RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH LAURA PERROTTA ROSS AND MARY ANNE PERROTTA

FOR THE

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kathryn Tracy Rizzi: This begins an oral history interview with Laura Ross and Mary Perrotta, on November 15, 2023. I am Kate Rizzi. We are located in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Thank you so much for joining me today to do this interview.

Laura Ross: You're welcome.

Mary Perrotta: Thank you, Kate, very much for the opportunity.

KR: For each of you, where and when were you born?

LR: I was born in St. Michael's Hospital in Newark, New Jersey, and I was born in the year 1946.

MP: I was born at American Legion Hospital, also in Newark, New Jersey, and I was born in 1948. My sister is two years, two months and two days older than me. [laughter]

KR: Let us start off talking about your family history, and I understand that you would like to go back a few generations on your mother's side of the family.

LR: Yes. Did you want to start?

MP: Yes. My mother's maiden name is Liloia, L-I-L-O-I-A. My mother lived in Nutley all of her life. Her name is Yolanda Liloia Perrotta. Her mother, Mary Sibilia, was born in Newark, and my grandfather, Pietro Liloia, was born in Avellino, Italy, *Provincia* Avellino, in Naples, Italy. Grandpa was a twenty-six-year-old mason that came to the United States and had some family in Newark, and Grandma was a sixteen-year-old young gal. Each family got together and said they were to marry, in those days--here's an old Italian word which we heard, and I still can't find the spelling of--a *masciade*, a match. Grandma and Grandpa came together in this particular kind of instance. They moved to Nutley, New Jersey, Grandma sixteen, Grandpa twenty-six, Grandpa having a profession. He was a mason. This was quite an ordeal for a non-educated gal like Grandma. [Editor's Note: *Masciade*, referring to an arranged marriage, is derived from the Italian word *a'mbasciata*, which translates to embassy but refers to the request to marry.]

LR: I just want to interject. This was around 1902 when my grandfather arrived on the ship at Ellis Island. The *Perugia* was the name of the ship, and the year was around 1902.

MP: The funny thing is, Grandma always told the story how she only met Grandpa twice, and they came to Nutley. Mason was his trade, and they purchased some property on Washington Avenue in Nutley, New Jersey. Now, this property, Grandpa later, along with other buddies of his Italian crew that were masons and builders and in construction, they constructed apartment houses right there on Washington Avenue, which later we all did dwell in. They had nine children. My mother was one of the nine children. There were seven boys and two girls.

As the family developed and grew, they all went to Nutley High School in Nutley, New Jersey. The boys all graduated and most of them went on to college, while the girls were destined to be homemakers. My mother graduated in 1934 from Nutley High School. However, our mother

went on to business, and later became successful in it. She became a buyer at F.W. Woolworth, which was located in Newark, New Jersey. She was bright and smart and energetic, and she managed to become a main buyer at the Newark store and was even asked to be the manager of the Irvington store. This was all during the World War II years. Again, women had a chance, because of all the servicemen overseas, for opportunities that they would not have otherwise had.

She met Dad in 1943, Lawrence Perrotta, and they met through mutual friends. Dad was from the Bronx. Again, meeting through mutual friends in 1943, I guess [it was] love at first sight. It was the darlingest of courtships. But Dad was in the Army, and he wound up being a first lieutenant.

LR: We think that the mutual friends, one of the managers at Woolworth's had known my father in the service. That's how my father had the connection to New Jersey, because otherwise he was a Bronx boy. My mother was friends with one of the other salesgirls who brought my mother to this match.

MP: Mom's family was rather extensive. She had, as I said, those many brothers. Her first brother was Nicholas, Uncle Nick. He became a dentist at the University of Maryland, and he served the country during World War II as an Army captain in Japan. Second in the chronological list was Uncle Louie. Uncle Louie was an Army staff sergeant, and he was stationed in the Philippines. We understand from Uncle Louie's stories that he was one of the guards of the prisoners in the Philippines. He later married Aunt Eileen, Eileen Trawin. Uncle Nick, as I said, was a dentist and did all the dentistry in Japan. Let me go on now to the third brother, Michael. He was also a dentist, graduating from the …

LR: The University of Maryland.

MP: … University of Maryland. It turned out, we heard in their stories, that in order to pay for the dental school of the two boys, Grandma and Grandpa had to get a loan on the property.

LR: Yes, they mortgaged the property for Nicholas.

MP: Then, Nicholas in turn paid for Michael. Michael was in the Army, and he was also a captain stationed in Missouri, where he met Anna Marie Vogel, a nurse at a hospital in Jefferson City. He was a captain and did the dental work for the soldiers in the location of Missouri. Fourth on the list was Gerard, my mother's brother Gerard, who was a chemical engineer. He graduated from the Newark College of Engineering [now New Jersey Institute of Technology]. He met his wife Sondra Lowitz while there at the Newark College of Engineering, and he was selected to work on the atom bomb, the Manhattan Project, which was a rather secretive process. He remained in-house with my mother and her mother and father and was a part of that major contribution to the United States' warfare. [The fourth brother was baptized Gerard for reasons explained later, page 29. However, after he married and throughout his professional career, he used Gerald J. Liloia. Always among the family, though, he was Gerard, Uncle Gerard, or Gerry.]

He was also on the civil defense during the war, and this is one of the stories where we see where our mother got connected with a lot of stories connected with war performance. She was on the civil defense. She told the story about how she and Uncle Gerard, and he recruited some of her lady friends, they'd go at night and ask people to pull down their shades because of the anticipated air raid …

LR: Air raid attacks.

MP: … Air raid attacks. That was the fourth brother. The fifth brother was Anthony, and he was in the Navy. He was a radio technician on submarines in the Mediterranean, off the coast of Italy. He saw a tremendous amount of action. Later on, after the war, he became a mechanical engineer through the GI Bill, and he married our Aunt Marie, Marie Minai. His children tell us, his daughter and son, that he learned the Morse code, which was something that he worked with.

LR: He remembered his whole life the Morse code.

MP: The sixth brother in line was Peter. Peter was just seventeen years old, and he was the valedictorian of his class at Nutley High School. He joined the Navy V-12 officer training program, and he was sent by the Navy to be educated at first Swarthmore College and then later Princeton University. He married a gal by the name of Doris Toriglio and ...

LR: He became a civil engineer in his later days.

MP: There was a seventh boy, Frankie, but we understand that he died in 1932. We believe, according to the story, that it was from pneumonia, and he was just under one year of age. Another person that we had involved in World War II and involved in all of my mother's letters was her brother-in-law, Anthony Iannicelli, Tony, he was her brother-in-law, married to her older sister Josephine. He was a medic with the Army in France, later stationed in Oklahoma, where Aunt Jo, Josephine, did join him. I think what I'm saying so far, Kate, is the fact I've mentioned the several brothers, a brother-in-law, and the service of the Liloia-Perrotta family to the World War II endeavor. Now comes my dad Lawrence, Lawrence Joseph Perrotta.

LR: Do you want me to do that?

MP: Please.

LR: My father was a very remarkable man. The more that we share our memories of him, we realize what a remarkable person he was. He graduated in around 1933 from New York University. He had a degree, a B.S. [bachelor of science] degree, in accounting. Of course, that was really at the height of the depression, the early 1930s. He kind of bounced around from job to job, and then he eventually joined the Army in the 1930s in order to have a career and to earn a living. He stayed in the Army; I believe it was six years. His date of discharge from the United States Army was December 7, 1941. [Editor's Note: On December 7, 1941, Japan launched a surprise attack on U.S. military forces at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, as well as attacking points throughout the Pacific. In an address to Congress the next day, President Franklin D.

Roosevelt called December 7, 1941 "a date which will live in infamy." Congress then declared war on Japan, bringing the United States into World War II.]

MP: Is that ringing bells? [laughter]

LR: As the story goes, and this is the story, my dad had a younger brother, Salvatore, Uncle Sam, and he had driven down to Fort Meade, Maryland to pick up my father because he was going to be discharged that day. He was standing outside the gates. The story is my dad came out of the barracks, he had his civvies on, he had his backpack, and he was ready to go home to the Bronx, and all of a sudden, the sirens started to blare.

MP: We're getting a little emotional here, Kate.

LR: My uncle apparently said to my dad, "Larry, don't worry about it. It's only going to be about three or four weeks, and this whole war will be over."

MP: This is 1941.

LR: Well, of course, it was not over in three or four weeks. Any serviceman who had been discharged within three months of that date, you know the story, they had to come back, and many of them, because they were already trained, were sent overseas very early in the war. My father, of course, was called back, and he was sent to Officers' Candidate School at that point. [Editor's Note: World War II ended in Europe with Germany's surrender on May 8, 1945 and in the Pacific on August 15, 1945, with Japan's official surrender coming on September 2, 1945.]

MP: Because he had a college [degree]. That was the requisite.

LR: Right. In the beginning of the war, he trained men, and he also taught them how to use guns and how to dismantle their rifles. There were things that he knew from the war that he really never spoke of to us, but we saw photographs of him over the years with certain equipment that he was showing the men.

MP: It was a funny thing that we saw, even among our uncles: They never spoke of what transpired, particularly Dad and Uncle Anthony, who were in absolute action.

LR: Of course, then he was discharged in 1945 after he was wounded, which we will talk about his experience in the war in a few minutes. We'll talk about how they met now. You want to do that?

MP: Is this okay the way we're talking?

KR: Yes, this is great. You go on. I have a few follow-up questions, which I can come back to.

MP: Okay. Well, we mentioned that our mother and father met through mutual friends, Anne and Al, and not to give a last name, but Anne and Al brought them together. They were supposed to get married in April of 1945, but Dad was called back to go overseas. As Mom tells

the story, she planned her wedding in three days for January. We knew of all of this, the courtship and the wedding plans, through the letters, which we're giving to the archives [Special Collections and University Archives, Rutgers University Libraries]. She planned her wedding in three days, and they were married on January 13, 1945 in Mom's house.

LR: Our grandmother and grandfather's house, the house she grew up in.

