

DP-04

VINCENT CIRONE

BIRTH DATE: 1918

INTERVIEW DATE: MARCH 23, 1989

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INTERVIEWER: ANDREW PHILLIPS

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SICILY, 1923

AGE 5

SHIP NAME NOT RECALLED, LATER PASSAGE ON "THE REX"

PHILLIPS: This is Andrew Phillips and I'm speaking with Vincent Cirone, right?

CIRONE: Right.

PHILLIPS: With the Italian C-I-R-O-N-E. This is interview number 378 [DP-4] and it is the 23rd of March, on Thursday, and in 1989. And we are beginning this interview at about 12:15. And Mr. Cirone is from Italy, or Sicily.

CIRONE: Sicily.

PHILLIPS: From Sicily.

CIRONE: Palermo.

PHILLIPS: From Palermo, in Sicily.

PHILLIPS: A little town, uh, a little town east of Palermo.

PHILLIPS: Tell me what year you were born.

CIRONE: I was born in 1918.

PHILLIPS: What year did you immigrate to the United States?

CIRONE: It was in April. We arrived on, at Ellis Island
April the 23rd, 1923.

PHILLIPS: Okay. So 1923 and 1918, so that was, yeah, you were
pretty, you were pretty young. You were only five
years of age.

CIRONE: Yes, I was five years old. In fact, I was just five.
My birthday is on March the 3rd.

PHILLIPS: So let me, let me take you back. What I'd like to do
is to take you back to your memories and perhaps the
stories that your parents told you about the old
country, about Sicily and Palermo and life back

there. And, uh, what it was like for you when you were born. Where were you born, actually?

CIRONE: I was born in the little town of Altavilla, Milicia, see. And that's about fourteen miles east of Palermo. And, uh, it was a small town and, uh, my father, he was a barber there. And we had property, we had olive groves and we had, uh, regular farming land. And we had, uh, lemon groves. You see, in fact, we've still got some of those, some of that there property yet, see. And that's the story of how the people used to live over there, see. They didn't have, it wasn't, their property wasn't all in one place. They were scattered. Some people, like, we had property up in the mountain, then we had property along the seashore, along the Tyrrhenian Sea. And that's the way people had their property out there. That's the way they used to make a living. But my father was a barber, see. My grandfather, he was a doctor, a dentist and a barber. (he laughs) See, in those days when a person used to have a toothache they used to go to the barber shop, see. And, uh, he probably gave them a slug of whisky or something like that, and he would pull his teeth out, see. Or if

somebody got shot, see, my grandfather would go over there and take the bullets out. (he laughs)
That's a fact, see.

PHILLIPS: Why would somebody get shot?

CIRONE: Well, that's the way it was in those days, see. People used to walk around with guns and with daggers, with knives in their pockets, see. Now I'm talking about my grandfather's time. At least, that's what I used to hear, see.

PHILLIPS: So your parents sounded like they earned a fairly decent living, you were.

CIRONE: Oh, yes. My father made a pretty good living out in Italy, see. The only reason why he came over here to the United States is because of my two brothers. They were born in the United States, then they want back to Italy when they were small. My father went, you know, when my father went back. You see, my father became a citizen in 1906, see. And, uh, he had an older son. My oldest brother, he was born in Italy, see. And then in 19-- , my father became a citizen in 1906 and, uh, my two brothers were born

here. (voices off mike) (break in tape) See, my, two of my brothers were born here, Anthony and Mike, see. Then when they were young, when they were just kids, children, see, my father went back to the old country.

PHILLIPS: And these brothers were older than you, and this was before you were born.

CIRONE: Yes. That's way, way before I was born. My oldest brother was old enough to be my father. In fact, he was, he served in the Italian Army, my oldest brother, with my father. (he laughs) My father was a barber in the army, too, see.

PHILLIPS: That was during the first war.

CIRONE: During the First World War, yeah. And, well, naturally, I was born during the First World War, see. And we lived there in Italy all those years. My, then my sister was born. My brother, my other brother was born, my brother Frank. My sister Nancy was born, and then I was born. So that, that kind of sort of, uh, made it quite a few years that we stayed in Italy before we came back here again, see. And we

came back here, it was in, uh, in April. In fact, it was April the 23rd that the boat, uh, landed at Ellis Island, see. I remember that. Well, I remember that because my father used to talk about it, see. And, uh, we stayed in Ellis Island for about six months.

PHILLIPS: Before we talk about Ellis Island and the actual arrival and what you did there, why did your father decide to leave?

CIRONE: To leave the country?

PHILLIPS: To leave Italy.

