

**INTERVIEW WITH
MARIAN (RUBBA) SILVESTI**

**CONDUCTED FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF HAMMONTON**

**INTERVIEW BY:
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MARIAN (RUBBA) SILVESTI

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HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF HAMMONTON

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Effie Kennedy member of Hammonton Historical Society
Interviewing Marion Silvesti (oral history at her home)
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Effie: State your full name.

Marion: My full name is Marion Alice Rubba Silvesti. My age is 74. I was born on March 11, 1936.

I was born at the West Jersey hospital in Camden and then I came home to live on Horton Street in Hammonton. I lived in the home of Dr. Russell Rubba, my father's brother. I lived there for five years and then my father bought a home one block down the street, on Horton St. The families were expanding. My parents lived there for the next 65 years or so until their deaths. I always lived in that house until I went off to college. It was a typical residential area. We were only a block or so from town. We had the kitchen, living room, TV room, three bedrooms. It was a big house with high ceilings, not a very big back yard. I went to the Hammonton schools all my life. Went to kindergarten through 12th grade. I walked to school and walked home for lunch every day. We walked with friends from the neighborhood so it was a fun time when we did that. I remember all the names of my teachers because school was important to me and I enjoyed it.

My kindergarten teacher was Miss Wood who lived on the same street as I did. Miss Lobbly was another kindergarten teacher, I had Miss Hudson, Miss Whippen, Miss Stella, Miss Phillips, Miss Doran, Mrs. Maloney, Mrs. Arico, Mrs. Procter, Miss Olivia, the music teacher, Mrs. Maloney, Mrs. Fithian, Mrs. Petrecca and our principal's name was Mr. Smith.

My best friends during my school years are still my best friends today. Gail Westphalen, Fiely, Katherine Roby Parkhurst, Angela Gazzara Mazzeo, Gerry Errera Richie, Charlotte Bancheri Milham.

I am married. I have been married for fifty-three years. I married Frank Silvesti. He was born right across the street from where we are today. He was born in that house. I was twenty years old when I got married. We knew each other a couple of years. We met at a football game. The places that we went as a young couple was mostly to the movies, sports events, events that our children participated in. We would go for rides. That was more or less our entertainment at the time.

I have five children. Their names are Greg, born in February 1958, Marguerite who was named for her Irish grandmother, she was born in August 1963 and Valarie was born in 1964, Gary born in 1968 and Lauren

in 1973. They all live in Hammonton today. I have eight grandchildren. I will be having nine as of January. Their names are Greg and Matthew Silvesti, Kendall and Kerri Patton, Cole and Brian McCarty, Benjamin and Ashland Silvesti .

Describing my surroundings when I was a child -- I lived among my relatives. Many of us lived on Horton St. or nearby Orchard St. My grandfather had a very large home on the corner of Horton and Orchard. It was kind of the family gathering place. Across the street from that was Dr. Russell Rubba's home. Today the Bank of America's parking lot is where my grandfather's house stood.

My memories of Hammonton when I was young -- They are all happy memories. We played a lot of neighborhood games out in the street. We played baseball on the corner lot. I always enjoyed sports myself. I remember the end of WWII. The teenage girl across the street from me grabbed my hand and dragged me up to Bellevue Ave. I remember the wild blowing of horns and people shouting. Everyone was so overjoyed that the war was over. I do remember that.

Hammonton has changed a bit since I was little. It is much bigger now and more people in it. You don't know everyone the way you did back

then, it seems. It still retained its friendliness. It is a safe, wonderful place to raise children.

One of my favorite places in Hammonton that is no longer there -- I remember we hung out sort of at the Sweet Shop on Bellevue Ave. and that is no longer there. It was kind of a soda fountain that kids gathered in.

Major news event of my life: Well of course we all say 911, which was a sad event and the end of WWII, I can remember that.

