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DOMINIC REALI

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LEVINE: —August 2nd, 1998 and I'm here in Portland, Maine with Dominic Reali, who came from Italy in 1955 at the age of 12. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. If we could start with your birth date again for the tape and where in Italy you were born.

REALI: I was born December 28, 1942 in Chiprano [PH], Italy.

LEVINE: And [clears throat] you lived in Chiprano up until—

REALI: Yes.

LEVINE: —you were 12 and left—

REALI: Right.

LEVINE: —for the United States. Okay. And your mother and father's names?

REALI: My name was—my mother's name was Celeste and my father's name's Arduino—A-R-D-U-I-N-O.

LEVINE: Okay, and your mother's maiden name?

REALI: Carla Franchesci [PH].

LEVINE: [chuckles] Carla Franchesci?

REALI: Yeah, I'll write it for you.

LEVINE: Okay.

REALI: I can't spell. I haven't spelled for so long.

LEVINE: Okay. And did you have grandparents living around Chiprano?

REALI: Yeah, I had a grandmother on my mother's side and I had a grandfather on my father's side. And the other two are both deceased—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

REALI: —before I—before I was born.

LEVINE: Do—do you remember the two—

REALI: Yeah, I remember them very well.

LEVINE: How do you remember them? What are the kinds of things that you remember about them?

REALI: Well, just like a typical, you know, and the [unclear] lady that—they're—always had an apron on and always in front of the fireplace to cook supper or dinner or whatever. And everything was made by hand and—the major thing was that, where we lived, we lived on the outskirts of town.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

REALI: And we lived—lived in a farm, was like a shareholder deal. They—they furnish with the house and—and the animals and you just worked the land.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

REALI: And my grandparents—my mother's side's mother, she lived in—in a city on the—just closer to the city than we did. And when we used to go visit

there, they—you know, they always give us, maybe, like a piece of fruit, which we really did not have on the farm. So that was like a luxury, like kids today go to their grandmothers and grandparents and they might get a—you know, an ice cream bar or a piece of candy. Over there, it was a piece of fruit. And that meant a lot to us. And, you know, they were very hard-working people. You know, my grandmother lived to be 92 years old. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Wow. Huh.

REALI: And my grandfather on my father's side, he was—he was 92 also. And I remember him as—I still have pictures over in my house but a guy, 98, very handsome. As best as I can remember, he still had a full head on his shoulder. He liked his glass of wine because, you know, in Italy, they—everybody makes their own wine, especially in those days.

LEVINE: Yeah.

REALI: And he used to walk around with a cane, you know, and then he lived with one—well, one of his sons. They were both great people.

LEVINE: Now, was your grandfather also like a—a shareholder or [unclear]?

REALI: Yes, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

REALI: Yeah, yeah. That was very common in those days. You know, as a kid, that left such an impression on my head because, like I said, where we lived it was li—it was like one bedroom house. Then we had a kitchen, if you want to call it a kitchen. Then we had, like, a storage area and then they—we had the barn for the animals. And we all slept in the same room.

LEVINE: Hmm.

REALI: The only floor that had a floor in it was the bedroom. Everything else was dirt floors. No refrigeration.

LEVINE: Oh.

REALI: No lighting, no running water, no bathroom in the house. I mean, it was just—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

REALI: You know, when I tell people these stories, they don't believe me.
[chuckles] But I was just there in October of last year.

LEVINE: Has it changed a lot?

REALI: Oh, yeah. Absolutely.

LEVINE: Yeah.

REALI: Yeah. I mean, and I was back there even before that. I've been back twice. No, actually—excuse me—three times. And things have—I mean, they live a better life than we do now.

LEVINE: Yeah?

REALI: It's a—it's a mucher—slower-paced life than we live in—and I have—I have tons of cousins there. They all have two automobiles. They all have homes like we have and some of them, even better. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Ah.

REALI: But, you know, they're—they—you know, they live a mucher different life. You know, they—most of the houses still, you know, outside the [unclear] of the cities, they still have their own gardens. So they raise most of their greens and, you know, stuff that they have to eat. And then they walk in town and buy whatever they don't grow. One thing that amazed me the most and I was just—like I say, I was just there in October—and my cousins' houses and, actually, any house that I saw, the refrigeration is very tiny compared to ours, because, mainly, everything's cooked day by day and the consume it, [unclear] they eat it. And nothing's actually refrigerated. Very little. That—that—that was kind of—[chuckles] that was kind of surprising.

LEVINE: And they don't—they—so they don't buy it. They don't go to a supermarket and buy [unclear]—

REALI: No, because—

LEVINE: Buy everyday—

REALI: —most of the product they buy, and I'm speaking of my hometown of Chiprano—most of it's bought in outside markets, you know, and Saturday mornings they all—twice a week they come in and set up tents right in the middle of the cities. And that's where they bring—you can buy anything, clothes, fish, meats, cold cuts. You name it, you can buy it, just like you

do at a supermarket. So that's—that's mainly where they do most of their shopping, if—

LEVINE: Hmm.

REALI: But it's done daily, you know.

LEVINE: Do you remember market days from—

REALI: Oh, ab—

LEVINE: —when you were a little boy?

REALI: Oh, absolutely.

LEVINE: Well, could you talk about that and describe that [unclear]?

REALI: Yeah, it was just—you know, in those days, actually, I—I remember much, much bigger because I was—I was a young kid. And naturally, when you think back 30 years ago, you—you—you think that things were so much bigger.

LEVINE: Right.

REALI: But, you know, what—there used to be two—two different types of market. One was the—to buy all the needs that you needed for home. Like, you know, if you needed fruit or if you wanted to buy macaroni or if you wanted to buy a loaf of bread, which was very rare because we—you know, my mother would make that all, you know, at home. That there was another—another street that you went up and you bought all—there would be all kinds of animals, from cows to horses to goats, whatever you wanted to buy. So there was two—two different t—to me, in those days, that was like, you know, somebody today probably going to a—to an opera or to a big play. It was the sa—

LEVINE: Theme park. [chuckles]

REALI: You know. Yeah, that's right. I mean, to me, it was just as exciting just to see that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

REALI: And, you know—and it was. It was very exciting because we didn't go to the city that often. It was just on special occasions or, at times, if there was a feast going on. You know, and I mean, you know, I mean, I remember those days as clear as if they were yesterday. And the most

we got out of that, if we were lucky, if we got one ice cream. You know, because my parents were very poor. We didn't have—you know, we didn't have much of anything. So naturally, our eyes always [unclear] much more open than—than the regular city kids that were living in the cities because we were not accustomed to that. We didn't see it, you know.

LEVINE: Right. Do you think you got your—your love for working with food, somehow connected?

REALI: No, no. I think what is made me somewhat successful is that remembering where I was brought up, how I was brought up and how hard it was to put food on the table. It was very hard because, like I say, you know, we—we used to have to walk to school. And if—the best I can remember, we used to have to be in school by eight o'clock in the morning. And we had—and I think school ended at one o'clock in the afternoon or something like that. And what we brought—what we brought to school to eat was a slice of bread. That was it; that was our lunch.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

REALI: And the bread was made of cornbread. It was not, like a white bread.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

REALI: And when we got to school, when we—when I finally got to the fourth grade, then I had to go to the city or the school, we used to swap our bread with the city kids because they—they would have white bread. They never ate the—the cornmeal bread so we used to swap.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

REALI: And, you know, so I mean, that kind of lifestyle. I used to have to get up in the morning very early to take the animals out to eat because, you know, we didn't have the luxury of feeding them in the barns. We had to actually take them out, water them and let them eat in the—in the pasture.

LEVINE: Yeah.

REALI: And we had to watch them because we had to hang onto them be, if we didn't, they would—they would eat the grapes and they'd go in the corn or the—or the grain fields and stuff. And so we actually hang onto the ropes while they ate. So that was my job before I went to school. So the school system, as best I can recall, it worked around the farm hours. You know, which I had to do at home, because—I mean, and—and I think that's why in those days too that most parents used to have tons of kids, because

that's the only—they could survive working these farms. You know, the more help they could get from their own household, the better off they were.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

REALI: So—

LEVINE: So what would—could you describe, like, a typical day? I mean, you get up.

REALI: Yeah, typical day, you get up and, you know, you start doing your chores. You would either go out and get grass for the rabbits or feed the chickens or clean the stalls for the—for the cows, take the cows out, make them eat, drink, bring them back, make sure, you know, you fed the pigs. You know, we used to—we used to raise a pig, rabbits, chickens and the cows. Of course, the reason we had the cows to work the fields because everything was done by hand. We didn't have no tractor, motors. Everything was done by hand. So, you know, that took, you know an average—if I remember right, I used to get up at four o'clock in the morning and went to school around eight. And we had to walk to school. And that would take probably a—a good half hour to 45 minutes walk. Then we'd go to school and we'd come home; we'd start over again. We would do all our chores for us, then sit down and eat—eat supper at dusk, which, you know, was—everything was made from scratch. And that was my sister's job because my mother and father, they would be in the fields from dusk to dawn—excuse me, from dawn to dusk.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

REALI: Work in the fields and everything was done by hand. So my sister's job was to cook the meals while, you know, my parents worked the fields. And then we were all done with our shows, we used to go and help our parents do field work, which it could mean any—anything from harvesting something or weeding—weeding the grains or the cornfields or whatever. There was always plenty to do, plenty to do. But there was a lot of lack of goodies. You know, I mean, we never—at Christmastime, you know, we used to put our stockings, and we used to get a couple oranges. And we thought we were getting the world, you know, because that's all there was at—

LEVINE: Yeah.