CIRONE: Well, over here there was, uh, there was, uh, the times were bad. He had a barber shop and he wasn't doing too well, see. And over there he had a barber shop, and not only did he have the barber shop, but he had all that property. He had property up in the mountain that was olive grove, he had property below the mountain that was olive grove, see. And then he had, along the seashore he had, uh, he had land that he used to raise beans and vegetables and fruit trees, all kinds of fruit trees. Any kind of fruit tree that you thought about it, he, my father had it

there, see. Even trees, even food that you never heard of, my father had. Even banana tree, see. And, uh, he was making a good living over there. He figures, over here I'm starving, see, if I go back over there, I'm doing pretty good, see. Which he did.

PHILLIPS: Let me ask you, so you are now describing why he went back to Italy, and why he left the United States.

CIRONE: That's the reason.

PHILLIPS: Let me take you back a little bit further, and ask you why he originally came from Italy to the United States the first time.

CIRONE: The first time, well, that's pretty hard to think about. It's, it could be because maybe my mother had two brothers that were living here, see. Or maybe just adventure, see. My father, he wasn't a man to stay in one place too long, see. He came, he used to go back and forth quite a few times.

PHILLIPS: Travelling on the boat.

CIRONE: Travelling on the boat, yeah, see.

PHILLIPS: So he came across for the first time and saw his brothers-in-law.

CIRONE: Probably, sure.

PHILLIPS: Where were they?

CIRONE: They were here in Chicago, see. And that's where my father came, to Chicago, the first time. And here's where he, and Chicago is where he became an American citizen.

PHILLIPS: What did he do in Chicago when he arrived?

CIRONE: He was a barber, always.

PHILLIPS: Downtown?

CIRONE: No. He opened up a barber shop in the neighborhood.

PHILLIPS: Which neighborhood?

CIRONE: Well, at that time I don't remember. I wasn't even born at that time, so I really couldn't say what neighborhood, see. But, uh, I know that when we were living in Brooklyn, when we came the second time.

PHILLIPS: So let's just get this. Then he decides that life

isn't as good as he thought it was going to be, is that it? And he hasn't got as much land.

CIRONE: Yeah. He didn't have nothing over here, see. Where over there we had a lot, quite a bit of property.

PHILLIPS: So he goes back to Italy.

CIRONE: Yeah. And he was making a good living over there, see. Then, you know, naturally, my brothers, my brothers that were born here, they were small, see. And, uh, he took them back with him. Now, you take my brother, my oldest brother, eight years old, he was a barber. He was cutting hair and shaving people. My, uh, my brother Anthony, which is the next oldest, see, he was, uh, he must have been about ten years old, and he was doing the same thing, see. My brother Mike the same way too. He must have been around ten years old when he was barbering in Italy too, see. But then when they became seventeen years old, now, you could realize. So they might have gone back, when those two that were born in the United States might have been maybe, maybe a year old, or two year old, see. And when they became seventeen years old, being that they were American citizens,

they wanted to come back to America, see. And they did.

PHILLIPS: After having, after having fought in the first World War.

CIRONE: No, that was my older brother, my oldest brother, see. He came after we did, he came, way after we did, see.

PHILLIPS: So your father decides to, or your brothers, in fact, decide why. Let me ask you the question why did they all come back to America after going back to Italy where life was so good?

CIRONE: Because my two brothers, they were born in the United States. When they became seventeen years old they took off and they came to the United States. And they were living with my uncle, my mother's brother, see. And, uh, then my mother, you know how a mother is, "Oh, my two boys over there." They, you know, she, uh, she was worried about them, see. And she was pressuring my father, and before you know it my father said, okay, let's go back to America, see. And that's when we came, see. But you've got to

realize, though, now, like I said, my brothers, they might have been maybe one or two years old when they went back to Italy, and when they were seventeen years old they came back. And I probably wasn't even born then, see. Oh, I might have been born, yeah, see. So, and then he had all his childrens over there, see. So that's a long, long time before that's my father went back, came back to the United States.

PHILLIPS: Okay. So now the second time he comes back to the United States, this time he's got you with him.

CIRONE: This time he's got me with him, yeah.

PHILLIPS: What happens?

CIRONE: What happens? It's that we, uh, we landed at Ellis Island and they kept us there for six months.

PHILLIPS: Why?

CIRONE: See, well, it's because of, uh, I would say it would be political, see, because being that my father stayed in Italy so long, he probably never had his passport renewed, or maybe, maybe he might even have

had an Italian passport. Who knows. You see, I don't know for sure, see. But, uh, but they wouldn't let us in because they thought that, my father lost his citizenship, see. So naturally being that my two brothers were here, my uncles were here, and then we had relatives that were politically involved, see. They kind of, knew people, and they got a hold of a good lawyer, see.

