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Maddalo, Candy, Oral history interview conducted by **Michelle Freitas, Spring, 2009**,
2009 East Cambridge Childhoods Oral History Project, Cambridge Historical Society



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Candy Maddalo, Oral history interview conducted by **Michelle Freitas, Spring, 2009**,
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Oral History Interview with **Candy Maddalo**

2009 East Cambridge Childhoods Oral History Project

Interview conducted by Michelle Freitas in **Spring, 2009**

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You were born here, right?

Yes, right.

Where did your family come from?

My grandparents came from Palermo, Sicily. They moved to Cambridge. My father was the first generation here.

What did your parents and grandparents do here?

My father's father was a barber. All the boys in his family were barbers. The girls just did factory work at the Fenton Shoe. They worked at the shoe factory. A couple of her sisters cleaned the courthouses.

The barbershop was always here. My grandfather worked here as well as on Third St. He didn't speak English. He only spoke Italian but he had all sorts of nationalities coming in for haircuts. He was very tiny. He would stand on a stool to cut people's hair. He was 4' 8".

What was the name of the barbershop?

It was the Court House Barbershop. I don't know what my grandfather's was called. I know my father worked in the barbershop from 1951 until he passed away in 2002.

Where did you grow up in Cambridge?

I grew up on Spring St in East Cambridge. It's on the corner of Spring and Fifth. When I was 21, we moved to Thorndike and Fifth a whole block away.

So you have any siblings?

I have a sister named April and brothers John and Frank.

What did the neighborhood look like when you were young?

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It was factory town. We had canals and just tons of factories. It didn't look like it does today. We only had Lechmere Sales and a liquor store down the street and no mall. When I was a kid, people would refer to this area as "Tobacco Road". I never really knew what that is supposed to mean. No one wanted to live on this side of the tracks from Ninth St to First St. It was not considered a wealthy or well-to-do area when I was growing up. I think it mostly had to do with the factories.

Do you remember the names of the factories?

Well there was Fenton Shoe. There was Squire's, the pig factory that burned down when I was a kid. There was the salami factory and the curtain factory. That was called Corona Curtain. There was the sub shop, Ray's Sub. It was just a factory town mostly.

So you remember Squire's burning.

I remember my dad being on the house hosing the roof down so all the little things flying over wouldn't cause our house to catch fire. The smell was really unique.

Did a lot of people move out of the neighborhood over the years?

When I was growing up, you were born here, you grew up here, you raised your kids here, and your kids stayed here. Somewhere along the line it changed. When the factories started closing, they shut down the canals and they put the mall there. The area started to become too expensive. The families that were born and raised here couldn't stay here anymore. They had to move out. If your parents owned something, then they passed it on to their children. That's why I'm still here. It's not as close of a neighborhood as it used to be.

Did you have any favorite places you liked to visit growing up?

My parents were kind of strict. We weren't allowed to go to any places. I liked the drive-ins. My parents used to take us to the drive-ins. There was the Meadow Glen Drive-In and the Assembly Drive-In. Our favorite place to eat was Ray's Sub. We would go into Boston sometimes. We would take the T into Boston but that was it.

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Did you spend time in your father's barbershop?

Every Sunday we had to help clean the barbershop. It was fun. We washed down the mirrors and put the chemicals in the bottles of the hairspray. During the week we weren't allowed to go in there too much because it was mostly all guys. Between the conversations the men would have and the swearing we weren't allowed in there too much. As I got older when I walked into the barbershop the swearing would stop and have polite conversation until I left. Little did they know that this building was built in 1880 and you can hear everything. So if they got really loud in the barbershop I would have to run down there and say tell them I could hear them swearing.

So you were working in this office while your father was downstairs?

Yes, I was in this office almost six years before he passed away.

What did your mother do?

My mother had two jobs. She worked at a bakery on Sixth St and Cambridge and at Holy Ghost Hospital, which is now called Youville. She worked in the kitchen as a supervisor. Back then you didn't need a big degree. They figured if she raised 4 kids then she could supervise people in the kitchen. Her two sisters worked there as well. My mother worked more in the cafeteria while her sister was in the kitchen. Her other sister supervised the LPNs when they had the nursing school there. She would supervise the students and stay in the dorms. When I was in high school, I cleaned the nuns' quarters at the Holy Ghost Hospital when they ran the school there.

What schools did you attend?

