

AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH
ANNABELE SCAFFIDI MITCHELL



Recorded and transcribed for the benefit of
Historical Society of Hammonton

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Historical Society Members Deborah White or Janet Hasulak will be prefaced by "HS"

Annabelle Mitchell will be prefaced by "AM"

HS. What is your full name?

AM. Annabel Scaffidi Mitchell

HS. How old are you, and where do you now live?

**AM. I live at 80 Valley Ave. and I am 87years old.
My birthday is April 1, 1931**

HS. Where were you born?

**AM. I was born at home, 15 West Pleasant Street,
Hammonton, N.J.**

**HS. Did your parents move to any other cities or states?
when you were young?**

AM. No, we stayed here in Hammonton.

**HS. Can you describe what the town was like and your
surroundings as a child?**

**AM. My surroundings were great. We were young kids
and we would go to the movies in the evening. We
could walk home at night. There was no one to be
afraid of. My neighborhood was safe.**

HS. What was a favorite movie you saw?

AM. Gone With The Wind, is the only one I can think of.

**HS. Can you picture any particular room in your home?
How would you describe your home?**

AM. My home had eleven rooms in it. It was a two story home and it had an apartment on one side, which my parents rented out to a friend. It was an apartment for a long time. Later the women moved. She was a friend of my mothers. We then took over the whole house. The house had five bedrooms, kitchen, a living room and on the other side it was something like a duplex. It had a bathroom in the shed, and when you sat on the toilet the tank would fill and then you got up the toilet would flush.

HS. Is the house still there?

AM. Yes, and there are residents in it.

HS. Do you remember when it was built?

AM. No, I don't remember when it was built. I know Mr. Little was the original owner. I think his first name was Harry.

HS. Did you have your own bedroom?

AM. I had my own bedroom. My brother had a bedroom. My sister and I slept in the same room. The other two bedrooms were part of the apartment on the other side of the house.

HS. Where did you go to school?

AM. Hammonton. I went to Hammonton grade school and Hammonton High School.

HS. Where were the schools located at the time?

AM. They were in the same place. Originally because my Mother had to work, I was put in Catholic school. They take you when you are four years old. So I was Four when I started. They transferred me when I fifth grade. I went to Hammonton's school district. I graduated Hammonton High School, then I got a job.

HS. I am guessing it was a little unusual for your mother to have worked during that time. What did she do?

AM. She was a sewing machine operator. She worked for The Aggressive Coat Company. It is not there any longer.

HS. What was her maiden name?

AM. Her name was Mary Jarrolle.

HS. Do you remember the name of any of your teachers?

AM. Oh yeah! Miss Harper, Miss Moyer, Mr. Walser.

HS. Who were your childhood friends at this time? Have you kept in touch?

AM. Yes, they live in the area. Ellen Clark, she married a Firhett. Then there was another girl. They lived around the corner on Washington St. We used to roller skate around the block. We were friendly.

HS. How did teenagers dress when you were a teenager?

AM. We wore saddle shoes and bobby socks, skirts. We never wore pants.

HS. What would have been considered wild clothes or wild hair back then? If a teen was a bit of a rebel?

AM. There wasn't any that I recall. People stayed conservative, not like today. Today it is a lot different, all sorts of styles.

HS. Were your parents disciplinarians with you, or were you able to do what you choose to do?

**AM. Oh no, my parents were very strict.
We listened we were good kids.**

HS. How would you be scolded or punished.

AM. We would simply get hollered at, that is all.

AM. I remember in high school my sister liked a boy. He would come around and sit on the curb and my father would holler and chase him home.

HS. Were things very formal if you wanted to date?

AM. Oh, yes, my father was strict. You needed to do things properly. My father was a glasscutter. Then the glass cutting business went out of business here in Hammonton. Then he didn't have a job. My mother had the steady job, so she carried the insurance. She was the breadwinner.

HS. What glass company did your father work for?

AM. Skinner Glass Company. Their buildings I think are torn down. They used to be on South Egg Harbor Road. In fact he cut a glass jewelry box for my mother when he worked there. I still have it. I will some day give it to one of the grandkids.

HS. What did you do for entertainment as a teen?

AM. We roller skated and then we would go to the movies on Saturday afternoon. For 11 cents we would see the movie.

HS. Was this at a movie house in town?

