite a few years. My mother would make sure she made enough food for grandpa. Eventually, he did need a caregiver, he did have somebody come in. Then my Aunt Kay from Philly, she would come on the weekends. Aunt Kay would do extra cooking and she would clean, she was my favorite Aunt.

Question: That's great, nice memories.

Aunt Kay Nordo (phonetic), she used to bring homemade cookies and chocolate chip and the delicious rice pudding. She used to go buy the stuff from Termini's when she had the money, she would bring us desserts. She was really something else, yes. My grandmother, which would be my grandfather Dominic's wife, she died young of a heart attack. I never knew her at all. My grandmother, Annie, I knew her for a long time.

Question: That's your mother's mother.

She was a hard worker and had a very nice personality. She ran a roadside market also, Vara's (phonetic) Market in Elwood until she was about 80.

John: It's right near the light in Elwood, there's some kind of garage there now.

Yes, across from the police station or something there. So, granny, she was another hard worker. When we weren't working, my mother would go visit my grandmother every day in town. My sister and I would usually go with her until we got a lot older, but we would always be there.

Question: What was Annie's maiden name?

Curreri.

Question: Curreri was her maiden name.

That LaRosa name comes up but I'm not sure, I don't know.

Question: Curreri was her married name.

Curreri was her married name. What was her maiden name. I should know that. Oh, Annie Curreri's maiden name was Sceia.

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Question: From an educational standpoint, do you know who finished school and who did not?

My grandmother, very little.

Question: Annie did not.

Annie, I think had up to maybe 2nd or 3rd Grade, that's it, self-taught. My grandfather drowned; her husband drowned.

John: In Hammonton Lake.

Question: What was his name?

Frank Curreri. I don't know anything about his education at all.

Question: He drowned in Hammonton Lake?

No.

Question: As a young man.

Yes. After a hard day's work at the feed store, he went not to Hammonton Lake it was that other place, when we go down Weymouth Road.

John: Furnace?

Question: By the way of Furnace, I've heard that's dangerous there. There are currents there that are very dangerous.

He didn't come back. She knew where he was going and then she sent my Uncle, Uncle Neem found him, I think.

Question: That was tragic.

Yes.

John: He was presumably a good swimmer, that's what the story was.

Who knows, but he was very young.

Question: Did he finish school?

I doubt it. No, I do not know anything about him.

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Question: They worked the land, became farmers then. What about your father's parents, what was their educational background?

My grandmother died at a young age, so I'm sure there was none. I'm almost sure. My grandfather, no, I don't think so, right, John, like your grandfather.

John: No. We were the first kids who ever graduated from college, anything else was high school or below.

They never discussed it actually; they were all self-taught.

Question: And successful with what they ended up doing that wasn't an issue, like they were sitting around complaining, wishing they had done it, a different career. They seemed settled and happy in what they were doing.

Yes.

John: They all lived through the Depression too. It was tough times. They would have to have weird jobs. Her father and her uncle had a bulldozer and in the winter time they would go to Brigantine, and they cleared all Brigantine out, cleared all the houses out just to have something to do in the winter time, to get the trees out of the way and everything. They grubbed the land.

Yes, they did that for years.

John: I can remember when I was a kid, my grandfather had seven acres of apples back of the brick house there, that was your father who came with the bulldozer and knocked all those trees out.

Oh really, I didn't know that.

Question: Just to clear the land to use for something else?

John: Yes.

Question: They rolled up their sleeves and did whatever needed to be done and made money at it in the process.

John: No unemployment no welfare or nothing like that back then.

Question: Yes, they had to make the money, they had to bring the dollars in.

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To survive, yes.

Question: Can you think of anything else I should know about your family, yourself, anything else you would like to add?

Well, my parents did travel. Once my father had a few dollars and he liked to travel. They travelled across the world. Once the farm season was over, I think I was in 4th Grade and Eileen was in 2nd, we stayed at my grandmothers for one month while they went to Europe. He visited his relatives that he found out about.

Question: That was important to him to see the world and see his relatives.

Yes. Then he did a big trip to Russia in 1960.

Question: Which grandfather are we talking about?

My father, my dad, did that.

John: That was during the really super cold war. They were one of the first groups allowed into Russia.

They were invited, that was a big deal.

Question: That was unusual to even get to go there then.

Yes. After he went there for a year or two, he used to go speak at the different organizations, he took slides. Yes, that was a big deal.

Question: He shared that information.

Right.

John: I remember I was a teacher at the Hammonton Elementary School at the time, 6th Grade. He came and he gave an assembly program.

Who did?

John: Your father and a couple of other farmers. They showed the video of themselves in Russia.

Of the life in Russia, yes.

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Question: It was educational for not just themselves but shared it.

My dad graduated high school and he got into Villa Nova. I think he lasted one week.

Question: He decided it wasn't for him?

No, he just said, that's it. He said, "I need to go back and work on the farm and that's what I'm going to do." But he did graduate high school. I think all of his siblings graduated high school. That was good, yes.

Question: For that day and age, that was an accomplishment.

It was big, especially for the females, it was great. That's right, I remember that now. I don't know if my mother's sister graduated high school, she may have Aunt Laura. I think she did, but like I said, I know my mother didn't. It didn't really matter, she went on. Aunt Laura was very business-minded, too.

Question: Did your mother continue to cut hair at all?

