

THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Dr. Vincent DiFrancesco

Interview Date: December 12, 2013
Interviewer: Bernadette McMahon
Transcriber: Betsy Barnett



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TAPE 1/SIDE 1

MCMAHON: We're just about ready. This is Bernadette McMahon and it is December 12, 2013. I am at the home of Dr. Vincent DiFrancesco in Silver Spring, Maryland. We are going to be interviewing him for the Ruth Ann Overbeck Capitol Hill History Project. Good morning.

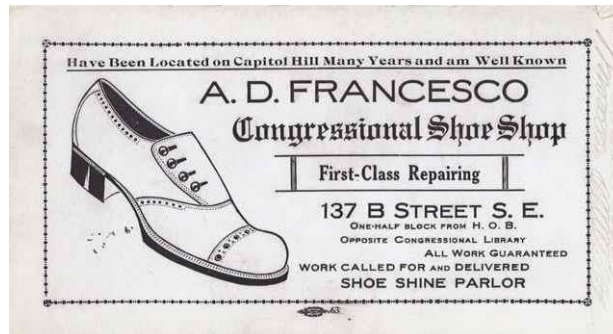
DIFRANCESCO: Good morning to you.

MCMAHON: You know what we're going to be doing here? Talking about your childhood on Capitol Hill.

DIFRANCESCO: Absolutely.

MCMAHON: Very good. Do you want to tell me when you were born and where you were born?

DIFRANCESCO: I was born September 16, 1916. I'm 97 years old. And I was born on Capitol Hill at home at 137 B Street SE. And, now, if you'd look at this blotter—no, turn it over—the name is misspelled there. See, it should be D-I.



MCMAHON: Oh, I see.

DIFRANCESCO: And my father says he got tired of people calling him "DYE-FRANCESCO".

MCMAHON: So, he just went to A. D. Francesco.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: And what I'm looking at is a blotter. That's something I haven't seen in a long time. [Interviewee laughs.] Dr. DiFrancesco's father's Congressional Shoe Shop at 137 B Street SE, which is labeled as one-half block from the House Office Building, HOB. Back then I suppose there was only one.

DIFRANCESCO: What?

MCMAHON: One House office building.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, there was only one. Yes.

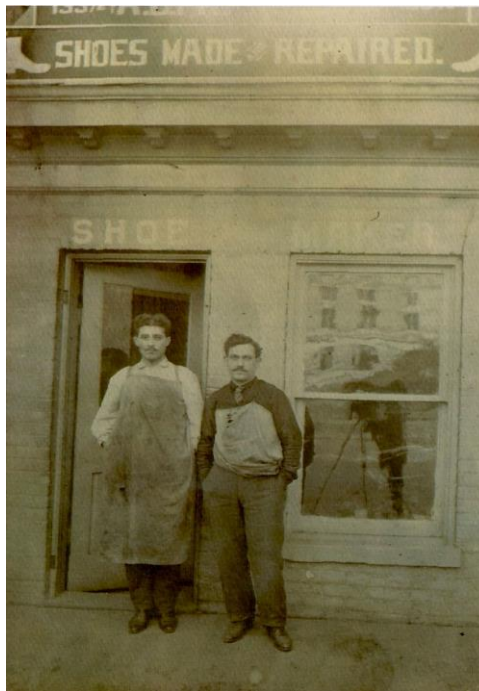
MCMAHON: Was it called the Cannon Building back then?

DIFRANCESCO: No. We never gave it a name. It was The Building.

MCMAHON: The House Office Building, yes.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: And it says it's opposite Congressional Library, and "all work guaranteed." "Work called for and delivered." And Dr. DiFrancesco's daughter Maria Christmann is also here today, so her voice will be on this tape as well. And she's showing me a photograph of two men in front of the shoe repair. Who are these men?



Zio Pasquale "Patsy" Olivieri and Antimo DiFrancesco,
in front of Congressional Shoe Shop, 135 B Street SE, around 1904

DIFRANCESCO: Well, this is my dad and ...

MCMAHON: Your father on the right.

DIFRANCESCO: ... and his nephew on the left.

MCMAHON: Okay.

DIFRANCESCO: And his name was not DiFrancesco.

MCMAHON: It was not?

DIFRANCESCO: No. His last name was Olivieri.

MCMAHON: Okay. Well, we will have these names to ... oh, you're giving us this. Thank you. So, we will have a copy of that picture. Do you know about when this would have been taken? When would your father have been that age?

DIFRANCESCO: Well, I would say about the time that my mother came over from Italy. That would be about 1902. [See the note on page 11 which provides corrections to these dates.]

MCMAHON: 1902. Wow!

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: So, long before you were born.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes. [Laughs]

MCMAHON: So, do you want to give us the name of your parents?

DIFRANCESCO: My father's name was Antimo, A-N-T-I-M-O. Back then, people didn't have middle names.

MCMAHON: Oh. Okay.

DIFRANCESCO: And his relative—both of them were shoemakers. And ...

MCMAHON: I see. So, and this is your parents and children [referring to another photo].

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, yes.

MCMAHON: And which one are you? Well ...

DIFRANCESCO: My mother told me I was ...

MCMAHON: Oh, you weren't born yet in this picture. [Both laugh] So you are the—that's why—are you the youngest?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: Lovely. And, so, your mother was Rosa Olivieri ...



DiFrancesco family, in 1916. From left: Antimo (father), Frank, Maria, Rosa (mother), Justina, and Teresa. Vincent was expected at this point but not yet born.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

[From family records: Antimo Di Francesco: b. 4/18/1879, d. 4/5/38; Rosa Olivieri Di Francesco: b. 7/19/1881, d. 4/6/74; they married 8/2/1909, either in San Clemente or Caserta, Italy. Children were Frank: b. 6/23/10, c. 4/27/70; Teresa: b. 9/3/11, d. 1/7/95; Justina: b. 2/6/14, d. 2006; Mary: b. 2/6/14, d. 2008; Vincent: b. 9/16/1916.]

MCMAHON: ... DiFrancesco? Very good.

DIFRANCESCO: And her brother is the second man ...

MCMAHON: Oh, in this. Right.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: In the picture in front of the store. So, your father already had a shoe store by 1902.

DIFRANCESCO: No. He came over in 1902, but—I'm trying to date that picture.

MCMAHON: Yes.

DIFRANCESCO: That would be maybe 1904, instead of 1902.

MCMAHON: All right. So. Now, I noticed this says 137 B. And this picture, on the back, it says 135. Was it a double building?

DIFRANCESCO: No, no. He started his business at 135 and then he bought the next door building.

MCMAHON: I see. And was the business in both parts or was ...

DIFRANCESCO: No.

MCMAHON: 137 was just the home.

DIFRANCESCO: No. 137 was our home and the eventual ...

CHRISTMANN: Shoe shop.

DIFRANCESCO: ... shoe shop.

MCMAHON: All right. So, did he keep 135?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes. He rented 135. And then was able to save enough money to start his own—have his own home at 137.

MCMAHON: I see.

CHRISTMANN: My sister might have put the incorrect address on the back there.

MCMAHON: Well, it sounds—I see. All right. So, it might just be an error. Okay. But you say he did start out in 135 ...

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, he did.

MCMAHON: ... and then bought next door and rented 135.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: Do you remember who the tenants were in 135?

DIFRANCESCO: Well, yes. The tenants were a tailor by the name of Goldman, G-O-L-D-M-A-N.

MCMAHON: Very good. Thank you for spelling these. That'll be important when we get to the transcription.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, yes. Incidentally, you can get this picture from the Library of Congress.



100 block Independence Avenue SE (May, 1962; U.S. Architect of Capitol, via Library of Congress)

MCMAHON: All right, I will do that. And this is the block. And where is your—this is your building?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes. The taller one.

MCMAHON: So, you had the biggest building on the block.

DIFRANCESCO: Well, there was another three story building in the block, Dr. Moffitt's office and home.

