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I hereby give the tapes and transcriptions made of interviews recorded on March 8, 1989 to the Oral History Library of the Fashion Institute of Technology, for such uses and purposes as the Director of the Oral History Library shall determine.

MEMOIORIST

INTERVIEWER

Signed

Signed

June 6, 1989

Date

Date
Dear Ms. Felsher:

This letter will confirm my understanding and agreement with the Fashion Institute of Technology with respect to my participation in a series of interviews conducted by the College's Oral History Research Program.

1. The interviews will be taped and a transcript made of the tapes. The tapes and transcript (collectively called the "Work") will be maintained by the College and made available by the College in accordance with College rules and general policies for research and other scholarly purposes.

2. I hereby grant, assign and transfer to the College all right, title and interest in the Work, including the literary rights and the copyright, except that I shall retain the right to copy, use and publish the Work in part or in full until the earlier of my death or ____________ 19__.

3. This letter contains our entire and complete understanding.

Very truly yours,

[Signature]

Date 6/17/89

ACCEPTED AND AGREED:

THE FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

[Signature]
GRADINA APRILE

b. April 1, 1897
Portula, Italy

Quill winder, weaver

Morton Mill, quill winder
Ashley & Bailey Co., jacquard silk weaver
Brilliant Silk Mfg. Co., shaft loom and jacquard weaver
Frick & Eaton, shaft loom and jacquard weaver
INTERVIEWER: -- at the Westmont Home in New Jersey. May I just ask you some questions about your family and your background. Now, were they in the silk industry?

APRILE: My father in Europe.

IN: In Europe! What did he do in Europe?

GA: Weaving.

IN: And was he a weaver here, also?

GA: Oh, yes. That's all he knew how to do. Outside of Europe he was always raising pigs and his business was in the bologna business, making bologna sausage.

IN: Where was he from in Europe?

GA: Northern Italy, Portula, near Switzerland, up that way.

IN: Okay. Near Vicenza, Venetia, etcetera. Up in that area.

GA: Not at the bottom of the boot.

IN: The top, okay.

GA: I wouldn't know. I was born there but why I don't know.

IN: Now, was there anyone else in your family who was weaving over here?

GA: My mother did a little of it but she wasn't working because she had five children. In fact, one was born when my father was here in America already. He brought the older boy here. My older brother come
down here with some friends a few years after he was here, and he couldn't take care of all of us so we struggled along up there, and mother did what she could. She was working at night, also. I don't know. I think she was in a silk mill, but what she did I really don't know.

IN: Now, did your father help you get your first job?
GA: Not really. We just walked into it. We come in. We were all in the silk mill, everyone of us.

IN: All of the children worked.
GA: Everyone of us.

IN: How old were you at your first job?
GA: I was 14.

IN: Did you have to get working papers?
GA: Yes.

IN: And was that true of your brothers and sisters?
GA: All of them, yes.

IN: Did you work in the same mill that your father worked in?
GA: No, not at the beginning. He was out then when we got the home in Hawthorne. At the beginning of Hawthorne he was more or less retired and making his garden at home.

IN: Did you have brothers and sisters?
GA: My brother and sisters were all with us.

IN: What did they do? Did they also weave?
GA: Everyone of them were in the silk mill.
IN: Were you all weavers or did you do other things?

GA: No, just weaving.

IN: Just weaving. Do you remember the name of the first mill that you worked in?

GA: Ashley and Bailey.

IN: Ashley.

GA: And Bailey. We lived up in Hawthorne the beginning of that and they called it Ashley Heights because he owned the whole hill.

IN: How did you get from Hawthorne to here? The mill was here in Paterson?

GA: Oh, yes. Oh, I worked on Market Street for a long time. When I lived there we had a bus come to Hawthorne and back. I had to get up and get a bus every morning, winter, summer.

IN: What time?

GA: 5:00 in the morning. I was working--the place is knocked down now--right at the corner of Market Street and Spruce. They knocked it all down now. I worked there my last in the Brilliant Weave Shop.

IN: Oh, Brilliant. You know, someone else here also worked at Brilliant. Did Leah Knapp work at Brilliant?

GA: Yes.

IN: Did you know her?

