

Transcript of Oral History Tape #T-2-41, Transcribed by Mary Ann Vartia,  
08/21/03

Interview with Mrs. Enis Bernacchi, October 25<sup>th</sup>.

Mrs. Bernacchi: When I met him in the country, I used to live in the farm.

Interviewer: In LaPorte here?

Mrs. Bernacchi: In LaPorte. I was born in Chicago. Lived in LaPorte for most of my life, and I met him. He came out to my house. Of course, I never even saw him before. That was the first time I saw him. So we started talking together, you know how it goes.

Interviewer: Did he just come down to visit you? Or was he working?

Mrs. Bernacchi: No, he just came down and visit.

Speaker 2: Why did he visit you?

Mrs. Bernacchi: Well, I tell you. He was a neighbor that used to sell fruit.

Speaker 2: Well, that's what she wants to hear.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yeah, sell fruit, see? And so he was going to stop to them people, down to that place. Then he stopped to my house. And he said to me, "Don't you know me?" Oh, no, he told my mother, "Don't you know me?" he said to my mother. She said, "No, I never saw you before. I don't know you." And then he stopped there and had something to eat, something to drink to my house. And since that time, keep on coming all the time. It was the first time he saw me.

Interviewer: What year were you married then?

Mrs. Bernacchi: What year was married? Ah, age 18. Wait a minute, wait a minute. I got the (indecipherable) 1916, isn't it? 1916, I'd like to be sure.

Speaker 2: I had it in the office there.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yeah, well, I got it here someplace.

Speaker 2: 1915, 18?

Mrs. Bernacchi: In 1915. That's when I got married. It will be 62 years in ah-Thanksgiving. (indecipherable)

Speaker 2: 62 years this year. Yeah, that's right, 1915. That's right, then, 1915.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yes, 1915. I thought I had it marked...

Speaker 2: Thanksgiving of 1915.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yeah, it will be 63 years from Thanksgiving. 1915. I get married St. Joe Church, St. Joe Catholic Church, St. Joe.

Interviewer: Where did you live then?

Mrs. Bernacchi: I lived in LaPorte. First, when I was young woman, I used to live in Chicago. Then my folks, they bought a farm. Then we moved up here in the country.

Interviewer: When you were married, though, where did you and your husband have a...

Mrs. Bernacchi: In LaPorte. Most a time.

Speaker 2: Where at, though? Like...

Mrs. Bernacchi: Well, right here Indiana Avenue I used live.

Speaker 2: Oh, in that big two-story house.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yeah, in that big two-story house on Indiana Avenue. Then first I lived in LaPorte, I mean downtown; and Eighth—what they call that road down there, dad used to have a place there. Ah, Eighth Street.

Speaker 2: Eighth Street?

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yeah, downtown.

Speaker 2: You used to live right here in the LaPorte area then?

Mrs. Bernacchi: Of course, I didn't live there very long, just about a year. Then we moved up Indiana Avenue. Then we move in our place. We built a home.

Speaker 2: You rented an apartment up in Indiana Avenue.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yes, rented an apartment in Indiana Avenue there. And I raised two children in there. I had two children when I live in that house. Then we built. We bought this place here and we built a little home. Not this one. Small one. I lived there five years in the small house. Then we build this one. Was here—right here in Fox Street, another home.

Speaker 2: Somewhere over here?

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yeah, uh-huh. You change everything now, you know.

Interviewer: So how many children did you have?

Mrs. Bernacchi: Seven.

Interviewer: What was it like raising seven children then?

Mrs. Bernacchi: It was okay. I work hard. I had—I was a hard-working woman, you know; and I was happy. I had a good husband.

Interviewer: Did you help your husband in the business?

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yes, yes. I help him.

Interviewer: What kind of...

Mrs. Bernacchi: Well, we used to had a field. We used to raise tomatoes and vegetables and stuff like that. Used to raise peas and beans and stuff like that. Of course, your daddy was in business with Vic.