MP: An apartment, upstairs apartment, eight rooms. She even tells a story how she carried the keg of beer herself up in her wedding gown, ripped her stockings. Her sister Josephine was supposed to be her maid of honor, and Josephine, on January 12, had her first baby. Mom went to the hospital to see Josephine. She had to get a friend to be the maid of honor in the wedding at St. Mary's Church in Nutley, New Jersey. Only Gerard and Peter were present for the wedding. Dad's family came, his two brothers, his father, his sister Connie. Then, the wedding [was celebrated] in the house, food, whatever, all in small circumstances, all the neighborhood people. This is what was most amazing to us, even in our time--we're a different generation--everybody from the neighborhood, they participated on short notice and came to the wedding. None of this grandeur that we experience today. We even found that so many of these neighborhood people, the butcher, the guy who owned the tavern, the man who lived across the street, Pasquale up the street, they all would send letters to all of the people in the service. We found them among my mother's letters. They had a honeymoon in New York, two or three days. Dad said to Mom, "I'll be called, and I can't tell you where and when and the time."

LR: Because at the time, as you probably know, they didn't know if they'd be going to the Philippines. They didn't know if they'd be going to Japan. They didn't know if they'd be in the European Theater, and they couldn't let the family know what their assignment was.

MP: Mom found out eventually--one day, he didn't come back to the hotel. She went back home to Nutley, and she gets a call from his sister Connie, I believe. Dad gave one third of his message by phone to his brother Sal in the Bronx, the second third of his message to his sister Connie, and then he did call Mom with a third message. She still couldn't make hide nor hair of it. She put it together with the brother and the sister, and then she found out where he was located.

LR: He was going to Germany.

MP: We thought this was really something, like in a Clark Gable movie, where they secretively make the call and then they find out where their loved one is located. That was something which we discovered from reading the letters.

LR: Now, we'd like to talk a little bit about his war record, but did you want to ask any follow-up questions to what we've already said?

KR: Yes, I would, thank you. To go back to your mother's side of the family, I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about what Nutley was like in those very early years of the community.

MP: Well, having lived there my whole life, just for one year now in Nanuet, it remained as a very safe and contained community. At one time, one of the authorities of the town said that Nutley is an oasis unto the world.

LR: Nutley is three square miles in size, so it's a very small space. The story goes, and I could be wrong, it was originally settled by Dutch settlers, but the story goes that when immigration happened at the turn of the century, in the late 1800s, early 1900s, there were about sixteen families that established themselves in the town. Some of them had Dutch names like the Satterthwaites and …

MP: Speer.

LR: Speer was another one. But there were also a slew of Italian immigrants who came into the town, and among them was the Liloia family. The Liloia family was not only the nine children of my mother's family; they had cousins across the street who were also Liloias. It was my grandfather's brother, and he had children. My grandfather's sister lived up the hill on Hancox Avenue, and she had children. In this area of what they called Big Tree Nutley, where all of these Italian families [lived], my grandfather never really had to learn English because he could go to the barber, he could go to the butcher shop, he could go to the produce store, and he could speak Italian because they were all [Italian]. As a matter of fact, one of my mother's cousins was a barber across the street, when we were growing up. These sixteen families established the town with so many progeny, so many children and grandchildren.

MP: They were referred to as the pioneer families of the town. This guy who called us an oasis, he was one of them, the pioneer families.

LR: We could name so many of the families: Liloias, Vocaturos, the Piros, the Cocchiolas, the Orechios …

MP: The Intindolas, the Rotundas, the Violas.

LR: Many of them came from the same area of Italy too, and they kind of clustered together with their countrymen in the town.

MP: It seems as if it was a place where you stayed. I know, as having been a teacher at Nutley High School, with so many of the grandchildren, the same names would come up, and I'd [say], "Oh, did you know so-and-so?" "Yes, my grandpa was down on Washington Avenue." It had that "loving" effect. It was a very safe and happy community. Now, the world's changed, and I go back to it, or even upon exiting from it last year, it's changed, but the world itself has changed.

LR: That was what it was like when my mother was living [in] the Washington Avenue area growing up. We do have other tales to tell about when we were growing up, which would be in the 1950s and the 1960s. I don't know if you want us to …

KR: Let us hold off on those stories for a little while, because we will get into your lives. I do want to ask about your mother. What was it like for your mother and her family in Nutley during the Great Depression? What was it like for your father's family in the Bronx during the Great Depression?

LR: Well, our mother's family, I want to say they were almost well-to-do compared to a lot of people, because of the fact that my grandfather had a trade that allowed him to earn a living. He was a mason, and it allowed him to earn a living. However meager, it was somewhat better than others who didn't have a trade and who had to seek work in other ways. You're talking about the 1930s, is that what you mean?

KR: Yes.

LR: They had a home. My grandfather had an apartment building with five apartments where they collected rent during that time.

MP: One time, they had to take a piano from somebody for the rent.

LR: Yes. As a matter of fact, the youngest child, my Uncle Peter, actually had piano lessons, which my mother paid for because she was about fifteen years older when he was a little boy. She paid for his piano lessons. They had a situation where he could even foresee his sons going to university, which Uncle Nick did do, I guess, around 1930-something.

MP: Dad graduated in '33, so '34-'35.

LR: Maybe '34-'35. Uncle Nick went to Villanova University for his undergrad, and then he went on to the University of Maryland for his dental [school].

MP: They collected rent. The situation involved one large apartment building, which had eight rooms, and it was situated above a store. That's where the whole Liloia nine children were raised.

LR: Upstairs.

MP: Below was a storefront, next to that was another storefront, and above that, another apartment building, where five families could live. At one time, it was filled with all the families.

LR: All of us.

MP: Us as well.

LR: Our uncles and our cousins.

MP: They were collecting rent. As minimal as it was, and even if the rent was [minimal], people were paying in dollars, which provided food money. Even during the depression, they were getting the itemized food stamps. What was it?

LR: The rations. That was during the war.

MP: Excuse me. Let me correct that. The rations during the war. My uncle who was out in Missouri that had married Anna out in Missouri, she would write to Mom, she'd say, "Yolanda, if you have any extra rations, please send it to us. We need potatoes, we need coffee."

LR: We're getting away from my mother's childhood. We also found, when we found the letters, my mother started to keep a journal about her life. After my father died, she sat down to write about her own life. We discovered that when she was thirteen years old, she took her sister's working papers and went and got a job in what she called the cherry factory. We don't know where it was.

MP: She was a cherry pitter.

LR: She pitted cherries, and she describes in her journal how her fingers, at thirteen years old, had gotten all wrinkled from the sulfur. That's when they used to pit the cherries, and then they'd put them in whatever to make them maraschino cherries, to make them red. But they first had to soak them in sulfur, and she was on almost like an assembly line at thirteen years old. She describes that extensively in her journal.

MP: She cleaned the house every Saturday with Aunt Jo because Grandma had too many children. That was something which is foreign to the little girls of today, I assume.

LR: She was also responsible at the school for her younger brothers. My Uncle Louie used to tell us a story. I don't know if I'm getting off the subject, but he was a bit of a rascal. They went to Washington School on Washington Avenue in Nutley for elementary school.

MP: She went to Washington.

LR: As a matter of fact, I started at Washington School myself, and Mary did too. Mary went to kindergarten there ...

MP: Kindergarten, two months of kindergarten.

LR: … Before we moved to our home. Uncle Louie was kind of a rascal. They had a teacher named Miss Ayers, and she used to ask the children every day, "What did you have for breakfast?" Uncle Louie used to say, "*Salsiccia*," which was his Italian dialect for sausage. [laughter]

MP: And a couple of eggs, a *salsiccia*, tomato juice, potatoes. He'd make it as if he went to a buffet. [laughter]

LR: Here everybody else was so poor and nobody was eating.

MP: And he didn't have it, either.

LR: The teacher called my mother and she said, "Yolanda, your brother is lying in class." My mother would say, "Oh, Louis, he doesn't know. That's not what we had for breakfast." She would always kind of cover it over.

MP: The girl in front, he'd take her braid and put it in the ink well.

LR: He was a rascal.

MP: Mom was called. Never the parents, always my mother. Always my mother.

LR: He was a rascal. My grandmother had littler children at home, and parents weren't involved in the schools in those days the way they are today.

MP: Even when she got her job, she went down to Newark and worked, after high school, [at] F.W. Woolworth, which doesn't exist, I believe, anymore. But it was really dynamite when we were kids; it was a fantastic store. Peter would come down and borrow money from her, and she gave him piano lessons. Uncle Gerard would stop by, they called her Yo, "Yo, can you give me a few dollars?" She was very, very responsible, which is evident by the fact that as the war progressed and she was a part of it on the home front, the letters that she wrote diligently, nightly, for the benefit of my grandmother as well, but Grandma would just sit there and dictate what to tell the boys.

LR: Being a girl, even though every one of her brothers went to college, the two girls did not. My mother graduated from high school. She got awards at high school.

MP: For perfect attendance. She never missed school.

LR: She never missed school. She loved school, and she did very well. As a matter of fact, when we got to Nutley High, there were still some teachers who remembered her. Miss Lentini remembered her.

KR: Did your mother reflect on that later, that she did not get the opportunity to go to college?

LR: I think there were times when she felt like she should have gone to college, but it just wasn't in their ken at the time. It wasn't in their thinking at the time to be a girl and go to college. It just really wasn't.

MP: No, and she felt very proud of her success that she had in the business world. Again, probably because all the men were overseas, the opportunities were more grandiose for the women.

LR: At Woolworth's, she did bookkeeping, she did stenography for her boss.

MP: She was a floor walker.

LR: She was a buyer. This is, again, in the 1940s, not when she was a young girl, but she really had a real business sense. Then, my father had a business, which we'll talk about later, and she used to do his payroll. She used to help in his office, and she was amazingly smart.

MP: She was a smart lady. Being denied the college education, she probably would have excelled even more, but that's the way the times were. She was so proud of us, that the three of us did go to school. Laura, teacher, I a teacher, and our kid sister who passed was an attorney. We lost our younger sister, Yolanda. She was forty-six years old.

LR: In 2000.

MP: 2000, yes. She was an attorney in town, Nutley. She had a practice right in Nutley. Three children, she left. She was named Yolanda because my mother didn't want either of us to be named Yolanda. My grandmother tells the story of how my mother was called Yolanda. She was reading the paper, a journal from Italy, the Italian *La Voce*, and the two princesses of Italy were Mafalda and Yolanda. So, Mom was named after the princess of Italy, so we hear, *principessa*.

LR: It could be true; it could not be true. [laughter]

MP: Yolanda, my father fell in love with her and her name. Then, when Yolanda was born five years after me, he said, "This one has to be Yolanda."

