

Pace Nicolino
June 18, 1981

Mark Greenberg
Interviewer

MG This is Mark Greenberg on June 18, 1981 in Barre, Vermont speaking with Pace Nicolino for the NCS Barre History Series. Now where shall we start. Suppose...

PN I could talk for hours, but we only have so much time so.

MG Yea. Why don't you tell me about the Sacco and Vanzetti funeral.

PN Sacco-Vanzetti Funeral - I was a little girl. My father had worked for years for that case. In fact, somewhere you, you may read about Emma, I think it was Emma Goldman. She had come here in, for that cause. She had dinner at our home. But when Sacco and Vanzetti died, there weren't that many people here in the city who were you know involved. My father was one of them. And he just felt as though it was going to be a, I guess he felt as though it was going to be a historical event which of course it has been and it still is. And so he took us to Boston to the. What I remember about it is the throngs of people that were there. The sadness about it all, the tears. Actually as far as I was concerned, it was a, it was sad because everyone, but we did not understand the full impact of this whole affair actually when you're a little girl. Now I can see, you know, I can see into it much more. But the day of the funeral, I recall there, there was somewhat of a little, everything went along smoothly, but there was somewhat of a little riot there and I do remember people being pushed back and I remember my sister who was younger than I was with us also, falling down and a horse just stepping right over her you know. But that, as far as being that riotous, that's as much as I remember of it. What I remember is the sadness, the tears, peoples feelings were just so deep, so terrific.

MG Was there an anarchists group or community in Barre? I know there was socialists.

PN Yea, there were the socialists and there were the anarchists and of course no doubt you've heard about the murder, I would not call it a murder, I think a shooting of Elia Corti and as I recall, as it was told to me, I would never have have known about it, that they had, the man who shot had shot into the crowd to disburse the crowd because it was getting a little unruly and Mr. Corti was the one who was shot. That's the story as I, I've gotten it you know.

MG The crowd, why was the crowd gathered?

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PN They were gathered, there was some affair going on, they were arguing about something that was going on. That's as much as I you know can recall of stories being told to me. But the anarchists movement also which has, which got a foothold in America in Patterson, NJ and Barre, VT, but it never flourished that much you know. I always feel that, well they call themselves anarchists, but you know I think they were just strong minded individuals who, I don't think intentionally that they would ever really hurt. They were good people as far as I can, what I've read about it. You know, they were just good people. They get a little hot headed in those days. I'm sure America is so is full of those days in all parts of the country you know. It's just that here in Barre, we have such an ethnic group coming from all over the world. They came from countries where maybe they had been persecuted, where it was difficult to find a living. And they came here and they just mainly it was a little power that they gained also in being free. Isn't that what usually it does to us when we are free and we gain a little power and we want more and more?

MG You mentioned before about when Debs came.

PN Oh, Eugene Debs, yes, Eugene Debs, his book, "The Cry for Justice," was one which my father had taught me to read and it's certainly is an interesting book. There's many many authors in there, Willis Centimyer and oh, just so many. He came to the what is now the Elks Club and was the armory at one time and there again I was just a little girl. My father used to take me to all these places and after that, he spoke that evening, I cannot tell you what he spoke about because I was such a little girl and you know wasn't, I just know that people were just so interested and one local Republican today came up to me and said, "Little girl, your father brings you to all these places." He says, "I want to tell you, that I have never heard the voice of Christ before, but I heard it on that stage tonight." And that has always stayed in my mind. I see this gentleman time to time and he always remembers it, so do I. (LAUGH)

MG Tell me a little about your father. He worked in the granite sheds?

PN He worked in the granite. He came from Italy, oh, early 1910 I guess. Over there, he had worked in the sheds, but then before he came he was a Singer sewing machine representative with his own bike and the Singer name on it. But he came to America and went to work in the shed and he always, he always fought for the laboring party.

He was, as I said, I guess perhaps the original draft dodger from the 1900's. He hated war. Consequently when he had a daughter in 1917, he named her Pace which means Peace. He, all his life he fought for changes in the granite shed for the dust prevention machines which finally came into being in 1936 the year which he died. But his, his main concern was always for the welfare of the working man which I think in those days he, it was necessary to fight for the laboring man. I believe perhaps it's still in some cases today, but I, myself I feel that unions sometimes have become very powerful too. And I dare say that if he were living today, he might feel the same way because I do remember at one time during a strike period when the wages, I believe it was the wages of the workmen, they took a cut also because they felt their situation was such that you know and he worked for, he worked for the cause where he felt that it was you know necessary and I think, I think he was very fair about this. But of course when you are a laboring, a labor man, you are often termed a radical. (LAUGH) And well that's the cause he fought for in all his life. That's, that was his life.

MG Do you remember the strikes of 1923, '33?

PN Well not the strike of 19, what's interesting the strike of 1922 of course I was too young to know but I've been told that, of course that's when your French Canadians came over and naturally they hated them for years and years. It was, well you couldn't even go out with a French boy because he, his father was a strike breaker back that many years ago. Today, certainly no one holds such a grudge against them. They are hard working people. They have, you know, they certainly have proved themselves as everyone else has in their own right. But the French Canadians are very hard workers. Most of them worked on their farms and came down in worked in the sheds. And they really have done a great deal for our community.

MG You were speaking of the Mutuo?

PN Mutuo Soccorso Group?

MG Are you involved in that?

PN Ah, I am not involved in it now. My father was yes. He was the President of the group I think in 19, late '20's. And that group today is changed somewhat. Naturally they, they have all types of nationalities in it. It's an ethnic group I would say now, today. Basically they still keep their original Italian background, but their meetings

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could be held at most any language today. And they of course were the first to have a health insurance and I would like to see that written up some day because, also they were instrumental holding benefit dances for widows whose husbands had died from the occupational hazards of silicosis. And these men died at a very young age. Some of them in their very early forties left widows and young children. Well the Mutuo would put on benefit dances. And I can recall one. It has to be at least, oh, fifty years ago when they earned \$800 for this widow. That was an enormous amount in those days when you compare it with today's, you know today's monies it's nothing. But in those days that was a terrific amount of money to raise. And this is, this is what Mutuo used to do in those days. Of course they had their dances and they sold their wine and their fresh bread and salami and ham sandwiches. And by the end of the night, there was a little flack because somebody had had to many drinks. But that was all part of the days and it was, (LAUGH) things that remain in your mind you know.

MG What do you think of Barre now?