

EI-1101/IANNELLI

EI-1101/ IANNELLI  
FANNY (FILOMENIA) ESPOSITO IANNELLI  
BIRTH DATE: JULY 6, 1912  
INTERVIEW DATE: AUGUST 31, 1999  
RUNNING TIME: 51:00  
INTERVIEWER: KRISTA M. SENATOR  
RECORDING ENGINEER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.  
INTERVIEW LOCATION: TOMS RIVER, NEW JERSEY  
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED/REVIEWED BY: KRISTA SENATOR, 9/1999

ITALY, 1926  
AGE 14  
PASSAGE ON "THE PRESIDENT WILSON"

SENATOR: Good afternoon, this is Krista Senator for the National Park Service. I am a student intern from Skidmore College with the Ellis Island Oral History Project. Today is Tuesday the 31<sup>st</sup> of August and I'm in Tom's River, New Jersey at the home of Fanny Iannelli, who came from Naples, Italy in 1926 when she was fourteen years old.

IANNELLI: Right.

SENATOR: Also in the room is Mrs. Iannelli's daughter, Madeline Barbini, and Paul Sigrist Jr., director of the Ellis Island Oral History Project, who is running the recording equipment. Why don't we begin by you giving me your full name please.

IANNELLI: My full name is, when I was, Filomenia.

SENATOR: Okay. And your last, maiden name and last name?

IANNELLI: Iannelli.

SENATOR: Okay. Your maiden name?

IANNELLI: Esposito

SENATOR: Esposito, okay. Could you spell that for the...

IANNELLI: E-S-P-O-S-I-T-O. I remember. (she laughs)

SENATOR: Thank you, thank you. (she laughs) And please state you date of birth.

IANNELLI: When I was born? 1912. Wait a minute, wait a minute, 1912, I was born in 1912.

SENATOR: Okay.

IANNELLI: 190-12

SENATOR: Thank you. And where were you born?

IANNELLI: In Italy, in Naples.

SENATOR: In Naples. What did Naples look like at that time?

IANNELLI: If I could remember, it was like a mess. I don't know about today.

SENATOR: Can you describe the town at all? How was it a mess?

IANNELLI: They didn't keep everything in place like they do today. Stuff on the street, they sell stuff on the street. I remember that much.

SENATOR: Okay. And what is your father's name?

IANNELLI: Anthony.

SENATOR: Anthony.

IANNELLI: Tony.

SENATOR: Iannelli?

IANNELLI: No, Esposito.

SENATOR: Oh, of course. And his occupation?

IANNELLI: Barber, he was a barber.

SENATOR: Could you describe what he looked like?

IANNELLI: What he looked like? One of my daughters, maybe one of those kids, I don't know. (she gestures to nearby photographs)

SENATOR: Okay. And describe his personality and temperament.

IANNELLI: Oh, very bad temper. (they laugh)

SENATOR: Do you have any anecdotes about your father? Any memories? Stories about him?

IANNELLI: Oh, I got to tell all his stories? I don't know all his stories.

SENATOR: Or just if you have a memory...

IANNELLI: I remember he had a couple of fights with people but I don't remember everything. Of course, he was in the business. He was a barber. He bought the place apart from another guy. Now this, he came from Italy that time and they said, "Well one of us, the two of us can't live over here. We got to do half each." So my father took the, the (she pauses) he took the barber shop. That's how I remember. And they had a lot of them between the two men.

SENATOR: And the barber shop, where was that?

IANNELLI: Columbus Street.

SENATOR: In...

INNAELLI: In Brooklyn.

SENATOR: In Brooklyn.

IANNELLI: Yeah.

SENATOR: Okay.

IANNELLI: Columbus, 102, 103 Columbus Street.

SENATOR: Do you remember what he did for work in Italy?

IANNELLI: No. I know he was a barber all the time.

SENATOR: And how about your mother's name?

IANNELLI: Mary.

SENATOR: Mary. And her maiden name?

IANNELLI: Geraci.

SENATOR: Could you spell that please?

IANNELLI: (to Madeline Barbini) Madeline, you spell.

SENATOR: Madeline would you...

BARBINI: G-E-R-A-C-I, Geraci.

SENATOR: Thank you. And what was her occupation?

IANNELLI: Dressmaker.

SENATOR: Oh, can you describe her appearance?

IANNELLI: Ah, she was a nice lady. What else could I tell you about her? I've got nothing bad to say about my mother. But she was good.

SENATOR: Do you have any memories of her?

IANNELLI: Oh plenty. I got all my kids, they remember my mother. They always talking about her. That's why I said she (gesturing to her daughter) should be here because she knows more than what I know. She's young girl and she's got better memory.

SENATOR: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

IANNELLI: Yes.