GA: No, not from there. I only knew her when I came here.
APRILE

IN: Could you tell me a little bit about what you did, your job? Just sort of describe what you did as a weaver.

GA: I worked at the jacquard looms for a long time, three or four looms, but that was too much.

IN: You mean you watched three or four looms?

GA: Yes. I couldn't reach for the cards because the jacquard looms has a pattern. That was making tie silk, but fancy. Not just plain. The shaft looms was the plain material and dress material. I didn't do too well there because I had to have a little bench in the front and a bench in the back because I couldn't reach. It was very bad for me.

IN: Because of your size?

GA: My height, yes.

IN: But the jacquard was easier for you?

GA: No, not really because it was up high. I needed the height and I needed to stretch to pull the ends in.

IN: What type of a loom then did you --

GA: The jacquard.

IN: You still did the jacquard.

GA: Oh, yes.

IN: And you watched four looms?

GA: Well, no. I watched two. When it come to four I had to give it up. That was my time.

IN: When was that? How old were you approximately?

GA: I don't remember. Quite a while after. I didn't do
nothing after that.

IN: You watched the looms. What else did you do? Did you have to fix ends and things of that sort?

GA: Oh, yes. We had to put the ends in if one broke and the little what we called the heddle went down, the loom would stop. And put the shuttles in when the loom had to go back and forth. Where it opens up and one shuttle goes in, closes, opens again, what was making the looms run the cloth.

IN: And it would stop when you broke an end?

GA: Oh, yes.

IN: Did you actually repair the ends?

GA: Oh, yes. You tie a knot. We had spools there for same color thread and put it in the little eye of a needle, thread the heddle and then make it in the front, pull it in the front in the shaft and in the comb like. What did we call that?

IN: The comb?

GA: The shuttle.

IN: The shuttle?

GA: Where all the ends come in. No, it was where when they put a whole new warp in they used a reed.

IN: A reed, okay. So you'd have to put it through the reed, also.

GA: Yes, each end had a --

IN: A special way to go through.

GA: Yes, like a comb only it was very thin. You had to
have good eyesight and all.

IN: Did that happen often with the silk you were working?

GA: Oh, yes.

IN: Do you have any idea what grade of silk you were using? Was it good silk that you were weaving?

GA: Oh, yes. On the jacquard you always used pure silk because that was for ties. That was pure silk. On the shaft looms mostly it was crepe or raw silk. Then that could be dyed for dress material.

IN: Oh, and it was dyed afterwards. You were doing what they call now "gray goods," I think. Just one color.

GA: Yes, raw silk.

IN: Raw silk. Oh, that's interesting. So that you watched it and you actually had to reach over. It must have been hard for you.

GA: Oh, yes, it was. Then when it got to four looms I had to quit.

IN: How big was each loom?

GA: Oh, the looms were forty-eight inch material. Forty, forty-two inch material.

IN: But you really didn't have to do anything to the cards above.

GA: Well, unless I had to pick back. If I had a float, something went wrong in the front and I didn't see it. Sometimes you pick out that much and you have
to count your picks because you have to pull all that card back to match the pattern where you were weaving. We had to match that again, go back to it.

IN: Where did you learn this? Who taught you to do all this?

GA: My sister taught me and her husband taught me.

IN: Before you went to the mill?

GA: We were all weavers; we were all weavers.

IN: Did you learn to weave before you went to the mill or did you learn when you were there?

GA: No, learned in the mill.

IN: Did they call you an apprentice at the beginning?

GA: Oh, I don't know. Learners. We were called learners.

IN: And how long did they give you to learn?

GA: When you were able to learn one or two looms, but usually it was two looms. Like I say, when it got to be four looms I had to quit. I was a little too short for that.

IN: Did they pay you?

GA: No, it was piecework. If you didn't work, you didn't get.

IN: And even at the beginning you were on piecework, which meant that you really -- Did you get paid as a learner?

GA: You had to produce. No. No, in fact, you should pay the one that teaches you.
IN: You would pay them?

GA: Well, I didn't because they were my sister and my brother-in-law taught me how.

IN: What would people pay them?

GA: I wouldn't know.

IN: You wouldn't know because you didn't have to.

GA: Generally something. Yes.

