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Joann Condellone Oral History Interview

Michael Limmer, Interviewer

Lovejoy Library, SIUE

February 14, 2019

Michael Limmer (ML): This interview was conducted on Thursday, February 14, 2019 at 1:10 p.m. in Lovejoy Library on SIUE's campus. My name is Michael Limmer and I am interviewing Joann Condellone. Joann, could you please give us your name and birthdate.

Joann Condellone (JC): I'm Joann Condellone, and my birthdate is October 14, 1941.

ML: Perfect. So if we could just talk a little about, you know, you grew up in Collinsville?

JC: I did. I grew up in Collinsville. I was born there just before Pearl Harbor... for some context yes.

ML: So could you tell me a little bit, I know you grew up in an immigrant family.

JC: I did and at that time in those years, the early '40s, Collinsville was still primarily at least in the immigrant community was a coal mining town. The mines were beginning to close in some areas, but the last of the mines ran until the early '60s. But at the time when I was born there were still lots of union coal mines in southern Illinois and around us in coal mining is what brought my great-grandfather, my father's mother's father. And my grandfather's from Italy to the United States and to Collinsville in particular, to make a living digging coal.

ML: What was your great-grandfather's name?

JC: Giovanni Berutti. He is buried in the Union Miners Cemetery in Mount Olive, Illinois. He died of black lung at the age of 43 in 1901. Which in those days was young to die of black lung. Today not so much because of the way mining is done. But probably he died so young because of the kind of mining he did in Italy. He worked in a tungsten mine and some other mines that had high silica content in its basilica that's so deadly. That's probably what killed him and left his widow with children to feed and not much money. So the man worked himself to death.

ML: And that was your mother's father?

JC: That's my father's mother's father. It's my great-grandfather.

ML: What about your parents?

JC: My parents. My mother was born in a beautiful little hill town in Tuscany called Massa Marittima, that her people lived in for many generations. My grandfather, her father, Annibale Burgassi came to America with one of his brothers in 1913 to dig coal, again there was not enough work for people to feed

their families in Italy, not working people. The land reform hadn't happened yet. There was no hope of ever owning your own property or moving anywhere socially or economically. So he came to America. He mined in the mines in Tuscany. Tuscany is full of mines. It's called the metal-filled hills around them. Not coal but hard metals. He came as an experienced miner. He came to Southern Illinois where he knew people. Where they told him come here there's work here. They also would have spoken the same Italian that he spoke, so it made it easier for him to integrate into a community. Because even though Italy was already a modern federation at that time, this was pre-first world war, when he came and they were just struggling to have Tuscan as written and spoken Italian. It was not unusual for people to have such different dialects that they might have a hard time talking to each other. So, if you came with people from your town, your province, your region, you were more likely to actually be able to understand each other. He came to Southern Illinois. He worked for two years, sent for my grandmother and their three daughters, their three children to come to America. My grandmother didn't want to come to America. Typical of a woman of her time, she never really had the opportunity in her life to make any decisions for herself. Had it been up to her she would have stayed in Italy and when I met them and their town I can see why, it's magnificent. They waited and waited to go the First World War was brewing and my grandfather was sending anxious letters, please come, please come. Finally, they came to America. Of course, none of them spoke any English. The oldest child, my aunt Margaret, who had a magnificent memory and was absolutely fearless. Sort of took charge of things and when I was very young and we sat around the table, and the stories were always told around the table after the meal with wine. She told me about that trip. About the ship having to turn the lights off because there were hostile ships in their area and that it was a pretty scary time. They made their way to America and then all the way across from Ellis Island to Donkville which is now a part of Collinsville to the coal-mining town. My aunt told me that when my grandmother woke up in the morning and saw this grey ugly coal mining town where her house was that she wept because it was not Italy. They traveled around, they went from mine to mine. Eventually stayed in Collinsville. Managed to build their own house. My two aunts married young. My aunt Margaret married at fourteen and her middle sister at sixteen. My mother was at home with her parent's. Mining was an iffy proposition, they worked, they didn't work. They struggled to make a union. There were some very hard times. My mother went to work at thirteen in a dress factory. For many years was the primary breadwinner in her family when my grandfather wasn't in the coalfields. My mother was extraordinary in that she didn't marry until she was twenty-one. She married on a Saturday and she told she got paid on a Friday and the Friday night before she married she gave her parents her last paycheck. So that they would have that money from her. Then she and my father lived in a small rental house next door. Italian was the first language in that family. My mother was fluently bilingual as were my aunts. Although my aunt Laura was not proud of being Italian and always refused to speak Italian. My aunt Margaret spoke beautiful Tuscan as did my mother. And so all of our events and family get-togethers were dual language, we sat around the table and there were three conversations. There was Italian-Italian, Italian-English, and English-English and sort of jumped in when you could. There was always this focus on the story. I grew up hearing about Massa Marittima, life in Italy, coming to America, how hard it was to work in the mines. It was my father's family, his father came from near Turin, a beautiful town called Pianezza. That still, my family, there still owns my great-grandfather's house. I get to go visit it whenever I go to Italy. He bought it in 1861 and his picture is still in the parlor there.