SENATOR: Could you name them please?

IANNELLI: Um, wait a minute. Esposito, you got to put Esposito. Gerry Esposito, Tony Esposito, Nancy Esposito, only Esposito. That's it.

SENATOR: And, are you the youngest? Oldest?

IANNELLI: No, I was the oldest. I'm the oldest.

SENATOR: You're the oldest, okay. Could you describe your house in Italy?

IANNELLI: Oh, I have a beautiful home. Then when I come over here I was disappointed because we had to go to sleep in back of the store. Then my father had a barbershop, then. He can't afford to get the rooms. You know it was very bad. That time was very bad so we had to sleep in the back and I cried like a baby. I want to go back to Italy. I didn't like it. But then I got used to it. Now, I'm happy here now. I got married over here. I got all my daughters married. I lost my husband nineteen years ago. But, he, he came from the same place I come from. I met him over here.

SENATOR: Oh, he's also from Naples.

IANNELLI: Yes the same (unintelligible) And it was good friend of my mother, his mother and my mother. And I met him over here.

SENATOR: And what was his name?

IANNELLI: Philip.

SENATOR: Philip Iannelli.

IANNELLI: Yes.

SENATOR: Okay.

IANNELLI: The only one. (she laughs)

SENATOR: Who lived with you in Italy?

IANNELLI: Nobody. Me, my mother and the kids. And my father was here in America.

SENATOR: Really.

IANNELLI: Yeah, and then he sent for us.

SENATOR: Okay.

IANNELLI: That's why we came. That's how I remember my father very good because only the first year we seen him. He came with the boat, you know the little boat. We were on the ship. When we sailed here, we were on the ship and he was with the boat. And he's going, "Who's you father?" "There he is." (she laughs)

SENATOR: When did your father leave Italy?

IANNELLI: Oh, you mean the first time? Well, he used to work on the ship, back and forth, you know? I could say maybe I was about ten years old. I can't remember everything. (she laughs)

SENATOR: Why did he leave?

IANNELLI: Because he didn't make enough money. He wanted to come in America to make enough money to make us so we could live better. By that time we lived worst, 'cause we lived better in Italy at that time. But now it's, it's okay.

SENATOR: Um hum. And what did he do on the boat? Do you...

IANNELLI: He's a fireman. You know.

SENATOR: He was a fireman on...

IANNELLI: On the boat, yeah.

SENATOR: Where did the boat go?

IANNELLI: In Italy, in Naples and America.

SENATOR: Okay. So it would go back and forth.

IANNELLI: Back and forth used to go. Yeah, then the last time he got stuck over here and then he sent for the family.

SENATOR: Where (she pauses) Did you have other family members in Naples?

IANNELLI: Oh yeah, my mother, my grandmother, my aunt, all the family was there.

SENATOR: And did you see them often?

IANNELLI: Oh yeah, when we were there. Yeah.

SENATOR: Were you especially close with anyone in your family?

IANNELLI: My aunt.

SENATOR: What was her name?

IANNELLI: Nancy.

SENATOR: Nancy. And her last name?

IANNELLI: I don't know, no.

SENATOR: Okay. Do you have any anecdotes about your aunt?  
Anything you can remember about her?

IANNELLI: She's dead now.

SENATOR: Yeah, but when you were young maybe?

IANNELLI: Yes, I remember her. Nice person.

SENATOR: Okay. What was religious life like in Italy?

IANNELLI: We were Catholic.

SENATOR: And was there a nearby house of worship that you would go to? A church?

IANNELLI: Oh yeah, we had a church.

SENATOR: Could you describe what the church...

IANNELLI: Oh where we lived, that was about a couple of years we lived. I remember the church, it was a small church. And we used to go every Sunday and then when there was a christening in the church, we used to go too.

SENATOR: Can you recite any prayers or anything like that?

IANNELLI: What do you mean prayers?

SENATOR: Prayers that you would say in church.

IANNELLI: Yeah, prayers in Italian.

SENATOR: Um hum.

IANNELLI: Yeah.

SENATOR: Can you recite one for me. (Mrs. Iannelli laughs) Do you remember?

IANNELLI: (she recites the Ave Maria.)

SENATOR: Thank you. Did you go to school in Italy?

IANNELLI: Yes.

SENATOR: You did?

IANNELLI: Yes. Yeah just for, when I was young. Then when I came over here my father take, I take the transfer to make me go to school. We were from Jersey and instead of me going to school, I went to work. Because we need the money, otherwise he couldn't be in business.

SENATOR: So, how old were you when you stopped going to school?

IANNELLI: Must be about thirteen years old.

SENATOR: And when did you begin going to school in Italy? How old were you?

IANNELLI: I don't remember that.

SENATOR: Okay. Where was the school located in Italy?

