

Mandolyn Reidy
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Final Creative Project

Question #1: Where did you migrate from and why?

Francis Giraudo: I immigrated from Italy to America on June 6th, 1951. I had lived through the war where bombs were going off around me and I wanted to go to a new world that offered a new life. As I was only 18, I realized that I did not know how to do this on my own. I then met my husband, your Nonno (grandfather in Italian), who had migrated to America about 15 years before and returned to Italy to find a wife. Although he was quite older than me, I loved him very much. When he told me he would return to America with me, I was thrilled.

Question #2: Expectations vs. Reality of coming to a new place?

Francis Giraudo: When we arrived in America, there were many things that were fascinating to me. I was amazed at how advanced the society was compared to my small town in Italy. The first thing that shocked me was the large number of cars that were on the road. I had never seen so much traffic in my life. One of my biggest disappointments was my first meal when we landed in America. My husband ordered me a steak and when it arrived it looked like it had just been killed. I was used to the food being thoroughly cooked back home. I missed Italian food and the food my mom made. When I went to the grocery store, much of the food was canned or frozen. I grew up on a farm, and got fresh vegetables and fruit anytime we wanted it. I should have expected it, but besides my husband, and a close Italian community, no one else spoke my language. As I did not know English, everything was foreign to me including watching TV, listening to the radio or reading a newspaper. I realized that I had to learn English immediately.

Question #3: What have you missed most about leaving your home country and why is it not possible to replicate that here in America?

Francis Giraudo: The first is that I left my immediate family, including my mother and father and three brothers. While my husband's brothers and their wives were near the city that we moved to (San Francisco), I still lost that connection with the people I grew up with. In addition to missing my family, I missed the constant communication of my native language of Italian. While I talked with my husband in this language and amongst our friends, outside of that circle I realized that I was interacting with another world. When you're talking to people in a newly learned second language, you are struggling with finding the proper words and grammar to use. Often times it was hard for me to connect on a personal level because things would get lost in translation.

Also, I was accustomed more to living in an old-world where buildings and architecture dated back many decades and even centuries. To me, California was made up of new houses and

modern highways. The town I came from, Cuneo, was in the mountains of the Alps where there weren't many cars and technology was rare. I missed the quaintness and simple times of my quiet village of Cuneo.

Question #4: As a woman, what challenges did you face in your new home?

Francis Giraudo: When I was in Italy, it was a very traditional male-dominated society. Women were expected to stay at home and take care of the housework and children. Coming to America, I hoped that these traditional ways would be different. However, many of the same prejudices about women existed here. Not many women worked at that time, especially in professional services. As I told you before, I knew I wanted to do something with my life. So, I decided to study accounting while I was also learning English. Accounting, at the time, was something that was mostly done by men. So not only was I a women trying to get work but I was also doing it in a job that was mostly all male. One thing that I found was that because accounting was all numbers, translation from Italian to English was not an issue. I found that I could really excel in this. And so after getting a low-level job, I was able to move up in the organization because I was good at what I did.

Question #5: Do you believe that the treatment of female migrants has improved or worsened since your own migration journey?

Francis Giraudo: In some ways I believe it has become better and in some ways I believe it has become worse. When I first arrived, it was difficult to be an independent woman. However, in some ways it was easier than it was back in Italy where gender roles were much more traditional. At first, it was difficult to convince my husband that it was necessary for me to work, but he later understood we needed the money and also saw that Americans were more open to this idea than the Italians. When I first came to America, the immigration process was very mechanical. The administrators just wanted to move everything along quickly, and as a result, I had to shorten my name from Francesca to Frances and also had to drop my middle name. So, if you look at my driver's license, it no longer reflects the name I was baptized with. The part I would say that has become worse is that it is much more difficult to migrate to America than when I came over. Back then, I really did feel like the country was "the land of the free" and welcomed me onto its shores. Nowadays, the attitude has dramatically changed and it feels like this country does not want to receive more immigrants. The talk of walls and armies protecting our borders reminds me of the days of Mussolini, the fascist, and the Nazis ruling over my home country.

Question #6: As a migrant mother, how did you share and pass on your culture with your children in America? For example, how important was it that your children understood and or spoke your native language? What other practices/traditions/beliefs did you think were important to pass on (such as recipes, holidays or religion)? Did you find it important to someday bring your children back to your original home where they could experience the culture as you lived it as a child?

