

**GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION**  
**SOUTH VILLAGE**  
**ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

Oral History Interview  
ROMANA & ANDREW RAFFETTO

By Liza Zapol  
New York, NY  
February 5, 2014

**Oral History Interview with Romana Raffetto and Andrew Raffetto, February 5, 2014**

Narrators	Romana Raffetto & Andrew Raffetto
Birthdate	8/29/32 and 1962
Birthplace	Asolo,Italy[RR] and New York,NY [AR]
Narrator(s) age	81 [RR], 51 [AR]
Interviewer	Liza Zapol
Place of Interview	144 W. Houston St, NY NY
Date of Interview	Feb 5, 2014, 1:30 pm
Duration of Interview	2 hours, 32 minutes
Number of Sessions	1
Waiver Signed/copy given	Y
Photographs	Y
Format Recorded	.Wav 48 khz, 24 bit (2 lav mics and one room mic)
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MP3 File Name	RaffettoOralHistory.mp3 [182.9 MB]
Order in Oral Histories	3



Romana Raffetto and Andrew Raffetto, in front of the fresh pasta menu at Raffetto's. February 5, 2014. Photograph by Liza Zapol.

## **Quotes from Oral History Interview with Romana Raffetto and Andrew Raffetto**

“So the Greenwich Village, to me, is beautiful. That’s what I feel. And now I don’t walk too much, unfortunately. But I used to, when I used to take them to school. We used to go all the way up to Bleecker Street, all these stores. Or at that time, when they were little, 14<sup>th</sup> Street was better than now. 8<sup>th</sup> Street, we used to, on Sunday, dress up and take Washington Square Park and go to 8<sup>th</sup> Street...”

(Romana Raffetto p.43)

“The one thing I would comment about the present-day Village that’s a little sad, I have an opportunity to come to work and experience it. And we own the building. We could always live here if we wanted. But I think the opportunity for people to experience it is just becoming more and more difficult with all the rents. And it’s just not the same. When the rents of the stores are the same, then you don’t have a little bakery or a little doughnut shop. It’s all chain things.

(Andrew Raffetto p.43)

“And my mother sometimes will say, ‘I’m from Asolo, from the Venice region.’ She was there until she was nineteen, before she had to go make money for the family. So that’s like twenty out of eighty. So sixty years, she’s like a New Yorker! Yet her first inclination might say, ‘I’m an Asolana. I’m from this town.’”

(Andrew Raffetto p.58)

“I used to get angry sometimes, because as the business got busier, Saturday you couldn’t just hang out, go play in the park. We worked, my brother and I. As people got older—back when the drinking age was eighteen and such, some of our friends were going to Fort Lauderdale for spring break. Well spring break was then, for us, Easter break. And Easter’s another big holiday. Not as much anymore, but back then with the families and the neighborhood, recent suburban people would still trek in and keep their tradition going. With all that kind of stuff, we couldn’t go anywhere. So there were times when elevating to manhood and working, being a working adult, if you want to call it that, could be annoying sometimes when you couldn’t do things. And then if you wanted to do things—I liked theater, but I wouldn’t join the high school theater group cause they rehearsed three days a week after school. I would help close up or I would help make something, so the personal life and ambitions just took to the back burner.”

(Andrew Raffetto p.31)

## Summary of Oral History Interview with Romana Raffetto and Andrew Raffetto

### Raffetto Family Business

- Marcello & Louisa Raffetto (Romana's parents-in-law)
  - Immigrated to NYC early 1900s, Ellis Island
  - Six children
  - Marcello - pasta maker & baker in Genoa, Italy
- 1906, M. Raffetto and Brothers - pasta business opens at 174-76 Sullivan Street
- Early Years
  - Sullivan St. location bought for \$9,500 in 1919
  - Walk-up building
  - Italian neighborhood, densely populated
  - Storefront in basement
  - Sold two flavors of dry pasta
    - Meat & spinach ravioli (original to Genoa)
    - Spinach & egg noodles
  - Mailed pasta to other states
  - Phone number same since 1920s
  - 1920s Prohibition
    - Marcello caught selling liquor in store's café
  - Early 1920s Marcello & Louisa go back to live in Italy with infant son Gino
  - Marcello's brother and his son run the business in NYC
  - 1941 Marcello dies in Italy, son Gino is 18, war time
  - Early 1970s Gino takes over Raffetto family business
    - Shift / customers demand fresh noodles
  - 1976 business buys car for deliveries
    - Delivery spots
      - Beatrice Inn, W. 12<sup>th</sup> St.
      - Fedora Restaurant, 280 West 4<sup>th</sup>
      - Villa Margutta
      - Patsy, on 46<sup>th</sup>
      - Trattoria da Alfredo
      - Tavola Calda, 285 Bleecker / now Ottomanelli's
      - Café Alfredo, 117 Perry St.
      - Grotta Azzurra
      - Paolucci's
      - Sal Anthony's
      - Ballato's, 51 East Houston
      - Paris Commune on Bleecker St .
      - Sign of the Dove/ Tavern on the Green/ Russian Tea Room
      - Joe's Dairy (recently closed)
    - Business grows with more delivery cars & drivers needed
  - 1980 pasta boom
    - Raffettos reputation

- 1979/80 New York Magazine article about store
- Current Day
  - Three generations in the store
  - Sullivan St.
    - Renting out 176 Sullivan / known as Sullivan Bistro
    - Celebrities living on block
  - Store location – 144 W. Houston St.
  - Original customers still visit
  - Need to expand business, find factory/manufacturing facility on Leroy St. (W. Village)
  - Celebrity customers
    - Donald Sutherland
    - Fred Gwynne (Herman Munster)
    - Isabella Rossellini
  - Current day retailers
    - Fairway
    - Dean & DeLuca
    - Agatha & Valentina
    - Garden of Eden
  - In-store products at 144 W. Houston St.
    - Pasta
    - Sauces
    - Prepared foods

#### Romana Raffetto

- Early Years
  - Born in Asolo, Italy, August 29, 1932
  - Mother – vegetable stand owner
  - Romana – dressmaker by trade
  - Lives in England
  - 1957 moves to New York for work / English diplomat's nanny
- Marriage to Gino Raffetto
  - Romana and Gino's Wedding dinner at the Coach House / now Babbo
  - Gino
    - Well-educated in Italy, in medical school, war interrupted school
    - Moves to England & works at jelly factory
    - 1956 Gino comes back to live in NYC
    - Banker: Belgian bank, Banca Nazionale del Lavoro
    - 1970s Gino takes over Raffetto family business
  - Children: Andrew & Richard
    - Sons start to work at family business (as teenagers)
  - Family life
    - Mother in-law initially not nice / Romana came from a lower economic & educational background

- 1974 renovations to building, family lives above storefront
- 1978-1979 Romana returns to Italy / parents pass away within a year of each other
- Business
  - When Gino took over the business, Romana offered to help him run the business
  - Romana started making the sauces / still cooks the sauces
- Notable Locations
  - The Peacock Cafe, W. 4<sup>th</sup> St., Italian owners, where she met Gino
  - Chock Full O' Nuts
  - Movies
  - Bleecker St. stores
  - Washington Square Park
  - Trattoria da Alfredo, 90 Bank Street (W. Village)

#### Andrew Raffetto

- Born Saint Vincent's Hospital, Greenwich Village, December 7, 1962
- Education: Our Lady of Pompeii, Fordham University
- Family crest
- Family lore – original Raffettos pirates / criminals, settled in Genoa
- Apartment they lived in (above store) - railroad style
- Holland Tunnel built – 14<sup>th</sup> St. created
- Notable locations
  - Children's Aid Society on Sullivan St.
  - Carvel's near Children's Aid Society
  - Jack and Jill (doughnut shop)
  - Checker Park, Sixth Ave. & W. Houston
  - Sign of the Dove
  - Joe's Dairy (closed)
  - Zito's, Bleecker St. (closed)
  - Carmine St.
    - Stolen goods from store sold here
- Archival photos of neighborhood with Raffetto's store
- Current day – runs Raffetto's with brother Richard

**General Interview Notes:**

This is a transcription of an oral history that was conducted by the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation.

GVSHP began the Greenwich Village Oral History Project in 2013. The GVSHP Greenwich Village Oral History Project includes a collection of interviews with individuals involved in local businesses, culture, and preservation, to gather stories, observations, and insights concerning the changing Village. These interviews elucidate the personal resonances of the neighborhood within the biographies of key individuals, and illustrate the evolving neighborhood.

Oral history is a method of collecting memories and histories through recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of adding to the historical record.

The recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. Oral history is not intended to present the absolute or complete narrative of events. Oral history is a spoken account by the interviewee in response to questioning. Whenever possible, we encourage readers to listen to the audio recordings to get a greater sense of this meaningful exchange.



## Oral History Interview Transcript

**Zapol:** This is the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation Oral History Project, and this is Liza Zapol, oral historian for the project. It's February 5, 2014, and I'm here on West Houston Street, above Raffetto's. And if I can ask each of you to introduce yourself, please? What is your name?

**R. Raffetto:** I am Romana Raffetto. I was born August 29, 1932, in Italy. I immigrated here to America.

**Zapol:** And where in Italy were you born?

**R. Raffetto:** A little town called Asolo, near Venice. People will understand 'near Venice' more than my own town, but it is a very famous town anyway.

**Zapol:** Great, thank you. And if I can ask you to introduce yourself, please?

**A. Raffetto:** Yes, my name is Andrew Raffetto. I was born December 7, 1962, in St. Vincent's Hospital here in Greenwich Village. And I currently run Raffetto's with my brother Richard, who has two years on me—he's November 2, 1960, also St. Vincent's—and we both grew up in Greenwich Village. And we now continue the tradition of running Raffetto's pasta store.

**Zapol:** Thank you. So you have some photographs here, and I know you wanted to, Romana had sort of—

**R. Raffetto:** He has [photos], also.

**Zapol:** So you both have photos. Maybe we should with the beginning, with the Raffettos. So how did that family line, then—which, Romana, I think you said you married into—how did that family line come to America?

**R. Raffetto:** Okay. Exactly the years, I don't know, but these are the original [rustling of photos]. The mother and father of my father-in-law. And so they came in the early 1900s, I guess, something like that. I had another picture, but I can't find it. Here it is: my mother-in-law, father-in-law, and my husband and his brother, when they were little children.

**Zapol:** I'm gonna pause for a second just so I can take some photographs of the photos that you're taking.

**R. Raffetto:** But I had a piece, I couldn't find it. But if I find it, I'll send you a copy.

**Zapol:** So the grandmother—

**R. Raffetto:** Was here first, with her children.

**Zapol:** What was her name?

**A. Raffetto:** Luisa.

**R. Raffetto:** Luisa, yeah.

**Zapol:** So Luisa came first with her—

**A. Raffetto:** Five out of six children.

**R. Raffetto:** Five out of the six.

**A. Raffetto:** Now, in recent years, with the computer, I've investigated on Ellis Island. And now I donate to that cause. I think it's incredible to find things. And I've recently determined, I think it's 1902, that I find a Luisa, and it was written 'Carlo.' Which I think in the fancy script, you could see different letters—you know, the 'R' becomes a 'B' with the fancy curls of that John Hancock thing with a quill pen. And who knows [how] the people at the port, at Ellis Island, interpreted their writing or whatever it was. So just in the last six months I thought I found a 1902 entry of Raffetto going somewhere on MacDougal Street. So that's literally the turn of the century where they came here. How my grandfather managed to decide, or why he made pasta—A relative who just passed away at the age of ninety recently mentioned that he was making pastries or something, working in flour, so to speak, back in Genoa, almost like as an apprentice.

And I guess the promise of a better life—they came over through Ellis Island. And 1906 has always been the start of the business. Whether it's on stationary and other correspondence, we use that as the beginning. So my grandfather somehow managed to create a store in 1906, we presume, and we take as fact. And it was at 174-76 Sullivan Street. And we find some mail from Italy and otherwise, and some stationary, with that address. [00:05:55]

Raffetto-2

**R. Raffetto:** This is one. This is the grandma, this lady, that is telling about how she made a good trip with a boat, she went back, and she's in good health. And she signed, 'Your beloved mother,' the way at that time. And this is another one that was written to Raffetto on Sullivan, so they did start there. Some people say, "Why did he start with the pasta?" My father-in-law was a baker in Genoa. They come from Genoa, from Italy, and that probably is the reason why he started with flour, because he was where they make pastry and bread and stuff like that. That's what his sister told me about it.

**Zapol:** Do you know why they left Genoa? What was the reason for them coming here?

**R. Raffetto:** That I don't know.

**A. Raffetto:** They originated from a little town called Ognio, up in the hilltops outside of Genoa. And this is a pretty cool story, not so much for Greenwich Village, but just it sounds so crazy, it's good to hear. There's a Raffetto who could be some fifth cousin or something, and when this gentleman, Joe Raffetto, retired, he went to Genoa and this little town outside of Genoa, up in the hills. And he did some genealogy-type thing. And from church records, which, before census, the church had records. And somehow he came back with this story that—we're all sticking to it, cause it sounds so good—that the original Raffettos were two pirates from the port of Genoa. Now they're criminals, so supposedly they hid in the hills from authorities or something. And I guess they settled and more Raffettos came.

In fact, when I was a young boy, we went to our first vacation to Italy when we were like eight or ten years old, my brother and I. And we went to the cemetery to see my grandfather. They're buried over there, my grandparents. And I went there, and about maybe forty to fifty percent of the tombstones say Raffetto. Now, growing up in New York, if it wasn't a cousin—like, you never ran across another Smith, O'Reilly, whatever. It just never happened. So I remember asking my father, "Are these all our relatives?" And he said, "No, it's —

**R. Raffetto:** He was so shocked when he saw.

**A. Raffetto:** —around here, it's a common name." And it's kind of just funny. But this one person who did the study, somehow someone told him this story with the pirates. It's a good thing to pass to your kids and stuff, "We come from pirates." [laughs]

**R. Raffetto:** Show her the stemma.

**A. Raffetto:** Oh, yeah. We'll get to that, Ma. There's a family crest that I recently found, discovered, from a relative who was a naval dentist.

**Zapol:** Oh wow! Has it been explained to you, the crest itself? You know, what its meaning is, or the colors, or any of that?