My mother's history -- My mother was Irish. Her parents were both Irish. They spoke with a little bit of an Irish brogue although they were first generation. It was their grandparents that had come from Ireland but they lived among the Irish in Philadelphia so they actually did have an Irish brogue to their voices. My mother lived in Philadelphia until she was ten or so and then they moved to Atlantic City. My grandfather was a railroad conductor. My mother spent her teenage years in Atlantic City. My mother was rather a small person kind of unlike me. She had light brown hair, fair skin. She had one brother, Joseph Mac Anany, two sisters, Mary and Alice. They are all dead at this time. I have one cousin who now lives in Brigantine on that side of the family. My mother attended parochial school

in Philadelphia and then I suppose she attended the beginning of high school in Atlantic City but she did not finish. She said the nuns beat her over her hands with a stick and that was the end of that. She went to work for the telephone company and rose up in the ranks there. She worked for about a year or so after she married my father. They lived in Atlantic City in an apartment for a year or so and then they moved to Hammonton and were there ever since. My mother loved to dance in her youth and she spent a lot of time doing that in Atlantic City. That was her favorite activity I think plus the beach of course. My mother was a Catholic. She only worked that one year or so after she got married, for the telephone company. Then she became a housewife and mother. My father was her first and only husband.

My mother's ancestors were from Ireland, her grandparents. Her parents were American born. My mother's paternal grandmother was an O'Quinn. She came over from Ireland shortly after the potato famine, a large family. They had moved from Ireland to Scotland for a couple of years while they were preparing to come here. Then Mr. O'Quinn, my great grandfather died and she came over anyway with the little children because

she had some older children who had already come here and she lived with them first in New York and then moving into Philadelphia.

My mother's health was generally good. She died in 2002 after having some strokes. She died in her house on Horton Street surrounded by her family. I was her main care keeper. She is buried in the Hammonton Catholic cemetery next to my father.

My father's full name was Frank Richard Rubba. No nickname that I know about. He was born in Hammonton and he grew up on Horton St. in the house on the corner of Horton and Orchard. My father was medium size man, dark hair, dark eyes. He had six brothers and a sister. They are of course all passed now. I have Rubba cousins who I was more close to than anybody on my mother's side because my mother's side lived in Atlantic City and we did go to Atlantic City several Sundays out of the month we would go to Atlantic City and visit. I grew up among my Italian family in Hammonton so I consider myself mostly Italian.

My father attended the Hammonton schools and finished high school. Of course, he walked to school every day. He told me stories about his school years. My father was an inquisitive, curious person who was very much into education and reading. He told me about the May days that they

celebrated back then at the schools. It was a very big time. They did make the May pole. They had a lot of athletic events going on. He always enjoyed that. My father was a Catholic and he did attend St. Joseph's church in Hammonton. My father's brother, Rev. John Rubba, was the first Hammonton boy to be ordained a Catholic priest. He married my mother and father in Washington, D.C. in 1933, shortly after he was ordained. My mother was my father's only wife. My father was not in the military although several of his brothers were, Dr. Russell Rubba serving in Germany, the worst battles of the war. Dr. Anthony Rubba serving in the Pacific. Dr. Anthony Rubba who was a dentist went on to become a career Navy man and became a captain in the Navy.

My father's ancestors came from Gesso in the province of Messina, Sicily and that was both my grandmother's and grandfather's family came from there. I went to Gesso, Sicily to try to find some evidence of the family but I did not get too far with that. We think that the name Rubba was possibly spelled in a different way than it is here. That may be one of the reasons we did not find too much.

My father's health was generally good. He died of Parkinson's disease in 1987 and he is buried in the Catholic cemetery in Hammonton.

My parents met when my father's dance band was playing in Atlantic City and my mother who loved to dance was in one of the clubs and met him in 1933.

My mother became a housewife and that is mostly what she did. Her home was everything, her children were everything. She did in later years join the St. Rita's Society at St. Joseph's church. She was in the Republican club. She was in the mother's club which was formed in Hammonton many, many years ago when we were little. I think it sort of turned into the Hammonton Civic Club later. My mother liked to cook. She cooked all of our meals. She did not encourage her daughters to do much in the kitchen because that was her headquarters and she wanted to do it her way. She did some Irish meals. Ham and cabbage, the stews. Things of that sort. She didn't do a lot of Italian cooking, however she did learn to make spaghetti gravy from my father's sister. My favorite meal as a child. My mother would occasionally make homemade pizza. We would eat that and that was really a treat because we didn't have all the pizzerias around then that we have today in Hammonton. My mother passed on a lot of recipes to me. I have an entire collection of hundreds and hundreds of

recipes which I will pass on to my daughters and granddaughters. I have already done so.