Francis Giraudo: One of the things I wanted to do was to make sure my children spoke Italian in addition to English. At home, we almost always spoke Italian so that they would be familiar with it. In fact, my son was shocked when he went to his first day of school where everyone was speaking English and he only spoke Italian. I learned from that mistake and made sure my second child, my daughter and your mom Mandolina, was fluent in both languages when starting kindergarten. A very important part in my life in Italy was my connection to God. Fortunately, there was a Catholic church near us in San Francisco that held services in Italian. I also thought it was important to raise my children in the Catholic religion. In addition to being baptized and receiving holy communion, both of my kids attended Catholic grammar school, middle school and high school. One thing that I cherished were the cooking lessons that I learned firsthand from my mother. The secret recipes are a special connection with not only the memories of my mom, but also the town of Cuneo. It was very important to me that I someday could bring my children back to my place of origin. Back in the 60's, it was very expensive to travel, especially because of the great distance from California to Italy. We saved up our money, though, and were able to take your mother and your uncle over when they were 6 and 10. While it was wonderful to introduce them to my brothers, it was also very sad for me as both my parents had died a few years before we were able to make the trip. Though there were many great sights to see and locations like Rome and Venice, we spent the entire time in our small village up in the mountains. I figured at that time, it was more important for my family to reconnect with their roots rather than spending the time in tourist areas.

Question #7: What are some positive things that have happened to you because of migrating?

Francis Giraudo: First thing was that I had a loving family. Because there was no Italian food that I liked in my new city, I learned to be a very good cook all on my own. As you know, my specialty is homemade raviolis. Coming to America also exposed me to so many interesting things that are available in America and especially California. I learned to love the outdoors, which I never appreciated back in Italy. Your Nonno and I vacationed every year in Yosemite. I also appreciated the true freedom that was here in the country. You have to remember that Mussolini was leading Italy and freedom was not a word that was often heard.

Question #8: Did you have to leave family behind when you migrated? What was the decision process you went through to decide to come to America? If you had to leave family behind, how did they react? (e.g., Were they happy for you? Sad? Did they make you feel guilty or did they wish you the best?)

Francis Giraudo: It was a very difficult process for me to decide to move to America. My mother was absolutely against the idea and forbid me to even talk about it. Even before I met my future husband, though, I knew I wanted to leave Italy. It was not that I disliked the people or the culture, but I hated the war and what it had done to my town and our lives. Much of my family's property had been taken away during the war years so there was resentment to what the government had done. Also, I had memories of bombs dropping near me and wanted to rid my thoughts of those nightmares. I prayed to God every night to allow me to escape and envisioned the United States like the land of Oz. The movies I had seen of America excited me.

While I looked to God for an answer, I was reluctant to talk to a priest about my wishes as I feared he would tell my mother. I know that priests are not supposed to talk about people's confessions, however this was a small town and our priest had a big mouth. When your grandfather arrived, not only did I fall in love with him, but I fell in love with the idea of moving to America. Telling my mother about my plans was extremely tough. She refused to listen to me and told me that she would no longer talk to me if I moved away. I was absolutely committed to making the move, but realized I would break my mother's heart in doing so. My mother actually did not talk to me again after my wedding and my migration to America for many years. Even though I sent letters, the only ones I would get back were from my father and brothers. It wasn't until my father became ill that I began speaking with my mother again. When she passed away, I felt great guilt and truly believed that God was punishing me for leaving her those many years before.

Question #9: How did/do you maintain connections to home?

Francis Giraudo: My husband had moved to Italy to join his brothers who had already moved there 8 years before him. So, when I arrived, there was already a family connection with his brothers and their wives. There was also an Italian social club where Italian immigrants would meet regularly. Finally, there was a local Catholic church where many Italians would attend mass. There was one mass every week that was spoken in Italian and then all of us would get together and talk in our native language.

In the early days, we did not have a phone, so it was extremely hard to have any communication with my family. It would take forever for a letter to arrive after it was sent out. I was always so excited when a letter would come, however it was only a few times a year when they did arrive. It took me 13 years before I actually went back home because it was very expensive to travel and there were no nonstop flights from San Francisco to Italy. Being apart from my family in Italy for 13 years was very difficult at times. Faith and prayer kept me strong in this new world.

Question #10: How do you bridge your new home with your old home?

Francis Giraudo: In addition to speaking Italian at home, much of the decoration and furniture in the house reflected the look and feel of Italy. We had paintings of Italian settings, like Venice, and often played records by Italian singers like Mario Lanza. There were only 3 real Italian stores in the city, so I would often take my daughter and son with me to see how authentic food was made. For example, there was one store that specialized in nothing but pasta. I think it is lovely whenever you are home from break, Mandolina, and come with me to the Italian shops. I know you also like cooking with me when we make Italian dishes, like chicken piccata, polenta or gnocchi. It means a lot to pass my culture onto you, Mandolina. I hope that in a small way, the recipes I have shared with you let you get closer not only to me, but also to your Italian heritage.

Francis Giraudo

