New Jersey's Monmouth County
The Place You Want to Be

Interview with Frank Mocci

Under the Auspices of the
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Flora T. Higgins, Project Coordinator

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Mr. and Mrs. Mocci, Christmas 1999

Ms. Wikoff: Mr. Mocci is a lifelong resident of Monmouth County, and he's going to tell about growing up and farming in Hazlet. My mother, Grace Stillwell, taught him in grades three through five. I hope that he'll reminisce about his children and everything he'd like to tell us about. Tell us about your family, approximately when they came over.

Mr. Mocci: My father came from Naples, Italy in 1907. My mother came here in 1910. They had known each other in Italy, but they had no idea what part of America they were coming to. And they met after a couple of years in Matawan. I think they got married in 1912. Then they started their family. He used to work for a fellow by the name of Frank Nunziata. He used to sell fertilizer and seeds; he worked for him for ten dollars a month for three years. And then after three years, Nunziata had a farm, and my father worked as a share crop holder. But my father made twenty-five and Frank made seventy-five, and my father did all the work. Still he made probably a thousand, twelve hundred dollars a year; but he had to work hard. Then he bought a little farm from a fellow by the name of Montana, on Hillcrest Road, and that's where he started farming. He bought all his equipment from Pete O. Weigand, at the Hazlet Trading Post.

Ms. Wikoff: I remember that name. Pete O. Weigand was president of the school board, I think.

Mr. Mocci: Yes, he was. And that's where my father bought his plow. He bought a team of horses, and that's where he started farming. And he farmed there for three years and then he bought a farm in Matawan. After every three or four years, he'd sell the farm, make five or six hundred, a thousand dollars, and buy another place. In 1924 he bought the Homestead in Hazlet from Ackerson, Judge Ackerson, but he paid a lot of money.

Ms. Wikoff: How many acres?

Mr. Mocci: There were forty-five acres. But he paid a lot of money for that ground - thirteen thousand dollars because he was an Italian. My father was the first Italian who had property in Hazlet. This was in 1924.

Ms. Wikoff: That's the year I was born.

Mr. Mocci: Then he bought another piece of ground from Mrs. Morrow, Emmy Morrow. We had been renting it; it was forty acres, and we bought it from her. This is five or six years after he bought the Ackerson farm. We were the only house that had a telephone. All the neighbors had to come to our house. The telephones were wind up. I joined the Hazlet Fire Company, but I was blackballed twice because I was an Italian. And after I joined, then my brothers joined, and we were all in the fire company, three brothers in the Hazlet Fire Company. Every time the whistle blew we all went to the fire. My father used to raise hell because we all went to the firehouse. I got married in 1942; my wife comes from Brooklyn. She'd never seen a farm before in her life.

Ms. Wikoff: How did you happen to meet?

Mr. Mocci: It's a long story. My father and my mother knew her family in Italy; they were what they call "paisan": they come from the same town. It's a small world. We had two kids, Joe and Carol. My father loaned five thousand dollars towards a new building for the fire company. It was a small building. There was one bay there for one truck and then they built the new bay and put three trucks in. That's why my father loaned five thousand dollars toward a new building. And I don't remember whether the whole building was fifteen or twenty thousand.

Ms. Wikoff: That was a huge donation, and in those days. He was a very generous person.

Mr. Mocci: There's a fellow by the name of Lon Lauton. He was very friendly with my father, and he was the president of the fire company. He got my father to loan him five thousand dollars.

Ms. Wikoff: One thing mother used to tell me was that when you were busy on the farm, planting and picking, that farm children didn't go to school, so she would try to tutor you to make up for what lessons you lost. Is that true?

Mr. Mocci: Yes, that's true. We had twenty acres of asparagus when we were young. There's forty-acre piece that my father bought that had twenty acres of asparagus. We used to cut the asparagus, we used to ridge the rows, we used to cut white asparagus, that's called Oyster Bay.

Ms. Wikoff: In Germany, that's the kind of asparagus they cut. It is white. That's a lot of work.

Mr. Mocci: Right. And you got to keep ridging it up. And that ground there, if the wind blew it was light brown, and on a good windy day, it would knock them right down, so my father would have a team of horses with a ridger.

Ms. Wikoff: We had a ridger, remember?

Mr. Mocci: Yes. With a team of horses, he would ridge up the rows, and we used to start, me, and my brother, and two men, and my father. We'd start cutting asparagus like five thirty in the morning, and by nine o'clock we were always in the same spot when the bell would ring at the school, and we'd run across. Frank Weigand used to live right across.

Ms. Wikoff: I remember where he lived.

Mr. Mocci: We used to run across his back yard there and go to the school. Frank came with his hands all dirty and your mother wouldn't -

Ms. Wikoff: But she was a farmer's wife - how about that?

Mr. Mocci: But we used to leave the field, and my father used to say, "Can't you take a day off and finish cutting asparagus?"

Ms. Wikoff: When you got hurt or sick, how would you get cared for? Did you ever go to a doctor?

Mr. Mocci: My mother was the doctor. There were eleven in my family, and two died at birth, so there were nine of us living, and my mother was the doctor. She'd give us Coca Cola with syrup when you had a cold - that took care of the cold. You also got hot bricks on your feet in the wintertime if you got a cold. We had a hot air furnace. Downstairs - oh, it used to burn up, and upstairs was always cold.