**A. Raffetto:** No, it hasn't. I just recently discovered it on a trip to Italy. A slight fast-forward, there was a time in the early Twenties my grandfather built a house in this hilltop town. He retired after only less than twenty years of making pasta, and left this business to— [00:10:05]

**R. Raffetto:** A brother.

**A. Raffetto:** —his brothers. In fact, the original name of the store— We have a 1928 calendar hanging in our store window, with the Coca-Cola girl? You know, the Victorian type thing and it says, 'M. Raffetto and Brothers.' So he left the business to his brothers and went back. Recently, my wife and I went back, because that house was still in the family. My cousin was selling it. And my wife and I felt very passionate about tradition. We want to look at it and spend summers in Italy like the Tuscan Sun movie [*Under the Tuscan Sun*], and the kids will learn Italian and all that kind of stuff. We went there, and we went to this one restaurant in this one little town of 100 people. There's not too many people left. And on the walls of this restaurant was this crest, so it was kind of funny, just to see this. I was all emotional. And I've since made a ring with this crest, just to wear it with pride.

**Zapol:** What is that town like? You say there are 100 people there. Do you have a sense of what it was like when your relatives, when your grandfather—

**A. Raffetto:** Very simple. There was one general store in the Seventies there, and that has since closed. And up on the hill, there's this one restaurant—

**R. Raffetto:** The church. The cemetery.

**A. Raffetto:** A tiny church that would amount to a tiny chapel, at best. Very ornate, but very small. And the town square might be a fifty-foot circle.

**R. Raffetto:** And there is still—now it's been sold—the house made of stone.

**A. Raffetto:** Stone and clay.

**R. Raffetto:** It was empty, inside.

**A. Raffetto:** Just a shell.

**R. Raffetto:** I found a little bottle there, on the floor. Belonged to his grandfather, and it was still there.

**Zapol:** So that belonged to your husband's—

**A. Raffetto:** Grandfather.

**R. Raffetto:** Grandfather, yeah. And we would visit there, and the name of Raffetto is in there. And I looked through, because it was just one flight, and that's it. And the ground floor, it was a lot of garbage.

**A. Raffetto:** It was an abandoned old place.

**R. Raffetto:** And by looking, I found that little—show that little bottle, on top there.

**A. Raffetto:** Oh, okay.

**R. Raffetto:** I wrote down something.

**A. Raffetto:** Yeah, we found this in the building.

**R. Raffetto:** I found it.

**A. Raffetto:** Okay, you take credit for finding it. [laughs]

**R. Raffetto:** This bottle come from the old house, in Ognio, Genoa, the house of Gino's grandfather. And I got to this in 1977. That's something really old there. Cause it was on the ground, among the stones.

On our recent visit eight years ago, we stopped in the restaurant, discovered the family crest, spoke to a waiter there—who could have been in his mid eighties—who remembers my

grandfather and my father. Hanging around there, what's interesting is that this one restaurant, Hugo's, is kind of famous. It's a destination restaurant to say the least. And they bought this two-story structure of clay and stone and made it a wine cellar. And this old waiter, eight years ago, showed it to us. And it's perfect because it's in the mountains on an incline. So it's perfect temperature for storing wine. And I don't know if they're making their own beer, but certainly—

**R. Raffetto:** In 1977 they had beautiful trees of bay leaves. Couldn't believe it, so I had to dry them before coming back to America so they'd let me bring it in.

**A. Raffetto:** I think the original question was why would they leave Genoa, come here.

**R. Raffetto:** We don't know.

**A. Raffetto:** I guess it's much like a person who grew up in—Johnny Carson was in Wichita, Kansas or something. You maybe think you got a better shot going somewhere else, so they did. And this was, from my understanding, a very Italian neighborhood. By going into the Ellis Island pages, you see on the ship and the manifest they put the destination. And you just see they're all Italian, going to an Italian brother, cousin. You even see people going to Our Lady of Pompeii Church through the parish. And most churches to this day do social work and help the community. And that's what they did. So this would be a good spot to settle if you open up a store. To this day you need foot traffic, so you want to go to a densely populated area. The Village, being an older part of the city than say uptown by a few years, had a certain density, built in clientele. [00:15:36]

**Zapol:** Sure.

**A. Raffetto:** So I guess that would explain that.

**Zapol:** So what had you heard about the first store? What were some of the stories about that place?

**A. Raffetto:** Not much. Back in the day, as far as the store goes, what's interesting is very few flavors. We made a meat and spinach ravioli, which is original to the Genoa area. So they made that. I don't think they made a cheese ravioli to start out with. And probably to back up the theory that if the people from Genoa, from the North, ended up in this area, you would sell what

they recognize, and offer it. And then they made spinach and egg noodles. Only two flavors. And what's interesting is that they were dry. Somewhere we have stationaries that says 'dry and fresh.' But even as a small child, I remember we sold and made much more dry noodles. And what's interesting with the demographics and such, if you think of the lack of refrigeration, a dry noodle—even to this day, your house upstate your pantry's full, the refrigerator's empty. It just stores better. So we made tons of dry noodles. And in finding some documents during a construction phase when we gutted the building and renovated the old tenement, we found sales ledgers where my grandfather was mailing pasta. Washington, Philadelphia, it's almost like the early mail order business, which is kind of fascinating. You think you have a modern plan for your business, and it was done, basically 100 years ago, because it was non-perishable.

So it's interesting. Back then the store, when it was so simple, two flavors. It's a simpler operation. More humble, in a sense. And people shop by daily meals and such. You could say that up to two years ago.

**R. Raffetto:** At that time, though, the only fresh pasta was the pasta made when the people wanted to make their own ravioli. And it was a very soft pasta. I kept it covered with a plastic, and wet, to keep it warm. That was popular then.

**Zapol:** Because they needed the fresh to be able to then—

**R. Raffetto:** Yeah.

**Zapol:** I see.

**R. Raffetto:** This is when they were in the Village. This is where they grew up, because my father-in-law left America and my husband was only ten or twelve months old when he left. And they grew in the house that he made bigger.

**A. Raffetto:** So after 1906 to 1924—eighteen years—he made enough money to say, "I'm out of here. I'm going go back to Italy, build a house, and stay there."

**Zapol:** Right.

**A. Raffetto:** And he did that. I'm very grateful to my father's uncle and then that cousin [that] kept the store. Because if someone else said, "I'm out of here," it wouldn't have been there for

my brother and I and my father. Obviously he was out of the country, and then he came back thirty years later. There was no room for him in the business. We were merely the landlords. But then that old cousin, who stuck it out with his father from 1925 to about 1975, he said, “I want out.” So my father went in. It’s very fortunate that it didn’t dissolve. It could have just fizzled away.

**R. Raffetto:** You see, my father-in-law, when he [went] back, he left to his brother, he said to them, “I leave it to you, but if my son wants to get in, you have to take him.” And in general, that’s what happened. [00:20:16]

**Zapol:** I see. So he left with that condition, that if he wanted to come back, he could.

**A. Raffetto:** Right, but my grandfather died in 1941 when my father was eighteen. And with the War and things happening, who’s gonna remember that conversation between—

**R. Raffetto:** The two brothers.

**A. Raffetto:** And hold anyone to it and all that kind of stuff. So it just didn’t happen that way, but eventually—

**Zapol:** It came back.

**A. Raffetto:** It came back, right. In fact at one point there was another cousin who worked with this long-time cousin. So it was nice that there were other cousins running the business and maintaining and making a good product and all that.

**Zapol:** Right. And it’s still keeping some of the same original items—

**A. Raffetto:** Yes, oh sure.

**Zapol:** —that they were making.

**A. Raffetto:** Some of the items to this day around the holidays, Christmas being the biggest one—that meat and spinach original recipe. Sounds like KFC, but—

**R. Raffetto:** People that used to shop fifty years ago, they still come.



**A. Raffetto:** They still come for that, and it's actually very rewarding to serve a customer who could be in his eighties and hear, "Oh I've been coming in here since I was a kid. My mother used to send me to go get the ravioli. We lived on Sullivan Street." All that history. It's nice to listen to.

**R. Raffetto:** There was a woman who called you, but she couldn't come and get the ravioli. She could not be without on Christmas, and you mailed it to her.

**A. Raffetto:** Yeah, I recently FedEx'ed [Federal Express] some meat and spinach ravioli to a woman who said, "Sixty-five years I haven't had a Christmas without the meat and spinach. Any way to get them?" And she lives in town not far from my house in New Jersey, but I just sent it FedEx and she sent me a check. [laughs] And she was very grateful. Those are the perks of keeping something going like we have.

What's interesting in my quest for history—because I'm the family history buff of late—besides Ellis Island, is a customer mentioned to go to the Museum of the City of New York. And they have a photo archive department where you could look on the computer. And I found there an actual listing of Raffetto and Brothers on Sullivan Street. So for \$125 a print—and I signed that you're not supposed to reproduce this—I own a library photo. And there you see our shop using the basement place. And what I find interesting is that this strip of row houses has become luxurious town homes. I can never remember her—Anna Wintour? The *Vogue* lady.

**Zapol:** Wintour, yes.

**A. Raffetto:** She lives here. And in this photo there's cracked windows, the steps are missing and the hand railing, when you zoom in on the computer. Richard Gere had this building for a while, put the meditation hut on there [laughs] that a few neighbors got annoyed with.

**Zapol:** So then they're both like two or three doors down from Raffetto's.

**A. Raffetto:** Right. So that was fun.

**Zapol:** So looks like it's about a four-floor or three-floor walk up, with the basement being the storefront.

**A. Raffetto:** He probably rented the two basement stores for manufacturing or certainly to walk in. We have stationary representing that address. And much to my surprise when I did all this research, the first thing I looked up was a listing they had. You could look up by street, so I looked up West Houston. I saw 148, so I said, “Oh, I hope 144 is in that shot, in that angle.” And sure enough it was. Much to my surprise, Raffetto’s is not there in 1920, when this gentleman took the series of photographs.

**R. Raffetto:** Maybe they didn’t have the advertising. [00:24:52]

**A. Raffetto:** No, Ma. Anyway this is our building, and it was shocking because we always knew we were on Sullivan Street. But I always thought it was just for a few years, and then they moved over. And sure enough, we have the original deed of 1919 where this building was bought for \$9,500. So I guess in 1919 he bought it and then converted it. Because it’s not a walk-down place, as much of the block is.

**R. Raffetto:** He raised it.

**A. Raffetto:** So he raised it to street level, and then must have moved in 1920, [19]21, or thereabouts. So looking at the Museum of the City of New York re-wrote my history in my head.

**Zapol:** Sure, seeing the photographs, it sounds like.

**A. Raffetto:** So that was an interesting discovery.

**Zapol:** So I’m interested, then, in hearing a little more about your story, how you came to America, and then how you met your husband. And then, through that, how you met the family and came into the business. And then we’ll be able to tell your story, cause you came afterwards. [laughs]

**R. Raffetto:** Well, I came to America in 1957 with an English diplomat. He was here for two years. And I was taking care—he had two girls—and he thought I could bring the girls here. I was in England then, and he came to ask me if I want to go to America.

**Zapol:** So first you lived out near Venice, then you moved to England. And why did you move to England, and when?

**R. Raffetto:** Necessity. To help the family. And then there I met this gentleman, and he asked—I was working in a store like ours, in London. And he came to shop. He remembered me from another time, and he says, “Would you like to come to America?” And I said, “Of course I would like to. [laughs] Who doesn’t want to go to America!” And he explained to me that he has to go ahead, but the two girls would be left behind, if I will take them. And we came on the [Royal Mail Ship] *Queen Elizabeth*. I have a couple of pictures here. And I brought the girls, and I took care of the girls, and I stayed with them about two and a half years or so. During that time I met my husband, and I never went back.

**Zapol:** How did you meet him?

**R. Raffetto:** There was an old café on West Fourth Street called the Peacock, very full of music, classy, pictures, you know. It was owned by a couple, they were very artistic. And they were Italian. And all the young [people] at that time like me used to go there. They had a round table, and no matter how many you were you always had room at a round table. And that’s where I went. And my husband was sitting there, and we met there. And then exchanged telephones and the usual story. [laughs] And I got married in 1960 and we came to live here. And the house was terrible then, very dirty. My husband did a lot of work to make it look nice.

**Zapol:** Your husband had grown up in Italy, but—

**R. Raffetto:** Yes, and he came here just before me. He lived with his aunt, which was the sister of the son.

**Zapol:** His father’s sister.

**R. Raffetto:** Yes, his father’s sister.

**R. Raffetto:** And that’s it, we met. We didn’t have money, just each other. We went to Chock full o’ Nuts a lot, to the movies. [laughs] You know, walking to the park and walking everywhere we could help each other. And then we decided to get married.

**Zapol:** And you left working with the diplomat.

**R. Raffetto:** Yes. And the diplomat gave me away, because I didn't have my father here. He was very sweet to me. And I had my dinner at the Coach House. Now it's a Mario Batali [restaurant].  
**[00:30:04]**

**A. Raffetto:** Babbo.

**R. Raffetto:** It was the Coach House, and it was owned by a Greek. And that was the first time I had London broil. And it was so nice. And he made it for \$1.95 each. We didn't have money. And it was very good. We did it there. Unfortunately I don't have pictures of that, because the camera —

**A. Raffetto:** They didn't load the film right. It didn't catch —

**Zapol:** Oh, no!

**R. Raffetto:** So I got married in the church. Thank god for my mother! [laughs] If I didn't have her, no pictures. I always wanted to go to Babbo to see if it's still the same, because we had it upstairs. One time I tried to call, and they have all these computerized—I can't deal with this. So that's it. I never went back there. But that's where I had my dinner.

**Zapol:** What church did you get married in?

**R. Raffetto:** At that time, because I was living with the diplomat, we were at 68<sup>th</sup> Street between Third and Second Avenue. And the church was on 63<sup>rd</sup>, the Catholic church that's supposed to be my church. And I married there. And it was funny because when we had a meeting with a priest—we told him we were alone, we don't have a family—and so he says, "Okay, take care." So when I arrive in the church he prepared my husband in the doorway, because then I would walk down with him, because we didn't have nobody.

