

Interview with Theresa Turck Reynolds

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[00:00:00] **Victoria:** [Setting up] Put this here. Um... So my name is Victoria, and I'm going to be interviewing you. Can you state your name?

[00:00:09] **Theresa:** Theresa Turck Reynolds.

[00:00:11] **Victoria:** And who are we going to be talking about today?

[00:00:13] **Theresa:** Talking about my grandparents and you know—then about me a little bit, about my parents if we have time for that.

[00:00:20] **Victoria:** And is it both of your grandparents from your mom and your dad's side that immigrated?

[00:00:24] **Theresa:** Right, right. Both my maternal and paternal grandparents are from Italy. Three of them were from the Calabria region. And one was from Puglia, which is in the Eastern coast of Italy.

[00:00:37] **Victoria:** Very nice. And can you tell me a little bit about your grandparents or what you remember about them? How old were they when they came to the States? Whether they were already married before coming here, had children.

[00:00:50] **Theresa:** Well, my father's parents—they were married. They were married in Belsito before they came to America and they came with a daughter

who [00:01:00] was one years old. She was born in Belsito. In fact, I have a copy of her birth certificate and they were in their early twenties.

Then my maternal grandmother—she was eighteen. She came over in 1913. She met her husband here who was Pasquale Gotti. He's the one that was from Puglia. Now I not sure when he came over, I've been trying to find out, but it's difficult.

But I know that my grandmother—having been born in Rogliano her family moved to Acquaformosa. And it just flabbergasted me because I had been to Acquaformosa - and it's a hilly town, which most of the little villages in Italy are—how she made it from there to Naples to board the ship to come by herself in 1913.... It just amazed me and I was too young and probably not really interested - which is sad - in my family history to even ask her any questions about [00:02:00], you know, “How was it to be by yourself?” So anyway she was an interesting and very independent woman.

[00:02:08] **Victoria:** I love that. Do you know how many children they ended up having when they came here?

[00:02:14] **Theresa:** Well my grandmother—my paternal grandparents, as I said—came with a daughter. And then they had three more children. And my father was the baby of four. And he would tell me about his older sister, Mary, you know—who'd been born in Italy—really was his mother because his parents were busy doing what they did—they own the grocery store down in Kingston point. So they were really busy with their business and he just remembers very fondly having his older sister guide him, take care of him.

So then my maternal grandmother she married Pasquale Gotti in 1914. My mother [00:03:00] was born in 1915. She had a brother who was born in 1916 and then another sister born in April of 1918.

And sadly that was a year of the Spanish flu. So my mom's dad—they called him Potsy—he died in October of the Spanish flu leaving my grandmother with a three year old, a two year old and a seven month old.

[00:03:26] **Victoria:** Wow.

[00:03:27] **Theresa:** So she found it quite difficult to do that—family helped her. At one point my mother said that it was so difficult for her because... I think there were family members that could take care of the baby because my grandmother had to work.

So my mother and her brother went to Port Jervis. I don't know if there was an orphanage or a children's home or exactly what it was. But to relieve her—I guess of some of the childbearing—she placed the children there. But my mom said she would visit every weekend.

[00:04:00] And one weekend she went and my uncle was not feeling well. So she abruptly took them out and brought them home. But in the meantime, my mom's grandfather, Potsy's father Sergio, was living with them. But he was, you know—he started to get elderly. So then she met Frank Turck whose wife had died. He had two children and they met up and they married.

So he (with his two children), my grandma (with her three children), formed a family of two adults and five children. They went on to have two more children.

[00:04:39] **Victoria:** Wow.

[00:04:40] **Theresa:** So it was a large family. They lived down in Kingston Point. They lived on Beach Street—which is no longer there—which is off of North Street—right in front of the Hutton Brickyards.

So then when my step grandfather's parents died, they moved up to Second Avenue and that's where mom continued to live [00:05:00] until she was married. But because of the Depression [pause] it was um.... My grandfather—my step grandfather—lost his job in the brick yard and my grandmother was too proud to accept any kind of charity.

