



Aida Catania

Interview

1991

Length: 1 hour, 34 minutes and 30 seconds

[*The interviewer who begins the discussion is not introduced.*] The interviewer notes that she is at the Bradford Public Library speaking with Aida Catania. Also present are Joe Saint and Irene Moriarty. They will begin the interview asking Aida a little bit about her background, with Joe asking the questions. It was Aida's dad who came first to New York and he worked as a cook. He lived in France for 13 years and then he went home to visit his mother, and they picked him up to serve in the army for 18 months which bothered him quite a bit. From there he came to New York City (and worked as a soup chef). He didn't like it because it was too rough, so he moved to Toronto to work at the King Edward as a cook. Then he met a family by the name McMurtry* and he worked for them in the butcher's store. He started up a butcher business on Elm Street in Toronto.

Aida's uncle (her mother's brother) came from Italy, this would be in 1904. Her uncle was Mr. Cavello* (Charlie); she imagines a lot of people knew him and he came from Italy in 1905. He didn't like looking after himself so he sent for Aida's mother who was just 20 and she came over. Aida's mother met her husband (Aida's father) and they got married in 1906 in Toronto at St. Pat's Church on McCaw Street. They had the butcher store for a while and then he and her mother's cousin bought a farm on Bathurst Street where the Catantias lived. Her mother's cousin went back to the old country and her dad took over. In 1910 they moved to the farm. In March, 1911 her grandparents came over for a visit (her mother's mother and father). On the boat there was a Polish boy and a Jewish boy who were fighting, and one had accidentally kicked her grandfather in the stomach. 10 days after he got to Canada he died. Her grandmother stayed with her mother and never went back to the old country. They had a





brother there and he took over the properties in the old country. Nothing was ever done about that incident on the boat. At that time, if you were sick they would put you in quarantine and you might get sent back, but he wanted to see her mother so he didn't complain; it must have ruptured a valve.

They lived there until 1918. Then they came to Bradford and lived where LeBlancs* live now; they rented that place. But they had bought the house where James used to live which used to belong to the Skinners. It was 49 acres with the house on Church Street; (*they are looking at a map*) the Olmans* live there now.

Aida's mother's maiden name was Cavello. Her mother's brother was Charlie Cavello, but his real name was Secondo which means "second". After he got married he went to Vancouver and then he came back to Bradford. He used to have a shoe store and make harnesses. Bruno is an artist, and Mr. Cavello's son. They lived on John Street where the IGA is. The first store that they had was where Harvey Currie* had his seed store. Corrigan bought it from him and he bought the E.P. Snow place. Mr. Currie (Harvey Currie's father) built the barn down on the farm for them. They sold that to Catanias and then they moved to Bradford. Mr. Currie also built the barn here (in Bradford), and they had the house on Church Street. Aida's father didn't like the animals being too far away from the house so Mr. Currie built them the house in 1921 (on Holland Street). Aida thinks the barn was built in 1920 for \$3000, and that was quite a bit of money back then; that was a beautiful house in the 20's. George McDonald built the foundation in the barn and the stones came from the hill. On the 24th of May the town would ask if her dad would like to blast some dynamite. So her dad would put dynamite under the stones and he would bring them down to the lane. George would pay \$2 a load for those stones to use when he was building foundations. Most of the older houses had stone and cement foundation.

They used to sled down the hill. Her brother used to make a bob sled. They would start at the public school and at noon hour no body better come down (they called it "Lover's Lane"). You'd start up at the school and you would end up at Webb's Corner*. Aida doesn't think anybody walked up that street at noon hour because it wasn't safe. There weren't that many cars,





although sometimes you'd end up in the main street. Aida's brother was named August, but her grandmother used to call him Gusto. There were Bob, Margie*, and Dorothy Williamson, and Bob used to call August Goosey-Goosey. Poor August would be so embarrassed. One day they were coming up that street and right in front of Fred Cook's mother's house, August gave Bob a good punch and knocked him out.

