

**TAPE:** **EI-1000**  
**NAME:** **HILDER ACETO**  
**BIRTH DATE:** **AUGUST 16, 1911**  
**INTERVIEW DATE:** **MAY 13, 1998**  
**RUNNING TIME:**  
**INTERVIEWER:** **JANET LEVINE**  
**RECORDING ENGINEER:** **SAME**  
**INTERVIEW LOCATION:** **PORTLAND, MAINE**  
**PORT:**  
**RESIDENCE IN ITALY:** **LETTONANOPPILO**  
**RESIDENCE IN U.S.:** **PORTLAND, MAINE**  
**DATE OF ENTRY:** **1928**

LEVINE: Today's May 13, 1998 and I'm here in Portland, Maine with Hilder Aceto. Who was born Elda Bre...

ACETO: *Elda.*

LEVINE: *Elda, E-L-D-A, Bre...*

ACETO: Breggia.

LEVINE: Breggia, which is B-R-E-G-G-I-A. Mrs. Aceto came from Italy in 1928 when she was 17 years of age on the Augustus. The ship the Augustus, at the time of this interview Mrs. Aceto is 86 years of age and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. If you would start by saying where in Italy you were born and your birth date.

ACETO: I was born, you mean my home town?

LEVINE: Yeah.

**ACETO**  
**EI-1000**

ACETO: My home town is Lettomanoppilo, it's long.

LEVINE: Could you spell it?

ACETO: L-E-T-T-O-M-A-N-O-P-P-I-L-O, 'Manoppilo.

LEVINE: Um, and when were you born?

ACETO: August 16, 1911.

LEVINE: Now the town Lettomanoppilo is

ACETO: *'Manoppilo* in [ ]

LEVINE: What do you remember when you think of Lettomanoppilo, what are the things that you get....

ACETO: Beautiful, when your young everything is beautiful.

LEVINE: Well what in particular was beautiful?

ACETO: Well there was this young guy I think he loved me and I loved him too. But [ ] my mother wants come over this country because my father was here.

LEVINE: Ok, we're going to pause here for a second.  
(pause)

LEVINE: Ok, we're resuming again and Roco Aceto, Mrs. Aceto's son is here with us as well. Ok, you were saying that Lettomonappilo was beautiful. In your minds eye, what are the things that you recall and think about when you think about that place?

**ACETO**  
**EI-1000**

ACETO: Beautiful, beautiful there was my youth, I was there. And then I came to this country, I loved this country now, but when I came I didn't.

LEVINE: Did you want to come?

ACETO: No.

LEVINE: Just tell me is this a farming town? What did people mostly do in the town?

ACETO: Work in the mine some of the..

LEVINE: What kind of mines?

ACETO: In my home town they had a shoe shop, a tailor shop, and most tailor shop. Canteen for the people want to go drink, it was beautiful.

LEVINE: And what kind of mines were in the town?

ACETO: Salf, Salf and what else? Um, asphalt.

LEVINE: Asphalt, huh. And how about your father did your father work in the mines?

ACETO: Oh, no, my father a trade, he was a shoemaker. Not fix the shoes, he used to make shoes.

LEVINE: So did he travel from town to town or did people come to him?

ACETO: No, we had a, he had a big house, with two stores on the bottom. One used to work make shoes, that one used to sell shoes in other store.

**ACETO**  
**EI-1000**

LEVINE: So people would come in and be fitted for their shoes and he would make them.  
And uh, did you go to school?

ACETO: There, not here.

LEVINE: And what do you recall about that?

ACETO: Beautiful school I supposed to go out of town to go to high school, but I did go  
three, four months and my mother says, “no you can’t go,” because I had to take  
the train to go to school. So she didn’t want me to go, eh, and I did alright.

LEVINE: And what about your mother, what was her name?

ACETO: Maria Carmen.

LEVINE: Carmen was her maiden name?

