

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Virginia Pinocci

COLLECTION: 4700.1736

IDENTIFICATION: First generation U.S. citizen, daughter of Sicilian immigrants; Baton Rouge native

INTERVIEWER: Petra Munro Hendry

SERIES: McKinley High School Oral History Project – Social Organizations

INTERVIEW DATES: April 11, 2005

FOCUS DATES: 1940s-1950s, 2005

ABSTRACT:

Tape 3438, Side A

Born February 11, 1931 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana at her parents' home; her parents immigrated from Sicily; her father could read and write but her mother could not; her mother was a homemaker and her father was a peddler; he sold groceries out of his car to residents on River Road; her family lived on the corner of Highland Road and McKinley; her father had run a grocery store but it closed down during the Depression; she and the neighborhood kids would play in the empty store that was attached to her house; her neighbors were primarily African American; her neighbor Carter had a two-story house and a telephone; her family did not have a bathroom in their house until she was thirteen; her job was to clean the outhouse; most of the families in the neighborhood worked for Esso or Standard Oil; a few of the neighbors were school teachers and one was a professor at Louisiana State University; the houses in the neighborhood were not old or dilapidated and they were not all shotgun houses; there was one other Italian-American family in the neighborhood – the Messinas; the neighborhood was close to Blundon Home for Orphans and the Blundon School; there were many grocery stores along Highland Road; she had four sisters and six brothers; two of her brothers went into the service; her father had a heart attack and died in 1945; one of her brothers quit school as an elementary student and got a job at Pan Dandy Bakery; her father's grocery store was reopened; the Cotton Club restaurant on Highland was a popular place for whites to congregate before and after LSU games; Highland was populated with businesses and residences; it was widened during the war; one memorable business near the Cotton Club was the Kwitchakickin bar; Virginia became friends with Granadas who had a record player and introduced her to jitterbugging; she won every jitterbug contest she entered throughout her life; she could adapt to the dance style of any partner; she attended Beauregard grade school; she rode the bus to school, which was driven by Mr. Menasca who conversed with her father in Italian; she had to go to Catechism and would walk a mile and a half to St. Agnes Church with her friend Una; there were many Italian-owned grocery stores along the way; there were no big chain stores, which allowed the neighborhood to

support so many grocery stores; it was a happy small community; Reddy Street School (Old McKinley High School) was also on the route to St. Agnes; she never had any fear while walking home alone; she started attending school at St. Agnes in the fourth grade; she finally made communion with the second graders; only white students attended the school; she attended Baton Rouge Junior High and then Baton Rouge High; she was a member of the first class that went to school for twelve years; she graduated in 1950; they had their 50th class reunion in 2000; there were sororities and fraternities (clubs) at the high school; Italians were not allowed in the sororities; Italians also could not work for Louisiana Creamery and they could not drive a city bus; her brother Vince was the first Italian to work for Gulf States; during her senior year she was accepted into the Boosters; she was already engaged so she did not join the club; her high school experience was not marred by the prejudice of her classmates; she hadn't started school until she was seven so she was older than her classmates; she went to school with J. C. Redd, Struther, Rip Collins, and Bob Pettit; she met a baseball player during her junior year at a Baton Rouge Red Sticks game; there was a baseball park on Dalrymple before the interstate was built; there was also a small zoo and a golf course in that area; the new player for the Red Sticks was nicknamed Snow White Pinocci; he flirted with her during the whole game; they met at Donnelly's after the game.

Tape 3438, Side B

Virginia went on a date with Snow White (Frank) Pinocci; they missed the last bus into town and had to walk home; he kissed her at her front door; he had been loaned out to the Red Sticks from the Boston Braves; the Braves transferred him to Clarksdale, Mississippi; he stayed at her house the night before he left; she went with her brothers to take Frank to the bus station; she was upset when she got home; her mother was ill and fell; her brother Vince was installing a plumbing fixture in his house and sat against a live wire and died; the funeral process lasted three days; Virginia and Frank got married and settled on Highland Road; he did not want to go back to Massachusetts but he was still wanted to play baseball; they moved to St. Ferdinand Street; she had four children – in the hospital – between 1952 and 1959; the neighborhood was lively then but by 2005 was economically depressed; the east side of Highland and Thomas Delpit Drive was a mostly black neighborhood; she and the other children would play Catholic Youth Organization basketball at St. Agnes; the neighborhood overall was ethnically and racially mixed; she went to the movies at the Varsity Theater and Chimes Theater; the Lincoln Theater near South Boulevard attracted black entertainers and patrons; her brother got married and lived in that area; the prosperity of the East Boulevard area also faded away by 2005; entertainment was simplified in the 1940s and 1950s; people went to City Park on Friday nights for singing and dancing or to the City Park swimming pool; they would go to LSU games; when Sam Jones was inaugurated, the whole town shut down; Dalton's department store was a popular place to hang out; Rosenfield's was also a prominent department store but it was very expensive; her niece had a dress from Rosenfield's that cost \$11; Virginia's wardrobe was made up primarily of hand me downs from her sisters; the area she lived in was simply referred to as South Baton Rouge but it was distinctly different from North Baton Rouge; the plants were in North Baton Rouge and Hopper's Drive-in was also there; South Baton Rouge had a skating rink and Borden's; Mr. Losavio and Virginia's father were going to buy vacant land near LSU; her father backed out of the deal when the area flooded after a rainstorm; Nicholson Drive was a wooded area in the 1940s/50s; St. Agnes was a big church; all the kids went to St. Agnes; she was baptized and married at St. Agnes; they played CYO ball against other Catholic Schools; there were derbies

and dance marathons in North Baton Rouge; there were also street fairs like present day carnivals; Huey and Earl Long were well known in Baton Rouge; Earl was a laughingstock in the community; Huey was killed in 1939; Virginia and her friends took the bus to New Orleans for the LSU-Tulane games and Mardi Gras; Italians were discriminated against because they worked hard; St. Joseph's Altar was a popular tradition; people would give money and then they would go to the church and eat all they wanted; Italian food became very popular over the years; Virginia's mother made pizza before Americans had a name for it and the Italians also introduced muffalettas; Virginia's family ate mostly vegetables because they could not afford meat; she believed her mother was a saint just like Pope John Paul II; her mother worked in the fields at LSU; she would be pregnant and not know it; her work in the fields would often cause her to lose the baby; Virginia's family had a tiny yard at their home; they had fig, pomegranate, and plum trees, and they grew some vegetables; Virginia and her siblings were delivered by a black midwife named Rose; Rose was paid two dollars to deliver Virginia; conclusion.

TAPE: 1 (T3438)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 16 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 63 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: Correspondence; Inventory; Processing Checklist; Transcript with Interviewee Corrections; Virginia Pinocci obituary; Mary Angela Caruso Saia obituary; Joseph Caruso obituary; James Lee Babin obituary; Concetta Provenza Greco obituary; Frank Pinocci baseball statistics; Bob Pettit Wikipedia entry (6 pgs); Bob Pettit Louisiana Encyclopedia entry (2 pgs); Bob Pettit basketball statistics (3 pgs); Sam H. Jones Wikipedia entry (4 pgs); Samuel T. Sanders Birmingham Southern College Alumni information; Samuel T. Sanders Louisiana State University Catalogue information; Historical Preservation of the Lincoln Theater (5 pgs); Remembering the Lincoln Theater (2 pgs); The Sheik of Araby Wikipedia entry (2 pgs); Muffuletta Wikipedia entry (3 pgs)

RESTRICTIONS: None