ML: Wow. That's fascinating.

JC: Looking very dapper, leaning on his cane, and his bowler hat on his head. The deed to his property is on the wall next to it. It's now owned by one of my cousins, the grandson of one of my grandfather's brothers. My grandfather was the only one to come to America. He spoke Piedmontese, which is its own language and some of the northern Italian dialect but spoke English always to me, unlike my other grandfather who always spoke Italian. My father's father was a very charismatic, extremely bright man, who was a cooper, that is he made barrels and a carpenter and a gunsmith. He did a lot of organizing in the coalfields for John L. Lewis and when the great schism came and united miners' union and the offshoot union was formed it was a kind of civil war that progressive miners which started in Gillespie, my grandfather was a part of that group. I found a wonderful C.C.C. trunk in the attic from my grandfather's house. That has the every scrap of paper that's the history of the Condellones in America, in there I found my grandfather's Progressives Union card. There was a big civil war, people died, it came to a bad end, the United Mineworkers continued to be the representative miners' union, but my grandfather went on to do other things. He took people hunting, he tried to open a bar, he opened a gunsmithing business, he wanted just to be his own boss. Fiercely independent, a legendary shot, I hate to admit a poacher and an absolutely interesting man. Whenever we had family get-togethers and we did often, my grandmothers sisters would come from other parts of Illinois and their husbands and children and sometimes grandchildren and we would have a great party on the lawn and my grandfather would play his concertina and we would make smudge pots of tobacco to keep the mosquitoes away and eventually the women would go upstairs and talk and the men would go downstairs in the basement and pass the wine around and tell the stories and I always went to the basement and sat and listened to the stories. I always loved the story from the time I was a very small kid. I grew up hearing about life in America, about coal mining wars, about who was brave, who did stupid things. They didn't tell me everything and there is still questions that I would ask if I could have one of them here. I would ask my grandfather about certain battles, if he was in them and if he was the Prager lynching, I would like to know that. I know he went to East St. Louis when it was burning in 1917 to see because they could see the smoke. My father said he just put his long gun over his shoulder and walked there from Collinsville and came back and said that was pretty awful. There were people hanging from the street lamps and the city was burning. He was that kind of a guy. He didn't take part in that battle he was not a bigot. He was a communist and an atheist. And gave up communism for a sort of democratic socialism late in his life but never gave up his atheism and believed truly and deeply in solidarity as did they all. I never realized when I was a kid about how truly difficult their lives had been. I mean, imagine my mother never had a grandparent, didn't have an aunt or an uncle. You know there was no family. She told me about a woman in the coalmining town who had no grandchildren and she was Czech this woman and they did not speak a common language but they got very attached. My mother would always accompany her when she went shopping and take her to buy her groceries and the things she needed for her house and she would always buy my mother a little treat and they would go to the old lady's house and they would have tea and she was sort of a surrogate grandmother for my mom and my mother was sort of her surrogate grandchild. You get the picture that people have tremendous resilience and courage. Sorry. When I first started going to Italy, twenty-some years ago and I found in Massa Marittima the full copy of my mother's birth certificate and it had the address where she was born. So I went, I went there and I sat on a bench for two hours just looking at it, you know, just looking at it. Every year I go back and my son was there this year and I said oh please go by number 16 via Giuseppe Verdi and see who is there. One year I was there and there was a man working in a garage there and I told him the story about my grandparents leaving from there to go to Italy and my mother being born there and he took me home and made me coffee and fed me cookies and told