Her brother August was born in Toronto and Aida was born on the farm on Bathurst Street. Her brother Frank was born on the farm and her sisters Laura and Lena were all born on the farm. Leo was born in the house on Holland Street. There were six in the family: Frank, Aida, Laura, Lena, August, and Leo. Most of the families had six children in those days. August is retired and he lives in Toronto. Frank is retired and lives in Lefroy and he spends 6 months there and 6 months in Cape Coral. He married Jenny... (*last name is inaudible*). August married Eleanor Hamilton. Frank has 3 girls: Anne who married Bart Vanderdunk*, Betty-Lynn, and Lindy-Lou. Aida married Jim Catania and they have 3 boys and 1 girl: Vincent who is a mechanical engineer and he lives in Burlington, Laurene who is a high school teacher and graduated from the University of Toronto. Laurene is teaching an alternative school; last year she had 27 students and 24 graduated. It is getting a little bit much; she teaches grade 12 and life skills. She's teaching all days now, not just half days. If they don't show up, Laurene has to report it. Laurene has been teaching for about 3 years and it is taking lots of people off the street and welfare. Laurene has 2 adopted children: Mark, Jane, and Kelly. Mark is 21 but Jane and Kelly are still going to school. Vincent has 2 boys and a girl, 2 are at the University of London and the oldest (Jeffery) is a Computer Engineer. Jeffery won the Canada scholarship of \$5000. Jimmy and Jamie are going to the University of Western Ontario. Jamie is taking up Mechanical Engineering. Vincent's wife is a nurse and her name is Mary Sue... (*last name is inaudible*) Laurene's husband is Robert Decker* who is a Kitchener boy. He graduated from the University of Guelph and he works in Ottawa for Farm Credit. Phillip is a doctor who graduated from Western Ontario. He's specializes in sports medicine in Sault St. Marie. He has 3 girls: Amy, Natalie, and Lauren. His wife Peggy is a physiotherapist. She is a graduate of Western and she's a Newmarket girl. Dennis* is an Air-Traffic controller in Sault St. Marie. He has a boy and a girl:





Alison and Joel. To summarize, Aida's four children are Vincent, Phillip, Dennis, and Laurene (Laurie).

The interviewers would like to go back and speak about Aida's sisters. Laura married ... (name is inaudible) he was a doctor and he graduated from the University of Toronto. He was overseas; he went to Fort William when they first got married and he worked in a clinic up there. He went overseas with the Irish regiment. He was in England and Italy during the war and then afterwards he stayed for a while longer to work in the hospital. He moved to Mount Forest when he came back from overseas, and did some doctor's practice out there. That's where they met the Sign family; they had a drugstore there. That is the same Mr. Sign that ran the Bradford Witness. His brother was a druggist in Mount Forest and that's where ... met the Sign family. He was there for a while, and she doesn't know when he moved to Guelph. He wanted to get into surgery. Laurene was married in January 1965 on the 16th. On the 19th of February he had a heart attack and died at 49 years old. And that was Laura's husband who left 3 girls and 1 son. Their names are Dianne (she has a daughter who is partially blind and an artist; she has to lie down in order to paint. She lives in Owen Sound and the College there buys her paintings and she has spoken to other disabled kids about her painting), Shawn, Ryan, Gale, and Andrea. Andrea is also an artist in Toronto. These children were 7, 10, 13, 16, and 19 when Hilda died.

Aida has a sister named Lena who lived in Sudbury and was married to Clarence Clark who lived in Bond Head. He worked at a garage and then the city of Sudbury opened up an airport and he was manager of that until he retired. They have a daughter Marie who lives in Sudbury. She's married to a Donald Desjardin* who was a French Canadian. Clarence had Alzheimer's disease and died. Then there is her brother Leo who everyone here knows. He has 2 boys and 2 girls: John, Larry, Elaine and Marleen. They all live around here. John is president of the Lion's Club and his wife is Anne Tizzard*. Leo married Evelyn Davis from Stouffville. Larry has 4 girls and John has 2 boys and a girl. Elaine has a boy and Marleen doesn't have any children. She's married and works at a nursery school. Elaine married but she is divorced. Larry married Fran Kell and they have 4 little girls; the oldest is nine. There are a lot of girls in the family. Elaine has a son, his name is Aaron.