PHILLIPS: So tell me, what were they politically involved in?

CIRONE: Because they were, my father was in Italy too long, and they thought that he lost his citizenship.

PHILLIPS: But you said you had relatives here who were politically involved also.

CIRONE: Yeah. Politically involved. They're, they're the ones that got the lawyers and, uh, see.

PHILLIPS: They had political friends.

CIRONE: Friends, yes. In other words, they had a little pull. In those days pull meant a lot, see. But it took about six months to get, get that all cleared up, see. And, uh, going through courts and all that,

see, it was proven that a man does not lose his citizenship, see. As far as the children were concerned, we could have come into the United States any time, as long as there was somebody that would take care of us, because we were all kids, see. But the point is my father and my mother, see, they didn't know. Because according to an act of congress, we were American born, even though we were born in Italy, see. And, uh, it was proven that once, that a man does not lose his citizenship. He may lose his rights, but not his citizenship.

PHILLIPS: In this case, was this, do you know, was this the first case of its kind, or was it one of many cases?

CIRONE: I really don't know. It could have been one of the first cases of that kind, see. Because, you know, usually they don't, they didn't got through all that. But being that we had, we had relatives here and, uh, and my two brothers, even though they were young, they might have been seventeen, eighteen years old when all this was going on. You know, they, they, they kind of sort of made it their business to take care of it. Because usually what they'd do, if they

saw that, if they thought that you wasn't supposed to come into the United States for some reason or another, they would ship you back, see. They done that to my grandfather, with my grandfather, because nobody came to visit him at, to pick him up at, at the, at the pier, see. And he was all by himself. They, they shipped him back, see. Because he figures, well, this man can't make a living over here. See, there had to be a guarantee that if you, get if you come into the United States that you, you could be making a living for yourself, that you wasn't going to be a burden to the country. You follow me, what I'm trying to say? And if, and if they thought that you couldn't make a, that they had nobody there and no way of making a living, they would ship you back.

PHILLIPS: Did your grandfather immigrate before your father?

CIRONE: Yes. Way before my father.

PHILLIPS: What year was that?

CIRONE: Oh, that was a long time ago. I really don't remember.

PHILLIPS: Roughly.

CIRONE: Roughly, uh, it could have been, uh, oh, 1920, let's see, 1919, something like that, around that time.

PHILLIPS: And just repeat again what year you immigrated, your father immigrated, the second time?

CIRONE: The second time? In, uh, April the 23rd, 1923.

PHILLIPS: Yeah. So, in fact, it wasn't way back, it was, your grandfather, now, tell me again the date your grandfather, roughly, came in, the year?

CIRONE: Around, around, around, around the year 1920.

PHILLIPS: 1920. And so, and after that, he was sent back to Italy?

CIRONE: Yeah. He, all he done is get off at Ellis Island and they shipped him right back on the next boat.

PHILLIPS: What did your father think about that? Did he ever talk about that with you?

CIRONE: Well, he was, he was kind of teed off. Oh, yeah. He was kind of mad because the people that were supposed

to meet him at the airport, see . . . At the pier,
at the pier, I'm sorry, at the pier, see. Supposed
to meet him at the pier, they, they didn't show up.

PHILLIPS: So that was a pretty expensive trip.

CIRONE: Sure.

PHILLIPS: How much?

CIRONE: It cost him quite a bit.

PHILLIPS: Do you know how much?

CIRONE: No, not exactly. But, well, in those days, the train
fare, boat fare wasn't too expensive, but it was
expensive for, for those days, you know what I mean.
People probably worked maybe a full year before they
could save up enough money to travel.

PHILLIPS: He must have been pretty angry with his relatives for
not meeting him.

PHILLIPS: Oh, sure, sure. You can't blame him.

CIRONE: So now when you arrived you were very little. You
were about five years old.

CIRONE: I was five, exactly five years. Five years and one month.

PHILLIPS: Do you remember arriving?

CIRONE: Oh, sure, sure. I remember, I, I faintly could remember just where we, where we stayed at Ellis Island and where I used to play, see. Now, there was a big hall where we stayed, there was a big hall, see. And, uh, and then there was, I think there were metal stairs, going up the stairs, see. And the stairs was about, uh, I would say about six feet wide, maybe five feet wide, see. And then there was a platform the same way, see, going upstairs. And there, there was rooms up there, see, and we had one room. It was my father, my mother, my sister Anna, my brother Frank, my sister Nancy, and me. Now, there was three beds in there. There was a bunk bed, see, where my sisters, two of my sisters slept downstairs, and me and my brother slept upstairs, and my father and mother had a bed of their own, see. And I remember that much, see, but there was nothing closed or anything like that, it was just one big room that I think, they had us. I'd say the room was

about as big as this dining room, as big as this living room, maybe a little bigger, see. I remember that much. And then we used to play downstairs, see, in the hallway and, uh, they treated us very good. Even my father, I used to hear my father say how nice they treated us. Sometimes we used to play outside, see.