LR: It was a custom to name a child after a parent or a grandparent.

MP: She's Laura after Lawrence.

LR: My father was Lawrence.

MP: I'm Mary after both grandmas. There's always got to be a Mary. Where else shall we head now?

KR: What about for your father and his family in the Bronx during the Great Depression? What were their experiences like?

LR: Now, understand, my dad was nine years older than our mother. He was born in 1909. He came from a family of six, I believe. We're not as familiar with his story as with our mother's. He had an older brother, Anthony Perrotta, an older sister, Nellie. My father, I believe, was third, Lawrence Joseph.

MP: Then Andrew.

LR: Then, his brother Andrew, then his sister Connie, and then his younger brother, Salvatore. At the time, from what we were told, the Bronx was kind of like the country. If you left Manhattan and you went all the way north to the Bronx, there were farms, and it wasn't as citified yet as Brooklyn and Manhattan were at the time, around 1910, let's say, 1915. One of the stories that we heard was that my father's mother, who would be our grandmother, Maria …

MP: Maria Arrigale.

LR: … Maria Arrigale died in the first Spanish flu in around 1917. My dad was about eight years old, and his younger brother Salvatore was around six years old. His father was so busy with trying to earn a living …

MP: He was an immigrant.

LR: He was an immigrant also.

MP: What did he say? Grandpa Perrotta came in on the *Spartan Prince* from Avellino.

LR: In 1899, a little earlier than my other grandfather. They put my father and his younger brother in an orphanage, St. Malachy's home, which we tried to find that on the Internet. The only one we could find was in Brooklyn. My dad told the story that he and his brother ran away.

MP: They climbed over the fence.

LR: They climbed over a fence, and they ran away from the orphanage. They somehow made their way back to the Bronx. My dad was about eight years old, if you could imagine. They wound up in their grandparents' barn. They had a barn up in the Bronx. Then, when they were found by their father, he said, okay, they'll pull Nellie out of school. She was in the eighth grade.

MP: Eighth grade, the oldest sister.

LR: They made Nellie kind of take on the role of mother, and they were able to stay together as a family after that.

MP: It's quite a colorful existence Pop had.

LR: To think that from that, he went on to college, he was very smart. He went on to the High School of Commerce in the city, because he was so smart in the eighth grade. He played soccer for the High School of Commerce. I don't even know if it still exists. Does the High School of Commerce [still exist]? [Editor's Note: The High School of Commerce, located at West 65th Street in Manhattan, existed from 1902 to 1968.]

KR: I don't think so.

LR: Now, it's just Bronx High School of Science, I think.

MP: Then, he made his way to NYU, and he graduated with an accounting degree. He was an accountant in Nutley. That's the kind of business he had.

LR: We have his mug from 1933, [the year] he graduated from NYU.

MP: The difference between Mom and Dad in the sense of both being of Italian background, Dad seemed to have had, maybe because it was the way he was brought up by a sister and in a humble circumstance, more of an Italianism about him. He had customs that we learned, and even our Liloia cousins, the Nutley [cousins], weren't familiar with. At Easter, there's a pie maybe your husband's familiar with, the *Pizza Chiena,* the *rustica* pie, which Laura makes with eggs and mozzarella. We didn't ever experience a *Pizza Chiena*. We brought that custom to our Nutley situation. He introduced to us the *Paloma* [*Colomba pasquale*], which is an Easter custom, the bread with the egg, the Holy Spirit, all of which even though he had no mother, and really just a beaty-bop kind of a bringing up, they maintained their customs.

LR: Maybe they were more peasant customs, and here he is in this city. Then, my mother is out in the suburbs, so to speak, and I won't say they were more sophisticated, but I think because they were leaning toward education more, they tended to drop that cloak of peasantry that so many brought from Europe, so many brought from Italy.

MP: One thing we found in Mom's letters, which was interesting, I believe it was President FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] had said for all the folks during World War II to make a victory garden, so that when your garden came to roost, when it came to fruition, that war would be over. Grandpa Perrotta, that's exactly what he did do. He started a victory garden. Again, it was something you read about in the books that people made victory gardens, and Grandpa Carmine Perrotta made a victory garden waiting for his son Lawrence to come back. Sal was in the Army as well.

LR: Yes. My dad cherished his sisters and his brothers very much. He cherished them. But when he married my mother and he took up residence, you could say, in Nutley, we dealt so much more with my mother's family because we had all our cousins right there. But every Easter, we traveled to the Bronx ...

MP: Christmas too.

LR: … And once during the summer.

MP: When we would come in from New York, all the time when dad would drive, he'd stop the car, we'd be in Lyndhurst, and there was this sign that said, "Nutley 2 Miles." We were kids. Yolanda didn't even understand. He'd stop. He'd say, "Girls, see that sign? That's the sign that changed my life." It changed it for the good. "Nutley 2 Miles." I didn't know what he meant when I was five years old. Now, I go back and see the sign in Lyndhurst, that's Dad's sign.

LR: That's really all we know. We know that during the war, he used to send money to his sister Nellie, because she had small children, two small boys, and then she had three daughters as well after that. We know that because our cousin, Carmine, we called him Rick, years later, used to

correspond with Mary. He would tell Mary, "I remember when Uncle Lawrence sent us shoes or when Uncle Lawrence sent us our Christmas packages," because he and his brother Anthony were two little boys during World War II. My dad made sure that his sister's children had Christmas presents. That's the kind of person he was.

MP: Ricky used to say his mother Nellie used to clean the high chair, and underneath the high chair, when Dad left, she found a hundred dollar bill. He worried about everybody; he took care of everybody, as he did his daughters. He's quite a guy. His war record was--what do we do to go from here, Kate?

KR: Yes, let us talk about your father's war service. I think we left off, you were going to tell about him going overseas.

LR: Yes. He was commissioned in 1942 as a second lieutenant, after he had attended Officers' Candidate School.

MP: OCS.

LR: We told you about how they met. They met, they married, he was stationed in different forts, mostly in Maryland, Fort Meade, in the United States until 1945, which is when he knew that he was going to be sent overseas. They married in January rather than in April, because he was sent in January to Germany as a second lieutenant, and he was sent directly to the front. We think that he was sent to the Battle of Remagen. You've heard of it?

KR: Yes.

LR: The Germans had a bridge of some sort over the Rhine.

MP: The Ludendorff Bridge, L-U-D-E-N-D-O-R-F-F. You know all this. Forgive me, I'm spelling all these, you know the history, but it's new to me.

KR: Go ahead, you can explain the history as it relates to your father.

LR: The American troops were trying to get over the river to make their way to Berlin, because now it's the end of the war. It's 1945, and I believe Hitler was already in his bunker. I don't know if he was dead yet, but he was already in the bunker. This Battle of Remagen was from March 7 to March 25. I guess we could look that up and correct it. [Editor's Note: The Battle of Remagen was an eighteen-day battle during the Allied invasion of Germany in World War II, when American forces unexpectedly captured the intact Ludendorff Bridge over the Rhine River. The battle lasted from March 7 until March 25, 1945. Until the bridge's collapse on March 17, the Allies succeeded in moving five divisions across bridge into the Ruhr, Germany's industrial heartland. By then, the Allies had constructed alternate river crossings. Adolf Hitler retreated to his bunker under the Reich Chancellery on January 16, 1945 and spent 105 days there, until his death by suicide on April 30. Germany unconditionally surrendered on May 8, 1945, marking the end of World War II in Europe.]

KR: We can add it to transcript.

MP: We didn't put that date down in our notes.

LR: We forgot to put that down in our notes. He was involved in that movement toward Berlin. They were trying to get toward Berlin. The Americans were trying to get toward Berlin. His date of being wounded was March 8, 1945 in Germany.

MP: Tell her how dad got that position.

LR: From what we know …

MP: Again, folklore, stories.

LR: … Stories from my dad, they were getting ready to make the march forward, and there were a bunch of tanks that the patrol or the unit was going to march behind to try to break over the bridge. There was a captain that was supposed to lead the men, and he got battle fright. He went nuts, and he ran away from the tanks. Rather than the front of the men, he ran to the back and he was frightened. One of the generals said, "Perrotta, get up there." My father was in the first unit behind the tanks. The tank in front of him went over a landmine, and the tank exploded. All of the shrapnel went back onto his unit, his patrol. Many of the men died, many of them were killed. Because he was so close to the tank, he took shrapnel to his legs, to his shoulders, his head, to his whole body, but he survived. First, the medics brought him away from the battlefront. He was brought to Belgium. He was in a hospital in Belgium, and from Belgium, they brought him to a hospital in England, where he had seven surgeries before he was able to come back to the United States.

MP: My mother always told the story, just like in the movies, the telegram was delivered to her that, "Your husband was wounded." She tells how she sat on the steps with Aunt Jo, Aunt Josephine ...

LR: She collapsed.

MP: … My mom and grandma, and the three of them cried. We even have a copy of that telegram.

LR: The women were all receiving this news, and my mother was only married two months.

MP: Dad always said the Army doctors were magnificent, and the nurses. He always raved about the care he got in the Army. He had a lot of therapy, and the nurses were great.

LR: He started in a wheelchair. He went to a walker. He used a cane. Even when we were little, he used a cane. But, eventually, he was able to walk without any [assistance].

MP: It was always a sore spot with his legs.

LR: My mother, until the day he died, at night, sometimes he would get pains in his legs, and little slivers of shrapnel would come to the surface, and she would pick them out with a tweezer.

MP: When we'd go swimming, the kids would see his legs.

LR: Yes, they could see the little slits of shrapnel in his legs. He kept going.

MP: They'd say, "Uncle Larry's legs!" Nothing stopped him, God bless him. He claimed that he had great treatment from the Army. He always praised his career there, and he was a brave man. He returned to the United States, and he was at the Fletcher General Hospital in Ohio. My mother went out there to meet him and stayed with him a while. Then, he went to another hospital in Texas.

LR: At that point, she was pregnant with me when my father was in Texas. One little gift he sent, remember the little shoes? They were little straw shoes that I guess the Mexican people in Texas sold to the soldiers.

MP: Yes, I remember, with the little strap on it.

LR: He had sent a gift to my mother when he found out that she was going to have a child, and that child turned out to be me. I was born in March of 1946.

MP: He came back to Nutley and started life in Nutley. He was a man from the Bronx, Larry from the Bronx. It was well noted by all of Mom's brothers.