Speaker 2: He was a vegetable grower, and she used to go out in the fields, yeah, in early days now.

Mrs. Bernacchi: We had here—well, we got the greenhouse. We used to raise vegetables in here, right here by the greenhouse. Of course, we had no greenhouse then. And I had three kids. I used to go out in the field and work. Pick tomatoes, pick peas and beans, everything.

Interviewer: What would you do with your kids when you were out in the fields?

Mrs. Bernacchi: I used to take them along with me. Take a blanket, you know, put 'em in there. Three are done.

Interviewer: What would an average day for you have been like with all those kids and working and—what kind of jobs did you have to do around the house?

Mrs. Bernacchi: Oh, everything. Cooking. I had 14 people. Of course, at that time, I didn't have that many people, but I always had working people, they work, they help you, you know, on the farm. And then you had to make dinner.

Speaker 2: Borders. She used to have borders to eat here. Yes, even when I was younger, boy, I remember two or three of 'em. They used to eat meals here.

Mrs. Bernacchi: They eat meals. Dinner. I had about 14 people most every day to the table.

Speaker 2: There was always seven and two, with nine there was always 12 or 14 at our table.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Those extra men. They were helping in the working. And years ago they used to feed the people when they work in the farm or something. You know they used to do that. Now they don't do that anymore.

Speaker 2: She used to can, like tomatoes (indecipherable).

Mrs. Bernacchi: Oh, can! About 2,000 quarts with the fruit I canned.

Interviewer: Did you have a wood-burning stove? Or a gas stove? Of what?

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yes, yes. I have burning stove. I have coal, wood, everything.

Speaker 2: Yeah, she had a wood-burning stove, then she went to a gas stove, and then electric or whatever it is now. But she did have a wood-burning stove the first time.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yes, I have burning stove, and wood.

Speaker 2: And coal...

Mrs. Bernacchi: And coal...

Speaker 2: ...in the basement.

Mrs. Bernacchi: In the basement. Then we got oil, then gas. Change around, you know, some new things.

Interviewer: When you can on a wood-burning stove, is it any different than modern canning methods now?

Mrs. Bernacchi: Oh, I don't know. I used to have good luck. I never had anything spoil. I used to can everything. I always—about 2,000 quarts; I used to put 'em in the basement. I used to can about 10, 12 bushels peaches and cherries, strawberry, raspberry, everything I used to can. And tomatoes, I used to can about 300 quarts.

Interviewer: And this would just last one year?

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yeah.

Speaker 2: And then as I remember as I was a kid that we always had chickens.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Oh, yeah. I raised chicken. I raised chicken, 150 chickens, one time. See, then I raised 150 chicken again. I used...

Speaker 2: 150 in the spring, and 150 in the fall.

Mrs. Bernacchi: And then I used for my family. I didn't sell any. I used for my family.

Interviewer: Would you can the chicken meat then, too?

Mrs. Bernacchi: No, no.

Speaker 2: No, we killed them fresh every Saturday. Dad used to kill 'em, and we used to help her clean 'em down below in the basement, 10 or 12 at a time.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Then we used to have pigs. You know, kill the pigs, and...

Speaker 2: A couple hogs a year you had, and a couple goats and things like that, everything. And pigeons. We used to eat squab.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Beef, too, Beef, too. I used to raise squab, too. I had squab

Speaker 2: I had chickens for eggs.

Mrs. Bernacchi: In back here. (indecipherable)

Interviewer: So it's all—this is like a farm area?

Speaker 2: Oh, yes, yes, in the early days this was all farm area.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yeah, it was a farm. And back here they had apple—it was an apple orchard in back here.

Speaker 2: This was old Walton's orchard.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Walton orchard.

Speaker 2: I remember that very well.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yeah, yeah. And I work hard. But I was very lucky. I was always pretty well.

