

ASHRAE Leadership Recall (formerly Leadership Recalled)

Transcription

Interview of: Bruno Morabito

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Interviewed by: Ann Boutwell

Note: The original tape recording of this interview no longer exists.

Ann Boutwell

Mr. Morabito, would you tell us something about your childhood, your family, and your early education?

Bruno Morabito

Well, I was born in Italy in a little mountain village called Monte Cello, in the province of (Udinese) Ridge Canario. I spent the first four and a half years in Italy. In as much as I was very young, there is not a whole lot that I remember, but there are a few things I can remember. For example, the relationship of our house to the village square, to the church, and to my uncle's orchards. As a matter of fact, that reminds me of a little happening that took place on my fourth birthday. My father sent me a pair of shoes from America and I was so proud when I put those shoes on that I had to go and show them to my uncle. My mother said, "OK you can go, but be careful and come back as soon as you can." So I took off and I went to the orchard to see my uncle and show off my shoes. There are two roads, a high road and a low road. I went by the high road. I showed them to him and after he was suitably impressed with what I had to show him I took off and went back home, but I didn't go back home the same way I went up to the orchard. I decided to go by the low road. Well, my birthday is in February and February is the rainy season in Italy. It was very muddy in that little area where I had to traverse. I went through there anyway because I was too young to really know what I was doing and I collected a whole bunch of mud on these brand new shoes. When I got home my mother said, "My God, what did you do?" She started to scrape the mud off these shoes and guess what? No shoes. I left them, mired back there in the mud. I only wore them that once. That sticks in my memory all these years. I will never, never forget that. We left there in 1926 and I was four and a half years old at the time.

A.B.

Your father was already in the United States?

B.M.

Yes, my father was in the United States at that time. He had come to the states long before that time and actually he served in World War I with the American expeditionary forces. After the war he went back and married my mother and I was born. But he decided that his fortunes were best served if he came to America. He did come to America and when he had built a sufficient stake he sent for my mother and me and that is how we came to be in America. I have never been back since. Not that I don't want to, it's just that circumstance have not permitted it to date.

A.B.

What influenced your decision to become an engineer?

B.M.

Well, I guess it was the fact that my teachers thought I had a facility for math and science. They explained to me that the best outlet for this would be to pursue an engineering career, so I did. It is that simple.

A.B.

You attended Syracuse University. Describe the type of engineering program they had at the time.

B.M.

When I decided to pursue engineering I had dreams of being a big bridge builder. So what I studied in college was civil engineering. Unfortunately, when I got out of school it was just after World War II and there were no civil engineering jobs or bridges being built at that time. While in school I had been doing part time work for Holmes, O'Brian and Geer, who were involved in sewerage disposal, sanitary engineering. Well, somehow, that didn't have very much romance for me. Furthermore, when I got through school they wanted me to spend two years on the drafting board. So these two facts together convinced me that I needed to get out of that and get into something else. So that is how I came to go to Carrier. When I was in school, a Professor Carpenter taught a class in Heat-to-power which I took at the University. After studying under him I was impressed with him to the point that when I heard that he was at Carrier in charge of their engineering training, I decided to go over and visit him. I did and he hired me then and there and that started my career with Carrier which lasted for 36 years.

A.B.

Did you know Willis Carrier, the "chief" I believe they called him.

B.M.

Well, to say I knew him would be a misstatement. I met him I guess three times, brief meetings. I was very, very impressed with the man. Not only with meeting him in person but with all the legends I had heard at the time of his tremendous knowledge and his great contributions to the industry. For me it was a thrill to meet him, but to know him, no, not really. I guess I was very young at the time and he died not too long after I went to work at Carrier.

A.B.

How did you feel this past year when you learned that Willis Carrier had been inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame?

B.M.

I guess I have to say that I was tremendously pleased with the fact that I was associated with a tradition that at the beginning launched this industry and that over time built the great Carrier Corporation and I had a little part of that so I was very thrilled.

A.B.

I believe some of our other ASHRAE presidential members have worked or are associated with Carrier. Do you want to talk a little bit about these people?

B.M.

