



Italia Pirro
ROBS History Project
April 19, 2004 92

“My name is Italia Pirro. I am a younger sister of Bianca Pirro who was a Kindergarten teacher in the Brentwood School District for thirty-four years. I wanted to tell you about the origin of our name. Our parents both come from Italy at a time after which it was already unified in 1870. Both of our parents were born in 1872. They were raised at a time that the idea of Nationalism was very important to them. The king at that time, King Umberto, had several children. Our folks were wed in the year 1892. As the children were born, they were named after royalty. What happened when they came to my name – was, they had names like Bufalda, Vinchenza, Fernando -- but I was named after the entire nation – Italia. Italia means Italy and is as much akin to Ireland as Erin is when you hear that name. I’ve met only about three other co-teachers named Italia. There are not too many named America.”

“As a little girl I was called ‘Tootsie’, because at the time Tootsie Rolls were a popular confectionary sweet. They were small then, but they’re large now. During World War II we were living in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn where there was a Maritime Base and a U.S Coast Guard Station and a lot of the young fellows; the sailors, used to come through the Village of Sheepshead Bay and then they used to say, ‘Hi Toot’s.’ ‘Hi Toots’, or they were saying ‘Toots’ and jerky me, from Tootsie I was called Toots as I grew into a teenager from Toots and Casper. Once the War started I would turn around for Toots and I would be a fool, so I would say, “I don’t want that name anymore. I want a nice easy name.” Rather than Italia from school I always got called Italia, etalia, never Etalia, which is so easy to say. When you say Natalia from the Russian name, it’s so easy to go from Natalia to Etalia,

but everybody goes back to – How do you spell your name? ‘Italia’, no Etalia. Lately as a senior, I’ve been using Etalia because a good many of the seniors are foreign born and they give me my right name and it’s such a pleasure to hear it.”

“That’s how I got the name of Italia.” Your sister Bianca told us you came from a large family - of thirteen children and that you’re the last one. “It was said and it’s true that I was spoiled a lot. I got a lot of favors. But I didn’t get away with too many things.” “We learned in one of our college courses, you know the middle child is the one who is not getting too much of all the attention, the oldest child is the one that mostly everything falls on, support of the family and the youngest one is the spoiled one. But I find that in the later years, forget it – the ones who are called on, not the middle and the oldest, but the youngest who could always run and has the time –supposedly has the time to look after the group, and I find that’s what happened to me. I don’t feel that as a burden or anything. I just accept it. It’s part of living. I always said, coming from a big family if you don’t get along with your own family you’re never going to get along with anybody else outside. Also, I remember when we had zero population from the young teacher’s coming in and they were only having one or two kids and that was it. They couldn’t understand that people would have twelve or thirteen children. They didn’t understand it at all. I say I thank God that my mom and dad didn’t abort me. I’m here. We never went on welfare. We did what we could with each other. We helped each other and I don’t think it’s a terrible thing when I hear big families are here. It’s very good. I think it is”.

You were always a very close family. You and your sister Bianca remain very close today. Is there anyone else from your family who today is still living? *“No. They are all gone. That’s because of the Spanish influenza that happened a long time ago. My mother and father would have been –you say fifty years difference – -- two and a half generations – that’s a long time, that’s almost like a great grand parent, I think. Did you know your great grandparents? “No. We never met them and we never had enough money to make a trip to Europe to meet them. In 1966 was the first time we got to Europe and we met an older brother who went over there to visit grandma and he stayed there and we never saw him again. We wrote letters and all – but no we didn’t get a chance to see our grandparents.”*

“Our parents came to America around 1909 or so. One of them (my father) came through Argentina and my mother arrived here through Ellis Island. My

sister and I were born here. My father had originally intended to make enough money to return to Italy but my mother didn't want to do that. She said "I've got too much here in this country". "At the same time her father wanted to become a citizen of the United States. Then in that year the citizenship laws in the U.S. suddenly changed. If your parents had been in the United States for fifty or more years the children were to be considered Americans and the mother and father could become Americans because of the longevity of time already spent in America".