My father never cooked. The only time he came into the kitchen was to eat. He did not like to eat heavily flavored meals such as those flavored with garlic and onions because he was a businessman and he had to deal with people and he did not like the idea of eating things of that sort, spicy things.

My grandfather died when I was a freshman in college which would have been about 1955 and he is buried in the Greenmount cemetery in a huge beautiful plot. Some of his children are buried there. His wife is buried there too. My grandfather died in his 90's. He died mostly of old age. My grandfather had a big influence on me actually. He held court in his home there on the corner. We would all go up and see him. Every April first was his birthday. He had a lot of grandchildren and did not really give them gifts on their birthdays but on his birthday we all went to his house and he gave everybody a silver dollar through the years. My grandfather was very influential among the Italian population in Hammonton. He arrived from Gesso at the age of thirty in 1894 and he bought a farm on 15th street. First he worked at the brick yard in Winslow. I understand he

walked there from Hammonton and then he bought a small farm on 15th St. He did that for a few years and then sort of got into the wholesale fruit business in Philadelphia. That led to him buying a store on Bellevue Ave. which became a general store which featured fruits and vegetables and other things. All of his sons worked in that store as they grew up. That store later on turned into a furniture store which was run by my father Frank and his brother Nino.

My paternal grandmother's name was Maria Mangano. She also came from Sicily. She came over as a little girl with her mother. Again her father had passed away before they even came over here. They moved to Rosedale which is really part of Hammonton. My grandmother looked a little bit like me actually. She had a roundish face, fair skin. I didn't know her very well because she died when I was three from complications of diabetes. They didn't have insulin back then. I don't know what kind of personality she had. I do know that she worked very hard because she had a big family. I don't know much about her education either. She had one son from a first marriage which was very brief. Her husband passed away and he left her with one boy named Angelo. His name was Angelo Cappuccio and he became Angelo Rubba when she married my

grandfather. As far as I know she never worked outside the home but I am sure she worked plenty in the home raising those children.

Aunts and uncles on my mother's side. I do not have any of them living but I had one uncle and two aunts, Joseph MacAnney, Alice and Mary.

My grandmother Maria Mangano Rubba died in 1939 and she is buried in the Greenmount cemetery in Hammonton. She died of complications of diabetes. My grandmother did not have any influence on me because I was too small but I remember my grandfather helping a lot of the Italian people in Hammonton to get acclimated to this country. He did a lot to help other people and my father seemed to carry that on because I could remember my father had Wednesday afternoons off from work and many Wednesday afternoons he would be taking Italian people who had trouble with the language to social security office in Atlantic City and doing other things to help people in Hammonton that had come from Italy. Not only Italy my father was also very instrumental in helping the Greeks when they came here to work in Kessler shop. He enjoyed languages and he could speak many languages. My father was able to speak some of the Greek and the Spanish that came, he could speak Spanish also. He

helped some of them find a place in this town. He sold them furniture of course and through that he was able to be a help to them.

I only knew my grandfather as an old man of course. He liked to have a garden in his yard. He grew those very long squash that a lot of the Italian men did. He liked to eat eels. I remember him buying these eels and cooking them and eating them. He was a person who enjoyed his family and was very proud of his sons and daughter. He encouraged his sons to go on to college which was a bit unusual in those days but his daughter did get a chance to graduate from high school which was a bit unusual too for them. She did not go on to college. She went on to marry Dr. Joseph Esposito, a local dentist. My grandfather was a little bit tall for an Italian man. I only knew him as having white hair and he had a nice smile, I remember that. He wanted all of his sons to name their child Matteo after him. I do remember that which is an Italian thing. We had a lot of Matthews in our family. His name was Matteo which became Matthew. Some of them had the name as a middle name. In fact my grandson Benjamin has Matteo as his middle name. I don't know much about my grandfather's education but I do know he was an intelligent man. I know he served in the military in Italy and then he became an internal

revenue person in Italy and traveled through Italy doing that kind of work before he came here at the age of 30.