PHILLIPS: You could see Manhattan across the water.

CIRONE: Oh, yes, yes, yes. That was a beautiful sight. After we got out of there, then we lived in Brooklyn.

PHILLIPS: Tell me more about being there, though, because you were five years of age. All of this time, this six month period your father was going through the court process, was that happening on Ellis Island, or did he have to leave the island to go to court?

CIRONE: No, he didn't leave the island.

PHILLIPS: He wasn't permitted to leave.

CIRONE: No. He wasn't permitted to leave.

PHILLIPS: So did the courts hear the case on Ellis Island?

CIRONE: No, no. It, it was in New York.

PHILLIPS: Did he have lawyers representing him?

CIRONE: He had lawyers representing him.

PHILLIPS: How did he get the lawyers?

CIRONE: Through, through our relations. See, in fact, in fact, he a, they got all the information from Chicago here, because here's where he became American citizen.

PHILLIPS: Originally, the first time.

CIRONE: Yes. yes. In 1906, see. And they got all the papers that was needed, that my father became an American citizen, see. And they, they mailed them over to, to New York.

PHILLIPS: You went to school on Ellis Island.

CIRONE: Yes, I did.

PHILLIPS: Kindergarten, was it?

CIRONE: Kindergarten, yes.

PHILLIPS: Tell me about it.

CIRONE: (he laughs) There isn't much to tell about that, see. It was mostly play. That's all it was. But you could see that, the newspaper clipping, see, that I was holding a little doll, and my sister, too.

PHILLIPS: Mr. Cirone has a newspaper clipping, a photograph of him taken in 1927?

CIRONE: In 1923.

PHILLIPS: 1923, that's right, 1923, with about a dozen other kids. How many kids were in that kindergarten? Do you remember?

CIRONE: No, not offhand, see. We were quite a few. There was quite a few kids in there.

PHILLIPS: All different . . .

CIRONE: I was never lonesome, see. I was playing with all kinds of kids over there. There was even a little black kids in there, see. I remember that much because, like, it struck me funny because I never saw a black person then. That was the first time. You see, I asked my mother, I says, "Ma, how come, how

come," in Italian, I told her, I says, "How come that man, that little boy, is black?" See, she says, "Well, he's from Africa." (he laughs) Yeah.

PHILLIPS: How about language? You didn't speak English.

CIRONE: No. I didn't speak English. I spoke Sicilian, strictly Sicilian, see. My father and mother, they spoke Italian, see. But most of, most of the time they spoke Sicilian. Every, every town had their own dialect, see.

PHILLIPS: What did you, how did you converse with the other children, who must have also come from different countries?

CIRONE: How does children converse with other children? Now, not too long ago my niece came over here from Italy. She got along fine with all the little kids her age over here. They conversed with each other. It wasn't hard, see, it's simple. Two kids, they could understand each other regardless what language they speak, see. Am I right, see?

PHILLIPS: When, when did you leave Ellis Island, six months later?

CIRONE: Six months later. Yeah, I don't remember exactly the day. But then we went to live with my father's cousin for about three months. And then we moved to, in Brooklyn, and I can still remember the street. Floyd, Floyd Street. Floyd Street and Tompkins Avenue. Then from there my father opened up a barber shop on Ellery Street, across the street from the School 168. I went, I went to that school.

PHILLIPS: In Brooklyn.

CIRONE: In Brooklyn. I went to that school.

PHILLIPS: Tell us about life in Brooklyn.

CIRONE: Yeah. And then from there we moved to, uh, to Nostrand Avenue, see, right next to, about two doors away from the Lucky Strike factory. I don't know if you're, if you're familiar with that, see. And then from there we moved on Park Avenue and Tompkins Avenue, see. And, like I said, my father had, I went to Saint, I went to Public School 54 when I was living on Nostrand Avenue. See, then when we moved to Park Avenue and Tompkins Avenue, see, we lived right on the corner house. And downstairs was a

speakeasy. (he laughs) And every once in a while they used to raid it. I remember that much. Of course, I was a little older then, too, you know, see. And then I used to go to school, to Public School one fifty, 168. And across the street was my father's barber shop, see. And on Ellery Street there where my father had the barber shop, every, every, a certain time of the week, I don't remember if it was the weekend, I think it was the weekend, see, they used to have, they used to have carts there just like Maxwell Street, see, and the people used to sell their wares outside, see. It was pretty interesting.