**A. Raffetto:** A father.

**R. Raffetto:** Yes, and when he opened the door he saw this—Mr. Moore was his name—tall man, English man. And the priest says to him—look, he's confused—"And who are you?" And Mr. Moore says, "I'm the one who'll give away the bride." Such an English tongue. And then the priest got confused. He took Gino, my husband, back to the altar to wait there for me!

**A. Raffetto:** A little change of plans.

**R. Raffetto:** So that was the story, and I'm here now. Still here. I went to Italy a few times. Unfortunately I did go three times one year because both my parents died within a year. And first my father died, and my mother says she wants us all together—I have three brothers. And so I went in the summer to please her. Within two or three days, within a year, she died, so back again. So one year I went three times.

**Zapol:** What year was that?

**R. Raffetto:** [19]78 to [19]79.

**Zapol:** And you came from a different region than your husband.

**R. Raffetto:** Venice and Genoa.

**Zapol:** Right. So how was that for you, coming into this family? Was that difficult? Were there differences in the food, the language, or—

**R. Raffetto:** No, not that way. A little bit with the relatives. Maybe they didn't trust me. I don't know, something like that. But then I got very well all together with everybody, all the cousins. We had so many reunions. So I was part of the family.

**Zapol:** But at first, how did you notice that there were differences between you? What kinds of things were different?

**R. Raffetto:** [sighs] Most of all, it was my mother-in-law. Mothers-in-laws sometimes are no good. And she didn't like me because I was a simple girl, I guess. Because I am a simple person. And she didn't like that. But then she realized—I'll never forget, in 1977, when we went, she was still alive. She says to me, "It would be nice if you and I would be living together." Before I answer her, my eyes up in the sky and I say, "Thank you, God. I won." [00:34:58]

**Zapol:** So there was a sense that you came from a family that was not as well off as them?

**R. Raffetto:** That's my feeling.

**Zapol:** It was about money?

**R. Raffetto:** Money, yes, and—

**A. Raffetto:** Education.

**R. Raffetto:** —situation, education. Probably we were just married, and she came to visit us. And one of his ex-girls, she was a teacher. So my mother-in-law, without asking permission, in this room, she asked her to visit. And I got nervous. I remember I tried even to make a new dress because I'm a dressmaker. I made a new dress and suddenly I got my stamina back. And I said, "He married me! He didn't marry her! So why am I so nervous?" And that was it. It was just status. But then she realized I was a good girl.

**Zapol:** So you said you first moved here. And what did this apartment look like?

**R. Raffetto:** It had big stairs going up. The first time we lived on the second floor because it was still tenants both first and third. And the second floor they weren't there. Unfortunately it was people that didn't keep clean. It was so dirty. It was so sad, I have to say, to see that. And on this side—because this has changed—it used to be the living room. And then it was a little bedroom. In that apartment, there were so many roaches. Not one or two that you can see everywhere—a lot. He bought a gallon of disinfectant, my husband, and every night, in that little room that we slept, he used to spray before we got into bed. Your wife would never accept that. [laughs] And so he tried to clean up the house. And he did a good job. And then it started to sink. That's why we—

**A. Raffetto:** Gutted.

**R. Raffetto:** Gutted. We couldn't touch the front, or the back. But we changed the front of the store, though. The door was different from before. But the rest it had to stay the same way. But he had an architect and he designed all three the same: living room, bathroom, my bedroom, and other small bedroom.

**Zapol:** So they changed. And around what year was that, when it was all redone?

**A. Raffetto:** 1974.

**R. Raffetto:** We had the small bedroom over there with my other son. It was partitioned here, so we made the bedroom here. I wanted them to have their own bedrooms. And we had a table here, a small sofa. We managed. I raised them both until they got married.

**Zapol:** And what was your introduction to the store itself?

**R. Raffetto:** When my husband joined the store, there were the two. But one retired, and he got this place. And the other cousin that he mentioned, the other cousin died. The year was [19]78?

**A. Raffetto:** I'll back up just a tiny bit, because when my father came over in [19]56, part of the little bit of snobbery of my grandmother was the fact that he had studied Latin, Greek, and French, and all that.

**R. Raffetto:** He was well educated.

**A. Raffetto:** He was going to medical school, but when my grandfather died and the war came—talk about ruining your life—everything was just shattered.

**Zapol:** He wasn't able to pursue his education as much in Italy?

**A. Raffetto:** Right, and all the financial holdings in the Great Depression of [19]29 were hit in the American portfolio. And then when you get to Italy if you had any Italian money there was inflation and Mussolini and all this stuff. So they were penniless after having had nannies and the good life. Never worked. My grandfather never worked, the last eighteen years of his life. My father went to England first and worked in a jelly factory. He told of the horrors of having that one meal in a rooming house—boiled rabbit. I don't think he ever ate rabbit ever again in his life. When he got over here, I guess with his language and some significant education, he ended up in banking. So he was in the Belgian bank, and then he got a job with the French thing. And then he got a job with the Banca Nazionale del Lavoro, which is in Rockefeller Center. I think it's still there. [00:40:38]

And so he was an officer in some credit department type thing. But the way he explained it to me when I was old enough to better understand was when you're in a big bank there's always someone above you. And there's always the guy taking credit—all the politics. and the water cooler—not just gossip, but people trying to take your promotion and your raise and things

like that. So the original older cousin who I had mentioned earlier had always been in the store with his father, since the Twenties. My father had always told him, since the mid Sixties, “You know, if you ever get tired of this thing, let me know. Maybe I’ll come in.” And sure enough, in [19]71 he mentioned it. So my father actually used his two-week vacation from the bank to try to work there. Here’s a guy who was in a suit. When he was younger, he had custom-made suits, that’s how well off they were as a young man.

**R. Raffetto:** The hat, the umbrella. He was so elegant.

**A. Raffetto:** Fedoras.

**R. Raffetto:** Look there, you can see how elegant he dressed. And this is when he was in England.

**A. Raffetto:** Yeah. So the older cousin said, “I’ll leave.” So my father went in with a cousin who was maybe two years older than him. They were almost identical in age. And he had grown up on MacDougal. It was a pretty good set up. Unfortunately, this slightly older cousin that was with my father there—Angelo was his name, they called him Angie—he suffered a stroke on February 24<sup>th</sup> of 1978, and didn’t recover. He passed away from that. And Angie had two daughters, like college, and one daughter maybe was already married.

**R. Raffetto:** No, I don’t think.

**A. Raffetto:** But anyway, she wasn’t interested in the business. A younger daughter was engaged to some guy in the police academy. And that side of the family was speaking of having this twenty-one-year-old kid as my father’s partner. And fortunately, through discussions, legal and otherwise, they realized you can’t force upon a partner like that.

**R. Raffetto:** Can I stop you?

**A. Raffetto:** Yeah.

**R. Raffetto:** At that time he was concerned and worried, my husband. And I said to him, “I’ll help you.” He said, “Oh, what do you mean?” “I’ll work in the same store that you have. I know what to do.” And that’s when I joined. And I’m still there.



**A. Raffetto:** In 1978 my brother and I are like eighteen and sixteen, so it's not like my mother has to stay home and take care of us. We were out all the time anyway.

**Zapol:** [laughs] Right.

**A. Raffetto:** In the park playing or whatever. So anyway, it came back to the original family in a sense, the full circle thing. But that's how we came back to the pasta business. It was from domestic help from my mother, a jelly factory for my father to banking, and then we traded in everything for an apron. And what was interesting at that point, to lead into generation number three, so to speak, in [19]79 or [19]80—soon after that period where it's just us as a family—*New York* magazine did a nice article on us and picked us as the best pasta in New York. That was a time when my brother and I missed quite a bit of school, because we were just so overwhelmed with business. [00:44:53]

And on a more detailed thing, remember how I had mentioned earlier that dry noodles were more of a business than the fresh ones? Well in this period of time there's fettuccine alfredo. There's a famous restaurant in the West Village called Trattoria Alfredo, at 90 Bank Street. And it was revolutionary, almost like Da Silvano was of the Eighties and beyond, or Nineties and beyond. We only had one machine that my grandfather bought in 1917 to roll out the dough, and only one cutter. But the roller's the big one. We were getting so many orders for fresh noodles because people wanted to put fresh noodles on their menu. We actually abandoned dry noodles after about eighty years of making dry noodles. We just didn't have the machinery or the space in the back of the shop here to even get more equipment, because it was just so crowded.

**Zapol:** So that sounds like it was a real turning point pretty soon after your father took over the business.

**A. Raffetto:** Yes, very much so.

**Zapol:** And Romana, when you joined the business it became successful. Had it been successful before that?

**R. Raffetto:** In 1980 the boom of pasta came. As I said, the *New York Times* interviewed Gino—

**A. Raffetto:** *New York* magazine and the *Times*.

**R. Raffetto:** —to find out how many pounds of pasta he'd made now, because everybody now wanted pasta. At that time we were together, really together. And now we have people that—he doesn't like it—they call me 'Mama,' I say, "Hello, Son," [laughs] just to give it back.

**A. Raffetto:** Well as the boom started—the avalanche of business and such in 1976—my father and his cousin bought a [19]76 Ford Pinto station wagon to do deliveries, which was like ten or twelve stops. Old Village places like the Beatrice Inn, which is still around. Anyway, I could mention old names, but most of them are gone. And this old guy from Genoa that they knew from hanging around would deliver at lunchtime for a few hours. Well, within a couple of years, we had to get actual vans. Then we had to get a second van. Then we got a full-time driver, then a part-time driver. Then we needed two full-time drivers. So it just escalated from more restaurants putting pasta on their menu. It's highly profitable for the restaurant. The cost of the plate could be \$1 back then, who knows. You'd get \$7 or \$8 on all the pasta you want. So business just would grow ten, twenty percent a year for quite a while.

**Zapol:** So do you feel like your father's background in banking, his education, it helped the business become successful?

**R. Raffetto:** Yes. First of all, he was very honest. He would give you the best he can give. One time, it was very funny, one of the salesmen was talking to him about certain things that he had to sell. And my husband stayed quiet, listened to what he was saying. When he finished he said, "Do you know you are talking to a Genovese?" And the guy, he was a Jew, and the guy says, "Yes, I know. It takes ten of us to fool one of you." [laughs] I never forgot that!

**A. Raffetto:** [laughs] I guess that's a compliment.

**R. Raffetto:** They are very, they don't like to say they're—

**A. Raffetto:** Frugal? Thrifty?

**R. Raffetto:** No, it's not frugal. There's another word. But my husband said, "We are not like that. We like to save." It's not that we are—

**A. Raffetto:** Cheap?

**R. Raffetto:** Cheap, yes.

**A. Raffetto:** Just wise?

**R. Raffetto:** But we like to save in order to grow, that's what it is. But a lot of people say, "Oh, the Genovese are cheap, you know, they don't give you anything." [00:50:02]

**A. Raffetto:** Well the thought was always if you make a good product, you'll sell it. So you wouldn't cut down on ingredients, or get a cheaper ricotta. You would always use this Polly-O brand, which is like a New York type of cheese. I think they've been around since like 1890 or something. So you just use good ingredients, and you sell. And if they charge you a little more for the price, than you raise your price a dime. And if it's good stuff, it's only a dime. It's still pasta. It's not a steak.

**R. Raffetto:** My husband gave the business to the two of them, when he wanted to retire, before he died. He gave them the business. The advice he gave to them is always sell good stuff, you will never die of hunger. And it's true.

**A. Raffetto:** Over the years we would rather throw something out than sell it. You know, 'when in doubt, throw it out.' You find something in your fridge, you can't put that out there. Because if that's the first time they have your stuff and there's something wrong with it, whatever it might be, chances are you'll never see that person again. So you'd rather throw out the \$50 batch of flour and eggs or whatever it was, and then start new.

**R. Raffetto:** What was it that we threw out [when] for days we didn't have electricity?

**A. Raffetto:** Oh, we had a blackout?

**R. Raffetto:** A blackout, yes. Both freezer and refrigerator full of stuff, couldn't sell it.

**Zapol:** With [Hurricane] Sandy?

**A. Raffetto:** Over the years, with Sandy, the grid that went down in '07, in August. Remember that summer day?

**Zapol:** Right, the late summer blackouts.

**R. Raffetto:** So that's really the history. And as I say, I went downstairs [in] [19]78, and I'm still there. And I soon will be eighty-two years old.

**Zapol:** So what have been your jobs in the store?

**R. Raffetto:** In the beginning, serving, obviously. Helping cut the pasta. And now I do little. I don't serve the customer now, because I can't walk up and down. But I do cooking. I am the one who puts out all the sauces that we sell. They're all my recipes. A lot of the dishes that we sell are my recipes.

**A. Raffetto:** Prepared meals.

**R. Raffetto:** And I still cook. We have a nice woman that took over my cooking, and she does a good job. And I'm there doing something else. We always now and then invent something. Andrew and I normally always do the filling. If it's a new ravioli, we talk together, we taste each other's.

**A. Raffetto:** We're the research and development department.

**Zapol:** [laughs] That sounds like a good job to have.

**R. Raffetto:** Downstairs, this morning before you came I made two big lasagnas—spinach and crushed tomato. And I do different things. I do the zucchini cake. I do a torta with rice that is a Genovese dish. What I used to do here, for my husband. My husband liked good food. When I was inventing something, I said, "Do you like it? Is it good?" He said, "Yeah, it's okay. But don't make it again," when he didn't approve. He was very touchy in a sense. He didn't want to offend me. He said, "Don't make it again."