REALI: You know, but we made it through it and I think—like I say, when I think back of those days, which I wouldn't change for anything, because

obviously it was the right way to bring me up because, you know, I've done okay.

LEVINE: Yeah.

REALI: And I think that's why I've—I have been somewhat successful in my business, because of that thrive of—that you had to get up if you wanted to eat that day. You know, there was nobody going—was going to give it to you for nothing. You had to work very, very hard. I remember one specific thing. My brother, Frankie—he's a little younger than me. I remember I heard his first cry when he was born because we all—like I say again, we all slept in the same room. And my mother was working in the field that particular night, that particular day all day long. And the reason I remember that, we—we were home sitting around the fireplace and my mother was cooking dinner. And she would—and she actually, you know, everything was cooked on an open fire. I mean, there was no such thing as stove or anything like that. You know, they used to have little pieces of wrought iron that you could probably could put a pot over it, but with—you know, with a open fire underneath it. And my sister, Phyllis, went to set on her tummy and she said, "No, my tummy hurts." And that night my brother, Frankie, was born. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Wow.

REALI: You know, so I mean, you know, there's a lot of memories.

LEVINE: Were—were there midwives? Do—did—

REALI: Yeah, there was a midwife. Yeah, I tell this to my friends all the time and they laugh at me. In this country, the second that you think you're pregnant, you start going to the doctor once a month or maybe sometimes even more than that.

LEVINE: Right.

REALI: Towards the end it's a lot more than that. In Italy there's no such a thing. I mean, every one of us were born in my mother's bed. And the only thing she had is a midwife that came in and cut the cord and that was it. And—and they came back once in a while to make you chicken soup. That was the thing in Italy, that once a woman had a baby, that she would have chicken soup for a week or two or whatever it was. So there was never any help. There was never any doctors and, you know, and my mother had four children. We all lived. You know, we were very fortunate.

LEVINE: Right.

REALI: But in those days, every—had the children the same way, you know.

LEVINE: Was there anything else about health care that you remember with this?

REALI: It was—

LEVINE: Whether it was like old wives—

REALI: In those days—in those days, act—exactly. You lived on all theories that everybody else did. You know, people got to say, “Oh, yeah. Keep”—you know, “This will work for this.” You know, whatever. I mean, there was no medicine. I mean, if—I mean, I’m not saying there was not in the cities. But you couldn’t afford to go to a doctor. So everything was done on old-people theories, whatever worked. You know, if you took some kind of a herb that you found on the side of the road, you know, you melted it down or you rubbed it down, whatever. You put it on your body and you—they believe. And they—there’s one thing that I do remember specifically. Italian people are very, very superstitious, very, very superstitious, especially in those days. They all think [unclear] giving you the [unclear] and, you know, very superstitious people. [chuckles]

LEVINE: [chuckles] Do you remember any of the particular superstitions, like, growing up?

REALI: Oh, Jesus. Oh, yeah. I mean, tons of things. I—like if somebody give you the [unclear], you know, they used to call them leuk—[PH] I can’t even—I can’t even pronounce it right anymore because it’s been such a long time that it would cause you bad luck and stuff like that. And—and a lot of times people used to change their pillows because somebody thought they give them—they give them the old [unclear] that something would happen to the pillows while you’re sleeping at nights. And I really can’t remember the actual details. And they definitely believe in ghosts. I mean, every—I mean, any given night, somebody would tell you a ghost story. And I swear to God, I seen one too because they talked about it so much, because over there, when you went from—if you went to visit someone, let’s say from one farmhouse to one other, it was pitch dark. The only thing you had for lights was the sky. And, you know, it was very easy as a young child, regardless if it was me or someone else—it was very easy to see something in front of you, because, you know, even now when I—every once in a while, you know, you go in the woods and you’re—you’re looking around and you swear to God you see an animal.

LEVINE: Right.

REALI: And that’s all it is is a twig moving back and forth in the fields. But very superstitious people. [chuckles]

LEVINE: What do you think—why do you think that is? I mean, why should Italians—

REALI: Well, be—

LEVINE: —in particular, be superstitious?

REALI: Well, because I think what it was is that—and again, I'm only speaking of my area where I was born and where we were brought up, there was so much little knowledge on the outside world. You know, you did not have a—a radio. We did not have a TV to go by. Everything we learned, it was either by mistakes or by people around you. So I think that's how a lot of the superstition was going, because it was coming from one generation to another. And you—there was just stories being retold and retold and retold as generations went by. And like I said, there was nothing that reinforced it by nothing else because we had nothing. I mean, we never saw a newspaper where we were. So I mean, how can you learn anything except for what you, in your own ability, that you can hear or put it together and say, "Oh, yeah. That's right. You know, I did see a ghost yesterday." Or, you know, "It's going to rain tomorrow because the sky's just right." There was just things that would—

LEVINE: Right.

REALI: —were passed on.

LEVINE: Right, right, right. Who—who were the—who were the key people in your little town? Was—was it like the priest, or was there a mayor or—

REALI: To be honest with you, I—I can't answer that because I really didn't know because I—I was so—

LEVINE: Involved in your—

REALI: I mean, we were so involved where we lived, we really did not pay that much attention there, because like I say, you know, my mother was the one went to town to buy groceries when she had to, only when she had to. So we were kind of living in a separate world altogether. We didn't see none of that so it really didn't matter. I—you know, I—I do remember once in a great while, if I ever went to town, they used to have like a cry—what the heck they call them? A—a person that would stand in the middle—in the middle of the piazza. And he would actually scream off the news that was going on around town. He was—he was almost like a newspaper—

LEVINE: Oh.

REALI: —except it was coming vocally. And that was used in those days. I mean, I do remember that. People would get in the middle of—you know, certain people would get in and say, “This and this and this is happening. Blah, blah, blah.” And, you know, there’s a name for it. I can’t think of it. I don’t know if they call him the town crier or something.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

REALI: But that was used. But as far as mayors or something, we looked up to everybody. I mean, if we saw a police officer, we thought it was God. You know, because it was somebody above you and he was dressed differently than you were.

LEVINE: Right.

REALI: Different authorities. So, you know, even the guy that came around that owned the farm. I mean, this guy, I mean, left a big impression on my mind that he would—you know, he would come in with a horse and buggy carrying a 12-gauge shotgun beside him. And he was always dressed up, the best I can remember is like a suit, you know, with a big hat. And I mean, to us, when we saw something like that, that was—he was the boss, you know, and you—you did anything you could possibly do to please him and make sure, you know, nothing was done wrong because, I mean, everything was shared. If you had a pear tree, you could not harvest that pear tree unless he was there. And everything was counted, so many for him, so many for us, so many for him, so many for us. And some stuff was—was more in his favor and some stuff was a bit more in our favor. But he’s the one that made all the money. And to us, he was—he was the guy because that’s the only guy we came in contact with. So we didn’t know no mayor; we did not know, you know, who was running the actual city and so on and so forth.

LEVINE: So he probably would have been your hero or—

REALI: Yeah. More or less, yeah, he was because, like I say, you know, he—he was a power person to—to my eyes, you know, because—

LEVINE: Did he have—did he have a—did you have a personal relat—

REALI: No, no.

LEVINE: Would he—yeah.

REALI: You know, I might have said hi or something like that. But no, no, because, again, in those days, our lifestyle was totally different. The parents—the father did the role of negotiating or doing the talking. We—you know, we were taught to stay on the sideline and—and be quiet, in a sense, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. Were there—were there any attitudes that you can think of that your mother and father tried to instill in you and your brothers and sis—your brother and sisters in particular?

REALI: Well, I'm not so sure I can answer that. I mean, I think what our parents installed in us, like they—it was instilled in them with they—parents, that it was a hard world and you had to really work hard to be able to survive. I—you know, I mean, I know that they instilled in us honesty because I could speak for all my—my two sisters and brother. They were all honest. We don't take advantage of anybody. I think that—it just came with it. You know what I'm saying? Because they were very hard working people and they all—not just my parents; they all were. I mean, you know, every day. I mean, if I could just show you a picture, if I could draw it—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

REALI: Everyday being hunched over in a field working 14, 15 hours a day—

LEVINE: Wow.

REALI: Seven days a week. I mean, that's more of an education to—you know, in a sense that anybody could possibly get.

LEVINE: Yeah. You know, I think I'm going to [unclear]—well, how about religion? Were you a religious family or not particularly?

REALI: Not really, because we were too far—again, we were like an hour walk from the town. And like I say, there was always—

LEVINE: [unclear] church?

REALI: Well, there was church. There was church but it was too far and like I said—

LEVINE: Yeah.