One of the interviewers asks where Aida went to school when she was in Toronto. She says she lived on Bathurst Street and they didn't speak English too well (they spoke a French dialect). Jack Sweezy's* cousin Isaac lived next door. Mr. and Mrs. Tate moved in next door. Aida says her family came from Italy near the French border and they talked in dialect. Every town in Italy has a dialect, but this is very similar to French. Kathleen Harrison's mother Mrs. Taylor taught them. That school burned down twice while she was teaching there (the Amsterdam school, she thinks it's a house now). They used to walk to the bridge to go to school. The school board rented this house and Mrs. Taylor lived where the Steins now have their house. She decided that she could turn her living room into a school room and rent it to the school board. The children wouldn't have so far to go. Aida was quite small and Harold used to give her piggybacks because he says she was lost in the snow. They were all boys and she was the only girl. Mrs. Taylor was a widower, her husband died of TB and they had come from England. She was a beautiful lady. Then they bought the O'Brian's house. O'Brian adopted a Kathleen O'Brian. She is still living and lives in San Diego, California. Laurene had a conference to go to and got invited over but there was no one home, and she didn't get to see her by the time she left. When Aida's father came from New York, he boarded at Curly Maddin's* Aunt and Uncle. She was French-Canadian and he married a Makes* girl, Sadie. Makes* bought the house after they moved out. Joe LeBlanc lives there now on Toronto Street. At the back of their house there was a barn so when they sold the barn they brought a cow up. Her mother had a terrible flu in 1918 and Mr. McKay lived up on the hill and used to come down to milk the cow for them. Mrs. McKay used to send down big brown loafs of bread to her mother when she was sick; they were good neighbours. That was Isabelle Spencer's* grandparents.

One of the interviewers asks how long Aida attended this make-shift school. Aida says that she moved to Bradford when she was about 7. So she went to the Bradford Public School. Her teacher was Lukes*. The Bradford Public School was right up on the hill by the center. One of the interviewers asks if she remembers Dr. Stevens the Veterinarian. Aida says yes, she remembers Joe Grey and Archie Davey getting a snake and chasing all the kids in the school. The teacher was very upset. They threw it on Dr. Stevenson's roof to get rid of it. They were





always in trouble; they wrote profanity about Mr. Lukes on the back of the school (Lukes was the principal at the time). He wanted to find out who did it, and no one told. Jessie Curry* taught there, as well as Leona Davey and Miss Tindall. August went to school and because he spoke a different language at home, he would be reading and instead of saying “and” he would just pronounce it “an”. They put him back 3 classes in one day because of that. Jessie Curry* only taught for about a year and then she went on to teach high school, which was Harvey’s school. Harvey is a beautiful pianist. It was hard for Leona because her brother was there, Archie Davey. Joe Grey’s family had a grocery store. There were also Benrose* and Douglas grocery stores. Mr. Mills ran the butcher store and he lived up by the water tower.

Aida used to deliver milk in town when they bought the farm and were just kids. They had a pony and they used to deliver before they went to school. They were in milk bottles and it wasn’t pasteurized. Peterman* also delivered milk. Aida remembers her father going into Webb’s and he was mad at someone. Jim told him that it’s better to keep quiet because we are all related to one another. The Saints are related to the Collings, the Collings married the Saints, and they were also related to the Churches and the Reeves. Mrs. Armstrong. Mrs. Reeves, Mrs. Church, and Mrs. Armstrong (Shirley Watson’s mother) all went for a walk every Saturday night. They were all sisters of Joe Saint’s dad. The 3 of them were always together. They would go up town every Saturday night at 6 and do their shopping. The stores closed at 10 and they didn’t actually do any shopping until 10 to 10, and that used to make people angry. Aida remembers on Saturday night her dad and her mother would take her down to Douglas’ grocery store, and sit there and get a pineapple sundae for a nickel. At the back of the store they had tables for those who wanted ice cream. Mr. Mills the butcher was never sober very long. Mrs. Mills used to take care of the church... - Tape cuts out -