me a soldier had to die there an American, when the town was liberated in the second world war by the Americans. I have the great privilege of knowing family in Italy and America and we share the stories when I go and they tell me what it was like to live through the war, be occupied. One of my cousins there was a partisan, and he was an antifascist guerilla fighter and he would never talk about it but the son of his best friend who was also a partisan would tell me the stories about how brave they were and what it was like to have your town not only occupied by the Nazis but to have people that you grew up with that were fascists and how divided the community was and how they struggled to be one community again after the war. Again I saw that same kind of resilience. I remember walking down the street in Massa, the main street the Via Liberta' with my cousin Guido Mario Giovanetti and he was in his late seventies and it was August and the street was full of German tourists and there was more German being spoken around us than English and I said Guido doesn't this bother you, think of the days when you ran down this street to save your life with people who spoke this language shooting at you and he shrugged and he said it was a long time ago, the war is over, it's a different world now. I was always astounded at their ability to live fully and not descend into regret and anger. Again I think it's a tremendous kind of resilience. It's the thing that now that I'm elderly myself, other than the wonderful stories because we all live by stories and we all try to figure out who we are and what the world is like through stories but this gift of resilience I think is the greatest gift that I got from them. My father in particular who was. Everybody was born at home in the first two decades you know and he was born at home. For some reason, he had a physician and not the Italian midwife Mrs. Marko who delivered everybody else. I don't know why. Maybe there was something with my grandmother's pregnancy. But nonetheless there was a young doctor and he attended the birth and my father was born with a very severe orthopedic deformity, that's commonly called club foot. He would have never been able to stand. He certainly would not have been able to do manual labor to make a living. This doctor set up. I have a classmate from Washington University who is in the orthopedic clinic, I am going to send you to him, and I have the clinic card from my father's appointment in ninety-nine to go to the clinic and they did corrective surgery on him. He was in the hospital for four months and my grandmother went and stayed in a boarding house so that she could breastfeed him and he wore really heavy braces up above his knees to his thighs for the first nine years of his life. I often wonder if that experience made him or at least contributed to the kind of patient, tough intelligence that he had. I mean he had all his life and my son has it too. I wish I had it, I don't. This ability simply look very clear-eyed with very clear eyes at a problem and say "Ah this is the problem. This is what we could do." Even if it was something really ugly or difficult I never saw him descend into a kind of pettiness or regret. He was an elected official for many years. He started out as shop steward and ended up as president of his union for twenty-some years, and integrated the officer core of his union and for that got shot at and beaten up and threatened. I can still remember answering the phone at ten o'clock at night and someone saying "your father's not home, you don't know where he is, but I know where he is and you're never going to see him again." He was really genuinely a tough guy but he didn't, it didn't make him petty or mean or hateful or stupid and I have always been sort of dumbfounded by that. I'd known, I had the great pleasure to work with a physician who had that same temperament, who is a brilliant physician, that I worked with for a long time, but I think seeing that kind of intelligence and that kind of temperament and action in difficult times is a remarkable thing and I often again wonder if it was that experience of having to draw back, be a solitary person, to be moving around in these huge braces that gave him some perspective at a young age, that he might not have acquired otherwise. Who knows, but he was quite a guy.

ML: It sounds like your family had a huge influence on you. You were very close, intertwined. How did you feel growing up in this immigrant home? It sounds like you had adored it, in some way.

JC: In some ways, but you know Collinsville was a very small town and it was rather static, even then. You know, I was a bright kid and I lived in books and I grew up with the stories and I wanted to know what else there was in the world. I wanted to know everything there was in the world. I wanted out. The year I graduated from high school, my fathers, the plant where my father worked moved out of East St. Louis actually ten-thousand Union Packing House jobs moved out of East St. Louis in those few years. It had been the biggest packing house center in the state outside of Chicago. Those jobs were gone and East St. Louis obviously never recovered and they went to my dad's plant Armour's, I still don't buy Armour's products, went to Alabama a right-to-work state. My dad was out of work for a year. There was no money. My parents were very frugal. They had no debts. We owned our house. My mother made our clothes, we gardened, my dad hunted. We didn't spend a lot of money. We always had a ten-year-old car. But by the end of that year, there was very little money left. My mother went, I remember to work waiting on tables and my father was just horrified that he couldn't provide for his family. So I couldn't go to college. There was no question. I wasn't going to school. I went to see a friend and they said, my friend's mother said that her daughter was working for the telephone company, I should come and see and I went with my mother to visit in this horrible place where all these women were sitting there lined up at these nasty little machines. That convinced me I was getting out of there one way or another and that's why I went into the army. Cause it seemed like a way to go to school. I mean that's how they marketed it to you, as a way to go to school. I loved them, and I couldn't wait to get away from them. I wanted to know what was over the next hill and what was, I wanted the wider world. I wanted the world of books. Yes.

ML: Before you got over that hill and you know, to the world of books, take me through like what was a day like being a kid in this family. What did your parents do?

JC: Ah. My dad took the bus to the packing house. So my mother got up at five o'clock in the morning and this was a four-room house so people are up cooking and making coffee at five o'clock in the morning. You know you're going to hear that some mornings. So while he was eating breakfast she would make his lunch and then he would go and get on the bus. He would go to work and she would get my brother, I have a younger brother that's three and a half years younger, up to go to school. She would make our breakfast and our lunch. We did not have money to buy lunches at school and we had two cents for milk and sometimes an extra penny for a small piece of chocolate because the principal at my school always had a little candy stand at lunch and you could buy penny pieces of candy. We had a coal furnace. So my mother in the winter would have to go downstairs and make the fire. I remember we had this Indian blanket and my brother and I would huddle up with our bottoms up against the heat grate and wrap up in our Indian blanket until it warmed up in the kitchen and then go to school. In all but the worst of weather, I walked the mile to school and back home again. My father typically didn't come home until late in the evening. My mother would save dinner for him. We never ate in a restaurant. My mother cooked all of our food from scratch. She canned and preserved. As I said my father hunted, we ate squirrel, we ate rabbit. We ate a lot of traditional northern Italian and central Italian foods. My mother made her own pasta. My father and mother pickled peppers and canned mushrooms and it wasn't until I got into the wider world that I realized I ate like a king when I was a kid. You know all the wonderful things that you have to go to a really good Italian restaurant to get today was standard fare. There was that. I didn't see a lot of my dad during the week, because often he came home late, because he was in the