AM. Yes. You know where the building is on the corner of 3rd Street and Bellevue Avenue, across the street from the drug store? That was the movie theater. We would stay there all afternoon.

HS. How old were you when you got married?

AM. Twenty-seven.

HS. And what was your husband's name?

AM. Richard Mitchell.

HS. How did you and your husband meet?

AM. I worked at the gas company up on the pike. It used to be Natural Gas, then Suburban Gas. Any way I used to know a bunch of girls and we would go to McGuire Air Base, because they used to have dances at the NCO Club. We met at the dance. He was from Springfield, Pennsylvania, originally from Philly. His parents had moved to the suburbs. We started to date and then he got discharged and then he came down to see me.

HS. How old was your husband when you married?

AM. He was a year younger than me. He was twenty-six.

HS. You made a decision to stay in Hammonton?

AM. Why we stayed was because my mother was a widow. She was widowed very young. My father died when he was fifty-four years old. She was about fifty-three. They were close in age. She had this big house. My brother was gone, he had gone in the service. My sister was away, she went in training to be a nurse, and I was home. Since we had this big house, we just stayed there. In fact when I had my children, I had a daughter first, we lived there six years with my mother, then got our own place.

HS. How long did you know your husband before you married?

AM. Maybe two years. We would date and go to dances.

HS. Did you get married in a church?

AM. Yes, it was St Joseph's at the time. My husband wasn't wasn't Catholic, but we got married. They married you outside the altar. And we raised the children Catholic, he didn't care. He was Episcopalian, which is relatively close.

HS. You have how many children?

AM. I had three, but I only have the two girls now. I lost my son in 1993.

HS. What happened, if you don't mind us asking?

AM He graduated high school and he wanted to go into New York. He was a designer and he made very good money. He was a woman's clothing designer with prestigious companies. Don Kenny was his last employer. He had a good job. He made a six figure salary. He became chronically ill, and died. He came home. He was sick and he asked me to come home. I said, yes, this is your home. I took care of him. We lived on Bellevue Avenue at the time. The house is for sale presently. The address was 542 Bellevue Avenue. So he came home and I was taking care of my mother at the time. She had given up her home, and she was in her nineties. Then my mother and he were in the hospital and the doctor said you better put your mother in a home, because you are not going to be able to take care of both of them. So I did, I put her here at the nursing center. I continued to care for my son. He didn't live too long.

HS. What were your children's names and birthdates?

AM. Janice was the oldest. She was born October 30, 1959. My son, David was born, April 26, 1961. Judy was born July 21, 1964. She is my youngest. She is the one who lives in Medford.

HS. You get to see her fairly regularly?

AM. Yes, she comes down.

HS. How many grandchildren do you have? What are their names?

AM. I have five. Daniel is the oldest. He works in Washington DC. He has a good job. He was born, I think in 1992. The youngest is Cameron. He is 18 or 19, born in 2000. Then I have a granddaughter who was born August 4. I don't remember the year. Also two more boys, Steven and Jacob. I am not sure when they were born. They are in their 20's now.

HS. Do you see them very often?

AM. Not too often. They are in college you know. My youngest daughter's son just got a job in Lancaster, Pa. He finished college, he went to University of Pittsburg. He got this job with Armstrong.

HS. Are any of your grandchildren married yet?

AM. No, none are married.

HS. Do you have any particular memories of Hammonton? from when you were young and any favorite places that may no longer be there? What are your memories

AM. Everybody was so friendly. You knew everybody. You knew who owned the drug store, and who owned Malinskys. The there was a linen shop. There is a law office now there, on the corner off Horton Street and Bellevue Avenue.

HS. Was there a soda fountain?

AM. Yes. Godfreys on the corner of Egg Harbor Road. We used to go there after school and have a sundae or ice cream soda. This place was part of the drug store.

HS. Did you have a favorite song?

AM. I don't remember. That is too long ago.

HS. Was it big band, Frank Sinatra music that was popular?

AM. We saw Frank Sinatra at one of the clubs, Latin Casino. He came there.

HS. Any other places in town?

AM. Well, there was Melinskys. They sold clothing, for men and women. Then there was a five and ten. That was JJ Newberrys. Let's see what else was there. There were a couple of ladies dress shops. There was the Martin Shop, the Vogue Shop.

HS. Was Sears on the corner at this point?

