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Interview with

DAVID CIRULI

VIRGINIA CIRULI

April 18, 1987

Place of Interview:	Denton, Texas
Interviewer:	Dr. Ronald E. Marcello
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Oral History Collection

David and Virginia Ciruli

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing David and Virginia Ciruli for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on April 18, 1987, in Denton, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. and Mrs. Ciruli in order to get their reminiscences and experiences relative to the Italian immigrant experience and their life as second generation Italians.

To begin this interview, let's first of all get some biographical information from each of you. Mrs. Ciruli, you begin. Tell me when you were born, where you were born, your education--things of that nature. Just be brief and general.

Mrs. Ciruli: I was born in Pueblo, Colorado, on September 6, 1909. I went to school at Pleasant View School and graduated from Pleasant View High School. I went to Colorado State University in Greeley.

Dr. Marcello: What did you major in at Colorado State?

Mrs. Ciruli: I majored in business education.

Dr. Marcello: And what did you do upon graduation?

Mrs. Ciruli: I got a teaching job in Agate, Colorado; that was in 1936. I stayed there in 1936-1937, and then I came back and taught at Pleasant View High School in 1938 for five years. Then we were married in 1936.

Marcello: Mr. Ciruli, let's do the same thing for you. Give me a biographical sketch of yourself.

Mr. Ciruli: I was born on February 2, 1911.

Marcello: Where were you born?

Mr. Ciruli: I was born in Pueblo, Colorado, within half-a-mile of my present wife (chuckle).

Marcello: Tell me a little bit about your education.

Mr. Ciruli: I attended schools in the Pleasant View area, with the exception of one year that I was in the Avondale area. I moved back to Pleasant View and graduated from high school there. I was valedictorian. My wife was also valedictorian when she graduated, and she graduated at the age of sixteen years old.

When I graduated, I liked engineering. I attended the Colorado State University, which was known as the Colorado Aggies, and which is a land grant university now. I graduated in 1935, and my major was electrical engineering. In addition to electrical engineering, I took courses in mechanical engineering and surveying. I also took twenty hours of education courses, so I could teach school.

After I got out of school, my first job was with the Colorado Highway Department, and we worked one whole summer and most of the fall surveying roads. After that project was completed, there was a vacancy at Pleasant View for a math teacher, and I taught there for approximately three years.

About that time...my brother was older than I, and he was a little more aggressive. He was in the produce business and farming and so on. The first thing we knew, he was buying a lot of land. He continued working with Safeway for extra income so that we could buy this extra land. We wound up buying not only other farms and ranches, but we also got into the livestock business, the shipping business, ranching. We raised both cattle and sheep and fed both cattle and sheep for about twenty years. By then, my brother came ill and passed away at the time we were in the process of dissolving all of our properties, or liquidating.

Then I went to work for the government in electronics and missiles and became a general engineer in the engineering department, which gave me the authority to go and trouble-shoot throughout the depot.

Marcello: When did this take place, and where was it?

Mr. Ciruli: This was in Pueblo, Colorado--Pueblo Army Depot. I started there in 1966, and then I became sixty-five years old and retired in 1976 from the Army Depot.

Marcello: Let's go back and pick up on some of your family background, and then I also want to come back later on and pick up on some other things relative to your own lives. Mrs. Ciruli, tell me a little bit about your parents. In other words, where did they come from and when did they come over here?

Mrs. Ciruli: I'll try to remember that. My father was born in Genoa, Italy, and he was six years old when he came to this country with his parents. They settled in Pueblo, Colorado. My mother was also six years old when she came over with her parents.

Marcello: Where did she come from?

Mrs. Ciruli: She came from Salerno, Italy. I was trying to think of the city near it, and I can't right now. She was with her parents—her mother and father—and she was six. She also had a sister and two brothers that came over with her.

Marcello: Do you know what year they came?

Mrs. Ciruli: No, I don't.

Marcello: What was her maiden name?

Mrs. Ciruli: My mother's maiden name was Zito, and her married name was Muzzio. My grandmother's name was Marino. My mother spoke English from the time she could learn it here in this country. She was going to be an American, and she was.

She could see that the only way to get ahead was to get an education, and she saw to it that all of her children had the opportunity of going to school. At that time, most

Italians didn't go to school. They didn't get haircuts... they didn't do things that the modern kids were doing. But we got to go to school.

Marcello: So your mother was six years old, did you say, when she came to this country?

Mrs. Ciruli: Yes.

Marcello: What was it that motivated them to leave Italy and come to this country?

Mrs. Ciruli: Well, I'm sure it was the same for most of the foreigners at that time. This is the "Land of Opportunity." This is where they could get jobs. They were having a hard time making a living where they lived. It was very difficult; they had to work hard. Of course, they worked hard after they got here, too, but they could see that there was recompense, that they were getting something for their labor.

Marcello: What did they do in the old country?

Mrs. Ciruli: They farmed. They had farmland--very poor, hilly ground; very difficult farming. Salerno is near Naples. Naples was what I was trying to think of awhile ago.

Marcello: Did they own their land?

Mrs. Ciruli: They owned it. When they left, they just left it to the ones that were left there.

Marcello: Did they come as part of a group from that area?

Mrs. Ciruli: I'm sure that there was a group because they talked about the people that were together and how they shared the food

they had and how little they had that they did share.

Marcello: What did they tell you about the passage from Italy to the United States? Do you remember anything that they told you about the actual passage?

Mrs. Ciruli: Not really. I think it was a long time, but the children were well-fed and taken care of the best that they could.

Marcello: Do you know whether they had to bring their own food and so on along with them?

Mrs. Ciruli: Oh, yes, they did. They had their own food. They ate sparingly, but they had enough to get here.

Marcello: Mr. Ciruli, why don't you do the same thing. Give me a little bit about your family background.

Mr. Ciruli: My dad was born in Italy, and he came to this country when he was about twenty years old. He and Mother both came at the same time. Of course, they, too, were like others --they were farmers. They farmed not only their own farms. There were three original great-grandfathers from our generation, and they had vineyards mainly. They made wine. Their relatives had had a little winery of their own, and that was their main business. Like many others, they were told about the United States of America, and they, too, felt like they could better themselves. They were a big family, and naturally, as they grew older, there wouldn't be enough for all of them there. So they left and arrived to this country in about 1880, I would say.

Marcello: And where did they come from?

Mr. Ciruli: They came from Schavi d'Abruzzo, which is out of Rome about one hundred miles.

Marcello: And it's on the Adriatic side of Italy, is it not? Near the Adriatic Sea?

Mr. Ciruli: No, they were on the Mediterranean side.

Mrs. Ciruli: They were on the Mediterranean side, right.

Marcello: What did they ever tell you about the passage from Italy to the United States?

Mr. Ciruli: Well, of course, they had the lower deck--you know, the cheaper rates. They lived on mostly bread and cheese. They might have had some wine, but they really never did mention that. Bread and cheese was their main meal.

Marcello: What other possessions did they bring with them? Do you know? Did they ever mention this?

Mr. Ciruli: Very few clothes, and that was it. At that time, most of them had relatives in the States. In my dad's case, his brother was about fifteen or twenty years older, so he was good guidance. He was the one who recommended that they come because there were nice little farms they could buy, and they would be near the smelters in Pueblo, which later became the "Pittsburgh of the West." Their first job...they worked ten hours a day for a dollar a day. Then they went ahead and did their little farming on the side and were able to survive rather nicely.

Marcello: Did they come in through New York--Ellis Island?

Mr. Ciruli: Yes, they came in through Ellis Island.

Marcello: How about your parents, Mrs. Ciruli?

Mrs. Ciruli: Yes, they came in through Ellis Island.

Marcello: And then how did they get from Ellis Island to Pueblo?

Mrs. Ciruli: I think they came to Pueblo because there were other relatives here in Pueblo. The family had two other brothers and a sister who were here. I think one brother was here, and then they all came to Pueblo.