Speaker 2: When we used to go to grade school, we used to—this Fox Street—we used to follow single file, walk behind each other and get to school.

Mrs. Bernacchi: It was a bicycle—they used to...

Speaker 2: It was just a trail through the weeds.

Mrs. Bernacchi: And my boys they used to come home for dinner. They didn't want no lunch. They want something warm, you know.

Interviewer: You had a lot of work to do then?

Mrs. Bernacchi: Oh, yeah, a lot of work.

Interviewer: We're interested in showing in our films the difference between raising seven children then and raising seven children now.

Mrs. Bernacchi: And my boys they used to come from school, they take his clothes off, and then they get a big sandwich and they were going and work. We had a slice machine, you know, for cut the meat. And we never starved. We always had plenty to eat, thank God. That's one thing we—my husband, he was a very good working man. He always tried to get jobs, you know, here and there. He used to shovel snow in the winter. Then he used to work in the (indecipherable) Then he worked in the lumberyard, he worked at lumberyard.

Speaker 2: He did a little bit of everything.

Mrs. Bernacchi: A little bit of everything to help the family.

Speaker 2: You know off-season when they weren't growing in the fields, he'd get winter jobs.

Interviewer: He kept this up until?

Speaker 2: Yep.

Interviewer: When did he go into full time no off-season? When you had the greenhouses?

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yeah. We made...

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yeah, yeah. We didn't have no greenhouses then. You know, in the winter used to get different jobs.

Speaker 2: He got so he was doing pretty well. He'd go on vacations in the winter. When I was in high school I remember.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Oh, yes.

Speaker 2: Then, uh, he'd go on winter vacation, oh, 10, 15, 20 years there in a row for a couple months. And then we built greenhouses, and kind of stayed around here (indecipherable)...

Mrs. Bernacchi: We built the house first. We built this house first then the greenhouse.

Speaker 2: Oh, yeah. This was built in 1929. The first greenhouse was 1948.

Interviewer: It's a beautiful house.

Mrs. Bernacchi: It's pretty good. You know, it's a nice and strong home. I like it. Of course, it's a lot of work for me. I'm all alone, you know.

Speaker 2: He did a lot of the building himself on this home, too.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Oh, yeah. The basement he dug himself. Oh, yeah, we got a nice basement, dark, but a lot of work done.

Speaker 2: With what? Horses and a shovel, right?

Mrs. Bernacchi: Right, the shovel. Gino...

Speaker 2: Horses and you know, those pans as they call 'em.

Interviewer: How long did it take them to build the home?

Mrs. Bernacchi: Oh, no. He took so long, about six months of a job I think it was.

Speaker 2: Oh, it took him longer than that.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Maybe a year?

Speaker 2: Sure.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yeah, maybe a year. Probably.

Speaker 2: You don't build 'em in six months today.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yeah. Well, when you have—you know, they dug the basement, then they got them people fix up inside. That was a neighbor up there, your neighbor that did, he work in here. What his name?

Speaker 2: Luecker (sp?)

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yeah, he built this house. Of course, my husband done a lot of work and stuff, too. He did lot of work so that he can save money. In that time he didn't have no money.

Interviewer: I don't think you can answer this, but were you and your husband strict disciplinarians? Were you very...

Mrs. Bernacchi: With the children?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Oh, yes, he was. He was strict.

Speaker 2: Yeah, definitely.

Interviewer: He was?

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yes, yes, yes.

Speaker 2: Definitely so. We had to by in by a certain time at night; and if we weren't there, that's when my dad took over. He'd meet us at the door. Uh-huh. And we'd be on the job, regardless of we went out that night and stayed out till eleven, which was usually his deadline. If we stayed out that late, he'd still get you up at 5:30 or five or six, whatever it had to be to be on the job. You'd have to go off and work. So you wouldn't do this too many nights. You start to get pretty tired. You'd start realizing, heh, I'll get home earlier tonight because I have to go to work.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Well, he was very good to the kids. You know, they had all nice clothes. They had everything they want, but they had to work. The time they came from school they had to go in the fields and work. That's the way they all good workers.

