

Oral History Collection

Vanessa Lingenfelter's Grandmother (Name Unknown)

Interviewer: Vanessa Lingenfelter Date: March 14th, 2024

Place of Interview: Unknown

Vanessa Lingenfelter: OK. So, how are you?

Vanessa Lingenfelter's Grandmother: Good! And you?

Vanessa Lingenfelter: I'm good.

Vanessa Lingenfelter's Grandmother: That's good.

Vanessa Lingenfelter: So, I want to start by just asking you
to give a brief explanation of your background and
like what were your early experiences with cooking?

Vanessa Lingenfelter's Grandmother: When I was younger, I was
around my mom all the time.

Unknown speaker: Where were you born?

Vanessa Lingenfelter's Grandmother: Yeah, I was born in
Naples.

Unknown speaker: Italy.

Vanessa Lingenfelter's Grandmother: Mhm. And I was around my
mom all the time when she was do the cooking for
seven children.

Vanessa Lingenfelter: Yeah.

Vanessa Lingenfelter's Grandmother: Yeah. My mother had seven
children, so she had to do a lot of cooking.

Lingenfelter: Yeah, something that I've talked about a lot in my class is how so much of cooking and food is passed down through family and not through like official, like culinary school or through just like a cookbook published by a company. So, like, what kinds of things were you and your family like cooking around this time?

Grandmother: OK, my mom. Because we were seven children plus themselves. We were nine people. In the house, so she had to be pretty -- pretty savvy, you know, to cook. So, they bought a lot of -- they have a lot of dishes in Naples, but they are pretty cheap.

Lingenfelter: [laughs] Yeah.

Grandmother: Like we -- a lot of times we just stayed -- We had a different way to time wise, you know to eat over there. So, in the morning, like breakfast was we call it zuppa di latte, like all the bread soaked in the milk for breakfast.

Lingenfelter: Mhm.

Grandmother: And then a lot of times my dad, he will buy berries. The farmers, they came from suburb, it came in a city to sell berries.

Lingenfelter: Mhm.

Grandmother: So, we added this habit, we got these habits in Naples. The people you know, they don't want to go downstairs, you know, all the time to buy something. So, they had this little basket with the rope. We put the, you know, the basket down and the berry vendor, he will put -- in a dish that we put in a basket, he will put a bunch of berries in there. So, we did that too at times, you know, like a couple of times a week in the summer.

Lingenfelter: Mm-hm. And then Naples is a really interesting place because of how old it is as a city. It's older than Rome. And so there are certain ways of preparing food and foods themselves that go back like hundreds of years, thousands of years even. And that kind of reminds me a little bit of what we were talking about yesterday about the kind of Italian traditionalism when it comes to food, and I'm curious, would you consider yourself very traditional about food?

Grandmother: Yes -- yes, I think myself traditional because that's where I come from you know. So, I brought

the tradition over here, but when I came over here,
the food was different to me. And in Naples --

Unknown speaker: Sweet?

Grandmother: Yeah, it was all like -- to me, it tastes sweet.

Everything is sweet. And the people here, they put everything they want in one plate. You know, we are used over there to, to eat in the first course, the second course and once in a while, maybe like a dessert once a week or some dessert. Like we ate the Sunday sauce. You know the -- we had beef once a week. You know most how, food, it was more base and legumes, vegetable. And then fish, you know, we got a lot of fish over there because we are on the ocean.

Lingenfelter: Yeah.

Grandmother: So, once a week, we had the meat that we call it like ragù.

Lingenfelter: Mhm.

Grandmother: The? What? What do they call over here? The meat sauce for Sunday? Yeah. And that's, you know, and the lot of influence of the food in Italy in

Naples, it came from -- because Naples was under a lot of --

Unknown speaker: Rulers.

Grandmother: A lot of rulers, you know, like they were on the king. You know the kings to rule the city. And they had other government like Spanish, Greek. It was ruled by Greek -- by Romans, by Greek, by Spaniard, you know, and --

Unknown speaker: French.

Grandmother: French, you know, so they lived on a lot of different rules, so they kind of picked a lot of different way of leading.

Lingenfelter: Right.

Grandmother: And they put them together, you know.

Lingenfelter: Yeah, a lot of different influences.

Grandmother: Lot of -- Yeah, a lot of different influences, yeah.

Lingenfelter: And so, I thought it was interesting, you were talking about how the structure of how meals work in the US is very different from Italy. In Italy, you have the different courses. Is there like a

kind of -- what is like the purpose behind having the kind of different courses instead of it all on one plate. I've heard different things, but I'm curious about your opinion.