Ms. Wikoff: And if you stood there, if you were a girl, it would fill up your skirts.

Mr. Mocci: And if you got on it too hot in bare feet, you'd burn your feet.

Ms. Wikoff: I never heard about the hot bricks. Did they ever use those mustard plasters?

Mr. Mocci: Oh, when my sister had pneumonia, my mother used to make, hot plaster, mustard plaster, and half the time it used to burn the skin.

Ms. Wikoff: That was the way you took care of it. But didn't doctors sometimes come out to the house?

Mr. Mocci: Yes. Our doctors were Dr. Cassidy and Dr. Silcox. You must have heard of him. He was an old timer there in Keyport.

Ms. Wikoff: I remember a Gaswine from Matawan.

Mr. Mocci: Dr. Gaswine. And he had a son who also became a doctor. But Dr. Cassidy, he delivered most of the babies. Most of the babies were born at the house. My father delivered the first part of them. Then Dr. Cassidy used to come in and finish the job.

Ms. Wikoff: What big events happened that you remember? Of course there used to be boats that left from Keyport.

Mr. Mocci: Oh, yes. The farmers used to bring stuff to the pier at Keyport, and put it on the boat. I remember my father used to go to Keyport with other farmers, especially on a Sunday afternoon. All the farmers would go get in line; they had to wait for the boat to come in, because they couldn't all get on the boat at one time. And they had these horses parked in Keyport.

Ms. Wikoff: Did you ever take the ride that was like kind of a cruise boat, almost, that would take you into New York?

Mr. Mocci: Oh, yes, many a times.

Ms. Wikoff: That was really fun.

Mr. Mocci: Yes, it was. I remember when the Holland Tunnel opened up. I think we were the fifth or sixth car going to New York, and that was something! To go through the Holland Tunnel was some experience. The big thing was when my father used to get all the little kids on the truck and we'd go to Union Beach. We'd go down to the beach, like on a Sunday afternoon. That was a big outing, to go swimming on a Sunday afternoon. We used to bring some cooked stuff, and that was a big party then, to get on the truck with the food and go to Union Beach.

Ms. Wikoff: And then didn't Keansburg become really quite popular as a shore resort?

Mr. Mocci: Union Beach and Keansburg were the biggest ones. There was a pier for people who came in by boat to Keansburg, and then they used to have these small busses that used to take them to Long Branch, places like that.

Ms. Wikoff: Tell us about going to the Newark market. That was a big event.

Mr. Mocci: I started going to Newark market with my father when I was ten or eleven years old, and we went there for three or four seasons during the summer. Then when I was fifteen years old, I got my drivers license. Fifteen years old.

Ms. Wikoff: Was it a farmers license?

Mr. Mocci: No, it wasn't a farmer's license. My father knew the police, and Father Burke in the St. Joseph church gave me a birth certificate, and I got my driver's license. From the day I got my driver's license right up until I didn't go to the market any more, my father never went to the market any more. I went to Newark Market for maybe ten, twelve years, and then from there I went to the Fourteenth Street Market in New York. Then I started going to the Bronx Terminal Market. I went there for about twenty years, twenty-five years. Then we started selling direct to the chain stores, and that was one of the worst things we ever did. They told us what to raise, what they're going to pay you for it, and that's it. At least when you went to market, today was one price, tomorrow was another. When you went to the chain store - but we were lucky, we had some good chain stores that we went to.

Ms. Wikoff: My dad used to go to market and a lot of the times he had to come home with some of the load and he didn't know what to do with it. If it was tomatoes, they would get rotten; it was terrible. Did any of them kind of rip you off? I remember Dad saying that some people would jump on the truck as you came in and try to do that.

Mr. Mocci: The worst part of Newark Market was that it was a market all night long. So if you try to get a couple hours sleep, somebody tells you how much. Then if you ask them for a dollar, you take fifty cents. But I always managed, we always raised a good package of stuff, and we were always noted for a good package of stuff, at the Newark Market or the Bronx Terminal, wherever we went, and that's what counts.

Ms. Wikoff: Did you have to wash the vegetables before you took them?

Mr. Mocci: Yes. All the vegetables were dipped in water, and then we got a brusher, brush tomatoes, brush peppers, and then -

Ms. Wikoff: Automatic brushes?

Mr. Mocci: Yes, Tuscot. You remember the Tuscot potato grader?

Ms. Wikoff: Charles probably does.

Mr. Mocci: Well, we had it for vegetables, with brushes. Then we got the big

brushes, the waxer, the washer, everything there. We had a regular assembly line.

Ms. Wikoff: Did you ever hear of a farmer by the name of Ed Sickle, from Tennent? He used to go the Newark Market and I remember he was the first one that had that washing equipment.

Mr. Mocci: They're still in business, Ed Sickle. Didn't he have a Dodge agency?

Ms. Wikoff: That was a different Ed Sickle. But then when you came home from market, I know what you had to do, you had to go right to work. Right?

Mr. Mocci: Yes, we went to work and sometimes I didn't see my kids until the weekend. I'd go to market five days a week -

Ms. Wikoff: And your other brothers were home helping?

Mr. Mocci: Yes, but I was the only one at the market. If we had two loads, another brother would drop off a load to me. But when I went to the Bronx, I sold a lot of stuff in the Bronx Market. And you know something. I never brought anything home. I always managed to sell everything.

