JA: My name is John Andreozzi. I’m originally from Lackawanna, NY and I’ve been asked to talk about some of my immigrant ancestors. Each of my parent had a step parent. Those people we never knew and they were sort of like, in the most friendly term, ghosts. People that would sort of linger out there in our imaginations and we do have photographs. The first one was on my father’s side, Giovanni Andreozzi, and he was born in, Falvaterra, Lazio. Which is just south of Rome. And he came over in 1909. It looks like he just got off the boat and he’s with an older man who’s apparently guiding him. He came to Buffalo, NY and then down to Lackawanna. It was right on the shores of Lake Erie and in 1900 they had built the largest steel plant in the world there. So he was married in 1915, late 1915 to my grandmother.* And she was Vincenza Limongiello. She was born in an area called “the Hooks,” a tough water front tenement in Buffalo, NY. She changed her name quickly to Jenny Limoncello. That went easier on American ears. Limongiello and Vincenza didn’t go so well with some people at that time. They were married, and they settled in Lackawanna, NY right across from the steel plant. And they had three children. The first was my father, that was named Filippo, Phillip, after his uncle. Jenny and Giovanni were doing okay. My father was healthy. In 1918, grandma Jenny gave birth to her second child Maria Giusepppe, and named after her mother, Mary Joseph. She died within three
months in August of 1918. And then, tragically, in November 1918, Giovanni died. John died very suddenly. He was taken to Columbus Hospital in Buffalo, which was the Italian Hospital and he died there within a matter of a week of the Spanish flu. My father didn’t find out about this fact cause grandma remarried another Andreozzi, Tony Andreozzi, a year later. And my father always thought that, that was his father. And then one day, in the little Italian neighborhood that they lived, I don’t know how old my father was, but someone said, “Y’know, Tony’s not your father.” And my father said, “what?” and then I think it was a very unfortunate way to find out that your father is your stepfather.

JA: Meanwhile, in Calabria, in Southern Italy, my mother was born. Calabria is the toe of the Italian boot, in uh, she was born near Cosenza, which is the northern province of that in a small town called Marano Principato. Born on, Epifania, the January 6th, of uh 1918. Her grandpa, Filiberto Covelli, had been going back and forth between the United States and Calabria since 1899. His father went over in 1898 to Chicago, where many Calabresi went. And then he sent for his older son, Filiberto. Who goes there at age 16. And then he moves upstate to Kenosha, WI where there’s a whole bunch of people from that town and he’s working there. Going back and forth. He’s there, he gives birth to several more children, including my mother and he goes to Lackawanna cause he heard the jobs there paid better. They paid up to a dollar something a day, up to two bucks a day. And I have a picture of them in Italy, where they glued the, uh, Filiberto’s picture in America next to Rosina and the four kids they had. And my mother’s thinking, “Oh everything’s gonna be great now. Y’know, we’re doing alright. Ma’s got some money, we’re buying some new clothes, and we’re gonna see Pa, who we’ve never seen but once or twice, in the United States.” Well, Rosina suddenly takes ill in 1925 in March. She dies within two weeks.
We wrote and sent to grandpa, he keeps sending money back to Italy, but it takes him a year, a year and a half to get back there. Then he remarries Gelsomina, and the family finally comes over in December of 1927 when my mother’s not quite 10 years old. Now, Rosina, is this ghost of the family, my mother’s real mother. But she remembers enough about her to tell stories about Rosina. But we always have wondered what life would have been like if Rosina had survived because the four children that were, uh, Rosina’s children at the time that she had died, one of my Uncles wrote that they never truly recovered from that loss.

My father didn’t didn’t always talk about him or remember him so much, we only found out these stories from him much later, that he had a brother and sister that early who were both passed away Giovanni was the second child who had died at age one a little bit later and they were in a section of uh, Holy Cross Cemetery in Lackawanna that was reserved for many people and kids who died from the Spanish Flu. There was no markers on their graves, so, my father, myself, and my four siblings, we all chipped in enough money to put markers on those, on those stones. So, I started all this talking about the two ghosts in the family. The two ghosts there still hanging on our walls are Rosina Ruffolo-Covelli, my mother’s real mother. And Giovanni Andreozzi, my father’s real father. And that’s a little bit of my family history.

*When John reviewed this transcript a year later, he realized that he had been mistaken and that Jenny and Giovanni married in 1916, not 1915.*