So [pause]... Well—my mother was forced to leave school at twelve and she worked in the local shirt factories—Fuller Shirt Factory—until she was married in 1935.

[00:05:30] **Victoria:** Wow.

[00:05:31] **Theresa:** Yeah. And then when my parents married in thirty-five, they moved up to Midtown. All the Italians - there's a settlement in Rondout,

in Kingston Point. But they decided that—or my father decided—he wanted to live up in Midtown, on Derrenbacher Street.

In the meantime, I think everybody—all the lads, the gentlemen worked in the brick yards. But somehow my father—although he didn't finish high school [00:06:00]—went to Moran Business School, which was uptown Kingston. And he was then hired by Home Seekers, which is a bank down in Rondout.

And the interesting thing about that is there's a building—it was a famous building called a Cornell Building, right on the Rondout Creek. And that's where—I remember—his first office was. Then that was torn down, just like—you know with their [laughs]—just like they do in some towns. But then they constructed a new building across from what was then the Freeman, which is now a restaurant Mariners.

[00:06:32] **Victoria:** Oh yes. I know Mariners.

[00:06:33] **Theresa:** Right? So right across the street... Of course it's all urban dis [laughs] development, but across the street there was a piece of property. It was on West Strand. Now they're still East Strand or West Strand. It was East Strand—on the corner of East Strand and Broadway—it was a new building. So they moved from the Cornell Building into this new building.

And then after that, my dad went on to, um, he left. He left and started his own [00:07:00] insurance real estate business. But I digress—you have other questions.

[00:07:02] **Victoria:** No, no. I was just going to follow up with, um, when your grandparents came here—the ones that were already married—did their siblings or did they have—any of your grandparents—have any other family members that later moved also here to Kingston with them?

Or migrated—immigrated—with them? Or who was left behind? And did they have connections still to their home?

[00:07:24] **Theresa:** Okay. That was a good question. When my grandmother left at eighteen, she came from Acquaformosa and she left her mother, her father, [pause] um there were two sisters and two brothers. In fact, one was a young—I don't know if he was an infant—but he was very young.

She left them behind. And the same year that her father died—a month later—she got word that her father had died in Acquaformosa, leaving her mother with the four children. But also [00:08:00] prior to my grandmother coming, her older sister had come. They.... Everybody needed a sponsor.

So my understanding is that my grandmother's uncle, her mother's brother brought the oldest sister over. And she married [pause] a man by the name of Mr. Fabby. Now she would write to my grandmother and say how wonderful life was, and that her husband worked in “a Bunco,” which is Italian word for—you know.... And actually what she meant was clay banks ‘cause he worked in the brickyard.

So my grandmother thinking they actually worked in a financial bank, uh, came over thinking that... Anyway Christina was my grandmother's sponsor. So she was here. Now as far as my father's family, I'm not sure who was here, but everybody needed a sponsor and I've not been able to find out who their sponsors were.

But my grandmother—[correction] grandfather—came over with one of his brothers. There were several [00:09:00] brothers and sisters. Um [pause] he was the closest to one of them, but there were several that came.

[00:09:11] **Victoria:** And why Kingston do you know—aside from already having family here in Kingston - why they settled in Kingston?

[00:09:18] **Theresa:** That's a good question, which—you know—I've tried to figure that out, but there seem to be a development in Glasco of Italians and they were brick yards. And then it was—sorry—it's Glasco and then Kingston Point and there was one other area.

There's Saugerties, Glasco, and then Kingston. And I think the.... The fact that cause everybody who came wanted to better themselves. There was devastation and Italy, it was.... They were very sad. And I think it was [sigh pause].... They needed to leave to make a better life for them. There was a blight on the crops [00:10:00] in the Southern Italy.

There was some sort of insect that was destroying... [trails off] But Southern Italy was considered rather poor considered—you know, compared to Northern Italy. So wanting a better life, like most immigrants. They came over looking for

that. And why Kingston? That's the only thing I can think of is probably they had other relatives or the fact that there was.... They knew they could find a job.