Ms. Wikoff: See, you were a good salesman. My father wasn't, he really wasn't, and it was too bad.

Mr. Mocci: When we were young, my father said never take anything home, because if you take something home either you have to repack it or dump it. He'd always find somebody -- he'd always find a buyer for it.

Ms. Wikoff: But like you say, though, you had a good name. And buyers would probably come to your truck. That's the reason.

Mr. Mocci: I was selling tomatoes in the Bronx Terminal Market one Sunday afternoon. The Italian paper, the Progressive, that was like The Daily News, came over. I had put four hundred fifty, five hundred bushels of tomatoes on the truck. They were three quarter bushels, peach baskets, and they had covers, and we had boards on the truck, and we used to put them eight high in that truck. And on Sunday afternoons there would always be a mob of private people buying tomatoes to can, and on this Sunday afternoon, there were so many people around the truck that they called The Progressive to take pictures of people taking tomatoes off the truck.

Ms. Wikoff: Did you ever see the picture in the paper?

Mr. Mocci: Yes.

Ms. Wikoff: Did you save it?

Mr. Mocci: No.

Ms. Wikoff: I thought you were going to say the eight tiers tipped or something. Was The Progressive written in Italian?

Mr. Mocci: Yes.

Ms. Wikoff: That's interesting. Those were the unusual days, weren't they? I was going to get back to whatever holidays you had. What games did you play when you got together as a family?

Mr. Mocci: We used to like to play bocce ball.

Ms. Wikoff: You had to have nice grass for that.

Mr. Mocci: No, the rougher the ground the better it is.

Ms. Wikoff: Usually they have golf course turf.

Mr. Mocci: The old timers used to play for wine. My father used to be good. My father made ten to fifty gallon barrels.

Ms. Wikoff: That's what I was going to ask, if he made his own wine.

Mr. Mocci: Yes, he made his own wine.

Ms. Wikoff: Out of what?

Mr. Mocci: Mostly Concorde grape. Local Concorde grape. But he made a couple of barrels of California grape, but that was strong, and he couldn't drink too much of that. We had three or four monthly men working on the farm, and that's what they wanted, they wanted a glass of wine. We fed them, too, and my mother used to do their laundry and everything, besides taking care of the nine kids she had.

Ms. Wikoff: She was a worker. I remember the vineyards there in the Hazlet area. You had some vineyards, too, didn't you?

Mr. Mocci: Oh, yes, we had eight, nine acres of grapes. That used to be the big job in the wintertime, trimming and tying the grapes.

Ms. Wikoff: Did you ever have to take the grapes to market?

Mr. Mocci: Most of the grapes we took to Perth Amboy Market. A lot of Polish people there used to make their own wine.

Ms. Wikoff: We had a neighbor who used to go to Perth Amboy Market.

Mr. Mocci: That's why most of the grapes we sold in Perth Amboy. And a lot of people used to come down to Hazlet to buy them.

Ms. Wikoff: There's a new magazine that has just come out, *Martha Stewart Living*, and the whole center part of it is about dandelions, and dandelion wine. I have heard about making dandelion wine, but you didn't need to because you had the grapes.

Mr. Mocci: Well, my younger brother used to fool around and make dandelion wine. He made it out of the flowers. But that was strong, that was strong wine, and bitter.

Ms. Wikoff: I'll show you that article because it says how good dandelions are for you.

Mr. Mocci: Well, you know down in the South Vineland section dandelions are a big thing. They grow dandelions under the plastic and they get it early. It's nice and tender and it's clean because the plastic is over it. A friend of mine from Vineland sent me twenty pounds about three weeks ago, UPS, in the plastic bags.

Ms. Wikoff: So what are you going to do with them?

Mr. Mocci: I cook them, and we put some in the freezer.

Ms. Wikoff: Well, you're going to be very healthy! You just can't imagine all that dandelions can do for you. I never knew that.

Mr. Mocci: Dandelions are good for you. Every year Joe Petragneol sends me a box of dandelions. He's a big farmer in Vineland.

Ms. Wikoff: Do you get together with any of your old friends that were farmers?

Mr. Mocci: Yes. Especially down in South Jersey there are quite a few farmers and we get together.

Ms. Wikoff: Did some of them move down to South Jersey from this area?

Mr. Mocci: Yes.

Ms. Wikoff: That's what happened with the kind of farming we did. People moved from here down to Maryland because the land was so much cheaper and they were able to sell their farms at a profit here.

Mr. Mocci: Maghan is doing a good job down there.

Ms. Wikoff: That's what I've heard.

Mr. Mocci: We buy five or six loads of pumpkins every year. He raises beautiful pumpkins. It's all new ground.

Ms. Wikoff: This is just so much fun I forget to ask you questions. You say you used to play bocce, and the kids must have played hide-and-seek and things like that.

Mr. Mocci: Oh, that was a big game, hide-and-seek, and we played it in the hay mound.

Ms. Wikoff: Really, that was a lot of fun.

Mr. Mocci: We had eight horses, and grew most of the hay where Bell Labs is now. My father and a couple of farmers would get together. There would be a couple hundred acres of hay there, so they'd cut it, and a lot of times they'd bring it in loose, before they had the baler.

Ms. Wikoff: Oh, yes, I remember sometimes those loads would get tipped over.

