Chapter 3

Memories of Everyday Life I

*Hard Work and Family Life*

[...] Just work, come home, and going back to work. And I, I always worked, always. My grandfather always worked, my father always worked. I always worked.

*Interview Matt Martone, August 28, 2007, pp. 82f.*

Worcester’s Matt Martone emerged as the interviewee most interested in understanding how I am related to the Soloperto family. In several incidences during our interview, he made me, the interviewer, a topic of conversation:

My grandmother S...S the Soloper...I mean, I don’t think the Solopertos were what I just told you or what my father used to tell me about the Solopertos, but, you know, every year new things come out. Like I didn’t know I, you know, had a cousin in Switzerland.¹

Matt was an eager collector of family history and information. At Worcester funerals Matt would explain to his younger brother Philip who the people in the room were and how they related to them. By making my relationship to the Soloperto family a central topic of the conversation, Matt’s connecting of the dots in terms of family relationships is thus coherent with his role within the family as a collector of family knowledge. The motif *establishing family* thus remerged several times in this interview.

Tamara Hareven states how families must be studied as “a process over time.”² This chapter’s oral history analysis offers insight into how memories of past experiences have shaped families that are a product of time, past and present. The purpose of this chapter is to illuminate the family members’ memories and the generational transmission of tradition of their everyday lives, relatives, work, and chores in the house.³ These traditions, as Robert Orsi writes, “[...] are constructed [emphasis in original, CW], in particular times and places, out of particular circumstances of crisis and need, in a process with

¹ Interview Matt Martone, August 28, 2007, p. 20.
³ The names of the topics are “family” and “work/chore.” For overview of motifs consult appendix.
both conscious and unconscious elements [...]". In Orsi’s understanding of tradition, this chapter excavates how memories of work and family life are shaped by class, gender, residence, and generation. The gendering of everyday life within family settings in particular becomes visible in this section in which I ask: How was family and work remembered? What meaning did they attribute to those areas of life? How do these memories influence their identity?

Women of the second and third generations in Worcester inhabited traditional gender roles by creating closeness within tight family networks while fighting for the possibility to work outside of the home against the will of fathers and husbands. In contrast, the feeling of disconnection defined the familial memories of the separated line that had left Worcester in the 1930s: disconnection from the ethnic Italian neighborhood and disconnection from the Worcester family side. *Fearfulness* pervaded the memories of the separated line when it comes to the topic “family” and can be read as a reaction to a hostile New Hampshire environment against a non-WASP family. Fearfulness was also a reaction to parental pressures of expected social mobility.

The main part of this analysis is based on oral history transcripts; additionally, personal documents of the interviewees and public records are included, as well as oral histories of Rose Laub Coser and the *Worcester Women’s Oral History Project*. This chapter applies tools of narratology to delineate the frameworks of memories, and starts with a description of the main motifs that were established when recounting the reasons for why the separated line emerged in the first place, that is why Beatrice and Francis La Motta left their Italian neighborhoods of Worcester and Chelsea, Massachusetts, respectively, to live in the New Hampshire countryside. Then I dissect how “family” was established in the interviews, i.e., how my informants and I negotiated, questioned, and constructed our familial relations together. I am aware what risks come with doing research on closely and loosely related people. Maria Laurino’s statement, thus, shall stand as a memento that will guide me through this chapter. “Telling stories that are a part of family history is a difficult task—by choosing what to include and in reshaping the story, the teller for the most part reveals his or her viewpoint.” My viewpoint is both that of an outsider looking in—wearing the hat of a historian—and that of an insider who is a member of a community that I research. Moreover, I do not consider every piece of knowledge I have about these family members in