MCMAHON: All right. So this picture is from 1962 and at that point there seems to be a jeweler in the building where you were.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, yes.

MCMAHON: How long did your father operate the shoe repair?

DIFRANCESCO: Well, he died in 1938.

MCMAHON: Okay.

DIFRANCESCO: So.

MCMAHON: But your mother continued living in that building?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, she did.

MCMAHON: Okay.

DIFRANCESCO: And the building is interesting in that he put a new face on the building. It was a tan brick. And he also enlarged the building in the back so that we had four bedrooms in the back.

MCMAHON: So, was your home the top two floors?

DIFRANCESCO: Excuse me.

MCMAHON: Where you lived, was the top two floors?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: And you had four bedrooms.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: That's a big space for Capitol Hill. [Both laugh] That's not the norm.

DIFRANCESCO: Well, he enlarged it.

MCMAHON: By going backward.

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah.

MCMAHON: Uh-huh. Was that, do you have any idea, was that a hard thing to do back then?

DIFRANCESCO: Well, we had a very large backyard. It was plenty of space.

MCMAHON: I just wonder—people go through a lot of steps these days to get permits and permission to make changes. So, I wonder if—it probably wasn't that hard back when he was doing it.

DIFRANCESCO: I'm sure he had to get permission to do it. But, he had an architect ...

MCMAHON: He did, okay.

DIFRANCESCO: ... to take care of everything.

MCMAHON: He must have been a very good cobbler and a very good businessman.

DIFRANCESCO: He was a businessman.

MCMAHON: Yes.

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah. Matter of fact, he owned three homes when he died. And he came over with very little money, you know. Probably ten dollars, when he came over.

MCMAHON: Did he speak English?

DIFRANCESCO: Well, he learned it. [Interviewer laughs] He didn't speak English when he came over, but he was a progressive man in all accounts. He was a good cobbler and a good businessman and very progressive.

MCMAHON: How old—I didn't ask you when he was born.

DIFRANCESCO: He was born in 1879.

MCMAHON: All right. So, when he came over, he was in his 20s.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: And, did your mother come at the same time?

DIFRANCESCO: No, no. She came—I think he came over in 1902. So, my brother was born in 1905. So, she came, maybe, in 1903.

MCMAHON: And did they already know each other?

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, yes. They were sweethearts in Italy.

MCMAHON: Ahh. [Interviewee laughs] So, did she come by herself?

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, no, he went over and brought her.

MCMAHON: They got married in Italy?

DIFRANCESCO: I'm not sure where they got married, but I think they were ... [to his daughter] Do you have the picture?

CHRISTMANN: Their wedding picture?

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah.

MCMAHON: What was the name of their town? They were from the same town in Italy?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes. And the town was—well, it was near Caserta, which was near Naples. Caserta was the ... And their town had a name and it just escapes me right now. San Clemente.

CHRISTMANN: San Clemente.

DIFRANCESCO: And the interesting thing about San Clemente is that “San” is not Italian. “San” is Spanish.

MCMAHON: Oh.

DIFRANCESCO: And Spain owned that area for a long time.

MCMAHON: What part of Italy is that?

DIFRANCESCO: Well, it’s very close to Naples. Southern Italy.

MCMAHON: So, it was on the water?

DIFRANCESCO: No. No, it was inland. It was farm land.

MCMAHON: Okay. San Clemente. It does sound Spanish, doesn’t it?

DIFRANCESCO: Well, San Francisco.

CHRISTMANN: This picture I think you’re thinking of is from their 25th wedding anniversary.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, yes.

CHRISTMANN: It’s not their marriage.

DIFRANCESCO: No, no.

CHRISTMANN: 1934.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes. I remember that picture.

CHRISTMANN: Now, wait a minute. That says 25th wedding anniversary, 1934. That doesn’t quite make sense, if she came over in ’03 or ’04. I don’t know. You know, these were written many years later, so they could have been ...

MCMAHON: Oh. Could have been a different anniversary.

CHRISTMANN: Yeah.

[Note: after the interview, Dr. DiFrancesco corrected the dates being discussed here. His father went back to Italy to marry his mother and bring her to the U.S. in 1909. The 1934 photo discussed above—not included here—was taken on a 25th anniversary trip.]

MCMAHON: Mm-hmm. So, you were born right in that building. And you were the youngest of?

DIFRANCESCO: Five.

MCMAHON: Five. So, this wonderful family picture, you're ...

DIFRANCESCO: I had twin sisters.

MCMAHON: Mm-hmm. And an older—the brother was the oldest. And then another sister.

DIFRANCESCO: And I wasn't in the picture. [Interviewer laughs]

CHRISTMANN: But here's a picture of him when he was two, lying on the grounds of the Library of Congress.

MCMAHON: Oh, my.

CHRISTMANN: Of course, you can't see the building.

MCMAHON: Right, right. That's good. So, what do you remember about growing up in that neighborhood? It was commercial, but it was your home.

DIFRANCESCO: It was a beautiful neighborhood. And, like you say, it was commercial, but it became commercial one house after another. And, in that picture, we're flanked by restaurants. This is a restaurant, this is a restaurant, and this is a restaurant.

MCMAHON: Well, this picture is from 1962, so this is just before it was torn down.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: But, in your childhood, were there also restaurants there?

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, the whole block.

MCMAHON: The whole block was mostly restaurants.

DIFRANCESCO: We had The Ugly Duckling, which was a high end place to eat. And we had Little Tavern.

MCMAHON: The Little Tavern. I can see that. That was around when you were a child?

DIFRANCESCO: That was much before McDonald's. It was a chain.

MCMAHON: I remember it, and there's a Facebook page called Old Time D.C., which the people who founded that meant it to be the 1980s. [All laugh] But it has caught on with people of all ages and all parts of town and there's been a real interest in Little Tavern buildings. People have been posting pictures of Little Tavern buildings in various places.

DIFRANCESCO: At Little Tavern you could get a hamburger for a nickel.

MCMAHON: Right.

DIFRANCESCO: But it was a small hamburger.

MCMAHON: Little tiny. You bought a whole bagful, right?

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah. [Laughs]

CHRISTMANN: But was it in existence when you were a child?

DIFRANCESCO: What, the Tavern? No. I mean, it came—it was a chain. There was a bowling alley between our house and The American Café. And then you had the Little Tavern, which took very little space.

CHRISTMANN: But was it there when you were growing up?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

CHRISTMANN: It was.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, it was.

CHRISTMANN: Okay.

MCMAHON: I didn't know that chain was that old. I mean, this [the 1962 Architect of the Capitol photo] is 40 years after you were a child.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes. [According to the Little Tavern website, <http://www.littletavernrestaurants.com> the first Washington location was opened in October 1928; it does not indicate which location was first.]

MCMAHON: You said one building after another became commercial.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: Were they residences before that?

DIFRANCESCO: The whole block was a residence when I was small.

MCMAHON: Oh.

DIFRANCESCO: And, one by one, people opened up restaurants. And they didn't tear the buildings down. They just renovated them.

MCMAHON: Right. Were any of the residences boarding houses?

DIFRANCESCO: One of them was. Mrs. Deis's house was a boarding house.

MCMAHON: Dyson?

DIFRANCESCO: Deis's. She spelled it D-E-I-S, Deis.

MCMAHON: Deis.

DIFRANCESCO: It's a German name.

MCMAHON: Mm-hmm. So, the reason I ask is I know people often—there were a lot of boarding houses and rooming houses on Capitol Hill for a long time.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, yes.

MCMAHON: Some of that happened during World War II. But you're saying there was at least one on your block in the 20s?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: Okay. Were there other families who lived over the stores, the way you did?

DIFRANCESCO: Dr. Moffitt's family at 127.

MCMAHON: Okay.

DIFRANCESCO: He had his office in the basement and they lived on the first and second floors.

MCMAHON: And you said that was the other three story building on the block?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, yes.