Union Hall after work and sometimes the union, he had the reputation for being an excellent mediator so the union often sent him to other places and he also did some teaching on how you organize a union and sometimes he sent my mother with the women's group. She went to Washington and New York to represent the families of men who worked in the union. They were deeply involved in it. Sometimes he would bring home, he would call and say he was bringing home two or three guys from either the state or the national union and my mother would cook for them. She would make pasta. She would make chicken. She would make salad. Then I always got to sit at the table and listen to the conversations. They were talking about, and what they were trying to do was preserve their union, negotiate for contracts. We always went to the Union Hall on the weekends, so I would go with my dad to the Union Hall I have his desk that was in his office, it's enormous. Sometimes on Saturday afternoon after we got out of the Union Hall we would go to the Polish Hall and he would drink boilermakers and I would drink chocolate soda. He, Mr. Peanut out of the package. I loved going to union meetings with him. He took me once to an international meeting in Chicago and I mean he always treated me like an intelligent human being. He would say now here is what the problem is, and here is what we want and here is they want. Now, this guy is going to get up and he is going to make this argument and then you see that guy over there he is really with this guy and he is going to get up next and he is going to support this argument by saying so. So what we have to do. He would just tell me about how the mechanics of it, the strategy of it, how to look for what they really wanted, what the arguments were. Then, you know, we would talk about it. Sundays, we always had a big dinner. We went to early mass. We went to Bruno's bakery after mass and got goodies and brought them home. My mother made dinner from scratch. We listened to the Italian hour on the radio and we talked. We talked books. We talked politics. We talked about what was happening in the world. Sometimes we talked about Italy. But there were always really interesting conversations that included everybody. My grandparents who lived down at the bottom of our road would come up after lunch sometimes middle of the afternoon and there would be coffee and cookies and wine. There was a lot of family in the day-to-day. My step-cousin lived two doors away and he is still one of my best friends. He is, let's see I'm seventy-seven, he is seventy-eight and we still hang out. There were kids in the neighborhood. We had a woods, behind. On good weather, we spent the day. We would leave with a wagon and food and we would go in the woods and build a fire and make a camp and get in the creek and hunt for crawdads and nobody bothered us. You know, we'd go in the mornings we'd come home in the evening. In the winter we'd take a sled I remember a neighbor had a dachshund and we would put him in a box on the sled and take him to the woods. It was fairly uncomplicated. I really had no to contact of being part of an Italian minority. That I was, that Italians were a minority and I wasn't aware of the horrific Italian stereotypes until I got older. Until I, certainly was in college and then later in the university and certainly when I lived in New York and I realized how much anti-Italian sentiment there was and how much the stereotypical Italian had so little to do with the life I knew as an Italian-American or with the Italians that I knew. The food was different. The relationship with the church was different. The patois was different. I begin to understand my mother's classic Tuscan snobbery, "we are not like them," as a defense of not being that stereotypical Italian. My first year in college I was at SIU Alton it was before the Edwardsville campus was open this was like sixty-one, sixty-two because I come back from the military and I was taking a history survey course and the very first meeting of the class the professor said she how just come back from a European trip and that she told us this little joke and she said well she'd taken the train from Switzerland to Italy she knew when she passed over the border from Switzerland to Italy because she looked at her watch and her watch had been stolen. So I just remember that it just enraged me and I was rising up out of my seat and my friend who was sitting behind me put his

hands on my shoulder and said just sit down and shut up you need to take this course. But I then I began to understand again as I got into a wider world but that certainly was not part of my consciousness as a young person and now of course in the last thirty years I've read an enormous amount about immigration and women immigrants and the great diaspora and the difference in culture from one province to another in Italy but I was ignorant of it then.

ML: It sounds like as a kid you were very well-rounded, you experienced a lot.

JC: I was pretty secure.

ML: Yeah. Your parents exposed you to a lot it sounds like. So I know you ended up joining WAC.

JC: Yes I did.

ML: The Women's Army Corps.

JC: Right out of high school.

ML: Right out of high school?

JC: Yes.

ML: So eighteen?

JC: Yes. Eighteen.

ML: Okay and you said you did that because that was your opportunity...