One of the most difficult experiences to remember in your sister's life was the time and the circumstances under which your father lost his life. Can you tell us about that? It was the most difficult death of a family member that Bianca ever experienced and as Italia just told us, she still vividly remembered it.

At the time Italia didn't have her own car. *"Our dad was having a major stroke and the police were called and an ambulance requested. When the EMT's finally arrived they were without an oxygen reserve as was Coney Island Hospital when Bianca arrived there in the ambulance. She was the only passenger allowed to travel to the hospital with him due to lack of room in the ambulance. She was present as all other extreme life saving measures that were tried by attending staff of the emergency room failed to save him. She watched as the people who were pounding on his chest did everything they could to save his life to no avail. Bianca was there, she witnessed it – and was traumatized by the memory."*

"Papa was six foot. I saw his passport. Mama was about four foot nine". She used to make her own pasta and bake her own bread." "She used to make like eight big loaves of bread. She was always baking. I can always remember her baking. That's it. My dad would clown around. When he was in Argentina – well let me tell you this way – Dad learned the Italian language (the highly spoken one) from the brothers in the Church and he joined the choir. And they taught him and he developed his voice so well that he sang opera." "Not so great that he would be a famous star but beautiful enough, strong enough and good enough that in Bensonhurst when he used to paint in the house and he had the windows wide open, he used to sing all these arias and I used to be outside playing and people used to stop when they'd be passerby's and applaud him and I used to say," "What's the matter with those people"? "What are they listening to my dad for"

What's the big deal? "You know what, I remember a lot of the songs when I remember the opera, the arias that are performed on TV or in the opera house –I remember my dad and I appreciated that and across the street from us lived the Salmaggi's. The Salmaggi's are like the ones in the Bowery; the Amato Opera Company – they're like the third most famous but it's not as well known as the others. And I was always wondering why they never asked my dad and he was the impresario I'm sure he was – no he could never hear my dad because he was always so busy – the impresario – going to look for other commitments. He was hardly ever home, and he had a big family. His family and ours – we had good times together"

"I was born in 1922 in Manhattan on the lower east side. I was born at 71 Broom St in Manhattan. Yes. I was born at home. All of us had wives – midwives who charged \$2.00 each. One of my sisters, Mary, was born when we were in the tenements where there was a woman who meant well, but she would have purchased Mary from my mother because we had so many children and she and her husband thought it was too much for my mother to look after so many children. But mom would never give us up and I'm glad she didn't". What other early memories can you think of to share with us today?

"In front of where we lived there was a white cement wall that we always used to sit on. It was directly across the street from where our neighbors, the family of Alfredo Salmaggi used to live. They were a talented musical family in which everyone played a different instrument and the father himself, Alfredo was a highly respected impresario of operatic offerings Like the Amato family from the Bowery in lower Manhattan the Salmaggi's produced and directed highly respected selections from operatic performances known well by their discriminating audiences of loyal followers. In those days on Saturday nights they would line up on the white concrete platform and who had a guitar, who had a violin, who had a banjo and we used to hear this music. And my sister also in the basement that my father made or finished it off, she used to have on Saturday nights also, from New Utrecht, the kids from New Utrecht would come down. My sister used to get the old phonograph records, the old 78's, and we used to dance and all they had there was the sandwiches that they cut in half not fancy things, and soda, no wine – none of that stuff, and early hours, they left about ten o'clock, they didn't leave at one or two or three in the morning and it was good clean,