MCMAHON: Mm-hmm. Some of these I see—and this is, again, the pictures from the 60s—some of them are only one story buildings. So, you wouldn't have had people living upstairs. But others, like The

American Grill next to you, that was two story, but ... Does that mean there were not a lot of playmates for you on the block?

DIFRANCESCO: That's true, yes.

CHRISTMANN: But Mel Moffitt was your friend.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, and he just died.

CHRISTMANN: He just passed away. He was the one ...

MCMAHON: Oh, you mentioned him to me.

CHRISTMANN: ... we were trying to get the two together ...

MCMAHON: Yes.

CHRISTMANN: ... for your interview. But he just passed away.

DIFRANCESCO: His father was our family doctor.

MCMAHON: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. And, as I recall, there was a street behind you called Carroll Street.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, it was.

MCMAHON: Now, were the backyards connected?

DIFRANCESCO: There was an alley.

MCMAHON: There was an alley. All right.

DIFRANCESCO: And I married a girl from Carroll Street.

MCMAHON: Did you really? [Interviewee laughs] Oh, that's nice.

CHRISTMANN: They met in the alley.

MCMAHON: Oh, oh, that's wonderful. Oh, what a beautiful picture. And Maria told me that you got married at St. Peter's ...

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: ... in 1942. [Interviewee laughs]

CHRISTMANN: I don't know when this was taken.

MCMAHON: This is probably fairly recent. I got married at St. Peter's, too.

DIFRANCESCO: You did, really?

MCMAHON: In 1971.

DIFRANCESCO: Oh.

MCMAHON: We still go there every week. Yeah, that's what it looks like.

DIFRANCESCO: Do you remember the fire?

MCMAHON: No. That was, I think, in 1940.

DIFRANCESCO: It was. I was interning then. Just two blocks away at Providence Hospital.

MCMAHON: So, you remember the fire.

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, yes. I remember going up in the tower and observing the fire.

MCMAHON: The tower of the hospital?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: You could see it [the fire at St. Peter's] from there.

DIFRANCESCO: It was a clock tower.

MCMAHON: So you did your internship at ...

DIFRANCESCO: Providence.

MCMAHON: ... Providence, right there. You didn't travel very far, did you? [All laugh]

DIFRANCESCO: Well, no one traveled in those days. [Both laugh]

MCMAHON: You married the girl from the street behind [more laughter from all] and walked over to St. Peter's together. [All laugh]

CHRISTMANN: He did take the streetcar to college.

DIFRANCESCO: The what?

CHRISTMANN: You did take the streetcar to college.

DIFRANCESCO: I did. So did your mother. [Christmann laughs]

CHRISTMANN: Yeah.

MCMAHON: And what was your wife's maiden name?

DIFRANCESCO: Rosanelli.

CHRISTMANN: R-O-S-A-N-E-L-L-I.

MCMAHON: And her first name?

CHRISTMANN: Maria.

MCMAHON: And do you remember her address on Carroll Street?

DIFRANCESCO: Well, it was the 100 block. 132.

CHRISTMANN: She was living with her sister and her sister's husband.

DIFRANCESCO: They had no children.

CHRISTMANN: They had no children. She was living with them while she attended Trinity College.

MCMAHON: She went to Trinity? Okay. And, why don't you tell me about the schools that you went to.

DIFRANCESCO: Well, I started at Dent School, and Brent. And then in the fourth grade the whole class was transferred to Brent. Those names, incidentally, are interesting because they're the original mayors of Washington. Brent and Dent.

MCMAHON: I didn't know that. I know those names. Brent is still an active school.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, it is.

MCMAHON: A different building, though, than you went to.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: And Dent was purchased by the Capitol Hill Day School.

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, it was.

MCMAHON: Back in the 70s, I think, and it's still a school.

DIFRANCESCO: That was a beautiful building.

MCMAHON: It is a beautiful building.

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah.

MCMAHON: And right across from Garfield Park.

DIFRANCESCO: And Garfield playground.

MCMAHON: Right. Right. That's still there. [Interviewee laughs] Very busy. So you went to Dent. And then did they just build Brent? Is that why you moved to Brent?

DIFRANCESCO: No. We had the same principal at both schools. And Dent went up to the sixth grade, that's all. And Brent went up to the eighth grade. And that's the reason we moved over.

MCMAHON: So, you went there just because the different grades were in a different building.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, yes.

MCMAHON: Okay. And then I understand you went to Eastern High.

DIFRANCESCO: I did.

MCMAHON: Now, that was where it is now, on East Capitol Street.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes. Well, it was being built at that time.

MCMAHON: Must have been—I think it opened in 1917, so I guess they were building it when you were very young.

DIFRANCESCO: No.

MCMAHON: No.

DIFRANCESCO: No. Hine Junior High used to be called Eastern High. And the new Eastern was built in—well, I'll have to think about it. Right. It was built just before I started there. Because my brother had gone to—was there a Hart Junior High? I think it was called Hart Junior High. [Eastern High School moved to its present site at East Capitol and 17th Streets in March, 1923.]

MCMAHON: Hmm. I haven't heard that name.

DIFRANCESCO: No.

MCMAHON: Hart?

DIFRANCESCO: Hart later on was principal of Eastern High School. H-A-R-T.

MCMAHON: All right.

DIFRANCESCO: And the picture that she showed you ...

MCMAHON: This one.

DIFRANCESCO: No—yeah. All five of us were [at Eastern High] ...

MCMAHON: That's amazing.

DIFRANCESCO: I was a freshman and my brother was a senior.

MCMAHON: That's a close family. [Interviewee laughs]

CHRISTMANN: Well, and he also skipped two grades.

MCMAHON: Oh, I see. So, it wasn't—they weren't five children in four years.

DIFRANCESCO: No.

MCMAHON: Okay. That's right. And the newspaper mixed it [the photo caption] up. Oh, this is the school paper. [The Eastern High School newspaper article and photo being discussed is available [here](#).]

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah.

MCMAHON: That's very nice. Oh, they mixed up the twins? Oh, well. That happens.

DIFRANCESCO: No, the twins were always in the same grade. All the way through.

MCMAHON: Now, this is 1929, according to what's written on it.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

CHRISTMANN: That makes sense because he would have been a freshman.

MCMAHON: A freshman.

CHRISTMANN: Let's see, '16. He would have been about 13, 12 or 13. And if he skipped a couple of grades—yeah.

MCMAHON: You went to medical school at George Washington?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

MCMAHON: ... back to where it's actually working. There! You were talking about the school and the fact that all five of the DiFrancesco siblings were at Eastern High School at the same time ...

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah.

MCMAHON: ... because you skipped a couple of grades. So, you caught up with the others. And we have a copy of a 1929 *The Easterner* school newspaper that shows a picture of the five of them.

To go back to the block that you grew up on—I understand your mother stayed there.

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, yes.

MCMAHON: After your father died.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: Did the shoe shop close?

DIFRANCESCO: No. No. My brother eventually took it over, but ...

MCMAHON: He did. What was his name?

DIFRANCESCO: Francesco DiFrancesco.

MCMAHON: Oh, all right. [Both laugh]

CHRISTMANN: Frank, Frank.

MCMAHON: Frank. I see. Didn't go very far. Didn't change names too much.

CHRISTMANN: Oh, you haven't heard the half of it.

MCMAHON: So, he ran it. How long was it still operating?

DIFRANCESCO: Well, he ran it until the Army got a hold of him. We both served in the Army.

MCMAHON: Mm-hmm. In World War II.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: During World War II?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: Mm-hmm. So, that was the end of the shoe repair?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes. And my ...

MCMAHON: And your father had passed away by that time.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes. In 1938 he died and then my brother entered the service in 1942, I believe. So, he didn't have it very long. He learned by doing. He actually was a mechanic and he couldn't get work as a mechanic. So, he took over the leather business.

MCMAHON: Right. And, then, when you and he both went in the military, did your mother rent the place to another business?

DIFRANCESCO: No, he rented it. And then he went in the military. But, I think it was empty for a couple of years between the time that the draft guy got a hold of him.