JC: I was desperate to go to school and it seemed to me that it would get me out of Collinsville and it would help me get to school. Not necessarily by an easy route but that it would get me there and I was a pretty naive kid. I'd never eaten in a fancy restaurant or ridden in a new car. You know? I passed all the tests. I did extremely well on their intelligence test. So I got to choose my military occupational specialty and I became a cryptographer and I went to cryptography school it was a program of mostly men of course. I mean there weren't very many members of the Women's Army Corps and we were still were not integrated of course into the wider army. The school I went to in Georgia was a god awful place, Fort Gordon Georgia, just an awful place. In my class, there were thirty-six men and four women and we were all smart kids from working-class families who wanted to go to school who didn't have any money. We had that in common. One was from Boston. One was from Nebraska. Oh god, I don't remember who the fourth one was but there we were. Then I got stationed at Fort Meade Maryland at that time it was a huge post. Two and a half times bigger than my hometown. You know, it was before the world of computers, things were automated, but they were not fully computerized so I worked in this huge busy communication center underground, locked in, badges, and guns and we worked shift work. They made it absolutely impossible for me to go to school and I complained a lot and went to visit people and made my complaints known which was absolutely useless. They wanted me to, I took the officer candidate test and I proficiencied out of I don't know how many hours of college and they said well if you reenlist we'll send you to officer school and then you'll be able to go to college for sure. But by that time I didn't trust them

anymore and I had an experience. I had already learned how dangerous it was to be a woman in the military. I learned that at Fort Gordon and I saw the way women who had problems were treated by our own cadre who were to a woman all World War II veterans and they really had contempt for us. They saw as some sort of "who in the hell were we to wear their uniform," they were all veterans they had been in a war. There wasn't much advocacy in our cadre. I'll give you an example. One day at work I slipped. We worked in this incredibly noisy, busy unit and these wires went back and forth across the walkway and the intercom was blasting and nobody was hearing it so I went running down to pick up the intercom because you had to respond and I slipped or tripped with the wires and I hit my head, just slammed right on the top of my head on the corner of a concrete post. I got nauseated and literally saw stars, sat down on the floor, felt really sick so my commanding officer said, "Condellone you're going back to your company because I want you seen at the infirmary." I got back to my company and my first sergeant sent me to the gynecologist because I was nauseated and dizzy so I might be pregnant. So there I am in my uniform, no ring on my finger, sitting there with all these military wives and I get to be examined by for the first time in my life by an army doctor who wants to know not what my neurological status, is but if I'm pregnant or not. That's sort of a view of what it was like to be, I must have had a concussion, at least a light concussion. I mean, fortunately, I woke up the next day. Right? But they were ridiculous. You know, they were ridiculous. Later on that year I was assaulted by a man who had a lot of rank and I knew there was no percentage in making a complaint about that, but I also knew that I was out of there. I did not ever tell my parents, because I didn't even tell another human being until late into middle age, because I didn't think my parents needed to know that. They were horrified that they couldn't send their smart kid to college. That's the last thing I needed to tell them. So I told them it was because I couldn't go to school and the military refused to pay any attention to me. So I got a general discharge. If they tried to give me a dishonorable discharge I would have fought that but a general discharge seemed to be an easy way out. So I got out. When I read about, you know some of the things that Colonel Ann has written about women in the military and I see how women are treated, fifty-six years later it still makes me really, really angry. I don't think I had PTSD but what I had, it took me much of my twenties to figure out where in the hell I was going from school to school and job to job to sort of re-root myself in the world is that I developed a great contempt for bureaucracies and organizations and I saw them all as incompetent and stupid. I took me longer to mature into adulthood and then, of course, I chose the profession, midwifery, which is a constant negotiation with the powers that be and bureaucracies to advocate for patients. I must have figured it out for a while. I don't know that even at this age I fully comprehend what all of that meant to me for sorting out my life in my twenties.

ML: So how long were you apart of the Women's Army Corps?

JC: Two years.

ML: Only two years?

JC: Yes.

ML: Okay. So then you leave...

JC: I came home and went to SIU Alton and then I went to the University of Arizona, moved to New York, and you know, went to LAU for awhile, went to under college for a while, worked in printing and

publishing, which I loved, I absolutely loved. I started doing volunteer work on the lower east side where I lived. I was really involved in the antiwar movement and the integration movement. I had a lot of friends on the lower east side who were activists. The group that I volunteered for was just a storefront social service that helped people get enough to eat and go to the doctor and find a place to live and I helped with their children's program, which I loved, I absolutely loved. Out of that I met a lot of community activists. In sixty-eight when there was war on poverty money a local organization got a huge grant to start a community development project. They were called the Real Great Society. They were a coalition of Puerto Rican and black and later additionally Chinese former gangs. We had a grant that came from them to run a program called the University of the Street and the man who was the executive of that was a man I knew from other community work and he asked me to come to work for them and run their children's program. So I did that for the last few years that I was in New York.