Douglas’ first name was Johnny and Hughie*. Mrs. Mills used to light the fire at the Catholic Church (the Holy Martyrs Church). She used to go down early on Sunday morning and she would start up the fire. It was about every 2 weeks and in the winter it was sometimes more than 2 weeks; she got 50 dollars a year. It would just be a wood fire, and farmers from the country would bring up wood. She would also clean the snow in the winter. That was before





they bought the land from Reynolds. The church was always warm when they got there. In the summertime they had a different priest from Toronto and someone would take turns having them over. Aida's mother took a turn once and worked very hard to clean the house. Their family just had feather mattresses and they got Father Kelly who probably weighed 300 pounds. Aida's mother starched the curtains and Father was warm so he knotted them on either side. He got up in the morning and he said he was going to have lunch somewhere else (his niece from Toronto would pick him up), so her mother didn't have to make anything. He wouldn't walk to the church though; they had the pony and the buggy and he asked Aida to drive him. So Aida took him to church, came back, put the horse away, and ran back up to church to go to mass. Her mother went into the bedroom where he slept and she said he wasn't coming here again. Aida doesn't think he slept very well because it was hot and he had to sleep on a feather tick (a feather mattress); but he was nice. Joe Saint used to ask his mom what you had to do to become a Catholic because they seemed to have more holidays than everyone.

Aida remembers Jack Sweezy's* mother was Catholic and she mother would come just before Easter to go to confession. She talked very loudly; she was telling Father how she drank a little bit. They used to do that a lot at the old church. Father Wedlock* talked loudly too. Joe can remember funerals there, and outside on the doors there used to be something like velvet. Aida says that those were crepe wreaths that used to be hung on the door and that meant that someone was dead in that house.

Aida remembers when her grandmother was buried in 1942. They got up the hill and it was so stormy they had to bring her body back to the house. It was a week before they could bring her body back. There was no funeral house in Bradford. The first one Aida remembers was run by Winnie Woods' mother. Jim Woods used to have the shoe store. That's when Mrs. Quinn had an ice cream shop near there. Frank Cokenny* was the funeral director, and then Keith took it over but he didn't like it. They would take the body upstairs over their furniture store and that's where they did their work dressing the body. They also lived in the house behind that. Fred McKinstry would drive the horses to take the body to people's houses and cemeteries. Mr. Ruth* used to dig up the graves. People came to visit the body, and if they were





Catholic then people stayed up all night. You would toss stories around and talk about old relatives, drink coffee or some liquor, and play cards. Sometimes it would be for 3 days, and then they would go to the church for mass. Sometimes they would have the coffin open at the church for those who couldn't come to the house. They got used to this, but everything is so easy now; you don't have the body at home anymore. It was a worry having the body in the house, she remembers her grandmother being home. She remembers when Aunt Bella Sinclair died. Isabelle* (Bella) and Aida would play together; there was a bunch of them there. Max and Merle* Morris used to tease them. Aida had 2 sisters and she had to carry one and pull the other.

Joe Saint tells a story about Aida's dad. They used to go to Aida's place to play and they wanted to get some apples. Bella Sinclair was with them and she wore a wig but it got lost. The boys were blamed for stealing it. Then they left. Joe remembers winter time came and Aida's dad came down the street with a wig and he said, "Here Leonard, the boys got blamed for stealing the wig, but the birds made a nest of it." Bella was John Sinclair's sister. The wig had been washed and it was on the clothes line. The wind made it loose and went up to the tree. Aida's father saw it and got it down.