Grandmother: Well, like in the -- like in the morning we had a, you know breakfast which it was like, you know, all the bread. You know if there was some bread left. You know?

Lingenfelter: Uh-huh.

Grandmother: And put milk in there. Actually, Papa, you know now, once in a while he does that and he's not Italian. You know he loves the, you know, the bread with the milk. So, but over there like, so in the morning we ate that. And then usually like we call it pranzo, which it's the one that you call over here lunch.

Lingenfelter: Mhm.

Grandmother: Like we did the main dishes, you know, at 1:00. Maybe 12:30, 1 to 1:30, you know that kind of? Yeah. Most it's made by legumes.

Lingenfelter: Mhm.

Grandmother: They should -- You know, they're pretty cheap, you know. So, with the legume dishes, with the pasta. You know, my mother, she was able, you know, to feed all of us, you know.

Lingenfelter: Yeah.

Grandmother: So that's what most we had, you know, like, at least in my family, you know, like maybe some other people they had some salad with that, you know, things like that, you know. But most of the time we had the legumes dishes or just maybe pasta with the vegetable, you know. Again, in one dish, you know and then maybe in the evening we call it's what you call over here dinner, you know, for us it was Cena, it means dinner. I guess you know. And then over there we had. Well -- we were not a well to do family, in other words. You know, so we didn't have a -- like a need to -- every day you know things like that. At times we had maybe another dish of legumes and vegetable, you know, or maybe some eggs, you know, eggs. We use a lot of times, eggs. At times like a mozzarella, Buffalo mozzarella, you know, those are they would all -- like cheap kind of way of eating, you know, like

the one you call a Caprese over there, well we had them a couple of times a week over there, you know caprese with tomatoes and mozzarella. Yeah. So, bread. You know, bread. There was a big staple in a house. You know, actually, my father, he used to -- his job was to prepare a document for people that they need but they don't want to go themselves, you know, to different offices. You know people, they used to pay him with the food. So, they used to give him a nice big, you know, big we call A big crusty bread, you know, and a thing full of eggs too. Fresh eggs from a chicken, you know. So, we, you know, we used to wait for my father to bring those things, you know. And we were all happy when they call you know? And he had this big fresh bread, you know. With a lot of eggs you know, and some figs. Fresh figs, you know? Yeah, all of that stuff, you know. So, but that's -- And then we ate the fish, you know, that's always la Cena. I know. In the evening, you know.

Lingenfelter: Yeah.

Grandmother: Right and fish, we ate a lot of dishes with fish, which over there some fish was, you know, always

on the cheap side. You know, like those little smelt, you know. We had octopus. There are things that you know, we ate liver, you know veal liver. That was a cheaper cut of, you know, from animal, you know, from a veal or beef, you know, things like that. And then once a week, we ate on Sunday, you know, we ate the, like I say the ragù, you know.

Lingenfelter: Yeah. Something that's really fascinating about that is how -- because I think that a lot of people, at least in the US, tend to associate Italian food as being like, very like, high class or very like kind of expensive or like wealthy, but a lot of the most famous Italian foods, especially like Neapolitan foods come from like working class families who were able to make things that were very delicious out of the resources that they had.

Grandmother: Right.

Lingenfelter: I was watching -- or there's this series -- that it's on, it's on CNN, but I think it's also on prime. But it's this guy who goes around to different regions in Italy and he has like -- so it's all about the food in that region.

Grandmother: Right, yeah.

Lingenfelter: And I watched yesterday the Naples episode, and he was talking about how pizza was originally created by like the poor in Naples because it was a effective way to feed a lot of people at once and it wasn't super expensive to make.

Grandmother: Right, that's true. But there is a story behind the pizza, how it came about, you know? But why did they call a pizza Margarita?

Lingenfelter: Because of the Queen of Italy?

Grandmother: Yeah, the queen was hungry, you know. Right. And she say -- I like something fun to eat, you know. And one of these, a person that was working for her, you know. His name is Gennarino Gennaro. Genaro went and they cooked up some flour and water and yeast, you know? And he came up with this pizza and he called Margarita.

Lingenfelter: Mhm.

Grandmother: Even if the pizza was made before by other people, you know, but the Margarita, you know, it came up because the queen, you know. And he made them as the color of the Italian flag.

Lingenfelter: Mhm. Yeah.