Then when my mother and dad were married, his folks... well, his father baked bread for a living while they were here. They were married in 1900--something like that. His father bought them a five-acre farm and built them a four-bedroom brick house. So they did have a little start, but they had to work hard because it was just five acres. It was a truck farm--all vegetables.

Marcello: When your grandparents came here, were they intent on staying, or did they ever have any intentions of striking it rich and going back?

Mrs. Ciruli: Oh, no, they came here to stay because they never did talk about going back.

Marcello: What was your case, Mr. Ciruli?

Mr. Ciruli: Oh, definitely they stayed here. On my mother's side, they encouraged her brother to come, also. My mother's maiden name was Lamano, and they were from the same village. Of

course, they lived with my parents for a few years until they could get started. They had a big house, and they were able to have the two families in it. They worked together very nicely.

Marcello: What was it that drew them to Pueblo? How did they end up in Pueblo?

Mr. Ciruli: My uncle was here. He and a brother-in-law of his--their names were Nerone--were kind of leaders for this community, for the Schava people in particular. That was one of the reasons, but the main reason was that there was a smelter there, and you could go right to work and buy yourself a little farm.

Marcello: You mentioned something that also is a familiar pattern. In a great many cases, the first ones to come were single males.

Mr. Ciruli: That is true. We had a neighbor who reminds me of exactly what you said. He just worked here and there. In fact, there were two of them. This other neighbor sent for his family later. In fact, they had two children in Italy, and then they had two more children after they were back together.

Marcello: And I'm assuming that your parents came from New York to Pueblo by train?

Mr. Ciruli: By train--all of them.

Marcello: Did they ever mention if they had any problems getting from New York to Pueblo?

Mr. Ciruli: No, they didn't. Apparently, about the only problem most of them had when they arrived was for them to get their names spelled right. A lot of them changed and shortened their names because at the port they couldn't spell their names right. Actually, my parents were given the Sicilian name, which is C-i-r-r-u-l-l-o. Then we changed it later on.

Marcello: Both of you mentioned that in the old country they, in essence, were farmers. That was rather a drastic change, wasn't it, that is, from farm life and then going into these smelters in Pueblo?

Mr. Ciruli: Not necessarily, because they started farming as soon as they came here. They went right to a farm. But in addition to that, that gave them a good start for cash money with which to buy their seeds and their tools. In those days, of course, all they had was a plow and a horse or two, but they were able to survive.

Marcello: So the original goal in working in the smelter was to eventually own land again.

Mr. Ciruli: True. Once they were able to buy more land and could make a living on the land, many of them--my dad was one, and my uncle--just quit the smelters.

Marcello: What did they grow on the farm?

Mr. Ciruli: All vegetables.

Marcello: So it was more or less truck farming.

Mr. Ciruli: Truck farming--exactly. That's what they called it, just like

back in New York.

Marcello: Mrs. Ciruli, was that your folks' intention, also, that is, to use the smelter as a way of eventually getting land?

Mrs. Ciruli: I don't think my dad ever worked in the smelter because they were in town. My uncle went into business--the grocery business--and he helped his dad with baking bread. He baked bread with his dad until his dad bought the farm for him. So farming was new to him. But he learned it--the hard way--even though he had never done it. But my mother had always farmed with her parents, and she was the one that led the farming business. They called it "farming" in Italy, but it wasn't; I mean, they farmed on hills. They didn't have the farmland that people had here. They just had hills, and the little vineyards were all on slopes. The way they even farmed it, we couldn't understand it when we saw it.

Marcello: What kind of a farm was this that your folks had?

Mrs. Ciruli: Oh, they had the prime land on the mesa. They got to choose the spot because at that time there weren't many people that settled there. They were just beginning to settle. They had a beautiful five acres, and then they bought another five. So that gave them ten, which Dave's folks bought from my folks later. That still is a good ten acres of ground.

Marcello: And what did they grow?

Mrs. Ciruli: It was all in truck farming--vegetables.

Marcello: What did you say your maiden name was? You mentioned it awhile ago, I think.

Mrs. Ciruli: Muzzio. We spelled it here Muzzio, whereas in Italy it's M-u-z-i-o. That is really the correct spelling, but for some reason they started spelling it with the two z's when they came here.

Marcello: When they came to Pueblo, did they live in a particular section of the town with other Italians? I'm referring to your folks, Mr. Ciruli.

Mr. Ciruli: No. They lived just east of Pueblo on the farms. There was a little town by the name of Blende, where the smelters were located. Dad walked to the smelters, and it was exactly about two miles from the farms. The farms were perfectly level and had good irrigation.

Marcello: How about those Italians who lived in Pueblo? Did they live in a particular section of Pueblo? Did they more or less live together?

Mr. Ciruli: Yes, the Italians generally lived in one little area. Then the Slovenians lived in another little area. They each had their own churches--practically all of the foreigners. They did live in clusters, and each one was near the steel mill. Later on, we got the steel mill when they converted from smelters to steel mills.

Marcello: I guess there was probably a certain amount of security living with one's own nationality. I'm sure that's why they did it at that time.

Mr. Ciruli: Very much so. In fact, my parents in 1918 bought a farm which was about twenty miles east of Pueblo. When they got there, there were no Italians. But they did buy this farm for $25,000, and it was 220 acres. Within two years they paid for the farm. Then they moved back to the mesa and went back to their little farms.

At the same time, when Dad came back to the farm that my wife's folks owned at that time, they had a little grocery store in the basement. My dad continued with the grocery store, and then a little later on--in another year or two--he would build a nice, big building with a grocery store in the front and a pool hall in the back. I recall as a kid that every Sunday the men would play pitch for either tobacco or pop or something of that nature. They didn't use money. Whoever lost had to buy the other a pop or cigars, mainly. So it was kind of a little recreational area for the boys and the men. Some of the other people played pool.

Marcello: We talked about this a little last night, but I'd like to get it on the record. You mentioned the farm that they bought in 1918. I recall that I mentioned at the time that it seemed like an awful lot of money to pay for a farm

at that time. Explain how that all came about.

Mr. Ciruli: The reason that it was a lot of money at that time was because it was during World War I. The economy stayed rather high at that time, until about 1925-1926. Between 1918 and 1921 were the most lucrative years.

Marcello: What did they grow on that farm initially when they bought it?

Mr. Ciruli: They initially had a lot of alfalfa on it, and the alfalfa was always loaded on boxcars, and they would ship it to mostly the Midwest and the East. We also grew some corn and sugar beets. And they did raise a small garden for their own use.

Marcello: As you mentioned, those were good years for agriculture with the war going on.

Mr. Ciruli: The prices were very good--very good. That was the reason they were able to pay it off in two years.

Mrs. Ciruli: May I add one thing to why the Italians and the Slovenians and all of them grouped in areas? They did it to help one another, moreso than they do now. They don't now. In fact, you don't see the friendship; you don't see the help that was given at that time.

Of course, my dad, with the help that his folks had given him--buying the farm and all--was soon loaning money. They never had papers, never went to a lawyer. A handshake was all that was needed. He'd loan someone $5,000 or whatever

they needed, and that was all. They paid it back. There was never any argument, never any trouble. But that was it--they helped one another.

Marcello: At that time, then, was it more or less expected that one would marry someone from one's own nationality?

Mrs. Ciruli: Yes, at that time I believe they did, moreso than now. Now, of course, it's changed completely. But at that time, it felt like, I think, sort of an honorable thing to do--to keep the family as close-knit as possible.

Mr. Ciruli: It used to be that even the Sicilian people would marry the Sicilian people; and then the Calabrese and the Schavi were kind of clanned together. But they always got along.

I'd like to mention that in 1918--I don't remember exact dates of that time--they had the flu epidemic throughout the country. We talked about helping people. I remember Dad would get up...because some of them were so sick. He'd do his chores, and then he'd go around and do the others' chores. Mr. Muzzio would do the same thing. Then they had a grocery store, and he'd probably give them groceries.

Marcello: What you're referring to is that influenza epidemic that swept the country in 1918 and 1919. Did it take its toll in your area?