ACETO: No, Maria Carmen Donatelli, that’s her maiden name, Donatelli.

LEVINE: With two L’s?

ACETO: Yes.

LEVINE: And your father’s name?

ACETO: Emita Breggia.

LEVINE: Now you mentioned that your father went to the United States before the rest of  
the family.

ACETO: Oh, yes he was here when we came, my mother and I and my little sister came.  
He was here in America.

**ACETO**  
**EI-1000**

LEVINE: How old were you when your father came here?

ACETO: Ah, wait a minute, I think I was three years old when my father came this country and he come back when I was 12.

LEVINE: What was it like seeing him when you were 12 years old.

ACETO: I didn't like him.

LEVINE: (laughs) you didn't like him.

ACETO: I like my grandfather better, his father.

LEVINE: Why did you like your grandfather so much?

ACETO: Because my grandfather lived with us, and I never saw my father.

LEVINE: And did your grandmother live with you too?

ACETO: Yes. She died before my father come back there.

LEVINE: Can you think of anything she did with your grandfather, places she went or things that he...

ACETO: Oh, yes, we used to take a walk and she, used to, and I had another cousin Orienda. My grandfather used to call us (pee-pee-pee), me and my cousin used to run, go with him in the canteen. It was nice.

LEVINE: Were you close friends with your cousin?

ACETO: Oh, yes, she's here um, she lives here and this [ ] and Westler st.

**ACETO**  
**EI-1000**

LEVINE: So you grew up together?

ACETO: Almost, not all the time. She came to this country before I did.

LEVINE: Do you remember things you used to do for fun when you were a little girl?

ACETO: Yeah, how do you say that, Hopscotch?

LEVINE: Jump Rope.

ACETO: Jump rope, that's it. Go to school, we kind of liked school.

LEVINE: Did you go to a, did you have a nun? Or did you go to a regular school?

ACETO: A regular teacher. Public school.

LEVINE: Was your family a religious family?

ACETO: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: You remember any of the like ceremonies or big festivals, religious events that you celebrated over there.

ACETO: Oh, yes August 15, that was the assumption and we had a procession, firework, band, and food by the bushel (laughs). All the relatives get together, oh yeah that was beautiful.

LEVINE: Did you have sisters and brothers then?

**ACETO**  
**EI-1000**

ACETO: no, I had only one sister, which she lives Cape Elizabeth. She was only five years old when we came. Then my mother had another daughter when we came over here in 1929. My young sister [ ], she died at the age of 36. And that's it.

LEVINE: And ah, so did you have a family on your mother's side, over there?

ACETO: Oh, yes, there's still some there, in Florence and my home town too.

LEVINE: Do you remember your house?

ACETO: Beautiful, my house, you saw.

LEVINE: Just describe it a little bit.

ACETO: Was [ ], how do you say that, stucco.

LEVINE: Stucco.

ACETO: Pink, the outside. With a green shudders, oh, was beautiful, we don't supposed to be here. Just because my mother love my father so much, I didn't even know what love was. So she want come over and she dragged me over here.

LEVINE: So in other words when your father came back when you were 12, then he left and came back here.

ACETO: um huh, um huh, he left, yeah I think he only stay about four or five months there. Because he had a business here, shoe [ ].

LEVINE: In Portland?

ACETO: Yeah, in Hyde Street.

**LEVINE**

**ACETO**  
**EI-1000**

LEVINE: So did you work at all after you finished school, before you came over here?

ACETO: There?

LEVINE: Yeah.

ACETO: No. This place was a little town with, they didn't have no factory nothing. Second, I was the only one, they thought I was the queen. Never work.

LEVINE: And how about food? What do you remember of the kinds of food that you liked when you were little?

ACETO: I like everything, my mother used to make homemade spaghetti, boiled spaghetti, rigatoni, [ ], ravioli, everything. It was supposed to be...

LEVINE: Ah, so when ah, do you remember when your mother told you that you and your sister and she were going to come over?