I went to the Thorndike School K-8 and then I went to Cambridge High and Latin. Then I went to multiple colleges and chiropractic college.

Did you have any favorite teachers or favorite subjects?

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My 8th grade teacher was Mr. Richard Kelly. He's passed away since. My high school math teacher was my favorite, Mr. Forninado. I didn't have a favorite subject. I did like my chemistry teacher. He was wonderful. That was the only time I cared about chemistry.

Thorndike was a neighborhood school, so did you spend a lot of time with your classmates?

I didn't hang out a lot. I was mostly a homebody. My sister was more of the social butterfly. I had a couple of friends in grammar school but again because my mother worked two jobs it was my responsibility to come home, clean, make sure the kids were fed on time, have supper there for my father, make sure the kids got to bed, and then my mother came home from work. I was the oldest. When I went to high school, I had a couple of friends. I could hang out a little bit until 4:30 at night. Other than that, I was responsible for the other kids. Towards the end of high school, I was part of the choir, which I did like.

How did you feel about having to come home? Did you like it?

I didn't know any better. I was used to it. My older brother was born with a severe heart condition. The ambulance was always at our house taking him to the hospital. When I was little, my job was to keep him calm during one of his heart attacks. I was used to doing these things. If you grow up that way, you don't know any better. When I was in the 8th grade I did work for a candy store on the corner of Sixth and Spring St. I worked there for a couple of hours on the weekend to help with the money. I got \$12. I got a third for myself, a third in the bank, and my parents got a third. My third went to help pay for my brother. A lot of kids grew up like that so we didn't know any better. As I got older in high school, I got to go to the teen center. Originally it was a shopping store where you got the S&H green stamps. Then it turned into the teen center. It was on Ninth St, which is now Fulkerson St. You could play pool, listen to music, play cards, talk to the other kids. Mostly I played cards. I played trumps; I was bad at the other card games.

Did you play games with your siblings?

With my sister, we played hopscotch and throw the ball against the wall. The boys would play baseball in the backyard. The boys got to do a whole lot more than the girls did.

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When there was no school, did you just stay home and help out?

We had no vacations. My parents made a list of chores during vacation time. We all had our list of chores. We did not travel; we didn't go on vacations. It wasn't until I was 16 that we went to New Hampshire for the first time and it was odd. We took a bus there. My parents couldn't afford it because my brother was very costly. We would take the train to Boston, to the Boston Common. There was a little pool there. That was our beach. Once in a great while we would go to Revere Beach. They were great parents. They just had to work.

How often was your father's barbershop open?

It was open six days a week from 6 in the morning to 6 at night. He was there all the time as well as his brother. Downstairs in the barbershop if you needed to know anything about this neighborhood, that was the place to go. If you had a question of what was going on, you would go to the barbershop. A lot of deals from East Cambridge Savings bank would get done in the barbershop. Then the papers would get signed in the banks. It was a great meeting place. That was one thing I really missed when he passed away. If someone told me something, I could run downstairs to verify it. A lot of people tell me they miss that about the barbershop. There is no place to go for information, to hang out, or to talk to people. There is no meeting ground that is neutral. A lot of people were hanging out, but not getting their hair cut. So my father looked busy all the time. He kept his fees really low because the area was not wealthy when we were growing up. Even when he passed away, a haircut and shave was only \$5 in 2002.

What did the shop look like?

Not like it does now. Very old-fashioned. The chairs were big and clunky. It was just really old like the old-time barbershops.

Did you attend church?

Yes every Sunday and holy days of obligation. It was a toss between Sacred Heart on Sixth St and St. Francis. If you went with my father, he went to the Italian mass. So he went to St. Francis, but other than that it was Sacred Heart. That was where we received communion and confirmation.

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So your mother was also from Italy?

Yes from Palermo, Sicily. Their families were from the same place but they didn't know each other in Italy. My parents grew up on the same street on Gore and Winter and that's where they met. My father went to St. Francis School and my mother went to Putnam School.

Did your parents have people over for dinner?

All the time. Mostly relatives but they had a couple of close friends that would come over. It was a lot of fun. We didn't have a lot of fancy foods but tons of macaroni and meatballs all the time. Our snack would be English muffins and a cup of tea. They were really poor and people would bring stuff over. That was a big treat. It was nice. Again, we thought everyone lived the same way we did. We lived in a house that had a central stove. My father put holes in the ceiling so the heat would rise. There was no heating system upstairs and there was just that one stove.

Is the house still standing?