Grandmother: Green -- White, the mozzarella, red, the tomatoes and green the basil.

Lingenfelter: Mhm. Yeah and you know, it's so simple, but it's so good. But I feel like that's so much of Italian cuisine is that the ingredients themselves are very simple, but they're so high quality and where so much --

Grandmother: Right, everything is fresh, you know, like usually people -- and I think they still do it nowadays, you know, maybe they change a little bit, but people there, they go everyday grocery they go on the market, the Fresh Market you know and they buy just enough for the day. So, the life of a woman over there, a mom, you know or a woman in general. You know, it's pretty busy.

Lingenfelter: Mhm.

Grandmother: Because you gotta think they gotta kids-- kids usually they don't gotta bus to go to school over there they walk to go to school. You know.

Lingenfelter: Yeah.

Grandmother: And they went, I don't know, nowadays, you know for sure. But when I was young, we used to wear a uniform to school, which it was just, how do you - - [Unclear]. Someday you put on top the clothes on the bottom, you know. So, everyone looks equal. And to differentiate the grade that you were in, they had like different colors like you know some kids they wore black with the white collar and the big ribbon here in the front. You know, and the ribbon, the ribbon will tell me what grade they were in. You know, things like that. And then white. So, girls, they wore white and boys they wore black.

Lingenfelter: Mhm.

Grandmother: On the bottom they had the -- they had the clothes, you know, like maybe shorts, you know, things like that.

Lingenfelter: Yeah.

Grandmother: You know so, but like the food, the part, you know, it's pretty like you said, it's pretty cheap in a way. I can make some dishes over here that I just use maybe no more than four ingredients.

Lingenfelter: Mhm.

Grandmother: A few of them even, it's got less, you know, ingredients like the Spaghetti Aglio e Olio, you know, garlic and oil, you know that just got the three ingredients, garlic, oil, and spaghetti. That's it. So, you can make pretty cheap dishes, you know, and they are good for you too. I mean, they are good. They are not fatty dishes; you know like if you go in Italy even now you know about 80% of the people you know they are a pretty normal weight.

Lingenfelter: Mhm.

Grandmother: So, they walk a lot, you know? Yeah, they walk because most of the people they live in the city, you know, most of the people and they got a suburb too, but the suburb, they look like more mini city, you know being able to walk wherever they go, you know they do got a car and everything but a lot of times they walk.

Lingenfelter: Yeah, that's like a -- I feel like a European thing in general, because I noticed the same thing

when I was visiting my dad in Germany. And I was so jealous because I hate driving, it scares me.

Grandmother: Right, right. Yeah. I didn't have a driver license when I was in Italy and I was, I was there up to 24 years old cause I came in United States when I was 24.

Lingenfelter: Yeah. So, it's not like Denton, which is where I live, like during the school year. It's like you have to drive everywhere, even like five minutes, ten minutes to go to the grocery store like you have to drive. I mean, you could walk, but it's like dangerous.

Grandmother: Right, right, right.

Lingenfelter: And it's kind of scary.

Grandmother: Well, now especially nowadays, you know,

Lingenfelter: Yeah.

Grandmother: Over here like it's too far to go grocery without, you know, without a car, you know. Because over here, we do the grocery once a week at least, you know. So, we got four or five bags, 5 to 6 bags. You know, like in Italy they go day by day. They buy everything in cash, you know.

Lingenfelter: Yeah.

Lingenfelter: Because one of the things, I feel like this is like a very American thing, but like the sort of big like Costco or Sam's Club type stores where you buy everything in bulk.

Grandmother: Right, yeah.

Lingenfelter: It's like, supposed to last you two weeks. I feel like that's something that only makes sense in the United States.

Grandmother: Right.

Lingenfelter: It's like, you know, you're not going to the grocery store every day because who wants to, like, get in their car and drive every day but in Italy and a lot of European cities like that's just not a problem.

Grandmother: Yeah. So, I had to learn all of those things over here, different culture. You know it's I mean our culture is the same, you know Europe and the United States, the culture is generally the same. You know, but lately they really over the years they start to change. You know like Italy is still Europe, I mean not just Italy, it's still a

traditional kind of way you know. So, when I came over here and it was pretty different. The weight was different, the food was different. You know, the way of living, you know, like I had to learn to go to grocery once a week. You know, I didn't drive, so Papa, he drove me to the store. You know, I do the grocery and I didn't know the language either, you know. So, he kind of was helping me to buy stuff, you know. But eventually, you know, I learn the language all by myself, you know, through a TV, to talk with people you know. So that's how I learned the language over here.