IN: Do you remember what the size of the piece that you took off -- I mean, how did they --

GA: Oh, by the yard. That was down at the bottom. You had to loosen up everything and pull it off, roll it on another roller and carry it yourself to where then they picked it. If there was loose ends or knots they had to pick it.

IN: How much were you able to weave in a day?

Approximately.

GA: Just whatever you could, you know, but you had to work. You really had to work.

IN: So would you take a yard or two, was that normal for a day?

GA: Oh, more than that.

IN: Every day would you bring it in?

GA: No. You had so many yards to do by piece. You had orders. You had an order, a ticket order how many yards of this, how many yards of that, and the pattern number from your cards were on.

IN: So you could have an order to --
GA: You have to have the card taken off for the --
IN: Weave fifty yards and you would have to wait until you finished it before you would get paid?
GA: Before they cut it and then they'd cut it.
IN: When would they pay you? Only when you presented --
GA: Every two weeks.
IN: Oh, okay.
GA: It was every two weeks pay day. It wasn't too much, but it was great.
IN: Do you remember what it was?
GA: Not really, but it was very little.
IN: Leah Knapp said something about a "smash". Did you ever have "smashes"?
GA: Oh, yes, because sometimes something goes wrong with the loom and two shuttles come out, get together from each side. When you have a pattern like jacquard, your boxes work on both sides, the boxes what hold the shuttle in, and if something happens and they both come out together then you're really in a mess. You have a smash with the warp in the front or in the back and then you have to rip that all out until you get the pattern.
IN: Oh, you have to pick it out?
GA: Oh, yes, you have to pick it out. You rip it on the edges and pick it all out, count your picks and then go back. Each pick is a card on your cards, until you get to the right pattern and match it.
IN: Did that happen very often?

GA: Well, once in a while we had those things. You get used to it all.

IN: I can imagine what it looks like.

GA: It wasn't easy.

IN: And what was the light like? Was it light? Did you have good light when you were working?

GA: No, with the green little shades. For me it was hard. I was starting then that I didn't know what was wrong with my eyes and then, of course, that kind of work you really have to have eyes. So you have to have good eyes and you get glasses, you do what you can, and when you can't do it no more you give it up. But there comes a time.

IN: Did you wear the hat?

GA: I had a peak. We had shades. [tape turned off]

IN: You were saying about the hat, a peak.

GA: Oh, yes. I had a shade, a green shade. In fact, I think I had it here for a long time and then I gave it to my brother one day. I said, "I don't need that here." I wasn't doing anything. But we did. I did a lot of crocheting here for the ladies. We have a sewing day.

IN: Tell me, did the peak help the light so that the light didn't glare down? Is that why you used it?

GA: Yes.

IN: I see. Did you work daytime?
APRILE

GA: Yes.

IN: What were the hours? You got up at 5:00 you told me and took the bus in. What time did you have to be at work?

GA: We started work 7:00.

IN: And you worked until?

GA: Until 5:00.

IN: Did you have a lunch hour?

GA: Yes, we had an hour, 12:00 to 1:00. You had to bring lunch. You couldn't get out and have lunch. It wasn't easy. No, it was five days.

IN: Did you have friends where you were working?

GA: Yes, a few.

IN: So you had some fun.

GA: It was alright. It's what you'd make it. You know, you couldn't fool around much because you had to keep your mind on your pattern. I enjoyed it, though. I love weaving. I enjoy hard work. I enjoy house cleaning, too, but lately I haven't been doing anything. Otherwise my place should shine.

IN: It does. Don't worry.

GA: It doesn't. It doesn't now. I haven't dusted in a month.

IN: Well, I can't tell. The place is very clean.

GA: No.

IN: What was your second job? When you moved from Ashley and Bailey -- Did you stay there, or how
long did you stay there?

GA: I went to the Brilliant. That was on Market Street.

IN: And how long did you stay at Ashley and Bailey?

GA: Oh, I don't know just the years. A lot.

IN: Then why did you move to Brilliant?

GA: Well, they closed up. They were on Warren Street by the Erie Station. Then I had too much to walk, especially winters like this. I can remember wrapping my legs up with newspaper to get to work and get back home. Sometimes no busses because those times we only had a bus halfway up from Paterson. We had to go shopping in Paterson and carry the bundles up and get off at Bell Avenue, if you know where that is. That was the end of the line, Paterson and walk up to our house. It was about twenty, forty minutes. It wasn't easy. We had a tough life, but we made it.