Speaker 2: A lot of discipline. Oh, yeah.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Now a days, you know, it's different.

Interviewer: Yeah, a big difference. You can see the difference in the 50s even.

Speaker 2: My kids step on my toes more than I'd step on his. I wouldn't think of stepping on their toes. But today, I don't know what it is, I try to hold down.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Well, you just have to make 'em understand, you know.

Speaker 2: ...but their peer groups have too much effect on them.

Mrs. Bernacchi: They were good boys, though. I never had any trouble. I never was called in the court. I never was called in the school. I never was called in the prison if they do something wrong. So that's very good, isn't it?

For seven boys and never would call for anywhere.

Speaker 2: We always drank wine at home with our meals by the way, too. Always made his own wine. And for dinner and supper we'd always have wine. We'd never drink milk or anything. Just wine.

Mrs. Bernacchi: I think the child, if they're used to drinking a little, is better to have than never drink anything. And then they find out they get drunk, you know, and things like that—is no good. You know, if you could learn it from little on, I believe, they get more used to things, you know. They had wine when they eat to the table.

Speaker 2: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: Did he grow his own grapes?

Speaker 2: No. We used—well, we had 'em for a while. My uncle Gino used to grow them. But we used to—and her brothers grew 'em.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Buy. We used to buy.

Speaker 2: Buy a lot of Californias--Zinfandel. That's a wine grape.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Wine grapes.

Interviewer: I know there were quite a few people around the county that made their own wine, but grew their...

Speaker 2: Most of the Italians did. They imported the grapes. Yeah. And there was a few Concord grapes, but that doesn't really make the best wine, as far as we're concerned.

Mrs. Bernacchi: California grapes makes the best wine. You know it's really—sometime they used to mix them, but not very often they did that. Mostly we got from California, the grapes. And, of course, my brother-in-law, my husband he was in business with Vic. You know they were together. Told you about that. And he separated because he had a big family. We had a big family, and we used to own some of the field up there where he's got the



store now. I don't know if you know the Bernacchi where they have the store out there?

Interviewer: In Michigan City?

Mrs. Bernacchi: No, no. Here LaPorte. After the land was belong to my husband. Then we sold it to my brother-in-law, see? They were together for a while in business.

Interviewer: A family tradition then?

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yes. Well, you see, my brother--my brother-in-law, his wife, my sister. We married two brothers.

Speaker 2: Two brothers married two sisters.

Mrs. Bernacchi: We're so close yet.

Speaker 2: Wasn't papa's father in Italy a farmer, too?

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yes, he used to raise vineyard.

Speaker 2: Vineyards. He had grapes.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yes. He used to raise big vineyard.

Speaker 2: Raise grapes? Yeah. Wine country there.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yeah, was wine country. Used to make a lot of wine.

Speaker 2: And my dad left and never saw his father again.

Mrs. Bernacchi: My husband, he came in this country, he was 14, 14 years old.

Speaker 2: Fourteen and a half, nearly 15, that's what he always told me.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yeah, something like that. And, you know, he had to do for himself. He didn't have nobody to tell him what to do, you know?

Speaker 2: He was never given a thing.

Mrs. Bernacchi: No.