Mrs. Ciruli: Oh, yes. Even the doctors wouldn't come out or go to visit homes--it was that bad.

Marcello: How did your folks do?

Mr. Ciruli: Well, we were fortunate, similar to Virginia's folks, that we didn't lose anyone. But the paisans and cousins—we lost some.

Marcello: Let's talk about some of the Old World customs and so on that they brought over to this country. Let's talk about wine-making first of all. Mr. Ciruli, did your folks continue to make wine?

Mr. Ciruli: (Chuckle) Practically every Italian that we knew...it was just tradition that they lived with until they died, most of them. I remember every year Dad bought a hundred boxes of Zinfandel and ten boxes of the red grapes (I forget the names) and mixed them together for the color, naturally. I remember helping Dad with the wine-making.

Marcello: So how much wine did he make during the course of the year?

Mr. Ciruli: He would generally make two barrels—two fifty-five-gallon barrels. In addition to that, they would make what they called the acquata—watered-down, in other words. They would put some water in the mash at that time with ground grapes. Of course, they would drink that first while the other was aging (chuckle).

Marcello: How about your folks, Mrs. Ciruli?

Mrs. Ciruli: Oh, yes, they made wine. My dad had wine for dinner every night. In fact, he used to get a little high (chuckle). He liked his wine; he liked to drink. And he liked to drink quite a bit, wine especially. He made wine every year. He had, I think, two barrels. Of course, the first thing

when people came is that they were always offered wine. He had lots of friends.

Marcello: Especially when he had the wine.

Mrs. Ciruli: When he had the wine, he always had lots of friends (chuckle).

Marcello: Where did they get the grapes?

Mrs. Ciruli: They came in from California.

Mr. Ciruli: In fact, one of her cousins handled grapes. They'd ship them in.

Mrs. Ciruli: Oh, they had regular customers.

Mr. Ciruli: They'd bring them in by the carload, of course.

Mrs. Ciruli: You don't do that anymore.

Mr. Ciruli: When we went back...do you want to say something about the trip back to Italy?

Marcello: Sure.

Mr. Ciruli: We went to this little town of Schavi d'Abruzzo where my dad was born. Most of his relatives now work in the Rome area. A lot of them have one home in their little hometown, and then they have their home in Rome. That way they could still go out over the weekends or whenever they could, help take care of their vineyards or have someone look after them and make their wine, and they'd just take it in as they needed it. This kind of reminds me of what we did, too. They still are doing that in Italy.

Marcello: When did you go back for a visit?

Mr. Ciruli: We went there in 1985--the fall of 1985.

Mrs. Ciruli: Yes, they'd go back home to get their wine. Out there they had their vats, their barrels, and everything to make their wine. When they'd run out, they'd go home. The Cirulis still live there. Dave's uncle is still living--Lee's brother. They'd go back home to get their wine.

Marcello: What other Old World customs do you remember that they continued to observe when they came here?

Mr. Ciruli: You mean our folks?

Marcello: Yes.

Mr. Ciruli: Well, they had their gatherings, for example. You know, the Italian people like to visit. Well, most of them, I think, did. So we'd always get together at family gatherings. During the butchering season late in the fall, when it got cold enough whereby they could save their meat, they'd invite over all their relatives and the people right around them. Of course, it was more of a fun day for the youngsters because we would play games and wait for the bladder so we could make a football out of it and kick it around (chuckle). We noticed back in Italy that the relatives still get together quite a bit.

Marcello: How about Italian foods? Did they continue to eat them with a great deal of regularity when when they came here?

Mrs. Ciruli: Making spaghetti especially was the one main thing, I think, that they did that we don't do here. I remember my grandad would always ask my grandmother, "Would you make me some

spaghetti tonight?" Right away, she'd get a little round thing of flour on her board, break an egg or two in it, mix it all up, and have spaghetti in a half-hour. She was fast, my little grandmother. She could roll it out. She had a rolling pin. She didn't have the fancy machines that we have now. She'd roll it out on a rolling pin and then roll the dough up and then cut it by hand--just like that [demonstrating the technique].

Marcello: How about your mother? Did your mother make her own spaghetti?

Mrs. Ciruli: Oh, yes, at the beginning. But then, of course, she bought a machine, and we had a machine. She could do it, too. I can't.

Mr. Ciruli: When we had our grocery store--this was around 1924--we had manufacturers of spaghetti throughout the country. All of these little towns had their own little spaghetti-making business. So we bought a lot of it. They began to make twenty-pound boxes, as I remember.

Marcello: Would this be spaghetti that was made by other Italians who were in the business, so to speak?

Mr. Ciruli: Yes.

Mrs. Ciruli: Some of it comes from Italy. A lot of it does.

Mr. Ciruli: Then they started shipping some from...I remember some of the first really came out of New York--those places that were close to the ports. They picked it right up. As the towns got larger and so on, then they had their own. We had

our own flour mill right in Pueblo in later years. What we did do is sell a lot of flour in the fall to the farm people because they didn't have the facilities out in the country that they had in Pueblo. In Pueblo they could go around the corner, and they had the little neighborhood grocery store that had everything you needed. I remember that we would buy a carload at a time for our little store because that's the only way you could get a cheaper price. Then we'd deliver it to each household. So I was loading hundred-pound sacks at the age of fourteen.

Mrs. Ciruli: Yes, pasta was the main dish. It still is for a lot of Italian families. They love their pasta.

Marcello: What special events or celebrations took place on Christmas, let's say, or during Christmas season? Were there any special customs that they brought over from the Old World that they continued here?

Mrs. Ciruli: Oh, the food, yes. On Christmas Eve we could not eat meat. We had to eat fish. On Christmas Eve we could not eat meat, and we still don't. We have a fish meal the night before. Then on Christmas we'd always go to church. It was mostly religious holidays. The religious part of the holidays was emphasized more than the giving of gifts. We didn't get gifts as children. We began to get stockings filled with candy and an orange and fruit as we were getting older. But when we were very young, we didn't get the gifts that children

do now.

Marcello: Mr. Ciruli, how about your family? Was their Christmas celebration very similar?

Mr. Ciruli: Very much so. Generally, maybe two or three of the families got together and had the Christmas dinner. Otherwise, traditions were identical to the other Italian families. We abstained from all meats, of course, and then on Christmas Eve we had our fish.

Mrs. Ciruli: Bacala.

Mr. Ciruli: Bacala was what they called it.

Marcello: Was the speaking of Italian common in your household, or was there a conscious effort to learn English as soon as possible?

Mrs. Ciruli: No, we didn't speak Italian. I'm sorry about that, though, because we didn't learn Italian. At school we never tried to speak Italian. My folks never spoke Italian at home, except maybe between themselves. As I say, my mother spoke English as well as I did because she made that effort to learn it.

Marcello: Was there a feeling that if one were going to get ahead, one had to learn English?

Mrs. Ciruli: Oh, my goodness, yes! She could see success in the people that were bright, had gone to school, and were earning money.

Marcello: How about the case of your family, Mr. Ciruli?

Mr. Ciruli: It was pretty much the same thing. I mentioned the other day that I don't remember talking Italian when I first began talking--very little of it. I was the youngest of the family with the exception of a sister, and then we had cousins that were neighbors, and we were always together. We spoke nothing but English. However, we would speak to our mother and dad in Italian occasionally. They would ask us a question...they'd talk to us in Italian, and most of our answers were kind of a mix between Italian and English.

Mrs. Ciruli: But they spoke Italian mostly.

Mr. Ciruli: Oh, yes, the older tolks did. However, on my wife's side, for example, they had the grandmother come out and help them every day during the summer months, and that's when you learned most of your Italian.

Mrs. Ciruli: Yes. She walked out to our place. She lived in the city then. She'd walk five miles to come out to help her daughter, which was my mother. She spoke Italian; she didn't speak any English. She could understand English, but she didn't try to speak it. She just felt like Italian was her mother tongue, and that was it.