Mr. Mocci: One time, I'll never forget. We had a Model T Ford, and a guy had a load of hay on it. He went to go and the load was too wide, and the Model T went right straight up in the air. They were very light anyway. Didn't take them much to go up in the air. They only had that little motor in the front.

Ms. Wikoff: How many men did it take to unload your hay into the barn?

Mr. Mocci: We were modern, we had a horse with a fork.

Ms. Wikoff: Oh, I know, I used to drive the horse.

Mr. Mocci: Stick the fork in the pulley and bring it up on the hay mound. The horse did all the work.

Ms. Wikoff: But, there had to be somebody in the hay mound.

Mr. Mocci: Yes, well, we kids, we didn't mind working. We were five brothers.

Ms. Wikoff: You must have had a cow.

Mr. Mocci: We had two cows. My father always had two cows. One cow came fresh and he'd always raise a calf. There used to be a circus when Marx, the butcher from Red Bank Marx, used to come down and buy the calf. My father was a good bargainer. The butcher would tell my father, "I'll be there at twelve o'clock to pick up the calf." Well that calf got a belly full of milk by twelve o'clock, so he

would weigh more; he was loaded. He was butchered.

Ms. Wikoff: I always felt bad when that happened; it looked like it hurt them, but it really didn't.

Mr. Mocci: No, it didn't hurt them. The butcher knew how to do it.

Ms. Wikoff: So selling the calf kind of helped pay for your milk.

Mr. Mocci: That way we'd have fresh milk all the time. The cow, when it's going to have a calf, can't be milked for a couple of months.

Ms. Wikoff: Did your mother also sell butter?

Mr. Mocci: No, we made cheese and butter for the family.

Ms. Wikoff: We didn't have as big a family, and when we would get too much milk, I remember my mother used to make what we called pot cheese. They call it cottage cheese now.

Mr. Mocci: We used to make cottage cheese, and the pigs used to get the water from the cottage cheese.

Ms. Wikoff: Did you have pigs?

Mr. Mocci: Oh, yes. Every year we killed seven or eight pigs.

Ms. Wikoff: And then did you smoke your ham?

Mr. Mocci: We used to smoke it. Then we took it to a fellow in Keansburg who smoked the bacon and the hams. The hams my father always did, the real Italian hams,
prosciutto.

Ms. Wikoff: Charles's family had a smoke house and they always had it filled with hams and bacon and sausage.

Mr. Mocci: My father used to put them under the press after he had had them in the brine for ten or twelve days, then he'd put the ham in the press and take all that salt water and all the blood and stuff, and he used to press them and they used to come real flat. Then they used to put a lot of black pepper on them and put them in the cheesecloth, and then they used to hang them up in the wagon shed. They used to be better the following year because they'd be nice and dry. The black pepper was so the flies wouldn't get in.

Ms. Wikoff: Tell us about smoking of the hams.

Mr. Mocci: My father would always kill six, seven pigs. And he used to bag them in brine. Oh, maybe twenty days in the brine, and every once in a while he used to turn them. Then he used to put the hams in a wine press and leave them under the press for maybe a week or ten days, every day going in to squeeze the press a little bit more. Then when they were cured, he used to put black pepper, the big pepper on them, and put them in cheese cloths, and hang them up in the wagon shed. Like the smoked bacon.

Ms. Wikoff: Did you ever make sausage?

Mr. Mocci: Yes. We put in those casings. We used to make sausage. And some of the sausage my mother used to make lard.

Ms. Wikoff: I know, just think, now today we aren't supposed to eat all that fat! Did you have somebody come to kill the pig? That was a big operation.

Mr. Mocci: A fellow by the name Curley used to kill them.

Ms. Wikoff: People used to do that as a profession.

Mr. Mocci: Yes. Will Ganzi was the other name.

Ms. Wikoff: Tell us about your summer kitchen.

Mr. Mocci: We had a summer kitchen. In wintertime that's where we used to cut the pigs. But my father built a summer kitchen to have a big cellar to keep his wine in. In other words, he had the big cellar downstairs, and on top of that was a summer kitchen. It was a big summer kitchen. And that's where we used to cut up the pigs. We had a couple of freezers in there.

Ms. Wikoff: You really ate well. Did your wife do a lot of canning?

Mr. Mocci: Yes. We did a lot of canning, in fact, we still do a lot of canning today. We still do a lot of tomatoes.

Ms. Wikoff: I still do tomatoes, too.

Mr. Mocci: I've got so much stuff in the freezer, I give it away. Most of it we give it away because we can't eat it all.

Ms. Wikoff: I should have told you to bring some!

Mr. Mocci: Like those dandelions I was telling you about, a lot of dandelion, and we have escarole, spinach, corn, eggplant, fried eggplants, and roast peppers in the freezer.

Ms. Wikoff: How do you freeze the corn?

Mr. Mocci: I've got a contraption that takes the corn off the cobs. It works very well. Especially super sweet. Super sweet freezes very well; it's always sweet, never loses its taste.

Ms. Wikoff: Is super sweet a white corn?

Mr. Mocci: Yes. And then there's the bi-color corn, that's super sweet too. It's half yellow and half white.

Ms. Wikoff: I do think that farmers eat well. Especially in the olden days, I don't know today, because we get most of the stuff from the stores.

Mr. Mocci: That's one thing I have to say, we always had plenty to eat in the house.