PHILLIPS: What did they sell? What kinds of things?

CIRONE: Oh, they used to sell clothes, they used to sell second hand stuff. It was like a, like a marketplace.

PHILLIPS: Tell me where this was again?

CIRONE: On Ellery Street.

PHILLIPS: In Brooklyn.

CIRONE: In Brooklyn.

CIRONE: How old were you then?

CIRONE: I must have been about six, seven years old, see. I remember one time I had a teacher, he was a man teacher. Oh, he was mean. He used to hit everybody, all the kids, he used to hit. In fact, somebody turned him in. But, you know, one time, I used to go home for lunch, see, and Joe and I used to go back, back to school after lunch. I used to play around, skip around here and there, look into windows and all that, and sometimes I used to get to school late. So one day this teacher here, of course, I was late, kept me after school, and he laid me across the two benches. And he was slapping me in the face. And do you know, because I wouldn't cry, he kept slapping me in the face. And I wouldn't cry, see. But after he let me go I went home, I walked in the house, and my mother, my mother and my sister, my sister Anna, she was a teenager then, see, she saw the hand marks on my face and she asked me what happened, and I told her, see. Then I started crying, see. My sister Anna, she takes a butcher knife that big, see, she

takes me by the hand and she takes me to the school, and the teacher was still there, and she takes that knife and puts it at that guy's throat, "If you touch my brother once more," I said, "I'll come and cut your throat off." And man, that teacher never touched me again. He never touched me again. And I remember just like as if it happened today, see. And if my oldest brother had knew about it, that guy, that guy would have been buried, buried, see. My brothers, my brothers, my oldest brothers, none of them were fools. We were, we were seven in the family, and we were that close. Nobody could touch any one of us, see. Like I says, my oldest brother, he was old enough to be my father. And he was crazy about me. Sure, he was in the army. He was, he was in the front when I was born.

PHILLIPS: Where?

CIRONE: In, uh, in Italy, in Australia, in Austria, not Australia, in Austria, in Austria. Yeah, and he came over and he says, "Where's that new baby? Where's that new baby?" (he laughs) He came on a leave.

PHILLIPS: Where is he now?

CIRONE: He's dead.

PHILLIPS: Did he come to America?

CIRONE: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: Your oldest brother, I mean.

CIRONE: Yeah. He came after we did. He came in about 1925, yeah.

PHILLIPS: Did the family stick together in America?

CIRONE: We were very close together.

PHILLIPS: You all came to Chicago?

CIRONE: Yes, always. We were always close together in Chicago. My brother lived upstairs and downstairs.

PHILLIPS: I'm just going to stop. (break in tape)

CIRONE: See, yes, we were a very close family, see. Like, after we were all, when we were single, we all lived with my brother Anthony, see, because, you know, my father was, my father and my mother, they went back to Italy, see, and there's where they died. So we

stayed here, and we lived with my brother Anthony and my sister-in-law Ida. She was like a mother, (break in tape) Okay, now, where was I?

PHILLIPS: Actually, what I'm going to do, I think, is turn the tape over at this point and we'll continue . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

CIRONE: Clock stops ringing. (clock chimes in background)

PHILLIPS: Okay. We're on side two with Mr. Cirone. It's interview number 377 [DP-4], continuing talking about your family all living together here in the United States.

CIRONE: Yeah. You see, after we came back here in 1923, see, in 1932 my father decides to go back.

PHILLIPS: That's the third time he's going back.

CIRONE: That's the third time, see. So he went back and he took my sister with him. And then in 1933 my mother and my sister Anna and me, we went back, see, to Italy. Because things were bad here, see. So then

and the war started to break out. This is really good. (he laughs) See, you know, then Hitler started to get to be pretty famous, you know, pretty powerful. And Mussolini, too, see. And, uh, before you know it, I was, being I was a teenager then, I was out in the streets, "Salude, Duce." My father looked at me, he saw it, he said, "Hey, that's enough of that." So he sent me back. (he laughs) Not that I was a Fascist, or anything like that. It was just the idea that you're a young person, you're hanging around with a lot of young kids that are your age and they're all fascists, you know what I mean. So before you know it, you're in with them, see. But things were bad there, over there. Like one time a guy says to me, he points at his, uh, he point at his lapel, and he says to me, "When are you going to get a button like this?" It's a Fascist button. I said, "Hey, what am I going to do with a Fascist button?" (a dog barks in the background) He says to me, "Shhh." He says, "Do you know the walls got ears?" See? Even had to be afraid to say. And I innocently, I was used to the United States here, you know, and I used to speak freely, see. And they'd say, "Shh. The walls got ears." But, uh, that's the

reason my father sent me back, and he wrote to my brother Anthony, he says, "Hey, I'm sending your brother back. You're be, you're responsible for him." And he really treated me like I was his own son.