Marcello: I know that in a lot of cases immigrants and perhaps Italians in particular experienced a certain amount of prejudice and discrimination when they came to this country. Can you remember any examples of that happening within your family's experience?

Mr. Ciruli: It wasn't too bad, really, in our family, but we did see quite a bit of it.

Mrs. Ciruli: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Can you elaborate on that?

Mr. Ciruli: It just seems like the Italians were looked down upon as they did on some of the others--the Slovenians and so on.

Then, too, we had the misfortune of having a feud between the Trinidad people and the bootleggers at that time, who were the Italians or the "Black Handers," as they called them, in Pueblo. You know, they originated from New York. They were organized, and there were quite a few killings. Of course, that's what gave the Italians as a whole a bad name, moreso than some of the other nationalities. They called them the "Black Handers."

Marcello: Do you know what the background of that feud was?

Mr. Ciruli: Yes. We had prohibition at that time.

Marcello: This was in the 1920s.

Mr. Ciruli: Right, the 1920s. There's where the feud was, because the Trinidad people didn't want our people selling whiskey in their area, and they were, of course, infringing on our territory. So they would have a lot of shootings, actually, pretty close by.

Marcello: Mrs. Ciruli, you picked up on this a moment ago when I asked the question relative to discrimination and so on. What do you remember about that?

Mrs. Ciruli: My mother always tells the joke about the little Italian man who was working for an English person. The day had ended. He had been working, and, of course, they made them work from sunrise to sunset. He'd say, "Day gone," and so they started calling him "Dago," and that's where they got the name. My sister was one of the first school teachers because she had gone on to school. She taught school. Then it got to where the Italians were sort of "digging" the Italians. There was a nosy neighbor that...the story got back that she called my sister a "dirty dago." So my mother went to her, and she said, "Now listen, Mary, my daughter is a dago. Okay, that's right." But she said, "Dirty? No!" So she says, "I don't want to ever hear that again." Boy, that was the end of that. My sister was, as I said, one of the first Italian girls that taught school in our county, and we did have to fight that.

There was always discrimination. For the better jobs and the better positions everywhere, the Italian people had to show ability. It's sort of like the colored people now. They have to be good to be recognized.

Marcello: How about in school--in grade school or high school? Were there any problems there?

Mrs. Ciruli: It was the same thing--the same thing. I mean, they tried to compete. A lot of the Italian people were just pretty smart, and they couldn't beat them. They couldn't get ahead

of them, and they didn't like that because most of the little Italian people--a lot of them, anyway--were at the top of their classes.

Mr. Ciruli: In some of the city schools, they did have gangs. The Italians would stick together, and so would the English and even the Czechoslovakians. They'd have a little trouble of their own, but that didn't last too many years. The younger people and the new generations, like ourselves, for example, were just mingled in with all of them. In our schools, I remember we had no trouble with the youngsters, whatever nationality they were.

Marcello: Let me just go back and recapitulate something here for a moment. When your folks came to this country, they originally worked in a smelter and had this little farm.

Mr. Ciruli: Right.

Marcello: It was how many acres?

Mr. Ciruli: Ten acres.

Marcello: And then what was the next step in this economic progression?

Mr. Ciruli: You mean as far as farming?

Marcello: Yes, as far as acquiring more land or whatever.

Mr. Ciruli: Well, what happened was that their children were a little more aggressive--some of them. Some of them just kept their little ten-acre farm or five-acre or whatever it was. But in our case and with Virginia's folks, they just expanded. If a neighbor wanted to sell, they'd buy them out. Consequently,

we wound up with bigger farms. We raised a lot of fall vegetables. I remember our folks having orchards with big apples. Dad would sell apples and turnips and carrots all winter.

Mrs. Ciruli: In our case, it was different because the boys were drafted.

Mr. Ciruli: Well, that was afterwards.

Mrs. Ciruli: Yes. Ron was talking about the progressions from the small farm to the larger one. That's what happened. My mother didn't want them to farm such a small plot; it would be easier to farm a larger place. She came to live with us until they were ready to come back, and then they bought this 320...well, it was 420 acres at the time so that my brother could farm that. One brother did learn the jewlry business, and he went into that. But my brother John had the farm, and he farmed then until he retired.

Marcello: And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

Mrs. Ciruli: I had two brothers and my sister Mary, who also taught school.

Mr. Ciruli: Incidentally, she was the first graduate of our Pleasant View High School that they had in that area.

Mrs. Ciruli: Mary was the only graduate--the first one. She had to go to the city school part of the time to get a high school education. That's how near the top we were at getting an education; that's the reason that we got one.

Marcello: It's also, I think, rather exceptional, in a sense, that

both of you not only graduated from high school but actually went on to college. That was rather unusual at that particular time, was it not?

Mr. Ciruli: Very unusual. But there was another family in our neighborhood, the Paradise family. They also...let's see, there were two...

Mrs. Ciruli: Three of them went to school.

Mr. Ciruli: Margaret, James, and Anita--three of them.

Mrs. Ciruli: One went into nursing. They lived across the street. They more or less followed our pattern, and that's the way the pattern began growing.

Marcello: Was an education something that was always encouraged at home?

Mr. Ciruli: Well, I don't know. It just seemed kind of natural for us. We felt like that our parents wanted us to go. It seems that in my brother's case, why, he wanted to work right away and start earning some money. So he went through the eighth grade and went on with his other business. The first thing you know, why, he bought a truck, and then a couple of trucks. We were into trucking and buying from other farmers and selling to stores. The first thing you know, we were big produce people.

Marcello: It would seem almost more unusual in your case, Mrs. Ciruli, to go on to college, as a woman from an Italian family. I guess I usually think of the male perhaps being encouraged

to go on to college, but not the female.

Mrs. Ciruli: Well, my sister had gone to college, and she was older than I. My brother had gone to college. But my mother was actually the one, because none of my dad's brothers and sisters--none of their family--went. I was just thinking of that. None of their children went to college. We were the only family that had college graudates, and it was because my mother was determined that we go to school. She worked hard in order to send us. They had money because they worked hard and saved it, not that it ever came in easy. She made it a point that we did go on to school.

Mr. Ciruli: I was just going to say that Virginia's mother was an exceptionally bright person. She could speak Italian fluently, and you'd think she was a college graduate. It was the same thing with English; she had a perfect control of the English language. She never did have to stutter for words, believe me. Then when they bought this big farm, they had Mexican laborers, and she could talk to them in Spanish. She never had a year of schooling. She was a good businesswoman--very aggressive.

Marcello: And you mentioned that you graduated from Colorado State in 1935?

Mr. Ciruli: Correct.

Marcello: Was it Colorado A&M?

Mr. Ciruli: Right.

Marcello: That wasn't a very good time to be coming out of college,

was it?

Mr. Ciruli: No, it wasn't because it was during the Depression (chuckle).

Marcello: What kind of a demand was there for electrical engineers at that time?

Mr. Ciruli: When we graduated, of all the engineers--mechanical, electrical, and civil--there was one...the honor engineer got a job with General Electric. That was the only offer.

Marcello: Like you were mentioning awhile ago, I assume that that's why you took those education courses and also the surveying courses and things of that nature.

Mr. Ciruli: That's correct. Our family and the Muzzio family and the Paradise family were pretty well recognized and were all at the top in education. This Paradise--the neighbor--was a druggist, a pharmacist, and I became an engineer. Then we had a couple of others who were engineers, also, in the neighborhood. Other than that, we knew that we could come back and get a teaching job.

Marcello: That was going to be my next question. What was the job market like for graduating teachers during that period?

Mrs. Ciruli: I got a job my first year. I was very fortunate.

Marcello: What year was that?

Mrs. Ciruli: In 1935, I guess, because I taught before I came to Pleasant View. Maybe it was sooner than that. I graduated from college in 1930, didn't I? It was 1930 or 1932. I taught one year at Agate, and then I taught a couple or three years

at Pleasant View, and then we were married in 1936. I remember we were married in 1936, but I don't remember those other dates.