IN: And smiling. And you enjoyed it.

GA: Oh, yes.

IN: Now, at Brilliant you were also a weaver?

GA: Yes.

IN: And did you do the same type of weaving?

GA: Same thing, yes. Shaft or jacquard. Mostly jacquard.

IN: And again two looms?

GA: Oh, yes. When they got four then --

IN: You would leave at that point.
APRILE

GA: Yes. I left and then I retired. I tried -- What did I try after that? I went to a lady's house. I was minding her baby at daytime because she was working. No, that wasn't a job, though. It was just courtesy. That's about all I ever did was weaving.

IN: Did you ever join a union? Did you have to join a union at any of these places?

GA: Oh, yes.

IN: At both of them?

GA: Oh, yes.

IN: Which union did you join?

GA: I don't remember now. Amalgamated something.

IN: Amalgamated.

GA: Oh, yes, we were union.

IN: What were your feelings about the union? Did you feel they helped you?

GA: Well, I thought it was a good thing. I thought it was needed. I can remember years ago when they had this big strike and we had to go in Haledon, when they had the meetings in Haledon. Do you know about that?

IN: Is this the strike in 1913? The big strike?

GA: Yes. That was it. When Gurley Flynn was talking.

IN: So tell me about it because I only know a little bit about this.

GA: It was up in Haledon. The house is still there,
Botto's House.

IN: That's right. I've read about that.

GA: Oh, yes. I was there.

IN: You must have been at Ashley Bailey at that time.

GA: Yes.

IN: You were on strike?

GA: Oh, yes. We didn't work. If the place had trouble like that my father never allowed us to go to work.

IN: Did your father participate in the strike, too?

GA: Oh, yes.

IN: Everyone did in your family.

GA: My brother, too.

IN: Did anyone go picket?

GA: Well, occasionally if it was not right. When we had the strike breakers come in then I remember when they used to have the meetings in the dye shop. That was different, though. We were in the weaving department. I can remember my brothers coming up and down Musser's Hill and they used to come across the fields and they used to get chased from there because they didn't want the workers around. They were watching the strike breakers and we were on the other side. But it wasn't easy.

IN: It must have been very difficult for the family because you weren't working, what was it, thirteen weeks?

GA: Well, we had friends and we had a good baker that he
said no matter how long we would be out we would have bread. So that was something we had home. We didn't have it too, easy. We went through our share.

IN: Did anyone in your family go into New York when they had that big parade?

GA: No.

IN: No one went.

GA: No, we didn't go into that. We picketed here if we could, but I didn't go out. My brothers did a couple of times, but I never went out picketing. I left it to those and I says when they can go to work and I can get up and go get a bus and go down Patterson I'll go to work, and that was it.

IN: Did any girls picket?

GA: There was a few. Oh, yes. There were a lot of them that were really enthused about the whole thing, but I didn't want to get into that.

IN: What did you think they were going to gain by the strike?

GA: Well, they thought they would gain a lot. A few pennies a day more, you know? It was hard. They weren't making much money. But like I say, we got along and struggled.

IN: And you went back to Ashley Bailey at that point?

GA: Oh, yes.

IN: Did everyone get to go back after the strike?
APRILE

GA: No, not all. Not all, no. Never a good thing. It's always a total loss more or less. A strike isn't profitable, no.

IN: Did any of your friends not go back?

GA: Well, a few changed their work. A few got something else.

IN: Was it because they wanted to or was it because the owners didn't want them.

GA: Out of necessity. Some moved away; some didn't. My father and my one brother went all the way to Pennsylvania to work there so they could send money home so we could pay our bakery.

IN: Really? Where in Pennsylvania did they go?

GA: Allentown.

IN: There were other silk mills there?

GA: Oh, yes. There were silk mills just like they were here, but we couldn't all go there, so my one brother went and my father. They were working there. It wasn't easy. Our life wasn't easy. I'm glad now I don't remember it all.

IN: You remember a lot. No one in your family did dying? It was totally in the weaving end?