PHILLIPS: This is your eldest brother?

CIRONE: My eldest brother Anthony. Not my oldest, but next to the oldest, my brother Anthony.

PHILLIPS: How much older than you was he?

CIRONE: He was about, uh, say about sixteen years older than me, sixteen years older than me.

PHILLIPS: So what was, tell us a little bit more about the atmosphere in Italy when you were, what were you, sixteen or seventeen?

CIRONE: Oh, it was beautiful out there.

PHILLIPS: Back in Italy.

CIRONE: It's beautiful. Yeah, the weather is beautiful, summer and winter. People used to raise crops all year round.

PHILLIPS: How long did you spend back in Italy, you?

CIRONE: Two years.

PHILLIPS: Two years.

CIRONE: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: Did you go to school?

CIRONE: No.

PHILLIPS: Did you work?

CIRONE: No. I used to help my father out at the, at the, at the property, see, planting things, and stuff like that. But it was beautiful over there, and I enjoyed every bit of it that I was there. It was exciting. It was very exciting, especially when Mussolini was in power, see. Things were a little bit different there. You know, like it was time for voting. You don't dare get out of the house when its time for voting. You stay in your house. At that time, now, I'm talking about. I don't know, today is different now. Today is more, today they've got the freedom that everybody has here, see. But at that time, when

it was time for voting, a man does not leave his house, see. Then when the time came, two Carbonaris would come, dressed up, you know, with their fancy hats and, see, one would get you by one side of the arm, the other one would get you with the other side of the arm, and they'd take you, and they'd tell you, "Now, you vote for this guy and put it in there," and you do that, see. You didn't have no freedom of the way you wanted to vote. Then when you were through voting and they came and got you, you were through voting, then you could, you was free to go to do what you wanted to do. But you couldn't leave your house until they come and got you and got you to vote.

PHILLIPS: Did you see them do that?

CIRONE: Sure. That's the way it was with my father.

PHILLIPS: What did he think about that?

CIRONE: Well, he's used to the United States over here that he had the freedom that, uh, he wasn't used to it. And my father was no Fascist. He was against Fascists. That's why he sent me over here, because he saw me out in the streets there with a bunch of

kids, hey, you know, "Salude, Duce." Marching out in the street, you know. My father said, "Hey, this has gone too far. This kids' going to get himself in trouble over here." So he sent me back, see.

PHILLIPS: What did you, uh, miss about the United States when you were in Italy for that two-year period?

CIRONE: Do you know, that's the funny part of it. I lived here in the United States almost all my life, see. And when I went back that time in 1933, I went back a hundred years, see. Over here, the horse and buggy were just about disappearing. I went over there, I had a, I had a donkey. I used to ride my donkey all the time to go here and there, see. And there was no facilities, no sanitary facilities, see. No water, no plumbing in the house. We had to go out to the street for water, see. They had a running, a running fountain out in the street that people used to go there for water, see. I went back a hundred year. But you know what? I didn't even pay attention. Because it, I knew that that's the way I was supposed to live, and that's the way I lived. I got used to it right away, see. Then when I came back to

America, then it was different. I got used to this country again right away, see. I came back, when I came back, in 1933 when I left, I left with the Rex. That was one of the best boats in the Seven Seas. And when I returned, I returned with the Rex. From New York to Naples, it took us four days. And there was no Queen Mary and no Queen Elizabeth that could ever beat that boat. And you know what? During the wartime that boat was at Naples, docked at Naples, and the English, they sunk it.

PHILLIPS: That was an Italian boat, was it?

CIRONE: That was an Italian boat. The Rex. Yeah, that was a beautiful boat. That boat must have been two blocks long, and about a block wide, see. It was like a city on water. I was seventeen years old when I came back.

PHILLIPS: You must have had a good time on the boat.

