Introduction:

This oral history report is compiled from interviews of family members and is related to the research topic of “Intimacy in the Family Setting.” This report will express how intimacy was a part of my family’s life and how it has affected my family in America. This will generally focus on the grandmothers from both my mother’s and my father’s side with input from my maternal grandfather.

From Italy with Love:

Both my grandmother and my grandfather’s families emigrated from Italy at around the same time. Both families chose the United States due to the promise of opportunity and because my great grandparents believed that their children (my grandparents) would do far better in America than in Italy at the time.

When my grandmother was growing up, there was a great deal of animosity towards foreigners of any type. Because of this, she and her brothers and sisters, along with her many other Italian friends, chose to only speak English at school and use Italian only in extreme secrecy. If she was found speaking her native tongue at school, she would be hit and embarrassed in front of the entire class. This fact of life at the time made it difficult for Italian Americans to integrate into mainstream society until they had learned sufficient English and were able to communicate effectively with their peers. Because my
grandmother was so young, she was able to learn English much faster than her parents and was fine by the time she was in High School. This rift in the extra-family sphere of life separated her from the community but also brought her family closer together. The bond that she shared with her family, language and culture, brought about a special intimacy that could only be found at the home. My grandmother’s parents were very strict and very catholic but always loving and extremely affectionate. She always remembers hugging and kissing everyone in her family all the time. It was welcomed as well as expected. The Italian culture of intimacy is not unique but it is something that not everyone shares in the United States thus she feels very fortunate to have grown up in an environment where open affection was a way of life. She believes that this has influenced her greatly. She chose to marry an Italian man because he was brought up with the same culture of intimacy and to raise her children in the same light. Even now, she treats her grandchildren the same way, always expressing her love through intimacy.

As far as child rearing is concerned, my grandmother’s parents were never afraid of giving her and her siblings a good smack if they misbehaved. It is also part of her upbringing that such physical acts are acceptable and needed when raising children.

In essence, my grandmother believes that intimacy is an extremely important part of her culture and upbringing that makes her who she is. She is
glad that she has passed this tradition onto her children and hopefully her grandchildren because of the importance she places on it.

**An Irish Catholic Zoo:**

My maternal grandmother comes from an Irish background and believes that her mother has influenced her greatly in the way she behaves and shows affection. Coming from a large family herself and having seven children of her own, she believes that large families are a struggle but it has also been the most rewarding experience of her life. She wanted seven children so that the family could do things together and always have friendships.

When my grandmother was a child, it was the midst of the Great Depression and the family generally had very little money and resources. She remembers having a very old car that everyone would pack into get around. The main reason why they got though the depression, she thinks, is because of the richness of her family and the bonds they shared. It was a very difficult time for her and her family and both of her parents were very over worked, but when they were old enough, they went out and got jobs to make ends meet for the entire family. Family sharing is an important aspect of a family in general to her. A family must make sacrifices together as well as share the wealth with one another when they have it. Giving is an important part of family intimacy in her mind.
During the time my grandmother was dating, it was socially acceptable for a girl to date several men at once and therefore she was dating about four men when she decided to settle down with my grandfather. Essentially, my grandfather was an enlisted naval man, Petty Officer in charge of damage control aboard the USS Enterprise, and was covered in tattoos. Along with that, he rode a motorcycle which was not so popular with my great grandmother. My grandmother was at first put off by my grandfather’s look but she soon found him to be the nicest man she had ever known and very affectionate. My grandparents dated for only three months before my grandfather proposed to my grandmother. Because of their immense compatibility and comfort level with one another, they believed that there was no time to waste. My grandmother had to tell her other boyfriends that she was now engaged which made them rather angry. One man she dated dented the hood of his car when he hit it out of anger.

A problem arose with my great grandmother because she did not like the fact that my grandfather was protestant. My grandmother did not care and said that it would work out either way. In order make things easier and have a better relationship with my grandmother, my grandfather converted to Catholicism which made my great grandmother accept him with greater ease. Unfortunately, this separated my grandfather from his fervent Baptist family but in general, it worked out.
My grandparents have been married for over 45 years and they still remain extremely close with one another and their family. They own an RV and travel around the country exploring and seeing everything they can. When they drive together, my grandfather always holds my grandmother’s hand. They believe that physical contact like hand holding, hugging, and kissing, is an important expression of love and intimacy that has helped them get though tough times.

With my grandparents seven children, they wished to pass on their expressive ways because it helps the family get closer and more trusting if you can hug one another. They had many rough times while raising their seven children but they came through all right and there was always family to fall back on in times of need.

**Oral Histories:**

These oral histories of my grandparents give insight into the various aspects of family life and how intimacy was incorporated into their daily lives and important decisions. Through both of the interviews, it was quite evident that both grandmother’s believed that intimacy played a major role in brining the family together and helping them through times of difficulty.