Lingenfelter: Yeah. Kind of back to what we're talking about the ingredients in Italy, the ingredients here are different, like it's a different climate. It's just not the same. And so, was that something that you noticed or something that you struggled with, or had to adapt to? Trying to reproduce Italian dishes, but with American ingredients?

Grandmother: In the beginning, you know I start to forget -- not forget about, you know, I start to learn the American way. You know to cook. You know, like I learned some dishes from Papa's parents. You know,

when we came over here and I start to do those because I wanted to please. You know to show whatever the food that he was familiar with. And so, what I did, you know, I changed, you know, a little bit and but I realized after quite a few years, you know, after I had a couple of kids, you know, I realized that I was putting weight on.

Lingenfelter: [laughs]

Grandmother: So, I tried to go back to the tradition, the way the Italian traditional way because, believe it or not, the Italian food, that's not fatty. It's different than the one they cook over here in the restaurant.

Lingenfelter: Mhm.

Grandmother: So once I made a --

Unknown speaker: Eat smaller portions.

Grandmother: And we do eat the smaller portions. You know in Italy, you know, if you go in Italy even a restaurant they put you little bit food that's why you are able to eat the first course and the second course you know, and even the third course, you

know so. Because they put a small amount in the plate.

Lingenfelter: Yeah.

Grandmother: Here you put -- You know you go in the restaurant, you know, they got the appetizer, they gotta you know, those big dish of pasta, you know? So, but when I start to change my way of eating, you know, and I start to introduce some more legumes, you know, pasta dish too, but not a big portion. Simple dishes. You know, I just have to lose weight.

Lingenfelter: Mhm.

Grandmother: You know, that's the difference. You know, in a way about the culture, you know, like we use olive oil, you know, extra virgin olive oil all the time. We are the -- well over there in the South in Italy, they use olive oil in the north, they use more butter.

Lingenfelter: Mhm.

Grandmother: Because in Italy we got the olive trees, you know, and all the weather's good, you know, in the North they, you know, they got they got more, they

eat more meat. In other words, they eat more meat because they don't got the ocean over there, you know.

Lingenfelter: Mhm.

Grandmother: So, because they want to buy everything fresh a lot of times, they don't eat the fish. But we in the south, we eat a lot of fish, a lot of tomatoes, you know, I mean, all that stuff, a lot of vegetable.

Lingenfelter: Yeah, climate has, like, a really big, [unclear] on what people eat.

Grandmother: Yeah.

Lingenfelter: I'm curious what, like American dishes were you kind of cooking, like when you first moved here.

Grandmother: I start to make a macaroni cheese goulash. Pork chops. Stew. I guess you know, I don't know how you call that Stew.

Lingenfelter: Mhm.

Grandmother: Lot of fried fish, you know? But we bought them frozen. You know.

Lingenfelter: Yeah.

Grandmother: In the supermarket, but, Yeah, all that stuff everything, fried you know. And I used butter, you know. A lot of that stuff. I forgot about my soups. You know, I make a lot of soups now. You know, we make a lot of soups we make [laughs]. But yeah, it was. It was different. You know, everything tasted sweet, you know, over here every day they use, they have a dessert. Some kind of dessert. That's what I know. This, you know, like my Papa's parents. You know, they almost every day they had some kind of dessert, you know? No -- you know, we hardly had the fresh fruit.

Unknown speaker: In Italy they had fruit for dessert.

Grandmother: In Italy dessert is fruit.

Lingenfelter: Mhm.

Grandmother: We eat, we do eat ice cream. You know that Gelato, we call it over there, you know. But it's just once a week, though, you know, that kind of stuff. It's not a usual day, after the meal we eat dessert. Yeah.

Lingenfelter: Yeah, no, it's different. Were there any ways that it was different but in a good way? Or in a

way that you wanted to kind of incorporate into your life?

Grandmother: In the United States?

Lingenfelter: Yeah.

Grandmother: [laughing] Yeah, it's hard --

Lingenfelter: Think hard.

Unknown speaker: Shopping once a week.

Grandmother: Yeah, well, the shopping once a week. It was convenient, you know, especially when you got a smaller child, you know. I had my first son, you know, right when I had to change everything, you know. So once a week it was convenient to go grocery. And yeah, you know, I mean it --

Unknown speaker: One store instead of the small stores.

