

TUALATIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Transcript #29

Silvio Traverso

This is part of the taped interviews that Toni Martinazzi did for research on her book on her family history. This is an interview she did with Bob Bartlett, Jr. talking about his Uncle Tony (Silvio Traverso) in July 1993 in Tualatin, Oregon. Bob's mother was Julia Bartlett, daughter of Teresa Martinazzi, Julius Martinazzi's sister. There is a third person identified on the transcript as Mary.

B Silvio had some cut glass, a drinking glass, and he'd give it to one person at the table. It had been cut clear through so every time you'd pick it up to drink out of it, it would dribble on you. You would try it several times and it would leak and then he would say, "Haven't you ever taken a drink out of a glass before?" That was fun!

Then he had another. He had a bladder with a long hose and a bulb on the end. He would put it underneath the plate of someone and when they tried to cut their food, he'd squeeze on the bulb, and his or her food plate would drop. And he would say, "Oh, well, haven't you ever cut your food with a knife before?" He was quite a practical joker!

All I have ever known him as, was Uncle Tony. I don't know why, because his name was Silvio. The first time I ever met him, I must have been about 4 or 5, and my parents and I did a lot of extensive traveling and he used to ----- came home just before Pearl Harbor and my dad went to work for the government and we stayed with him and Aunt Blanche. So I got to know him pretty well and he was forever pulling some kind of stunt. He would stir his coffee and if you weren't paying attention, he would reach over and put the hot spoon on you, you know, just enough to startle you.

Oh, he wasn't too much taller than you people (my sisters and I range in height from 4'9" to 5'3"). He was a pretty short fellow. He was about the same height as Julius or maybe closer to Art's size. I remember once we went to the bathroom, and he jumped back and said, "Oh, there is a bear in there!"

He combed his black hair straight back and he had a big forehead and he had one glass eye. He lost it up in Cascade Locks when he was a boy. He would walk around in the morning with that eye out and then when he went to clean it and put it in, he would spread a towel over the sink and lay it in there, you know, and if you weren't used to it, you would stare at him because he would be a poppin' his eye in and out. His good eye was hazel color. He had olive skin about the same category of color as Art and Bill Georgette. He was dark-skinned.

He was quite a joker and he would walk around the house in his silk boxer shorts and he wore garters on his long socks, to hold them up, you know. He had various colors of silk shorts. It was sort of his trademark. We used to joke about it.

Uncle Tony always smoked cigars. I thought they smelled real good. He always had a cigar and he chewed 'em more than he smoked. When it went out he would just hang onto it and chew on it.

T What was Julia, your mom, like?

B My mom was fair complexioned. When she was older, she had lost a lot of weight (in that seated picture). She was always quite full. A real robust woman.

T Tell me about Teresa.

B She had sung in the opera. She died before I was born. I was born in 1933. In 1956, my wife and I took our kids and Mom and went down to Disneyland and we went out to the cemetery out where she was buried near Los Angeles.

I don't know when they moved to Cascade Locks but Mother took me up there and showed me where Andrew had a hotel/bar and the building is still there. She took me to the house that she was born in and it is still there. I don't know the address. Mom and I could go there and take pictures of it.

The river had a lot of traffic and the paddle wheelers would go through the locks there and they would either have to lay overnight or stay awhile and they needed a place to stay, that's why they created the business. For a long time the only way was by railroad.

There was a great burn on her chest, a terrible burn. She was just a young child, just very young when it happened. She was on the floor and hot water got spilled on her. They were having another child, I believe, and they had a practical nurse, I believe they called them in those days. They were carrying the hot water back and forth and she tripped and it fell on her. I don't know who the child was. The doctors in those days used water and cotton, and they put the water and cotton on her chest too long and when they pulled it off, it took the skin and left great depressions all over her chest. Oh, it was just terrible!

T Was it Teresa having the baby?

B That I don't know.

T Your dad told me that Teresa lost a couple of kids.

B That could be it, then. I don't know for sure.

T Is your dad still living?

B He is 93 and he lives in Washington right now in a nursing home. My step mother?

T I called him, your Mary told me where he was, and some people say he can be grouchy but he talked to me for the longest time and told me all kinds of stuff. It was really nice. Did you ever hear any stories about Italy?

B No.

T Traverso's family? He died in about 1909. I found that out from the Polks Portland City Directory. Every year they would have them listed and it told their occupation and then, all of a sudden in 1909-1910, it is just Mrs. Teresa and Julia, I think. Maybe it was Julia and Silvio and then in about 1915 it was just Teresa and Julia and that coincides with when you told me Silvio had gone to California.

B Yes, it wasn't too long after that I believe, that she and Ma, uh – Julia, went down to join him.

M Julia was about 19 and she worked in a bank in Portland. I don't know what bank.

T Bob, do you speak Italian?

B Yes. I worked in a meat packing plant in Oakland and they were all Italians. I heard that Julius was just devastated when Teresa left. First he went to Oregon from Colorado and he stayed there and then she went to California from Oregon. I cannot find a marriage record for them anywhere. The courts in Portland don't have a record of it.

M Uncle Tony ----- marriage certificate from his first wife. He was married before Blanche but that's all we know. He was seven or eight years older than Julia. He was pretty young when he was married the first time.

B My mom had been married before.

M They got them before three hours and had it annulled.

B I only have vague pieces of the story anyway. But it seems that this gentleman was a salesman and she was working in the bank and they met and they went and got married and her mother jumped on it right away and she got Uncle Tony and I understand they got as far as _____ and that was the end of that! They picked her up and brought her home and had it annulled. I don't know why, if she was too young, or what the objection was. I don't know the gentleman's name and that's all I've ever been told. She didn't tell me the story. I think it was Aunt Blanche or Uncle Tony that told me. Families are interesting!