She would do it at home maybe for friends or something. I remember she used to give me permanents. I had real curly hair, too. My sister, we both did, you can see the picture up there, we both had curly hair. I remember her down the cellar with those big things to give the permanents.

Question: They looked like machines?

Yes, something from out of space, but she did that. She was very talented when you think about it, but she stopped doing it. When we were young, we used to even freeze the peaches like in canned tomatoes and all that. And then after a while she said, "I can't do this, I'm working on the farm." We did that maybe until I was 10.

Question: It just became too much?

Yes, it was way too much then, which was fine. We had a very interesting life. We did go with my parents and Eileen to Florida. I don't think it was Disney World, no, we went to Florida a couple times during the holiday.

John: Didn't you go to Williamsburg? I think I saw pictures of you in Williamsburg.

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Yes, we did that. I remember my father and mother taking me and my sister and my cousin Anna to New York and we stayed at The Plaza.

Question: That was a big deal, I bet.

That was a thrill. That was 8th Grade, I think. That was really thrilling. My parents travelled a lot and as things got better, we used to go out to dinner once in a while. We had a good life, yes. We really did.

Question: You were blessed.

Yes, we really were.

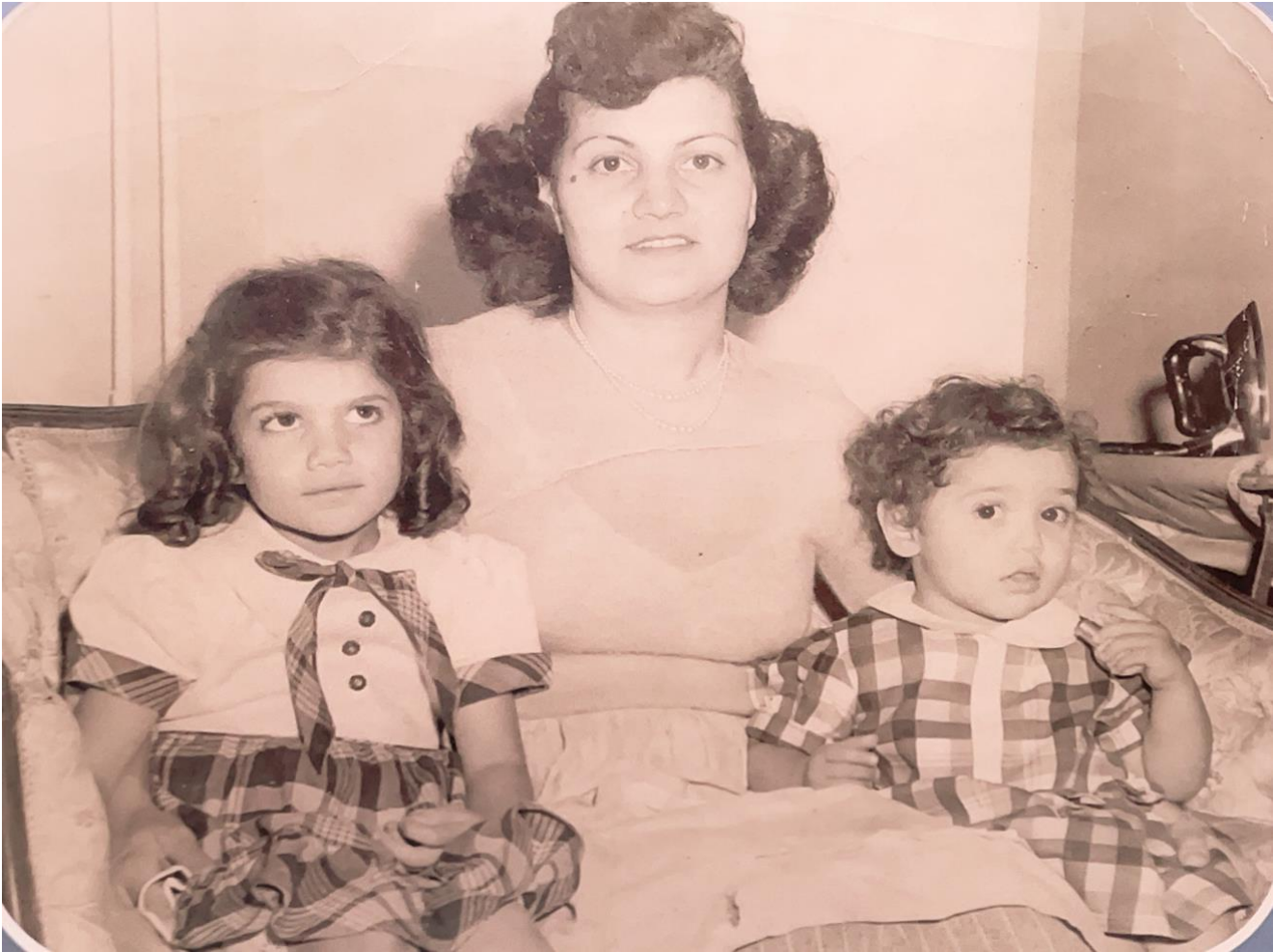
Question: I really appreciate you participating in our project.

This has been interesting. You have to do John because he is very interesting.

Question: I would love to, very definitely. Thanks again.

[End of Interview]

Joanne Battaglia Wiessner, her mother, Anne Curreri Battaglia and Joanne's younger sister, Eileen Battaglia Pareto



Joanne Battaglia Wiessner with her
husband John E. Wiessner