Ms. Wikoff: As poor as you might be.

Mr. Mocci: My mother used to make homemade butter.

Ms. Wikoff: And bread.

Mr. Mocci: Actually, my sister and I used to make bread once a week. Once a week we used to make fifty pounds of flour into bread, and my sister and I used to work the bread, and my mother used to tell us to keep pounding some more and to keep turning.

Ms. Wikoff: You made an awful lot then.

Mr. Mocci: We had an outside oven.

Ms. Wikoff: A beehive oven, we called it.

Mr. Mocci: An Italian made oven. We used to make eight, nine, ten loaves of bread at a time, those big loaves.

Ms. Wikoff: Do you still have that oven?

Mr. Mocci: No, that's gone.

Ms. Wikoff: And what kind of bread?

Mr. Mocci: Mostly white bread, and some was rye bread. She used to mix it. We had a lot of peach trees, and we'd trim the peach wood and stack it by the oven. That's what my father used to burn to make the oven real hot, that fine dried up

peach stuff. He'd get up by four o'clock in the morning to light the oven, and my mother would have all this bread on the table. Once you make the bread, it's got to rise for three or four hours, and when it got nicely risen is when we used to put it in the oven.

Ms. Wikoff: Did that last you one whole week, the amount that you made?

Mr. Mocci: Oh, yes.

Ms. Wikoff: So you really didn't have to go the store.

Mr. Mocci: Oh, no, we never bought bread. And the longer the bread stayed, the better it was.

Ms. Wikoff: Well, we've learned an awful lot about farming. How many years did you belong to the fire company?

Mr. Mocci: I joined the fire company in 1937, and I guess I've been in the company about sixty-four years. And there's only one member is older than me, so I'm second on the list.

Ms. Wikoff: They don't make you do the fires anymore. Do they still hold suppers and things like that to make money?

Mr. Mocci: Yes. But our fire company has so much money that they don't have to raise that much.

Ms. Wikoff: Well, of course the county and the towns help them out now.

Mr. Mocci: The fire company used to own a lot of land. We used to hold fairs and stuff there. When the fire company sold it, they got over a million dollars for that property back there. Over a million dollars, and that's how we were able to buy all the equipment, plus the county buys a lot. We've got a nice firehouse.

Ms. Wikoff: Do they hold the fairs in the firehouse?

Mr. Mocci: Some. We have the annual dinner on Highway 9 at a big catering place called Excelsior and other catering places.

Ms. Wikoff: What would you consider are the biggest things that happened in your life? How many grandchildren do you have?

Mr. Mocci: I have five grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

Ms. Wikoff: And then you still celebrate with the family? The family comes for certain birthdays and things like that?

Mr. Mocci: Oh, yes. We still hold most of the parties at my house. Christmas Eve we have at my house. But the Italians have got to have all that different fish, and me and my wife cook all the fish on Christmas Eve. We start cooking about four o'clock in the afternoon. We use mostly shrimp, spaghetti with the anchovies - mostly deep-fried. Baccala is a must, but we had all different kinds of fish.

Ms. Wikoff: Deep-fried! Oh my goodness, what a lot of work that is.

Mr. Mocci: Yes, but I've got a basement that is like a restaurant downstairs. That's where we do all our canning and everything. I do all my cooking downstairs. I'm not allowed to cook upstairs. And I keep a nice, clean kitchen, too. No matter what I cook, I clean up; I never leave a mess.

Ms. Wikoff: That's what's important.

Mr. Mocci: My daughter comes to make her sauce there. A lot of people come and use my basement.

Ms. Wikoff: Well, that's wonderful the way you've shared. Are there many families left that you still know in the area?

Mr. Mocci: Not too many left around Holmdel and Hazlet. DeGregoria is a good friend of mine. Do you remember the DeFidele in Colts Neck? We did about the same type farming.

Ms. Wikoff: And then what about Lucarelli?

Mr. Mocci: Lucarelli? Well, Dominick used to be a big farmer. We were with his wife just last night; we went to an anniversary. She was in Florida and she had just come back. She was in Florida for three months. Dolores. Do you know Dolores Lucarelli?

Ms. Wikoff: Charles might know him. I think he was active with the Board of Agriculture. I don't go there, but I understand that Dearborn is a wonderful place.

Mr. Mocci: It's a beautiful place, they've got beautiful stuff. I think it's as good as Delicious Orchards.

Ms. Wikoff: And then they do catering also, don't they?

Mr. Mocci: A lot of catering. They've got a wonderful deli. You should go there just to see the deli that they have. Beautiful place. You've got to wait in line. They've got a line from morning until nighttime. Unbelievable.

Ms. Wikoff: But that's kind of the answer to farming today. It's called direct marketing, and it seems that you have to do that.

Mr. Mocci: They get a lot of stuff direct. Plus they've got two trucks that go up to the city every day. Sixty-five percent of their business is the deli. You've never seen so much cooked food. People come and buy cooked food and take it home and eat it. My daughter does, too.

Ms. Wikoff: We went to a marketing conference and once somebody said, "You know if we only had another depression, we farmers might make out better. People would have to cook and not get all prepared foods." It was kind of a shock, but it's the truth.

Mr. Mocci: You know, people are making too much money today. Things sell for five, six, seven dollars a pound. How much does it cost you to make an eggplant parmesan? Six, seven dollars a pound there. Everything.