[00:10:26] **Victoria:** Yeah. And your grandparents had started... They had their business. Do you know how they went about doing that in Kingston?

[00:10:33] **Theresa:** How that started I really don't know. But it really was, um, quite a nice little store. It was on the corner of North Street and Delaware Avenue. My grandparents lived there and when I was a kid, I really thought that the house was really big.

And so was the yard because they had pigs and chickens and, you know, they had vegetables. Now when I go down and look, I'm thinking, "My goodness," you know—it's like a postage stamp and the building has changed. Um, [00:11:00] the wraparound porch is no longer there. [Pause] But they did quite well.

[00:11:08] **Victoria:** Yeah.

[00:11:09] **Theresa:** I have pictures of my aunts—I mean they are dressed very nicely.

[00:11:14] **Victoria:** So, they did good here....

[00:11:16] **Theresa:** Yes, it appeared to me that—yes, they did very well.

[00:11:19] **Victoria:** That's very nice. And do you know, um, do you remember if they ever talked about how they liked the Kingston area or did they ever talk about leaving Kingston and moving elsewhere in the U.S. or in New York?

[00:11:30] **Theresa:** No, no. In fact, my maternal grandmother's siblings went back to Acquaformosa for a visit. They were adults. They financially were able to go. My grandmother didn't go. She also had a sister who married somebody from France and she came over, wants to see everybody. So.

Yeah, no. And then - that's what amazed me too was why [00:12:00] my grandmother didn't go... Unless there were some memories that she didn't—you know, she was uncomfortable with.

I don't know. And of course [pause]... I kick myself for not asking those kinds of things.

[00:12:12] **Victoria:** That's what happens a lot of the time.

[00:12:14] **Theresa:** Yeah. And the other thing I needed to say is my mother knew a lot about my father's family—who the people were, members of the family. Because evidently my grandmother talked to her about it.

Whereas my maternal grandmother didn't share much information with my mom about that side, but my maternal grandmother did share with my mom and I... It just amazes me that she did. And even that they'd had that conversation.

[00:12:49] **Victoria:** That's really, really amazing. I'm going to ask some questions about more of like cultural traditions now.

Is there any cultural traditions or celebrations that have [00:13:00] been passed down through your grandparents? Like any Italian traditions or anything like that?

[00:13:07] **Theresa:** Well, they went through—you know, what we did at home. There was always the holiday—you know, special dishes at special times and we'd get together, but....

As far as my learning any of that and train... [laughs]—no. It stopped with my mom. I did not marry an Italian gentlemen and I really... I guess really wasn't in tuned with keeping on the Italian tradition. I think I tried different foods and my children didn't [pause] really like it. So.... But then it was.... Then I did—as they got older (and I think you'll probably find the same thing)—your tastes change. And so.... There are still a couple of dishes that I make.

[00:13:50] **Victoria:** Yeah. That's really really nice.

[00:13:53] **Theresa:** But other than traditions.... And that's....I think my family lost a lot by, um—or [00:14:00] at least maybe I did, I'm not sure. I, maybe I [stammers], you know... When they moved uptown—or Midtown—I did not have a close relationship with other Italian children.

And many of the families stayed together and they carried on the traditions. And now that I belong to this Ulster County Italian American Foundation, I'm listening to families talk about, "Well, we did this and we did that." And, um, and I'm thinking.... Or "my mother taught me this and my mother taught me that."

And I'm thinking, um—[pause] wow. You know that probably would have happened if we'd stayed in Ponchhockie. I would have had that association with other children and our families. But, um, we didn't have that because...

The one thing—the one thing that was stressed was being American. Everything was—becoming an American and having to talk English, and I think there was, um, you know.... Italians felt sometimes and it might still be so [00:15:00], like other... Sadly, like other people from other countries—the nicknames that they were given and just how they were looked down upon. So, I think that was very important for them to learn English. I was never taught how to speak Italian.

[00:15:20] **Victoria:** Was your mom?