ML: You went from SIU Alton and then from there, you went to Arizona?

JC: Mhm. I went to the University of Arizona.

ML: How long were you out there?

JC: Just a semester because I couldn't afford it. I absolutely loved it and I had good friends from the military there who really wanted me to come and put my life together there. I loved it. Great school. I had the world's best Italian instructor and a really fine writing teacher. I simply couldn't afford it. I had friends in New York and in those days it was easy to find work, it was easy to find a cheap apartment. I was determined I was only going to be there shortly and I then I was going to Italy. It took me some time to get to Italy. So I went to New York.

ML: You went to New York and the pull was friends and a job and?

JC: And yes. Being able to go to school, very inexpensively. Yeah.

ML: Then you also mentioned while you were out there you did a lot of different types of activist work through different organizations. How long did you do that? How long were you in New York?

JC: I was in New York almost ten years. My partner and I had Sam, my only child in seventy, and the University of the Streets was pretty much in shambles at that time and I had gone back to work for the offset lithography company that I had worked for some time. It was a very strong union shop and I met a lot of really old-fashioned smart activists there who were very much involved in the antiwar movement. I felt at home with those guys. They were for the most part men. Then we had Sam. I had this sort of epiphany when I had Sam. I had a wonderful pregnancy. I studied Lamaze with Elisabeth Bing, the woman who brought Lamaze to America. I had a wonderful labor and birth couldn't have been more normal, unmedicated. I came out of it feeling like an adult. Then four weeks postpartum was dreadfully sick with septicemia and a hundred and five point six temperature, back in the hospital, nearly died, got better. While I was getting better figured out that I was going back to school. I was going to be a midwife and I was going home to do it because I knew that George and I would need help with the baby and the world and so that's what I did.

ML: You met George in New York?

JC: Yes.

ML: You mentioned also that you were of the minority women, it was majority men, what was that like being the only woman?

JC: Well you know I grew up in the Union Hall and all these uncles. I like men. I've always liked men and I think because I grew up with such interesting men. I felt comfortable. Did I get hit on? Yes. Did I respond? For the most part not. Did I have wonderful mentors who were men as well as women? Yes. I would say the worst experiences I ever had being a female minority was in the military, but the military condoned and promoted violence against women. That was not true of the people I worked within the community development organization and that was not true of the old-fashioned socialist activists that I worked within the printing business. I was good there.

ML: Then also in New York you did printing?

JC: At first year yeah. At first I worked for a publisher. I worked for G.P. Putnam Sons. I realized that I just loved that production piece of it. Putting things together. I went and got this job at this offset lithographers. I actually was the first woman they ever hired in production and I just loved it. I loved all the problem-solving. I loved going to the other presses. I took classes. It was just really, really... Plus as I said a lot of the, certainly not management, but the craftspeople were old-time union guys and I understood that. I felt at home there. Of course, later I realized I was the only production person who didn't have profit sharing, right, but it took me a while to figure that out. I worked for them right up until my maternity leave. They were very kind to me. They'd say come in when you can. Stay as long as you can. Sometimes they sent me home in a cab. Then after I had Sam. I trained a couple of replacements. One didn't work. The next one didn't work. The next one didn't work. They said come back, and we'll pay your daycare and I knew if I did that I'd be doing that for the rest of my life and that I really needed to go back to school and find my own profession.

ML: What year was Sam born?

JC: Seventy.

ML: Nineteen-seventy. Okay. You move back to Collinsville with George and Sam and you come back. What's the plan?

JC: The plan is to get a degree in nursing work for a couple of years, go to graduate school, get a master's degree in nurse-midwifery, and go live in Canada. That was the plan.

ML: What was the draw in Canada?

JC: It wasn't America. It stayed it generally out of the war. We had friends who moved there. It was cheap to homestead. We bought a hundred acres on Cape Breton Island, which we still own. Only Sam and I own it now instead of George and I own it. We would homestead and I would go be a nurse in Canada. That was our goal. It was to raise our child in a safe place. Vietnam was hell on my brother and so many of our generation and I figured by the time my son was eighteen there would be another war. It

was about keeping my child safe and living close to the sea which is something I love. So we came back here. I indeed did get my bachelor's degree in short order.

ML: From?