**Zapol:** Right, so you would know when he really didn't like it, and when he really did like something, too.

**R. Raffetto:** Oh, yes. [laughs] We were very good couple together, I have to say. And we raised two good boys, very good. I'm so lucky with the two of them, lucky, lucky. This morning I saw on program that a boy is taking care of his sister because she was in the wheelchair. And I

remember telling the two of them, “Remember, you have to take care of each other, because nobody else will take care of you. When we are gone, you have to take care of each other.” And I had to say that. They have their own family, but they respect each other. [00:55:15]

**Zapol:** I’d like to hear more about the neighborhood itself when you came into the business. So you talked about before, like 1976, that route where they had that one car, the Pinto had gone to all those different places. So what were some of those businesses? Were they Italian businesses in the neighborhood? What were a lot of the businesses that the—

**A. Raffetto:** That we were selling to, or just existed?

**Zapol:** That you were selling to.

**A. Raffetto:** It was just the local Italian restaurants. And just a handful of them are still sitting there.

**Zapol:** What were some of the names?

**A. Raffetto:** The Beatrice Inn, which is on West 12<sup>th</sup>. Which is now like a hot club. My mother’s friend owned that, and her brother owned the place next to it, called Casa di Pre. We were also selling to my mother’s dentist, [Dr. Charles] Dorato. His mother just sold Fedora Restaurant, at like 280 West 4<sup>th</sup>. The mother was eighty-eight and still running the restaurant. We sold to them for a while. There was a real nice place on Minetta Lane, next to the theater, and it was called Villa Margutta. Then it became La Boheme. Now I think it’s Perla. I’ve heard good things about it. But Via Margutta had this woman with these black glasses, looked like Jackie O [Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis]. They were good time customers. Uptown there was a place called La Scala. Our friend we went to grammar school with, [his] father owned it, Artie Murtallo [00:57:12].

Then Patsy’s Restaurant on 46<sup>th</sup>, they utilize the fact that Frank Sinatra was in there all the time. And they’re third generation. Sal, the son, is our age, and still buys from us. They’re real nice people.

**R. Raffetto:** Alfredo.

**A. Raffetto:** Trattoria Alfredo?

**R. Raffetto:** Yes.

**A. Raffetto:** Back in the late Seventies and Eighties, Trattoria Alfredo was like a pioneer of sorts in Italian cooking. And not spaghetti and meatballs and all that classic American, almost diner type stuff. He created Tavola Calda, at 285 Bleecker, where Ottomanelli's is now. Ottamanelli used to be a couple of doors down. So he had Trattoria Alfredo, Tavola Calda, and Café Alfredo on 117 Perry [Street], near St. Vincent's there. And they were all popular and did well. We used to have a few more customers in Little Italy. And not to put down Little Italy, but it's become so touristy that nobody gives a hoot about the quality or anything like that. And of the few places that did buy from us, I'm almost never down there, and they're not even in existence.

**R. Raffetto:** I only went once, to Grotta Azzurra,

**A. Raffetto:** Yeah, there was Grotta Azzurra. We supplied them for like forty years. I think it reopened, but who knows what's there. There's a place called Paolucci's. It was there since 1920. Benito's was a place. SPQR. We used to sell to Sal Anthony's, on Irving Place. That was an old-time place. Ballato's on, is it 51 East Houston, that Sal Anthony bought? Used to sell to them. Anyway, there were plenty of Italian restaurants around that we ended up supplying. So it was good to have enough deliveries, keep the van full.

**Zapol:** So that was early, and then it grew to more places. Or those were some of the places that it also then grew to?

**A. Raffetto:** Everything just kept growing, to tell you the truth. We used to have one truck and he'd go uptown first and then come back and do the Village. Then he had so much uptown that we had to get a separate guy to do the Village. So from those original ten or twelve restaurants, it ended up growing to like, say, 300 total. [01:00:08]

**R. Raffetto:** When I came up with the neighborhood, it was a lot of family, a lot of older people. Today it's changed. This street, it was all family.

**Zapol:** In 1960?

**R. Raffetto:** Yes, at that time. And the next-door neighbor, for example, we used to watch the garbage, always clean the sidewalk where we were. Now there is a lot of young people because

students come. And because they sold the building—the guy next door before, he sold it. He had three buildings, one, two, three. And before he put it to sell, he asked my husband, “Are you interested? But I want to sell all three together.” But we didn’t have the money, so after that somebody bought it and it became a mess. People come and go, come and go, a lot of young people around. There’s no more community like—because I’m old, what can I say.

**Zapol:** But in 1960 you say there were a lot of older people, but a lot of Italian families. In this side? Or more further south?

**R. Raffetto:** Well, in this side, this block was practically all Italian. Sullivan Street, on the other side, was a lot Italians living there. But now it’s just completely changed, because this side’s become a luxury building. The other side, now the Japanese built a big building. The fantastic theater left. We used to go there. Then there was also the funeral home. The building collapsed.

**A. Raffetto:** Nucciarone [Funeral Home].

**R. Raffetto:** It changed so much that now you go out the door, you don’t know anybody. At one time, you used to say hi, and even there was a guy sitting outside with a chair. Sometime I feel like doing it myself [laughs]. Nobody else does it.

**Zapol:** People used to be outside on the street a lot.

**R. Raffetto:** And you greeted each other, and you gossiped with each other. It was more friendly. Now it is all strangers. All strangers. And of course the ones that walk around always are like—

**Zapol:** With their phones. Andrew, what was it like to grow up in this neighborhood? Can you give me a story about playing in this neighborhood?

**A. Raffetto:** I sometimes, having kids myself now, although I’m in suburbia, keep trying to remember, how did we do that? Or how was it done, I should say. And how did I go out in the park at age eight or ten—and maybe I had my older brother with me—but just to go outside? And there were kids all over the place. To coincide with my mother talking about families and such, I went to Our Lady of Pompeii. And I remember that first, second, and third grade, there were two classes for each grade with like thirty kids in each. As the years progressed, fourth

grade was just one class of thirty-five. So I don't know if that was already the dwindling family type thing.

**Zapol:** Because people had moved out?

**A. Raffetto:** I guess. And I remember, the names weren't all Italian. Not that I even cared, but when I think of the names and stuff, it wasn't as much as the first few [grades]. But just going out in the park on any given moment, you could easily run a game. We would have to choose a baseball game. I mean, baseball needs nine players per team. You couldn't go outside now and find eighteen kids with nothing to do. I raised one daughter in the city before moving out, and I realized you schedule things. Everything's a schedule, you know?

**R. Raffetto:** You played at the Children's Aid Society a lot.

**A. Raffetto:** Yeah, another one bites the dust, the Children's Aid Society on Sullivan.

**Zapol:** Yeah, tell me about that, what was that like there? **[01:05:01]**

**A. Raffetto:** It was tremendous. I still have my Bear Cub card that I think I paid \$2 a year to get. Although I think the woman at the desk pocketed the money, but we won't go there. But anyway [laughs], that's another story. But used to go there after school, and it was funny, there were no classes. You went and it was a hangout, a lounge of sorts. And you went in the gym, and if you were there with ten friends, you would say, "Do you want to play a full court basketball game?" And there were two captains, and you chose. And there were odds and evens and you got first pick, and you picked the tallest kid and the shortest kid. And like the old movies, the less skilled kid was picked last, the less coordinated kid. And you actually learned leadership, because then you play center and you play guard and whatever. "You guard so-and-so." And same thing in the park, if you play a football game, all right, who's going to be quarterback?

It was actually much better. Because thirty years later I have my own daughter. And school was canceled on a snow day. And we're with a couple of friends, and they're like, "Well, what do we do?" I go, "Well, draw, or do something." I don't know, they almost didn't know what to do because they're so used to being told. So I think whatever you could say about the Seventies and Eighties, that independence that you were given, that you wouldn't do now with kidnapping, actually made you wiser and more mature. I keep thinking about it, because you



want your kid to be a decision-maker and process how to choose things, decisions and such. And back then you just made so many decisions.

And then we used to hang out on the church steps of Our Lady of Pompeii, or on a stoop on King Street. I haven't seen anyone hang out on a stoop—now, I don't know if they're chased away cause it's vagrancy, or no loitering, or what. But we stood there, and you would see our mothers come out of PTA [Parent Teacher Association] meetings or something and talk. And the mothers knew you, and they kind of knew who wasn't the really good kid. And if you were a good kid, they knew that too.

**R. Raffetto:** There was one PTA woman that swore so much. And I never grew up in a house with this. My father didn't. My husband didn't. And so I always thought, because I always remembered a proverb that said, 'Tell me with whom you are going and I shall tell you who you are.' And this woman was vulgar. And I knew. Every time she said, "Hi, Romana," I'm looking, who is looking? [laughs]

**A. Raffetto:** You almost didn't want to be seen with her.

**R. Raffetto:** Yeah.

**Zapol:** So also, you said there were bad kids, and they would know who was the bad kid. So tell me about your group of friends. Who were your friends? Were they also Italian kids, or at Our Lady of Pompeii?

**A. Raffetto:** In the early years you would hang out with your friends from your particular school, and from Our Lady of Pompeii. Most nice days we were on Sixth Avenue [and 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, near McDonald's], by that park. Back [then] they still had a seesaw, which I guess is too dangerous now with a lawsuit. You don't see them in any public parks anymore. And an eight-foot slide—at least you got some speed going down. Which again, I'm sure is not allowed anymore. And the monkey bars—when do you see monkey bars anymore? Yeah, we'd hang out with our grammar school friends, when you're so little 'you're on your mother's skirt,' so to speak. So if my mother and her four Italian friends or whoever would go sit on the benches, then you stayed near them.

But then when we got a little older, fourth grade or something, we would end up at Children's Aid Society. Or out in the park. But when you went there, then you met kids from St. Anthony's, St. Joseph's, St. Luke's, P.S. [Public School] 41. But I somehow remember maybe ten percent of the kids were from P.S. 41—I can't explain why. Because I got a sociology degree and I try to rethink history for my own kids, for my own sake. And I remember so many of the kids who were there might go home and change, but a lot of us still had our school uniforms from the private thing. Which, on the demographic front, people might today argue about freedom of expression. Many people are anti-uniform, but looking back it was the greatest thing. Walking to school—no one had a car. No one had Air Jordans. Some kids had the Pumas. Those were nice. I only had Converse All Stars. [01:10:42]

But you didn't know anyone's wealth, I remember. It was somewhat innocent. You never went up to someone's house—so rare—because you just met in the park. Because the apartments were so small. You didn't go play Scrabble. As a boy you're out running and sports and climbing the monkey bars and chasing each other or whatever. Up and down the slide. So with the uniform and staying outside, you never, ever, knew who was wealthy or who wasn't. Which I think was a plus, cause nowadays the pressure could be daunting. So it was interesting to not put a dollar sign on your friends, ever. Maybe in high school you caught wind of things like that, maybe. But even into high school you just went in the park. And you had a glove or the same \$20 basketball as anybody else did. So it was actually nice to be very equal, where you didn't feel inferior. You didn't feel superior, but that's the way it should be, you know? It was actually a good way to be.

**Zapol:** Yes. And if you have a particular story about maybe a neighborhood adventure, or understanding boundaries in the neighborhood?

**A. Raffetto:** Well some of it was a little deviant. Not too deviant. We would do stupid things. One of our favorite things to do [laughs] was when we would sit on the church steps of Pompeii, every now and then we would leave the steps, walk toward the curb and look toward the clock tower and pretend there was a jumper or something. So we'd all be looking, like, "No! Don't do it! Don't do it!" And people walking by would have to stop. "Oh good, he went back in. Thank god, this guy was gonna jump." We would try to save as many lives—we would just milk it for whatever.

Then there was a doughnut shop where the Village Bistro is, or the bagel place is, called Jack and Jill. It was actually a mini version of Chock full o' Nuts. You would go in there for a 15¢ powdered doughnut. It was a fun place. Before they closed, they had this guy, Walter. And Walter looked like Darrin Stephens. So he might deliver a pastrami sandwich to someone, and when he'd walk by, we would all start singing the *Bewitched* theme [laughs] as loud as we could. We thought it was funny. Someone walking by would say, "What the heck are these guys in 1985 doing with the *Bewitched* theme?" But this guy looked exactly like Dick York [Richard Allen York]. So that's like a harmless stupid thing we would do. Then, other times, we would get friendly with homeless people. And this one guy would actually go for gold, and he was trying to save money to go back to the Yukon and all that kind of stuff. So we learned by it.

One of the more touching moments—it's actually going to get me choked up—we were in Checker Park. I don't know if it's called that, but we called it the Checker Park—at Sixth Avenue and West Houston [Street], opposite the fire station—because it had checker tables back then, before they put a stupid seal there that no kid plays in. But anyway, so we're sitting there, and I remember we were in, say, second year of high school. I was taking Latin and I remember my best friend, Andrew Scarsi, who had The Derby restaurant. And their family had a grocery store like ours, since 1917. Anyway, he's studying German. There's this homeless guy, and we're meeting there to go to the movies. We're gonna go see *Superman 2* or something like that, or *I*, or whatever it was. And this homeless guy is mumbling German stuff, so my friend Andrew starts saying, "Ah, sprechen sie Deutsch?" and whatever. And in the end, my friend Andrew started talking to him, and he was telling him how his wife and kids were massacred in front of him by the SS [Schutzstaffel] or something. Still chokes me up [audibly moved]. It's weird.

[01:15:41]

**R. Raffetto:** It was very sad story.

**A. Raffetto:** So we gave him all our money instead of going to the movies. I must be tired. When I'm more tired, I'm more emotional. But it was so—

**R. Raffetto:** Sad.

**A. Raffetto:** So back then part of working in the store was we always had enough money. So my friend Andrew—who would always help up in The Derby—and other guys, we always had like

\$5 in our pocket. Back then a token was 50¢ and the movies were \$3. So we all felt so lousy that we gave him all our money, because we all felt so bad for this guy, it was amazing.

**R. Raffetto:** Did you feel that it was a true story, or—

**A. Raffetto:** Oh, it was true, this guy was—

**R. Raffetto:** For example, he's very generous. One night, in front of Pioneer [Supermarket], when there was the supermarket on the corner of Bleecker Street, there was a woman with a baby sitting there. It was cold, and she was begging. And he felt terrible. And he had \$20, and you gave it to her, do you remember that?

**A. Raffetto:** Yeah, that was after playing basketball at the Children's Aid Society.

**Zapol:** Had you encountered stories of people who'd been refugees or who had lived through World War II before in the neighborhood? Were there other people like that who lived in the neighborhood?

**A. Raffetto:** There were always older characters. If you're kind of young you may not hear their stories when you're fourteen or whatever. This was just sheer luck —

**Zapol:** He just opened up.

**A. Raffetto:** —that he was like babbling in German. And my friend Andrew's a little forward, and just like, "Sprechen sie Deutsch?" And the guy responds. And I don't know how it got to that point, but it was [pause] emotional. So if we all had \$5 in our pocket, we gave him like \$25. You almost want to do more, but what could you do? How could you go to the movies after hearing this story that my friend Andrew translated? It was just staggering. So that was a good one.