AM. Yes, Sears was right there, where there is nothing there now.

HS. So did you shop in town?

AM. Mostly in town, we didn't have malls. We mostly did local shopping.

HS. Did you use the Sears catalog to order things?

AM. Sears catalog, yes. We did that too.

HS. Can you think of any major news events that happened during your lifetime?

AM. Not really.

HS. What about World War II, do you remember where you were when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor?

AM. I remember we listened to FDR on the radio. We had one of those Philco radios.

AM. When my brother graduated in 1944 he went right in the service because he didn't want to be drafted. He went in the service and joined the Navy.

HS. Did he survive the war?

AM. Yes he did. In fact he just died not long ago. He was 92. First his wife died, then he died in the same year.

HS. How long did he stay in the Navy?

AM. I think for 3 or 4 years and then he got discharged.

HS. I have some questions regarding your mother. What was her full name?

AM. Mary Jarolle

HS. And where was your mother born?

AM. She was born in Sicily. Both of my parents came from Sicily. I am true Sicilian.

HS. What did your mother look like, how would you describe her?

AM. Oh, she was a pretty lady. She had a pleasant personality. My father was gruff, but she was pretty and a nice lady.

HS. Did your mother have brothers and sisters?

AM. She did, in fact she came from Sicily with her mother and sisters and her brother, I think. She had two brothers and there were five sisters. A big family by todays standards. Well, they didn't have television then!

HS. So her father did not come over, just her mother?

AM. Her father came first and bought a home. He also bought land to farm. Then he sent for my grandmother and the children. My mother was five years old, when she came with her sisters. It was interesting.

HS. What school did your mother attend? She went to school here in the states?

AM. She went to school here, but she only went to the fifth grade. She had to go work on the farm and go dig the potatoes, and the same for my father. But my mother loved to read. She would always read the newspaper. She was self educated.

HS. Do you remember any stories she told about her childhood and school days?

AM. No, not really.

HS. And was she a Roman Catholic? Did she attend St. Joseph's Church in town?

AM. Yes, she was Roman Catholic, and went to St Joseph's Church but went to the public school for her education.

HS. Was she only married to your father?

AM. Just to my father.

HS. Was church a big part of your life here in Hammonton?

AM. We just went on Sunday.

HS. And how was your mother's health? She was healthy until her later years?

AM. She lived until the age of ninety-nine. She was a hard worker. I can remember her going outside, she had a bench and two tubs she would scrub and wash the clothes in. I can see her now wringing out the clothes with her strong hands. I attribute that strength to her strong heart.

HS. Your first washing machine was what kind?

AM. It was electric with rollers. She didn't have to crank it. Times have changed, haven't they? We used the old clothes line, some people still do.

HS. When did your mother pass away? You mentioned she was ninety-nine.

AM. She passed away December 31, 1995. My sister passed away after her, my sister lived in Easton, Pa. and then after her husband died she came down this way to live with us. My sister died in 2005. You know sometimes when all your family is gone you feel so alone.

HS. Is she buried in a local cemetery?

AM. She is buried in Green Mount.

HS. I would like to ask a little about your father. What was his full name?

AM. William Peter Scaffidi.

HS. Did he have a nick name?

AM. No, Bill they called him.

HS. And he was born in Sicily?

AM. Yes.

HS. And can you describe him?

AM. He was a tall man. I have pictures of him home. Sometime you have to come over and see them.

HS. Did he have brothers and sisters?

AM. He had a lot of brothers, Joseph, Dominic, John there is another whose name I forget, but their children are still around.

HS. He had three brothers?

AM. He had more than three brothers.

HS. Was he educated in the states?

AM. Yes, he didn't get much education. He too had to go to work.

HS. You said he was a glasscutter?

AM. Yes, then that went out of business. He had to do another job. He drove a truck to take produce to New York and then he got another job. He got a job as a janitor at the high school here in Hammonton. That was the job he pretty much hung on to a long time. Then he wanted to go into business for himself so he started a taxi business. He got a car, got a license and drove taxi and that was his last job.

HS. Had he gone into the military?

AM. Yes, he was in World War I.

HS. What branch of the service was he in?

AM. He was in the Army. He was stationed in Camp Humphys. I think that was in Virginia. The war didn't last long. He was only in for about three months. The war was then over. He was never wounded.

HS. Did all of his ancestors come from Sicily?