REALI: And most of the time we were just too busy—

LEVINE: To go to—

REALI: Well, you know, of course, our chores didn't change, no matter rain or shine or Sunday or Monday, our chores never changed. And we had to do so many things every day. So, you know, very rare we went to town. Like I say, and a special occasion, if it was a holiday or something special, then we would go in town. There was a small church and—you know, there was more than one. And it was called Sa—Saint Rocco [PH]. And—and we went to it. But it was—it was not an every-Sunday occasion. You know, so, you know, whatever religion we felt, it was more or less what we knew, you know, within ourselves, you know, in our household where our parents tried to teach us, but other than that, you know—

LEVINE: Hmm. Uh-hmm. And how about—what did you do for enjoyment? Or what did your parents do for enjoyment?

REALI: Not a—

LEVINE: Did your [several words unclear]?

REALI: Not a thing. [chuckles] Not a thing. They just—the only thing they knew was work. Yeah, I mean, you know—I mean, to them, if—if a neighbor came over, they sat around the fireplace and shot the breeze with them, that we enjoyment, or visa versa.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

REALI: I mean, they did that, you know, but, you know, because like I say, remember, there was no automobiles in those days. That's all they had for transportation, bicycles. And there was no lights; everything was pitch dark. So when it became night, most likely you were in your own house and, you know, because you went to bed early because you had to get up very early. But, you know, the only thing I would say, mainly, would be visiting the neighbor and shoot the breeze a few hours and—and that was about it. You know, and then, you know, in today's time—I mean, in the later years, what people used to do in—in towns, they would go to downtown in the piazza and they'd hang around the piazza having a cup of coffee. And that's where the—the news we caught up. You know, they'd be talking the things would happen. You know, and—and—but in our case, because we live too far, that didn't happen very often.

LEVINE: How about anything with music or dancing? Anything like that?

REALI: Nothing. No.

LEVINE: And so—so you really didn't play, like an [unclear]?

REALI: No. Yeah, we played outside, you know, to ourselves—you know, kids' games, whatever we played. But that's not—like I said, there was—we never owned a radio. I didn't even know what a radio was like. I mean, out of the 12 years I lived in Italy, the best I can remember, I went to one movie and I can't even remember who took me there. You know, because like I say, we had nothing. We were very, very poor people so we didn't have anything.

LEVINE: Did you have any toys that you remember?

REALI: I cannot remember. To the best of my knowledge, if there were it was homemade stuff, you know. Yeah, I did have something. I—I can't—I don't even know what the heck they call them. You—it's a little thing that—it's rounded and it's almost shaped like an egg and it's got a—a point on a bottom.

LEVINE: Oh, like a top?

REALI: I—I'm not sure. And you—

LEVINE: Spins?

REALI: You wipe—you wind it with—you put string around and you throw it on the ground and it spins. You know, we had stuff like that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

REALI: You know, we used to play marbles on the way to school and back from school, and we used to throw them as we walked. We played with marbles; probably that was one of my biggest thing [chuckles]—it's funny you mention that. Because when I left the country and I had a best friend and that's where I left them, my bag of marbles. And that was my possession. You know. [chuckles] And, yeah, so we—you know, we did have a few games that, you know, that we played. And we did play bingo, believe it or not.

LEVINE: Wow.

REALI: They—they didn't call it bingo. I think they used to call it tombla [PH], if I'm not mistaken. And I don't know how to spell that. You know, we used—little cards and they used to have little pieces of wood with numbers on it so my [unclear]—we used to play that once in a great while but not too often.

LEVINE: This—this would be children?

REALI: Yeah.

LEVINE: [unclear] children—

REALI: Yeah, they have children, everybody that, you know—

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah. Were there—were there any, like, people who came through town? Special people that, you know—like a shoemaker or anything like that? Was—was that something that you remember?

REALI: In a town, yes. No question about it. But what we loved, very rare that somebody would come into your home to try to sell you something. Because like I say, you know, they—you were too far away, number one. And the houses were too spread out, really, because, again, those guys would have to either use a bike or walk to do that. Not very often. It doesn't—you know, it doesn't leave a spot on my head to say, "Yeah. Jeez, you know, they used to come around." I really don't recall it.

LEVINE: But were your clothes homemade? Is that—is that—do you remember that?

REALI: [chuckles] Most of my clothes, believe it or not, were—were from here.

LEVINE: Oh.

REALI: My uncle, Vegenzo [PH], which he was the first one that came to this country and that's how we got here. He was, like, 12 or 14 years old when he left Italy on his own, by himself, and he came to America and he settled in Portland. And what—what it was, every once in a while he would send us a pack of clothes, used clothes. My mother used to make them. You know, I mean, you got a picture with all—you used to wear the same thing over and over again. In the summer months, we always went barefooted. We used to save our shoes for the cold part of the year. And, you know, we learned to sew them. I used to be able to sew my own shoes, you know, with their—if they're ripped. I couldn't even know how to start today. You know, those are things you really learn to do for yourself, you know. You know, for example, you asked me about toys. I just remembered. When we used to butcher our pig once a year, we used to save, I believe, the bladder. And we used to blow it up and play ball with it, you know, and, you know, I mean, all the things we did was more or less home grown or homemade, you know, one or the other. You know, it was very rare that—because we didn't have the money to go out and buy it. So we—you know, in those days, you made almost everything you—you had. You know, do you need it? Regardless if it was recreation or for survival.

LEVINE: So talk about the pig. Well, that was like a—one pig a year?

REALI: One pig a year and every Christmas time area, that's when we used to butcher it and it's going to gross you out but—

LEVINE: Go ahead. [chuckles]

REALI: —it used to hang in our bedroom, you know.

LEVINE: Oh, my—

REALI: Because it used to—in those days, they really believed that once you butchered the pig it was supposed to hang for, like, two or three days to make sure that everything was drained out. And, you know, and that was made for—we used to get all different things. We used to make bruchutte [PH] with it with the hindquarters and stuff [unclear]. We used to make sausages, hang sausages, and—and the way you made bruchutte, you used to put it in—in a big tub and you used to salt it and put big, big stones in it so it would press—press all the liquids out of it. And then you used to—you used to hang it over your fireplace to smoke it. And sausages, used—all by hand. You used to cut up—cut them up all in little tiny pieces. Then they used to stuff them in the intestines and then used to hang it over your fireplaces from—for months to cure them. And once they were cured, you cut them up in lengths again. You wipe them down because they'd be all full of dust and smoke. You wipe them all down and you put them in big jars and you put olive oil in it. And they would last for years in that way so, you know, when it came time to eat, you know, she would take one or two, whatever she—my mother wan—would take. And that's what we ate. Then the lard. She used to melt the lard down and that's what she cook—she used for cooking, for, like, an oil. She would use the lard and that stuff used to—she used to put them in big jars. I remember it used to look kind of whitish after it would congeal again. So, you know, every part of the pig was—was utilized for something. Just—[chuckles] I tell people all the time. The blood, when you used—when you used to butcher the pig, the blood was saved. And then once it was congealed it looks almost like a Jell-o.

LEVINE: Right.

REALI: And you used to cut it up in chunks and put it in the frying pan and fry it and we used to eat it. So nothing was wasted.

LEVINE: Oh.

REALI: Absolutely n—like chickens. If we used to kill a chicken for whatever reason, we used to—my mother used to save the feathers and then when

she had enough feathers, she'd make a pillow with it. Nothing was thrown away. I tell people all the time. The only thing we throw away on a chicken was the beak and the toenails. Everything else was eaten.

LEVINE: Wow.

REALI: Everything.

LEVINE: How about the rabbits? Did you eat—

REALI: Same—same thing. Oh, yeah. Absolutely. That's w—that's why we raised them to—for food. So—

LEVINE: Did you use the pelts?

REALI: No, no. That we did not on—on a rabbit. We didn't. Either we did not have the knowledge how to save them or—we didn't. No.

LEVINE: Wow. So what was—would be a typical meal? Like, that you—

REALI: Typical meal? Some kind of a pasta. Pasta and sauce, pasta and beans, pasta and sauce, pasta and beans. I mean, all—polanda [PH], which is a very—

LEVINE: Cornmeal?

REALI: It's a cornmeal that, now you go to a fancy restaurant today and you buy. It's very expensive. It's like a—it's a heavy—if you could picture, if you took a bunch of cornmeal and you whipped it up until it was pretty solid. My mother—there used to be this piece of—it was like a dish. It was made out of wood that was like about two inches high but was not straight up. It was on a bevel like this. And my mother would put that stuff all inside of that. Then she would take a spoon and go around all over the top. So she'd make kind of like little holes in it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

REALI: Then she'd pour red sauce over it. Then everyone at the table would take a corner and just start eating it. And I mean, today, this is a delicatessen in restaurants and there's no question about it. Pasta fagioli [PH] was another one; we used to eat that constantly. That's little tiny macaronis with beans, some kind of—form of beans. Then my mother—in those days, she used to take the heart of the pig, boil it in water and she used to [unclear]. And you put that between two slices of bread; it was fantastic. But pasta fagioli is served everywhere in this country today as an hors d'oeuvres. In Italy, it was our livelihood. So every day of the week we ate

some form of pasta. And every once in a great while we used to get a piece of meat and that was very rare, like if we're having company for some reason. Then my mother would go in—in the chicken coop, grab a couple chicken or a couple rabbits or something, butcher them, clean them and cook them. Every—even today, like I said, when I visited my cousin in Italy in October, the same thing. They have—they have a yard where they grow all the greens. They have chickens; they have rabbits and they have pig. And they do—they're still doing the same thing.