JC: Here. SIUE. Went to work. Had a wonderful little hospital that doesn't exist anymore in East St. Louis, Christian Welfare. Then I got... at that time St. Louis University had a master's degree in midwifery. Part of the war on poverty that is not as well-known as some of the other issues was a great initiative for expanded practice nursing, advanced practice nursing. Midwives have always been advanced practice nurses. We always did more and had more responsibility than most nurses. There was all this money to send people like me off to get advanced practice skills so that we could fill that niche between doctors and less skilled practitioners. St. Louis University had a masters in midwifery at that time and I got accepted into that program and I had a federal fellowship that paid for my entire graduate education. Gave me a stipend which paid my daycare. I got an excellent master's degree. Because I had no debt and I had seven hundred dollars in debt from undergraduate school I had a certain freedom to go take care of poor women which is what I wanted to do. Here it was impossible to deliver babies. I taught nursing. I went to Texas on the Rio Grande border with a catholic institution and did an internship for a summer. Came back and got a job at the then forming only full practice midwifery service in the region, which was at St. Joseph hospital in St. Charles and the physicians threatened to boycott the hospital if they didn't get the midwives out of there. So off we went. No midwifery practice. For years I ran a family planning STD clinic. I worked for the state department of public health evaluating family planning services. I was the administrator of a project in Centreville where we took care of pregnant women and then did some family planning, and then realized I'm fifty when am I going to practice fully. My then-husband, George and I had long parted when Sam was four and I remarried in seventy-eight and my husband was a professor here. He was getting ready to retire and we kept our house here. We bought an old farmhouse in Pennsylvania and I went out there and practiced. He died just several years after we moved there and I continued to practice there until two-thousand and eight when I retired and came back here. So I did deliver my babies.

ML: Why did you never go to Canada?

JC: George and I separated and there I was trying to find my way in practice with this young child. It seemed more important than ever for him to be close to my parents. He and my father were very close. He knows stories that my father never told me. He was, Sam really attached to my family. Then later when I remarried Bill was a tenured professor. We were not going to Canada and the years passed. I go to Canada often. Sam and I went for the first time together last year and we walked our property together. No easy feat. It's wooded and wild. I would still love to live on Cape Breton Island but not in the woods. I love it there. I love the proximity to the sea. I like the island mentality of people. They are very private but cooperative at the same time. There's lots of art. I love the place, so I go when I can.

ML: Fascinating. I want to backtrack and I want to hit a few things. You mentioned your brother and Vietnam. Was your brother deployed?

JC: My brother enlisted when he was still in high school. There were eight of them that enlisted together in the marines. My brother was a marine. My brother was, still is a very handsome articulate man. No

interest in higher education. Quite an athlete. Football. Track and field. He went off to the Marine Corps. He called me from San Diego when he was 'cause they took a ship they were leaving. I begged him not to go. I said you don't have to go to war. You know you don't have to go to war. If you want to go to Canada I'll go to Canada with you. If you want to go, I mean I was a young single person and he hung up on me. I took me years to realize how much I insulted him. We were raised to take care of people. To engage in our community and do what we could. I couldn't imagine how he could survive if he killed while he was there and he damn near didn't. He had terrible PTSD. He's in his seventies now. He was a wife, a good marriage, a child, grandchild, but fifty years have struggled to get there. I do not exaggerate.

ML: What's going on by the time you get back in nineteen seventy to Collinsville? What's going on with your parents and what are they doing?

JC: Well my dad was in his sixties working for the city of Collinsville and he was also a township trustee for Collinsville Township. He was a precinct committeeman for years. He's always been involved in his community. I used to love to make rounds with him. He'd say so-and-so lives there and that one's going to need a ride to the polls and this woman needs help with that and we need to bring surplus food to this family. He knew everybody and everything. It was his way to just tend to people. He tended to people. He was still in politics. He had terrible arthritis. His health was not good. Terrible pain really. A horrific amount of pain. I went mushroom hunting with him. We had great times. He loved getting to know my son. They spent a lot of time together. Things were tense because of my brother's PTSD. It was difficult to see my parent's age and my father's world become smaller and smaller as he aged. It was interesting when I went to Pennsylvania in ninety-one we had been here twenty years. Sam was an adult. We had spent a lot of time together. The Sunday meals, the celebrations, the making pasta together, the feeding my colleagues, the hunting mushrooms, the listening to the story. I had a party and said I'm going to Pennsylvania and Bill's going to split his time between here and there. My mother was beside herself. My father said you know what you need to do for your profession. We'll manage. When I went back there he had knee replacement surgery which I begged him not to have because I felt he was a terrible surgical risk and I didn't like his doctor. I liked the hospital even less and he said, "look you know I can't get around and I'm incapacitated with pain, this a risk I have to take" and it killed him. He had a post-op heart attack which they were all too stupid to notice until he was in congestive heart failure and we got him into Barnes for excellent care but he had too much cardiac damage and he died. I felt that if I had been here and seen him up close that I might have figured it out. That was really horrible. That was horrible. It was horrible for all of us. My mother, she'd been married till she was eighty-one and he was the only man she'd ever dated or kissed. He proposed to her on their first date. She'd known him her whole life. It was really hard for her. My brother was great. He spent a lot of time with her. Stayed with her a lot of the time but I came and went from Pennsylvania. Then my husband died and there was all of that. It was a really difficult time.