CIRONE: Oh, yeah, yeah. I remember one time, I would, naturally you make friends. There was people, like, my own age, see. And there was a girl there, a beautiful girl. She got on the boat in Gibraltar,

she got on the boat. The boat stopped in Gibraltar and picked up a few passengers. And she was a beautiful girl, and she had a skirt up to here. (he gestures) I remember that, see. And I was looking over there, see. So she pulls her skirt down, and I says, "Yeah, I'll, see, see, no more." Because she said, "Si, si." She was talking, she was saying "si" in Spanish. Yeah. So I says, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. I see, see no more." (he laughs) Another time, when I was going to Italy, this is really good, too, on the Rex, the waiters, they didn't speak English. They just spoke Italian, see. And we were at the mess hall, in the dining room, and he takes, they were serving with us. And he was putting spaghetti in my dish. And I says, "That's enough." He smiled and he kept giving me more. And I says to him, "I don't want no more." And he kept putting more, he kept smiling and giving me more spaghetti. So finally I got so mad I says, "I don't want no more basta." "Oh, basta, basta." Basta means that's enough too. It means spaghetti. You see, pasta means spaghetti and it also means that's enough. Oh, and then he says, "Oh, basta, basta," so he stops giving me spaghetti. (he laughs)

PHILLIPS: When you came back to America, you were still a young boy. You were . . .

CIRONE: I was seventeen.

PHILLIPS: Seventeen years of age.

CIRONE: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: And what was America like? The war hadn't yet affected America, had it?

CIRONE: No, no. I came back in 1935. See, I left in '33 and I came back in '35.

PHILLIPS: And by this time the Depression was easing, Roosevelt had certain plans, welfare and that kind of thing.

CIRONE: Yes, yes, that's right. There was a WPA, there was NRA and all that stuff there. No, things were getting easier. In fact, I, uh, you know what I used to do , in case, when I couldn't find a job? I used to go down to the market, I used to buy a couple of baskets of strawberries, a couple of boxes of strawberries, see. I used to pay maybe thirty-five cents for a box of strawberries. I'm talking about a

good size box, maybe there was twenty-four, twenty-four quarts of, twenty-four quarts of strawberries. You see, I used to buy maybe two or three boxes like that at thirty-five cents a box, I used to go down in the alley and I used to sell them. I'd sell them three boxes for a quarter. "Hey, these strawberries, three boxes for a quarter." Well, it's better than going around stealing, or something like that. Cause of my brothers, they wouldn't let me do that, you know, see, if I didn't have enough money, they would all give me money, all my brothers. But that wasn't the point. The point is that I wanted it on my own, see. And that's how I used to fool around. Then finally I got myself a job, see, in the novelty shop.

PHILLIPS: In the what shop?

CIRONE: Novelty, where they used to make rings, and good luck pieces.

PHILLIPS: A novelty shop.

CIRONE: Yeah, ten dollars a week. Ten cents, I was making twenty-five cents an hour, see. And that was enough for me. That was plenty for me.

PHILLIPS: What about the Depression? What were your memories of the Depression here in Chicago?

CIRONE: Well, everybody was on relief, see. As far as I'm concerned, the president that we had during the Depression was Hoover. I would say he was a good president. He supported the whole nation. And he, a lot of people would think that he was a bad president, because a lot of the banks closed and all that stuff, but that isn't so. See, the Depression was coming when he came in, and there was nothing he could have done about it. But, like I said, he supported the whole nation by giving them relief, clothes, shoes, see. And, uh, not only that, until the day he died, he was advisor to all the presidents that were at the White House. Am I right? So he had to be a good president.

PHILLIPS: How about Roosevelt?

CIRONE: Roosevelt, he was all right. Sure, she was the, he was the war president.

PHILLIPS: Tell me about those war years in the United States. What was your experience?

CIRONE: Well, I was lucky. When I was supposed to go to war, the Japanese heard that I was coming, and they gave up, you know what I mean? I was on two weeks leave of absence, that I was supposed to go in the army, see. Then Truman sent out the atomic bomb and the Japs, they gave up, and they sent me a notice that I was rejoined. So I didn't go into the army at all.

PHILLIPS: What did you think when you heard the atomic bomb had been dropped on Japan?

CIRONE: Well, I, I wasn't too keen about it, (a clock chimes in the background) for the simple reason that in fact I made a remark to myself. I says, "I wonder if Truman would have thrown that there bomb if the Japanese had the same bomb that we had." I, it's, of course, it was a good thing, he saved a lot of Americans. That's one thing that was good about it, but look what he did. And, uh, I think that we could have done it a different way instead of, instead of throwing the bomb over there.

PHILLIPS: Was there much debate about that among your friends and colleagues at that time?

CIRONE: No. Nobody ever said a word about it. Nobody, well, there everybody was glad because the war was over because of that.

PHILLIPS: People, you think, perhaps didn't realize what a large historical event the dropping of the bomb was, or was it because they were just, didn't know what to say?

CIRONE: No, they, some were against it and some weren't, you know how that goes. And a lot of people think that Truman was a very good president. But, uh, my opinion was just a little bit different. I always had it in my mind that he was a little bit of a Communist. I don't know, I remember, though, that when he was at the White House there was quite a few Communists in the White House too, see. And when he used to go for his daily walk, you heard about him going for his daily walk, newspaper, newspapermen used to go up to him and said, "Is it true that you have Communists at the White House?" "No, sir." And used to keep walking. And I still think that he was, that he was, that he did have Communists at the White House. They were our allies at that time, so why

shouldn't he if he wanted to?