wholesome fun. You could take walks and all. This was mostly back in the thirties.” What about favorite foods that you associated with the holiday? “Oh, mama made the braids, a lot of the braids with the eggs for Easter, and everybody got a separate one, an individual one. You know what, she never made lasagna, I swear, I had to go outside the house to get lasagna and the one with the honey, the honey cakes; “strufalla” My mama always made me clothes though. I was always the best dressed in my class. Always! Like my sis, but my sister made her own clothes, I was always the best dressed. My dad learned to be a brick layer. He had that job one time and he learned it. He built two houses, four apartments, on either side, attached and he lost them during the depression because they were only paying on the interest not on the principal of the debt and he lost those”. “All he had left for us was \$2,000. So with that money my brother and a cousin and my father built a house in Sheep’s Head Bay that he made into a one family but divided it into three, but then he got a few paisans who lived there for six months without paying because he felt sorry for them. They used their welfare money, oh, jeepers what we saw. Oh, my other brothers and sisters pursued other vocations. My sister Bianca and I, as you know, became teachers. Another sister went in to sewing (the garment trade) and my brother went into medical research. Sammy over in Europe who went back to Italy owned a vineyard. I think his sons and grandchildren have it now.”

Why and how, did you become a teacher? “Oh, I can tell you that. I used to do it as a kid. I know what. I had bronchitis for six months as a kid. And in those days, they told everybody, you had to stay in a shaded room. The blinds were always closed. You did stay like that for six months. Another sister-in-law used to teach and she used to give some papers to me like legal papers and little colored squares and things, and I used to use the Vogue magazine in order to not trace the figures, but draw the figures. So, it was like school for me. What happened then is that I used to take the Salmaggi kids, not only those kids but other kids on the block and use the steps that went down to the basement to seat them and give them papers and all and I used to teach them and they used to listen to me and some of those kids were big kids (gesturing with her hands); whole families and all. That’s how I got started with the teaching. I liked my teachers a lot. In school I said to everybody in the family, “You go to school.” and then Bianca used to come home with the “A’s all the time and I said, “I gotta come home with “A’s”. I think that Bianca shouldered most of it because mostly everybody went to her”. What’s

the most enjoyable thing you've ever done? *"I think today I'm getting it. I get this from my father; I'd say, meeting people. When we go to dances, ninety percent are women; ten percent are men. Now, the men I have a good choice, although they do go and ask each other to dance. You know, the women go over to the men to ask them to dance. I don't do that. Forget it. It's okay with me. It's fine. But when I get these dances, it's too simple for me. I'm very active. I am. When we do "The Peabody", at these Senior Proms and all, with the kids, I'm with the kids. And they're the ones coming over and asking me.; these youngsters. So we're doing the Cotton Eye'd Joe thing and they're showing us how to do the electric slide. I learned that all from the kids. So, I'm up to what the kids do and I will stay with them – physically" . "With the ones we go to at the dances, forget it, they sit more and talk more, they're great people they really are. The one I like the best is "Bubbles". She has a transplant. She knows how to do striptease dancing but not the kind of dancing that the ordinary lay people come up on the dance floor and start shaking all that they have which has no regard to dancing at all. She has a nice easy way of doing it. Not--It's suggestive but it's not filthy. It's really dancing. She's a pleasure. I have such admiration for her. I think she's in her eighties. She comes with her walker. She sets her walker aside if she can handle it, with a transplanted heart she does a mean -- and she really goes to town. She's wonderful. Now when I do my dancing and all, I don't interrupt if the line dancing their doing is too easy, I go over on the side, I go in the back, a little part of the room and do my own dancing. I get my exercise that way. I love it. I've done aerobics and step dancing and all that stuff. I can't stand it. It's the most boring thing in the world. So, with the line dancing I love you can do what you want. So, now, the band leader, Roy Coletta, from Islip – he came to Bay Shore High School prom, Saturday afternoon, he looks for me and his vocalist looks for me. These people have played with Harry James, the Dorsey Brothers and all and they say I want you to dance to me, and dance with Bianca because she's ninety three and they're amazed that she's doing what she's doing. So when I get the recognition I can't believe it. I'm only doing it for fun. I make mistakes left and right and it doesn't phase me one bit. I don't give a hoot if I turn left or if I turn right. Just as long as I don't hurt anybody; and I don't hit people. I really don't. I can measure my way of going. So that's why I'm having such a ball. And Oh, I went to Abraham Lincoln High School. I was most fortunate. I started in PS 112 in Bensonhurst. That was about 70th St and...going the other way 16th or 17th Avenue. And I only stayed there two years, and the new school was put up – PS 186. In 112, the 2nd Grade*

that was okay, when I got to the 3rd grade that was the year that I lost the six months that I got bronchitis. But I picked up the study and that was good I asked that they let me go through the Grade and I made the Grade I wasn't left back and that was good. That was a brand new school. PS 112 was a great school. We had all these new teachers. Oh Boy, we'd the best. We had one class of disabled kids."