ACETO: I think she don't, you don't think how special those days. Of course they know once they here and I had two homes, two house there.

LEVINE: Well could you describe yourself, what were you like when you were 17 years old, when you came to this country?

ACETO: Crazy young girl. [ ] but full of fun. Which I could never fun because my mother was so strict.

LEVINE: Oh, your mother was strict. Was your father strict too?

ACETO: Not really. But my mother was...6:00 the entrance of the house was closed, locked for the night. But then was, it's a little town, you can't go nowhere.

**ACETO**  
**EI-1000**

LEVINE: So, um, was your grandfather alive when you left?

ACETO: Oh, no, they all there. They're all gone.

LEVINE: Did you take anything in particular with you that you wanted to bring to this new country?

ACETO: Oh, my mother did. She had two trunks full, all the things that she had, nice things and the China [ ], in, in Italy.

LEVINE: You still have your trunk?

ACETO: Oh, I still have my trunk yes.

LEVINE: Really, wow. Do you remember leaving the house? Did the people come and say goodbye?

ACETO: Oh, yes, the people was like this, full of people, then was 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon. In November 5, we left. (rings)

LEVINE: Ok, we're going to have to close...

ACETO: No, no, wait a minute...(break)

LEVINE: (continue) Ok, so tell me did a lot of other people from your town go to America before you did.

ACETO: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: And what did you hear from them, or what did you expect about the place?

**ACETO**  
**EI-1000**

ACETO: Well to tell you the truth I didn't hear nothing, because I didn't want to hear, my mother wants to move here and I says alright. You don't think on, they your parents when they want to do something, especially when your younger or. Now I can say, "No, you go I don't want to go."

LEVINE: Did your father tell you any things or write any letters, you know about his life here in Portland?

ACETO: Not really, he used to write to my mother, and uh, he was making papers and says, "get ready because I'm making papers, you and Helda and the little girl, Franchesca, you gotta come over here." And [ ] and the glory, she want him over here.

LEVINE: So what about everybody in the town right before you left, can you remember?

ACETO: The people I want the people, of course I'd remember, I've been back five times. But some of the people now it's all gone, everybody die.

LEVINE: But did they come to your home and say goodbye?

ACETO: Oh yes, oh yes, yes. One my friends she [ ] those stage coach they used to use then.

LEVINE: A horse and a wagon?

ACETO: Yeah. One my friend who's there she hand [ ] where you go, stay here, where you going?

LEVINE: So you gonna miss your friends huh?

**ACETO**  
**EI-1000**

ACETO: No, they all there those friends.  
(background chatter)

ACETO: That's now, [ ] now. Yeah, but uh, now it's my life here, 70 years here, I got my family I lost my daughter a year and a half ago. My life is here, but uh, even now if I go back I would come home here.

LEVINE: How do you think about yourself, as far as, your Italian heritage and becoming an American for so many years in this country, how do you think about those two sides of yourself?

ACETO: Well, I let that side long go, this is my life.

LEVINE: Ok, so the Mandolin was that part of, did you have music and everything before you left?

ACETO: Oh, yeah, I had a boyfriend, used to serenade me every weekend.

LEVINE: He serenaded you? (giggles) Were you in the window?

ACETO: Oh, no, no...

LEVINE: Tell me about your boyfriend and the serenading.

ACETO: Yeah, he want me, but my mother says no, absolutely not. He came after me I was 13, 14, years old, I was 17, when I came over here. Wasn't time for me to have a boyfriend. He's my boyfriend.

LEVINE: Ok, so when you left by the horse and the wagon, do you remember where you, where did you travel to? And how long did it take?

**ACETO**  
**EI-1000**

ACETO: Well this is my hometown. We had to go to get the train, to go to Naples. So we had to take the stagecoach. We were supposed to uh, mail carrier during the stage coach, it's not the stage coach you see here on T.V. was a little nice.