GA: Yes. I had one brother, the youngest one, in the dying. He was there in--oh, what is that now? Not Johnson's. Only one the younger one, but that I don't know too much about. He never liked the silk mill. He never liked weaving or nothing. The
others, we were all weavers. My sister was an excellent weaver.

IN: Did anyone in the family weave at home? Did you ever have a loom at home?

GA: No.

IN: Did you ever have any connection with the so-called "cockroach shops"?

GA: No. No, not really. I enjoyed everywhere I went. It was good. I enjoyed my whole life. Didn't have much entertainment, but what I had I enjoyed.

IN: Did everyone that you worked with enjoy it?

GA: Yes, we were a good group.

IN: Were most of the people Italian where you were working or was it a mixture?

GA: Yes, it was a mixture. Some Hollanders. But it was a case of either do that or nothing. Those days that's about all there was unless you got into a shirt factory or something. A lot of the Holland people were in the shirt mills. That had someone there to have them come in. Usually our kind was always all weaving. They liked hard work, and it was. It was hard work.

IN: Tell me, you speak very well. You obviously went to school.

GA: Only to about the third or fourth grade.

IN: Really?

GA: That's all, yes. A bit of a farm house. One-room
school. It was a farm when we went and lived there. All of a sudden it came a school house.

IN: Now, your parents immigrated here. You said you were born in Italy and came here.

GA: Yes, we were all.

IN: You speak with absolutely no accent.

GA: Well, that I don't know.

IN: My grandmother who was born here, although lived in Italy, she speaks with an accent, but you don't. Did anyone in your family?

GA: No, none of us did. I had one younger brother than I and he didn't speak any. No, none of us had an accent. My mother never spoke English. My father very little, but my mother never really got into it, but the rest of us, all the children were all like myself.

IN: I didn't ask you. Were you married?

GA: Yes, I was married and divorced. Went through the whole bit. Four years and I said that's it.

IN: You were divorced?

GA: Oh, yes. I'm divorced.

IN: When did you get divorced?

GA: Four years after I was married.

He was an outdoor man. His weekends had to be up at Greenwood Lake fishing with the boys. So I said, "Well, you know, we got married." We both had to work. He was a warper and I was a weaver. So we
come home. I had a nice house. I said, "It has to be cleaned." There's work to do when you work all week. So he wanted his weekends with the boys up in Greenwood Lake. I said, "Alright. You go. There's the door. When you go out, you go out. When you come in, you have to come back in. But I'm not going to put up with this every weekend that I have to sit home and clean and you go." So he got to be a little bit, "Well, I'm going. I'm going." So finally one day --

IN: That must have been very hard to get a divorce at that time.

GA: It wasn't easy. On my own I got it and paid for it. Didn't ask him for a nickel. Didn't get a nickel. No alimony, nothing. All on my own.

IN: This is a long time ago when divorce was not common.

GA: Oh, yes.

IN: It must have been very difficult for you.

GA: It wasn't easy.

IN: How did your family feel about it?

GA: They didn't like it. They didn't understand it, but they didn't say much. My father was already -- No, he was living with me then. My mother was gone. She passed away early. She was only 58 or 59. But my father was here. He had a little house on 8th Street in Hawthorne and we moved in there. So he was with me until he was 86 years old.
IN: Your exhusband was a warper.

GA: Yes. He went back home with his mother and his mother come up and said could she come to visit. I said, "Anytime you want. The door is there." I went to see her and he was there. She said, "Don't mind him. He's my boarder. You can come anytime," and she would come to see me whenever she could. We had a very good relationship. No hard feeling, no fighting, even getting my divorce. I got my own, paid for it, never asked him for nothing. The lawyer even told him, "You're very lucky she's not fighting for money." "I wouldn't give it to her." He said, "Don't say too much. You're supposed to. You'll have to give it to her if she was fighting for it." But I didn't ask for a thing.

IN: So you worked your entire adult life.

GA: Yes, my whole life.

IN: Do you remember what year, how old you were when you retired, when you stopped working in the mills?

GA: Oh, I think I was about -- Gee, I really don't know. Never thought of that. I never thought of that. I was in Frick & Eaton on Market Street so it wasn't -- I don't know.

IN: So you don't remember if it was in the '40s?

GA: I don't remember to say.