Marcello: Describe how you got together. You were mentioning a little bit about this last night, Mr. Ciruli.

Mr. Ciruli: Well, we were neighbors; we lived within a quarter-of-a-mile from each other when we were still in school.

Mrs. Ciruli: He said he would come and help me herd my turkeys. That was his lovemaking scene (chuckle).

Mr. Ciruli: Well, that happened after you were teaching in Pleasant View.

Mrs. Ciruli: It was before we were married. I'd bake cakes that he loved. That's what we did. We didn't get to go places; my folks never let us. We didn't date very much. We didn't get to go out too much; you know, at that time you didn't. So once we were planning this big steak-fry. We had everything together, and we went up to Beulah. Beulah was only about twenty-five miles from where we lived. It was a big deal. We got up there, and I'd forgotten the steaks (chuckle). We had bought lovely steaks, and we were going to have such a nice outing. That was my big flop (laughter).

Marcello: How long did you court before you got married?

Mr. Ciruli: Oh, it was about six years, I'd say.

Mrs. Ciruli: We knew each other for a couple of years. We'd go to the show, maybe.

Mr. Ciruli: We'd all go together, though, you know. In fact, my brother and Mary would go together quite a bit because we were going together. We'd go to different dances where we'd all get together and dance on a Saturday night. That was our recreation, of course, for the week.

Mrs. Ciruli: That's true.

Marcello? And you married when? What year?

Mr. Ciruli: In 1936.

Marcello: Again, that was not the greatest time in the world to get married. How did the Depression affect the agricultural business in your area?

Mr. Ciruli: Fortunately, the Depression didn't bother us as much as it did some of the other people in our community because we had our vegetable farms. Dad would go in to the mill. Some of the people were still working, although not fully working. The steel mill wasn't affected quite as much as some of the other businesses in some of the other areas. Therefore, Pueblo survived fairly well. I suppose there were a few hungry families, but in our neighborhood, if anybody really needed something, the people that had it gave it to them and helped them out. Her folks would loan them money to keep going, hoping to get it back. But as far as actually going hungry, we probably didn't have all of the fringes, the better things, but in terms of ordinary food we had no problem.

Marcello: Plus, from what you said awhile ago, I gather that those farms were owned.

Mr. Ciruli: Most of them were owned.

Mrs. Ciruli: The big farm wasn't, but the little farms that our folks had were owned. Then the farm that my folks bought, they soon paid for that. But as a child, we lived very frugally. My mother made most of our clothes. She made our little dresses; she made our underwear. We didn't spend money the way they do now. Of course, we can't make those comparisons now, but my mother would wash these flour seed sacks and make all of our underwear with those.

Mr. Ciruli: Coming down to Denton, I don't know how we got talking about the flour mill in Pueblo. I asked Virginia, "Do you remember what brand of flour they made at the flour mill?" And she said, "Yes, Major C." I said, "That's right. I remember you wearing a lot of those clothes with that C on them." (chuckle)

Mrs. Ciruli: Well, I can't tell you our hard-up stories. My sister Mary should be here. She could tell you about the times my dad would come home with butter. Butter was a real treat—for us to have butter. She'd say, "My mother would slice off a little piece for each one of us, and we had some butter!" But my dad always brought fruit when he would go...he had a wagon, and they'd pick vegetables and load this little wagon. Then he'd go on Santa Fe in Pueblo and sell vegetables.

The ladies would come out, and they'd buy their fresh vegetables that way. That's how they earned their living--hard work. And they were frugal; they didn't spend any extra.

Marcello: So most of those farmers, then,were pretty self-sufficient to a large extent.

Mrs. Ciruli: Oh, yes. They still are.

Mr. Ciruli: That's what Dad did, too. During the vegetable season, he'd go practically every day, with the exception of Saturday and Sunday--sometimes even on Saturday--and peddle these vegetables just like her dad did. His best trade were the Austrian people, and then there were the Italians.

Mrs. Ciruli: I was going to say that besides the pasta, we do have some cookies that we learned to make from my grandmother. There's one cookie that she made that none of us can make; we just don't know how. But the pizzelle and the fig cookies and some of those little tarralucci that they all make are cookies that they made in Italy.

Marcello: Was there a conscious effort made to pass those recipes down from grandmother to daughter to you?

Mrs. Ciruli: Well, that was just natural for them to learn to do it. That was part of the tradition, part of training, actually, because most of the girls went on as homemakers or didn't marry. That was what they were supposed to do--my grandmother to her daughter and then my mother to us. We didn't do it as much as we should have because we went away to school

then, and we missed out on some of that.

Marcello: There's something that I should have mentioned a moment ago which, I think, was a very important part of the immigrant experience. What role did the Church play in the life of your family? For instance, in the case of the Irish, the Church played a very, very influential role. What was the case relative to the Italians living in the Pueblo area? What kind of a role did the Church play?

Mrs. Ciruli: Well, as I say, the holidays were centered on going to church. My grandmother had a brother who was a priest. She was a sharp little lady--my grandmother. My grandmother would come out, and she had a rosary in her pocket. She would always say the rosary. Most of the time she'd get a ride. At that time, there was very little traffic on the highway. There were schoolteachers that would come out to school, and they began to recognize her. They'd pick her up, and they'd take her because they knew that she was walking. But all the time she was walking, she'd have a hand in her pocket saying the rosary.

Marcello: Was the priest at your church usually Italian?

Mr. Ciruli: Yes.

Mrs. Ciruli: We had one. It was an Italian priest that married us. But right now I don't believe there are any.

Marcello: How diligent were Italian males--I'm speaking now of the first generation, the ones that came over--how diligent

were they at going to church?

Mr. Ciruli: Not nearly as much as the women, let's put it that way.

Marcello: Do you know what the reason was for that?

Mr. Ciruli: In most cases, I think it was because they were working. They had to work. Just like out on the farm, see, we had all irrigated farms, and the men just had to work. However, in our situation it seems like when we went to church, we all went.

Another big day that we had was Memorial Day. It was just kind of like a Fourth of July in a way, because there at our cemetery they would have people selling ice cream and different things. It had a kind of religious feeling attached to it. It was our duty to go out to the graves and pray and all that.

Traditionally, the women did go to church a lot more than the men.

Marcello: Did you notice that to be the case, also, Mrs. Ciruli?

Mrs. Ciruli: Oh, yes. But the men did have to work harder, and on the farm the water was in turns. Each one had so many hours, and naturally, if the men had to water, they had to take care of the water. They would have to take care of the animals. It was just impossible for them to go. And then I think they more or less just didn't go and didn't make it a habit, which is true even today. When people don't go, they just don't make a habit of going.

Mr. Ciruli: But I remember going to church. Dad would get the vegetable wagon, and then we'd all go. Then once in a while they'd have a mission. I don't remember if you'd remember those missions at Mount Carmel or not.

Mrs. Ciruli: We'd go to church in a wagon. My mother would heat bricks and wrap them in newspapers and put them in the buggy so we'd keep our feet warm. That's the way we'd keep warm in bed, too, because the house was cold. We didn't have the heat that we have now; we didn't have any heat except the coal stove in the kitchen.

Mr. Ciruli: That's something you probably don't remember.

Marcello: I'm afraind not (chuckle). Let's pick up again with your marriage. Now you mentioned that you were married in 1936. Was it a traditional Italian wedding?

Mrs. Ciruli: No. We wouldn't have it. When we got married, we were both teaching; so we had to get married on a Saturday, have our honeymoon on Sunday, and go back to work on Monday (chuckle). We got married on Saturday, and Dave's sister had planned a big dance Saturday night, which they had after we were gone, anyway, because that was what they wanted. But we weren't there. We didn't have a big wedding. We didn't have a big church wedding; we had just a family wedding because we wanted it that way. But that was the custom at the time--to have a big church wedding. When Dave's sister got married, they had a three-day wedding. They had a tent and bands and food galore.

Mr. Ciruli: The band was an accordian (chuckle).