Grandmother: Yeah, one big store instead of a small store. Like over there. They got a small store, you know. They do got a supermarket over there, but most people go in a small store to do the shopping. They got the bread store, the fish stall. You know, actually the face, it's an open store, you know, it's an opener area, that they sell fish. Like the

meat store, they got everything separate, you know.
So maybe that that part is fun to do, when you are
used to do it, you know, because everything is
fresh. But go grocery once a week, it was more
convenient over here, so. The weather too, was
different when I came over here. You know?

Lingenfelter: Yeah.

Grandmother: When I first came over here, there was a lot of
snow. I never saw snow in my life!

Lingenfelter: Yeah, [unclear].

Grandmother: Yeah. The only snow we saw over there was usually
like on top of the Vesuvio. The volcano that we
got over there.

Lingenfelter: Yeah.

Grandmother: The Vesuvio Volcano. We saw a little bit, you
know, on top of the mountain there you know, but
there's no snow over there, at least in the South.

Lingenfelter: Yeah.

Grandmother: In the north they, you know, they do get some
snow there, you know.

Lingenfelter: Yeah. So, in the US like particularly in like the northeastern US, there's a lot of people who have like Italian ancestry, like their grandparents or like great grandparents, all immigrated from Italy. And so the US like received like some of the largest amounts of Italian immigrants in the world during like the early 20th century. So as a result of that, there's kind of like a sort of Italian American cuisine. I think it's like very much Italian influence, but it's also very much distinctly American.

Grandmother: Right. They change. Did you ever hear the Alfredo sauce today? That doesn't exist in Italy.

Lingenfelter: Mhm. I've heard that before.

Grandmother: I don't know. You know what? You know, I call them a heart attack dish. Alfredo sauce [laughing]. But yeah, when the immigrants they came over here from Italy you know they brought the culture over here and then you know you gotta adjust yourself you know like I adjusted myself you know, over the years, because I feel like I live over here, you know, and I gotta adjust to this culture, you know? So, it was not that hard to do it, you know. It's

just like when you come from another country and then, you know, I came over here because, you know, we got married, you know, I met Papa when he was in service over there in the military. So, we got married over there, you know, and we came over here. So, but everything else, I mean, you know, the food -- the food is food, you know. I just gotta -- you know, the bad things. I got, the habits. I didn't realize then, you know. But when I start to see my weight coming up. You know, I say I better go back and eat my beans. My Mediterranean diet you know, in a way, you -- I think that you heard about Mediterranean diet, right?

Lingenfelter: Yes.

Grandmother: Yeah, well, that's what it is. That's what I follow. That's the traditional way to eat in in Italy.

Lingenfelter: Mhm.

Lingenfelter: Yeah. So, you've kind of like, had this experience of, you know, you grow up in Italy with Neapolitan Italian food and then you move to the

US and you kind of adjust and adapt to sort of US cuisine, but then now you've kind of sort of found like a middle ground between the two?

Grandmother: Yeah, yeah. I think mostly I do cook Neapolitan because they are pretty easy dishes to make. And actually, now I gotta, you know Dylan? Yeah. He asked me if I can teach him how to cook. So, he comes every Saturday and we cook something together. You know, some of my Italian real Italian dish.

Lingenfelter: Yeah, and you know, I mean, that's like the best way to learn how to cook is from family because there's certain things -- there's some knowledge that you kind of have to know by watching and not just from a recipe. Like my mom taught me how to make Brigadeiro, which is like a Brazilian dessert.

Grandmother: Right.

Lingenfelter: And I was trying to -- because I made it for some people in one of my classes last semester, and my friend Liam, he was like, "Oh, can you send me a recipe?" And I was like, I don't have a

recipe, but I wrote something down. I just, like, wrote down, like, some stuff. But like when he made it by himself, like it didn't end up good because there are certain things like that you kind of just have to watch to know. And it's like, OK, just like, come over, I'll show you how to make it.

Grandmother: Right. Well, you're right. Because I feel the same way. You know, when somebody, even in my own kids, you know, when somebody asked me said "Oh, can you give me the recipe," you know?

Grandmother: I say no, my recipe, you know, I write stuff down, you know. But when I see something by my memory, you know and everything. But I write in both languages, you know. So, I write half in Italian and half in English so nobody can be able to -- And then, you know, I really do a -- you know, it's not like a recipe book, you know. I write it down by the book, in other words. You know, I write just the way I make the thing, you know, like one spoon of this one spoon of that, you know, I don't measure a lot of stuff. You know, I just put everything in there, you know and the dish comes out good.