It is but it's been renovated. If you were poor enough at the time, there was a system I think it was called Just-A-Start. You would put your name in and the poor people would get a house but you had to have sweat equity. That's how we got the house. It worked out great for my parents. In between working they would go there and put sweat equity in. You had to help the people from Just-A-Start to build or renovate the house. They were in there all the time tearing down walls and taking out stuff. The house only had fireplaces so the heating system had to be redone. That's how you got the house cheaper. You did a lot of the work. All the four kids were there helping too.

Do you remember the neighborhood or the church doing any special events or anything for holidays?

Pretty much what they do now. They have the Christmas Bazaar and the Cosmo and Damien parade. It's the same as they do now. They used to have dances back then. Once a month my father used to help run the dances. People would go down to the church hall or a hall they would rent. There was a dance and a little food. They don't do that anymore. I went to the dances. It was fun. It was an older

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crowd. I was born older I used to tell people. It was more my parents' generation. I would go and a couple of my friends would go too.

What would your family do for Christmas?

Everybody would come over the house. We would have more Italian than American with the lasagna, meatballs, and sausage all thrown into one saucepan. At Thanksgiving, as we got older they did get a turkey but no one really ate it. It just sat there and died the poor thing. The first time we saw a turkey it was like, "What is that?" No one ate it. There were a lot of us because there was my family, my aunt's family, and my other aunt's family. My mother had 4 kids, her sister had 4 kids, and her other sister had 6 kids. It was a big family get-together.

Did they all live East Cambridge?

Yes and all within a block or two of each other.

Did you play with your cousins?

No I had my jobs to do. Actually they did too. It was pretty much the same. Both parents had to work, sometimes more than one job. The oldest of the siblings had too many responsibilities.

How did your father get the money to start his barbershop?

His father I would assume. I have no idea. I know they rented originally but I don't know.

What was your first job?

I worked for Dr. Thomas Cordima as a chiropractic assistant. That's how I got into chiropractics. This was after high school.

What did you do in high school?

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In high school in senior year there was a half-day of school when you could work the other half. I worked for Corona Curtain, the curtain factory. I did little secretarial stuff that no one else wanted to do. It was for a very short period of time.

Do you remember any stores not here anymore?

On this street there was Statler Hardware on the corner. There were stores across the street but I don't remember the names of them. There was a grocery store and convenience store and houses where the parking lot used to be. There were a couple of pharmacies down the street but they're gone. On just about every block there was a corner store and a butcher store. All of them are gone.

Where did your family get their groceries?

The meat was from the butcher store on the corner of Fifth and Thorndike. It depended on what they needed. Other than that they sent us down to the S&H green stamps store on Ninth and Cambridge. If they needed something quick, then we would go to Percoco's on Fifth and Thorndike.

Has the level of crime changed in the area?

I think there's more crime now than when we were growing up. People used to sit on their stairs or on the street in their chairs. Everyone was out. It was a well-watched neighborhood. You could go from town to town. You had your little thugs growing up in the neighborhood but it wasn't like it is now. I personally think it got crazier once they put the mall in.

Did your family go to the North End?

Yes a lot of our relatives lived in the North End. We would take the train there.

Did the neighborhood have a strong sense of community? Did you feel you were part of a specific group in the neighborhood? I mean, was East Cambridge different from other parts of Cambridge?

Yes it was. From Ninth St to First, it was a world of its own I think and if you went beyond that it seemed strange. People were very friendly. You could go anywhere. If you felt uncomfortable you could go to

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someone's house. Everybody knew you. When I was growing up I remember it being a heavy Italian and Irish area. I remember when someone found out I was not Irish; they wouldn't let me play with their children anymore because I was Italian. My parents didn't care who we hung out with or who we played with as long as they were nice people. As we got older a lot of Portuguese people came in. They were on Charles and Hurley streets. That wasn't so bad. My parents didn't care about that but other people did. They wanted the Irish to stay with the Irish and the Italians stay with the Italians. Kids don't care. If someone wanted to play with you, then you were willing to play. I do remember that family wouldn't let me play with their daughter.

Did you ever go to Harvard Sq or Central Sq?