LEVINE: Wow, wow. So what—I forgot what I was going to say. So everybody would eat together in—

REALI: Absolutely. Absolutely. Every—I mean, my mother cooked once a day on—at suppertime. We sat around the table and we ate whatever was in front of us.

LEVINE: Oh.

REALI: I can't tell you the nights that my mother would take a little bowl. She would put olive oil, salt and pepper, put it in the middle of the table. And she'd go in the garden and dig up a couple onions or something like that or bread, and that's what we'd dip the onions in that. That was our supper. You know, I mean, there's a lot of nights that—I mean, it—there was just not—

LEVINE: [unclear].

REALI: There was just not enough to have meals everyday. I mean, there was a lot of nights that's what we'll eat. You know, or a salad, something like that. You know, I mean my mother used to make bread once every 15 days. She used to make big loaves. I mean, you know, this huge. And—and the reason she made so many of them is because we had no wood. So she—she could only turn that thing on a very minimal time. It was just an outside—

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

LEVINE: —[unclear] about the outside—

REALI: Yeah, the outside oven works—cooking, works like you see today. A lot of restaurants, they have them now. It's the—it's the old fire ovens that you will fill this thing up. It's like a cavity. You fill it up with wood. You light it and, once all the wood was burned down, my mother would take,

like, a broom or a mop. [clears throat] And she would sweep that stuff all to one side on—or on the edges of the thing. And he would put the bread in the—in the center of it. Then she—they would put, like, a wooden door in front of it. Now, don't ask me how that wooden door wouldn't burn. I have no idea; I can't remember. And she would leave the bread there for x amount of time and the bread would come out beautiful—big, heavy crust, nice and crusty. But she could only make it once every 15 days because we did not have enough lumber to burn to be able to do that. And towards the end of the—of the 15 days, the bread was so hard, if you hit somebody over the head, you could kill them. So what my mother used to do was to take the bread, submerge it under water, then squeeze the water out of it, put it in a big bowl and put salt, pepper, oil and vinegar. And I'm telling you, it's delicious. And you ought to try that sometime at home.

LEVINE: Wow.

REALI: Whoever listens to this tape.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

REALI: You know, I mean, it's fantastic.

LEVINE: Huh.

REALI: You know?

LEVINE: Wow.

REALI: And that was our survival. That's how we used to survive. Nothing was thrown away. Nothing absolutely was thrown away. Yeah.

LEVINE: Was olive oil a big part of—

REALI: Oh, absolutely.

LEVINE: —what you ate?

REALI: Absolutely, yeah.

LEVINE: And did—did it grow? I mean, were the olives—

REALI: We didn't—we didn't do it. We bought that. It was—there was families that actually made it. That was a more I—a livelihood. They made oil, you know, because the ol—you know, there's olives all over Italy. And that's what—that's what their business was, making olives—excuse me,

making oil. So, you know, some of the stuff you had to buy. You had no choices. But whatever we can make with our hands, we made with our own hands.

LEVINE: And was there much—much bartering going on?

REALI: Much what?

LEVINE: Bartering?

REALI: I don't—I don't know what you mean.

LEVINE: Trading. Like, [unclear] from—

REALI: Oh, absolutely.

LEVINE: —him and you [unclear].

REALI: Oh, absolutely. Oh, absolutely. What was done most of, when it came time to harvest a crop, no matter what it was, if it was corn, grain or whatever, they would lay out the time between—between farms. So if—let's say if the Realis were picking corns this—this week, all the neighborhood farms would come there. And they would work the fields all day long. And what you did, you fed them. Then when it came their time, you went to them, so that's how, you know, we—they exchanged labor, because there was no money but they fed you. And—and so that was done a lot. And, you know—and—and again, every—my mother would take—if—if we were lucky enough, she would take a couple of chickens. She would take the eggs, take them to town to sell them to get a few dollars, because, you know, you did have the—you needed the dollars to do some kind of a buying. So that's—that was done that way too. So the [unclear]—the [unclear] on animal if you had one, or whatever. So that was done. But mainly, the—the labor exchange was—was great there because, when it came to different harvests, you had to have people that would come around and help and work all day for you. And then you did it for them.

LEVINE: Hmm. Was there anything else about life back then that maybe we haven't touched upon?

REALI: Well, yeah. I mean, what it was too, when I was born it was right in the middle of World War II. Things were very tough in those days. There was bums everywhere. I remember that as plain—clear—

LEVINE: You remember bums?

REALI: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Well, the reason I remember because when—they were still piled all over the side of the roads when we went to school. I mean, you could still—you know, you could see them everywhere. And even on my own farm where we lived, there was big, big, huge holes in the middle of the fields that the bums [unclear]. And the Germans were all over the place. My mother and father told me stories that make your hair curl. You know, that the Germans would come in your house, take everything you had. They raped the womans. And they—and if you said anything, they'd shoot you. You know, so that was—you know, we used to have—[chuckles] I laugh at this because it probably was no different than the chicken coop. We used to have this bomb shelter in back of our house. Probably, if somebody threw a firecracker in the thing it would—blown up. But it was—you know, it was a bomb shelter. So it was supposed to have been, because, like I say, you know, we were right in the middle of the—of the war zone. And my father told me stories where at times, you know, he had—we had no food to eat. So there was a place where they actually would pass out some type of food to—to help the families. And you used to go for days and days and days and wait in line, wait in line and bombs going off everywhere. And by the time you get to—to the, you know, [unclear], it would be closed for the day, so we have to repeat it the following day. My father was in the service too and the stories he's told me and that it's so hard to believe that the things that were—well, they all—when you—when you think back, what people do today, and if you roll the clock back 50 years, I can understand that those things would happen. I've heard stories now. You know, there's no way I can tell you if it's true or false. But my neighbor—our neighbor was telling us a story at one time that he was captured by the enemy. And I can't remember if it was the Germans or something else. I can't remember what the heck it was. And he said that he was hung in his room on his feet. And it was hundreds of these guys in there, you know, people. And they said they were eating them, on top of that. Actually, they were butchering and eat—he escaped.

LEVINE: Hung upside down, you mean by—

REALI: Yeah. Yeah, that's what—that's—that's—I remember that very clearly. And in those days, like I say, you know, civilization, I guess, was not that clear to some people and is not today either but—

LEVINE: Right. Well, war is [unclear]—

REALI: Yeah, wars is all [unclear].

LEVINE: Right.

REALI: I mean, I do remember, like I say, you know, they used to—they used to steal everything in your house. They would come in if you had sausage hanging you. They would take all your food and, you know, we had nothing to start with. You know, and it was—

LEVINE: Hmm.

REALI: That was tough because, like I say, you know, 12 years later my—all—well, a lot sooner than that, I mean, there was bombs everywhere. I—and as a matter of fact, we have relatives that lost their arms because kids would try to take the bombs apart so they could sell the metal. And not knowing what they were doing, the thing would blow up in their faces or get killed and so on and so forth. So that was—you know, that was a tough time to go by. I mean, I don't remember the actual war but I—

LEVINE: But you remember the—

REALI: But I—but I know the aftermath because I could—I could see it, you know.

LEVINE: Wow, wow.

REALI: I mean, I—as a matter of fact, I—I have a family that—it's a friend of mine. They came to this country about the same time we did. They have—I think it was—they lost either one brother or one of the brothers lost their arm, you know, doing the same them.

LEVINE: Hmm. Now, you mentioned it was—it was your uncle who came here first?

REALI: Yeah, my uncle Vegenzo Reali came first—came first, yeah.

LEVINE: And why—what prompted his coming here? Do you know?

REALI: That I don't remember. Well, most likely, I—I—probably because they could not—they could not stay where they were because Italy—where we were in Chiprano, all the youth left the second day who were old enough to leave because there was no jobs.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

REALI: There was no way for them to make money. So most of them all went to Germany, France, all those neighboring areas to find jobs. And whoever could come to this country will come to this country. But it was very, very tough to come to this country in those days.

LEVINE: So when did he came? Do you know?

REALI: I don't know. I don't know. I can't remember. I mean, I could find out but I—I don't know when he came.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

REALI: But I know that he was like either 14 or 16 years old when he came to this country. And he got odd jobs and then eventually he worked for longshoremen, which was very common in those days. And then, plus, he opened up a little bar which today is known as the Village Cafe still. It's still around, very—

LEVINE: Oh.

REALI: —popular restaurant today.

LEVINE: Oh.