LR: He even says in one of his letters, which we're going to give to the archives, he said, "Yolanda, I hope you recognize me in my civvies," because she had never seen him in any civilian clothes ever. When he came out of the service, it would be the first time she'd see him in civilian clothes.

MP: We then lived in one of those apartments. The first floor was Uncle Gerard and Aunt Sondra.

LR: No, they were third.

MP: Who was on the first floor?

LR: The first floor was Aunt Jo and Uncle Tony.

MP: The second floor was Marie Adele and Uncle Anthony and Aunt Marie.

LR: Marie Adele, Peter, Uncle Anthony and Aunt Marie.

MP: Then us.

LR: We were in the front.

MP: Upstairs, Aunt Eileen and Uncle Lou--Sondra, Sondra and Gerard, excuse me.

LR: Eileen and Lou lived in Grandma's house.

MP: Right. We were all there, *tutta la famiglia* [all of the family].

LR: All our cousins: my Aunt Jo's three boys, my Uncle Anthony's two children, we three kids. In Belleville, my Uncle Mike, who was a dentist, we mentioned before, he had an office in Belleville, and so his kids grew up in Belleville, which was the next town over. We were all together. We were with our cousins all the time at my grandma's house.

MP: They were small circumstances. We'd have a birthday party …

LR: Little, tiny three-room apartments.

MP: I was even talking with my cousin Joseph on the phone the other day. He said, "Mary, how did thirty-five of us fit in one of those kitchens?" We did it. There was one bathroom. We didn't think anything of it. It was different. We had a beautiful experience in that.

LR: My father, after the war, decided to establish his accounting business in Nutley rather than going back to the Bronx. He actually opened up a storefront …

MP: In Grandpa's building.

LR: … In that building, 20 Washington Avenue. His office was one of the storefronts below the apartments where we lived. That's how he started his life in Nutley.

MP: He had a very, very well-known business by the time he passed. He was a good man, honest, and accounting he did. Then, he furthered himself by going on the GI Bill to Rutgers in Newark, and he got all of his insurance certification. It was a duality, the business of insurance and accounting.

LR: In those days, a CPA [certified public accountant], now I'm talking about the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, as his business grew, CPAs would go to the site. He had a lot of little businesses that were his clients. If he had a music store in Union City, which was Nunzio's Music Store, on Tuesday, twice a month, he would be at Nunzio's in Union City. He'd drive out there. He had a big account in Nutley, Richardson's Heating and Air Conditioning, and he had an office at Richardson's in Nutley. So, he'd be there two days a week. Mr. Terry, the tire store.

MP: Joe Neri down in Kenilworth, who had an athletic store.

LR: He would get his files and he would go to the site, where he would do the accounting there. He'd do the payroll or whatever.

MP: Here's the killer whale. Of course, I worked in the office myself in the summer, but he hired Aunt Eileen as his secretary. Now, who is Eileen? Louie's wife, Uncle Lou's wife, Eileen Trawin. We loved her. Oh, she was our dear, dear aunt. He trained her. So, again, family. Eileen lived in the building, too.

LR: She helped him with the insurance part. Then, twice a week, my mother would go down to the office, and she would do the payroll for him, or she would help him with some of the ledgers, the accounting ledgers. Everything was handwritten, big accounting ledgers, big books.

MP: He had the big ledger machine. That's how he trained me. Many years later, when our sister became a lawyer, he had many of his clients that needed to be represented in court. Of course, he wouldn't charge them; he wouldn't let Yolanda charge them either. He used to call her *la avvocatessa dei poveri*, the poor man's lawyer. The poor kid, she had to come from a deluxe office on Franklin Avenue in Nutley. He goes, "Well, my daughter's a lawyer." His daughter became a lawyer, and she serviced his clients. It was lovely, but it's the way life was.

LR: Eventually, Aunt Jo moved to Speer Place in Nutley, which in a way was moving out of the central city area to the more countrified area. Remember, I said it's only three square miles, the whole town. So, she wasn't that far away, one little bus ride away. Then, after she bought a home there, my parents bought a home on the same street.

MP: Can you believe it?

LR: We were three houses down from my aunt. She had three boys, and we were three sisters. We went to school together with them, and we played on the street with them. We can talk about our childhood whenever you're ready for that. [We were] always together, always Nutley, always around each other, always family.

MP: What else?

KR: Tell me a little bit more about your mother's experiences on the home front during World War II. Then, you can also go into her letter writing and saving all these letters that has turned into a treasure trove.

MP: Okay. How do we start?

LR: Well, her life on the home front, they had to send one at a time, each of the boys, into some sort of war situation, except for Gerard, who, as we said, worked locally on the atomic bomb as a chemical engineer, and we don't really know what agency he was with. We never did find out. His wife, when she passed, took that information with her. We don't know about that. Each of the boys, as the war progressed, entered the service. The two younger ones, Anthony and Peter, were really only teenagers when they went into the service. Anthony saw action. Peter did not, because he was only seventeen years old when he went into the V-12 program.

MP: They were still in high school, and she mentions [in letters] about their graduations and how she attended them. Then, she would write to all of them [about] the graduation situation.

She really was the dispatcher. She regulated, it seems, again, her mother, God bless her, she was a good lady, but my mother had the smarts and she orchestrated all of the events of the boys. Even when they were in the services, when they wanted things done, they'd write to her. Uncle Lou had a girlfriend, Marian, and he wanted Mom to buy her a Christmas gift. He said, "Yo, buy her a Christmas gift. I'll give you the money when I get back." She was given, by letter, responsibilities from her brothers as well to take care of [things]. Go ahead.

LR: She talks a little bit about how the people on the home front used to visit each other a lot. For example, the relatives from the Bronx would come and visit, and my grandmother would give them dinner and it was without my father being there. She talks about so many women were working in Newark in the stores, the department stores and businesses, insurance companies and so on in Newark. She had a lot of girlfriends. She talks about, in her letters, telling my father, "I went with Helen to Asbury Park for the day." Their lives somehow had to go on, even though there was a war going on. Other things, she mentioned going to the movies with girlfriends, going shopping for her brothers, sending them things. In one of the letters, Uncle Anthony writes to her, "Thank you, Yo, for the jelly beans you sent at Easter." He was on a submarine and I don't know if he had come to dock or whatever, but he was able to get a gift that she had sent him of jelly beans.

MP: She sent him ten pounds of jellybeans.

LR: Yes, ten pounds of jelly beans.

MP: He said was she a hit. Then, they all wanted her picture for their lockers. "Can you send me a picture of you? All the guys want your picture." He said, "The jelly beans were a hit." Uncle Lou's girlfriend needed such and such. Uncle Nick, who was out in Japan, wanted to make sure that Mama and Papa got to doctors and would make sure he'd send her money, and she would handle that, taking care of their medical needs.

LR: Nick would send money home for my grandparents. Remember I said to you, not that they were elite, but because they had these sons that could earn a living from the war, Nick would send money home for my grandparents. He wasn't married at the time. Mary says dispatcher; she was a dispatcher. She constantly let her brothers know through her letters what was happening at home, the health of her mother, the health of her father, their in-laws that would visit.

MP: Right. One little nephew was born, her sister's boy. She was almost a second mother to him, because his father was stationed away, and Josephine went to work. Yolanda went to work. Together, they raised a little boy, Anthony. Let me see what else. She was with the civil defense with Uncle Gerard. They'd go out at night making sure that the shades were pulled.

LR: Oh, even at Woodworth …

MP: Yes, she collected for the Red Cross.

LR: She collected for the Red Cross. She writes in her letter to one of the brothers, "I collected this much …"

MP: 175 dollars.

LR: Yes, she thought that was so fantastic. It was such a great sum that she had collected for the Red Cross. She tried to volunteer during this time as well. But it was a big responsibility having a full-time job, having two parents at home, having a husband …

MP: … Who was in the service and she didn't know where he was located …

LR: … Having brothers who were all involved in the war. It was a rough time for her.

MP: Even though we said that they rented the apartments, she was in charge. Those receipt books, we used to get them to play apartment with it. She'd write out the receipts and if they'd pay five dollars, two dollars.

LR: Whatever the rent was.

MP: On the third floor, the people owed, and they had to take the piano and bring it to our grandparents' house because that was the way they made the payment. She had a big responsibility. A lot of people she orchestrated.

LR: When we found the letters, we didn't really know any of this, and we discovered a lot of the wartime stuff in the letters. There's even a story about the day that my father was shipped out, which isn't in the letters, it's in the journal. Remember we said she didn't know where he was going, but in his phone call to her, he said, "Come to Grand Central Station and wait under the clock," I'm going to cry, "I'll come there to say goodbye." She did indeed go to Grand Central Station that day. He said he'd be there at four o'clock, and it got to be four o'clock. Larry didn't come. It got to be five o'clock. He still didn't come. There was a woman there, and she said, "My dear, what's wrong? You've been waiting here for so long." She said, "Oh, my husband's being shipped out, and he said that he would meet me here to say goodbye." The woman said, "Well, why don't you go to the desk and ask them if there was a message for you? Maybe he couldn't make it." She went to the desk, and they said, "There's only a message for a Yolanda Perrotta." She said, "Oh, that's me." She didn't realize that she was Yolanda Perrotta. She had only been married a few days, and she thought of herself as Yolanda Liloia. They said, "We've been announcing it over the loudspeaker, 'Yolanda Perrotta come to the desk,'" and it said to wait until six o'clock, the message. She went back and she said just as she got there, sure enough, across Grand Central Station, she saw him walking in his fatigues.

MP: It sounds like something in a movie.

LR: He came to say goodbye. So, she did get to see him.

MP: Mom said too that when Dad would come to her store in Newark, how all the other young women, they'd all clutter around.

LR: They were so jealous, because he was a lieutenant. He wasn't just some private; he was a lieutenant. He was very dashing. Our father was very dashing. He had a mustache.

MP: It seemed like something lovely. They were good parents. They worked hard and made sure we went to school, and we had a happy childhood in Nutley. Nutley was a safe, good place to grow up. As I said before, I used the word oasis, which was used by one of the authorities in town. We had all the things that were of childhood, like even if you watch some of the old shows, all the kids on the street used to go to the movies together on Saturday, a Saturday matinee, at the Franklin Theater, which now is closed.

LR: Should we get into that now?

MP: Where do we go from here?

KR: Are there any other stories about either your father's wartime service or your uncle's service that you learned about in the letters that you would like to share?