No we weren't allowed. I think the only time we went to Central Sq was with my parents. I think it was called Joe & Nemo's. It was a hot dog place. You have to remember back then was the hippie generation and the flower children. My parents were sure we all would get kidnapped by one of these people. These people would approach you so my parents were very nervous about it. You have to understand during my generation we had to black out our windows and shut off lights. There was that scare going on. I was too young to really know what was all about. People might see the lights and bomb us. We would have air raid drills all the time. It was a little different than it is now. Parents were a little bit afraid. The Thorndike School, Sacred Heart, St Francis had fall-out shelters. We would go to the Thorndike School.

How were the students in your school? Was it very diverse back then?

I was mostly all white children mixture of Italian and Irish in the grammar school. Later on they may have been one or two Portuguese children. High school was very mixed but grammar school wasn't. Now kids get bussed to school but back then if you lived within a certain radius you went to a certain school. Where your address was determined what school you went to.

Do you think there were any rivalries between Putnam and Thorndike?

None that I was aware of. Again it depended on where your address was and how strict your parents were. You may not even know those kids existed. If they were from this side of Cambridge St, you

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didn't know them. If they were from that side of Cambridge St from First to Ninth, you knew them. Cambridge was the divided line and you couldn't cross it.

How was high school then?

It was a shock. People stayed within their social groups initially until they made other friends. Then it was East Cambridge versus North Cambridge. I remember a little of that in 8th grade too. And it was school versus school, Latin versus Rindge. I didn't care. Some people are crazy about things like that.

Do you have anecdotes about anything unusual that happened in the neighborhood?

I remember the paranoia in the neighborhood when the Boston Strangler was around. People locked their doors. If people saw kids on the street, they would yell at you to go home and even call your parents to get you. You would be running an errand for your parents and other parents would be yelling at you to get home. I remember JFK and the whole city just about closed down. All the parents took their kids out of school and we went to church. The church was never so full in its entire life. Those were big events around here. Other than that it was everyday living except there was major fires like the pig factory.

Were there pigs in the factory when it happened? Did you care about the pigs?

Yes there were but I was too young to really understand. I just know it smelled horrible.

Did you see a lot of kids playing in the streets outside?

Yes a lot of kids played in the street in front of the house. They played ball or jump rope. Now you don't see much of that.

Did you get to go outside or did you have to stay inside?

I was mostly inside but once in a while I got to. It wasn't so bad. It kind of made me who I am today. I'm not afraid to work.

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Did you have a television growing up?

Yes we had a little black and white. Back then you got 5 channels: 4, 5, 7, 56, and 38. When 25 came in, we thought we hit the lottery. We had certain TV hours. We watched TV together and you had to get up to change the channel. It was supervised so we watched Laurence Welk, Ed Sullivan and things like that. My uncle got a color TV when that came out and we would go to his house to watch Batman. Then we got an air conditioner. That was great too. It was the best thing we ever had. I swore when I grew up I would get a good job so I can get a washing machine and dryer, dishwasher, and an air conditioner in every room. That's why I went to college. You know when you're little you think of needing to go to college to get these things.

Where did you go to college?

Initially I went to Northeastern. I wanted to be an x-ray tech but I really hated it. I wanted to be a chiropractor because I worked for Dr. Cordima. I went to multiple colleges at night and worked during the day to get all my prerequisites. Once I got that then I went off to Davenport, Iowa to become a chiropractor. There I went to school during the day and worked at night. I was able to support myself so that's how I did that. It took me a little longer than most kids today who go to college straight after high school.

How was living in Davenport, Iowa?

Awful. There's nothing there. At that time there was nothing to do so studying was all you could really do. The town closes up very early. There really wasn't much then. I hear it's grown since. The Muddy Mississippi is truly muddy. Their 4th of July was pretty pathetic. You know I only went there to go to school. Back then that was considered the Harvard of Chiropractic. There were only 4 schools; now there are about 13. I went to where the school was which I'm glad I did.

What did your family do for the 4th of July?

We walked down to the Sonesta before all that stuff was there. We watched the fireworks from the Sonesta area on the grass in front of the Charles River. When we were really little, Cambridge had its own fireworks. We would go to the Cambridge Common in Harvard Sq. They would take us by car. The

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whole city was there. They did away with that when I was a kid and now there are just the Boston fireworks.

I would love my kids to stay in East Cambridge but no one can afford to live here anymore. You can't buy anything around here. It's ridiculous for four walls. At one time it was difficult to practically give the house away. No one wanted to live down here because of rent control and everything was in really bad shape. Things needed to be repaired. My parents told me not to buy anything because of rent control and you wouldn't get enough to pay your mortgage. I wish I did.

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