LEVINE: Was it just you and your sister and your mother, traveling?

ACETO: Yeah.

LEVINE: So you got...

ACETO: To Naples.

LEVINE: ...to Naples and did you stay in Naples before you took the ship?

ACETO: Oh, yeah, two days.

LEVINE: And what was it, had you ever been to Naples? How did that strike you?

ACETO: Scary like, but uh, when I looked the balcony I saw the bay there, Naples Bay. All the water, I had never seen that much water. (laughs) And then on the ship, (sighs) the ship was rough, the water was rough. [ ] the mess outside, that was terrible. I says if God make me go in America I'll never cross this water again. I cross five time on a plane.

LEVINE: So what happened, do you remember anything aboard ship? Any incidents that happened?

ACETO: No, they used to dance there every night they had a dance, but I couldn't do it, I couldn't go because my mother won't let me.

LEVINE: So were you traveling, in what it was called Steerage, in the bottom of the boat.

**ACETO**  
**EI-1000**

ACETO: Oh no, we sat in glass, we came.

LEVINE: So as far as food, and sleeping...

ACETO: Was good, more good, good, yeah. We sit on the, at the table and those swivel table, on the swivel chair. With the, with everything. Wine, Spaghetti, Meat, and then three o'clock, the bell ring on the ship, if you want to have something, a break or you call the...

LEVINE: Like a tea time?

ACETO: Tea, marmalade, crackers, [ ], it's a bread. We had everything.

LEVINE: Do you remember the ship coming into the New York Harbor?

ACETO: Oh yes, I remember, people on a board, my mother had three brothers in New York. They all came with uh, three veterans they didn't have the cars, they had taxi, taxi. Three taxi and this guy says, "This lady was not on the ship with us." We didn't know she says, "I'm going to sit in place." And my mother says, "I think this the same place I go." It was, because her husband came after the lady, so the wife introduce, my mother name, her husband says, "Oh my God," her brother was here they left and went back home. Now we had to wait there, until this guy and his wife go back, because they live up and down with my uncles. Says, "you better go and get your sister," because he says, "I met his daughter, she's a young lady and they were waiting for you." Instead, those my uncle, they already went back says, they not there.

LEVINE: They went back to Portland?

ACETO: No, Astoria.

**ACETO  
EI-1000**

LEVINE: Astoria.

ACETO: So anyway, finally they came and we went over there.

LEVINE: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when the boat first pulled into the...

ACETO: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Did you know what that meant at that point?

ACETO: Statue of Liberty?

LEVINE: Did people respond, do anything special when they saw it or anything?

ACETO: No.

LEVINE: How about seeing New York, what was your first impression of that?

ACETO: You want to hear something, my mother says, "Oh, my hometown is better than this." (laughs)

LEVINE: And how about Ellis Island, what do you remember, everything you remember about that.

ACETO: It was nice, was nice, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember your experience there?

ACETO: All the people would cry here, cry there, and somebody have go back because, they had lice. But was nice, wasn't much what they say now, sometime, I saw that one time Ellis Island on T.V. and people crying, they had send them back

**ACETO**  
**EI-1000**

somebody there, what's his name, the Godfather, I saw the Godfather too.

Nothing happen to us.

LEVINE: Did you remem-do you remember being examined there?

ACETO: What do you mean examined?

LEVINE: In other words, your hair checked, your heart checked...

ACETO: No, they look at you. They look at you, if you look alright, pass. But, like I says, lotta young girls there go back, not back to Italy in a hostel there to clean her up or whatever it is they supposed to do. And that's it, then we came to this country.

LEVINE: So when you left Ellis Island, where did you go to?

ACETO: My uncle's house in Astoria, Long Island.

LEVINE: And what were your first impressions after leaving the ship and going to Astoria?

ACETO: Nothing, this America. I saw all the trees, you know, like this, I says to my mother, "Why did you take me here for? This is a forest." Because I'd never seen [ ] [ ]. A lot of trees, down a... the road.