MP: Uncle Lou guarding the prisoners in the Philippines.

LR: No, not really.

MP: No, nothing that we could be more specific on, Kate.

LR: The biggest thing was Uncle Anthony was a radioman on a submarine, we believe, or on a ship. I think it was a submarine. He did send a lot of letters to my mother, but most of it was about the family. Most of it was about, "What's happening with this one? What's happening with that one?" and wanting to know what was going on with them. Also, there were quite a few letters from Nicholas.

MP: He was more or less in a safe zone. He was in the hospital as a dentist in Japan.

LR: For any soldiers that needed dental care there.

MP: Does this have any bearing on it? As I said, they didn't talk about the horrors that they experienced, but we were told by one of dad's clients, and then later on told by my mother to us, that when planes would go over the office building, it was a frightening experience for my father and he would often seek shelter. I don't know if that's something about the …

LR: Almost like post-traumatic stress syndrome.

MP: … Repercussions of the war in that respect. I guess in a way you'd like to forget that; you can't think of your father in that capacity. But, one time, Mom had to go with her brother Gerard to get my father at Richardson's ...

LR: One of his clients, at Richardson's office.

MP: … Because he was just frightened by airplanes going over. It must have had an everlasting effect. We're doing the best we can, Kate.

KR: Should we take a pause?

LR: Yes, I guess so.

MP: Yes.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

KR: Okay, we are back on recording.

LR: As far as my father's war record, he was quite a man. From his being wounded in Germany, he does have a Purple Heart. He has a Bronze Star. He has marksman medals from even before the war when he was training soldiers. He has the crossed--my husband told me what that means, the crossed guns or rifles. I don't know what that symbolizes. [Editor's Note: The crossed rifles denotes the Expert Marksmanship Badge.] He was commissioned at the end of the war as a first lieutenant. That's how he left the war, because of his bravery at the Battle of Remagen.

MP: Laura took all of these awards and she has them all.

LR: Yes, I have them in a showcase in a shadow box, which I could get a picture of, if you would want to see them.

MP: He got the Purple Heart. We have so much to say, yet we didn't hit every point; here's something else. He was a citizen of the Bronx. However, in 1956, in this town of Nutley, they made my dad the grand marshal of the parade.

LR: Memorial Day Parade.

MP: In the Memorial Day Parade, he was the grand marshal of the parade. Oh, it was such an honor. Usually, it's a Nutleyite through and through, and they chose him to be because of his outstanding war record. He was in the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars], the Chamber of Commerce, the Italian Fiorente Club. But this honor that he had in the Nutley Memorial Day Parade, Dad was grand marshal of the parade, oh, they came and picked him up in a convertible and all the flags and all the kids on the street. Our little sister Yo was so excited.

LR: She was little.

MP: She was three years old, four years old. She was running all around. It was a tremendous honor to be the grand marshal but to not have been born and bred in Nutley to achieve that honor. So, that's something. His Army memorabilia, we took some of it and we put it in the Nutley Museum. There's a little museum on Church Street in Nutley which collects honors that

were given, and they have a showcase to Lieutenant Lawrence J. Perrotta. Again, the outstanding thing was he isn't [a Nutley native]. They pooh-poohed the fact that he wasn't from Nutley, but we made it clear, he became a Nutleyite. He's honored in that respect.

LR: We gave his uniform to my nephew Tommy, who was his little darling grandson.

MP: He was very proud of that achievement.

LR: His war record.

MP: I think really what made him proud, an unspoken pride, [was] the way he did take over for that captain. That story was something that he talked about but then didn't talk about. We heard about it, but it was an internal pride he had that he was called upon and he succeeded.

LR: The Bronze Star is for bravery in battle. So, it was acknowledged by the United States Army, his courage.

MP: Out of all the boys, all of them that were in the service, Dad was the only one that was wounded. Therefore, it became kind of the talk of the neighborhood. So many of the letters written by Mom's brothers to her [asked], "How's Larry? How's Larry? How's Larry?"

LR: Also, in the letters, we found that neighbors also sent letters to my dad and to the boys that lived next door.

MP: Joey Furnari who owned the tavern.

LR: There are letters from neighbors to all of these boys. The neighborhood was so proud of these six sons and the two in-laws, the two men that were in-laws. There were even cousins across the street who served also. As a matter of fact, in one letter, Uncle Anthony mentions that he bumped into his cousin Henry, who had lived across the street, met him overseas, I don't know where, in Italy or wherever they wound up. The neighborhood was all a part of this, and my mother, again, was the one they asked, they talked to, they called, they wanted to know from her what was happening.

MP: She told us the story, too, of she and Uncle Gerard being home, that as they started to come home, the boys, Uncle Gerard made a big, I believe she said it was a white sheet.

LR: Yes, a banner with their names.

MP: A big banner with all of their names. Again, they had an apartment building, an apartment building and two stores in between, they hung it across, and as each boy came home, he'd take a red paintbrush and check off that they were home.

KR: That is amazing.

MP: Very often, we've experienced, in our time, you're maybe too young to have seen all the Fredric March movies and Clark Gable movies of all the fellows coming home, but it seems that's the way it was. It was a respect, and it was an honor to be supportive of our country in those days. Let's hope that that's something that stays forever. Was that a little bit more?

KR: Yes.

LR: Do you want to pause for a minute?

KR: Yes, sure. Let's pause.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

KR: We are on and recording.

LR: Mary and I were both born at the end of the 1940s, so our growing up years in Nutley were the 1950s and 1960s. I graduated from Nutley High School in 1964, and Mary graduated from Nutley High School in 1966.

MP: Yolanda in 1971.

LR: Our youngest sister in 1971. As we've said before, we had relatives all around us. So many of our cousins went to Nutley High School as well. The 1950s and the 1960s, it really almost was like Mary mentioned, like *Leave It to Beaver*.

MP: *Happy Days*.

LR: On Saturdays, we would go to the Franklin Theater. For thirty-five cents or twenty-five cents, you could see a movie. They showed us old black and white ...

MP: Two movies.

LR: A nickel was a box of Dots.

MP: We'd go with everybody, the whole gang.

LR: You'd get in line outside the theater, and there'd be all your friends from school. You'd be standing in the cold, and they'd let you in.

MP: Never this business of the pickup and who's picking up.

LR: Nobody drove us. We walked.

MP: "Are you safe? Are you not safe?"

LR: You'd pick up kids along the way. We have a place, in the town of Nutley, it's called the Mud Hole. The Mud Hole is really a big lake in one of the parks in Nutley [Nutley Memorial Park]. In the winter, the Mud Hole would freeze over, and they would put, on a pole, a big red ball …

MP: No computer, no smartphones.

LR: … A big painted red ball if the ice was thick enough for people to skate. We would walk down to the Mud Hole, and we'd see if the red ball [was up]. My father used to say, "If the red ball isn't up, don't go on the lake." If it was up, we would skate. Again, all your friends would be there. Sometimes, Aunt Eileen and Uncle Lou would show up because they loved to ice skate. On a Friday night, a bunch of the kids from the high school would make a bonfire.

MP: We'd do each other's skates. Our cousins would help us. We'd help them …

LR: … Lace up your skates. A bunch of the kids from the high school would make a bonfire alongside the lake. No fire engines there, no lawsuits ever happened because there was a fire and one of the kids got burned. It was a very different time. We were kind of on our own as kids. The teenagers were on their own. We looked after each other. It was just different times. The parents weren't there. If somebody had told my mother, "Your daughter was down at the bonfire at the Mud Hole, my mother would have said, "Oh, really?" She didn't drive, so she couldn't drive over there and get us.

MP: She didn't drive, our mother. We walked to school. It was three square miles. Everybody walked.

LR: To the elementary schools, as well as the high school, in the snow. Really, in the snow. [laughter]

MP: We lived on a dead-end street. Our three cousins, our three boy cousins, lived up the street. Everybody from age--Yolanda, who was the youngest--from age five to seventeen all played on the dead end, spud, jump rope. Cousin Joseph, who always reminds me, was the turner of the jump rope. We'd play hide-and-seek. The big boys, Johnny and Danny, they would make a bonfire in the lot that was there, and they'd roast potatoes. We'd be around the little fire and roast it. We'd eat potatoes, have it all over our faces. The big ones watched out for the little ones, and we played simple games. It was so funny too, at the end of the street, during Hurricane Hazel [in 1954], a large tree fell in the middle of the dead-end Speer Place. For weeks, that was our playground.

LR: We climbed on it.

MP: We went in and out of the tree until the town decided to come.

LR: It was great for hide-and-go-seek. "Olly olly in free," we'd say.

MP: Jump rope, spud. Spud, that's a game of the past. There was a candy store, Al's, down on the corner. With a nickel, you could buy five pieces of candy.

LR: Yes, penny candy. He had little bins, at Al's Sweet Shop, and in each bin there would be Mary Jane's and there'd be Bazooka gum, all little penny candies. Kids at school would give us a nickel, and we'd go home for lunch. On the way back, we'd stop at Al's, and Joanne wanted this, and who'd want that. All penny candies.

MP: There was a drugstore on the corner called Bay's Drugstore. The owner was an old Italian guy. Three candy bars for a dime. We did have a lot of treats. We didn't worry about cholesterol in those days or our carbohydrates or whatever, but we were healthy kids. Saturday football games, we'd go down to the Oval, that was our park, and watch the team …

LR: … The town football field. It's still there. They call it the Park Oval. Those games, you could hear the roars from all over the town. Again, it was very small, and if Nutley scored a touchdown, everybody would be jumping out of their seats. As high school kids, we worked at the …

MP: … Refreshment stand.

LR: … Concession stand. The seniors always got to work the stand, so you got to see all your buddies come to the concession stand. At Thanksgiving, there was always a rivalry. When we were very young, the rivalry was between Nutley and Kearny, which was across the river, across the Passaic River, on the other side. Then, as we got older, it was with Belleville, and of course, we had a cousin that was at Belleville High School. On Thanksgiving Day, boy, that was quite a rivalry.

MP: The Belleville Liloias. There were many of them that were the Lilores because when they came through Ellis Island, some of the people who did the script didn't do it accurately. The clerks didn't have computers in those days, so it was a difference of the spelling. But we had a lot of family in Belleville as well.

LR: However they wrote it down--I'm sure you've heard this story too--if one brother was in this line and another brother was in this line, and this clerk wrote it as Liloia, and this clerk wrote it as Lilore, they were brothers, but they had different last names when they came to the United States.

