

Interviews with Emigrants

Interview to Ms. Santa Di Ferdinando, emigrated from Italy to Belgium

Interviewed by Cenci Beatrice from L'officina della memoria, Foligno (PG), Italy



Personal Data

First name: Santa Di Ferdinando

Age: 59

Country of origin: Italy

Year of emigration: 1952

Country of destination: Belgium

Now living in: Foligno. **Since:** 1972

Interviewed by: Cenci Beatrice

Date and place: L'officina della memoria, Foligno (PG), Italy

Personal History of Emigration

Before leaving

1. *How old were you when you left your country? Moving to another country was your own decision?*

I was two years-old. The decision was taken by my parents

1. *Did you leave alone, with your family, or with other people you knew? How many relatives did you leave behind?*

I left my homeland with my family . My grandparents are still there.

2. *Why did you leave your country? Were you looking for a job? Had you religious or political problems? Did you just wish to know new countries and new people? Other reasons?*

My parents left to look for job opportunity, it was a sudden decision (they left with a contract of job for the mines, they didn't know the language)

3. *How did you choose your destination? Did you know where to go and what to do? Did you know the language?*

Their hopes were to make a lot of money and to go back to Italy again.

4. *Tell me something about the expectations you had when you left your country: did you think to remain in the country of emigration, or to come back home ?*

Travel

5. *Which means of transport did you use?*

We travelled by train.

6. *How long was your journey?*

The trip lasted twenty-four hours.

7. *Tell me something about your feelings along the journey.*

I don't know, I was too young to know it; first my dad left with a five year contract of work in the mines, one year later my mother left but she wasn't glad because she terribly missed the rest of her family

First Impact

8. *Tell me something about the first impact with the new country. What first happened when you got to your destination?*

The first impact was very negative. My parents had to learn to live in a new place, to meet new people, to look for a house, to furnish it and settle down.

9. *How much time did you need to find a house?*

We found a house almost immediately, but it wasn't a real house, it looked like a hut.

10. *How much time did you need to find a job?*

11. Which were the main difficulties you encountered within the first period? what did you mainly miss (home, friends, language, food, tradition, other issues) ? Were there any countryman of yours waiting for you ?

It wasn't easy to be part of that community because you needed to find some friends, some were very rude with us, we missed Italy, the sun, we missed our relatives.

12. Did you feel "different" ? what did you think about that people? what did they think about you?

Yes, I felt different; we thought that Belgians treated us badly because we were foreigners; we thought the same thing of them we didn't succeed in integrating ourselves.

After some time (6 months/one year)

13. What have you done in order to try and integrate in the new country ?

We learned the language to integrate, we learnt to live as they lived, but it wasn't easy to integrate ourselves in a new country.

14. Did anybody (institutions, associations, single people, native or guest) help you to integrate into the community ?

Nobody helped us to integrate in the new country. For them we were only foreigners.

15. Did you feel that the help you received was enough? What could have been done and was not to help your integration.

16. What did you feel was the most effective help you received?

Going to school helped me. My parents sent me to school and this helped me a lot.

Now

17. *Is the country in which you actually live the one you reached first ? did you achieved citizenship ? or have you moved again? and why?*

No, I went back to Italy.

18. *[only for people still living abroad] What do you think now about the country you actually live? does it agree with the imagine you had before coming here ?*

19. *Is there any unpleasant event (racism, indifference, cold, etc.) you went through, or you witnessed ?*

I have suffered many unpleasant events and negative experiences at school and at the workplace . At school they treated us badly and we were called :” brutti macaroni”. Teachers, treated us badly because we were just improving our race instead of theirs, and my friends were treated very badly and there were things that were forbidden only for the Italians and not for the Belgians. We had to adapt to their culture and live as they did. We were not allowed into their shops; for example only in 1969 we were granted permission to implement a business, before we couldn't. We were treated in the past in the same way we are treating foreigners in Italy now .

20. *Do you think that the differences between this country and your motherhood have increased or decreased by the time? or did they remain the same?*

According to me the differences between Italy and Belgium are the same as they were in the past.

21. *How do you look back to your experience ?*

The experience was positive because I went to a foreign country, I lived part of my life there and then, fortunately, I returned home.

22. *Is there anything you “learned” from your new fellow citizens (job, culture, food, lifestyle, social or political institutions, etc.) ?*

The most important thing I learned was the new language.

23. *Is there anything you think they “learned” from you ?*

They learned nothing from me, I think.

24. *Is there anything you think they could “learn” from you, if only they knew you better?*

If only they knew me better maybe they could learn something from me and from the Italians in general (way of life, culture, costumes..).

25. *Which actually are your feelings? Have you any regrets? If you could go back in your life, would you come in the same place? or would you go elsewhere? or would you stay home?*

No I don't have any regrets. If I returned back I would go back to Belgium and follow my parents.

26. *Finally: what do you think about your future? are you going to stay in your new country? or to go elsewhere? or to go back home ?*