MCMAHON: So, had you already ...

DIFRANCESCO: Oh.

MCMAHON: Go ahead.

DIFRANCESCO: You mentioned the jewelry store. Well, we rented it to a jeweler.

MCMAHON: All right.

DIFRANCESCO: And I don't know their name.

MCMAHON: Well, this picture from 1962, I can see—I can make out the word “jeweler”. I'm not sure I can read the name of it. Was it that same business?

DIFRANCESCO: After the building was vacant, my mother had it rented to the jeweler.

MCMAHON: So, that was probably for 20 years then.

DIFRANCESCO: No, no. It wasn't that long.

MCMAHON: No?

DIFRANCESCO: It was maybe ten years.

MCMAHON: All right. So, it was empty and then the jeweler came in. And it seems like the jeweler was still there in 1962.

DIFRANCESCO: Mmm.

MCMAHON: But all that time your mother continued living upstairs?

DIFRANCESCO: No. My mother moved back. And I don't know when she moved back.

MCMAHON: Where had she gone?

DIFRANCESCO: She had gone to 3356 Pennsylvania Avenue SE.

MCMAHON: I see.

CHRISTMANN: Was that the house at Texas Avenue?

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah.

CHRISTMANN: Across the Sousa Bridge, up the hill.

MCMAHON: So, did she move there after your father died?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: All of you children were grown by then?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: So, when you went to college and medical school, were you still living on B Street?

DIFRANCESCO: No, no. I lived at 3356.

MCMAHON: Okay. So, you moved there—had you moved there before your father died?

DIFRANCESCO: No, no.

MCMAHON: No.

DIFRANCESCO: After he died.

MCMAHON: After he died. And then you were going to school.

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah.

MCMAHON: Was that a streetcar ride, to go up to GW?

DIFRANCESCO: No, I took a bus. The bus came right in front of the house.

MCMAHON: Very convenient on Pennsylvania Avenue. It's still there. I take the bus [both laugh] from Pennsylvania Avenue sometimes. The 30s.

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah. That used to be the orange bus. Do you remember the color?

MCMAHON: No, no. I didn't take buses very much until recently, really. I was able to walk to work and I just didn't need buses. And then Metro came, of course, after I had been there a while.

DIFRANCESCO: Mm-hmm. What street did you live on?

MCMAHON: Actually I live on the other side of this square. When I first moved there, I lived at 115 C.

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, uh-huh.

MCMAHON: And, by that time, that was 1966, and by that time everything was gone. Those two blocks had been torn down. But they hadn't started building the [Library of Congress] Madison Building yet.

DIFRANCESCO: No.

MCMAHON: So, I remember the—I don't think it was really paved, but there was evidence of where Carroll Street had been.

DIFRANCESCO: Mm-hmm.

MCMAHON: And I can't remember if there were any street signs left over from Carroll Street. But it was obvious there were two blocks involved. And, so, I've always been interested in this.

DIFRANCESCO: And my wife lived on Carroll Street.

CHRISTMANN: Right. And tell her how you met.

DIFRANCESCO: Well, that was peculiar. There was a professor—I can't remember names. But he lived in Mrs. Deis's boarding house.

MCMAHON: Okay.

DIFRANCESCO: He was a professor at Catholic U. and I got to know him. And he says, "There's a charming young lady about your age. You ought to meet her." And I wasn't interested. But I was changing a tire in my garage one Sunday and my wife had been riding a horse at one of the public hostelries. And she had on long boots and a riding hat and—what do you call those?

CHRISTMANN: Breeches?

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah, those breeches. And her garage door was open and mine was open and we were right opposite each other like that. And she stopped and she said to me, “Professor so-and-so said I should meet you.” [All laugh]

MCMAHON: He had been talking to both of you about one another.

DIFRANCESCO: He taught at Trinity as well as at Catholic U.

MCMAHON: Of course. That makes sense. So he knew her not just from the neighborhood.

DIFRANCESCO: That’s right.

MCMAHON: And what year was that? How old were you by that time?

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, I was ... Gee.

CHRISTMANN: Twenty ...

DIFRANCESCO: That’s a question no one has asked me. [Laughs]

CHRISTMANN: 22 or 3?

DIFRANCESCO: I graduated at 23.

CHRISTMANN: I know that. And you got married at 25.

DIFRANCESCO: Mm.

CHRISTMANN: So it was somewhere in there.

MCMAHON: So you graduated from medical school ...

DIFRANCESCO: Medical school.

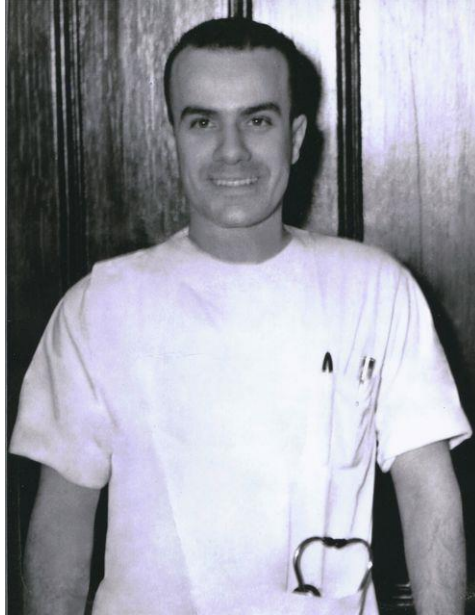
MCMAHON: ... at 23. That’s very impressive. Were you the youngest one in your ... [Sounds of paper rattling] Oh, handsome. No wonder she wanted to meet you. This is you in your hospital ...

DIFRANCESCO: That was in 1940.

MCMAHON: 1940. Is this when you were in school? Or an intern?

DIFRANCESCO: No, no, no. I was interning then. I’d just finished school.

CHRISTMANN: And that’s about the time I think you met mom. Right?



Vincent DiFrancesco, MD, 1940

DIFRANCESCO: Well, yeah, approximately.

MCMAHON: And then where did you live after you got married?

DIFRANCESCO: Well, I was in the Army four years and I lived in Virginia. In Williamsburg, Virginia.

MCMAHON: Oh.

DIFRANCESCO: And, then, of course, I went to Europe. When I got home, I'd saved enough money to put it on a house and, so, I renovated the house and started an office in the basement. And the basement was at street level. And that was at 2436 L'Enfant Square SE.

CHRISTMANN: It's across the Sousa Bridge.

MCMAHON: All right. I don't know—is L'Enfant Square still there?

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, yes, it's still there.

CHRISTMANN: It's right where Pennsylvania and Minnesota come together.

MCMAHON: All right. I know that intersection.

CHRISTMANN: Tucked back, behind the ...

MCMAHON: And that's where you grew up, Maria.

CHRISTMANN: That's where we grew up, yes.

[Additional information provided post-interview: After one year as an Internal Medicine Fellow at George Washington U Hospital, Dr. DiFrancesco was called into the Army in 1942. He subsequently practiced as a General Practitioner in the L'Enfant Square SE office for 38 years. The address was also his home, where his three daughters Rosa (born 1946), Pat (1949), and Maria (1951) grew up.]

MCMAHON: Right. So, you were already a medical doctor when you were in the Army.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: And you went to Europe.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: I understand you ended up becoming a POW [Prisoner of War].

DIFRANCESCO: No, not—I didn't do it on purpose. [Christmann laughs]

MCMAHON: Well, that wasn't very well phrased. [Interviewee and Christmann laugh]

DIFRANCESCO: But, I tell you another thing. I escaped.

MCMAHON: Did you?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: So, handsome and smart. [Interviewee and Christmann laugh]

DIFRANCESCO: And I brought three of the—I was a captain and I brought out three second lieutenants with me.

MCMAHON: And where was it that you were ...

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, that was in Germany.

MCMAHON: All right.

DIFRANCESCO: Actually, it was in Poland which had been annexed to Germany.