Ms. Wikoff: You were going to tell us about your son Joe's business. He's not farming, so you can tell us what he's doing.

Mr. Mocci: He does a little bit of farming. He farms about ten acres. But mostly they plant pumpkins on about three acres. We plant the pumpkins with the vine. But we plant the pumpkins late, to make sure the vines are all nice and green. The Ganz pumpkins are all over. We have a big thing with these pumpkin rides. We've got three wagons that never stop. Two hayrides.

Ms. Wikoff: Well, people really come for that.

Mr. Mocci: And we have a lot of these school trips; we don't want them anymore.

Ms. Wikoff: Don't they pay per child, or something?

Mr. Mocci: I think it's two dollars. I think they give the children a pumpkin and an apple or a gourd. Something like that.

Ms. Wikoff: Well, that's the way of farming today.

Mr. Mocci: These local schools around here are nice. But get some of these kids from out of the city, oh, they're bad news. That's what Casola's got, all kids from the city. Bus loads from the city. A few years ago we had a busload come from Jersey City. You know they never knew pumpkins grew in a field.

Ms. Wikoff: Well, that's like the milk. City kids never knew the milk came from the cow, they thought it came from the bottle.

Mr. Mocci: They thought that pumpkins were made by hand.

Ms. Wikoff: How many acres do you have left?

Mr. Mocci: Ten acres. There were eleven, but I subdivided one acre where I built my house, and ten acres with another, my house where I used to live before. My grandson works there and his two kids. And they're very busy. I'm there every morning, the company comes, and we make coffee at ten o'clock. I've got my own room there. So anytime you're down that way and want coffee, stop down at ten o'clock.

Ms. Wikoff: First you told us about your son, who has the greenhouse business that's turned out to be very good. Even your grandchildren work in it.

Mr. Mocci: I have three grandchildren working there and they're doing a very good job.

Bayshore Greenhouse store front

Ms. Wikoff: You go there and check up on them in the morning.

Mr. Mocci: Oh, I'm there every morning for three or four hours. I do mostly watering for a couple of hours in the morning. Then I have company come in, as I said, I've got my own coffee shop. My son works very hard over there.

Ms. Wikoff: Well, it comes from your background. Then I want to ask about your daughter who is teaching. She got the award for Best Teacher of the Year.

Mr. Mocci: She's been teaching for about fifteen years in Indian Hill School in Holmdel. And she's a very good teacher and she works very hard at it. Governor Whitman came down to visit the school and that's the grade that she picked to visit. And she spent a whole day there. They put on a play, and my daughter got quite a write up. Then Governor Whitman invited my daughter and her husband to dinner in Trenton, so they're very nice.

Ms. Wikoff: That was very nice. And didn't you say that her class did something kind of special?

Mr. Mocci: They had a bake sale and all the money went to Ronald McDonald House.

Ms. Wikoff: So you have two children you can be very proud of.

Mr. Mocci: I have, and five beautiful grandchildren, and a great granddaughter, and great grandson.

Ms. Wikoff: Please tell us about the different places that you farmed and tell us about the crops.

Mr. Mocci (far left) in front of the greenhouses with his family

Mr. Mocci: We used to farm a hundred and five acres here in Holmdel at one time. Holmdel and Hazlet. And we used to grow everything under glass, under hot bed sash. We only had one small greenhouse where we used to start the seed. And even when we bought the Marlboro farm, we used to grow all the plants over here in Holmdel and bring all the plants up there. We grew them here and took them up to Marlboro to plant. The farm was on Pleasant Valley Road, between the Home of Good Shepherds and the Marlboro State Hospital. We had one hundred and fifty five acres. First we bought ninety-five acres, and then about seven years later we bought another farm from Lenny Stevenson, which was another fifty-four acres. That farm that we bought in Marlboro, they used to call that the Chinese farm. It was the old Crine. Remember Crine? Well, Crine sold it to these Chinese, there were seven partners. We bought the farm in 1954, when the Parkway came through. And we were vegetable growers. We grew tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, and a lot of spinach, cabbage, and all kinds of greens: collard greens, mustard greens, turnip tops, eggplants, and peppers.

Ms. Wikoff: And then where did you sell all of these?

Mr. Mocci: Chain stores, eventually. We did alright because we raised a lot of stuff so we could supply these chain stores.

Ms. Wikoff: How did you wash your vegetables?

Mr. Mocci washing peppers

Mr. Mocci: We used to wash peppers and wax them to take the water off. If we didn't take the water off they would go bad when you put it in cardboard boxes. So they went through a little waxer that took off all the water off. When we used to pack tomatoes, it was the same thing.

Ms. Wikoff: Wasn't that brand new in this area?

Mr. Mocci: Yes. We had a regular packing and then we had a vegetable dipper where we used to dip all the greens, like cabbage, spinach, broccoli, all that stuff, through ice water. We had refrigerator trucks, too.

Ms. Wikoff: And that was a new idea in this area, too, wasn't it?

Mr. Mocci: We went to the Philadelphia Market, we went to the Bronx Terminal Market, and we had Shop Rite buying it from us. We went to the Terminal Market in the Bronx, and when we raised a lot of rutabaga turnips, we went to Boston with

them.

Ms. Wikoff: Isn't it too bad that the farmers today can't sell directly to local grocery stores? Now stores get it all from either California or Florida or some place.