"There were only about eight or ten in the class. They put on the most beautiful plays for us with beautiful music. I remember them. They were great. When we finished there I was supposed to go to Seth Low Intermediate School 96. Uh, uh -- Instead I was sent to J.H.S. 227 Edward B. Shallow - District 20, Bensonhurst 7th Grade to the 9th Grade, a brand new school, great. We had all these new teachers. Oh boy, we had the best! Again I had all these wonderful teachers. They were energetic with us. When we lost the house in Bensonhurst, we had to go to Sheep's Head Bay. So I had 7th Grade in the new school at Shallow, the 8th Grade I come to Sheep's Head Bay and where did they put me? They put me in a school that's almost 100 years old, I came from a brand new school with all the gymnastics and all the languages, foreign languages you could have everything. I was only there for two weeks but I was getting "A"'s in all my subjects except one, in English with the Writing. She wanted me to be more modern in my approach. And I didn't understand how to do it and I really did try hard. I think I was only ending up with a "C", so I cried to my sister Bianca. I said, "Bianca you gotta help me to get out of that school. I don't like it. I came from a gorgeous school and I came into this". So she dressed herself up – older and all -- and she went to the school and said we didn't move. This was within the 1st two weeks of attending and in all the years from the 8th Grade and the 9th Grade I was there at class all the time, I traveled by train ---Guess what? One of the teachers, my math and my art teacher, who lived in Sheep's Head Bay, she was in the choir of St Marks (the Catholic School,) occasionally when the weather was very bad, she used the train – I would always see her on the train – and when the weather was bad she used a cab and she would let me come with her in the cab she never told anyone in the school that I was out of the district. And if you're out of the District in New York City you had better know somebody. That's the only way you're going to do it. So I was lucky I went to Shallow Jr High. When I went to Shallow Junior High we had Opera, Operettas, in that school. Today? No. Today is very light musicals. Nobody touches classical as well. We do have it. But we had an abundance of the other –

the classical and I miss it. I really do. When we went to school – here we go again...they had a new school. Brooklyn College came up, I didn't go to Brooklyn College because it wasn't a registered College or something at that time so I went to Hunter because Hunter had the name. I wanted to go to Bellevue – I applied to Bellevue, to do nursing there, and my older sister, the real oldest one said, 'You have to wash the feces from the patients, and I said, 'You have to do what?' 'Oh.', 'Forget it. I'm not going to do that.' 'I'm not going into Nursing.' 'I'm not going near it.' so that's why I didn't take Bellevue. I would have made a good nurse too". I'm a good inpatient but a lousy outpatient. The sight of blood doesn't phase me. But feces? No way. But anyhow, Hunter had a good name. We didn't have the money to go to Colombia or Fordham. So I said, "Okay, I'll go to Hunter." "But I'll tell you, like Bianca said, you go co-ed." It's normal to go to school with boys and girls." It's the worst thing to be cut out. I had a co-ed education. Oh, I went to Abraham Lincoln High School. Here we go again. It was put up I think, in 1927. I was born in 1922, so I was five years old. We had Russian, German, French, Latin, everything in that school. But then you're talking about kids and we had sixty kids in each of those grades. In Abraham Lincoln we had 1,000 kids graduate. In 1972, somebody else who went there, Oh, one of my Principals who graduated there and the Secretary, each of them graduated from Abraham High School and said the same thing. When I hear people graduating with one hundred and four hundred in a class, it's too few. I'm used to 1,000 people. We had to go into a theatre in order to graduate we couldn't graduate from the high school. I did my Graduate work at Hunter College. Oh, with that Intensive Training Teacher Program we only paid \$5.00 at Hunter, nothing else. Oh, books! We had a racket with text books. We used to go to the libraries and get the books. We'd take them out for two weeks so we didn't have to pay for them. We used to cut expenses like that.