REALI: And, you know, he has seven—seven children, I believe. He was very lucky. You know, he lived very, you know, decently. And he did help his brothers in Italy because, you know, there was not just my broth—my father; there was two other brothers and, I believe, two sisters. And when he could on special occasions, he sent us a few dollars or he would send us some clothes and so on and so forth. And then he tried to get my father over here. But my father, the best I can remember, he waited for over 15 years in quota to—trying to get to this country. It's not like today. Today, almost anybody can come to this country very quickly. In those days, there was lines of people waiting and there's no way you could come here unless you were called, you passed the physical. You had to go through a physical. We had our g—we had to all go to Naples to get ourselves shot for—and before we could even—you know, before they even stamped your passport you could come here. So it took my father almost 15 years to come here, which I—if I remember right, he came here in 1953 or '54. He was there a year. Then finally, he called us because, again, in those days, you had to have somebody that would sponsor you here. You could not just come to this country and say, "Well, what am I going to do once I get here?" Somebody had to sponsor you, to feed you if you couldn't find work. And he was—and he was—my uncle was the guy that sponsored us. So then my father came. He got a job as a laborer.

LEVINE: In Portland?

REALI: In Portland. And then he called us and we came here roughly about a year later.

LEVINE: That means your mother and your sisters and your brother?

REALI: My mother and—and four of us. Yeah, the four children.

LEVINE: Wow. So do you have any idea what you expected when you were coming here as a child?

REALI: To be honest with you, I was so stupid, and I'll use the word stupid because that's exactly what we were, I thought it was a different sky, different moon, different sun.

LEVINE: Oh.

REALI: Different everything.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

REALI: I mean, I was just amazed. You know, I was just amazed that the world was the same. I mean, I was so impressed. I can still see it today, as plain as English, when we went to Naples—now, I'd never been there because Naples is a big city.

LEVINE: Right.

REALI: And we got on that ship and I could not figure out how that thing was going to stay on top of the water. I never saw an ocean in my life. But the biggest impression left me is that on the—on the wharf itself there was hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people waving to the loved ones that were leaving the country. And we still have pictures at home somewhere. But, you know, my—my grandmother was there, a couple of my uncles waving goodbye to us. And then when—once we set sails, the biggest impression left with me about the ship, the wake that it made, the white—I don't know if—you must have been on a ship before or a boat—the prop causes a big white—but on a big ship like that—again, now, I'm thinking back that many years ago. It seemed like it was forever. And this big white thing on the back, that was so impressive to me. I couldn't figure out what I was looking at but it just looked gorgeous.

LEVINE: You mean, like, the wave that—

REALI: The—but in back of the ship though. Not on the front.

LEVINE: Yeah.

REALI: It—

LEVINE: Right.

REALI: —causes this—because the props are turning, it causes everything to be white in the back. And to me, I never saw anything like that in my whole life. And, you know—and my poor mother, she never left the cabin. She was seasick the whole nine days we were on that ship. And my brother and I and my older sister were the only ones who used to go upstairs to eat, and we'd bring our food down below. You know, we'd play a little shuffleboard. Then we stopped in Portugal. I think that was our first stop in, you know, the—not—they didn't go to the town. They just anchored outside. And I do remember all the—the guys coming up in rowboats and trying to sell you, like, kerchiefs and stuff like that. And don't ask me how they would shoot the things with—from where they were on the water up to the deck, and people would look at them. If they liked them, they would put the money inside that thing and throw it back down at them. That left an impression of my mind because, to me, I never saw anything like that in my life. So that was exciting. Then, like I said, then our next stop was New York.

LEVINE: Do you remember when the ship came into the New York—

REALI: To—somewhat, yes, I do. I mean, I—I was—you know, I mean—you—you have to remember now, we came from shacks, that the buildings—probably the highest—the highest building was probably 10 feet that I saw. And you go to New York and you see all those huge buildings—[chuckles] I mean, you know, I mean, it was just amazing to see all that stuff, even 50 years ago or whatever amount of time it is. I think it was like '43 or whatever it is. I mean, even those days, it was—New York was so different than anything I've ever saw in my life. All the automobiles. I mean, all that stuff to me was just like, "Whoa!" You know, "Where am I?" You know, "What world?" And you got to remember now, I never—I did not speak a word of English. None of us did. And, you know, it was—it was so amazing to see all that and—and it was like you c—you came from a cave and all at once—all at once they introduced you to the world of something you never saw before in your life. And it was—you know, it was—it was very emotional. It was very emotional to see my father and my uncle for the first time. And they came down by car to pick us up. And I [chuckles]—

LEVINE: Yeah.

REALI: This—this—I have told this story many times. And we got off the ship after going through the harbor. But I mean, the emotion that went with all that, it was just phenomenal. I—I can't even start to tell you the different things that goes through you, and I'm quite sure they went through my mother and my sisters and my brother the same way, to see all those

different things that—to see the Statue of Liberty in front of you, not even know what it is, you know, but just see this humongous thing in the middle of the water, you know. It was breathtaking. It was all emotional, to get off the ship, to be checked out. You know, all that stuff. Of course, in those days—you remember now, we came from a very unknnowledged world. It's—with—I'm talking about within ourselves, not the country, within ourselves.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

REALI: Worried about—you know, people are checking your suitcases, not knowing if they're going to throw you in jail or whatever. You know, not that we were carrying anything. But not having the knowledge of what the system was or—or what—what was going on was very frightening. But on the other hand, it was so much to look at, so much to see. It was breathtaking. But anyway, my—after we got off the ship, and I'm quite sure it took hours to do that, we were hungry. So my uncle took us to a restaurant. That would have been the first restaurant I've ever eaten in in my whole life, and, you know, not knowing us, not knowing anything.

LEVINE: In New York City?

REALI: In New York City. So what—my uncle orders us lasagna. Now, I—we'd never seen lasagna in our lives, never seen it.

LEVINE: Oh.

REALI: And that's all I remember seeing, this dish with this glob of stuff in the middle with all this melted stuff all over the top. We couldn't eat it. [laughs] We never saw it. No—we all looked at each other. We couldn't eat it. [laughter]

LEVINE: Yeah.

REALI: So I—I do remember that and—

LEVINE: Do you have any remembrance at all about when you got off the ship? Did you get processed any kind of way—

REALI: Oh, absolutely.

LEVINE: —way or what?

REALI: I—I know we did but I can't remember what the process was.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

REALI: You know, I—it was so far ago that, you know, if—like I say, I'm quite sure we were all very frightened of—but in those days, Custom was very tough too, you know, one way or the other. But I—to give you details, I cannot remember exactly what happened.

LEVINE: Yeah. So your—your—your uncle drove down from Portland?

REALI: Yeah.

LEVINE: And—and after you had the—or didn't have the lasagna dinner, you—you got into the car—

REALI: We came to—

LEVINE: —and you came up?

REALI: —Portland, yeah. And—

LEVINE: So that must have taken a while.

REALI: Yeah, yeah. A long time. I mean, I—you know, I mean, today it takes what? An average of five to six hours. In those days, I'm quite sure that—taken at least another 40 percent of that time—

LEVINE: Yeah.

REALI: —involvement.

LEVINE: And then was there anything on that trip that—

REALI: No.

LEVINE: —also—

REALI: No, nothing—nothing stood out on the trip back here.

LEVINE: And how about Portland? What was it like being back here?

REALI: When we got home—when we got to Portland, I remember now, [chuckles] that was one time we all got new clothes before we left Italy. In those days, it was very, very custom to have long coats and the—and the big hat, you know, for the guys. So I had one of those on, you know, because it was cold. It was in No—you know, it was in December. So we got home—when we got home, they took us inside the house that we were going to live in. And if I remember right, it was a three-bedroom

house, a living room, a kitchen and one bath. I mean, it was like somebody bringing me to a palace, you know, because like, remember now, we came from a one-bedroom house. We—you know, my sisters and I all slept in the same bed. My mother slept and father slept in the other bed and all in the same room, no heat, no nothing. And we walked in. We saw that. We thought—you know, we just died and were born again in heaven. You know, we just—it just blew our mind, you know, what—what was there. You know, just to have a bed, just to have a separate room with a floor with heat, we were not accustomed to that. So that—that was very, very amazing. But you know, that was a very confusing night too because all the—my aunt, all his kids were there to welcome us and all that. And like I say, you know, it was like us being in a room—you know, picture yourself, somebody drop you in Russia, that you did not know any of the language at all, and all at once, a bunch of people trying to talk to you. You didn't even know what was going on, you know.

LEVINE: Could they speak Italian?

REALI: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah—

REALI: Well, my uncle could—

LEVINE: Yeah.

REALI: —and my aunt. But the kids, not really, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

REALI: But my—could, yes.

LEVINE: Yeah. So—so did you feel like you—you—you—home? I mean, did you feel like this was—

REALI: Well, [sighs] I think it became a home very quickly. But I—you know, I really can't recall how it felt that first night or the first week or so. I still think it was very strange, you know, because we were accustomed—well, we had, even though this was better but it was still very strange. We didn't know people. We didn't know anybody. I do remember the following day. My mother, you know—I put my clothes on and I went outside and I stood outside. And I'm watching the kids sliding back and forth on Hancock Street.

LEVINE: And you also hadn't had winter like that, had you?

REALI: No, no, no. Where we lived, it's almost like Florida.

LEVINE: Oh.