[00:15:21] **Theresa:** Yeah. My mom—they spoke Italian and that's probably what happens in a lot of families. If the children don't know the language—to keep a secret—they talk in the other language so the children don't understand what they're saying [Both laugh].

[00:15:35] **Victoria:** Yeah.

[00:15:36] **Theresa:** So I do regret that—I do regret that I didn't push wanting to do it. But as I said, the important thing was being American.

[00:15:45] **Victoria:** Right.

[00:15:46] **Theresa:** Yeah. So, um.... The one thing that I—of course I digress. I'll let you ask the question.

[00:15:53] **Victoria:** Oh, I was just going to ask—do you know if they came from Italy on the ship—or however [00:16:00]—did they come directly from Italy to the Kingston area or did they stop anywhere?

[00:16:05] **Theresa:** Well like most immigrants they came and it was—for all of my relatives—they came through from Naples Italy.

Somehow they got to Naples, boarded the ship, and came to Ellis Island. And then from Ellis Island, made their way up to Kingston. That was it.

[00:16:25] **Victoria:** Wow. That's really, really amazing. And you said you still have like some birth certificates and just...

[00:16:29] **Theresa:** Well when I went to Rogliano and I was able to get my grandmother and her sisters birth certificates, they were born there.

Then the family—for some reason—moved to Acquaformosa. So I was able to get a couple more birth certificates there—when I visited there. Then—I just went back a while ago—I tried to figure out about my gran.... And that's the thing about... The name is Turchiaro, T-U-R-C-H-I-A-R-O. And a lot of people say that [00:17:00] with a lot of these names that were difficult [pause] to pronounce or to spell, they would change it at Ellis Island.

And I found out through the years that that's not exactly what happened. We went from Turchiaro to Turck, to T-U-R-C-K. And um... I wonder [pause] if - in wanting to have a different name—there....

I don't know if you've heard about Palatines. These are people that came from Germany [pause] and there were Palatines in Kingston. And there was a Turck family (T-U-R-C-K) and they had a lumberyard in Rondout right on the Rondout Creek. So whether they picked up the name—you know, the spelling—from that, I don't know. But the other name—that I've found out through research—is Turco. 'Cause when I was in Belsito, I tried to get my grandparents' birth certificate.... Because the daughter was born there.

[00:17:54] **Victoria:** Yeah.

[00:17:55] **Theresa:** They didn't have anything. So we went to Cosenza, which is another city [00:18:00]. And the hall of records was there. And so they said, “Well just for the heck of it, do you think, you know that instead of Turchiaro, there was another name?” And I said, “Well, I remember one of the relatives saying it was some sort of problem before my grandparents came over and some of them were using the word Turco—T-U-R-C-O.”

Sure enough. My grandfather—my father's father—used Turco when he married my grandmother. And even though it says in the marriage certificate that his father's name was, um, Niccolò [pause] Turchiaro. He went by...

[00:18:40] **Victoria:** Turco.

[00:18:41] **Theresa:** Turco—yes. [Pause]. So another puzzle—'cause we do have Turcos in the area and I don't know if we're related. But—I think like with any family—there's always arguments and always disagreement. So they're going to change their name.

[00:18:56] **Victoria:** Yeah. Was there anyone that your [00:19:00] grandparents kept in contact with that were also—like within the area—that they became friends with—that were also Italian that immigrated around the same time or it was just only in that...

[00:19:09] **Theresa:** In that.... The area in King... You know—Kingston Point in Rondout, they all came over from.... They were all Calabrese, which means Calabria.

So they were all Calabrese. So they knew each other—I don't know if they knew each other in Italy, probably. Maybe not, but there was just one big community when they got here. In fact, there was an association of men who [pause]—they were philanthropic. If a family had a problem, they would help them any way they could.

I think it was called the Santa Maria [pause] Association. The Liberata was the same type of association out in Glasco. But Kingston had—I think its name was Santa Maria—and my grandfather was one of those men. So financially, [00:20:00] if they needed help—whatever they needed—they were there to help.