PHILLIPS: But there was a fear then, or a suspicion of the Soviet Union, of Russia, and Communism.

CIRONE: Yes. Yes, there was. There's always been. But look at one, all right, you know what Roosevelt used to call Stalin? Bloody Joe, see. Why would he call him Bloody Joe. Then all of a sudden they were arm, arm in arm together. From Bloody Joe, then they became the best of friends, the big three. Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin.

PHILLIPS: Until after the war.

CIRONE: Until after the war.

PHILLIPS: What about you after the war? What happened when, in fact, you were just about to be called up and then you weren't, what did you do next?

CIRONE: I went back to work, and I was laid off.

PHILLIPS: Where were you working then?

CIRONE: Teletype, AT&T.

PHILLIPS: When did you start working at AT&T?

CIRONE: Uh, 1943, until 1976. That's when I retired.

PHILLIPS: What did you start out as?

CIRONE: They started me out at seventy, seventy cents an hour plus bonus. So I was doing pretty good.

PHILLIPS: What were you doing? What sort of work?

CIRONE: Machine shop, see. And the bonus was pretty good. I was making a pretty good living there. And before that I was making forty-seven and on-half cents an hour in a different place, at Chicago Spring Hinge.

PHILLIPS: You became the machinist. Is that what happened?

CIRONE: Yeah, yeah, and I became a pretty good machinist. I could have been a tool and die maker. I could have done anything, see. I was, I didn't operate too long. After two years I was there that they made me an instructor, they made me. And I've been an instructor ever since, since I retired.

PHILLIPS: For most of your life you were . . .

CIRONE: Yes, I did hardly, very little work. When someone used to run into trouble, I used to go over there and fix the machine up in five minutes or ten minutes, and that was my job, see. I had it very good.

PHILLIPS: And you worked for AT&T.

CIRONE: AT&T, yeah.

PHILLIPS: How did you like working for AT&T?

CIRONE: I loved it. They had, you know, I got sick one time, and I was sick for a long, long time, for a whole year. Do you know that they paid me just like as if I was working, for a whole year? And then when I went back to work they made me go to work for two hours a day. Then after that four hours a day, then six hours a day. Then finally eight hours, see, when they thought I was well enough to work.

PHILLIPS: What year was this?

CIRONE: Oh, I would say that was about 1971, '72, like that. I was a good worker.

PHILLIPS: So what, any final comments, any other stories? Anything else you would like to share with us about

your experiences, observations, about immigrating to the United States, or . . .

CIRONE: Well, that's the best thing that ever happened to me, when I came back to the United States, see, before the war.

PHILLIPS: So you never, after that you never felt like going back to Italy again?

CIRONE: Oh, yes, oh, yes.

PHILLIPS: You did, you missed Italy.

CIRONE: Every other year I have my wife and I, we go and visit my sisters. I got my two sisters over there yet. See, my sister got married over there when she went back in 1932. She got married, so naturally she stayed over there, see. And my other sister stayed with her 'cause my father, and my father then they died, see. And, uh, so every other year I'd go visit them. I'd go with the excuse I have to go buy a couple pairs of shoes. (he laughs) So every two years I go and visit my sisters, and I buy myself two pairs of shoes, a dress pair, and a pair for every day. See, uh, they're not here.

PHILLIPS: So if, ever since you were a young man you're been back every two years.

CIRONE: Yes. Not since, since 1965, since 1965.

PHILLIPS: You started going back every two years.

CIRONE: Well, mostly after I retired. I started going back every two years.

PHILLIPS: So you married a woman who was also . . .

CIRONE: Yes.

PHILLIPS: Italian.

CIRONE: That's right. And that it happened to be that she's from, her parents are from the same home town as my parents.

PHILLIPS: And she was born in the United States.

CIRONE: But she was born in the United States. And you know what? She looked like a Pollack. (he laughs) Instead of Italian. (he laughs) Yeah, and it was kind of interesting. I happened, as big as the United States is, I happened to go and find somebody

that's from the same home town that I am. And she loves to come with me. Every two years we just pack up, and I just hope that I can go again this year, see.

PHILLIPS: Okay, I think, anything else you want to say?

CIRONE: Well, that's just about it, isn't it?

PHILLIPS: Okay.

CIRONE: Sure.

PHILLIPS: That wraps up our interview with Mr. Cirone, Vincent Cirone. It's interview number 378 [DP-4].