

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

CAROL ANN DIPIETRO

RESOURCES FOR EDUCATION AND ACTION FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH
IN AMBLER (REACH Ambler)

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

Lee Sullivan Berry

at

Carol Ann DiPietro's home
Ambler, Pennsylvania

on

24 January 2014

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

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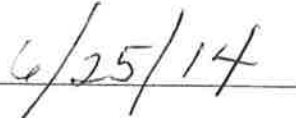
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ABSTRACT

Carol Ann DiPietro's mother's families (Rocchino and Zangrone) left Maida, Italy, to settle in Ambler, Pennsylvania, where her great-grandfather and grandfather worked in the asbestos factory, Keasbey & Mattison Company. Her mother worked there as a secretary and tells of white dust visible in the air and settling all over clothing. A parting gift from the company was a box of raw asbestos, which Carol took to kindergarten show and tell. At that time, however, asbestos was not known to be a hazardous material and no Rocchino relatives died of asbestos-related diseases. Though Carol lived too far from the White Mountains, she had cousins who played there.

DiPietro worked at the Ambler Fashion Shop from age fifteen until the store closed in the mid 1990s. During that period the main commercial street was so busy that a traffic policeman was needed on Friday nights. The decline of the town center began with the building of the mall in the 1970s; then CertainTeed Corporation moved out of Ambler. When IMS and a law firm moved away the decline steepened into the 1990s. Fortunately, the real estate market was still good, and crime was still low.

When a large high-rise project was proposed for Kane Core, the asbestos problem came to light. DiPietro was living in Lower Gwynedd Township and began attending the high-rise meetings. She says the meetings over the high-rise were contentious over the dominance of the large building, not so much over asbestos. She became interested in the asbestos question, though, and began to attend BoRit community advisory group (CAG) meetings as well. Eventually she was appointed to the Planning Commission. DiPietro compares Ambler's Planning Commission with that of Lower Gwynedd, on which she had also served. She thinks that the CAG's function to provide information about asbestos remediation has dwindled, due in part to the EPA's office nearby and to asbestos fatigue. She thinks the EPA should have done more for Ambler back in the 1980s when the remedy of capping the White Mountains was chosen. She wishes the asbestos at the BoRit site could be taken completely away and points out that much of the same disturbance occurred during the removal action as would have occurred during hauling away. She wants very much to see the six-acre wasted space made into a park-like area. DiPietro is proud of the friendly, dog-walking neighborhoods of Ambler; proud of the town's revival; and proud to be contributing by serving on the Planning Commission.

INTERVIEWER

Lee Sullivan Berry earned a master's degree in medieval studies from the University of Notre Dame, and a bachelor of arts degree in religious studies from the University of Pennsylvania. As a staff member in the Center for Oral History, Berry conducts background research and oral-history interviews, edits transcripts of completed interviews, and coordinates with interviewers and interviewees to finalize transcripts. She was the lead interviewer for the REACH Ambler project and has presented her work at meetings of the American Society for Environmental History and Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region.

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<p>Mother's parents from Maida, Italy. Settled in Ambler to be near relatives. Great-grandfather killed while working at Keasbey & Mattison (K&M). Mother worked as secretary at K&M, occasionally went onto plant floor, came out covered in white dust. Maternal grandfather also worked at K&M. Mother grew up in Ambler, began working at K&M soon after high school. No sense of asbestos hazard at that time. No relatives died of asbestos-related disease.</p>	
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<p>Grew up in Ambler. White Mountains continued to build up at that time. Too far from home for her to play on them. Took box of asbestos to kindergarten for show and tell. Butler Avenue bustling all that time; needed traffic policeman on Friday nights. Decline began with construction of mall in mid-seventies. CertainTeed Corporation closed mid-seventies. IMS Health moved and Timoney Knox moved; serious unemployment began; decline settled in by early 1990s; Fashion Shop closed. Real estate market still good, crime rate still low.</p>	
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<p>High-rise project raised concerns about asbestos; Citizens for a Better Ambler brought asbestos to her attention. Working in real estate office at time of White Mountains capping; talk there about property values; no one afraid to buy because of asbestos. General concern over capping. Factory buildings an eyesore. Meetings contentious over size and dominance of high-rise, not so much over asbestos. Building there now only five or six stories, but still too big.</p>	
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<p>Attended BoRit community advisory group (CAG) meetings, then Borough Council meetings. On Planning Commission in Lower Gwynedd. Appointed to Ambler Borough Planning Commission. Comparison of two Commissions: Lower Gwynedd large developments and trails, Ambler lots smaller; concern over trees; sidewalks; flooding; ordinances. Two proposals for K&M site: Boiler House and Ambler Crossings.</p>	
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<p>Attended CAG meetings as alternate representative for Borough of Ambler. Feels capping has diminished citizens' concern. Wants ground reused as park. Asbestos perhaps an indirect cause of deaths attributed to other diseases. EPA's office now provides information and answers questions, so CAG less necessary. Feels asbestos among top five concerns for town. Town's businesses still doing well. Would like EPA to provide more than just capping. Thinks larger surrounding municipalities could possibly have more influence. Wishes asbestos could have been taken away. Sporadic coverage by newspaper. Asbestos fatigue. Impetus for running for office not asbestos so much as keeping town vibrant and growing, taxes low, community safe. Feels dumps are wasted</p>	

space, ugly and full of other contaminants. Town busy at night, but maybe not with Amblerites.

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