So only Bianca came to Brentwood, you didn't come to Brentwood when you began teaching? *"I wanted to tell you, when Dr. Hoyt interviewed Bianca she was given a Kindergarten class because that was the only remaining opening for a teacher at that time. There were no other position openings available and that was because it was during the last week of the semester. She got me interested in Kindergarten too. The only reason I chose to sign a contract in North Babylon was I figured if they ever had to let one of us go it would be less likely to find ourselves out of a job, if we worked in separate school districts. That was the only reason I did that. I retired in 1988. I heard that for ten years you pay Brentwood*

Retirement Organization dues and then you are no longer obliged to pay dues after that. But after I was retired for about a year or so a new rule was adopted and I heard that you had to pay for ten additional years and then you wouldn't have to pay in after that. That meant you pay \$40 for the first ten years but the first year is free and the second time you pay \$20 for the next ten years but I don't know what the racket is now so I don't belong. Italia said she intended to get all current updated information from Phyllis Goodwin or Dot Zuckerman. She knows they'll give her the correct updates. She said they're terrific. She referenced Ivy Cover Ramsey and Bill Harris.

She told us that many of our Brentwood kids are related to families from North Babylon but they had close to half the number of kids in their district that we had in ours. We had double the number of elementary schools as well; close to twenty schools, many more than North Babylon. Italia taught for four or five years in a city school in Brooklyn, a year at St Paul's in Spanish Harlem and several years of Play School with Columbia University Part time and Full Time during the Summer after which there were policy changes that restricted teachers from outside New York City from participating in the program along with fulltime NYC Teachers.

Italia's purpose in her own words, was to leave something of herself with the children she taught. She fully intended to leave a little bit of herself with each and every one of the children for whom she was responsible. *"That was a feeling of personal pride that I carried within me every day of my life even in retirement; it was a feeling that no one could take from me and from which I experienced enormous pride and a great degree of personal satisfaction"*.

When she began in the classroom she was already close to getting her Master's Degree. She started with a Baccalaureate plus almost 30 credits and her colleagues were dumbfounded by what she'd accomplished. They were greatly impressed. *"All of them flipped because I was going to be starting with an almost five year advantage. And then when I was doing that I had to take three courses. When you'd take the regular Education courses you'd have to take "How to Teach Reading", from the very beginning but when you had to go into Kindergarten when you got the job, Oh boy, gesturing with her fingers, I had to do art because I was already doing arts and crafts in the afternoons at the School Centers. Right*

after class we'd finish up upstairs or downstairs, oh, that was three o'clock, five days a week in Fort Green. You'd finish your class, say from nine to three, then right away go from three to five, five days a week you had the kids. I had the young ones, from five, six and seven. Today I meet the kids wherever I go. They say, 'Don't you miss teaching?' I say no, you know why? Because I meet them all. I go to the church. I meet them at the church. I meet them with their children; I meet the grandchildren. I go to the dances. I'm gonna go in June to – Christina is graduating from Adelphi, she's going into teaching, I'm going to her graduation, her party and reception as well. Christina Christadello, I had a class where all the names were long (gesturing) like that, everyone of them – and Chris Christedoulou, was C-h-r-i-s-t-e-d-o-u-l-o-u. The third daughter to be born I thought would have received a lesser number of letters, but her given name was Alexandra Christedoulou. I say, 'How can they do that to her?' They call her Alex. But I meet them no matter where I go and I love them and I try to remember them. Even when I go to the hospital; like to make a visit, or pay a bill at the hospital because of the mammogram I have to pay for a stamp – like the nurses and all and I'm eating there, 'I had you – what's your name – Joe De Bello?' Oh, You know how I remembered? De Bello – he was the tallest fellow in the class - Not lying! His mother was eighty pound's, he was about 95 pounds, five years old. You see him now, he's still tall and big. Big! And he got transferred because one of them got sick, one of the family got sick and I got a call the following September “

“He was not being too kind to the youngsters in his class, because he was the tallest one there and whatever he wanted he got; so he was the King. I said I didn't have that problem because all of my boys and girls were as tall as he was so I happened to have a tall class at the time; so I didn't have to solve that problem. But he turned out great!”