Mrs. Ciruli: Well, I'll tell you, it was music, anyhow (chuckle). Everybody danced.

Mr. Ciruli: They put up a tent and a floor, you know, and we all danced for three days.

Marcello: How long did you say that you continued teaching, Mr. Ciruli?

Mr. Ciruli: I only taught part of two years, and then our produce business started to build up, and so did the farming.

Marcello: Let's go back and talk just a little bit more about that produce business and how it got started. You mentioned it earlier in the interview, but let's go into some more detail on it.

Mr. Ciruli: As I mentioned earlier, after he got out of the eighth grade, my brother bought a truck. We not only sold our own produce that we raised in our garden, but then they began buying from other farmers and selling to the stores in Pueblo.

Mrs. Ciruli: Safeway stores, mainly.

Mr. Ciruli: Well, it originally was Piggly Wiggly stores. It just seems like that as we progressed, then we had people coming out of Oklahoma and Texas with their little trucks, and we'd sell their produce. We did all of this out of our garage for several years.

Marcello: Now explain again how you got into the produce business with your brother.

Mrs. Ciruli: His brother talked him into it--to quit teaching and go

in with him.

Mr. Ciruli: Well, I really didn't have a decent job when I first started teaching school. We were only getting $75 a month. I think you were making about $125 because you were...

Mrs. Ciruli: A hundred dollars, maybe.

Mr. Ciruli: Anyhow, I remember when I was teaching that I would get up early in the morning and load the truck to deliver to the store and get back in time to start school. Then it went along that we just had too much business; therefore, I began devoting all my time to the produce and the other farms that we had purchased.

Marcello: I was going to say, as the produce business expanded, the land acquisitions also increased.

Mr. Ciruli: Yes. It seems like the produce helped buy the additional land, and in addition to that, my brother then went to work for Safeway. That's when really I had to quit teaching, because he was away from home and I had to take care of the produce at home, too.

It wasn't long that he decided that he wanted to open a place in Denver, a produce house in Denver, also. So he got a young fellow that used to work for...I think he worked for the Safeway warehouse people. He was very capable, and the first thing you know, we became a big shipper in the Denver area because they could buy produce all the way from Greeley and Longmont and all of those areas around Denver.

Then we were doing the same thing in Pueblo. We had a warehouse in Pueblo. So we'd load vegetables out of Denver and Pueblo and go on with the trucks. It wasn't long until we had big trucks of our own hauling produce all the way down to Amarillo and Oklahoma City and Dallas. In some cases, we'd even go into Louisiana.

In fact, in the winter months, we began raising a lot of onions and cantaloupe, and I took care of all of that part, the farming. We would ship throughout the country during the seasons of the onions and the cataloupe, both, because we had eastern buyers.

Then we went into the San Luis Valley, and my brother would spend the winters in the San Luis Valley buying potatoes for the Safeway stores. So he got acquainted with some of the produce men, and the first thing you know, why, we bought out one of the companies. We had three shipping operations out of San Luis Valley--mainly potatoes. Then we opened another one near Alamosa, Colorado, and we raised some vegetables with some other farmers and shipped lettuce, cabbage, and cauliflower out of the San Luis Valley, also, besides the potatoes. Then we wound up with three warehouses shipping potatoes out of San Luis Valley.

At the same time, we were expanding in our livestock, and we bought a big ranch. Well, it wasn't too large when we first bought it, but then we started buying all of the smaller

acreages. The rancher-farmers had left some of their properties because they only had forty and eighty acres. We bought those and wound up with a 20,000-acre ranch and raised cattle on it.

In addition to that, we had quite a bit of farmland. We wound up with about 3,000 acres of irrigated farmland. Then we bought another ranch or farm, with about 7,000 acres for dry-land farming.

Marcello: I was just curious a moment ago...what was the name of the produce operation?

Mr. Ciruli: Ciruli Brothers.

Marcello: Was there a joint ownership of the ranches and farms that you just mentioned, also?

Mr. Ciruli: The farms we originally...there was one farm that my uncle and my dad bought. It belonged to my brother and I...well, Dad was still living, of course, and then he turned it over to us and my cousins. So there's where we started the big farming.

One of the cousins during the Depression just didn't have anything to do, so instead of renting the farm out, he said, "Would you let me operate it, and you help finance the operation?" So that's what we did. So he went down there and did the farming for us, and while he was down there is when we began buying more of the farms. The first thing you know, why, we had hundreds of acres of good farmland. That's how we expanded the farming, because I wasn't able to take

care of that part of it, where you have your men everyday and so on. Then on the other two farms...at the B-X Ranch I had a foreman and one at the Broadacre farms.

Concerning the produce, we expanded our operations into what we call the Arkansas Valley. We had one in Las Animas, Colorado, because we had farms there that we had bought, and the other was in Granada, Colorado. They raised mainly cantaloupe, sugar beets, and onions. Those were the three crops that we would raise so that they would all fit in with our shipping program, in the produce part of it. In addition to that, outside of Denver--Gilcrest--we shipped potatoes during the summer months. But in the San Luis Valley, we continued all winter shipping--potatoes.

Marcello: Off the record a moment ago, we were talking about the operations of the farm during World War II. Since I'm sure there was a scarcity of agricultural labor, how did you compensate? Where did you find help?

Mr. Ciruli: The first compensation was that we were able to get what we called Mexican nationals.

Marcello: Was this under the Bracero program?

Mr. Ciruli: Right. This was under the Bracero program. They were all right in the field, but when we got them into the warehouses, they weren't very good.

Marcello: Why was that?

Mr. Ciruli: Well, they were just kind of used to more stoop labor, you

know, and when you got them in the warehouse, they were just kind of lost. And some of our machinery was used for packing vegetables and all, and they just weren't the type of labor we wanted.

So at that time we were able to get some Japanese to help us to run our tractors and do our planting for us.

Marcello: These would have been the Japanese that were evacuated from the West Coast.

Mr. Ciruli: Yes, from the West Coast. We had a camp down there near Granada that I've talked about. We used those. Then during the harvest, we also used some Italian prisoners that were located at the air base near Pueblo, which worked out real good for us because they were good workers and I could communicate with them (chuckle).

Marcello: About how many of the Japanese and the Italians did you have working on altogether?

Mr. Ciruli: At one time we had twenty-one Japanese. They did field labor and tractor-type work for us. I think we only had about twelve or thirteen Italians, but that was for a limited time. Mainly, we used the Italians during the onion harvest because we had large storehouses to store onions for the winter.

Marcello: How did that procedure work? Did you simply go to the POW compound and carry them out for the job, or were they brought out to you?

Mr. Ciruli: No, we'd pick them up. I'd generally have a person that... we had a truck fixed that we could haul labor in.

Marcello: Would they be accompanied by any military people or anything like that?

Mr. Ciruli: No. They trusted us, and they knew that they could trust the Italians. They were just glad to have something to do.

Now with the Japanese, we had to provide housing for them. In one case there was a little town of Boone that we shipped our onions and melons out of, and it had an old hotel that was vacant; so I rented that, and they stayed there. Then I moved some of them that I wanted to keep out on the farms later.

Marcello: I guess a lot of those Japanese had had experience in that sort of activity on the West Coast.

Mr. Ciruli: Yes, most of them were farmers. Some of them were business people, but generally they didn't go out to the farms. They took other types of jobs. Some of them were carpenters, I remember. They'd tell us, "Just give us any kind of a shack, and we can go in there and make it livable." And that's what they'd do. I was amazed when I went down to Granada to pick these people up. They'd built their own shelter. They'd give them the lumber and stuff, and they did it themselves.

Marcello: How long did you continue, then, in the produce business?

Mr. Ciruli: Until 1965.

Marcello: What prompted you to leave it?

Mr. Ciruli: Well, that was when my brother was ill. In fact, during this period of our produce and so on, he had a heart condition that he developed while he was in the service just for a short period. He finally had to move to a lower altitude. The first thing you know, we were in the produce and the farming down there. So he actually ruined his own health by getting too involved in the big farming operation down there. The first thing you know, he was gone. So it left a rather bad situation, and we had to liquidate everything.