My grandfather was only married once to Marie Mangano. My grandfather had the general store down on Bellevue Ave. He worked for a little while at the brick yard. He did not like farming. He did that for a little while and then he had the general store on Bellevue Ave. which had fruits, vegetables and other supplies. It became the site of Rubba's furniture company near the railroad tracks on Bellevue Ave. and today it is the site of medical offices, Dr. Belli is there.

Aunts and uncles on my fathers side of the family were Nino Rubba who served in World War I, Russell Rubba who became a doctor in Hammonton, the town doctor. Joseph Rubba who was a dentist, John Rubba who was a Catholic priest, Anthony Rubba became a dentist, Theresa Rubba Esposito who was the only girl. There was a James Rubba who passed away at age seven and Angelo Rubba ,the oldest one, died in the flu epidemic of 1918 as a young man.

My grandfather died in Hammonton of old age. He was in his 90's and he is buried in the Greenmount cemetery in Hammonton.

My great-grandparents on my mother's side, I didn't know them of course, but I do know that my great-great -grandmother's name was Bridget O'Quinn. My great-grandmother was Margaret and my grandmother's name was Mary. They came over from Ireland shortly after the potato famine.

Some of my mother's family is buried in Pleasantville which is where they buried families who lived in Atlantic City.

One of the stories from my childhood that I do remember is my grandfather died in 1944 when they had the great hurricane in Atlantic City. My grandfather always wanted to be buried back in Philadelphia where he came from but my grandmother buried him in Pleasantville so she could get there to bring flowers to the grave. On the day he was buried they had this tremendous hurricane and the ocean came up and ruined all the inlet homes, my grandmother's being one of them. I can remember as a child, I guess I was about seven or eight, I remember all the furniture out on the street, everybody's furniture was out on the street, drying because the water had come up into all the homes and they always said that Joseph MacAnney got revenge for not being buried in Philadelphia where he wanted to be buried.

My grandfather was a railroad conductor and my grandmother was a homemaker. I don't know anything about my great-great parents on my father's side except that they were from Gesso, Sicily. Many, many people from Hammonton come from there and when you go to Gesso you see that the names of the streets are all familiar Hammonton names. There is Campanella Terrace, Ordille St. You see all of these familiar names that you have in Hammonton, you see them over there in Gesso. My grandfather was very business wise and he bought a lot of property in Hammonton because his business was very successful and he bought property where Messina Ave. is today. He owned all of that. He sold it in lots for people. He also owned properties on Pratt and French Sts. and broke them and sold them as individual lots. He was quite a good businessman. In fact my grandfather and Nancy Cappuccio's grandfather, Benjamin Fogletto, were partners and I have some of their records of some of the rental properties that they had in Hammonton that they rented to people, it is amazing how low the rents were back then. They were very good friends. Ben Fogletto and my grandfather lived close to each other and they were very good friends.

My maternal grandmother was Mary Dillon. Her people had come from Ireland too. I don't know too much about them. My grandmother was short, wavy hair, pretty face, a little chubby. My grandmother was alive until I got married so I did get to know her somewhat. She was sweet personality, always a homemaker. I don't think she had very much education because I think she married when she was about sixteen . She would have gone to school in Philadelphia, if she went at all, because that is where her family lived. She had four children. She was married to Joseph McAnany only. She did not work outside of the family. My grandmother is also buried in Pleasantville, New Jersey. She died of a stroke. My grandmother on the Irish side did not have a big influence on me. I still remember her Irish _____ and she liked to knit doilies and she had lots of ornaments around her house which we had to be very careful about but I didn't spend a lot of time with that grandmother. She would come up to Hammonton on a bus for some of the holidays. We would go down there a couple of Sundays a month to visit her.

I don't know much about my mother's father because he died in his fifties. He was a railroad conductor. He was small, scrappy Irishman. I

don't know how much education he had but I don't think it was that much.