I asked: Did you ever need to hold a second job? “Oh, Yes! Because when we had the other house, my father died, and we had an older sister who wanted to stay there. She didn't want to move and my mother was still alive at that time. She was 61 and (my dad) was fifty four. So for that many years there was still a family member, a sister and another sister and her husband living in the house, and we didn't ask them to pay. We had to keep the place because my mother didn't want to leave that house. That's the one that dad built”.

We lost Bianca to the Brentwood School District and I said, "We never see her" and we didn't. "She didn't drive or anything. So, I said, you know what? I said, I'm gonna work in the City and after I find that you have a job in teaching, then I'll quit my job, and I'll work out here. So, that's how I came out to the Island because we felt we lost a sister. We didn't see her. Then in 1958 the pay was better in New York City. Yeah, then it turned because I came in 1958. In '58 the pay out here was not any better".

"I left teaching because I got scared. You know why? "The aids" was coming around. We didn't know which kids had aids and which ones didn't have aides. I'm in a Class of Kindergarten kids and you have it happen also in first and second grade when these kids go and bite. I was always afraid that with the bite it goes into the blood and you don't know what's happening. I was bitten when I was at this place called 'Play School', they called it 'Play School'". It was at this place that sounds like the Dalton School, it's not Dalton, but I can't remember the name. They had a family but the mom was not well and I think she had seven boys and the school was nice enough to let them in -- people pay -- it was a paying school, so they let this family come in, and without exaggeration I think they went thru about sixteen home makers and about three years time because nobody wanted to stay with these kids -- you don't know. Now all I did, I'm brand new coming into this situation in the summertime and somebody asked me. It happened to another girl and I'm so happy it did because now they don't think that I did it. You're just walking with the child they asked, 'Would you please take this child up to the office because the mother is waiting there for you?' Now here you are in the hallway so, I'm taking the kid with me and we're walking along and all of a sudden I get a bite. Three tooth marks in there. I never told anybody. I only told my family that I got it. Did I have myself tested? No, I didn't because I was afraid they'd think that I did something to the kid that warranted his biting me. The following summer, another brother did it to a little girl with a music teacher. She was walking through and she was asked. The same thing happened to her but she reported it. That was an experience where I did get bitten but that was out of the clear blue. Nobody ever hit me and oh, I know what I used to do. You get the tallest guy in the class, the tallest student, you make friends with him and he runs the behavior problems for you. That's how I did it. I was in a class with all boys, I think it was the sixth grade with them, (inaudible)." "There are different situations today. That's what frightens me. There are kids coming in with guns where they

*can really shoot them. That scares me, it really does. And you never know when“
“Oh, here’s another one --The last week of school, last week, three days before the
end of the school year, I get a new student. I’m not lying; from the Bronx, from
somewhere I don’t know where the kid came from, the Secretary brings him in,
‘How do you do’... and all, and so what happens you have everything organized
and it’s almost the end of the school year and I had everything organized and I
used to take these wooden stop and go signs made of wood with a little base like
on a broom stick, a square base and then the sign, Okay, so I would undo the base,
and put the base in the closet because in the summer they used my school room
during summer school, so I made sure I had everything together. So that’s why I
made sure I had everything stored properly. But the large stick. I call it ‘the broom
stick’ was this long and the wooden sign was this big – it was heavy – So the
Secretary brings the little child in and says, ‘This is John Smith’, ‘Oh Hello, John
Smith’ and Bianca had come in. She wasn’t working at the time. She was retired.
She came to help me pack up my stuff. So, she saw it too. I had all the kids sitting
around the tables that were joined I think we had twenty-five or thirty kids at the
time. You know the lunchroom tables? They were that size- all put together. In
the beginning when they came in all sitting together. They were all seated because
we had just started. We had to check attendance, give the news over the intercom
for the day, the pledge, a moment of silence. So what happens, the secretary
leaves, the kid runs all the way over to the window where the radiator covers were
– three of them - he picked up two – and he’s swinging them around over his head
and around his body – like this –I’m at my desk, he’s way over there at the other
end of the room. I’m dying. These things could become separated and hurt
somebody, so I had some dumbthingamajig on my desk, some little doll, I don’t
know what it was, I suddenly took it in my hand and while talking directly to him I
asked, ‘Have you seen this wonderful little creation. Come and take a good look at
what I have here?’ He dropped the radiator covers and came right over to me to
see what I was showing him. Three days before the end of the year. I made an
immediate referral to the school psychologist. I wasn’t going to go through this
ever again.”*