LEVINE: And now there aren't so many, in New York, when your going to Astoria. Um, ok, so you stayed with your uncle, how long did you stay?

ACETO: Two days. Then we took the train at night, 9:00 at night, we were here in Union Station, 7:00 in the morning. 7:00 in the morning there was people that they got supper. With a car, but the peoples supposed to take us didn't come, somebody else took us, we're not, you know when you go to Union Station it's like this

**ACETO**  
**EI-1000**

cobble street that is a little bit high. Well the cobles no good, it's start to go back. See what you did to me, even the cousins no good.

LEVINE: It's sounds like your mother never heard the end of it, did she?

ACETO: She says, "I don't know what's going to do something, no you didn't and I want to go home." Well my father was so tired of listening to me, so one Saturday morning, he went out, he says to my mother, he says, "I can't stand her crying anymore." I cry for three years, he went to the van he got five hundred dollars and he come home, gave me five hundred dollars, says, "go home." Because we had two house there, go home, got your uncles there, your aunts there, and your cousins, go home. I look at my mother, I look at my little sister and I says where the hell I'm gonna go. Neither my mother, and my sister, I didn't care for my father because I never saw him. Says no, I want to stay here, that's it I'm here.

LEVINE: Was there a time when you started liking being here?

ACETO: Took three years, more than three years.

LEVINE: Did you remember the turning point when you felt like you really wanted to be here?

ACETO: Yeah, another thing, when you come from other country to learn the language here, it's fully hard. And you don't understand you can't talk. I felt bad, because I thought everybody was talking about me. It's hard, it's fully hard.

LEVINE: Especially because you didn't go to school, so you weren't learning it in school, did you work at all in this country?

ACETO: When I was young, single, I never work here. I work after.

**ACETO**  
**EI-1000**

LEVINE: So when did you meet your husband?

ACETO: Oh, that was, 7 years after I came over here.

LEVINE: And how did you meet?

ACETO: I met my husband, because, see his mother maiden name is Donatelli and my mother's maiden name Donatelli, and some how there relate somewhere, I don't know where, way, what. So, but, her, my father-in-law, not my father [ ], he invited to go see his wife because his wife had miscarried, my mother-in-law, she was younger, she was young. So that's how we were there. So I met this young, your father, he took me home that night, he didn't speak good Italian, I didn't speak English either. So we talk and talk, says, "I want to take you to movies," I says, "movies, what's movies?" I didn't even know what movies are. So anyway to make a long story short, me him, and his two sisters, we went to the movies one Saturday. That's it, he started to come around, and that's it.

LEVINE: And what was your husbands name?

ACETO: Thomas.

LEVINE: So um, then you stayed living in Portland the whole time?

ACETO: Yes, I lived with my in laws 11 years, he was born there, there with the family. All my three kids, I had a daughter, that beautiful girl there and my other son Charlie, my son Rocco.

LEVINE: So was that sort of a customary thing, to move in with your in laws?

ACETO: No, it wasn't, no. My father was a good man, that time in 1934, there was depression when I got married and my father in law he was contracted. And when

**ACETO**  
**EI-1000**

they talk about the marriage, his father says to me, well we'll live with my mother and father. And then in the spring, we'll built a home for you and I, I says, "ok." The house still named Brighton Ave up here somewhere. But wasn't for me they sold the house after they built, I stay with my in-laws, 11 years. Until I couldn't take anymore I had to get out.

LEVINE: So, um, is that, during those 11 years, is that when you started to working in someway?

ACETO: No.

LEVINE: Later?

ACETO: No, after my divorce, he divorced me, because I ask I want a home.

LEVINE: Ah, so then you went to work.

ACETO: Oh, yes. And my mother took care of my kids.

LEVINE: Well that must have been a rough time and during the depression. (pause) So, when you think of your life, looking back on it, what were the high points of it? What do you feel satisfied about? What makes you feel good when you think about it?