MP: The same with our Perrottas. We have some cousins that are Perrottos with the O on the end.

LR: Whatever line they got in at Ellis Island.

MP: There was a tower, an International Telephone & Telegraph tower, down on Washington Avenue in Nutley called the IT&T Tower. It had a swimming pool for all of the people that worked there. In the summer, they let the town kids take lessons. So, that was another big ordeal. We all went down for swim lessons in the summer at IT&T. We had roller skating at a

rink, which was in Belleville, called the Riviera Park Roller Rink. Also, our own middle school had skating, so [there was] roller skating on Tuesday nights. The principal used to roller skate with the kids; teachers would roller skate with the kids.

LR: This roller rink in Belleville was almost countywide. People came from all over. As a matter of fact, two of our uncles, Uncle Anthony and Uncle Louie, were very good skaters. We think the story is that Uncle Anthony met his wife, Aunt Marie Minai, at the Belleville roller rink.

MP: They roller skated into marital heaven. [laughter]

LR: Apparently, Uncle Lou and Aunt Eileen used to dance on skates. There was a banked track …

MP: An organ played. It was wonderful.

LR: They had an organ player at night while you roller skated, and in the center, the little kids would fall down and stuff. They would speed skate around the bank. If you've ever seen a roller derby, you know how the banked track is.

MP: Summer camp was free at the Nutley parks. They'd hire some of the local young kids from high school as counselors. We'd play ping-pong.

LR: We'd put on plays. All for free. Our mother would just say, "Go down to the park. You're going to camp," and that was it. It wasn't really called camp.

MP: It was going to the park. We would play on our street, Speer Place, which was a dead end. We only knew that it was time to come in for supper when we'd hear one of the mother's say at six o'clock, "Everybody in for supper." We'd play until it got dark.

LR: Another thing we liked to do or we were kind of forced to do, because there were no malls, there was no Willowbrook Mall or anything, all of the shopping was done what they called downtown, which happened to be downtown Newark. There were a lot big department stores, Ohrbach's, Bamberger's, Hahne's department store, which was my mother's favorite, and of course, there was Kresge's, which was a little less [expensive], almost like the TJ Maxx of those days, and Woolworth's. F.W. Woolworth was a very big establishment in Newark, which is where our mother did work. During the holiday time, we would get on the bus with my Aunt Jo and my grandmother and my three cousins, boy cousins, who lived up the street--remember, we're all on Speer Place now--and we three sisters, and we'd get off the bus at the Chopstick Inn in North Newark. We'd have Chinese food, all of us together, and from there, we'd go downtown on the bus, or my dad would pick us up.

MP: We'd all pile in.

LR: We'd all pile into the car, we'd sit on each other or Grandma's lap, no seat belts. Some of us would sit on the floor of the car in the back, and we'd go to Kresge's because they had a train ride

up above the main floor. I guess it was their balcony or their mezzanine, and the train ride went all the way around the store. We would get a train ride at Christmastime around Kresge's, and then we'd go to Hahne's to see Santa.

MP: All together.

LR: All of us together.

MP: All the holidays were celebrated together, all at Grandma's house. We'd have Christmas at Grandma's house. We'd go to midnight mass …

LR: On Christmas Eve.

MP: … On Christmas Eve, and we'd walk in rows. You and I were always with Aunt Eileen, and Mom was always with the baby.

LR: To St. Mary's Church …

MP: Yes, St. Mary's Church.

LR: … Which is the church where our parents were married, we were baptized, and our mother and father were both laid to rest at St. Mary's Church in Nutley. Very devout Catholics, both of them, our father almost even more devout than our mother. They made sure that we had our sacraments at St. Mary's.

MP: Then, we'd have Christmas Day at Grandma's, but here was the kicker. We'd start early, we'd have our Christmas with Santa at home, then we'd go to Grandma's, Laura and I …

LR: Because, remember, we lived next door, in the apartment building next door.

MP: We'd bring Yolanda, put her in the high chair. She didn't do much about anything. [laughter] Aunt Eileen, Aunt Jo, Mom, and Grandma would make raviolis. Now, there's raviolis, Kate, and there are raviolis. [laughter] These were *giambotta* [gigantic]. Maybe you have experience with these. One of them on the plate was a meal. But Grandma required that we had to pierce the edges …

LR: Seal up the edges with a fork.

MP: Then, we'd carry them, one in each hand, and lay them on the bed in one of the bedrooms, where there was a big statue of St. Gerard. That's how we did the raviolis with Grandma.

LR: She used to use--she didn't have a rolling pin. She had a broomstick, because she would make the dough the whole size of the table, and she would slap the dough and thin it and roll it out with this broomstick. If you could imagine the dough was gigantic, I don't know, four feet by four feet, on her kitchen table. Then, she'd put the ricotta cheese across, fold it over, cut it,

and then we would do the edges with a fork to make sure that they were sealed. Then, she'd dry them on the bed.

MP: Laura and I--the boys would help, the cousins, but they were lame--we were the best ravioli carriers that Grandma had. [laughter] I mentioned that there was a big statue of St. Gerard, and how he got there was because Uncle Mike, the third son in progress, was dying from pneumonia, we believe, and Grandma promised to St. Gerard, if Mike lived, her next child would be named after him.

LR: After Gerard.

MP: The next boy was Gerard.

LR: The story goes that Uncle Gerard wore the saint's clothing until he started school. Whenever they would go to church, they would dress him in a black thing, a robe of some sort, like the saint's garment. Apparently, Saint Gerard is the saint of pregnant mothers.

MP: We all have that devotion to Gerard. That's in the room where we put the ravis. Dinner at Grandma's, there were so many kids, we were in the kitchen and the adults were in the dining room, and we'd run up and down the hallway.

LR: It was a long hallway from the kitchen to the dining room. Not today, like it's all open space.

MP: Another custom we had at Grandma's was New Year's Eve. Grandma would make zeppola. She'd do the dough during the day, and then the yeast would make it bloom.

LR: She'd fry them at night, just before midnight, and we'd all be eating zeppolas sprinkled with powdered sugar. Then, we'd go in the living room. She had a little TV screen.

MP: Thirteen inch.

LR: Thirteen-inch TV screen. We'd all crowd into this living room and watch the ball come down, and Guy Lombardo would play *Auld Lang Syne*.

MP: He had an orchestra.

LR: Then, we'd grab pots and pans and bang them for New Year's Eve. Us kids, the children, loved it. We loved it, all that noise and our uncles all around.

MP: The funny thing is too, I say to the one cousin I still keep in touch with, Laura with another one in Clifton, we were all so close, and then the lives, everybody scattered, the modern way of life. Our memories keep us tied, but they're memories. Every Sunday--take it from there, Laura.

LR: Every Sunday, after church, this is when we were little, not as we got to be teenagers, but when we were younger, after church, we would come back to my grandma's, and then all the

cousins would come. My Aunt Eileen and Uncle Louie lived in Grandma's house, and they would go to the Nutley Bake Shop and she'd get pastries. Grandma would have coffee going, and we'd all sit around the table and just eat pastries on Sunday morning, before it was time to go home and do our homework or get on with the day. That was a stop every Sunday at Grandma's house.

MP: Preakness Pool was a place where we all went in the summer. My father, through our milkman, found this camp in Totowa, New Jersey that on Sundays was open to the public, so we rented tables. It was called Preakness Pool. It was an Olympic-sized pool, and everybody, again, went to Preakness Pool in Totowa.

LR: We would get there very early because we wanted to get two big tables together. Why? Because everybody was coming. My dad had a little grill ...

MP: Just a little grill with charcoal. Uncle Larry was in charge of [grilling].

LR: … And he'd be making hamburgers all day long. We'd all be sitting at these two picnic tables. Grandpa, he'd bring his concertina once in a while. Our grandfather played the concertina, and he would bring that once in a while and play the concertina and we'd dance around and laugh.

MP: Which I still have. I found that in my basement. I just showed it to my nephew, one of Yolanda's sons, and he said, "Aunt Mary, I want that concertina of Grandpa's." "Okay, we've got your name on it, Tommy." Grandma belonged to the Rosary Society, and all of her lady friends from the neighborhood, Maggie Marone and Mrs. Orechio and Mrs. Viola, once a week the ladies would come together and do the rosary. Of course, the statue had to be present in their home.

LR: They would get to put a bid in to the priest to have the statue at their house. It was a big Virgin Mary statue.

MP: Grandma Mary was lucky. We got the statue.

LR: The priest would come.

MP: The priest would come, and because we were the girls, Yolanda didn't have to, she was a baby, but we used to have to go and do the rosary. Then, after that, we'd have to perform for the ladies. Laura and I played the piano on that junkie piano. She'd play one song, then we'd sing for the ladies. Where could you get something like that today? The Virgin was very well represented. We did our dedication to her.

LR: Can you tell we were never bored? We were never bored. Nutley High School, Friday nights, in the '60s, early '60s, [there was a] record hop almost every Friday night. A record hop. We didn't have a DJ [disc jockey]. We didn't have anybody announcing anything.

MP: Wait, wait, does Kate know what a record is? [laughter]

LR: Kids from your class would just put records on, and we'd be in the gym and we danced to records, all the old rock and roll. It was great.

MP: As with anything, the town changed. Laura married and moved away. She made her residence in East Windsor …

LR: Outside of Princeton.

MP: Her daughter and her husband, they were there, but it was close enough to come back and forth to Nutley. I remained in Nutley. I remained on Speer Place. Yolanda married and had three children.

LR: Our sister Yolanda, not our mother Yolanda.

MP: Our sister Yolanda.

LR: She ended up in Nutley.

MP: She ended up in Nutley as well, she and Tom and their three children, Mary, Tommy and Andrew. Laura has a daughter, Jessica. I remained at Speer Place. Dad died in 1992. He was eighty-two years of age. Mom remained with me. I did take over the house, and I kept her with me until she passed. She was my heart.

We all graduated from Nutley High School, and it always was a sense of a longevity. Laura was thirty years after Mom graduated, 1934, 1964. It seemed to be, Kate, and it still is slightly, it's changed, I noticed it being a teacher in Nutley, that it was the continuity of families. If not all the family, there was always a family member of these old folk that still is representative in the town. That brought us great pride, that we graduated from the school of our mother.