REALI: You know, once in a great while we got snow but very rare. You know, maybe once a year if it was a freak—once every five years—excuse me—if it was a freak temperature change.

LEVINE: Storm, uh-huh.

REALI: But it was very hot there where we were. Very hot. So this was a totally different—and that was, you know—as far as snow in those days, I mean, snow banks was high as 10, 20 feet here in—in the winter months. We never saw stuff like that. No, that—that was totally different. So I do remember standing on the corner with my hands in my coat pocket with a hat. I—I mean, I can't even think what I looked like to everybody else, you know—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

REALI: —dressed the way I was. But, you know, then—because we got here. It was a Christmas vacation for the kids.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

REALI: Then when school reopened, we started school. And our first year, we went to Cathedral School. And believe me, it was tough because we didn't even know the word "Good morning" or "Good night." Nothing. I mean, we had to go there and—and I can't even recall how we got by. But within about six months, I think we knew enough to—to get around. It just got better and better and better after that as far as the language. But it was very tough.

LEVINE: Were there other kids coming from—from other countries in your school?

REALI: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. As a matter of fact—as a matter of fact, there's one I'm going to go visit tonight. He came to this country—there was a bunch of us that actually—a bunch of families that came to this—that came to down—to Portland within this—within a year or two, tops. There was quite a few families that came from Italy, from our—not from our area, but from Italy. And we all became friends and they're still our friends today, you know, and so on and so forth.

LEVINE: Did the other kids—did you—were you called a greenhorn or a foreigner or [unclear]?

REALI: Oh, absolutely. Oh, yeah. Absolutely. Oh, yeah. We were called guineas every—every—every five seconds, and when we started going to school and, you know, I used to get in fights for a while. Then after a while, you know, you just tolerate it. But oh, yeah, absolutely. They—the Italian people, especially in those days, even before my time, probably were not treated any different than the African American people are treated today or 20 years ago. They—I mean, every—treated a lot better today. But if you turn the clock back 30 years ago, the African American were treated very horrible in this country.

LEVINE: Right.

REALI: And I really truly believe that, if you read up on history, maybe not as bad when I came, but in earlier times and that, the Italian people were not treated very—very nicely. You know, they were treated as very low people. And you were there to do their work and that's that. You know, and you were not—you were not the same type of people. But thank God, those things, you know, have changed tremendously in the last 50, 70 years. But, yes, absolutely. I mean, we—we were definitely looked at as different people, you know.

LEVINE: And did—do you think that had an effect on you? I mean, do you think that, like, made you want to work harder or—or it just disgusted you or—

REALI: Well, you know, I'm pretty sure that that whole—that that whole makeup made a big difference, how I was going to live, what I was going to do or not do. I think absolutely everybody's got a part of it, but I think what—what made us very hard working—I'm not speaking—you know, even my brother, my sister are all the same way. I think what made us such a hard-working people is because of our background. We—the way we lived and even today, I cannot stop thinking that that could happen again. You know what I'm saying? Even though—

LEVINE: Hmm.

REALI: —you know, the—but there's flashes in the back of my head that I don't want to go back and live the way I lived. So I've always—I'm always making provisions to make sure that doesn't happen.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

REALI: Even though I might not have to do that, but, you know, in my mind that, you know—not that I lay awake nights thinking about a rainy day, but, I mean, I—I know that a rainy day can happen. You know, and I try to provide ahead of time so that doesn't happen so there's no question that my bringing—upbringing was—was a heck of a lessons. And I think that's

why I've been so aggressive on making sure that I succeed in what—no matter what I do. It's not just my business. [clears throat] Everything I do in life, I do it one way, to succeed, regardless if it's a game, regardless if it's work, what it is, you know. It's that drive that I got to be very competitive. I got to be—I can't be a second best or something because I don't know. There's something inside of me that says, "You can't do that because, if you do that, somebody's going—somebody's going to stomp on you." You know?

LEVINE: Hmm.

REALI: So—

LEVINE: Wow.

REALI: So, I mean, you know, there's no question. I mean, we talked about this many, many times. There's no question that—you know, because I—I have three children and I don't see that same drive in my children, because they haven't—they really don't have nothing to really drive them, you know, as far as, you know, they're not worrying about they're going to be hungry tomorrow. They might not have shoes to put on tomorrow morning or whatever. They're—they never seen that. They'll never see that. And they're no different than the other children in—in this country. But because what—you know, that mirror or that picture I have, and I lived it. It's not that I just had a picture; I lived it. It's—it's different. You know, it gives you a different scope on life. [chuckles] There's—

LEVINE: Yeah.

REALI: —no question about it.

LEVINE: Well, I guess that's the—that's the—the idea of immigrants being harder—

REALI: Yeah.

LEVINE: —driven.

REALI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah, because they know the difference.

REALI: Yeah, I mean, I—I—if you were around when I left Italy, when I first come to this country, and if somebody said, "Dominic, what do you think your future's ever going to be? Are you ever going to be in business?" Whoever dreamed that I would have had what I have today? But it's all been drive and hard work. Nobody's ever passed me anything to say,

“Here you are. Go and do it.” I mean, I had to work for everything I got. And I’ve been very fortunate. I thank God that I am in a position I am today. I mean, I would have never, never dreamt—with no education. I have no education at all.

LEVINE: Now, what happened? You went to school—

REALI: I went to school and—

LEVINE: And then what happened?

REALI: Be—because I was, you know—because of the language and different school, I sat in the fourth grade here when I came here. I would have been 21 years old if I stayed in school. And I was wor—I was working very hard. We’re all working to help out.

LEVINE: You mean when you were going to school?

REALI: When I—oh, yeah. Absolutely. Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Like, what did you do when you were in—

REALI: I worked at the Village Cafe. Well, I started out first, I—the—my first job was dishwasher at the Marshview [PH] Restaurant. And we actually lived there for the summer because it was the summer. It was more of a summer restaurant. It was owned by my uncle’s daughter.

LEVINE: Hmm.

REALI: So I started there. Then I worked on a farm for one summer doing fieldwork and I was made a foreman, believe it or not. I was only there for one year.

LEVINE: You were only, like, 14 by that time.

REALI: Yeah, 14 or 15, whatever I was. And then I went to work for the Village Cafe for eight—eight years or so.

LEVINE: And when did you drop out of school then?

REALI: I was about 18 years old. I can’t even remember what year. Isn’t that awful? But I was working. I was working at the Village over 40 hours a week and I was—I was going to [unclear] junior high at school. Then I—I graduated from it because that was a three-year school, if I’m not mistaken. Then I went to high school.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

REALI: And I was at the same job working very hard. Then we went—we went to the Christmas break and I never went back. And so I never graduate—you know, in those days, Portland High School had four years of term. And I started as a freshman and I never even—like I said, I only went for three months of freshman school and that was it. And I've never been to a school since.

LEVINE: And then, so what did you do? You stayed working—

REALI: I stayed working at the Village.

LEVINE: Yeah.

REALI: And then was eight or nine years later, I went to work for Amato's [PH] and a few months later, we—myself and a—another gentleman actually rented from the owner that shop. And the gentleman—he was from Italy. He was, like, from—I'm from Portland and he's from South Portland. So that's how the towns were in Italy. And we worked together for 14 months. He got drafted in the Vietnam War and he just got married from a bride from Italy and he did not want to serve in a war, so he packed up and left for Italy. And he's been there ever since.

LEVINE: Oh.

REALI: And he's—he's here in Portland today. He came here seven—five days ago and I'm going to go visit him tonight.

LEVINE: Oh, my gosh.

REALI: So this is the first time he's ever—

LEVINE: It's the first time you've seen him in—

REALI: Well, no, I—I did see him in Italy once when—back in '89. But this is the first time he's been back here and I'm anxious to see him. I'm anxious—kind of anxious to show him what I've done, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

REALI: So, you know, and then—you know, then I finally—then I—I stayed with the—with—the owner came back here and I stayed with him for over six, seven years. Then I bought it from him and then I opened up all the other shops I have today.

LEVINE: Hmm.

REALI: So—

LEVINE: Wow. So when did you meet your wife?

REALI: Oh, God. I'm not married, by the way.

LEVINE: Oh.

REALI: I'm divorced. But I met Maryanne [PH]—God, it's got to be what? Thirty-some odd years ago. Whatever year that was. She lived on the same street as I lived then, on Newbury Street. And—

LEVINE: Now, was that an Italian area? Newbury Street?

REALI: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, Newbury Street, [unclear] Street—all those streets were known as—almost like a Little Italy. And she was—her name was Marianne Delfonzo [PH]. Her father's Charlie Delfonzo. They lived—they lived, like, five houses up the street from us. And—

LEVINE: So you knew—did you know her from school or—

REALI: Well, yes and no. I mean, I saw her because, you know, was a neighborhood thing. Then one day I'm walking [unclear] Street and she's walking the opposite way and I stopped and talk to her. Va, va, va, va and one thing after another, one thing or another, we got married [coughs] and we lived together for about 14 years, had three wonderful children.

LEVINE: What are your children's names?

REALI: Michael, Jeff and Julie.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

REALI: And then we got divorced in '85. And that's about it.