IN: I'm going to turn this off for a second. [tape turned off] I just want to go back. You never took
care of four looms. You stayed when you took care of two, and when it became four you left.

GA: I had four when I was on the shaft looms but not with the jacquard. Two jacquard looms and four of the shaft looms. I worked on that a while but I couldn't handle it much.

IN: Did you think it was dangerous? Did you think the work was dangerous?

GA: It was dangerous because when the shuttle comes out it can hit you. It can hit you in the face. We had people there that got hit in the face and lost an eye.

IN: Tell me how that happened. Would you be leaning over?

GA: Sometimes there's something wrong with the loom and it throws a shuttle out and wherever you happen to be.

IN: And it could throw it up. It could angle up and hit you.

GA: Oh, yes. It can come right out.

IN: I didn't know that.

GA: It wasn't easy. If you had a little mark on the loom and it had to come out, you kick back, you got the weights to lift up and everything. It wasn't easy. It was a hard job to learn.

IN: And you were always on boxes, leaning over the loom.

GA: Oh, yes.
IN: Or walking around it.
GA: Front and back.
IN: You had boxes in front and back.
GA: Yes. I enjoyed it. Hard work isn't easy.
IN: Weaving is enjoyable.
GA: Oh, it is.
IN: I think if there's anything else you can think of
-- Well, let me ask you this. Did you set up the
looms?
GA: No, they were all set up. They would come. We had
a boy or a man come and put the cards when it was
jacquard. We didn't have to carry that and put it
up because they have to climb with a ladder and put
it up and make the pattern. Like what kind of
pattern I can't just say now, but pattern on the tie
silk. It was nice.
IN: Here's a question for you. Did they give you the
pattern. You had to read it so you would know what
colors went in.
GA: Well, we had not really a pattern. We knew about
what it had to be. Even on a card you'd get to the
point--and they're all cut out. It's just a cut out
pattern and then it's all tied together.
IN: But you would have to have a pattern for your
shuttles.
GA: Not really. Not really.
IN: No?
GA: Just take it and this would be it. You know what colors because you would have three and four shuttles. One would come out and another one stayed in and then one box went down and another one would come out to make the color pattern.

IN: Well, for the color pattern they gave you a guide for that.

GA: Yes.

IN: Was it a chart or was it written?

GA: No, it was sort of a written chart for you.

IN: Did you have to go and get your quills?

GA: Yes, we had to go to the quill winder and get a board or sometimes they came in boxes. But mostly I worked where there was a board. The colors all you needed, so much of this, so much of that. When we run out we go back to the quill winder and get a few more quills.

IN: There could be three across and three down so you had a full board of quills.

GA: Yes. Very nice.

IN: Thank you very much. I appreciate this.

GA: Well, I hope it's been something. It isn't perfect, but I hope it will be something. [tape turned off]

IN: We're going back to some notes that I have and I see that you were a quill winder at the beginning. Just tell me where it was that you were a quill winder.

GA: Oh, I can't remember. Morton Mill.
IN: Morton Mill.

GA: Yes, the Morton Mill in Riverside.

IN: You said a label?

GA: Yes, it was sort of a label ribbon.

IN: How long did you stay there?

GA: Not too long. I had to go in and learn weaving.

IN: Then you went to Ashley & Bailey.

GA: Yes.

IN: Now, did you work at a place called Frick & Easton?

GA: Eaton, E-A-T-O-N. In fact, the son has an insurance place right up here on Union Avenue there. Morris Eaton.

IN: Was this before or after Ashley & Bailey?

GA: After. After I went to Frick & Eaton.

IN: And there you were a --

GA: Jacquard weaver. Also plain looms.

IN: And shaft.

GA: And shaft.

IN: Was it more interesting to do the jacquard weaving?

GA: Oh, jacquard weaving's very interesting because you had to learn a pattern. A shaft loom is always the same through the whole warp.

IN: Your sister was a weaver, also?

GA: She was a weaver. She was a good weaver. She taught me and then her husband took over.

IN: You didn't work in the same places or did you?

GA: No. Well, at the beginning we did but afterward,
no. Then she got married and she left. She had family.

IN: Okay. I think that we've covered it. Thank you.

End of Interview
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF THE
FASHION INDUSTRIES

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