**Zapol:** Yeah, and a way to bring, in a way, that very emotional moment very close to you—in your neighborhood, too.

**A. Raffetto:** It's funny when, in a grander picture, part of working in the store is kind of weird. We change it a little bit, but it's basically the same eighteen-foot walls and all that kind of stuff. And most of the buildings—thanks to your preservation—look the same in most cases, so you

almost feel like time stands still. Because I'm still doing what I was doing when I was fifteen when I started helping out, when the partner died, my father's cousin. So it almost perpetuates the memory, cause you're not removed from—I could walk by that park, and I could see the guy like I just saw it now, all teary-eyed and stuff, or other memories. Although as they go, like Children's Aid—I took my daughter to pottery class there, and I would walk into the gym that I played in. I'm like, how cool is it that you could stand in the gym that you played when you were like, eight or nine, you know? And sure enough, here it is, 2014. They leveled it, unfortunately.

**R. Raffetto:** Terrible, though. Terrible. They couldn't save it that time, the [Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation]. [01:20:07]

**Zapol:** No. I don't know the full story about how that, how it closed.

**A. Raffetto:** I think they sold it. Because that place is supposed to be non-profit and help the community, and I think that money would be well suited for the Children's Aid in Brooklyn or Harlem or whatever. And it's true, you'd go there—and I wasn't in need. In a sense, it was convenience, and sentimental. But you would see nannies drop off people in Range Rovers. It's filling a need, but it's certainly not a desperate need for the majority. Now of course what's sad is if twenty-five percent are people scraping by, need a nice place to send their kids in the afternoon, then they lose.

**R. Raffetto:** When you were little it was a nice place to send [you], a safe place.

**A. Raffetto:** Yeah. And then we just walked in, walked around the building.

**R. Raffetto:** The whole neighborhood would go there, the children.

**A. Raffetto:** Oh, packed. And we had leagues.

**R. Raffetto:** And I wasn't worried about it, you know? I knew where they were. That's safe.

**Zapol:** Right, like a good, safe place to go. So when you were fifteen, everything kind of changed for your family, in that moment, it sounds like.

**A. Raffetto:** True, true.

**Zapol:** What did you think about it then?

**A. Raffetto:** I used to get angry sometimes, because as the business got busier, Saturday you couldn't just hang out, go play in the park. We worked, my brother and I. As people got older—back when the drinking age was eighteen and such, some of our friends were going to Fort Lauderdale for spring break. Well spring break was then, for us, Easter break. And Easter's another big holiday. Not as much anymore, but back then with the families and the neighborhood, recent suburban people would still trek in and keep their tradition going. With all that kind of stuff, we couldn't go anywhere. So there were times when elevating to manhood and working, being a working adult, if you want to call it that, could be annoying sometimes when you couldn't do things. And then if you wanted to do things—I liked theater, but I wouldn't join the high school theater group cause they rehearsed three days a week after school. I would help close up or I would help make something, so the personal life and ambitions just took to the back burner.

**Zapol:** Your life kind of went to the store then.

**A. Raffetto:** Yeah, very much so.

**R. Raffetto:** We also worked there.

**A. Raffetto:** And going to college was just to get a diploma, and they took attendance even less than the high school did. I mean, my joke is that I didn't always attend, but I certainly was registered at Fordham University. But I wasn't always there. But my father, in that cautiousness and saving and the war and whatever, would say, "You got to get a diploma. You never know if this business will be around forever. You got to at least show that you accomplished something academically." So my brother and I squeaked out a diploma.

**Zapol:** Was there a point when it was a choice for you to stay in the family business? Or was it that, once you were fifteen, it was just the way?

**A. Raffetto:** Midway through college I knew it was kind of pointless to do anything else. Because in college they teach you how to, in business courses or sociology—I was sociology with a business minor—there would be classes about working your way up the ladder. Well, I

could just walk in and be the boss, basically, with my father, parents. Why would I want to go work for someone else and blah blah blah and all that kind of stuff? And then I had thoughts of pre-law and law, and I met a bunch of guys, new friends at Fordham there. And they would want to re-do a paper if they got a B-plus, and I'd be like, "Are you kidding me?" "Oh, but I need the grade point." And the stress involved with that was just—I saw.

So besides, I could be my own boss, without re-doing a paper. Because I certainly wasn't going to get an A-plus the first time out, putting in thirty to fifty hours at the store and taking some night classes. If I couldn't get the certain class back then, I said, "The heck with that." And the clincher, in a funny but serious way—in 1979, there's a film called *...And Justice for All*, with Al Pacino. You should see it. Because you come to the realization—I mean it's a film, but still—how little law has to do with justice. That, and it was an interesting film. So combined with the business doing well, not wanting to go to law school, and then you see this movie, I'm like, the heck with that. I'll just get that piece of paper and then I'll figure out how to make franchises of Raffetto's or something. You have this ambitious book thing. [01:26:00]

People would ask, "Why don't you open up a store uptown and do other things or branch out, so to speak?" My father just always said, "Look in your pocket. Because it's nice to be big, but even Ford loses money. In the end, if you're doing well with one location and two trucks or whatever, and you can provide for yourself and go out to dinner once a week, leave it at that. Don't overextend yourself." And I think that's why my brother and I take small steps. But we're always pretty cautious.

**Zapol:** What do you think are the secrets to how the business has succeeded in this time, then? Since you've been running—

**A. Raffetto:** I tend to think of good-to-great food at a great price.

**R. Raffetto:** And also our personality. People like him very much. And I have to say, they do like me, because if it's somebody that hasn't come for a long time, they always try to say a lot to me. And yesterday there was one guy, I couldn't remember, he said "Hello" from the front. And I said, "Wait a minute —"

**A. Raffetto:** That was Mario from Piccolo Angolo.

**R. Raffetto:** No, no, it wasn't him.

**A. Raffetto:** Yeah.

**R. Raffetto:** And I came up, on the front.

**A. Raffetto:** Oh okay, I got it.

**R. Raffetto:** No. It wasn't Mario, no. And I went to the front, just to make sure I know this guy. You see a lot of people. They know you but you don't remember them. And I go there and he turned the face, and I said, "Oh, it's you. Now, I wanted to make sure." So he kissed me. And then you know what he said that was nice? When I said, "Goodbye, I have to go," I was cooking, and he said, "Thank you for coming in the front. I like to say hello to you." So our personality does help, too. Besides the good food.

**A. Raffetto:** People appreciate, for example, that there's still family running the shop. When we working all those hours and stuff, my brother and I realized we were burning out quick. Because it was just so hectic working in a small space. And we were renting 146 West Houston. We were renting 176 Sullivan, which is now Sullivan Bistro, the first restaurant opposite our old store from 100 years ago. And so there was some rents back then and all that. And we wanted to consolidate into a larger space. So we aggressively searched for a place to make a factory, a manufacturing facility. We were able to acquire some space in the West Village, on Leroy Street. And that facilitated, number one, more growth, and just to maintain some sanity. Because every day was such a struggle, and because we had no room to make stuff, not even a day in advance. So every morning you'd wake up and hope the machine wouldn't break.

**R. Raffetto:** Then my husband got hurt in one machine, very serious.

**A. Raffetto:** Well, anyone who visits our store, we have a 1917 or 1916 guillotine noodle cutter. With that machine my grandfather bought a big roller machine, just these two steel rollers that flatten out the dough. Just like a Kitchen Aid machine attachment. [01:29:56]

Anyway, in 1979, while business was good and busy, this one guy quit for the third time. And he kept coming back. Anyway, he quits again, and my father had to make the pasta. And through being distracted, his hand went through this roller. And this roller, of course, being from



1917, had no safety devices, no break, so it did a lot of damage to his hand and all that. So that I remember we were out of school even more, because he spent six weeks in St. Vincent's trying to save the hand and finger.

**R. Raffetto:** I was running the store. And I was getting up early in the morning, and he had a telephone. So I would tell my husband what was left the night before, and he would tell me what the men should do for the morning. And we would do that all the time, since he was in the hospital, and I opened the store and serve and work and everything while they went to school. Then they came back and help each other, but it was tough.

**Zapol:** Yeah, that sounds like a really hard time. And also a part of the perils of a family business, when it's all on you, what happens when you can't be there too.

**A. Raffetto:** Oh, I know what I wanted to say about why people like us. Nowadays people like to see a family member. When we first did this factory thing, my brother and I went to the factory, because that was the new thing. My father retired. And my mother could still work the counter, but we ended up hiring a manager. A little more money, and just run the show, watch the place, here's the key, close up at night. And that fact that no family member was there, combined with no manufacturing, you literally wouldn't smell the flour. We don't really smell it even now. But when people walked in, you would smell it. And there was no more of the truck outside and us loading boxes with, you know, Sign of the Dove and Tavern on the Green and the Russian Tea Room. And there was this hustle and bustle and all that. So all of that was eliminated, because we did all of that on Leroy Street. And my father said, "Watch out, it's gonna be spooky and quiet, and it's gonna be eerie." And I'll tell you, it really was.

And it kind of bounced back, because at the time we didn't make any prepared meals or any sauces or anything. So we got the idea of making sauces and all that stuff, because we were selling someone else's sauce. And then this old guy got sick, this one guy making sauce, so then we asked my mother to come back to work and make a bunch of sauce. And since that day, it's taken off so well. But by making the sauce, now you got some smell—some garlic, tomatoes, basil, we were doing pesto. And now there's a family member. Then this manager person didn't work out, so then I ended up coming back to run the store. My brother would run the whole sale.

Meanwhile, I was six blocks away. So I would go back and forth on a bicycle or something, no big deal.

**Zapol:** You lived six blocks away?

**A. Raffetto:** Well I would go work at the retail. The wholesale, I was around, but—

**R. Raffetto:** And then one time we were all three living here, each one of us at the apartment.

**A. Raffetto:** That was the advantage of owning the building. The commute was great for most of us when I worked. [laughs] To sit in traffic now is like, oh my God. But actually, back then, when you'd work ten to twelve hours a day, it would be necessary. I mean, thank God, you wouldn't want to work twelve hours and then drive an hour back home. So it was a tough go to get to where we are now.

**Zapol:** What is a day that you see as being, you know, a really wonderful day in the store? When you think this was when things were really great, what do you think of it?

**R. Raffetto:** Oh, historically? We do very, very well with the homemade sauce. And I never forget my son Richard, when this man that was doing the sauces for us was out, and a customer missed him, because he was not doing his job anymore.

**A. Raffetto:** He got sick, this guy.

**R. Raffetto:** And Richard said, "Ma, do you think you could do the sauce?" And I said, "Well, I can try. I mean, I do it here." [01:35:07]

**A. Raffetto:** At home.

**R. Raffetto:** Yeah. But he says, "Yeah, but can you top Topper? Can you top him?"

**A. Raffetto:** Yeah, the man's name was Lou Topper[01:35:14]. So my mother loves the line of my brother asking, "Can you top Topper?"

**R. Raffetto:** And boy, did I top Topper! Every one I made is going. The pesto especially is going—like the basil, you know.

**A. Raffetto:** Classic.

**R. Raffetto:** It goes like crazy.

**A. Raffetto:** Yeah, can't make enough of it.

**R. Raffetto:** You can't make enough. So I feel so satisfied. Except one particular sauce, which is [unclear] [01:35:50] I researched, it's the amatriciana. It's a sauce that is made in the village Amatriciana, near Rome. The story says that the men were going out to work and the women would start to make the sauce. And this sauce, the original is the tomato, the face of the pig, and you use a little spice. So I make it with Italian bacon, pancetta. And I made that. And every sauce that I make, it is from original, but I add something. So it will be mine, not like yours.

**A. Raffetto:** A little twist to it.

**R. Raffetto:** So in the amatriciana, I put a little oregano. Just to be a little different. One chef, who had a restaurant on Thompson Street, used to buy from us. And one day he came in, he happened to notice the name of it, and the ingredients that we put it in. And he says, "Signora, in the amatriciana doesn't go the oregano." And I said, "I know. But that's my amatriciana." "Oh yeah, yeah." He didn't say any more. Because each sauce, I have something that you don't even think to put in, but I made mine.

**A. Raffetto:** Signature ingredient, or something like that, technique.

**R. Raffetto:** So that is one memory that I have. And we sell a lot of those sauces, really a lot. Every day, this big pot goes.

**Zapol:** Oh, that's great. Sounds like that's a great idea.

**A. Raffetto:** Maybe one of my fond memories, just in general, is when the store's packed, and there's a line at the register. It's a dream of any retailer. And it's not necessarily even a capitalistic thing. It's like, my god, that many people like what we do. So that's the compliment. It's like everyone wanted to come to your house to eat. It's kind of the equivalent.

**R. Raffetto:** We have a lot of movie stars come in our place. Some they don't want to be recognized. There was Donald—

**A. Raffetto:** Sutherland?

**R. Raffetto:** Yes. One day he was in front of the counter. And I asked the people, because I was behind, serving. And some people must have noticed. It was winter, like in the snow. And he right away went outside, he started to make a snowball. But he waited for whoever was with him. But a lot of movie stars. One of the nice guys to Andrew is the monster. What is he?

**A. Raffetto:** Yeah, talk about a childhood, like oh my God! Fred Gwynne, who was Herman Munster in *The Munsters*. And he did that movie with Joe Pesci, and he was the judge—*My Cousin Vinny*.

**Zapol:** Oh, right.

**A. Raffetto:** Yeah, he's in that, in his later years. But he drew for me. I was in school, but my mother got, he actually drew—

**R. Raffetto:** His head.

**A. Raffetto:** —the Frankenstein, like a caricature on the sidewalk. And he says, “Best wishes at Fordham, from Fred Gwynne, Harvard [University] [19]54.” So Herman Munster went to Harvard. Go figure that, right? And he liked the cheese and spinach ravioli. Heaven knows he'd be in there quite a bit.