My father had a very, very well-established business in town, and that was something of pride. When Dad passed, people even in the Chamber of Commerce said that Larry was just the most honest businessman. He had a lot of people that owed him money, we found out, which we never did collect, but it was his heart that worked very often in the way he dealt with business. It sounds so funny, sounds very dramatic, but when he did die and was in the funeral parlor, the line was down the block. That just shows what kind of a good man he was.

I represented Nutley quite extensively. I lived there until just last year--I'm seventy-five years old--seventy-four years of my life. Does that have to be in the tape that I'm seventy-five years old? But, yes, you got my birthday. I taught almost forty years, and a good thirty-five of those years were spent in the Nutley School System. I first taught at the middle school, the Franklin School. I started as an English teacher, then French and Spanish, and then eventually I went to the high school. That was seven years, and then the bulk of my career was at Nutley High School. I made a very good name for myself. I was very honored in being a part of my heritage in teaching there.

[I was] a very well-liked teacher, I must say. I'm going to be a little bit boastful. I won seven teaching awards, which brought me a lot of joy. Unbeknownst to me, I even accepted them with humility, I just did what I did, and it was beautifully received. I was in the Spanish and French Department, a world language teacher. I serviced Nutley in other capacities, on the negotiating team for our Nutley teachers. It was something quite different than what I was used to, but I was asked to be on it. I learned a lot about negotiations and the teachers' comments and the town comments. When it comes to money, everybody has a say when it comes to negotiating teachers' salaries. So, I learned a lot, and I was happy for the experience. In 1992, I won the Distinguished Educator of the Town Award, after which the police department asked me to be on a town Safety and Civil Defense Committee. That was another experience that I very much learned from. It was with things like 9/11, which then happened after I was on the committee, but any type of town disaster, we were the first to know, and then we had to give the news and take care of the community. That was what I learned from that particular committee. From my teaching, I branched out into a lot of town notoriety, as well as influence, as well as enjoyment. I find myself now that I'm in a different place, I very, very much miss walking down the street and seeing every kid that I taught or their parent that I taught and the familiarity.

LR: Might I add, there's not a place she can go in the town where she does not see someone who says, "You changed my life. You made a difference to me. I wish my child could have you as a teacher." She really had feelers through the years that she taught, and people still remember. They remember little details of her teaching, which is not common, but [it is] because she was so dynamic in the classroom, even her reviews say the same thing.

MP: That's my big sister. She loves me. She loves me.

LR: She was dynamic in the classroom.

MP: There was one particular award in 2009, it was the radio station, KTU 103.5, and they selected a "Teacher That Makes the Grade." They said it was chosen from the teachers in the Metropolitan area. One of my students had nominated me for it. We were in a faculty meeting, and the principal, Mr. Catrambone, said that he had heard from the radio station that one of our teachers had won a thousand dollars for computer service to our school and won this award. I said, "Oh, it's got to be one of those science teachers, those young kids." There were so many beautiful upcoming teachers. He goes, "Mary Perrotta." Holy mackerel, you want to talk about crying and being overwhelmed. I was in the senior years of my teaching, and it was a reward and it was a memory.

LR: Well deserved.

MP: I gave my blood, sweat and tears to Nutley. I did. I miss it tremendously, but life is what it is and the wheels go round. Our sister Yolanda graduated from Seton Hall Law School, and she was an honors student herself in school. She worked in a law practice that was right on Franklin Avenue with a very well-known real estate lawyer, and she even then went into working with him on his book. A smart kid, she was good. She was selected as the attorney for the Planning Board of Nutley as well. When Yolanda, our sister, was at Nutley High School, she was also the

editor-in-chief of the 1971 yearbook *The Exit*, which in those days, it was definitely an honor to be selected.

LR: Was it '73 or '71?

MP: 1971. Okay, thanks, Laura. We all were involved with music all our lives.

LR: All our lives.

MP: Dad had to do paper keyboards to get strength back in his arms by the nurses in the Army …

LR: OT, it was occupational therapy. They gave him a cardboard keyboard, and he tried to learn to play the piano.

MP: He said when Laura Jean was born, "My daughter's going to play the piano," and so we did. We found the most delightful, delightful piano teacher on Center Street in Nutley, Mrs. McLean, and Laura started. Then, two years later, I started with the lessons; five years later, Yolanda. Mom used to walk us to the lessons. We became rather proficient on the piano. We were at all the recitals, the two sisters that played the duets, and Yolanda would play her little recital pieces, but we all were involved very much with music to this day. I always told my students in the language class, reading music and playing music is another language. So, there we go. We were all selected for, well, it was the famed Nutley High School Choralettes, so we all were a part of it in our years of high school and did a lot of different experiences with some of the performances. Where were some of yours?

LR: All over.

MP: My group sang with the cadets of West Point, and that was great. You made a record.

LR: Yes, my group did. We made a record.

MP: We were involved with music. Laura, of course, in her years, but then she did marry and moved out of the Nutley area, so her contribution went to her dedication to her teaching at South Brunswick High School and her community, but not Nutley. We put in as a final thought, if it is a final thought, to this day, we still have one nephew that lives in Nutley with his wife. We also have one cousin and his family in Nutley. A fifth generation of the Liloia family still is in Nutley. Everybody's either passed and has gone to the angels or has gone on different paths.

LR: I also went into teaching, as did Mary.

KR: Please tell me a little bit about your education and then what you did over the course of your career.

LR: Well, I have a little bit more of a checkered past, you might say. I married and divorced, and my first husband was a graduate student at Ohio State University. So, I moved out there,

and I got my master's degree there and taught there for a while. Then, when I moved back to New Jersey and was divorced, I got a teaching job at South Brunswick High School, which is very close to New Brunswick. My second husband and I set up a house in East Windsor, New Jersey, which is outside of Princeton. My daughter went to Hightstown High School and then on to Wesleyan University. I taught for twenty-five years at South Brunswick High School. I taught high school English, every grade level, every ability level over the years that I was there. Toward the end, I was teaching the AP [Advanced Placement] classes, which I enjoyed very much. The last two years before I retired, I was a house leader. Each of the grade levels had almost like a dean who worked with students who were in danger of failing or students who had issues. I would be a liaison to the guidance department for those students and enjoyed that very, very much also.

MP: How about that history course you instituted?

LR: At one point, I had designed, with another colleague, a history course called American Studies, which was very unique. We actually went around to a lot of different schools to present what we developed. It was a course that was two periods a day. Students got credit for both English and history. What we did is we intertwined American literature with the history of the time. Of course, during the Civil War, they did a lot of Walt Whitman poetry, that kind of thing. It became quite a popular course, so much so that they had to include another teacher and offer more parts, options, for the students.

MP: More kids wanted to take it.

LR: Yes, the kids really found it very, very interesting. It was a good course. That was one of my innovations. I worked on the team for Middle States. I was on that team. I did a lot of things within the school system, a class advisor. I was the literary magazine advisor for eleven years. We won publication awards three different times after submitting our publication. That was about it for me.

MP: She has a beautiful daughter Jessica, who's [got a] lovely husband. Laura's husband John, her second [husband] John, we loved him. She was with him for over thirty-five years.

LR: He passed in 2015.

MP: We both have a Bachelor of Arts, or it was called an A.B., from what was known as Caldwell College for Women. At the time, it was a women's college, a Catholic women's college. Now, it's changed. We commuted, and our father approved of it, because it was a Catholic women's college. I have a master's degree from Fairleigh Dickinson University. Then, I got my thirty-beyond credits at Seton Hall in education, Seton Hall University.

LR: I have a master's in English from Ohio State University, and I have thirty credits supervisor certification from Trenton State, because I lived in that area, Mercer County, at the time.

MP: That place was as lucky as Nutley. [laughter] Education, even though it was coming from immigrant grandparents, so to speak, and then parents that were first educated, our father stressed that his girls were going to go to school.

LR: Yes, three daughters. He made sure that we all had an education.

MP: As I said, Yolanda went to Seton Hall Law School.

KR: Did Yolanda go to Caldwell for her undergraduate education?

MP: No. Seton Hall.

KR: Oh, she went to Seton Hall for her bachelor's degree.

LR: It was right about the time that they were accepting women, because it had been in all-men's university at one time.

MP: She went to Seton Hall University and Law School. We lost her to cancer. She had a rather prolonged illness. Laura moved back to Nutley, at the time, to help with her and her children, which was quite a sacrifice on her part. Her husband too, they came, they left their home in East Windsor, and she bought a home in Nutley.

LR: Then, Mary took care of the youngest. Her youngest child was six at the time that she died, so Mary pretty much raised him. She was the Little League mom, and she was the bowling team mom.

MP: You bet. My Andrew. He also belonged to the concert choir at school, which was a select twenty-five. They did a lot of traveling, and I was the concert choir mother. I had the opportunity to travel with them to San Francisco. They sang in Puerto Rico. They even sang at Notre Dame.

LR: She made sure he had birthday parties, just like all the other boys.

MP: It was a tremendous loss for us. It kind of damaged the continuity of our family, but young deaths do that. But we still try to keep her kids united with us and her daughter and her three grandchildren. We try, as you know too, with Italian families, no is not an answer.

LR: That's where we are today.

MP: Your own family, I can tell from your background, you must be the most loving of souls.

KR: Thank you.

MP: You're just absolutely loving in the way you've opened this program and worked so diligently with it.

LR: Could you hit pause for a minute?

[RECORDING PAUSED]

MP: I'm going to first just go back to the reference of all of us living on Washington Avenue. This is something our sister Yolanda always called it; she called it the family compound. So, I wrote that down. [laughter] That was a funny term, family compound. How shall we go, Laura? We said Uncle Lou and Uncle Nick did not have any children, but Uncle Mike, the Uncle Michael who was the dentist in Belleville, he had three children. His first boy is Michael, a man now, Michael, and then Suzanne and Peter, his youngest. Peter also became a dentist and took over his father's practice. Uncle Gerard is next.

LR: Uncle Gerard was the uncle that worked on the atom bomb. He was the chemical engineer. He was married to Sondra Lowitz, and he had one son whose name was Philip. Philip also became an attorney and worked for the State of New Jersey as an attorney, from what we remember. He's also passed away in the meantime. The next brother, second from the youngest, was Anthony, and he was the brother that was in the Navy, if you recall. His wife was Marie Minai, and his two children are our cousin Marie Adele, his older daughter, and his son Peter. We are still very close with those cousins.