ACETO: I feel good now, that, I was independent after I started to work. Now I got two sons, I lost my daughter, and I got all kinds of grandchildren, great grandchildren. I'm satisfied now. I have to, I have to be satisfied. My daughter never come back. Yeah.

LEVINE: And do you think the fact that you came here, that you immigrated to a new country, do you think that made a difference?

**ACETO  
EI-1000**

ACETO: More different.

LEVINE: What difference did it make to you personally, do you think?

ACETO: Well because, now it's all right...(phone rings)...that's Charlie. That's Charlie []  
[]. (rings) I didn't want stay here (answering machine)...

LEVINE: You, you were say, I was...(Boop) I was asking you what difference it made to  
you to have immigrated here. You said you didn't want to stay at first.

ACETO: No. (answering machine in background interrupting conversation) For me it was  
terrible because first thing, you don't understand the language. Second, uh, just I  
didn't want to stay, but I have to stay because of my mother and my little sister.

LEVINE: Do you think you've developed any strengths in yourself as a result of having to  
kind of start all over again in a new place?

ACETO: Oh, yes. Some of the things this is my life now, my mothers here. I love my  
mother so much, to make my mother happy, I stayed. (she is moved) And then I  
got look what I got. See that's my three kids, see.

LEVINE: Very nice.

ACETO: That's her daughter...

(END TAPE ONE)

(START SIDE B)

LEVINE: Ah, how about customs? Or ways that of thin- ways of doing things that you did  
in the old country.

**ACETO**  
**EI-1000**

ACETO: It's the same thing.

LEVINE: What kinds of things did you carry over to this country?

ACETO: What do you mean?

LEVINE: What kinds of customs, or ways of doing things, do you do here that you used to do there.

ACETO: The same thing I do here, I did there. I didn't do to much there because my mother used do it.

LEVINE: But what kinds of things do you do here that she did there?

ACETO: Cook, I never cook there, my mother did all the cooking. Bacon, I never, just the more, my mother, and now I do everything. What I did when I went to live with my in-laws, they know that I was an Italian girl, they know that I would do everything and left everything to me. Cook, is a food, (mumbles) you cook. I've been a cook ever since (laughs).

LEVINE: Ah, ok, is there anything else that you can think of, did you, do you...I guess you've been back to visit, but it's not as though you would want to return.

ACETO: I will, I'm going...

LEVINE: You gonna go back again, ah huh. Do you think that your life would have been completely different if you'd never come?

**ACETO**  
**EI-1000**

ACETO: Oh, yes. Yes, because when you was, you're born in some place and you stay there. You do everything there. What they do there now, over here you have to learn and...but I did, I did.

LEVINE: Well it sounds like it wasn't easy in the beginning.

ACETO: No it wasn't.

LEVINE: Ok, and how about this period in your life, now that your children are grown and you have grandchildren and great grandchildren.

ACETO: Sad. It's alright, I mean when I see my grandchildren I love to see. Oh, yeah, but everybody's got their whole family, no, not on the side.

LEVINE: Well is there anything else that you can think of that maybe we didn't talk about that has to do with your life before you came or coming here, or being here most of your life.

ACETO: Well, father, my mother before I came, like I said. A young girl, you want to do like every other young girls do, but I couldn't do because my mother wouldn't let me. That's it. My hometown [ ] now, now he promise me that he was going to back, now's he's got to see his daughters in-laws she's having a baby. I like to go back all by myself and I can't.

LEVINE: Ok, well I wanna thank you for all the things you could remember and now you'll be part of the Ellis Island Oral History Collection of people talking about their experiences. And um, I just want to say thank you,

ACETO: Your welcome.

**ACETO  
EI-1000**

LEVINE: I've been speaking with Hilda Aceto here in Portland, Maine on May 13, 1998.  
This is Janet Levine signing off.

(End Tape)