MCMAHON: Right. And, after you escaped, you did not get recaptured. You were able to get to freedom?

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, no, no, no, no. The Germans had made a sign saying that if you are caught escaping you will be shot. And I talked these three lieutenants into going with me. And we were picked up by the Russians the day we escaped. And that was in Poland.

MCMAHON: Mm-hmm. And what year was that?

DIFRANCESCO: Well, first of all I must tell you that we were very lucky. One of the lieutenants was named Wisniewski. He was Polish.

MCMAHON: He spoke—did he speak Polish?

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, yes. He spoke Russian, too. [Laughs]

MCMAHON: Very good. That wasn't luck. You picked well. [All laugh] Very good. And, so, you were—how long had you been imprisoned?

DIFRANCESCO: 44 days.

CHRISTMANN: More than that. 96 I think it was.

MCMAHON: I'm going to stop this for the [telephone]. [Interrupted by telephone.]

We're back and we have just been talking about Dr. DiFrancesco's time as a prisoner of war in Poland.

DIFRANCESCO: She [Maria] disputes the time.

MCMAHON: You think it was longer.

DIFRANCESCO: I was 44 days.

CHRISTMANN: Well, we have it from November 'til January.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes. And how many days is that? 44 days. [Interviewer and Christmann laugh]

MCMAHON: Okay. I'm not going to argue with him. [All laugh] Your mother still owned the place on B Street.

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah. And she moved back eventually.

MCMAHON: Because, Maria, you told me that you remembered going there as a child ...

CHRISTMANN: Yes.

MCMAHON: ... when there were parades.

CHRISTMANN: Parades, correct.

MCMAHON: And what did the parade—I'm a little puzzled by that because today parades don't start at the top of the hill.

CHRISTMANN: That's right.

MCMAHON: But they did back then?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, yes. They ...

CHRISTMANN: They're the presidential parade.

MCMAHON: The inauguration?

CHRISTMANN: I mean inauguration. Yeah.

MCMAHON: Were they staging areas?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, they were.

CHRISTMANN: Oh, okay, I don't recall that.

DIFRANCESCO: Our street was a staging area.

MCMAHON: I see. Well, that was great.

CHRISTMANN: Yeah.

MCMAHON: So, you got to see them getting started and—out of your grandmother's window?

CHRISTMANN: Didn't she have a little balcony? Did she have a little balcony?

DIFRANCESCO: A big balcony.

CHRISTMANN: Balcony.

MCMAHON: [Sound of paper rattling] I'm looking. Oh, it's hard to tell but I guess I can see railings. Is that it?

CHRISTMANN: I'm not sure.

DIFRANCESCO: That's it.

MCMAHON: So you were outdoors.

CHRISTMANN: I was very small so I don't recall a lot. But I do recall standing there and watching horses and ...

MCMAHON: Bands?

CHRISTMANN: ... and bands. Yeah, mm-hmm.

MCMAHON: And did they go down Independence then? When did it start being called Independence?

DIFRANCESCO: I don't know.

MCMAHON: I've been told it maybe was around the time of the war.

DIFRANCESCO: They changed Constitution and Independence at the same time.

MCMAHON: Right.

DIFRANCESCO: But I couldn't tell you what year.

MCMAHON: And somebody just told me, and I looked it up on a map, that across the river it's still B Street.

DIFRANCESCO: Mm.

MCMAHON: But I never even realized that. I knew it had been B Street on the west side of the river.

DIFRANCESCO: Mm.

MCMAHON: And frequently we have people who mention it, call it B Street.

DIFRANCESCO: Mm.

MCMAHON: So, but I don't know. I never knew for sure when it changed. But by the time you [Maria] were growing up, it was Independence.

CHRISTMANN: Mm-hmm.

MCMAHON: And your grandmother still lived there. So, did she live there—did she have to sell to Congress?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: Was that difficult? Do you remember what she went through?

DIFRANCESCO: Well, yes, it was difficult because the Congress didn't appropriate enough money and so she contested it. Got a lawyer and he got the amount increased. Not very much, but for an old widow with no money it was welcome.

MCMAHON: Yes. And did she still own the other two houses that your father had owned?

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, yes, yes. One of them was around the corner on First Street.

MCMAHON: On the same square?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes. And it became later on the Republican Committee building.

MCMAHON: Oh, I know where that is. Yes. So, it's not on the same square ...

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, it's the same ...

MCMAHON: That block is still there.

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah. No, no, you're wrong. It was right around the corner.

MCMAHON: All right.

DIFRANCESCO: And then after that block was built up, they moved it one block down.

MCMAHON: I see. Okay, okay. I didn't realize that. I remember when they were building the current Republican club.

DIFRANCESCO: Uh-huh.

MCMAHON: And I didn't realize they had previously had one on your block. And where was the third house?

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, the third house—we didn't live in the third house. The third house was a commercial property that my father bought.

MCMAHON: On that block?

DIFRANCESCO: No. In Northwest.

MCMAHON: Okay, okay. So, your mother had two buildings that she was selling to Congress.

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah. No. The Republican—a representative bought her second house on First Street. And he sold it to Congress.

MCMAHON: All right. So, by the time the Congress wanted to buy that block and tear it down, she just owned 137.

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah. That's right.

MCMAHON: Okay, okay. And she was still living in it.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, she had gone back. We had bought a modern house on Pennsylvania Avenue and she claimed she never liked it.

MCMAHON: [Laughs] She was a city girl.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes. [Laughs]

MCMAHON: So, she went back and lived there by herself?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: I can understand that. [Laughs] Tell me, you mentioned earlier that you remember going in the Library of Congress a lot.

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, yeah.

MCMAHON: Did you study there?

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, yes. Many an evening.

MCMAHON: When you were in grade school or

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, no, no.

MCMAHON: ... when you were older?

DIFRANCESCO: When I was in medical school.

MCMAHON: I see. Okay. Did children go in there at all earlier, when you were young?

DIFRANCESCO: Well, no. They wouldn't allow the children in the Reading Room back then. You had to have a reason if you were underage.

MCMAHON: That makes sense.

DIFRANCESCO: Uh-huh.

MCMAHON: What about the Capitol? Sometimes people tell us they played in the Capitol when they were young.

DIFRANCESCO: Well, I doubt that. They played in the Capitol grounds.

MCMAHON: Mm-hmm. You didn't go inside the building much.

DIFRANCESCO: No, no.

MCMAHON: Did you go sledding on the grounds?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: They allowed that back then.

DIFRANCESCO: No, you had to sneak it. [All laugh]

MCMAHON: Even then you had to avoid the police.

CHRISTMANN: Now, one thing you've neglected to mention was your father fixed a lot of congressmen's shoes and then you were the delivery boy.

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah. I was.

CHRISTMANN: So, you would bring the shoes over to them and ...

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah.

MCMAHON: I notice that's what it says on the blotter. It says "Work called for and delivered."

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: So, you did that regularly.

DIFRANCESCO: Well, most of them would come to the business and pick them up.

MCMAHON: They would.

DIFRANCESCO: Or they would have a secretary do it.

MCMAHON: Right, right. But sometimes you would deliver.

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, yes.

MCMAHON: And I don't suppose there was any problem of just going inside the building.

DIFRANCESCO: No, no. There was a guard there all the time, but you could just walk in. He might ask you where were you going and you'd tell him the room number of the congressman.

MCMAHON: Mm-hmm.

DIFRANCESCO: But they'd never stop you.

MCMAHON: Yeah. Well, you had shoes in your hand. [All laugh] Do you remember any particular congressmen that were customers?

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, there were so many. But, there, again, they didn't come in. They sent their secretaries.

MCMAHON: Right, right. You didn't usually see the member.

DIFRANCESCO: No, no.

MCMAHON: Mm-hmm.

DIFRANCESCO: But I got to know a number of them, but it's been so long I've forgotten their names. I remember the kids in my school who were in my school, who were in my class, whose fathers were congressmen.