Isabelle and Aida used to make butter tarts and she was nice. Aida used to be anemic and she used to get black corn preserve, but Aida liked the butter tarts better. They felt sorry for Isabelle because she had no dad. Innis* (her dad) died when he was about 21. Joe Grey died young too. Aida met him once shopping and he would chase them; he was married. He was not related to Jack Grey; his father used to be a grain buyer. People by the name of Grant bought the property after him. The Greys had a grocery store and an ice cream parlour, and they always said they were on the wrong corner because they didn't do too well. Baron's* used to be across the road. Greenburg* used to be in there. The Jewish people who used to be up in Gres' house were the Slotkins*. Aida met the girl but she lost track of her. One day Aida and Dorothy Fox were walking and Aida said an insult about them. The Slotkins* had farmed a bit but they weren't very successful; during The Depression they moved out of the city. They were good neighbours though. They had cows, and they had to teach them how to do everything. Sadie was





the girl's name, Sadie Slotkin*. Aida doesn't remember the mother and father. All the Jewish people were ostracized by the townspeople.

Aida remembers Tobias (who was Jewish) had an apartment, and when the building was sold to someone else, the new owners didn't want Tobias there. Aida's family had just rented Hughie Douglas' house on Barrie Street. Aida went to the store and could hear someone say that they couldn't find a place to live there and they may have to move to Newmarket. They said that the town didn't want them there because they were Jewish. Aida told them that it was terrible and she offered them part of the house. So they paid them \$15 a month for rent, and they were happy. They lived there until Aida's family moved away and then they took over. They had the little store right near Hughie Douglas' and later moved across the street. Their store had practically everything but groceries. They had two people working there and if they wanted change, instead of walking up to get it, they would put it on something like a wire and it would zoom back and forth. Max Godfrey was also Jewish and owned a clothing store.

Joe remembers that there was some big umbrella Aida's dad had. August and Lucy thought this umbrella would work as a parachute so they got in the back of the barn, they jumped off the back, the umbrella went inside out, and they buried themselves in manure. In Aida's barn there was a door on both ends and that's what they used to shoot out the straw when they thrashed. McLean* and Bob Faris did the thrashing and you had to keep feeding them wood so the steam engine could keep going.

August was in trouble all the time. They had chores to do and Aida was supposed to help her mother. Her brother played baseball and rather than have her dad raise his cane when he got home Aida would go down to the stable. Frank was always there and Aida would go down and do August's chores so he wouldn't get in trouble. One day, while sitting around the table, Frank tattled and there would be heck to pay. August loved sports, he could skate for miles. August would jump over barrels while skating during an intermission; that's when they used to have the skating rink. They used to have carnivals too. It was very cold skating; the rink was at Brooke* city parking lot. The Bradford band used to go down and play as well. Tom Fisher owned that rink. They were the Fishers from Fisher's Corner.





An interviewer asks when Jim (Aida's husband) took up the business in Bradford. They had bought the land down in the marsh from Lonus* and they had that until 1945. Then Jim had bronchitis so Aida told him to go down to the foreign office in Toronto and find out if they can have an... So he went down and put it over. He was awarded the agency in Bradford (in 1946) and then they built that garage. Lou Neilly from Gilford built it. Joe Saint's dad did work there too, as well as Copson* and Turner. Aida thinks Joe's dad helped with the foundation of the house. The wall must have been three feet because they had built it to help hold up the dirt. The building was not there when they moved in; they got the property from Mrs. Wood. Bert McLachlin* was supposed to renovate the house and when he came out she said, "Oh no you're not getting in here." So Jim had to sell the land back to Mrs. Wood, because he said it wasn't good for business if you are going to evict her. Then Gabriel bought from them, he was able to buy the land from the town.

Aida and her husband leased it to the Walkers and the Scarrows*. Jim worked for Scarrow* during the winter because there was no work in the marsh and he didn't like lying around. Scarrow* used to go hunting... There were 2 Crake* brothers and they used to live in the house in the corner.