Lingenfelter: Yeah, sometimes you gotta -- I feel like baking is one of those things where, like you do need to have like kind of very exact measurements, but with cooking you kind of just need vibes.

Grandmother: Right, right. Yeah. Bakery in any -- in any, even the United States, a Baker, you know, you gotta have the exact measurement, you know, otherwise it won't come out. You know, one cup of this, one cup of that. Like I -- that's the measurement that too were different over here when I came you know because we use grams you know kilogram, grams you know over here you use a pound or ounces, you know, things like that. We weigh everything there. If I need like let's say one kilogram of flour, you know, right over here it's --

Unknown speaker: 2.2 pounds.

Grandmother: .2 pounds.

Unknown speaker: 2.2.

Grandmother: 2.2 pounds. You know we gotta deal with pounds. Or maybe cups, one cup of this, one cup of that. You know, over there they weigh everything, or like

a lot of times they say una taza. Well, how much is one? One Cup over here is not the same as over there. Taza. Taza means a cup. Really, you know? But it's not the same measurement. You know, so that's another thing I had learned. Like when you go to the grocery, when I used to go to the grocery store. When I first came, you know, I was used to say, [unclear] right. Well, I had learned to say how much is a [unclear] gram or two oz. You know, the two or three oz is the same now. So, I start to say I like six slice of mortadella. Decided to say you know the -- because I didn't know, so I even in nowadays, you know, if I gotta get something, I don't say half a pound or one pound, you know, I say well, give me a four slice of prosciutto. You know, so. That's the way I managed to in the beginning -- I managed to survive. In other words, here.

Lingenfelter: Yeah.

Grandmother: You know.

Grandmother: Even nowadays, people when I talk, you know, I got an accent, you know, so a lot of people, they go. "Huh. Huh." And every time they say," huh,

huh?," you know, right. I keep making a mistake. You know, I do try to say in a way that they would understand. You know, but it's normal, you know, I mean that kind of stuff so.

Lingenfelter: Yeah, it's like. It's like nerve wracking when people are like noticing that you're making mistake and then that nervousness makes it worse.

Grandmother: Yeah, right. Right. You get nervous because you make a mistake and you realize that people don't understand you, you know? But I think some people, too. They don't pay attention when you talk. You know, they don't gotta patience with people that they got an accent.

Lingenfelter: Yeah, that's true.

Grandmother: Yeah, that's what I find out over the years, you know. And after a while, you really, you know, it's annoying, you know, for us that we learn the entire -- I learned the entire language over here you know from I didn't go to school to learn. You know, I learned myself, you know by talk with people and by watch TV news program. You know, things like

that. Read the magazine. You know, that's what I learned, you know. But.

Lingenfelter: And I wonder if that kind of changes depending on where you are, like if you're in a city where - - like New York City or something like that, where there's a lot more immigrants and so people are generally having more experience talking to people with accents or maybe there might be more patients just because of the experience. But I don't know.

Grandmother: Probably, you know, probably they're more -- Yeah, they are, you know, quite a few Italian over here because I, I mean, I don't gotta too many friends, you know. But from the food I see in the in the grocery store, you know, they got a lot of Italian. They got the-- where I go they got a lot of good Italian product, you know, from Italy, that's what I'm looking for. A lot of times when I do my grocery, you know, I look for Italian product.

Lingenfelter: Yeah.

Grandmother: You know, so, but I'm lucky that where I live,
they got a nice grocery store that they get all
this stuff. At least most of it you know. So.

Lingenfelter: Yeah. No, that's like whenever like when I first
went to Denton, like, the first thing that I like
-- one of the first things I did was like Google,
like Italian grocery store near me, Brazilian
grocery store near me like.

Grandmother: Oh, yeah.

Lingenfelter: You know there's certain things that like you
can't just find out, like I don't know Kroger or
what? What they have up there anymore, like
Wegmans.

Grandmother: Yeah, they got a lot of Italian. They got it
because you, I mean, your dad is, you know, he's
American but he's, you know, I'm his mom. So, you
know, he's like he's got a Italian ancestor let's
say, and then your mom is from Brazil, so you got
a Brazilian ancestor, you know? Yeah, you're kinda
between the two country, you know. But it's
interesting to learn to make Brazilian dishes too.
You know the original one, you know?

Lingenfelter: Yeah.

Grandmother: That your mom, you know your momma brought. You know so.

Lingenfelter: It's very interesting because Brazil's actually a lot like the United States in the sense that the food is influenced by having like lots of immigrants.