MCMAHON: So, were your friends all right in the—[Clears throat] excuse me—right in the immediate neighborhood?

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, yes. Yeah.

MCMAHON: And these were people that you went to Dent and Brent with?

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah.

MCMAHON: Mm-hmm. What was St. Peter's like back then?

DIFRANCESCO: Well, I would say since I was very young, from six to ten, the priests were very strict. You had no excuses for being late or missing Mass. And they ran a tight ship. [Laughs]

MCMAHON: Was it a large congregation? Were the Masses crowded?

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, yes, yes. It was very large. I have no idea how many, but all the pews were filled.

MCMAHON: Do you remember—lost it. Lost my thought. Were you an altar boy?

DIFRANCESCO: No. Never.

MCMAHON: Some people have referred to St. Peter's as an Irish parish. Do you remember? Were there very many Italians?

DIFRANCESCO: No, very few Italians, but a lot of Irish. Yeah. And, of course, you know Carroll Street was named after the bishop.

MCMAHON: I didn't know that.

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah. I don't know if he was the first bishop or not. Do you remember?

CHRISTMANN: No.

MCMAHON: There was a Daniel Carroll who donated the land for St. Peter's Church.

DIFRANCESCO: Uh-huh.

MCMAHON: And he was a landowner in the Capitol Hill area.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, yes.

MCMAHON: It may have been named for—it wasn't named for him?

DIFRANCESCO: It was ...

MCMAHON: The Carrolls had a lot of relatives.

DIFRANCESCO: It was named after the Carroll family, yes.

MCMAHON: Yes, yeah. Yeah, that's how it's spelled.

DIFRANCESCO: Mm-hmm.

CHRISTMANN: Is that the same as the ones from southern Maryland?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: Yes.

CHRISTMANN: That's what I thought, yes.

MCMAHON: They were all—That's all—That's Charles Carroll of Carrollton was ...

CHRISTMANN: That's where Catholicism, I think, began in Maryland, yeah.

MCMAHON: And, at the time when you were growing up, Washington was part of the Baltimore diocese.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, it was.

CHRISTMANN: I didn't know that.

MCMAHON: Washington Diocese wasn't created, I think, until '48. [The Washington diocese was created in 1939.] So, long after you were growing up. Were there grocery stores right there in your block?

DIFRANCESCO: We had the Sanitary Grocery Store in our block, but around the corner. And ...

MCMAHON: On First or on Second?

DIFRANCESCO: Second.

MCMAHON: Okay.

DIFRANCESCO: And then there was, in your block, the C Street block, on the corner was a Sanitary which later became Safeway.

MCMAHON: Really? Where on that block? On the part that got torn down?

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

TAPE 2/ SIDE 1

MCMAHON: Actually recording. There we go! You were saying there was a Sanitary Grocery Store.

DIFRANCESCO: And an A & P.

MCMAHON: And an A & P?

DIFRANCESCO: A & P was in our block. And Sanitary was in your block.

MCMAHON: On C Street.

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah.

MCMAHON: Oh. Okay. First and Second Streets, were they mostly residences?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: And C also?

DIFRANCESCO: Residences.

MCMAHON: And all of Carroll, I suppose, on both sides.

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah.

MCMAHON: So, B Street was the main commercial street.

DIFRANCESCO: It was the only commercial.

MCMAHON: Okay.

DIFRANCESCO: And, then, in the next block, Pennsylvania was all commercial.

MCMAHON: Yes. I understand Trover Bookstore, which I remember as being in the 200 block, I understand started in the 100 block.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, it did.

MCMAHON: Do you remember that?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes. I knew the owner. He was a bootlegger. [All laugh]

MCMAHON: Oh, really. Do tell. So, was that going on in the store?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes. [More laughter]

MCMAHON: Now I never heard that before.

DIFRANCESCO: His name was Verdi, V-E-R-D-I. And the [bookstore] name came from Trow, who was half owner, and Ver, from Verdi. They each took half of their name.

MCMAHON: Uh-huh. Was that there all the time you remember it? I don't know how old that business is.

DIFRANCESCO: Well, it was a new business, new business. And it wasn't there when I was a kid, but when I was in high school it was there.

MCMAHON: Okay. That's very interesting. I didn't know how long it had been there. It closed a year or two ago.

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah.

MCMAHON: And people miss it. But bookstores are hard to keep in business these days. And I always had heard that that had moved. Some of the other restaurants I've heard about—now, Mike Palm's was there at some point in the 100 block.

DIFRANCESCO: Not when I lived there.

MCMAHON: No.

DIFRANCESCO: No.

MCMAHON: No. I think he had been a football player, so I suppose it didn't start until the 50s, maybe. And then moved a block. Have you ever heard the term "Ptomaine Row"?

DIFRANCESCO: [Laughs] Yes.

MCMAHON: Did they call it that when you were a kid?

DIFRANCESCO: Well, that was dubbed by the Congress, you know, because they had to go to that block to eat.

MCMAHON: Mm-hmm.

DIFRANCESCO: And they called it Ptomaine Row. [Laughs]

MCMAHON: Even back when you were a child?

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, yes.

MCMAHON: Oh, I didn't know that name went back that far. I knew that people had called it that in the 50s or 60s, but ... [Christmann laughs] But, they really were decent restaurants.

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, yes.

MCMAHON: I mean, they were simple places, weren't they?

DIFRANCESCO: None of them got in trouble with the health laws.

MCMAHON: Yeah. I didn't think they were really dangerous. So, did your mother do her grocery shopping right there? Or did she go to Eastern Market? Or ...

DIFRANCESCO: No. We didn't go to Eastern Market, but Dr. Moffitt and his son and myself, we often went to the Market.

MCMAHON: To shop?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: What kinds of things did you get there?

DIFRANCESCO: Well, I didn't get anything. I was just to help him carry. Meat—I remember meat. Well, part of the Eastern Market was a grocery store and then the rest of it was an open market.

MCMAHON: Do you remember live chickens? [Interviewee laughs] People talk about that.

CHRISTMANN: He has a story to tell you. [Laughs]

DIFRANCESCO: I'd say I've killed at least two dozen live chickens for my mother. And I would chop their heads off.

MCMAHON: Who would? You would?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes. I would get a bushel basket and stick the chicken under the basket and then I'd sit on it and stick his head out and chop his head.

MCMAHON: Now was this chickens you had bought at Eastern Market?

DIFRANCESCO: No, we never bought it ourselves. And we went to the Florida Avenue market.

MCMAHON: Okay.

DIFRANCESCO: But, see, the bushel basket is important because after the chicken loses his head it flops for ten minutes and blood goes all over, all over the place. That way you confined the bleeding to the basket.

MCMAHON: So, you kind of figured out how to do this. [All laugh] Did you do that often?

DIFRANCESCO: Well, my mother would never buy a dressed chicken. It had to be alive for her to buy. She always said some of these chickens here that you buy died of a disease. [Laughs]

MCMAHON: She wanted to see it alive. [Interviewee laughs] So, you brought it home alive.

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, yes.

MCMAHON: And then used the bushel basket, what, out in the back yard?

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah, yes.

MCMAHON: All right. You mentioned that when you met your wife you were changing a tire.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: So, did you always have a car? Did your family have a car?

DIFRANCESCO: No. We bought our first car in 1927 and ...

MCMAHON: What was it?

DIFRANCESCO: Studebaker.

MCMAHON: Okay.

DIFRANCESCO: And, then, my father bought a Ford for my brother, who was of age at that time.

MCMAHON: And you had a garage?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes. Our garage used to be a horse stable.

MCMAHON: Oh.

DIFRANCESCO: And we still had two stalls in the garage.

MCMAHON: Had you ever had horses?

DIFRANCESCO: No.

MCMAHON: That was before your time.

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah.

MCMAHON: Do you have any idea when that house and stable were built?

DIFRANCESCO: Well, I imagine they were built together.

MCMAHON: Yeah.

DIFRANCESCO: We always said it was over a hundred years old.