**R. Raffetto:** He was coming quite often.

**A. Raffetto:** Yeah, nice guy.

**Zapol:** So it sounds like it's like these moments where it feels gratifying to be in the business. You feel appreciated, and you feel like people really love what you do. [01:40:02]

**R. Raffetto:** Isabella Rossellini, when she used to live here in SoHo, she used to come a lot with her bicycle. I used to scream at her, “You must be kidding, to be on a bicycle here in New York.” [laughs] She used to come because his daughter —

**A. Raffetto:** Meanwhile, look at Europe. Is that much better?

**R. Raffetto:** No. But even now there is bad.

**A. Raffetto:** Yeah, bad all over the place.

**R. Raffetto:** But to me, in Europe, all the people know about the bike. Over here they don't know about the bike.

**A. Raffetto:** That's true. The cars don't really pay attention to the bicycles.

**Zapol:** And then what are you thinking about for the future of the business? You said that your granddaughter was there. What do you think may happen soon, and—

**A. Raffetto:** What's interesting, lately and years ago I told you people used to say, "When are you gonna open up a place uptown?" In recent years, we've done very well with Fairway Market. The original store is 74<sup>th</sup> and Broadway. And this consultant guy—when we had those ideas of franchising and whatever, especially out of college—once mentioned to us how Fairway was the highest grossing store in the country per square foot. So when they had their original store, 2,000 square feet, maybe they did \$10 million—some high ratio. There's one original owner, but they sold. There are now twelve of these stores. And we do Garden of Eden [Marketplace], and we were in Whole Foods a little bit. It seems like the next wave includes re-selling the product. And it's so cool because you send the truck there with \$300 or \$500 worth of pasta, and you don't have any rent. There are no more extra employees. You don't maintain another store to get your product a little wider offering.

So we allocate some machinery, we got a new noodle cutter and we got this packaging just to pack it for a store. Because back in the day, when Fairway started, we'd give them pasta just like the restaurants, like in a shoebox. And they were packing it out like steak, like in a foam tray. Then someone approached them and said, "Hey, this guy has it ready to go on the shelf, so Raffetto, what are you gonna do?" So we had to spend \$20,000 on this little Dazey Seal A Meal kind of thing. And we made a primitive box, but it maintained them as a customer. And here it is, years later, we spent \$100,000 on this other machine, to make a tray and seal it and it lasts for two weeks instead of five days and all that. Not drying out and all that kind of stuff. So our re-selling customers seem to be our next direction. Because the restaurants still like our product, but it seems like some of these high-end restaurants—forget the spaghetti, dry macaroni places—there's like a line where some places just make their own. I mean, still there's plenty that say 'homemade noodles' and it's us.

It's kind of cool. We're in the resell market. We're in the white tablecloths, as always. And we still sell it direct in our own store. So we're diversified, because when the economy goes up and down, as we all know, I think people appreciate us again more when they know we sell our pasta to [Da] Silvano and some of these other places, and they can come in our store and feed three people \$10. All they have to do is boil the water. Buy the sauce my mother makes, buy pasta that we make on the old machine back in the factory, still to this day. Why go out? And they like that. Cause you even go in the supermarket, it's \$2 more a pound. And the package is only twelve ounces. It's not even a pound. And the sauce is monosodium glutamate and whatever else is in there. So we're diversified in a strange way where we're available in different levels of purchasing.

**Zapol:** And you plan to continue in those different ways? [01:44:57]

**A. Raffetto:** Yeah, rather than rely on any one thing. So I think that would help. And certainly just keep the store going. Because in the avenue, I wonder—I'm sure you guys noticed how Joe's Dairy recently closed. And people were truly heartbroken over that. Just around four years now, Zito's [Bakery] on Bleecker Street closed. So people who grew up here come back to neighborhood, and they want to just grab a ball of cheese and bread. That's not available anymore. But Joe's Dairy is continuing their wholesale supplying and all that. I don't even know if they supply Fairway, or they train the people and get a cut, I forget how it is.

**Zapol:** I think they train people, yes.

**A. Raffetto:** In fact the girl who worked at Joe's now works for us, because she said, "I can't stay home." But anyway, I sometimes wonder, the fact that their retail establishment is gone. And that public face, that you could walk in, affects the wholesale. Because when someone buys a box of ravioli in Fairway, or Dean & DeLuca, Agatha & Valentina, Garden of Eden, some of these places, somewhere in their head they might be aware of our little shop. "Well, I can't get down to the shop, but this is nearly as good. It's not like that day's batch, but I got to pick the kid up at ballet at five. Whatever, this works," you know? But if we ever close our retail store, which—on a bad day you say, "I hate retail!" If you ever did that, I truly wonder if the wholesale would suffer, because now you're just like Nestlé Foods. Who are you?

**Zapol:** You don't have that contact with the family.

**A. Raffetto:** Yeah, and it's like a perpetual commercial to walk here and see and hear that guillotine cutting. So I think the future—

**R. Raffetto:** And now we cook a lot in the back. And the smell, whether it's the mushroom, whether it's the meatball, whether it's the sausage, my god, you can really— I'm used to it, but sometime it hits me, too, and I feel hungry. [laughs]

**A. Raffetto:** Well, and talking about the family, and going back to our childhood, more families and kids out in the street and all that kind of stuff. Now everyone is racing around, both working parents and all that. In a weird way it also helps our business. Because now—this consultant guy used the term 'home meal replacement'—prepared foods, look at Whole Foods, how they have their spread right at the street level of most of their stores. That opened up so much more, because if we just relied on selling a noodle, not everyone cooks or has the time. So the sauce, and prepared meals, and the frantic nature of life in New York.

I can't help but think the property values and stuff are good for someone who owns it. Now, you could say it's good for us, but we're not selling. And you don't recognize the game until you sell your property. So if we're never going to sell, who cares what this building's worth? But everybody else who just paid \$1 million for the studio, or whatever it is, the two professionals have to work. And maybe they can't have a kid and all that stuff. So it's certainly a different dynamic. But whatever dynamic is out there, they need to eat. So we're lucky. And flour's still 40¢ a pound, so that works. Even though a couple of years ago it doubled to 80¢, so maybe we raised our price like 10¢. But sure enough, it leveled off to back to normal numbers.

**Zapol:** Yes, so as the neighborhood changes you still are providing this quality, the food that people need.

**A. Raffetto:** At a reasonable price.

**Zapol:** 100 years ago, and now.

**A. Raffetto:** Right, exactly. And I'll tell you, every once in a while we get sick of eating pasta for lunch. If my mother, my daughter and I—there's three of us. And my stepdaughter's

downstairs, too, sometimes. If nobody can pick what to eat, because you're just almost sick—not sick of it, you can't decide. So say we'll order out. I cannot believe, I mean, I believe it, but the price to order a burger. Or our neighbor next door with the pizza, this little pie is \$24. [01:50:15]

**R. Raffetto:** \$27.

**A. Raffetto:** Actually, if that's what's available for sustenance eating, ready made, that's why our food does so well. Because if we make it for three we'll sell it for six, not for twelve. Like why is the burger \$12? And mind you, I realized, if we went up like 50¢, for \$5.95, some things are \$6.50 now. Why, you go to McDonald's, the meal for the basic ground tendons of a cow, and all that is \$6. So our good food—I think that's why people are thrilled. And one of the funniest things is when people say, "You don't charge enough!" So that's when I say, "All right, give me \$20 then if you don't want to pay \$10. If you're so upset." But there are people who will, almost for our own good, like you're giving the public too much of a good thing. But we like volume. You don't want that lasagna thing to sit there. You want it gone in a day or two.

**R. Raffetto:** Another thing that my husband said, to sell cheap and so you empty the shelves. Don't keep the stuff on the shelf for a long time. It has to move.

**A. Raffetto:** Even canned goods and things are—like these San Marzano tomatoes. I don't know if you pay attention or anything like that. That's the new rage. Now if you make a good sauce, let me tell you, you don't need a \$5 can of tomatoes as opposed to the \$2 can. You got some garlic and onions and whatever you're doing, you can create something great, like we do, with the normal, standard issue one. And even that, we sell a can of these San Marzano things for \$3.50. And we pay about \$2.85 or \$3.00. Percentage-wise, that's sick, because normally we mark it up fifty percent, while everybody else does a hundred. They double it. They buy it for \$3; they charge \$6. And I can't bring myself to charge more, because who would pay \$5 for a can of tomatoes? But then people will come in, or I'll check different stores, and here and there—not everyone. Faicco's, which is old school, too, they have reasonable prices. What idiot would pay \$5? And then the can would sit there.

In marketing you learn the loss leader. Growing up, I remember I used to wonder, how could Pathmark sell a quart of orange juice for when it's \$1.99? And the teacher or whoever would point out, well, why are you there for orange juice? You like orange juice. So chances are



you like bacon and eggs, like my mother or whoever. And you might buy twelve other items, but what brought you in was that 99¢. It's a perfect—

**Zapol:** It hooks you in.

**A. Raffetto:** Hook, line, and sinker. So our strategy seems to work, anyway.

**Zapol:** Yeah, it sounds like it is. It's great that you're here. And I hope that, for us and for you, it will continue for a long time. And it sounds like you've got the right ideas to make it work. Now are there other things that I haven't asked you about—you have other photographs and things—that you wanted to share in the context of this being about Greenwich Village, about the neighborhood?

**R. Raffetto:** I love Greenwich Village. We have a little house up at a lake that my husband bought when they were little. And now I made friends with some women, and they say, "Why don't you come live here?" I say, "I like my little telephone booth apartment." Because many times I'm here alone, and I lean on the window and I look out, and you see the world passing by. I will never leave. Only when I die, that's it. And then my husband, it was the same. He died here in the apartment, and he left when he died. But he liked it here, too. He didn't want to go anywhere else. [01:55:00]

So the Greenwich Village, to me, is beautiful. That's what I feel. And now I don't walk too much, unfortunately. But I used to, when I used to take them to school. We used to go all the way up to Bleecker Street, all these stores. Or at that time, when they were little, 14<sup>th</sup> Street was better than now. 8<sup>th</sup> Street, we used to, on Sunday, dress up and take Washington Square Park and go to 8<sup>th</sup> Street. There used to be beautiful stores there, hats and—

**A. Raffetto:** Shoes.

**R. Raffetto:** Now it's junk. I pass with the taxi when I come home from the doctor. That's how I see, because I don't walk there. But my window is still good to look out. That's what I feel.

**A. Raffetto:** The one thing I would comment about the present-day Village that's a little sad, I have an opportunity to come to work and experience it. And we own the building. We could always live here if we wanted. But I think the opportunity for people to experience it is just

becoming more and more difficult with all the rents. And it's just not the same. When the rents of the stores are the same, then you don't have a little bakery or a little doughnut shop. It's all chain things. And that Grom place on Bleecker and Carmine? I've had one scoop there. It was \$4.95 for the scoop. And it was literally one, you know, that scooper thing. And I was like, how many people can they have?

Growing up, I remember we actually had a Carvel near Children's Aid Society. And anyway, there's all these little shops and things, and they're all gone. It's sad. I mean, talk about walking on Bleecker Street. We used to sell to a restaurant, to Paris Commune, which was one of my all-time favorite restaurants, and just nice people. Anyway, that strip next to Magnolia Bakery, I don't even know these designers, because I don't have those clothes. My daughter might know, the twenty-four-year-old. But it's like a mall of sorts, like Beverly [Hills] Rodeo Drive or whatever it's called. There used to be this African place that had funny rings. I remember buying presents for people. It's kind of funky. That's gone.

And if it gets too wealthy, like it's heading, it's creepy. Like that bum that we talked to on the steps—I guess it wasn't very nice, but it made some good stories. All that. The guy who was going pan for gold. Once he got enough money, he's going for the gold. And the sad German guy, the Auschwitz guy and all that kinds stuff—and not that it was so good. There were some social clubs, and some were just playing cards, and some were part of organized crime. Even that element, I don't know where they are. I'm sure they're doing something else. You don't have that walking by. And that cool stuff to tell your friends from Jersey or whatever, it's just not quite the same. And everything's a restaurant trying to sell booze to pay that incredible rent. The only ones that could afford the rent are chain stores. So when you come to Greenwich Village, that African store's not there, it's Coach handbags. Well I could see Coach in 500 locations across the country. If I'm a tourist and I'm visiting, or I'm some kid who grew up in Cleveland, and I wanna work and go to New York, it's less unique. It's getting less unique.

**R. Raffetto:** Talking just before about my window, one artist, a painter, he painted my house here. And he was across the street doing it. And in this window you see a little face. He says, "I painted you there, because I saw you there." So even that—

**A. Raffetto:** Oh, a sketch, it was a painting.

**R. Raffetto:** He made a little face that was me. He said, “That’s you there.” Because I bought it then from him, the painting.

**A. Raffetto:** Yeah, it was a street guy.

**R. Raffetto:** So that will remind them to remember.

**Zapol:** That you like to look out your window, you’re part of this.

**A. Raffetto:** There was an old woman from Genoa, Mary.

**R. Raffetto:** Oh yes. [02:00:18]

**A. Raffetto:** She was right across the street from where we’re sitting. And the last, I think, ten months of her life she didn’t come downstairs, her legs. And she was in a four-story walk-up, or at least three. And her son lived in Long Valley, New Jersey, which I was aware of because I had a relative there. And so her son would ask her, quite often, “Ma, we got a room for you. Why don’t you come out?” And she would tell me this story, said, “Yeah, my son wants me to come out there. And for what? To watch the grass grow?” She’d rather sit out that window. And then she’d bring a chair down and sit right outside this Japanese artist that used to be here. Now it’s a barbershop. Anyway, at the end she didn’t come out, but I would say, here’s a woman would rather look out a window at Greenwich Village than be in a comfortable suburban home.

**R. Raffetto:** She thought one night that they were robbing us.

**A. Raffetto:** Sometime back in the Eighties some crackhead broke the window of our store next door, that we were renting, to take a flour-encrusted boom box with a coat hanger. It was like the guys had a radio to listen to while working. They broke a \$200 windowpane to get that, and this woman saw it. But she’s not going to call us; it was done. He broke the window and he ran. Yes, back then people threw a brick through our window and took the brand new digital scales that back in the Eighties were like \$1,000 apiece.

**R. Raffetto:** And they were selling them on Carmine Street.

**A. Raffetto:** Yes, somebody told us later. So anyway, that crime element—

**Zapol:** You saw the changes in the neighborhood.

**A. Raffetto:** We were probably complaining back then, and here we are, in this, elegant, rich, whatever. Wasn't so bad, maybe.