Mr. Mocci: Now if you're going to sell direct, you've got to bring it to a warehouse where they divide it to all their stores. We don't deliver direct to the stores. We went to the warehouses. At one time then we had four refrigerator trucks.

Ms. Wikoff: You were big time for this area.

Mr. Mocci: We worked hard. One thing I can say, we never had a bad year, never. The drier it was, the better it was for us, because we had all the irrigation. We could irrigate one hundred fifty four acres. Every year we bought more pipes. The day we had the sale, they sold pipes for half a day, there were so many pipes there. When the pipes first came out they were galvanized, but then we went to aluminum pipes. They were man killers, those galvanized pipes. Even these aluminum pipes, when you had to move them, you had to get all the water out, and then when you were irrigating, if you had one bad move in a pipe, you would unhook the pipe and the thing would blow apart, and then you had to shut the whole system off to bring the pipes all back together.

Ms. Wikoff: I know what you're talking about. No fun.

Mr. Mocci: But, we did alright. As I said before, we never had a bad year. We always made money on the farm.

Ms. Wikoff: Maybe now you'd like to tell about the change from Marlboro over to-?

Mr. Mocci: When we sold here in 1987, we bought the farm in Marlboro. Also, when we sold, my son went on to work with all those greenhouses, and they stayed there for three years. And then when the rent got too high there, we decided to build over where I had this little farm with twelve acres, but it took them a year and a half before we got variance form the township to go ahead and build. Then after three years we started here in 1990.

Ms. Wikoff: And then before that you had just rented the land that the Bayshore Hospital is now on?

Mr. Mocci: Oh, that was way back. At one time we worked one hundred and five acres in Holmdel and Hazlet. We had irrigation all the time. When it first came out, we started buying irrigation, because on sandy ground if you didn't have water, you couldn't raise anything.

Ms. Wikoff: Don't you have to get approvals to use the water from the state?

Mr. Mocci: At that time no, but now you do. We used to pump out of a pond here. In fact, I have two ponds. After a while the state came in and told you to put a meter on the pump. Quite a change.

Ms. Wikoff: You can tell us about your children building the building and getting into the retail business.

Mr. Mocci: Well, after we built this place, we started putting up greenhouses. The first greenhouse was a gutter house, and where the store was, there was another treat attached to the store. Right now my son has sixteen greenhouses, and he's got two more going up this year. It's so hard to go out and buy plants and sell, because it's nothing like the ones you raise. They may be different size pots. We generally sell everything in forty-eights. It's better to have all one-size pots. It's easier pricing.

Ms. Wikoff: How many children are involved in this business now?

Mr. Mocci: My son and his wife and my three grandchildren. My three grandchildren and I spend time there every day. In the springtime we have two men working right after New Year's. We start around January 20th. We're closed for two months, January and February, but we're still working. We start with hanging baskets. You have to start hanging baskets early because they take a long time. He raises about between five and six thousand hanging baskets. All the greenhouses are hooked up; all watering is automatic, and the spaghetti tube waters the pots. But there's no end to the work. He just keeps planting and planting and keeps on going.

Ms. Wikoff: You were an entrepreneur when you started the irrigation and now your family members are entrepreneurs using the greenhouses.

Mr. Mocci: They're doing very well.

Ms. Wikoff: So tell us about your family gatherings when you used to have a vineyard and you made wine. I imagine the family got together to do that.

Mr. Mocci: When my father was alive, he made the wine. And then I had a younger brother who got into making wine. I never bothered making wine once. When I was young, I got so drunk on wine that I couldn't drink it anymore. It made me very sick.

Ms. Wikoff: Tell us about canning tomatoes.

Mr. Mocci: Every year we can as a family. We can anywhere between three to four hundred jars a year, and we divide them. I think this year we made three

hundred thirty seven jars in one day. We did sixteen bushels of tomatoes in one day, all hot packed.

Ms. Wikoff: Do you do it in your kitchen?

Mr. Mocci: The kitchen downstairs. Before you go home I'm going to take you downstairs and show you.

Ms. Wikoff: That takes a lot of big pots.

Mr. Mocci: A lot of big pots, and I've got a regular commercial tomato machine which sorts out the seeds and the skins. The tomatoes don't have any seeds or skins, it's pure tomatoes. The only thing we put in it is the basil and salt, and then we hot pack it. Years ago, when my mother used to can, we used to put the tomatoes in soda water bottles with a stick, and boil them in the tub outside.

Ms. Wikoff: We used to make ketchup, but that took so long, because you know you had to cook it down until it was thick. It never was as thick as the commercial ketchup you get today. Do you remember, it was a little bit runny.

Mr. Mocci: I have to tell you a little story about my father when he was farming. There was a ketchup factory in Hazlet, and in fact the smokestack is still there. It's like a monument there. I used to go there with my father with the horses to bring our cheese peppers there. Cheese pepper gave the tomatoes color, because the tomatoes didn't have a real good red color, and the cheese peppers used to be real dark red. That's why my father used to raise cheese peppers. They would mix them with tomatoes to give the tomatoes more color. That's a good many years ago.

Ms. Wikoff: Well, I'm going to bring you back to not so many years ago. You got an award from the Monmouth County Board of Agriculture for your achievements in agriculture in 1986. Congratulations! You probably had your family come to dinner that night. And your daughter Carol won an award recently. Well, she was chosen to be an outstanding teacher as I understand it.