MP: You're watching the name Peter surface quite a bit, because Pietro was Grandpa. We have quite a few Cousin Peters.

LR: We have an Uncle Peter, then Uncle Peter has a son Peter, Uncle Anthony has a son Peter, Aunt Jo has a son Peter. They all, as I said to you, honored the family by naming after. Then, the youngest was Uncle Peter, who was a civil engineer, and he had two sons, Peter the third, and Michael Paul.

MP: Aunt Jo, Josephine, has three boys, Anthony, Peter and Joseph. I'm still very, very much in touch with Cousin Joseph. He lives in Buffalo, but we were like brother and sister because he lived up the street.

LR: They lived right up the street. We still maintain a connection with them.

MP: We have quite a few cousins on my father's side. His brother Tony, Anthony, we kept in touch with his two daughters, Brenda and Marie.

LR: They are Perrottas.

MP: They are Perrottas, but the others were the Liloias, or as Uncle Peter used to jokingly say, "Li-boyas." [laughter] That's the Liloias. What else, Laura?

LR: That's it. I just wanted to say their names, so that they know that we remember them in our narration.

MP: I guess that's about it, Kate. That's about it. Laura's final comment, which we wrote at the finality of our notes: Our Nutley involvement extended over one hundred years. It's quite a longevity to it, even though some of our Perrotta relatives in New York would say, "Isn't Nutley where all the nuts live?" It was called Nutley because there's a lot of chestnut trees and hazelnut trees.

LR: Yes, the nut trees, beech trees. That's how it got the name Nutley. It was originally Franklin Township, and then they changed the name. There are streets in the town, Walnut Street, Beech Street, Chestnut Street. It's all from the trees, the nut trees, in the town.

MP: It's still a nice community. When I go back, it's like going home. "There's no place like home," Dorothy said. Amen.

KR: Would you like to share about your plans for donating your mother's letters to Special Collections and University Archives at Rutgers?

LR: Sure. Well, we did discover that my mother had saved, from 1943 to 1946, just about every single letter that my father wrote to her, that her brothers wrote to her, and then she also kept, from after the war, when they came back from the war, the letters that they brought back with them. We have, from 1943 to 1946, probably eight hundred letters, which are very folksy. They're very informative. They tell about daily life in town, back on the home front. The letters that came from my father to her inform her of what he's doing in terms of the war effort. He has a lot of letters from his hospital stay in England and then in Texas, when he was in a hospital in Texas, after he was wounded in Germany.

MP: We categorized them by years. Laura and I did do this.

LR: We mentioned also to you, Kate, before that even neighbors and cousins from across the street, the local guy who owned the tavern downstairs, she even had letters from them to her brothers.

MP: There were letters from miscellaneous relatives.

LR: Her sisters-in-law and letters that they sent. For example, the sister-in-law that was in Missouri would write to her about her husband, who was my mother's brother. She kept those letters. It was such a find, and it was such a joy to read them. As a matter of fact, we had a gathering of my daughter and my sister Yolanda's children, and they were just thrilled. They sat for hours last Sunday afternoon and just, "Listen to this," "Oh, listen to this one," "Hey, here's something Pop-pop said, "Wait until you hear what Pop-pop wrote here?" They were just thrilled with reading what their grandparents had shared in these letters.

MP: We even found out somebody else was interested in my mother.

LR: Oh, yes. She had another boyfriend who wrote to her, which we didn't know about. [laughter] I mean, these are things that we never would've known if she hadn't kept these things. He was very disappointed when he found out she got married. One of the letters …

MP: We won't use his last name, but my nephew Tommy--well, pretend it was Smith--he goes, "Could you imagine if we were the Smith family?"

LR: The letters are a treasure. It's a remarkable story of a woman who had a big family and who made her way herself and who was so important to so many people. A book should be written about her.

MP: The word dispatcher was what she was.

LR: She was a tremendous force in her family and in her town and to her children and grandchildren and nieces and nephews. My cousins even say, "Oh, Aunt Yolanda was so smart," or, "Aunt Yolanda was so funny." She had a wry, very dry wit and a smile that would knock you over. Even toward the end when she had dementia, if Mary would feed her, she had oatmeal and farina, and she'd look up at Mary and she'd smile with that smile.

MP: She'd put her hand on mine.

LR: She was just a lovely, wonderful woman.

MP: My attachment to her is tremendous and hers to me. Laura would hear her go, "Mary!" and I'd go running to her, whatever the case was. We then had her hospitalized at the end, needing oxygen and a nursing capacity at the end.

LR: In a nursing home.

MP: I was with her, and we were talking. Laura was always reading--we would read her her letters. I had to go to the girl's room, and I said, "Mom, I'll be right back." She passed in that time. Laura was with her, of course. The nurse said to me, "She waited until you left the room." I'm glad she did that. Laura's grandchildren used to visit Mom regularly, every two weeks.

LR: Every two weeks. My daughter would bring them and then they would play …

MP: ... All their instruments.

LR: One played the violin. One played the recorder. Another would play the French horn, believe it or not. They would play, and people in the nursing home would gather and see them. They would play cards with her. My daughter was absolutely faithful to Mimi. She was the oldest grandchild.

MP: Jessica, she's beautiful, her girl.

LR: She just adored my mother.

MP: And her kids too.

LR: Even now, she still remembers all the stories of Mimi.

MP: At the end, she had broken one of her hips and then another one. Then, it was …

LR: The dementia, they say, from that.

MP: I was with her every day.

LR: She lived to 103. Do you know that woman never had medication? The only medication she ever took was when she'd get a headache, she'd take Tylenol. [laughter] I mean, this is until she's 103. We never had to worry about her health. She was so hearty and strong, and she was amazing.

MP: She kept a journal, which I put in a folder, teachers that we are, and this is what the journal did look like. We're not talking about something that was an eloquent [notebook]; she started it with a pad. It consists of twenty-five pages and four additional pages she wrote at a later time and then an addendum.

LR: But you can see what she did. She went back. This is what she wrote when my father first died. She started it when he died, and she started at age thirteen. Then, she'd go back and she'd add stuff. She was so to the dime. I mean, she was just so specific.

MP: She wrote that she paid the tuition over here.

LR: She wrote here a note, my parents' mortgage on one of our larger buildings, 20 Washington Avenue, to send Nicholas to medical school, which we did tell you in our account. You can see all the way through. Then, another time she wrote in pencil here just to add information. She was a stickler about dates. She's got a whole page here of when they were born, when they died, a stickler about dates. She was so smart. It's a shame she didn't get a doctorate degree. She was amazing. That's the story of our mother.

MP: One of her grandsons Tommy even said this past Sunday, he said, "You never heard a foul word out of Mimi's mouth."

LR: No, never.

MP: Because I'm always, with my rambunctiousness, and he goes, "Mimi never would have said that." [laughter]

LR: Not only that, but she never got riled. She never got riled.

MP: She left that all to me.

LR: If things went wrong, my dad would yell at us or discipline us, but she would just handle it. She was quite amazing.

MP: Even when her daughter was dying, when Yolanda was dying, she was amazing, her strength. It was such a void she had, but we had to worry about her three young children. In a way, with the death of our sister Yolanda, which has made such an impact on our life, the sister camaraderie that we had, we didn't even have time to mourn, because we had the three children. Mary was sixteen, eleven, and then just going on six. It was a lot to take care of. Somewhere, you get the strength and take a deep breath.

LR: I think that's pretty much the story.

MP: Yes.

KR: You are both doing such amazing work to honor the legacy of your family members and your parents.

LR: Thank you.

MP: Thank you for saying that. That's great. Some days, when this became a lot of work, putting everything together, all the correspondences, Laura, God bless her, has done so much more than I, we say, "What did we open up, a Pandora's box here?" But the memories have been very comforting.

LR: Comforting.

MP: Yes, very good. A lot of tears. Even the kids were crying in talking about [the family history].

LR: We just never knew that she had these. I mean, what would make her keep all this? We wish she were here to ask her, why did you keep all this stuff?

MP: You know what else too, Kate, some of the letters are in a digitized form, that because they were overseas, they had to make photographs of them.

KR: V-mail. [Editor's Note: Victory mail or V-mail used a system of microfilming letters to conserve cargo space for transporting overseas.]

MP: Amazing. They're really crinkling now. For me to keep them anymore and preserve them … As a matter of fact, her wedding gown, Laura's youngest granddaughter said, "Oh, Aunt Mary, I want Mimi's wedding [dress]." Well, we'll see if it doesn't fall apart. But they're crinkling now. Now, if they can do that acid control of them and keep them, amen, God bless, that's great.

LR: We talked to the kids about it. If we were to keep these letters in our basements, it doesn't go anywhere. Then, what happens when we pass away? They throw them out. It would be a shame, I think.

KR: It is amazing that you are looking to the future and looking to preserve the letters for your family but also for the public as well.

MP: To think if one day one of your students here takes a letter and says, "Gee, let me quote this." Tell her about Lin-Manuel [Miranda], which you had told the kids.

LR: Yes, I told the kids, they love the play *Hamilton*, my grandkids, and I said to even my sister Yolanda's children and my daughter, when he wrote *Hamilton*, he's got a scene in *Hamilton* where Aaron Burr writes a letter to his daughter, Theodosia, I think is the daughter's name. "Dear Theodosia" is the name of the song. I'm sure he went to the archives, the National Archives, and he read all of Aaron Burr's correspondences with whoever it was, and then he incorporated it into the play. That's what archives do. They give you an understanding of people who came before you. You learn about them, and you see what it can mean for you. I thought that was a very good example of how archives can be used even to bring us forward. It's not just history. It's history helping us with now. [Editor's Note: Lin-Manuel Miranda's interpretation of Alexander Hamilton's life story in the Broadway hit *Hamilton* drew inspiration from the 2004 biography *Alexander Hamilton*, which author and historian Ron Chernow researched at the National Archives.]

MP: If Martin Scorsese wants to step in and do something ... [laughter]

LR: My son-in-law joked, he said, "Make sure you get right of first refusal, because if [Steven] Spielberg comes in and wants to do Mimi's life story." But you never know. She's a person who lived through a lot, and she has a story to tell.

MP: You had the patience and the kindness and the smarts to listen.

KR: Well, thank you both so much for doing this interview and for making the trek down here.

LR: Well, thank you very much for having us. We very much appreciate it.

MP: Thank you, Kate.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

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