They had four children.

Q: Do you have any family heirlooms that may have been sent down through the years through your mother's family or your father's family?

Pictures, diaries, journals?

A: We have pictures but I don't have much else. I always wondered what happened to the pictures of my grandfather because in his living room he had huge pictures, really big ones in big frames, on the wall. There was one of him when he was in the military in Italy. There was one of him when he was a tax-collector. He had a huge handlebar mustache all waxed.

They were great pictures and I don't know who in the family ended up with them and I don't know where they are today but I certainly would have loved to have them. My grandfather always had a piano and all of his children were musical. That piano got played a lot. It was an older piano.

It would sit in his living room and they would all play when they got together and all of the boys played instruments. My aunt Theresa played the piano.

She was probably self taught. She played quite well. She loved opera and I got my love of music from them. My father never raised a garden. His father did. My father was never much with animals. Neither one of my

parents were particularly artistic. My father was actively involved with the Hammonton Kiwanis among other things. My father was very involved in starting the first Hammonton High school band. He actively sought funds to buy uniforms for the band. He enjoyed community activities and he took part in them.

My mother belonged to the mother's club long ago which turned into the Hammonton Civic Club. She belonged to the St. Rita Society in St. Joseph's and the Republican club. My parents were not political. My father did not run for office although he probably would have made a good town councilman. He was interested in the town very much so but because he was a businessman he felt that he had to be friends with everybody. My father had a great wry sense of humor. My mother's sense of humor was not quite what my father's was. My father had a very wry, dry sense of humor which I could remember today.

If anybody lost their temper it was probably my mother. My father was very even tempered. My mother was more the disciplinarian. My talents from my mother were mostly domestic, from my father mostly musical and becoming intellectually curious and that type of thing because

he did read a great deal and encouraged us to do the same thing and he took us to a lot of places that would broaden our horizons.

I feel that I inherited much more from my father than my mother. I look like my father's side of the family and I grew up with them so I feel that I inherited more like them. I resemble my father and I am supposed to resemble my aunt, my father's only sister, very closely.

The greatest tragedy that my mother and father suffered in their lives was probably when they got the diagnosis of my brother at age 28 having multiple sclerosis. That was very devastating to them.

My mother had three children. I was the oldest. I was born in 1936. My sister Irene was born two years after me. My brother Frank was born in 1943. I look somewhat like my sister but we were very different in personalities. My brother was quite tall. My father had a couple of brothers who were on the tall side. My brother was about 6-2. He was the tallest in the family. Everybody else was more on the shorter side. My brother became a pilot. He went to the University of Miami and Emory Air Aeronautical Institute and he became a pilot and he worked for TWA first and was flying international flights. He became a captain for TWA and then at the age of 28 was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and he had to give it up

but after he went into remission some years later he worked for a US Air as a teacher. He was in the classroom teaching pilots in the simulator. He was able to work for fifteen years for them doing that. He loved aviation. He loved it a great deal. He came back to Hammonton when his wife passed away and he lived in my mother's house on Horton St. They were both ill at the same time and I became caretaker for both. My brother passed away in 2006, my sister is alive and living in Florida at this time.

We were all somewhat musical. We all had great love for music. We all played instruments. My sister was in the high school band. I was more of an athlete in high school. I was in plays in high school. My brother and sister were probably in them too, I think. That was one of the highlights of my high school career was being in plays. I was very involved in "You Can't Take it With You", "The Fortune Teller" was another one that we did. Herman Dash and Annie Gugliotta were the two high school music instructors and drama instructors who worked with us. I have a lot of happy memories from that. I liked sports in high school. We had a lot of intramural sports. Interscholastic we only did girl's basketball. That is all we did but we did play hockey intramural and I played tennis. Mr. Winfield Richie who was the manual training teacher at the school taught

us to play tennis. We had a lot of fun with sports and I did enjoy that. I started out to become a phys-ed teacher at Westchester University but I had problems with my knee and switched over to the elementary education curriculum and it turned out to be a good thing for me. I became a kindergarten teacher, and worked in the Hammonton school system for thirty seven years. Two of my children are doctors. My daughter Lauren is a veterinarian working now in Hammonton at Shore Veterinarian. My son Gary is a chiropractor and sports physician and a nutritionist. He has an office in Hammonton. My daughter Margarite is a nurse and Valarie was with the casino industry and my son Greg is with a mechanical contractor working out of Mt.Laurel.