Mr. Mocci: Yes, outstanding teacher of the year.

Ms. Wikoff: And where does she teach?

Mr. Mocci: Indian Hill School in Holmdel.

Ms. Wikoff: On this big bulletin board it says "Congratulations, Frank Mocci. Sixty years of Hazlet Fire Volunteer."

Mr. Mocci: In another year it will be sixty-five years. That was four years ago. They'll have to put another one on there.

Ms. Wikoff: It goes on to say about sixty years of friendship and service with the Hazlet Fire Company. Well, that's a long time. They really appreciated you all those years.

Mr. Mocci: When Carol got her award, they had opened up the new school.

Mrs. Mocci: There were two teachers who started there as students in the first grade, graduated, and now they're teaching at the same school. That's Indian Hill.

Mr. Mocci: She and two other teachers were there to cut the ribbon when they started that school, and now they teach there. My daughter has been teaching for over fifteen years there.

Ms. Wikoff: You can be proud of all the accomplishments of you and your family. Is there anything else that you'd like to tell us about farming and how it's changed? What tractors did you use?

Mr. Mocci: We had Ford tractors, and John Deere tractors. At one time we had twenty-four tractors. We used to raise eggplants. There was a cannery in Brooklyn that used to buy five hundred bushels. We used to put five hundred and ten bushels of eggplant on a truck, and they used to can these eggplants with vinegar at the cannery.

Ms. Wikoff: I never bought canned eggplant.

Mr. Mocci: These were pickled eggplants. But this company packed just eggplants for two or three weeks, and then it would be hot peppers, or green peppers.

Ms. Wikoff: Have you ever eaten pickled eggplant?

Mr. Mocci: Oh, yes, we used to make them here. But it takes a lot of eggplants because they have to peel an eggplant and cut it up and put them in the vinegar, then they have to press it. When you get done pressing eggplant, there isn't too much left.

Ms. Wikoff: A black juice comes out. We would make a layer of eggplant and put some salt on it and then put an iron on the layers to get the juices.

Mr. Mocci: Well, you know something about Italian eggplant.

Ms. Wikoff: In my experience with gardening it's one of the hardest things to grow because of the bugs that get on them.

Mr. Mocci: Now that's all under control. They don't have any more bugs on eggplant. I've seen a lot of big changes in Holmdel, yes. I remember when

Holmdel was all potatoes and corn. Everybody had to go to Dan Ely to buy horses. We used to freight the horses, they'd come down in Hazlet, and we'd take them off the cars and they'd walk them up, at that time it was all gravel, no pavement, they used to walk them up, they used to tie the tails and walk twenty five, thirty horses up -

Ms. Wikoff: Tie the tails?

Mr. Mocci: To the halter, you know. And they used to follow one another, no problem.

Ms. Wikoff: And would you bid for them?

Mr. Mocci: No, you'd buy the team of horses. He was a real horse dealer. You'd buy a team of horses, if you didn't like that team, you'd bring them back and you'd get another team with maybe fifty or a hundred dollars more. You'd do this until you got a good team of horses.

Ms. Wikoff: They always had to be a real pair that worked well together.

Mr. Mocci: That's right. When I was a kid we had eight horses. Four horses used to work in the morning and another four horses worked in the afternoon. I used to follow the horses barefoot.

Ms. Wikoff: Do you have any stories that you tell the children?

Mr. Mocci: They ask for a lot of stories. My son Joe was my right hand. He was the backbone of the ground up there in Holmdel. I did all the spraying out there, but now he knows more about spraying than I do, just by, you know, being my son.

Ms. Wikoff: Well, now you have to have a pesticide license to be able to spray, and you have to go in the winter and take a course.

Mr. Mocci: I just got my license for another five years, and I don't need it. We go to these meetings. We'd go to meetings in Asbury and Atlantic City for two, three days when they had the farm shows there. Whenever you go to a meeting you get points. I just got my license for another five years. The only time I use it is if I have to go pick up some pesticide. You have to have a license to do that.

Ms. Wikoff: Do you have a deer problem where you are now?

Mr. Mocci: No, we don't have a deer problem. The only thing we have a problem with is the geese. You know we don't have that much ground here, and the geese come along and pull out the little bit of ground that you plant.

Ms. Wikoff: We have squirrels as a problem, and the geese now are a terrible problem on golf courses, too. There's a new business that's developed: people raise border collies, and the golf course hires their border collie to come and chase the geese off! We saw this one time.

Mr. Mocci: We had a lot of greenhouses. At one time we had seven hundred sashes. In fact we still have a few hundred more now.

Ms. Wikoff: Well, those glass sashes were very difficult to keep, weren't they?

Mr. Mocci: Every year we always had these couple of men in the wintertime just to keep the sashes. Every year they'd repair sash, and paint maybe a hundred, hundred fifty sashes, because when you've got seven hundred sashes it would take you five or six years to do them all, so you do maybe a hundred at a time.

Ms. Wikoff: Well, we're so happy that you've been so successful as a vegetable farmer.

Mr. Mocci: Thank God.

Ms. Wikoff: We want you and Rose to stay well and enjoy the rewards of your hard work. This has been a very nice interview and we thank you again.

Mr. Mocci: I've been very glad to sit down and talk to you about this.