**R. Raffetto:** That's why I like what Andrew [Berman] is doing to—you see, I'm used to living in these places that never change. And I would like here to be the same. And that's why I support—

**A. Raffetto:** Oh, the [Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation] Andrew, yeah.

**Zapol:** When you say that you lived in these places, like in Italy, where—

**R. Raffetto:** My town never changed. Never changed. I have one, two, three, four, five, six, I have plenty of pictures, because obviously—

**A. Raffetto:** If you want to think of a landmark building, this would be a landmark town. Literally, they do not allow any alterations of any kind.

**R. Raffetto:** Nothing.

**A. Raffetto:** They have the covered sidewalk on one strip. When I was a kid, a teenager, we went, you know, the high school vacation thing. They had just put in a public telephone. I think it's in the same spot. They put the public telephone off the square, a little reserved, behind a tree, just to not— You could imagine how many councilmen in the town there, or the priest, whoever decide. It must have been a five to four vote to even get it, and the only reason they got it was you got to put it behind the tree. So that's where she comes from, this little medieval town.

**R. Raffetto:** We have now a traffic light on the main street. But when I was growing up, Maestro Malipiero was a favorite maestro of music. He was in charge of the antique—

**A. Raffetto:** Preservation.

**R. Raffetto:** And he didn't allow any of those traffic lights. Unfortunately, now even Italy, everybody has a car. And they are fighting, because—

**A. Raffetto:** It's a one-way street, this one strip.

**R. Raffetto:** —the street is so little. I remember my mother when they used to fight, “Which one goes back?” And she used to help—

**A. Raffetto:** Helped direct traffic. Because she had a vegetable stand right in the middle of this one-way street, so I’m sure she broke up quite a few debates.

**Zapol:** Wow, so she had a vegetable stand. So this is also in your blood, too.

**R. Raffetto:** Oh yes. Although I helped a lot of my brothers, because I’m the oldest. The one next to me became a priest like the Pompeii priest, but he died. And now I have one in England, one in Italy, my two younger brothers. But the one in England, I actually raised him, because I’m eleven years older than he was, and my mother was busy with the business. So I was the one with him all the time. And when I had Richard, my first son, sometimes I used to call him Silvano, because it reminded me— **[02:05:28]**

**A. Raffetto:** Flashback, right?

**Zapol:** Like your first little one.

**A. Raffetto:** Right, right.

**Zapol:** Well, thank you so much for taking the time today, both of you.

**R. Raffetto:** Our pleasure.

**A. Raffetto:** Like I said before, I can talk. [laughs]

**R. Raffetto:** You have a picture to show to her?

**A. Raffetto:** Well, I thought this is just cute. I don’t know who took it. This is the cash register that went up to \$8. You know the brass ones? And you hit it, and crank it—

**R. Raffetto:** \$7.99.

**Raffetto:** Yeah, \$7.99. We kept it until the Eighties. And then we went for a Casio. The scale— you had to wait for the thing to stop bouncing. Which my father’s cousin, I don’t know, he

accumulated some money. I don't know if he waited for it. "Ah, that's a pound!" Who knows if it was fourteen ounces? [laughs]

**Zapol:** Yeah, that's great. And it doesn't look too different from that now.

**A. Raffetto:** No, this is fairly modern.

**Zapol:** Oh, okay.

**A. Raffetto:** But this was an old Frigidaire. That thing was like forty years old. We were still using [it]. Then we got some new ones. But let's see real quick, if we have some—this is before the renovation. I say it was like the Sam Breakstone, or Vesuvio [Restaurant]. I don't know if you're familiar with Vesuvio. So it was two bay windows. Well, it was built underneath, but the two separate windows with the door in the middle. And underneath here were two drawers. And one of the drawers here, the top one was used for like a stapler, or pencils. The bottom one must have had twelve coats of paint, that when we gutted the building, we found, among other things, sale ledgers with the World War I mail order.

And this book, which is one of our most prized possessions, this is the book of the machines we've bought. I think you saw our guillotine cutter. That's my mother's recipe. So we had these mixers going until recently. The USDA [United States Department of Agriculture] told us to get rid of it. This is the dough break that, let's see, just for fun, see that machine that rolls out the dough? That's this thing. See the wheel? We still use it. We had to rebuild it, that piece cracked. The dough comes out here, and then it looks like a rug. It's a forty-foot thing of dough. But the back of the store used to be kind of cruddy looking.

**R. Raffetto:** We have the same telephone. I wish we had more older paper.

**A. Raffetto:** Those are noodle cutters. And then what? Here we are, this must be after 1920. Dry and fresh, but it was much more the dry noodles.

**R. Raffetto:** Did you just say that is from the Twenties? The paper?

**A. Raffetto:** Receipt, yeah.

**R. Raffetto:** Does it have the telephone number? Because we have carried the same number, never changed.

**A. Raffetto:** Oh yes, same number from the Twenties. And that calendar from twenty-eight that's in the store has the same number.

**R. Raffetto:** That will go there, in that book. I just took it out to see.

**A. Raffetto:** My brother did this— It's funny, it's newer—

**Zapol:** It's new.

**A. Raffetto:** Now it's forty years old! And for us, that's new.

**Zapol:** Right, it's a different sense of time. When you go through the store, what kind of memories come back to you, if you permit that, if you let yourself think that way? When you go through the store, maybe looking at particular machinery, or a certain smell—

**A. Raffetto:** When I see that guillotine thing, I can remember when I was first allowed to use it. Because for a couple of years, my father wouldn't let me use it. He was afraid I'd cut my fingers off. So it's ironic, when I look at it, seems like I've been doing it forever, and there was a time when I was too little to use the thing. [02:10:13]

**Zapol:** Around when, how old were you, do you think when you were—

**A. Raffetto:** Probably fourteen, I could use it. But like twelve, I'd serve a customer, and then ask my mother to cut it, or my father, or one of the workers. And then, not as recently, but when we revamped the store, every once in a great while I'd actually go to a spot where something was twenty years ago. It's not like you redecorated your house and you'd go to where the dining room used to be. I can't even explain it. It's so bizarre, and just out of the blue.

**Zapol:** Like you'll go to find something and you went to the wrong place, because it was in your path—

**A. Raffetto:** Exactly, it used to be near the bathroom was where we had grated cheese to give customers.

**Zapol:** It's in your muscle memory or something.

**A. Raffetto:** Yeah.

**R. Raffetto:** This is my other son. This is last year, when I was eighty years old. Here he is here, in the kitchen downstairs. I was doing this.

**A. Raffetto:** Fordham did a nice piece, an alumni thing? Cause my brother and I each went to Fordham—oh, I thought this was it.

**R. Raffetto:** This is my zucchini cake. [laughs]

**A. Raffetto:** This is a nice picture. That's my daughter, who wants to finish school and wants to be in the business. She actually talks about a restaurant. And I'm like, you really want to work nights?

**R. Raffetto:** When she was a little girl, we'd be in the kitchen. And go to the back, I'm doing a sauce or something. [referencing photo] Look at me, so serious. Don't know what I was thinking there.

**Zapol:** That's a great picture.

**R. Raffetto:** This, I like it. [cycling through photos] This too, the same. And this when I was young. They're clapping at a theater. I only have a copy, I don't have the real picture. But you can see, I'm the first one. And I made all those costumes. I'm a dressmaker by trade.

**Zapol:** You're a very talented lady.

**R. Raffetto:** My mother always said, "Learn something, you never know when you need it." And I learned to sew.

**A. Raffetto:** In front of the store, we used to have crank-out awnings. Now we went for the permit, we have a nice, doorman-building thing. But for years this was power. But for many years, [we had] this one through the Seventies or Sixties. Each morning, you went out, and you just, you talk about a classic shopkeeper. Even that little touch was there for so long.



Yeah, I actually wish we took some more pictures. When you're at work, what do you do, bring a camera?

**Zapol:** And you think it will always be the same, right?

**A. Raffetto:** Right. Here's my father's cousin. This is the guy that retired. And you could see that's the old bay window thing. And then there was an old Italian vegetable garden next door. But again, the same guy in an apron.

**R. Raffetto:** I want to take a picture to show to you.

**Zapol:** Okay, all right.

**A. Raffetto:** Here's that brass register. You know those crank things, with a wood base? I just recently took it to my house. My brother said, "Where's that old register?" I said, "Oh, it's in the basement, over here." He goes, "What if it were to flood?" So now it's in my garage. Now I don't know, a garage in suburbia, is it better there? The thing weighs like 200 pounds.

You see that fountain?

**Zapol:** Oh yeah, look at that. And that has really not changed.

**R. Raffetto:** No. That is an old, old fountain.

**A. Raffetto:** That's from 1700 or something.

**Zapol:** Your old village.

**A. Raffetto:** The town would go there for water. You know, one of those.

**R. Raffetto:** This is, over here, that's where I grew up. The little house. This is the street I grew up [on].

**A. Raffetto:** Talk about characters. There's a guy, Richie the actor. I guess you don't know him, why would you? Anyway, I think he lives on Sullivan. And he's been in a couple of movies and *Law & Order*. He must be in his mid seventies, at least. And he went up to the library. I guess the New York Public Library again has some archival [material]. For \$1 you could get a copy, and he laminated it. And he gave this to me. 1933. There's the awning, or one of them. Maybe

that's the vegetable guy. And then we have this bay window that used to stick out a bit. And there's our thing.

**Zapol:** Oh, that's great. Look at how few cars there are on the street, too.

**A. Raffetto:** See, I love this stuff. And then someone told me how there's no numbers, addresses; there is no 145 Houston. That, way back then, there would have been buildings this way, facing, and they were taken down, maybe even before photography. I'd love to see. I should go down to the city and see the tax maps.

**Zapol:** Yeah, you could look at some maps.

**R. Raffetto:** I have a letter in the country from a relative that they wrote to Marcello, to my father-in-law, when they were waiting to change this road.

**Zapol:** When they were changing Houston.

**R. Raffetto:** Because it was like a little street first.

**Zapol:** Yeah, and then they widened it.

**R. Raffetto:** And in the letter, I read it.

**A. Raffetto:** It's funny, I think the Holland Tunnel is 1927. But that would affect Canal [Street] more so. But maybe they created 14<sup>th</sup> and all that.

**Zapol:** Yeah, there were a lot of changes around that time here, so that would make sense. I think that was around when they—

**R. Raffetto:** And this is where Checker Park is. I wanted to tell you, when they were teenagers and sometimes they did something naughty, I was mad with them and I had to restrain myself not to scream, I had this in my night table. I was [unintelligible] [02:17:10] and I used to run to that and look at that picture. And then you say, "How can I be mad with those two?" How can I be mad with those two, because I was looking at them? Look how beautiful they are.

**Zapol:** It's a cute picture.

**R. Raffetto:** Very European.

**Zapol:** Very European, yeah.

**R. Raffetto:** See how they are dressed?

**Zapol:** Yeah, they're about two and three, or two and four, something like that.

**A. Raffetto:** There's a thing of business records. You could see when a business was incorporated. I didn't get to that yet. But when I was there, they had the tax maps. This is 1940. I guess if you argued, 'My building's not worth—why should I pay \$4,000 a year in taxes?' they took photographic evidence to show [it]. I guess we're block eighty-two, or lot eighty-two. There's a photograph for every building in New York, either 1940 or 1980. So I took the 1940. Now the annoying thing was, because we're such a wide street, it's a far view. I was hoping it was like I'm standing on the curb and doing something.

**R. Raffetto:** Let's see that one.

**A. Raffetto:** I showed it to you.

**Zapol:** It's pretty funny with a guy standing in front with a sign, too, though.

**A. Raffetto:** He probably changed them now. Now we moved over a couple of feet. It took this guy— But the Museum of the City of New York ones, they were \$125 a print. But to have that in Raffetto's?

**R. Raffetto:** I don't remember the [unclear] [02:18:53]

**A. Raffetto:** There's no visual of the Sullivan thing. Or even, other than my cousin, my father— what's that, the Fifties—this is at least 1920.

**Zapol:** Yeah, that's great.

**A. Raffetto:** And you see, on the corner here, all the Italian things. Like avvocato means lawyer, and seamstress, and there were other pictures. The same guy must have walked around taking photos. So this guy, Arthur Hosking or whoever it was, he took Bleecker, MacDougal [Street]. So you see the other row of the townhouses.

**Zapol:** All the different tenement houses and the townhouses, yeah.

**R. Raffetto:** I want to tell you a little story. This is a funny story. I read it, because we have a box this big full of correspondence from the Twenties.

**A. Raffetto:** From that window.

**R. Raffetto:** No, but there was some that you brought me from Italy. And in one letter, I read it. It was in the Twenties, in the Prohibition, and whoever wrote to my father-in-law, it says that they got caught. This floor was a café. They had the stairs going down—

**A. Raffetto:** They had a stoop before my grandfather leveled it and all that.

**Zapol:** Right so you would walk up to the first floor, which is where we are?

**R. Raffetto:** This first floor.

**Zapol:** Which is sort of the second floor.

**R. Raffetto:** It was a café, and they caught them selling liquor. And then the guy continued to say they got a big fine or whatever, and they were accused of having prostitution. And I'm looking, I said, "In my apartment?" [laughs]

**A. Raffetto:** Where are we staying?

**R. Raffetto:** [laughs] Where we stay? Prostitution! And that was in the Twenties.

**A. Raffetto:** In my house, where my children play with their toys. Like *The Godfather*. [laughs]

**R. Raffetto:** It was a cute story. He said to me, "One day you go there, and you translate." And then one day, maybe when I don't work anymore, maybe I'll stay at the lake. And each day, I'll try to do something, because they like to know. Because this is all news that they are sending back home.

**A. Raffetto:** And these apartments used to be railroad style, which I remember as a kid. And in the top floor, when the people finally got out, because it was rent controlled—my father was trying to de-control it. They changed the laws for less than six units, but there was the bathtub in

the kitchen, which I remember we used to play in. It was empty, and my brother and I used to play basketball in the core room. And just to think, we must have been so small. I mean, how big could it have been? But it seemed like a playground, you wouldn't believe.

**Zapol:** To have a whole apartment to be able to run around it.

**A. Raffetto:** Right, and store stuff. We had a bicycle.

**R. Raffetto:** The top floor was divided in five rooms. Here was divided. The first floor was divided in three. The second floor, it was divided in four, because we had the little room that I explained before.