Then after that, I went to the Pueblo Army Depot as an engineer. That was the first time that I really got to use the electrical engineering part of it. However, during the operations of our farms and building warehouses and so on, I applied my abilities in construction, and I could do my own surveying. In buying land and so on, I'd write up deeds. My wife would type them. I was able to do all that without even talking to a lawyer. So it all came in handy. We had a lot of irrigation wells that required a lot of electrical work. We put in our own wells. We'd just have a fellow come in and drill the holes, and I'd buy the pumps and the wiring and do all of that myself. Then we had a lot of equipment--tractors of all kinds--and we did our own land-leveling and surveyed the ditches.

Mrs. Ciruli: You used your engineering training all along.

Mr. Ciruli: So we had a garage of our own, and we built all of our

equipment. I was able to tell my people just exactly--my mechanics--what I wanted, and we built a lot of our machinery.

So I had quite a lot of experience, and that amazingly came in extremely handy when I went to the government job because in the work I did, I was able to understand the workings of these tanks and personnel carriers and guns and all that. It was a simple thing for me to do my research on, because after I got into the missile part of it, I got into the general engineering. My job was actually to go out and troubleshoot where they were having problems with certain things wearing out too soon and breaking. I'd get with the fellows working and then go to whatever records we had and research some of the things that could have been done. Therefore, I was able to save the government over a million dollars a year in the time that I was there.

Marcello: Was it kind of strange to go from being your own boss to this other job?

Mr. Ciruli: Yes. I felt somewhat uncomfortable for a while, but I soon got accustomed to it. In fact, I began to kind of like it because I didn't have that responsibility of the farm operations. I used to buy my own livestock and sell my own livestock. Many days, I would leave for several days to receive my livestock. At other times I'd get up at two o'clock in the morning and leave, and then many times--when I was out buying at the sale--I wouldn't get home until one

or two o'clock in the morning. Naturally, where you have a lot of people working, it was quite a strain on me. So that was a relief on that part in that I would just concentrate on working for someone else, and you had your paycheck without having to worry about it.

Marcello: In the meantime, Mrs. Ciruli, while all of this was going on, how long did you continue to teach?

Mrs. Ciruli: Oh, I quit teaching soon after we were married, and then we had our children. Mary Jean was born in 1940, and then David in 1943. But Dave neglected to tell you that I kept all of their books.

Mr. Ciruli: Well, that's what I was just going to tell him.

Mrs. Ciruli: Okay, you're forgiven (chuckle). It was quite a task. Besides that, they had a little business in town with Achutz or whatever his name was, and I kept their books until I said, "I refuse to do this," because it was just too much. Then after Dave's brother died, of course, they had over-expanded and had a lot of debts.

Anyhow, that was my role. Then I had to play mother and father at home--because he was gone so much--with the children.

Marcello: That bookkeeping operation must have been fairly extensive, given the size of these other enterprises.

Mr. Ciruli: Well, she took care of most of the payroll. She had to take care of all the payrolls for the farms and the warehouses that I used in Pueblo County. But these others all had their

own bookkeeper and so on. In fact, in our main office, we had several salespeople and foremen, buyers, and several others. It was a well-organized operation in all of the different places.

In 1940 and 1941, I think it was, there was a fellow from San Luis Valley that my brother had gotten acquainted with, and he wanted to come to Pueblo and build his grater. He built potato graters. This was Achutz. We talked about it, and he wanted somebody to go in with him, so we joined forces. About that time, I was working on an onion grater that I was developing and got a patent on. Then the first thing you know, we combined the two, and we were building potato graters and onion graters. That was quite a feat for me, you know, because I had a patent (chuckle). As I say, I liked the mechanics, and then by having my engineering ability, I just felt like I could do anything.

Then with the livestock, like I say, I had to go out to sheep camps sometimes and stay overnight. Then I'd load them early the next morning, before they would drink water or eat, in order to get the right weight (chuckle). So I always tell people that I've stayed in sheep camps and I have met presidents.

We had an extreme drought between 1949 and 1953--in through there. During this period, we wanted to get some federal aid, so President Eisenhower came to Pueblo. We rode out to this one dry-land farm we had, and I had quite a visit

with President Eisenhower. We had some calves there, and we talked about them. He said, "I wouldn't mind having those for my little Gettysburg farm.

Marcello: What were your impressions of President Eisenhower?

Mr. Ciruli: Well, he was a real polite-type person, due to his schooling and his military work. He was rather frail; that's the thing that surprised me. You would think that he'd be a big, strong person, but he wasn't. In fact, we were advised that when he went through the reception line, we were just to kind of hold his hand and not squeeze it.

One amazing thing happened. There was a friend of mine that was in the service. As President Eisenhower was coming through the line and shaking hands with me, he reached over to this friend of mine and says, "Hi, John. How are you?" Just like that. John Williams was just a farmboy out there. Eisenhower's wife was from Denver. Then he had a friend that was a doctor who was in the service with him. So he would come to Pueblo and visit with him, and this farmboy would sell vegetables to him, and he got to meet John. When John first went into the Army, he was in one of his...I don't know what you'd call it. Anyhow, Eisenhower was one of the generals that was in charge of this...

Mrs. Ciruli: Regiment.

Mr. Ciruli: ...regiment or whatever. But he remembered him. "Hello, John. How are you?"

Mrs. Ciruli: My, that was tremendous!

Mr. Ciruli: And he wanted to know how Mrs. Black was getting along, because the doctor had passed away. When did President Kennedy come out?

Marcello: He was elected in 1960.

Mr. Ciruli: Well, then he was here in 1962.

Mrs. Ciruli: Pueblo Reservoir?

Mr. Ciruli: Yes, the Pueblo Reservoir. He dedicated the Pueblo Reservoir. What we got through Congress was a water project to take water out of the Colorado River, which would be the west drainage on the Continental Divide, into the eastern drainage by putting tunnels through the Continental Divide. So he came here to dedicate one of the big reservoirs that we had in Pueblo. Before he came here, of course, the Secret Service people would come in about ten days ahead of time and check everything out and check us all out. But we had to kind of entertain them. Then when the President came...see, I was a director of the Frying Project, which was the Southeast Colorado Water Conservancy District. We were the sponsors of this big project. Naturally, we got to get on the platform with the president.

Marcello: And what were your impressions of him?

Mr. Ciruli: Oh, that was really surprising. One of the first things that I noticed was that he had red hair, and it didn't show. On TV he looks kind of dark-haired, but he's red-headed.

That was really an impression.

Mrs. Ciruli: Well, what was your impression of him?

Mr. Ciruli: Well, he was just a teriffic person--real friendly. You know, he really shook hands with you. I remember that while we were waiting and nothing was happening, some of us didn't get to shake hands with him. So then I went up to him, shook hands with him, and here they were running these TV cameras, you know (chuckle). He was so likeable, so likeable. You just couldn't help it. I could tell you more about him.

Mrs. Ciruli: Lot of charisma.

Mr. Ciruli: Oh, charisma is right! There was a doctor who called me, and he wanted to know if he could get two tickets for a couple of nuns at the hospital. They just insisted that he get them there to be able to be there. So I did, and they got to sit with our wives. As soon as everything was over with... there was a barrier there. The first thing you know, Mother went through the ropes. The president had a little time on the stand, so the first thing you know the wife and the others ...then the two little sisters were left behind. So I stepped down there, and I said, "Do you want to shake hands with the president?" "Oh, yes, we'd love to!" By then, the president had started back. I said, "You grab my hand and follow me." I went right to his car. When he got there, here were the sisters. He reached over and shook hands with both of them, and they were so thrilled (chuckle).

Mrs. Ciruli: Sister wasn't going to wash her hands for a week (chuckle).

Mr. Ciruli: For a month.

Mrs. Ciruli: For a month? Oh, dear (chuckle)!

Mr. Ciruli: I got to meet President Truman in the Muehlebach Hotel in Kansas City after he had retired.