The people that were with Carrier during the time that I was with them were J. I. Lyle, Ned Stacey, Carlyle Ashley, Walter Grant, and Bill McGrath. All of whom were presidents of ASHRAE at one time or another. I did not ever meet J.I. Lyle. I do not know why I didn't but I didn't. However, I knew all the others. Ned Stacey was a real gentleman. He was one of the founders and he spent some time in the

Navy and he was a retired Navy captain after the war, and he was my boss. He was Director of Application Engineering at the time that I was working in that department. Stacey had great respect from everyone who knew him. Not only respected but very well liked. Carlyle Ashley, he is a real brain. You really had to be on your toes when you talked with him about some of the theories behind the technology that we were involved in, heating, refrigerating, and air conditioning. He was a real brain. He was, I guess, a specialist in this area for the company. Walter Grant, he was a brain also. He was very smart. He too was manager of application engineering during the time that I was there, part of the time I was there. Later he became vice president of engineering for the corporation. He was a very important man and he did a great amount for Carrier. Bill McGrath, another president, he was a very inventive man, very strong leader. He showed it in all the things he did and he eventually became vice president and general manager of the machine and systems divisions when it was first organized as part of the Carrier Corporation organization. Of course, he is still alive. I guess Ashley and Bill McGrath and Walter Grant are still alive, the other two have passed away.

A.B.

In your membership folder it indicates that you hold a United States patent. I would like to know something about that.

B.M.

Actually it is a patent for improving the efficiency for improving the efficiency. We never used it at Carrier because we are not in the evaporative condenser business. Someone may have used it somewhere, but I don't know whether or not it has been used.

A.B.

In 1961 you received the Wolverine Diamond Key for your outstanding paper. Would you discuss this please?

B.M.

The paper was on how to design an air-conditioning system with smaller installed horsepower and likewise using less surface, and also high rise in the chill water temperature that the system was using as a coolant. This did produce some economies of scale which were apropos then and are still apropos today. In fact, required more now because of the energy concerns that we have.

A.B.

What was the Wolverine Diamond Key award and why do we not have it today?

B.M.

This award was sponsored by the Wolverine Tube Company and I guess they cut it out for economy measures or for whatever measures they have. I really don't know the reason they cut it out but they did cut it out and in its place ASHRAE has created other awards that I guess are just as good as that one.

A.B.

Could it be possibly because it was a commercial name?

B.M.

It's possible. I don't really know what all the reasons were.

A.B.

You were president of ASHRAE in 1977 and 1978.

B.M.

To talk about my presidency I think I would have to say at the time that I started to go towards this road I noted that ASHRAE was not making all the contributions that it could to society in general. It was not ASHRAE's fault it was because of all of the things that had happened to that time. I thought that ASHRAE was a very strong visible organization that had much to contribute. The only way I figured that it could get to the point that it could make these contributions effectively was to be better known and involved in our industry and by the government. The government most of all because there were problems that we had already gone through with energy. For example, the government could use our help on it and did not know enough to ask us. So I thought we should do something in order to make sure that when a problem came up in which we could make a contribution we were called upon to do so. That is why I selected the theme. Over a period of time I think we accomplished the goals that we set out to accomplish, which was to be better known with other associations, with the trade associations with other societies, to be more recognized for our contributions in these areas, or by these organizations, and certainly to be recognized by the government for the contributions that we could make to certain problems that society was facing in general. I think that we did some very good work in the areas of standards. Standard 90, though it started back in 1974-75 or even before that perhaps, did find some of its endings during my administration. The start of Standard 90 of course is the standard for energy conservation in new buildings. There was another standard that started about that same time and that was energy conservation in old buildings, existing buildings. And you know that is an odd thing because there is much, much more energy that could have been conserved in existing buildings if that had been tackled first, but somehow we tackled the new buildings first. I suppose because that is the first thing that was considered. In any event, those two standards were worked on during that period of time. The solar standards were worked on at that same time. In addition to this, Frank Faust, who is another past president chaired a group which was made up of other societies, engineering societies, AIA, and ASHRAE along with a lot of people from government agencies that were all interested in energy conservation standards. Through the work of that particular group we were able to guide the government people who were interested, and who were participating in that particular effort, in being sure that all the key technical issues that were involved in the energy conservation standards that they were following were considered and considered properly. So that is another one of the things that we did. We continued all of our efforts to get the government to recognize that we could make contributions even in areas beyond just the standards activity. We continued the research effort so that it grew. In connection with working with the government, we were able to obtain some research grants that have grown and grown as a result of that activity. There probably are a good many more things that I could say in this area. You probably would have to stop me if I got out my little book here and looked at all the things that were going on at that time because it was really a busy time. I didn't have much time for myself that year.