**A. Raffetto:** They cut out a room right here.

**R. Raffetto:** Yes, there was a little room.

**Zapol:** So you made it into two different bedrooms. Or you made the bedroom that you two shared, and then the rest of it.

**R. Raffetto:** In the back, yes. But that was where I told you we were putting all the disinfectant, ammonia for the roaches. And then the top floor, because it took no stairs, they had five small rooms.

**A. Raffetto:** There was a core room, and then the four corners were four rooms. Four, two in the back, two in the front, and then the living room. And the toilet right in the living room.

**Zapol:** Stuck in.

**A. Raffetto:** Yeah, it was funny. Growing up in an apartment, what I've come to realize, maybe it's 700 square feet or whatever, all together. It prepares you for the future. Because anywhere I live, to this day—you talk about flashbacks—I think I'm living like a king. Puts it in perspective. Whereas you think about suburban people with the McMansions and stuff—I mean, I like the good life, too. But if you're a child who starts with an elevated lifestyle, and cars and bikes and whatever, swimming pool in the back, it would be difficult if you cannot maintain that. For your career, finances, whatever. Whereas, I would be sad if there was a downturn, but it would almost be, 'Oh, well, well now I'm back full circle.'

**Zapol:** 'I know how to do this.'

**A. Raffetto:** Right. And the simplicity of, oh, there's less to vacuum. Again, we rented places for the summer, but they were all little bungalows. Never having a grand growing up, childhood, it was a great blessing. You can really start growing up in the Village now. You're probably well off anyway and have the house in the Hamptons and all that kind of stuff. So that humbleness, I doubt it could be created again, you know? And least around [here]. [02:25:07]

**R. Raffetto:** When my son Richard got married, they lived for a while on the second floor. But then they decide to go to New Jersey. And they were looking, they rented [a] house. And I was sad they left. And I said, "Huh? Why are you leaving? Don't you going to miss your neighborhood? Where you live around?" And he says, "Yeah, a little bit, but I need space." And I looked at him, and said, "Isn't that funny? I raised both of you in this space. I've never looked for another space."

**A. Raffetto:** Well, when you get a taste of more space, sometimes it's nice.

**R. Raffetto:** Yeah, but I still like here. I don't feel that I'm cramped. Maybe your daughter does. Sarah lives with me. So she's happy because she likes New York.

**A. Raffetto:** Oh, loves it. If you tell my brother, "Listen, both tunnels were crushed. The George Washington Bridge cracked. You can't go to New York anymore," he would just say, "All right." A guy who, for a couple of reasons, just couldn't care less. You could just tell. Whereas my wife and I would move back in a second with a little more space than one apartment. Now mind you, I have five kids total. Two are older, the college age stepdaughter, my daughter. That's how we met, at Children's Aid, at summer camp. We realized they were each missing a parent. And then play dates morphed into, you know, I said, "Let's leave the kids home and you and I go out." [laughs] And then three kids later, we have five.

But we toy with the idea of taking two apartments. Then I got to pay my mother double, two rents. And even that's now pricey. So at least utilizing the city, visiting, that type of thing, I just love it. Whereas my brother, for whatever reason —

**R. Raffetto:** Doesn't care.

**A. Raffetto:** —could do without. “Nah, I’m not gonna go in.” “Oh, there’s restaurants out here.” “Don’t you wanna go to a hockey game?” “Well, the [New Jersey Red] Devils play in Newark, if I really want to go,” as opposed to going to Madison Square Garden.

**R. Raffetto:** Well, his wife’s like that, too.

**Zapol:** You’re still connected to the neighborhood. You feel a different kind of connection to the city?

**A. Raffetto:** Yeah, much more so.

**Zapol:** And you certainly do feel connected here. You have roots. It’s rooted.

**A. Raffetto:** She doesn’t want to watch the grass grow at the lake house, like Mary across the street.

**R. Raffetto:** First of all, I’m no gardener, so I—

**A. Raffetto:** It’s a figure of speech, Ma, you know that.

**R. Raffetto:** I know, but even there if I plant something, I hope nature will take care. Because I can’t do it.

**Zapol:** But you know how to cook.

**R. Raffetto:** Cook, yes. I’ve been cooking all my life. I started when I was ten years old and never forgot. My mother went to visit her family, so she went away for a week or so. And I had my younger brother, two years younger than I, and my father. It was the birthday of my father, and I tried to make a cake. So I made a ring cake, the way I thought my mother used to do. And I took it to the bakery, because we used their oven, because we didn’t have an oven. And when I took it home, it broke. And I was so desperate, because—

**A. Raffetto:** Devastated.

**R. Raffetto:** Devastated. And I said to my father, “It broke, almost there.” And he said, “Don’t worry, in order to eat we have to break it!” And he consoled me that way, I’ll never forget. Never forgot. So I started very young.

**Zapol:** You kept on cooking after that, it sounds like. Well, we might be in a good place to stop now anyway. So yes, unless you feel like there's anything else that you want to share or any final thoughts?

**A. Raffetto:** Well I won't confess to anything else now. [laughs]

**R. Raffetto:** I don't know what deep you want to know, but it's my life here. It really and truly is my life now. And I like it, that's it. I loved a lot of books, as you can see. I have some pictures when I was a baby, a young girl. And I love fashion, because I have a lot of fashion books. I still pray God that she [Sarah Raffetto] will like to have a lace dress. Because I have a lot of lace to use. But she doesn't— **[02:30:31]**

**A. Raffetto:** Yeah, lace is out, mom, sorry.

**R. Raffetto:** No, it's not over!

**A. Raffetto:** Maybe it's making a comeback. I was about to say in closing, I moved out of the city in 2001. So up until then, for almost forty [years], for the most part I was always in the city. Now I'm out there thirteen [years]. By having been in the city more than I've been out there, I could still say I'm a New Yorker. But as the years get creeping, for how long can I say I'm a New Yorker, if the thirty-year mark gets [unclear] **[02:31:22]**? And my mother sometimes will say, "I'm from Asolo, from the Venice region." She was there until she was nineteen, before she had to go make money for the family. So that's like twenty out of eighty. So sixty years, she's like a New Yorker! Yet her first inclination might say, "I'm an Asolana. I'm from this town."

It's funny how everyone leans toward their childhood more than anywhere else. So like I think I could still say "New York." I've got a few years I could legitimately say that. And then, who knows? I might be back, and then I'll put a stop to the suburban years, and put more years on the New York time.

**R. Raffetto:** Are you a New Yorker yourself?

**Zapol:** I'm going to stop the recording now, and then we can chat a little more. But thank you both for this today.

**A. Raffetto:** It was our pleasure.



**R. Raffetto:** Our pleasure.

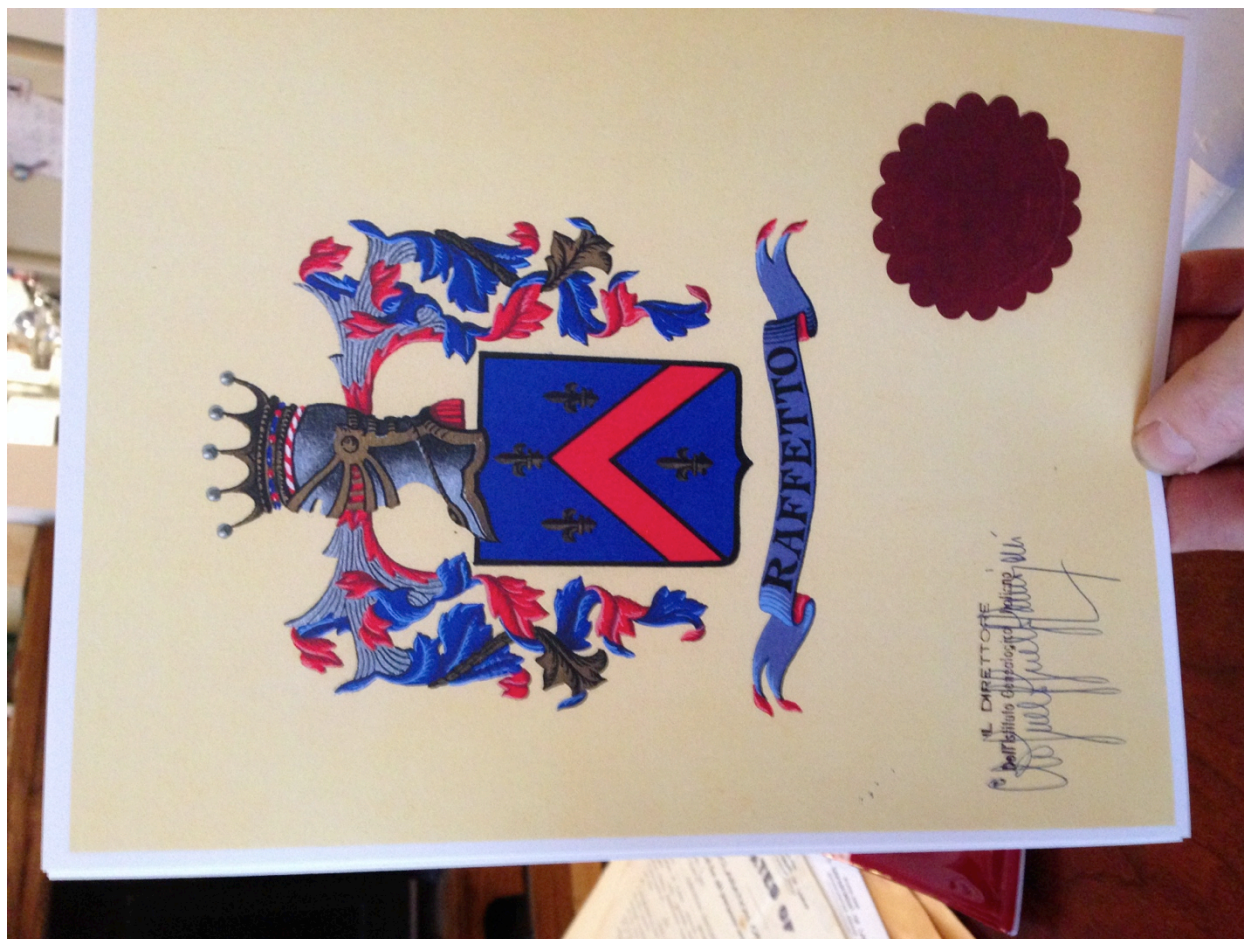
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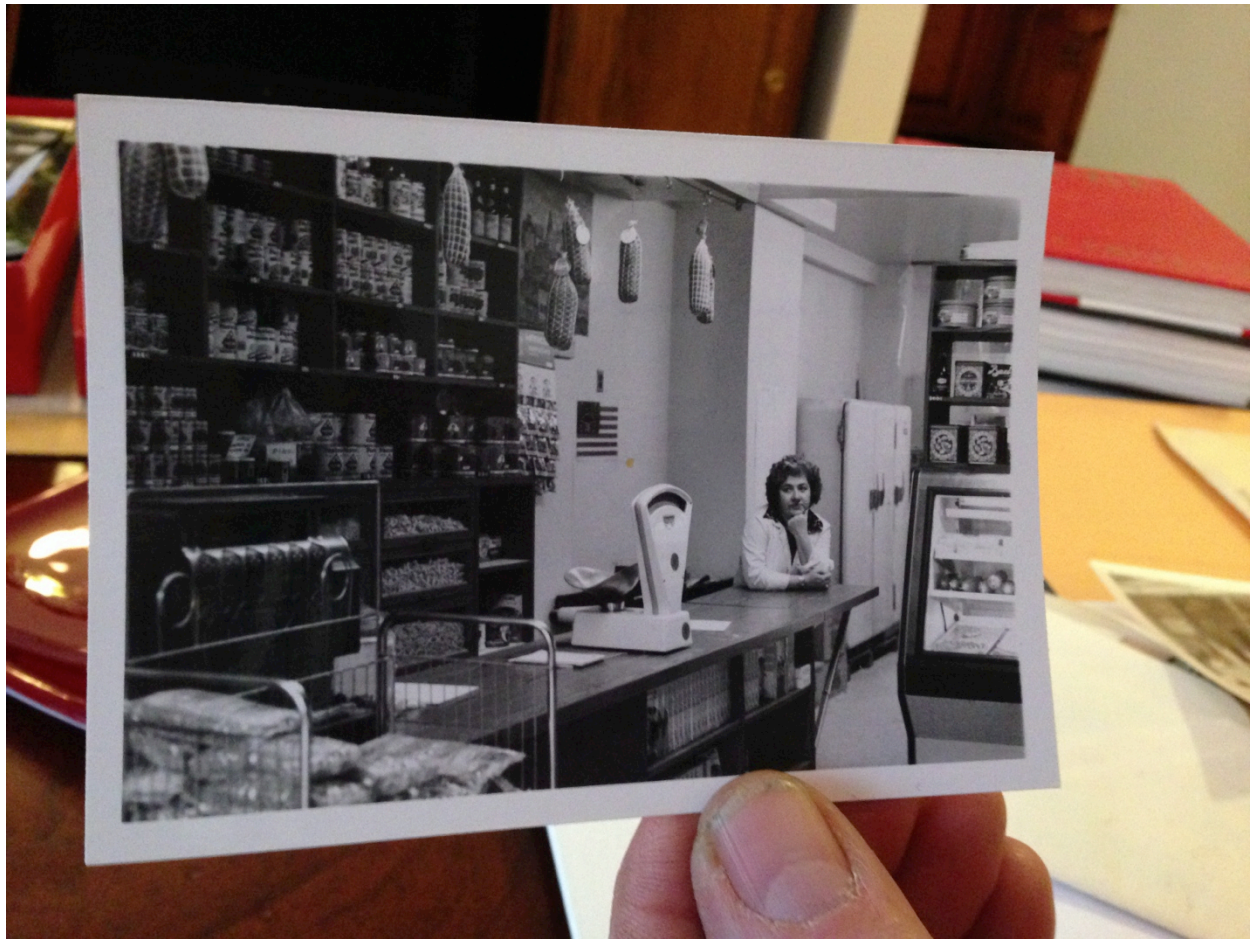
Raffetto Family members (unknown).







The family crest.



Photograph of Romana Raffetto at Raffetto's, c. 1980 (?).