Speaker 2: He did it on his own.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Do it on his own. You work hard. He wasn't afraid to work. No, no. He was taking off in the winter when we didn't have the farm. You know, you don't produce any vegetables or anything like that in the winter so he used to go down and work and get a different job, you know, during the winter. Heck, we got--oh, we had chickens. We had pigeon. We had pigs, too. We had some land way down back where we got the greenhouses, you know, and we used to raise the pigs. I remember one time my husband raised 'em, he sold

'em. He made \$200. You know at that time that was a lot of money. Little pigs, there were six pigs. And they were sold. They were very good, and he made a lot of money, \$200 isn't much, but at that time was. He was so pleased. I never forget. They were down with Vic, you know he build a house, your brother, Vic. He done a bit of everything, I tell you to raise the family, but I'm happy. I always—I loved to work, and I still do. I'm maybe as old and I still keep on going. The afternoon I sit down a little bit now, because I'm getting older and I should rest a little bit. During the summer I'm always walking around the yard and all around—keep on going. I think it's very good for you. And we was happy family.

Speaker 2: How many pair of—you used to tell me sometimes—of blue jeans you'd have on the line washing?

Mrs. Bernacchi: I used to wash by hand. I didn't have no washing machine.

Speaker 2: Never owned a washing machine.

Mrs. Bernacchi: And I used to wash—after while I didn't go out anymore because I used to send to a laundry. They used to do damp wash, see? They bring your clothes already washed, and not dried, and you had to dry and put 'em on the line yourself, right down there. Then my husband, he got a wash machine in the basement. It was Maytag, I remember, just like now. And they took about six hour to wash all them clothes. I said, (indecipherable) I said, "Let it go." I thought, send it to the laundry, have damp wash, and then I used to wash two to three times a week myself, 24 pair of overall. Sometimes they used to wear overall, those kids. I don't know how many pairs, 10, 12, 14 pair sometime I had. You know there were seven, and they'd get dirty. I still remember these, I had to the line full of overalls.

Speaker 2: Yeah, I remember.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yeah. But big clothes I used to send them to the laundry, you know, because damp wash they used to do that. So my husband got...

Speaker 2: In later years you did, not at first, you mean.

Mrs. Bernacchi: No.

Interviewer: How long would it take you to wash all that by hand before you sent it out?

Mrs. Bernacchi: Oh, I don't remember. I used to—I still wash my clothes now, for me, you know. Not the bedclothes and things like that, but all my clothes I wash myself. You ought to see what a big bunch I wash. Going (indecipherable) in the line out there, I got two nice tubs in the basement. I wash. I still got a little washboard, you know, to wash.

Speaker 2: She used to go and go and go.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yeah, and I should-- I don't have to do it but if I want I can send to the laundry. But I like to do it myself, you know. Because the laundry, they spoil sometimes the clothes. You know how they do when you got

nice clothes that way. I still do it. Well, I think working don't hurt you. I still do my cooking.

Interviewer: How long did it take you to cook for a family that (indecipherable) all the borders?

Mrs. Bernacchi: Oh, I used to cook, I used to cook about sometimes three pot of spaghetti. You know, three pot is quite a bit. And sometime on Sunday I roast about 15-20 pound of big roast—beef roast. And fry some, 7-8 chicken.

Speaker 2: Of course, she had that big spaghetti pan. I still remember it. (indecipherable) It was about that big around, Aunt Jo took it, yeah. It was about that high with a big handle on the top of it. You used to fill that full of spaghetti.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yeah, a lot full of spaghetti so they had enough to eat. One thing we did. We work hard, we always had plenty to eat. We never had to go to the big ticket. You know you got along fine. So that's good. It's something. No, we never had to go to the big ticket (Indecipherable). We all got along. I used to—I did a lot of canning. That helps, too, a lot of canning I used to do. I had a basement, I got a place down there yet, was awful nice, they got all junks (indecipherable) in that little room.

Speaker 2: As I look back, the multitude of things that all contributed towards cutting costs down in the home, like raising chickens. Of course, today raising chickens at the cost of feed, I say, economically you can't do it if you got to buy the feed. We used to grow the feed, though, raised corn anyway. And then hogs. We used to feed the hogs a lot of the vegetable greens in the summer. A lot of the waste, but they were good, stuff that you would throw out.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Corn, corn was very good.

Speaker 2: And the chickens you got the eggs from.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yeah, we used to feed 'em corn.