MCMAHON: Even when you were there?

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah.

MCMAHON: Well, that would be one of the very early buildings then.

DIFRANCESCO: Well, the city grew up around the Capitol, you know, and the Library of Congress.

MCMAHON: The library wasn't built until, I think, around 1898. I should know that, but ...

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, my father used to tell me that when he moved to B Street, the building hadn't been finished.

MCMAHON: Okay. That's just about right.

DIFRANCESCO: And he lived there around 1902.

MCMAHON: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. That makes sense. So, you know, we don't usually get to interview people who were around that long ago. What about drugstores? I've heard stories about—one of the people we interviewed had been the son of a pharmacist. And he talked a lot about how the drugstore at that time was kind of a gathering place in the community.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: Did you have a drugstore on your block?

DIFRANCESCO: At the end of the block, on Second Street. It was Dr. Sprucebank who had a pharmacy there. And there was later on another pharmacy, but it wasn't very active. In the middle of the block. And I always used to say that's the second bootlegger. [He and Christmann laugh]

MCMAHON: So, you're remembering a lot about the Prohibition Era. Tell me more about it.

DIFRANCESCO: Well, I was too young to be drinking, but there were two characters who would sell whiskey to the congressmen. One of them was called the man with the green gloves, and the other one, I don't know if he had a name or not. But, he would hide the whiskey in the Capitol grounds.

MCMAHON: Which one?

DIFRANCESCO: Well, the part opposite the Library of Congress. There was always something growing. And he would hide the whiskey. He would already have one bottle in his pocket. He sold that and then he'd go back and he'd get another one.

MCMAHON: So, he kept a supply in the bushes.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes. [Interviewer laughs]

MCMAHON: I've heard about somebody they called the man in the green hat. Is that different?

DIFRANCESCO: I don't know.

CHRISTMANN: Well, you said green gloves.

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah.

CHRISTMANN: Green hat or green gloves?

DIFRANCESCO: Green gloves.

CHRISTMANN: Green gloves. Mm.

MCMAHON: Okay. That's interesting. Apparently, there were a lot of people doing a lot of different things ...

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, yeah

MCMAHON: ... in that time.

DIFRANCESCO: There was a classmate of mine, a Jewish family in the block just beyond your block on D Street, and her father was a bootlegger. And everybody knew that.

MCMAHON: Everybody knew who was a bootlegger, where you could buy ...

DIFRANCESCO: Well, there must have been more than one. [Laughs]

MCMAHON: Right, right.

DIFRANCESCO: After all, you know, in those days, a bootlegger couldn't find a job, you know. So that's what they did. And I remember your sister-in-law lived in a house on D Street that blew up from the fumes.

CHRISTMANN: My sister-in-law? You mean my mother's sister-in-law?

DIFRANCESCO: No, I mean Grace.

CHRISTMANN: My mother's sister.

DIFRANCESCO: No, not your mother. My wife's sister.

CHRISTMANN: That's what I'm saying. You're telling me it was my sister-in-law.

DIFRANCESCO: Ah.

CHRISTMANN: You mean your wife's sister. I look like my mother.

MCMAHON: Oh. When did it blow up from the fumes?

DIFRANCESCO: Well, I think the whole boiler blew up, yeah, from some of the fumes.

MCMAHON: When was that?

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, roughly, that would be about 1929.

MCMAHON: I've never heard that story. How much blew up?

DIFRANCESCO: Well, apparently this bootlegger was a novice and he didn't blow away the fumes. And the fumes ... The house didn't disappear. The house was still there, but she lived in that house when it blew up. [Laughs]

MCMAHON: She was there when it blew up?

DIFRANCESCO: I don't know. Because I only knew her when she lived on Carroll Street.

MCMAHON: Mm-hmm. Oh, I see. Okay. When your wife was still living with her and her husband.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: But she had moved to Carroll because the house she lived in ...

DIFRANCESCO: I'm not sure why.

MCMAHON: Oh.

DIFRANCESCO: I do know this, that they bought the house on Carroll Street.

MCMAHON: Now, one of the people—we've interviewed a couple of people who were part of the Donohoe family.

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, yes.

MCMAHON: Did you know them?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, I knew them. They had a mansion on Second Street and they owned, I think, two or three lots together and they built this mansion.

MCMAHON: Oh. Facing your block? Right.

DIFRANCESCO: No, facing the side of our block.

MCMAHON: Right. Yes, that's still there. It's used by a nonprofit organization now. [Correction: this statement actually refers to 224 Second Street SE, in 2014 the location of the National Indian Gaming Association. The Donohoe home at 220 Second Street SE was replaced by an apartment building at some point.]

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, uh-huh.

MCMAHON: But it is there. It's a very interesting looking building. And, then, I understand they had a car dealership around the corner.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, they did. They sold Fords.

MCMAHON: Mm-hmm. And a real estate office, maybe on the other side of Pennsylvania.

DIFRANCESCO: Well, I'm not sure where their office was. Their real estate was not in the same building as the automobile place.

MCMAHON: No. That's my understanding is it was on the other side, probably where one of the other library buildings is now.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, yes.

MCMAHON: Mm-hmm. Did you—I understand you have seen this book *301 East Capitol* [by Mary Z. Gray].

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, yes. I read it.

MCMAHON: And did you know that family at all?

DIFRANCESCO: Zurhorst.

MCMAHON: Mm-hmm.

DIFRANCESCO: I didn't know them, but I knew the name and I knew they lived in the same building.

MCMAHON: Mm-hmm. Mary is a friend of mine.

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, she is.

MCMAHON: I've gotten to know her. That's what started her writing this book, was we wanted to interview her. And she decided she would write a book instead.

DIFRANCESCO: Ah.

MCMAHON: And she did it! And she lives out here in Silver Spring, too.

CHRISTMANN: Oh.

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah, I remember the columns.

MCMAHON: Yes. It's still there. That's a modern picture [of 301 East Capitol on the cover of the book]. It's owned by the Folger Library now.

DIFRANCESCO: Oh.

MCMAHON: They use it for offices. Have you thought of any—are there any other topics that you've talked about while you were preparing for this? Have I missed ...

DIFRANCESCO: I didn't prepare for it. [All laugh]

MCMAHON: You didn't. You just remember these things all the time, huh?

DIFRANCESCO: I have a good memory.

MCMAHON: You do.

DIFRANCESCO: I remember when my father brought me to kindergarten and my mother didn't speak English at that time. So, he had to bring me to school.

MCMAHON: What do you remember from it? Was that at Dent?

DIFRANCESCO: Dent, yeah.

MCMAHON: So, they did have kindergarten ...

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, yes.

MCMAHON: ... at that point.

DIFRANCESCO: Uh-huh. I attended the kindergarten. They had two teachers at the same time.

MCMAHON: That's interesting. What do you remember from Eastern High? Did you have a good experience at Eastern High School?

DIFRANCESCO: Well, I was 12 years old when I ...

MCMAHON: You were very young.

DIFRANCESCO: ... when I went to Eastern and I joined the high school cadets. And I could barely carry the rifle. [Both laugh]

MCMAHON: Yeah. This picture from Eastern, you do look very small. [Christmann laughs]

DIFRANCESCO: I was small.

MCMAHON: So, was it harder to be part of a high school crowd because you were young?

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, no, no. We were all young. I remember one fellow my age, but most of them were 13, 14 years old.

MCMAHON: Yes, yes. That would be more typical for high school.

DIFRANCESCO: Mm.

MCMAHON: But you never had any interest—did your father encourage you to get an education rather than follow ...

DIFRANCESCO: No, well.

MCMAHON: ... him into the shoe repair.

DIFRANCESCO: No. He didn't discourage me at all. Matter of fact, this fellow who was living in our block—I wish I could remember his name—he got me started. He said you don't have to take a full course the first semester. See if you like it and, then, if you like it, you can continue.

MCMAHON: At GW.