T I vaguely remember one time someone came to visit. It might have been your folks. My mom was always suspicious, she was really funny that way. She had a whole set of her own problems. But she didn't like my dad's side of the family and she was real critical about them and I think it may have been you who came. I remember a woman in a long coat. And they were there for just a little while and Dad said that they were our relatives. Nadine said they came up several times and Dad -----

B One time I do remember coming here. We came to this field here, and there wasn't any house on it then. All of you girls were out, and I think you were weeding berries.

T When this company came we were in the fields and we didn't stop.

B No.

T Okay, but we should have. But that was Mom's doing. She should have said, "Come on in, let's have coffee" or, you know, do something, but she was that way.

M Your Mom and Julia didn't get along. I don't know why, but something was there because when they were at the Tualatin Country Club, Art would go over there to talk with them but Ann didn't go.

T Mom wouldn't talk to Grampa Julius for about 30 years. The only time she started talking to him was in 1958 when the Oregon Centennial was on and she was doing the Tualatin history and he came up and she was asking him some questions. I don't remember Grampa Julius ever being at our home except that one time and I'm not sure he was even inside the house that time! I don't ever, in my whole life, remember my mother being in their house.

B The first time I saw Art (Toni's editorial comment – Bob is about 3 years younger than me?) the war was still on. When we came up this way from where his folks were living, we stopped here and that was in the mid 40's when I was 10 or 12. I remember stopping here and you people.

That's the first time I met Uncle Julius. He seemed quite cordial. That was the first time I was ever in the old house up on the hill. We ate something there. We ate in the kitchen. Yes, yes we did. In the southeast corner of the kitchen there was a big wood stove with a water tank along side. And on the north side of the kitchen there was a big wooden table, and I forget how many chairs, 6 or 8 chairs around it.

T I've got one of those chairs in Michigan!

B And if I remember right, there was a back porch right by that water tank. I remember going out to a woodshed or something of that sort and then inside the kitchen and just off the kitchen there was a back porch, and a stairway. And in front of that was a living room, a parlor. It had an old wood stove in it too.

When they set me down, I was at the far end of the table and I could look directly in there and I could remember a big part of it was seeing that big wood stove in there that had so many doors on it. It had doors on the side and in the front that opened. It was in the middle of the room on a wall but not directly in the center of the room.

Do you remember a china cabinet that had glass doors and had little marble statues in it?

I don't remember what was in it but it was not on the kitchen side. It was on the other.

And I was upstairs and I don't remember as much about the upstairs. It had rafters and the boards showing, just like my grandmother's house. I think there was just one bedroom up there. That was awhile back, now! I can hardly remember my name sometimes!

T Uncle Clyde told me that Kate had told him that Dad used to help her get away so they could go to dances and stuff. She would climb out that upstairs window onto the porch and he would help her off the roof or he would help lift her up so she could get back in when they got back. They used to pull shenanigans like that!

Do you remember ever seeing any gold silverware that had the name Martinazzi engraved on it?

B No, no I don't.

T Did they show you any old family stuff?

B No. He just showed me the barn. He had just had a new milk house put in. Then he showed me where the water source was, where the spring house was. It was down where I-5 is now.

T Do you remember that zigzag fence that went down behind the barn alongside the freeway? It was there a long time after the freeway went in. There was a back porch out there too.

B There was an outhouse out behind the house. It was a long time before they got a bathroom. I had forgotten there was a back porch. You had to step down into the woodshed. He had a calf in the barn that had scours. They had a big team of horses. Percheron? Yeah, because he could almost walk under them, they were so big. I remember it, because he could just walk right underneath their backs. I remember that. I've always thought he was a good farmer.

T It has always seemed to me that he was more progressive than my dad. Even when I was a kid, it seemed that way. Grampa would be the first to get a fancier dairy. He had retired from the dairy business by the time I grew up but when I was a kid, it seemed like he had everything bigger and better than we did. We borrowed his equipment. We borrowed horses. But I don't remember big, big horses like that. But Loyce told me that he had horses like that.

B Oh, he had some big ones. I remember that because I was awestruck. It was the biggest horse I had ever seen. It seems like he had a New Holland Harvester or haymaker, baler or combine. And then he had one of the first power-driven elevators to put the baled hay up into the loft. And I remember that he was one of the first. And I

remember that people around the area would have him do work for them because he had this modern equipment.

T What kind of reputation did he have?

B As far as I know it was all right. I've never run across anybody that said any different.

T They did, though. He was crookeder than a dog's hind leg! He used to work Billy and Buddy so hard and not pay them. Just awful! He was awful to them! He would cheat people if he got a chance. (Toni's aside written comment – Corky {George} Andrews told me) It's really sad, but I think it might have been because he missed out on a whole bunch of love in his life. When you think about how small he was, how he came over here without parents, and then all that moving around. Then he got separated from his sister. Can you imagine what that would do to a 10 or 12 year old kid?

B Yeah, it would ruin you!

T And no one has ever told me how old he was when his mother died. But I think I've found out who took care of them before they came to America. I think it was one of Enrico's sisters. She had a place in Bellagio. She lived in the Lake Como area and they had a summer home in Bellagio. We went there and we met her great-grand-daughter and they had a -----

B Just off the lake a little bit?

T It was right on the lake. They lived in Milan, but they had a summer home there that had been in the family for a long, long time. But Gulia wrote to America. Irene had the stuff. She sent Christmas cards to "Nipote" which can be niece and nephew or grandchildren. And it seems like ---- I am positive that's who it was because Gulia Morosini was Enrico's sister.