Speaker 2: A lot of squabs, we used to eat. I remember as a young kid.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yeah, those squabs, they were the best. You can't find them lately.

Speaker 2: And you always had a couple of pork roasts.

Interviewer: How many squabs did you have to make for one meal, though? If there was all those?

Speaker 2: Well, a squab was basically like—not quite as big as a Cornish hen, right?

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yeah.

Speaker 2: About like a Cornish hen.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Oh, yes. But they were dandy. They were nice one. We had a good kind, you know, it was good pigeon.

Speaker 2: And that's quite a delicacy if you go in a big restaurant in Chicago and see if you can find it. And they're delicious.

Mrs. Bernacchi: I used to cook maybe seven, eight, you know, we wait until we got enough, you know. Sometime used to get 12. Used to get 'em ...

Speaker 2: And of course, all the vegetables we used to eat all summer. We used to eat vegetables to who-tied-the-pup 'cause we had 'em available to us.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Now we put our potatoes away or cabbage, you know, and things like that. They used to make a hole, you know, and put it in the ground.

Interviewer: Oh, bury them?

Mrs. Bernacchi: Bury them, yeah. Then when you want 'em, you used to dig.

Speaker 2: We used to have cabbage, carrots, turnips,

Mrs. Bernacchi: Cabbage, carrots, turnips, everything.

Speaker 2: As I look back, it was a lot of fun.

Mrs. Bernacchi: It was a lot of fun. And they kept good, you know, if you keep 'em in those, was just like a barrel they put 'em in, you know. And they cover 'em up and when you wanted, you used to go pick 'em.

Interviewer: Did the boys help in the house, too? Or did they just work outside?

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yes. They helped me, too.

Speaker 2: Oh, yes.

Mrs. Bernacchi: I didn't have no girls. I didn't have no girls. Everybody took a turn.

Speaker 2: After every evening meal—of course, I was the last one, and papa was next to me. So we all had our turns in the kitchen. Every night my dad would say, "Okay." He'd say to her, "you go in the living room. You just it to me." And she'd go sit in there and then he'd come in and inspect afterward. He'd go in the closet and look at the dishes and see if they were dry. See if they were dirty.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yeah, they used to help. A big family like that, you know, you have to—you don't have...

Speaker 2: So we'd each have our turns, yeah.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yeah, they all had a turn.

Interviewer: What is the age difference between oldest and youngest with seven?

Speaker 2: Twelve years. We're all two years apart, except the two oldest are 13 months.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yeah, the two oldest only 13 months. And then the rest are two years apart. I think Joe is two years.

Speaker 2: No, they're all basically two. Sometimes it was the tail end time of the year, you know.

Mrs. Bernacchi: My oldest boy is 60. They all married. They all have family. And I have 29 grandchildren, and I think I got about, wait a minute, great grandchildren I must have about...

Speaker 2: Four or five?

Mrs. Bernacchi: Oh, my God, we talking about, I got about 14.

Speaker 2: Have you?

Mrs. Bernacchi: Just a minute now, count 'em up. Dan you got two. Two, those are—Russ has got three.

Speaker 2: Well, that's five.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yeah.

Speaker 2: And Ann's got one, that's six. Patty's got three, that's nine.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Yes. And Benny got three.

Speaker 2: Yeah, that's 12. Judy's got two. That's 14.

Mrs. Bernacchi: Fourteen. I thought about 14. And I have another one (indecipherable).

Speaker 2: See why there's so many of us.

Mrs. Bernacchi: That's pretty nice, isn't it? 14. And I think 29—29 grandchildren. 29. Very lucky. I have pretty good luck with my family. They were pretty well. Some they had (indecipherable) but beside that they were most of time well. And I nurse all my children—no bottle baby. Yeah. So here I am, still running around.

Interviewer: Why I thank you for your time.

(This is the end of this tape.)