LEVINE: Now, how about the Italian community in Portland when you were growing up? How would you describe it? I mean, it was a big Italian community, right?

REALI: It was very, very big. Like I say, especially in that area, in the industry area, in the industry of Newbury Street, all those side streets, the [unclear], federal. That's mainly where most of the Italian people concentrated or lived.

LEVINE: Is that by St. Peter's Church?

REALI: Uh-hmm, yeah. Right there.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

REALI: And there was a—a grocery store called Commercial Fruit. And that was the actual grocery store of Portland. Not only Italians but a lot of Americans used to shop there too. Everybody spoke Italian. You could buy anything you wanted in there. So, you know, more or less, when my mother went shopping—

LEVINE: She could speak Italian.

REALI: She—they would—they would stand and gab and bring up to date on all the news about all was going—because my mother could not read or write. And there was a lot of people in the same—the same predicament. And mo—

LEVINE: Could she speak English? Did she learn—

REALI: Yeah, she spoke English at—toward—you know, broken English. But it was enough. Her and I worked at the Village together. And I used to be the guy that would handle all the waitresses' checks, you know. And I would order them. And she would remember everything. And it was amazing. She would remember the orders, the—who had it, who did not have it, what she'd have. And I don't know how she did it but she did. And, you know, she was not the only—her and I were not the only Italian people that worked there. There was others too, because this kid that I'm going to go see tonight, originally, he worked at the Village too. We all worked in the same—so we—we kind of all lived in the same area. We hung around together. We did things together. We visited—we—you know, so that became—and I'm quite sure that was like that even before we got here. But that—to us, that became Little Italy because, you know, that was—that was the big, massive way people lived and concentrated. The waterfront was right there so a lot of the—a lot of the people worked off the ships when there was work. It was close to town.

LEVINE: Did you go outside of that Little Italy—

REALI: Oh, sure.

LEVINE: —very much?

REALI: Not really. I mean, you know, we did because we went to school—

LEVINE: Right.

REALI: —you know, but my parents, not really, because my father didn't drive, didn't do nothing. So, I mean, he didn't drive until I was about, I don't know, 15 or so years. I can't remember how old I was when I got my license. I was very young; I know that. He didn't have a car. My uncle did and my uncle used to take us for Sunday rides once in a while. He took the whole family. So that was the only time we actually went outside, you know, our areas when my uncle took us because we—none of us had c—automobiles in those days. So, you know, once in a while my uncle did take us for Sunday drives.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And what did your father do? Because he had been working on farm.

REALI: My father was strictly a—my father was strictly a laborer. He worked as longshoreman and there was no guaranteed job. There was two shifts a day and when you broke for lunch, you had to go back and wait in line again. If your name was not called, you go home. If your name was called, you had work.

LEVINE: So that—that's why you and [unclear]—

REALI: Yeah, that's why we all—that's why we all had to pitch in to survive, because, you know, there was no way that he could survive just by himself.

LEVINE: Was life easier for your mother here? I mean, at least she didn't have of work in the fields, right?

REALI: Sure, absolutely. Oh, absolutely. But she—she did also, I mean, when she—when she got—she worked for the Village for about, I would say, 10 to 12 years.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A]

LEVINE: This is tape two and side A and I'm continuing here with Dominic Reali. And you were talking about—let's see. You went outside the Little Italy with your uncle. Oh, your father and your mother—your mother working at the—

REALI: Yeah, my mother—

LEVINE: —Village and the recipes that she—

REALI: Yeah, my mother worked at the Village and a lot of the stuff that's on the menu today, it was—it was more or less—I don't want to use the word "invented" but, I mean, it was more or less done by my mother because she did so much home cooking. And people today still remember my mother and they still ask for her. And she passed away in 1975.

LEVINE: Oh.

REALI: But she—she was liked by everybody in the Village, even myself. You know, we used to make different types of sandwich to eat—to eat lunch. And we'd go out in the bar, sit in the bar, ea—and eat.

LEVINE: Yeah.

REALI: Then, you know, before you knew it, people kept saying, "Well, Jeez, can I get one of those?" You know, and—and I mean, it's—I mean, it's amazing how much stuff we actually sold to our customer that was just our meal for the day. And then we—people would ask for it and we would cook it and—and give it to them. I mean, it's—it's—my mother was a great cook [unclear].

LEVINE: Can you think of any of the—of the—of the particular items that, like, were hers, were her recipes?

REALI: Well, I mean, if—well, I mean, I can't remember exactly what it was but there was tons of sandwiches we used to make. I remember—I remember this particular thing. We—you know, we used to probably take a—we used to take a heel of a [unclear] bread, cut it—cut it in half, toast it under—under the broiler. And we used to take a piece of steak about that thin and—and cook it the same time and put butter all over it with a nice big piece of raw onions. And we used to go out in the bar and eat it and people used to drool. I remember very specific when—when Armaday [PH] the owner of today, which is my uncle's son, made the first veal Parmesan dish. Okay, nobody sold it. You know, we didn't sell it in that place. And he went out and bought the shoulder. My mother would take the shoulder and she would fillet it, bang it down so it would be nice and tender. She would bread it in—with the—with the eggs and the cheeses and all that stuff, then hand fry every one of them.

LEVINE: Wow.

REALI: You know, that became one of—one of the Village Cafe top main dishes. He still sells it today. But we made—I don't know. I—I can't remember. I wish I could. But, I mean, we made tons of different types of sandwiches that, like I say, became part of the menu.

LEVINE: Wow.

REALI: You know, it's—

LEVINE: So she's left her mark—

REALI: Yeah, definitely.

LEVINE: —in Portland, huh?

REALI: I mean, she definitely is. I mean, I walk in today and I—I eat at the Village frequently and people still come up to me and—and say that every so often they think about my mother. You know, it's just—

LEVINE: Oh, that must make you feel good, huh?

REALI: Yeah. Oh, it is. It is.

LEVINE: Yeah.

REALI: It's great—great feeling.

LEVINE: Now, did she become a citizen? Did your—did your father [unclear]?

REALI: My father—on behalf of my father in those—and I don't know if that's still the same way or not—he had become citizen individually. Then when we reached a certain age, actually we became citizen on behalf of him.

LEVINE: Right.

REALI: You know?

LEVINE: Yeah.

REALI: And so we're—you know, we all became citizen.

LEVINE: Do you remember when he became one?

REALI: No, not really.

LEVINE: Yeah.

REALI: No.

LEVINE: Yeah.

REALI: No.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, let's see. How do you think of yourself as far as your Italian side or heritage and—

REALI: Well—

LEVINE: —the American side?

REALI: I—actually, I'm—I'm very fortunate to have two great heritage—[clears throat] excuse me. And I say that with an open heart because I'll always be Italian because I was born there; it's in my blood. But I'll always be an American too because America's been so great to me. The opportunity that I've had in this country I would never had, you know, in those days in Italy. I pr—you know, maybe I would have; I don't know. But I can't tell that because I didn't stay there. But I don't think so.

LEVINE: Hmm.

REALI: So I have a lot of love for this country, not because I've been successful, because in this country definitely if you are aggressive enough or if you want—you know, if you want to work hard, you'll always, always make a good living, if you work hard. And your opportunity in here—in this country is much greater than it'll ever be in any other country. Now, I haven't traveled the world so maybe that's a [unclear] statement, but from what I know from Italy to—to here, I've been very fortunate. I—I think—I think—thank God that my uncle chose to come to the United States because I would have never, never dreamed that Dominic Reali would have been in business, or would have had the smarts to run a business, or would have the chance to run a business. [chuckles] And I—and I—and I've had a chance and I've worked very hard at it. I've been doing it for—I lose track—somewhere around 35 years. And it's been a challenge but it's also been a great thing that's happened, because I've been very fortunate to—to have a company that I've had the chance—I've given somebody else the opportunity to have a good job and make a good living and love what they're doing. And I have—I have a lot of great—a lot of great people working for me.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

REALI: You know?

LEVINE: What do you have in mind, I mean, in this period of your life and what you foresee? Do—do you—are you going to keep at this for [chuckles] 20 more years, do you think?

REALI: Well, believe it or not, we are right now in the middle of the largest growth we ever done in this company. You know, I—I have—my 11th shop right now is under construction. Just started about two weeks ago. We are planning to open three stores a year. When I say we, I mean myself and the people on—with me.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

REALI: We haven't tested three yet. We've—we've definitely done two but we haven't done three yet, but that's our goal.

LEVINE: Wow.

REALI: We want to reach somewhere around 30 units.

LEVINE: Is—are these all in Portland?

REALI: No, no.

LEVINE: They're all over [unclear]?

REALI: In the state of Maine. No.

LEVINE: Oh, in the state of Maine.

REALI: They're in the state of Maine but they're not all in Portland.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

REALI: So we want to do 30 units and we want to go outside of the state. And then, after that, we're working towards going public.

LEVINE: You mean on the stock exchange?

REALI: On the—yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

REALI: And if that happens, once that happens, we're either going to continue doing what we're doing or maybe franchise. If somebody wants to buy us out, whatever the cards hold. But like I say, no, I'm not—I'm not ready to retire yet.