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah. And GW at that time was nothing but a row—maybe 20 row houses. And you'd have classes in an old home and it was wooden steps going upstairs. And gradually I saw it get to be a large institution.

MCMAHON: Was it in the same location then that it is now?

DIFRANCESCO: Well, see, the medical school was across from the church and that would be 14th Street, whereas these old houses were in the 20th block of G Street.

MCMAHON: 14th and G are you saying?

DIFRANCESCO: No. 20th and G.

MCMAHON: 20th and G. Okay.

DIFRANCESCO: And the medical school was in the—the address was 1335 H Street NW.

MCMAHON: Is that near New York Avenue?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes. There was a church between us and New York Avenue.

MCMAHON: Okay. Was that called GW at the time?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, it was, but originally it was Columbian College.

MCMAHON: I remember hearing that.

DIFRANCESCO: Uh-huh.

MCMAHON: Yes. But I didn't know when, what time period that was.

DIFRANCESCO: No. And I don't know when it changed.

MCMAHON: Okay. But it was GW when you went there.

DIFRANCESCO: It was GW, yeah. [The GWU website, <http://columbian.gwu.edu/aboutus/history>, says Columbian College became Columbian University, then changed to George Washington in 1904.]

MCMAHON: Mm-hmm. Very good.

CHRISTMANN: I found a picture of the house on Carroll Street.

MCMAHON: Oh, wonderful! Oh. I can get to these and just download it. That's great. What was the—was this regular brick on Carroll Street?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, in brick. And they were—each house was only 15 feet ...

MCMAHON: Wide?

DIFRANCESCO: ... across. Wide.

MCMAHON: They were little. Was it a narrow street?

DIFRANCESCO: Very narrow.

MCMAHON: Uh-huh. I assumed it was. There's a number of those one block streets.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, yes.

MCMAHON: And they're always very narrow. You're right, very close to your neighbors across the street.

DIFRANCESCO: But, they were nice homes, though. They were—yes.

MCMAHON: And this is your wife's ... where she grew up.

CHRISTMANN: Where she lived with ... Well, not grew up.

MCMAHON: Okay. Right.

CHRISTMANN: She grew up in Connecticut. But my Aunt Grace Rosanelli, my mother's sister, was married to Jack [Giacomo "Jack" Lombardi].

MCMAHON: Okay.

CHRISTMANN: My Uncle Jack. And they lived here. And the other sisters came down from Connecticut and lived with them, and my mother in particular, while she went to Trinity.

MCMAHON: Very good.

CHRISTMANN: I was looking for the original of that paper from Eastern High School. We have the original somewhere, but I couldn't find it. That's just a copy.

MCMAHON: Well, if you find that—can you scan?

CHRISTMANN: Mmm. I can get my husband to do it, yeah.

MCMAHON: Because I think that would be interesting to have. And, if he can ...

CHRISTMANN: Cut out the—yeah.

MCMAHON: ...zero in on that part.

CHRISTMANN: Mm-hmm.

DIFRANCESCO: Now, I want to tell you Dr. Moffitt's name. H. W.—no, H. Watson Moffitt.

MCMAHON: And that's M-O-F-F-A-T-T?

CHRISTMANN: E-T-T.

DIFRANCESCO: I-T-T.

CHRISTMANN: I-T-T? Oh, it was I-T-T.

MCMAHON: Oh, okay. And they lived right on B Street.

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah. They lived at 127 and we lived at 137.

MCMAHON: Okay. Do you have any stories from your time at Providence Hospital?

DIFRANCESCO: I do, but I don't want to tell you.

MCMAHON: Oh. [Both laugh]

CHRISTMANN: I found the son, the one that was his childhood friend. It was M-O-F-F-I-T-T.

MCMAHON: All right.

DIFRANCESCO: Get her mom's picture.

CHRISTMANN: Of what?

DIFRANCESCO: Her picture.

CHRISTMANN: Well, she has a wedding picture here.

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah, but she doesn't have the picture I carried with me during the war.

CHRISTMANN: I'm not sure which one that was.

DIFRANCESCO: It's right next to my bed.

CHRISTMANN: Oh, that one.

MCMAHON: So, this is you in your wedding picture.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes. And my mother.

MCMAHON: And you're in uniform.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes. And my wife.

MCMAHON: This is your mother?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: And is that the church in the background? Or was that at the house?

DIFRANCESCO: I'm sure that was ...

CHRISTMANN: I think it was the church.

DIFRANCESCO: ... right after the wedding.

CHRISTMANN: Yeah.

MCMAHON: Was it in the winter?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

CHRISTMANN: February.

MCMAHON: All right. Mine was in February, too. [All laugh] Oh, isn't she pretty. This you carried during the war?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: Beautiful.

DIFRANCESCO: And she was always the most, the best looking of all the, you know, officers' wives.

MCMAHON: And she rode horses.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: That wasn't in the neighborhood, was it?

DIFRANCESCO: Oh, no. That was in Potomac Park.

MCMAHON: Ah, okay. Well, I'm picturing this encounter in the alley with ...

DIFRANCESCO: She ...

MCMAHON: ... the woman in boots. [Interviewee laughs]

DIFRANCESCO: She rode horses and I rode in tanks. [Interviewer laughs]

CHRISTMANN: Well, you also used to say when you met her she smelled like a horse and you looked like a grease monkey, [All laugh] because you were changing a tire.

MCMAHON: And it was love at first sight.

Well, this has been delightful. Unless you have thought of some other topics that we should cover.

CHRISTMANN: I learned a few things today. [Laughs]

MCMAHON: Did you? About the bootleggers?

CHRISTMANN: Yes.

MCMAHON: So, thank you very much. I appreciate ...

DIFRANCESCO: Why, you're welcome. I just wish my memory was better.

MCMAHON: Oh, I think it's amazing. I mean we are talking about things that happened 80 years ago and more.

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah.

MCMAHON: So, I think this is—I have been very excited about this because I really have always thought it was very interesting what happened in that whole block.

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah.

MCMAHON: And now we have a lot more information from a lot longer ago than we've ever had before.

DIFRANCESCO: You know there was twelve restaurants in that block. Twelve.

MCMAHON: Is that the number?

END OF TAPE 2/SIDE 1

TAPE 2/SIDE 2

MCMAHON: I can start. Okay. You were saying there were 12 restaurants.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: And you were going to name some of them.

DIFRANCESCO: Well, Betty Alden Inn and The Ugly Duckling. They were first class restaurants. The rest of them were, I shouldn't say joints, but people went in there hurriedly to get something to eat. They were ordinary restaurants. [The 1932 Boyd's District of Columbia Directory shows the Betty Alden Inn at 125 B Street SE; in 1936, a restaurant was still at that location but was not named. The 1956 Directory lists "furnished rooms" with the name "Alden Betty Inn" at 109–113 First Street NE.]

MCMAHON: Kind of lunch counter type places?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes, some of them were.

MCMAHON: Mm-hmm. Did they have carryouts back then?

DIFRANCESCO: If they did, I never ran across one.

MCMAHON: Mm-hmm.

DIFRANCESCO: I remember, though, my sixth grade teacher liked The Ugly Duckling and she would send me to get her lunch in a paper bag. [Both laugh]

MCMAHON: Did you go home for lunch when you were in school?

DIFRANCESCO: Yes. we had ...

MCMAHON: Okay. So, you were going to that block anyway.

DIFRANCESCO: Yeah.

MCMAHON: And then you would bring her back some lunch.

DIFRANCESCO: I also had a bicycle. [Post-interview information: he had a red Indian bike, and his friend Mel Moffitt had a Rollfast.]

MCMAHON: Oh.

DIFRANCESCO: So, that wasn't any problem.

MCMAHON: That was a quick trip.

DIFRANCESCO: Yes.

MCMAHON: Mm-hmm. Well, thank you again. And, Maria, thank you for arranging all this.

CHRISTMANN: Sure.

MCMAHON: I'm going to shut off the recorder now.

END OF INTERVIEW