*“I had student teachers who would keep me up to date with what was
happening. One helped me with that and I showed her what I was doing.
Truthfully, I was spoiled by the Playschool experience I had in NYC.”*

“I’ll tell you the situation. In Playschool we had twenty children.—that’s it. Not more than twenty in the summer, from 10 am to 5 pm. We had a regular Playschool teacher who did not have to go to college. All she or he had to do was accept the job. Playschool in New York City is a good school and they call it Playschool because the Playschool people used to send their materials over to us to test. With that job they used to have to have a teacher’s license to teach in New York City. So there you had two teachers and this one knew what was going on, because they were required to be there all year, and they know the families. It’s in the Projects; it’s Morningside Heights. So in that classroom there’s your support right there. You also have two Future Teacher’s of America at the same time, who come in for two weeks. They’re getting their training – that’s four people in the classroom. Did I say the Nurses? They have two Future Nurses of America. That’s six people in the room with twenty kids from ten to five – what a delight. We had materials at your beck and call, and we spoke together, we had to have meetings in which we all spoke to each other. It was great. That was how we did it. So we each contributed. We had a team of six plus the teacher to work with twenty youngsters. That’s what I would like - a setup like that. But you don’t get it today. They keep cutting. We had a systems approach and we shared with one another. Teaching for the new comers today is still too much about egocentrism – it’s still too much about me –me –me! I’m remembering the way John Dewey was all about I –I – I. In other words, satisfy your own wants first. “I’m first, I’m first and if I’m not first I’m not worth anything”. I’d understand better if told to satisfy our own ‘needs’ first, like Abraham Maslow proposed after publishing his hierarchy of human needs several decades later.” I agree with Italia when she said, such an attitude becomes very difficult to defend unless understood through the lens of personal life experience. Her approach was the only correct one. She said to lead by example, that’s it. “Show that you’re fair. Even where you live you have some kids that aren’t so nice and you make friends with them and you sort of soft-soap them a little”.

“Tony Jackson (I think he died) was a great basketball player. “I can see him doing it” He used to come down to Fort Greene. We had quite a few basketball players. Oh, I met that other fellow too – the one who died -- Wilt Chamberlin – a great big beautiful man. Everybody knew him. He was immense. He was going out with one of my co-workers. He was a doll. After one of his games we went to this club –anyhow I wanted to tell you at Fort Greene on Saturdays when we

worked there – they let the kids –it’s an old school –it’s over a hundred and fifty years old by now – five flights, no elevators, we had 1,000 students in that school, Thirteen classes in each Grade – but anyhow when we had the afternoon session and on Saturdays especially, we used to have some of the kids, we used to let them use the gym, they didn’t wreck anything they just wanted to use the gym and they used the gym because they used to put a buck in the game and they would win the money that’s why they played so hard. But on this particular occasion Tony Jackson came as one of the teachers and I can still see him doing it. He placed the spinning basket ball on the tip of his middle finger and kept it there still spinning as he ran the entire length of the school’s gymnasium. I don’t know why I thought of him. He was very nice; and very, very, sweet. That was only one of many, of the most wonderful experiences that we had.

We thanked her for consenting to be part of our interviewing process. Miss Pirro replied almost demurely as with these three simple words from her heart, she told us - *“I love you”*.