LEVINE: No. [chuckles]

REALI: [chuckles] As long as God keeps me healthy and—I want to continue growing. I enjoy it. It's a lot of hard work, believe me. It's a lot of chances.

LEVINE: But you wouldn't have it any other way, right?

REALI: No, no. The challenge is great. As I told you early in the statement is that, no matter what I do or—it's a challenge for me and I have to do it right. I—there's no halfway for me; it's—that's the way God made me and I'm not so sure it's wrong. You know, some people say, "Yeah, because you're too agress—you're too—you want to be too good at everything you do." But, you know, that's the way I've been and maybe that's what's made me successful. I don't know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

REALI: You know?

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, is there anything else that you can think of regarding immigrating here that maybe we haven't talked about? Any other aspects of it or ramifications for you or—

REALI: Well, I mean, you know, I don't know if—I mean, it's very tough for anybody, I think, to leave—to leave their homeland, especially once you are in the high teens. You know, I was very fortunate. I was very—I was still young.

LEVINE: Wow.

REALI: You know, I was still young. But once—once you start hitting 18 to 20 years old and older, it's got to be very tough. You know, you take my parents for an example. I mean, it had to be—you know, they never expressed it to me but it had to be very tough for them to leave what they knew.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

REALI: You know, to leave everything behind, their friends, whatever they owned, their families, the goal 3,000 miles away and never knowing if they were ever going to see anybody again, it's tough. And I—and I'm quite sure that that played a role in all of us, in our family and other families that came here. But you make the best of it. I—you know, and again, you know, when you go to a strange land there's always people that welcome you and there's always people that don't welcome you. You know, and—and we had to pay those dollars. You know, we—and we all went through that. But we succeeded it. We got accustomed to it. They came

accustomed to us. I think—I think, overall, it was a great move. I thank my father [chuckles] for having that vision to come to this country, even want to come to this country, because my other uncles have the choices to come here. And two of them chose not to, you know. My father did. And I say it all the time, if it hadn't been for my uncle—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

REALI: —to call my father, then if it hadn't been for my father to call us, we'd still be in Italy. Now, don't know what I'd be doing there but, you know, I'd probably be still eating and walking, hopefully. But I'm glad we did. It's been great. I would not change it for the world. And I just hope that I can leave something to say that I've earned my keeping to be here, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Do you think you've passed on any kinds of attitudes stemming from your childhood to your own children?

REALI: I try. I try very hard. You know, I think respect is everything in this world. I think we all lost a lot of that for each other in this world. I try to tell that to my children all the time, treat them with respect, no matter if they make five dollars an hour or if they make a thousand dollars an hour. You treat everybody equally and I try to do that. I—that's one thing I've worked very hard at, not to look anybody down or—or treat somebody else different because he's a millionaire or whatever. I try to treat every—you know, on the same level. I have friends on both circles. I probably hang around with people that make an average pay than—more than people that make a good sum of money. To me, that's not important as long as they—they're nice people. That's all I—that's all I look for. So I try to teach that to my children. But it's hard. It's hard because you have to—as I said earlier, that they have been brought up how everybody else has brought up. You know. You know, you treat every—nice. You're okay. You go to school. You work x amount of hours a week and so much—so much is going to happen to you. They're great kids. I love all three of my children to death. Sometimes I wish I could have spent more time with them, you know, but on the other hand, sometimes it's very hard to do everything. I—you know, I guess—I think—I hope so. I think—least—at least, if I have not taught it to them, I hope that they get the genes so somewhere along the line they click in. I have a son, Michael, that he is so good-natured that it's unbelievable. He would take his heart out and give it to anybody. You know, he's a great, great kid. My son, Jeff, nice kid but he—he stands his ground. He's not willing to give up his grounds if he thinks it's right. You know, and—you know, is that bad or right? Who knows? You know, he—he's going to have to cipher that out himself to see, you know, which is right—

LEVINE: When it's right and when it's not.

REALI: —and when it's wrong.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

REALI: You know, my daughter, Julie, she is—that's her picture right there, as a matter of fact—

LEVINE: Oh.

REALI: She's a special kid. She's—she's going to be 25 next year. She—she's my only child that's—has a college education, very bright, very pretty. I'm—I'm hoping the best for her. And, you know, she's still growing up. She's still young and I'm hoping somewhere along the line, like I say in all three of them, that things will start changing, you know, and—and to understand when to—when to say yes and when to say no. You know, and they've been great kids. You know, thank God none of them are involved with drugs. You know, that's—none have been in trouble with the law, so lucky that—I've been very fortunate so far, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah. How about heroes? Did you ever get any heroes after you came to this country? Either people you knew or people you—

REALI: Well—

LEVINE: —knew of?

REALI: I mean, my heroes were people that—you know, maybe this is not the right thing to say, but I mean people that were working very hard or taking care of their families, and they stood out. And to me, that—that's—they were—they stood out from—from the—from the rest of the people.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

REALI: To me, those were heroes. I—I tell—I've told this story a couple times and I lived right next door to the Village Cafe. And in my spare time, a lot of time I used to stand in front of the steps and just stand there and look and watch people drive up, ba, ba, ba, ba. And every—every once in a while this guy—I don't know who the heck he was; I have no idea—he used to drive around with this big white Cadillac. And he would have a picture of a rose on each door. I used to stand there. My eyes used to bulge out. [chuckles] I said, "Wow! Would I love to have one of those things someday!" You know, I mean—you know, I never forgot that. You know what I'm saying? Now, that might be—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

REALI: —selfish saying this and, “Well, that’s only things.” But to me, you know, I don’t know the guy from a hole in the head, or I’m just saying—

LEVINE: Yeah.

REALI: But if he earned that hon—honestly and he worked hard to get that, to me that’s an achievement. To me, that’s a goal. To me, you know, he’s not just a guy sitting home [unclear] come in. “You know, I’m going to go out there and work—work my fanny off.” And—

LEVINE: Right.

REALI: You know. In a sense, could he be my hero? Probably. You know what I’m saying?

LEVINE: It inspired you [unclear], you could say.

REALI: Yeah, he inspired me. Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

REALI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

REALI: So, you know, I mean those are the things, you know, that—

LEVINE: That drove you.

REALI: That drove me. You know—

LEVINE: Yeah.

REALI: I—I have—my uncle, when he got married in this country, he married a lady that had three children and one of them was Don Valley [PH]. He used to own Valley Steak Houses. You know, he—at one time, he had like 60 steak houses around the country. You know, I mean—I mean, any time his name came up, I mean, actually my eyebrows would go up in the sky, said, “Wow!” You know, because I put the guy on a pedestal and, I mean, at the time I said, “Wow!” You know. This guy’s—you know, has got houses and ba, ba, ba, ba. You know, because like I said, you’ve got to remember that when you look at something like that, you multiply by it by 40 in your mind automatically. You know what I’m saying? You know, there’s also going to be this and he’s going to have this, you know. So to me, that was—that was great. But you know, but then, you know, even

my schoolteachers, you know, when I went to school, there were certain teachers, I thought the world of them. I thought they were heroes. You know, I mean, you know, just by—I remember a lady in our school. I—if I'm not mistaken, her name was Miss Mead. And she was a lovely teacher, a beautiful—I mean, I—you know, I mean she was a great, great teacher. And [chuckles] the end of the season she made an announcement that she was going to take all children to—that passed a specific specification, take them to Old Orchard Beach for the day and for rides. And one was grade. You know, how well you—you know, if you got A's and B's; I can't remember exactly what it was—and whoever never missed school for the—for the year. Well, I was that guy. [laughter] I was not the smartest one but, see, I never missed school. And she took us to Old Orchard that day. You know, she was a great teacher. You know, I mean, you know, so things—

LEVINE: So it was a challenge or something you want—

REALI: Yeah.

LEVINE: —that—

REALI: You know, and I mean, and this, so to me, like she was like a hero. Another—another one of my teachers, his name was Mr. Copett [PH], I believe—he was a retired captain on the ship. Now, I looked at him totally different than I would have another teacher because I thought he—you know, he was a different type of a person. He was a captain of a ship. You know, and my mind, “Whoa!”

LEVINE: Yeah.

REALI: “A captain of a ship?” You know, so, I mean, you know, it was things like that. No—nothing big. I mean, you know—you know, I think—I think the one that really left a mark on my heart was President Kennedy. You know, I mean, I—he—he was probably—probably one of my biggest heroes because the—whatever happened to him. I mean, the things that—the things that happened to him should not happen to anybody, not even an animal. You know, we—I remember very specifically that day when that was announced, including myself and my whole family, we sat there and cried like a bunch of babies in our—in our living room watching on TV. You know, it was a very sad moment for the—for America, you know, and that was sad. You know, and that's—that will always be with me, you know.

LEVINE: Oh, wow. Well, maybe—that's a good place to end. I want to thank you so much.

REALI: Well, you're welcome.

LEVINE: It was a really interesting interview.

REALI: Oh.

LEVINE: I'm so happy I got to do it.

REALI: Oh, thank you.

LEVINE: And I've been speaking with Dominic Reali and here in Portland, Maine and at the office of Amato's. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]