A.B.

I want to know something about your interview. I think you are the only ASHRAE president that I know of that has ever been on national TV. Why don't you tell us the background about being on the Today Show and being interviewed by Jane Pauley. Mention all those names, how it came about.

B.M.

Actually the opportunity came about through the efforts of Amos Landman. I don't know whether they approached him or he approached them for ASHRAE to be on the show. He would be the only one to

answer that question. But the opportunity came through him. Fortunately, at that time I was president and that is how I got to represent the society. I hope I had something to give at that time. I did appear on the show. The circumstances were, I believe, that the network wanted to have someone discuss the relationship of the engineer and the contractor with respect to HVAC insulation in the home. They were concerned about rip offs and wanted to warn the public and that is how the whole thing developed. That is what we went on to talk about and hopefully we did cover.

A.B.

What about your work with the International Institute of Refrigeration. What roles have you played in that?

B.M.

Well, there are two aspects to that question. First of all, in 1977 the society replaced that National Academy of Sciences as Secretariat of the U.S. National Committee for the International Institute of Refrigeration. That was probably initiated by the committee members who were working on that activity. I simply endorsed it because I thought it was the right thing to do and it was very much in keeping with my theme of involvement beyond ourselves. The other aspect of the question is what my relationship to IIAR is. There is an association here in the States that is IIAR and I have been representing ASHRAE a couple of years as their representative whenever they have had a meeting. Those are the two relationships I have had with this whole situation. I don't know necessarily that they are tied in.

A.B.

Was the ASHRAE Ambassador-at-large Program initiated during your administration?

B.M.

No. this was initiated before I became president. As a matter of fact it is evidence that I am not the first one to recognize that we needed to have involvement beyond ourselves in order to make the kind of contributions that his society really can make.

A.B.

Do you remember the ASHRAE Winter Meeting in 1978 and the incident of the fire in Atlanta?

B.M.

I sure do. I could see it from my window where I was staying. It tied up traffic and it's too bad because I guess that place was kind of a landmark. I don't really know this but that is what I have heard. I saw the fire and I saw all that smoke and as a matter of fact I was going from the hotel, I don't remember where I was going, but I was kind of impeded by the fact that this was going on at the time. I remember it very well. As you may recall, this burning that we have been talking about is the burning of the Loew's Theater which is where the premier showing of *Gone with the Wind* occurred.

A.B.

The focus of that 1978 ASHRAE Winter Meeting was on energy. Why was this an important issue at the time and what was ASHRAE doing about it?

B.M.

It was an important issue at the time and it still is an important issue because of the fact that 35 percent of all the energy that is being used in this country is being used in buildings, not just public buildings, buildings in general. Obviously, because of the involvement of ASHRAE in heating, ventilating, air conditioning, we influence greatly the percent of that energy that is being used in these buildings. So

that is why it is important to ASHRAE and will continue to be important as long as we are involved in this business. At the time that we were thinking about all this I was convinced that congress was fiddling while all this energy was burning. We didn't really have a national energy policy. We advocated that such a policy be developed. That is as far as we could go at that time, but we ourselves at ASHRAE certainly did all we could to influence a reduction of use of energy or conservation of energy in buildings design. One of the things I would like to mention is that each president has left some kind of a legacy to the Society. That is evident in the fact that the Society has continued to grow over a period of years. As a matter of fact, the growth since I was in office has been tremendously significant. At the time I was in office we had a total membership of 35,000. The membership now, after eight years, is up to 50,000 which to me represents significant growth. There must be something that the society is doing right in order to achieve this kind of success. Hopefully, it will continue because the Society has so much to give and we want to make sure that this contribution is made. I have been active since I was president in a number of ways, but one in particular that I think is related to the theme of my administration was an activity that was done through the Government Affairs Committee. We developed a seminar for chapters and regional meetings in order to get them to become more active in public affairs. These seminars were geared to showing them how and stimulation them into doing it.

A.B.

What advice would you give young people entering an engineering career in heating, ventilating, air conditioning and refrigeration?

B.M.

The best advice that I could give them is to become a member of ASHRAE and become involved as soon as they can because that is the way that they are going to broaden their horizons.