Marcello: That must have been an interesting experience, too.

Mr. Ciruli: Well, not too much. He was pretty plain. He didn't have to push the way he did while he was president.

Marcello: On what occasion did you meet him?

Mr. Ciruli: You mean Truman?

Marcello: Yes.

Mr. Ciruli: Oh, we just happened to go there on a produce business tour, and we stayed in that hotel. We just met him out in the front. He was out with some of his other buddies, out walking around. Well, that pretty well covers it, I think.

Marcello: You mentioned that you kind of retired in 1976, but I guess in one sense you really hadn't. Is that correct?

Mr. Ciruli: That's correct. I got my real estate license at the same time that I went to work for the government, the same year, because everyone had told me, "You're a natural salesman." I used to do all of my own buying and selling; I used to buy a lot of produce and travel and sell. They said, "He's just a natural," and, you know, I had the background of everything else. So I went ahead and got my license.

Just before I retired from the depot, I bought a tract

of land and had it subdivided. Sure enough, I said, "No, I'm going to take three or four months off, maybe six months. I don't want to be doing anything with real estate. We just want to do what we want to do." He said, "No, you're going to have to help me sell now. I want to get rid of these houses as I build them." So first thing you know, I'm working full-time in real estate, and I'm still doing it.

Marcello: I just thought of something else. While you were working at the depot, was there anything extraordinary that happened there in terms of your career that you might want to talk about?

Mr. Ciruli: Yes. I was hired as a general engineer--head of the Value Engineering Program. I'd go up every Monday morning and have group meetings. I'd go to the missile shops or the tank shops or wherever, you know, and give them a little speech: "If you run into any problems out of the ordinary, just call me, and I'll come down, and we'll investigate it and see if we can't help you correct the problem."

So this one fellow called me in and said, "I'd like for you to come down. We're having trouble taking these shock absorbers off of the tanks and personnel carriers." He said, "All we can do is hammer them off, and first thing you know, we wreck them and have to replace them." So I went down there and looked the situation over and went back to the office.

First thing you know, I drafted out this tool, whereby they could take this tool and slip it right on behind...they take the nut off of the two ends of the shock absorbers and then put this tool on it and then get an air gun and just pop them off. You save every one of them. So I perfected that for the government, and they put them all into use, and that saved a lot of money.

Marcello: You did not get a patent on this?

Mr. Ciruli: No, because I was working for the government. But if I was in other areas other than the government, I would have. But I was very tickled because I was recognized, and we went back to Washington, D.C., to the Pentagon, and I received an outstanding award. President Nixon was supposed to give us this award; however, since he wasn't there, Agnew was the one that was there to give us the award. This was all done at the Pentagon, and, of course, we got to be with this general. We got to meet several of the generals. Then, when we were to go through the line to get our awards...you just go right along in line, and one of them would read your award, and then the vice-president gave it to us.

Then there was David Packard. Remember him? He was assistant secretary of defense. When he called my name, he said, "From my hometown!" I was going off to the stand, and he reached out and shook hands with me. I was the only one that got to do that. It so happened that I knew his dad well--

he was a lawyer--and then his uncle lived as a neighbor to us when we were out on the ranch. Of course, we didn't get to converse at all. That was one of the highlights, naturally. That was quite an honor.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. For a large part of your working life, you were in the produce business and ranching. In a sense, you were really an entrepreneur. You basically started that business from scratch. What qualities are necessary to do something like that?

Mr. Ciruli: Well, first of all, the thing that really helped was the fact that I went ahead in an engineering course and graduated as an engineer, because you really come to understand a lot of things. Then taking the education courses also helped. I really felt like I could tackle anything without any worry about it--just go ahead and do it. In our big farming operations, it just took so much to get it all going, and I had the ability to do it.

And I could handle people. I was into teaching, and I never really had any trouble to talk to groups of people and so on.

Then with the good help of my wife, who took care of the records for me and the home and all that, I was able to tackle most any problem.

In fact, even our livestock...once a veterinarian would come out and do it once, why, I would just pick it up and take

it from there and do it on my own--buy the medication and syringes and whatnot. I've operated on cattle and everything else, pulled calves. I was able to do that once I got the knack of it.

Marcello: Mrs. Ciruli said something a moment ago, and I think there's a great deal of truth to it. Maybe you can comment on this. She mentioned that to be a successful entrepreneur, you have to have a lot of nerve.

Mr. Ciruli: Yes.

Mrs. Ciruli: That was the backbone of the whole thing--both of them. The brother had it; he was a go-getter.

Mr. Ciruli: My brother had a lot more guts, so to speak, than I had. I was quite reserved, and it was a good thing because otherwise we wouldn't have been able to keep our business together as long as we did. He was a real gambler when it came to produce and buying land. And it paid off in most cases, as far as the land was concerned.

Mrs. Ciruli: We're still living. That's what counts right now, after going through all of that.

Mr. Ciruli: When I went to work at the Army Depot, Virginia was teaching in this special program.

Mrs. Ciruli: Adult education. I had to go back to work; that's the way it was. I taught basic education. I was at the college teaching basic education when I fell and broke my hip.

Marcello: Which college was this?

Mrs. Ciruli: Southern Colorado State College in the adult basic education program.

Marcello: What kind of courses were you teaching?

Mrs. Ciruli: Well, I had typing for one, which was my main subject. We had the secretarial course. I had English. I'd teach spelling and reading and anything that was needed for them to get their G.E.D.--General Education Diploma.

Marcello: How long did you do that?

Mrs. Ciruli: A couple of years...about two years.

Mr. Ciruli: Two or three years. During that same time, that was when we were still living at Avondale, and I was working at the depot. They needed a math teacher, so we taught there during one session.

Mrs. Ciruli: He taught a math class. I even taught a math class, and I don't know anything about math. I'd go over the next day's work, and he'd show me what to do. I got by pretty well. Those kids thought I knew math, but I really didn't. And I don't. I don't know math.

Mr. Ciruli: Oh, you do all right.

Marcello: Let me ask you one last question, without trying to get too mushy. Were your folks right? Is this the land of opportunity?

Mr. Ciruli: Were my folks right?

Marcello: You said at the beginning of the interview that that's why they came.

Mr. Ciruli: That's why they came.

Mrs. Ciruli: Definitely!

Mr. Ciruli: Definitely, yes, because we really did well even though we had our problems. Our biggest problem really was my brother. He just really overextended himself. When he went to Arizona, he just used these thousands and thousands of dollars that we were really secure on. But we were just having bad luck. So it made a hardship on us. But then once just my wife and I took care of our own part of it, we were able to save money, and first thing you know, we began to invest more money and seemed to go right ahead.

Marcello: I guess the point is, then, the opportunity is there, and it's up to you either to stand or fall.

Mrs. Ciruli: That's true—for anyone.

Mr. Ciruli: The Good Lord gave us a brain, but you have to use it. Between both of us being of the same type--reserved--we didn't demand the best of everything. We like to live as ordinary folks. We really got along in exceptionally good shape.

Marcello: I thought I had asked you the last question, but I think there's one more that I want to ask you about, too. Back at the very beginning of the interview, you had mentioned that both your parents had instilled in you the value of an education. Did you pass that on to your children?

Mrs. Ciruli: Oh, yes. There just wasn't any doubt in our minds, nor in their minds, but that they would go on to school after they

finished high school. Mary Jean was valedictorian at County High School and went on and graduated from St. Mary's of Notre Dame. She later got her doctorate at North Texas State University. David also graduated from Notre Dame. He was valedictorian at Catholic High School in Pueblo, and then he went to Notre Dame and graduated from Notre Dame. He got his master's degree and then had all but finished his doctorate; but he didn't quite complete his thesis, so he didn't get it. So they both have done very well, and I know they're passing on that tradition to their children because they are all doing very well.

Marcello: Okay, I think that's a pretty good place to end this interview. You have said a lot of very interesting and important things, and I'm sure that everybody concerned is going to value these comments.