[00:20:03] **Victoria:** Wow. And what about, um, religion or any...?

[00:20:11] **Theresa:** Catholic. And Roman Catholic. Yeah. All of them.

[00:20:20] **Victoria:** Yeah, I think those are most of the questions. Do you have anything else you want to say - thinking about your grandparents or their

experience here, moving, losing that sense of [pause] trying to be Americanized or...?

[00:20:34] **Theresa:** I think they carried a lot of their traditions with them - you know, like, um my.... Making their own sausage—having pigs and making their own sausage and drying that... That was—that was a real treat.

And then my other grandfather—he made wine—he had grapes. And he had a wine press and he made his own wine. And then my grandmother—my mother's mother—she had an outside kitchen. And I remember going up there and having fried, um [pause] they weren't [00:21:00] pumpkin, what were they [pause].... Anyway [laughs], one of those—something like a pumpkin and she would fry the flowers. They were delicious.

And when I visited Puglia many years later that was one of the delicacies. So I'm thinking maybe it was something that my grandfather had brought from that area for her to.... Yeah. There were different kinds of—uh... And then he made—my grandfather—built her an outside oven, and that's where she baked her bread.

[00:21:31] **Victoria:** I love that.

[00:21:32] **Theresa:** So yeah, they carried a lot of their traditions from Italy over here. And I regret that we didn't continue it. I didn't, but it's just one of those things that I do remember. But I think my family is just very, um, service oriented. I know my dad and my mom volunteered and helped out a lot of people in town. So I'm very proud of who they were.

[00:21:58] **Victoria:** Yeah. That's really really amazing.

[00:22:00] **Theresa:** I [00:22:00] think they contributed quite a bit to the area. My father—they're talking about a lot of “first this” and “first that,” and “first other.” And I believe that he was the first Italian-American alderman at large in the city [pause]. And during the war—one of the interesting things that... Mussolini—you know, was very [laugh]. Very [pause], um—well—[a] whatever dictator in Italy. And in order to encourage the relatives not to join in with him, there was a letter campaign. And my dad went to—in the middle of town, there was a.... It's called the Murphy Center now. But they went there and they wrote letters to the relatives, encouraged them not to join in with Mussolini.

So that was one of the things they did during the war, but it was a lot of [pause]—I remember a lot of things during the war, not only with the Japanese, which was very sad, but also with the Italians.

[00:22:56] **Victoria:** Yeah, for sure. And do you know if your grandmother [00:23:00] or your mother kept in contact with any family in Italy to this day? Or do you have any family that you keep in contact with?

[00:23:08] **Theresa:** I have no family over there—no. But I did find—after my mother died, there was a lot of things I needed to go through—and I found the letter from my father's (would have been his aunt) that she had written from Belsito. But it was an Italian and I don't [laugh] read Italian. But it was very nice that she had written it to him because Charles - she wrote it to Carmine, CA-R-M-I-N-E, which is Italian for Charles. Yeah.

And that's the other thing that I'm wondering—why my dad didn't go to Italy. It wasn't that he couldn't afford. He chose not to go. And I would never—you know [pause]... I, [laughs] I just hope you ask a lot of questions [laughs]! Cause it's so important to do that.

And I'm trying to impart a lot of this with my children—trying to write it down and do the [00:24:00] genealogy for them.

[00:24:01] **Victoria:** I think it's really nice that you know, all this information and that you went back and are searching for it in key documents. Are there any pictures of your grandparents, even here living in Kingston from Italy...?

[00:24:16] **Theresa:** There was one that I—my mother did not have any pictures, but my cousin (through his father) had some. And I believe I do have a picture of the family when I grew up.

But—you know, just like any other picture—there's no names. I just looked like my grandmother. So I'm thinking it's probably her and I do have other pictures, but [pause]... It's sad, I don't know who they are. Just the ones that I know. So...

[00:24:48] **Victoria:** Alrighty. Well...

[00:24:49] **Theresa:** Well thank you. This is very—you're very lovely. And thank you so much.

End: 24:54