Grandmother: Yeah.

Lingenfelter: And so like it's really like -- because like I was saying before, there's a lot of like a lot of Italian immigrants that left Italy in like the 20th century, especially in the South, but they're in the United States, is one of the big places that they went, but also a lot of Italians went to South America mainly and Brazil.

Grandmother: Right, right. Yeah. Yeah. And believe it or not, you know when because a lot of Italians, they came, especially the South, not much the north, but the South people from the South where we are, the more immigrants over here after the war was over, but when they came over here, you know, they were not welcome. You know, they didn't wanna -- They used

to say no Italians, you know. They used to call people names. You know. They thought they had some kind of name for the Italians, I don't remember now what else? What? OK, what?

Unknown speaker: Wops.

Grandmother: Wops. It means -- well they thought everybody belongs to a mafia or something, you know? But they gotta you know, I mean they are mafia everywhere. You know this Italian mafia there's Chinese mafia, Russian mafia they are like you know South American. But yeah, always there are those groups like that, you know? So. But the Italians, though they brought a lot of trade. Like who was like was make shoes. Who was a chef? You know, they cook them at the pizza. They had the constructions, you know, they did the -- they brought a lot of trades. You know, they were not on the government, you know, ends out. In other words, they made, they made something out of themselves.

Lingenfelter: Yeah. And it's interesting because something that in this class I'm doing this project for, we talked a lot about Italians in Argentina and there was kind of like a different experience there

because a lot of the Italian immigrants that went to Argentina were skewed more wealthy, like a lot, is a lot of them were from the north and a lot of them from like kind of more upper class families, right? So, we kind of talked about how in the US Italians like experienced a lot of discrimination. There was like a very much like a negative experience there, whereas in Argentina there was kind of -- it wasn't really the same because a lot of Argentinians wanted more Italians. They wanted more European immigrants because they felt like Europe was like more classy and so they were kind of put on a pedestal, almost. And so, it's interesting how perceived like wealth or perceived class --

Grandmother: Well, they were more like they had more trade.

You know they, so they could help the, let's say people in another country to learn a trade.

Lingenfelter: Mhm.

Grandmother: That kind of stuff because yeah, you can. And we, you know, the in the South we were poor, but we still had the trades, though, you know, we still had the trades today. Now I came over here because,

you know, I got married, you know, with an American dad and believe it or not, when I got married, you know, Papa had to prove -- and he's an American, you know, an American citizen. No, he had to prove to the American Embassy in Naples, you know, that he had a job over here.

Lingenfelter: Mhm.

Grandmother: So, his father had a hardware store, right? So, they made the notarized document, let's say no, that he would have a job with them when he came back.

Lingenfelter: Mhm.

Grandmother: You know in United States?

Unknown speaker: So, you could come.

Grandmother: So, I can come. Otherwise, even if I was married, I wouldn't been able to come. If he didn't prove that he had the job over here.

Lingenfelter: Yeah, I think a lot of people don't realize how complex the application process can be.

Grandmother: They did all of the tests, you know, all the -- and finally the shots I need. You know they give

me a shots you know before I came over here I mean
all of the, you know everything you know like.
Yeah. So. But I changed my life in about 3 months.

Lingenfelter: Mhm.

Grandmother: I was 24, so now it's about well, 53 years that
I that I'm in this country, you know.

Lingenfelter:

Yeah. And so, we were talking about how, you know, in the
beginning, like you kind of adjusted to sort of
like a more American way of life, particularly with
cooking. And then you kind of adjusted back to like
a more Mediterranean diet.

Grandmother: Right, right.

Lingenfelter: At what at what point like in the timeline here,
did you kind of go back more to sort of your roots?

Grandmother: Yeah, after many years because you know, for
about for about 20 years, you know, probably after
about 20 to 25 years or so, you know, for about 20
years I was homesick. You know, home in my country,
in other words, you know, family, you know,
country, you know, kind of thing. I was home sick.
So, I was upset a lot of times. You know, I was

sad, you know. So, but I, you know, after a while because I had my children now. You know, they kept me occupied. You know, because I was home. I never work outside the home, you know. So, I was one of those people you call housewife. Yeah, so, you know, but. No, I you know. And then I have to walk a little bit to the time, you know I got used to it. You know the first time that we -- that I went back in Italy for a visit you know it was after 27 years.

Lingenfelter: Mhm.

Grandmother: Came over here. Yeah, so.