An interviewer asks what kind of business Aida and Jim had. They had the Ford agency. They sold tractors, cars, trucks, everything. They did repairs there to; they had mechanics that they sent to Toronto to take classes. The mechanics were Keith Reynolds, Jim, Mr. Ferragine's nephew Peter Bianchi (he came from the old country and he asked them for a job so they trained him), and there were quite a few others. Peter Bianchi now has his own garage in town. Keith Reynolds came when he was just 19. Jimmy had a license and they didn't, so they had to apprentice. There was another chap who was friends with the McGannys* and he had a license in Italy but he didn't like it in Bradford so he went back after 2 months. The kids from the high school helped them on certain weekends; Paul Mooney, Herb and Peter Catania, Leo Catania, and John. Jim got sick and he wanted to lease it to someone. By the time Mr. Walker came up, Jim was feeling better and didn't want anyone to lease it anymore. Mr. Walker got in the office in Toronto and they were pretty well forced out of it in 1951. They thought Mr. Walker was going





to have it for 5 years and then another 5 years, but then he moved it to Newmarket. In 1961 they took it back, and then Jimmy just had a service station there up until 1971. Then they sold it to Gabriel (not sure what his first name was, but it was a father and son). They sold it for about 120,000 worth of stock and Gabriel sold it for almost 3. The people who have it now had paid over a million for the garage. Aida thinks Gabriel sold it to Campbell. There was a partner with Campbell when he first bought it named McLachlin*; he was in there for a short time.

One of the interviewers asks if Aida remembers when Highway 88 was paved. Aida remembers they were digging up the logs in the road. It was a dirt road. She thinks it was first paved after the Second World War. Aida remembers that they built a dam near where her family lived which her father was helping with but it washed away. Her father took branches from his willow tree, planted them down near there so the roots would take hold, and the dam never broke again. It was down by the bridge; they dammed the water so they could drain the marsh.

The interviewers would like to discuss Jim's father and mother. They came from Toronto and Aida thinks it was Rusto* from Newmarket who brought them up to buy the farm in 1918. They came up in the fall of 1917 and they moved in April of 1918. They came up from Toronto with the horse and had all their furniture and their kids in the wagon. Their names were Peter and Natala* Catania. They had 7 kids; 5 boys and 2 girls. Jim was the second oldest in his family. There was Mike, Jim, Jenny (she died young), Leo, Mimi, John, and Sam. The Catantias had an orchestra. Williams from Newmarket played the fiddle, one of the boys played trumpet, Mimi played the accordion, Leo played the drums, Jimmy played the guitar, and Mike played sax. Jimmy also played the piano. They were very musical, and they would make about \$6 a night. They played square dances in Sutton, Keswick, Bradford, Newmarket, and Holland Landing.

They had box socials at the church. During a box social, a box would be fixed up with sandwiches and pastries. It was a way of raising money because people would bid for them. They would bid maybe 50 cents to a dollar. The girls made the lunch and the boys bought them, and then they'd eat together. One person used to make sandwiches with just ketchup in them





and the bidders were worried about who would get that one. During the Euchre parties, they used to go from house to house and they raised \$15-20 each time for the church. That was to pay for fuel, lights, and taxes. They used to have beautiful lunches. On Sunday afternoons in the summer time they used to have picnics and go from one farm to another. This was strictly done by the people of the church. The priest would announce whose place it was going to be held at. Everybody would bring some kind of food (sandwiches or cake). You knew everyone and it was a nice community effort. For the Euchre parties you would have to clear all your furniture out of the way and put up 10 tables. Sometimes you would even have it in the bedroom. Sometimes 20 people would show up with 25 cents each. There were no house dances, but they had them in the school houses; Amsterdam used to be where some were held. – Tape cuts out -

*Note: * Indicates that the word or name is written as it sounded, and therefore may be incorrect.*