AM. Yes.

HS. Do you know any stories about his ancestors or his childhood?

AM. No, I don't remember any of that.

HS. Did his health remain good until his later years?

AM. He had pancreatic cancer, with no cure for it. He was 54 when he died, such a young age. He is buried next to my mother at Green Mount Cemetery.

HS. Did your parents ever talk about how they met and fell in love?

AM. No, they were private.

HS. Do you know anymore about your mothers likes and dislikes, or her hobbies?

AM. She loved to crochet and she was a hard worker. You have to come over to my home and I will show you pictures.

HS. Was she a good cook?

AM. Oh, yes an excellent cook.

HS. What was your favorite meal she would cook?

AM. She made great macaroni and meatballs, bracirole, sausage, and all that stuff.

HS. Do you like to cook ?

AM. Yes, I do, but not any more. You know why? It is just not fun cooking for one person.

HS. What about your Dad? It sounds like he was a hard working man. Did he have any hobbies? Was he a man who was good with tools?

AM. He was a man who used to like to go to the bar room and drink, that was his hobby. My mother would say, get up stairs; your father has been drinking. She was afraid he might hit us. Things were a lot different.

HS. Women tolerated a lot.

AM. My mother tolerated so much. He was verbally abusive to my mother. It was hard to take.

HS. Did they keep a garden or raise animals?

AM. Oh, yes they had a garden. Always we had tomatoes and things like that in the backyard. My mother was the gardener, mostly. She enjoyed doing that.

HS. Were either of your parents actively involved in the community, joining clubs or political groups back then.

AM. No, not really.

HS. Do you feel you have more traits from your mother or father? Who do you think you resemble most?

AM. I think they said I look like my father. But, I think I have more of my mother's traits.

HS. What do you think was the greatest tragedy your parents experienced in their lives?

AM. That is a hard question .

HS. How many children did they have?

AM. They had three children, two girls and a boy.

HS. And what were their names?

AM. My brother's name was Anthony and my sisters name was Catherine. Catherine was the oldest and I was the youngest. I miss my siblings.

HS. How long have they been gone?

AM. My brother has been gone a year. I used to see him occasionally and sister in law, they were nice people.

HS. And your sister?

AM. My sister, she has been gone along time. She was 82.

AM. What happened to my sister is she had uterine cancer. Her gynecologist doctor retired and then she never went to a doctor. She was a nurse she should have known better. She did not keep up with her check ups. Then when she came down here I took her to a doctor and they said she had cancer. She took treatment, but she didn't live long. It was sad.

HS. Do you remember you sister's and brother's birth dates?

AM. Catherine was born August 24, 1922, and Anthony was born in June of 1926. I was born in April.

HS. Has your daughters asked you a lot of these same questions about family or the past?

AM. No, not really. They are busy with their lives. It is different today.

HS. Did you know your grandmother, either your mother's or father's mother?

AM. I knew them. My grandmother on my mother's side took care of me, when I was really little and my mother worked. My mother would take me there and she would take care of me. I would go to my father's mother on 4th Street too, the house is still there.

HS. What were their names?

AM. His name was Scaffidi. I don't remember her maiden name. He was Antonio Scaffidi. This is father's father. My mother's father was Charles Jarolle. My grandmother was named Anna. That is why we have all these Annas. My cousin was Anna May, and Anna Marie, all kind of Annas. I was named Annabele. I mostly went by Annabele. We all had to be named after our grandmother.

HS. Did your grandmothers work outside of the family?

AM. No, they did farming. That kept them busy. They had the raspberry fields. Raspberries were big then, more so than blueberries, raspberries was their main crop. In fact I even remember picking for my Uncle.

HS. Do you think your grandmothers had any influence on you?

AM. No, but I remember them looking after me when I was younger. I remember one time when I was staying at my father's parents. They used to have a big table under a shady tree. This is where they would pack the raspberries. I remember climbing up on the table to get on the pear tree and my grandfather scolded me.

HS. Where was the farm located at the time?

AM. 4th Street and the other farm was on 14th Street and 1st Road.

HS. Do you remember much about your maternal grandfather?

AM. No, I think he died before I was born. His name was Charles. I don't remember him and barely remember my grandmother.

HS. What did he die of? He died at a young age then?

AM. I think he died of pneumonia.

HS. Is he buried locally?