Lingenfelter: And was it, was it sort of kind of after like, you know, like your kids had all sort of, like grown up and kind of left and done their own thing. Like, did that have an impact at all on, like how your homesickness or how you looked at kind of your relationship to your Italian-ness.

Grandmother: No, I mean the actually.

Unknown speaker: The internet helped a lot.

Grandmother: Yeah. The Internet and Facebook kind of kind of helped a lot, you know, to communicate in Italian

with my, you know. So, I didn't forget it because after a while, you know if you don't speak the language you know you forget about it you know and it's sad that when you are, you know, speak, you start to speak another language, you gradually you know, you forget your own language, you know. But with the TV, which I got a cable program, you know from Italy, so I watch that you know, and I understand everything. Now I can speak better in Italian too, you know, like and stuff. But I just wish that I taught my children Italian. But I didn't because I was afraid that they would not be able to learn English. So, I didn't want them to be embarrassed. You know that people, kids, they wouldn't understand them. So, I kind of forgot about my language you know, and I start to talk English.

Lingenfelter: Yeah.

Grandmother: All the time, you know, gradually when I learn the language, you know, so.

Lingenfelter: Yeah.

Grandmother: But now they don't know. You know, they don't know how to speak Italian, so you know.

Lingenfelter: Yeah. Would it be fair to say that your sort of return to cooking more Neapolitan dishes is kind of part of a larger like a larger experience of you trying to, like reconnect with your culture?

Grandmother: Yes, yes. Yeah. Yes. Because

Unknown speaker: And it's healthier.

Grandmother: And it's healthy too. I mean, that's probably a good reason, you know, like we hardly go over McDonald's. You know, we hardly go over Burger King, you know, and even a restaurant now, you know, we hardly go. I found the difficulty to eat American food in restaurant -- oh Italian food in a restaurant because it's not the same. You know, so I'm more aware of what I what I eat. So, I, you know, I tell everybody the Mediterranean diet. It's a good diet just to cut the portion, you know, smaller.

Unknown speaker: It's a way of living, not a diet.

Grandmother: Yeah, it's a way of living. It's not a diet.

Lingenfelter: Mhm.

Grandmother: You know we say dieta de mediterraneo, but it's not really dieta. It's just a normal way of eating. You know, unless you got a health problem, like if you got diabetes maybe, you know, or if you're gluten intolerant, you can't eat starch, you know, things like that. But if you are healthy, you know, and Mediterranean diet, a smaller portion and you gotta move. That's what you gotta do too. Move like, you know, go for a walk. Yeah, you know, I'm. I'm used to now being over here. I've been, like I said, I've been 53 years here, you know, so and you know my kids they are older. You know, I'm very proud of my kids, your dad you know and Raj and Daniella, you know they are they are pretty well established, you know, so.

Lingenfelter: Yeah, and kind of a little bit going back to what you said before about diets as kind of being not just a diet but a way of life. I want to go in on that a little bit more because I feel like that's so true because the way that you engage with food, it's a lifestyle. And like you, you can structure so much of your life around that like you were saying before about how the times that

you eat are maybe like are the amount that you eat
are different and --

Grandmother: That's one thing we always did, you know, like
when my kids were young. You know, we always make
sure we all eat together. Dinner. Yeah. So that
was good, you know.

Lingenfelter: Yeah. And I think that's really important
because like mealtimes like, I mean obviously
there's like there's like health and there's
sustenance, but it's also like a way to come
together and to kind of --

Grandmother: Communicate, communicate with the family and
everything.

Lingenfelter: Yeah, it's a form of communion and like and
that's also like having that kind of habit because
I also grew up like always eating together with my
family at the dinner table. And no, like, phones
or like distractions at the dinner table. And now
like -- which, like my parents, probably learned
from their parents like my dad, probably learned
from you. And now, like when I'm like, eating
because, like, I have dinner like me and my

roommates, we take turns like making dinner and we all eat together. And like, we don't go on our phones out during dinner. And so, it's kind of like reproducing that same tradition.

Grandmother: Right. Well, even like even when you're in college, you know, you gotta get a roommate that you guys got about the same, you know, the same habits you know can --

Unknown speaker: Compatible.

Grandmother: Compatible, in other words, you know, just like a marriage. You know, if you get married, you know you gotta be compatible with the other person, you know, in otherwise they wouldn't work. We should, we talked about how many -- an hour?

Lingenfelter: I think almost two hours.

Grandmother: Oh my God! But that was good, you know we had a good talk.

[End of interview]