We are all very into education. We always have been. All of my children went on to school one way or another and have done well for themselves. They all live close by and we get together every Sunday as Italian families do in Hammonton. I still continue to cook on Sunday and now my immediate family numbers twenty and somehow I pack them into this house which is their homestead. They like to come home. All of the children seem to have bigger homes that I do but they like to come here on Sundays and spent a few hours together and talk about their weekly

activities and what their children are involved in. They are a close knit family and attend each other's sporting events, dance recitals and things of that nature. That is something I got from my family because they were close knit and put a value on family relations.

My father's family had a lot of longevity. Many, many, many of them, the priest Rev. John Rubba lived to about ninety-seven, Dr. Russell Rubba lived to about ninety-five. My grandfather was in his nineties. Many of his brothers lived to their nineties so I'm hoping for the best.

Q: Other than the genetics do you think anything else had something to do with it?

A: Clean living. They were good people. Of course a lot of people smoked back then. They were not party animals. They took care of themselves. Fresh foods had a lot to do with it.

My husband, Frank lived here on First Rd. all his life. His father was Domenic Silvesti and his mother was Katarina Mazzeo. They also came from Sicily, the Gesso area.

My husband's family experienced quite a lot of illness because of TB. My husband's father passed away when my husband was young. There was one death after another. The two sisters died also of TB all within a

relatively short time. His mother passed away. My husband was actually orphaned at a young age. He was raised by his two brothers Carlo and Joe in the house across the street. They each took care of him when the mother passed away. My father in law had a small farm because he was not well and they were very poor. People that lived here on First Rd. all knew them then. The families still live here, the Calabrias, the Aiellos, the Buccis, the Mentos. They all lived on First Rd. back then and still do. The generations carried on. My husband did go through high school amazingly. He also wanted to get an education. He could have quit because there was nobody to push him to go but he graduated from twelfth grade and because he wanted to he took a lot of college courses but he knew he didn't have a shot of going to college because he didn't have any money. He became a dry cleaner. He worked for South Jersey Laundry for many many years, probably close to sixty. He just retired at the age eighty from South Jersey Laundry and dry cleaning. That is more or less his background.

Effie: Well all the education went into your children.

Marion: Yes. They all had their opportunity to go. They all had their opportunity to take music lessons. They all liked music. Only one really

was very,very good at music. Lauren plays the piano. She took to it real well. The others had the opportunity and they developed a love for it but they did not go too far with it but Lauren plays very very well. One out of five isn't bad. It was a struggle to send those children to school but it was well worth the effort.

Q: Do you feel that they are carrying all your values.

A: Yes. I do. I admire all of them. They are good children. They bring a lot of joy. My grandchildren also. I now have two grandchildren who teach at Hammonton High school. The teaching kind of skipped a generation with me. I taught. None of my children became teachers although my daughter Margarite does a lot of teaching in the nursing profession.

My granddaughter Kendall teaches science at the high school and my grandson Greg is a health and physical education and driver-ed teacher at the high school. My grandson Matthew is at Rowan University now studying to be a teacher. So that will be three. My grandson Cole is down in Florida becoming a sound engineer so they are carrying on. I'm proud of all of them. Most of them were very athletic and did set some records at the high school for sports. Greg Jr. has an all time rushing record in football.

Also I am proud of my sons because they did a lot of volunteer work in sports in Hammonton. My son Greg for over thirty years coached the Hammonton Hawks football team to many championships and had a lot of influence on young people. His son Matthew now has taken over. My son has just retired from coaching. I am proud of that. The volunteer work is important and they had a lot of influence on young people.

Dict: Marion Sylvesti 9-10-10
Trans: Carol Effinger 11-23-12