AM. Yeah, he is here. He is in Green Mount Cemetery In fact all my cousins and aunts all bought plots in the same area.

HS. Were diseases such as tuberculosis, or polio a problem? Any epidemics you remember?

AM. No, oh, the flu! My mother lost her sister in 1918. She was pregnant at the time. My mother said she and her sister Grace sat up all night with her sick sister. Her name was Josie. She was in St. Agnes hospital, but passed away.

AM. So many people died at that time in this town, they could not bury her. They had to keep her home on the couch until the undertaker at the time had a chance to bury her. A lot of people died.

HS. What about your father's father? Did you have a relationship with him, that you recall?

AM. No, I don't remember. I remember he was a big tall man. My grandmother was a little short chubby lady. I don't remember about his personality. I wasn't around him a lot.

HS. Were you at their home for holidays?

AM. Oh, definitely we would go there.

HS. What traditions do you remember?

AM. Christmas Eve we would go. Christmas Eve was the holiday we would get together. They would make fish. We didn't have the seven fishes, but we would have smelts and bacala. I make bacala for the family and they love it. They would be disappointed if I didn't make it.

HS. Do you know anything about your great grandparents?

AM. No. They were over in the old country. I have some relatives still there.

HS. This is over in Sicily?

AM. Yes, I have never been there.

HS. Can you think of anything to share with us that we perhaps did not think to ask?

AM. All I know is I was born and raised here.

HS. What year was the home on 542 Belleview Ave sold?

AM. We lived in that house a long time. I think we moved there, I have to think. My daughter went back and said Mother you don't want to see it. She said it is a mess. They lost the house and didn't keep up with it. It was a nice house. We did a nice job on it, remodeled the whole thing, because it was an old home. In fact I have pictures of it. We lived there a good 25 years. I raised all my children there.

HS. Did you move because you wanted to downsize and get a smaller space?

AM. Yes, we didn't need the space. And that house had an apartment. You know my husband took care of Mr. Collins. Mr. Collins owned that property. He was a dairy man. He went to the same church as my husband and he asked my husband, Richard, will you sort of look after me? My husband did look after him. Richard would do things and take him here and there.

AM. When Mr. Collins had to go in a nursing home. He asked my husband to take the home. So we bought the home from him. I think we paid \$ 85,000 at the time. We did have to do a lot of work to it. So we had someone come in and do all that work.

AM. The home I am in now we built in 2009.

HS. What do you know about the history of the house next door?

AM. They were oil people. Adamucci their name was. In fact he had oil tanks all back there. They dug them all up. Teresa and he had two children, a boy and girl. The boy lived here for awhile. Then they wanted to build a new home, so they built a home out on Pine Road. They ran their oil business out of the home. I went there to pay the oil bill. They delivered oil to my mother's home. Trucks were parked on the property.

HS. Where was the actual dairy?

AM. He didn't have the cows that I remember back there. He would get the milk and process it in the barn. Mr. Collins had trucks for delivering of the milk. Everything was in glass bottles and they would leave the milk on the porch.

HS. Were there cows where the Rice home is now?

AM. No, I think that was just vacant land. I remember the Rice's. She was a teacher and he owned the hardware store in town.

HS. Did you know any of the occupants of this house? (106 Valley Ave.)

AM. The Lagos lived here. Before them the Bernato's Georgie Bernato had a grocery store in town. The Lagos moved up on Bellevue Ave. He was a painter. He had two boys I think.

HS. So you have seen this street take on a new look. I understand there had been old trees on this street. Were the trees removed when the new paving of the street was done?

AM. I don't remember. Things change over the years.

HS. Did you spend time going to Atlantic City when you were a girl?

AM. Yes, we would go to the steel pier. We would take the train, my mother and my sister would go. We would see the diving horse.

HS. What was it like seeing the horse diving?

AM. It was nice and exciting.

HS. What kind of bathing suit did you wear?

AM. A one piece, full suit. No one would ever wear those two piece, bra and panty type suits back then. And we would wear a swim hat when we went in the ocean.

HS. Do you remember anything else about Atlantic City?

AM. No, We loved the boardwalk. My mother loved the boardwalk. This was before casinos. There were A lot of little stores, including a linen store she liked.

AM. I am going to go now. You have to come over and I will get out pictures of a lot of these old folks.

HS. We would love that!