ML: That sounds very difficult. You're living in Pennsylvania and your husband dies, what brings you back?

JC: We had bought a farmhouse so I had rehabbed it. I had a community I loved there. I was working at that time just part-time practice with a physician that was from Pana, Illinois that I was really fond of. We had a really good collaborative relationship and I had hired a couple of other midwives that I liked. All of that was good but I lived in a very rural setting. A hundred and thirty-five-year-old house that I just

managed to finally finish rehabbing. I was really involved. I'd started a writer's group. I was involved in the arts council. I lived in a community of organic farmers. There were some really good writers. There were a lot of really good things there but I was tired of living in Appalachia and I felt that I wanted to live at least in town and not quite so rural, so that it wasn't so very hard to get to things. Twenty minutes to the grocery store. An hour and a quarter to the hospital, etc. Then Sam said he was getting married so I thought great perfect time to come back home and we had kept the house and little farm that Bill and I had bought here and Sam was living in it so that became his place and I bought a house in town. So what was left of my family one cousin I'm particularly fond of, my now ninety-four-year-old aunt, my brother, and my son are here, so I came back here.

ML: Did you pick up midwifery when you came back?

JC: My intention was to practice part-time but the state of Illinois made that really impossible. They would recognize the, oh my god, they didn't have any reciprocal certification. That was going to be a very long expensive process. It was impossible to work part-time and pay for my insurance because midwife carries a big cost for insurance and of course, the institution always provided my insurance in Pennsylvania. In order for me to work and be able to afford insurance, I either had to work fulltime and pay for my own insurance and work fulltime for an institution that would pay for my insurance and I didn't want to work fulltime, I wanted to work part-time and to write because I had started to writing again about thirty years ago, and I knew I couldn't practice all the time and write too and not get old on top of it. It just became impossible. I haven't practiced since I moved back here. In fact, I've retired my certification and my nursing licensure. I volunteer for hospice, but not as a nurse as a civilian volunteer. That's the nursing I do now.

ML: Your son now he's thirty-eight, thirty-nine?

JC: He's going to be forty-nine this year.

ML: Oh forty-nine.

JC: Yes. He's practically middle-aged.

ML: So what's next? What's next for you? What are you doing now? What drives you now?

JC: I think that... the story. The two things that I've loved the most consistently in my life are the story and midwifery. Those two things have a surprising amount in common in that they both require you pay exquisite attention to what's going and that you're not quite the center of the universe. The process or the thing is and I really like that kind of deep engagement. When I came back here and god I've taken courses from some wonderful people on this campus; Geoff Schmidt and Valerie Vogrin and Allison Funk. Who've just been wonderful to me and had pieces that I like published and find myself writing. There's that. In a sort of and I think that it has to do with the developmental stage of old age, of generativity. I think that my tribe is the tribe of immigrant women of labor organizers and so I work with Mother Jones Museum, I work with an Italian organization that I cofounded here on the campus and we tell the story of who did all this work and who did all the middle class, and what immigrants mean and how we got to be a modern democracy which is the... in working for the museum and the Italian cultural association are the only things that keep me from absolute despair about the state of my society and my culture and my

democracy. Which as I see as grim. Much grimmer than it was when we were marching on the Pentagon in 1967. I see it as grim. I feel an urgency to be part of the group that says hey wait a minute look at this. There's a lot to be learned from this and isn't it interesting. I think it's that. I think it's generativity and saying this is the way to give back to all those people. I think about my great grandmother, who died impoverished in a state institution probably with a kind of dementia. When I got her death certificate I was so excited I found out where she died and I sent for her death certificate and it didn't have a god damn piece of useful information and I realized she died among strangers who knew nothing about her, and that's so awful. I think about my grandmother her daughter going to work at fifteen because she had to help feed people and my mother going into the dress factory at thirteen and I got to spend six years at a university and I have this healthy old age and I'm always buying another book and reading another book and reading another story and speaking to another class. Yesterday I got to talk to two class of really smart young people at Roxanna about why it's important to study the immigrants. So you have to say thank you. I have to say thank you.

ML: That's a great message. It really is.

JC: I am a very privileged human being. There is a great song. There's a song called the "Price of Coal" and it comes out of a song that was written out of the Spring Hill mining disaster in Spring Hill, Nova Scotia in the fifties and the line in the song is "the price of coal is paid in blood and bone." So, I think it's important to remember that.

ML: I think that is a perfect place for us to end it. A great message. Thank you so much.

JC: What fun, Michael! What fun! You're so sweet to let me do this.

ML: Thank you so much.

JC: I hope I get to meet again Michael.

ML: Oh. We will.

JC: You get into that Master's program, I want to meet that professor.

ML: Will do. Thank you.