IANNELLI: Oh, you want the address in Italy?

SENATOR: Not the exact address but in relation to your house.

IANNELLI: It was a nice house. We had nice people. My mother used to, she used to sew for the people. I used to deliver the cloths and they used to give me tips all the time because I was a kid. And that's how we, we can make to money to come to America.

SENATOR: Really. And you did this while you were going to school?

IANNELLI: What do you mean?

SENATOR: You worked and you went to school at the same time...

IANNELLI: No, no...

SENATOR: ...in Italy?

IANNELLI: No.

SENATOR: No.

IANNELLI: I just went to school, that's it. Most of the time I used to be in the house 'cause my mother used to be sick all the time. And I, she need me for help.

SENATOR: What...

IANNELLI: That's the only reason I don't go to school. My sister went to school.

SENATOR: And what was her illness?

IANNELLI: My mother? She had the cancer.

SENATOR: In Italy?

IANNELLI: No, no, over here.

SENATOR: Over here, okay. Did you learn English prior to coming to America?

IANNELLI: Oh yeah.

SENATOR: So how well did you speak?

IANNELLI: I had an accent all the time, I still got it. (she laughs) But she got no school.

SENATOR: Describe what you did for entertainment as a child in Italy.

IANNELLI: Oh we used to be in the big house. We used to get all our friends, every Saturday night we used to dance. Kids? Your talking about kids now? Yes.

SENATOR: Did you have any close friends that you can...

IANNELLI: Yeah I had a lot of them. And I don't remember them no more.

SIGRIST: Could we pause just for a moment, please? (Break in tape)

SIGRIST: Okay we're now going to resume.

SENATOR: Could you tell me more about your mother's work as a dressmaker?

IANNELLI: Oh, I don't rem- , they used to work in the house. They didn't go to a factory, my mother had a, the machine in the house. People used to come in the house and then she used to make their clothes. She used to make a little money.

SENATOR: Who were these people?

IANNELLI: The neighbors.

SENATOR: Just the neighbors in Naples.

IANNELLI: Yes.

SENATOR: Could you describe the house that you lived in?

IANNELLI: The house was like a, first floor. You walk up three steps and then you go in the house and there was a bigger house. And we had the

kitchen outside the house and the bathroom outside. And my grandmother used to live upstairs from us.

SENATOR: The kitchen was outside the house?

IANNELLI: No, yeah, outside the house but in the house.

SENATOR: Can you explain that?

IANNELLI: Yeah, you open the door and there's a fire right over there and we used to cook.

SENATOR: So you cooked over a fire?

IANNELLI: A fire, yeah.

SENATOR: Can you tell me about the foods that you ate in Italy?

IANNELLI: Oh everything the best. (she laughs)

SENATOR: Such as? What kind of food?

IANNELLI: A lot of vegetables. Because my mother wanted us to be skinny all the time. I was the only fat one.

SENATOR: And where did you get the vegetables?

IANNELLI: At the store. And the guy used to come around with the wagon, the horse and wagon and my mother used to buy off them.

SENATOR: Would they come right to your house?

IANNELLI: No, in the block. And I remember, when it was your birthday they used to come and sing it to you. That I remember. (she laughs) We used to get all ready for the, for the guy to come with the, with the machine to the play. You know. I mean we all had a good time.

SENATOR: Can you sing the song for me?

IANNELLI: Oh, gosh. (she laughs) Why didn't you tell me before all this. I would have been ready. I would've remembered. What do you want me to sing? "Malevena" [ph]

SENATOR: Sure.

IANNELLI: (she sings in Italian)

SENATOR: Thank you. That was wonderful. (she laughs)

IANNELLI: It was good?

SENATOR: Yes, you have a beautiful voice.

IANNELLI: Oh yeah, when I was young. We made a tape of me and my daughter. We sing Italian. She sings Italian, my daughter. She went to school over here too in Italian. She picks up everything, she's very smart.

SENATOR: Okay. What did you know about America before you came?

IANNELLI: I know that we had to come and see my father and then the family had to be together. My mother said in the night, every night, "You know, your father is going to be here. You're going to behave yourself. Making sure everything is done right." What I hear from my mother. But that's all know. But he was a good father though.

SENATOR: And when did you come to the United States?

IANNELLI: When I came over here in America? 1906 [sic]

SENATOR: How long had you been away from your father?

IANNELLI: What do you mean? When the first time my father come over here? Well he left me like a kid, at twelve years old. Then I grew another couple of years, then I met him again.

SENATOR: Okay. What was it like to get ready to leave for America?

IANNELLI: Oh, it was exciting. Like when Americans want to go to Italy. Same thing. People were excited to come over here. We used to see my aunt, one of my mother's sister's was here, too. She was in Newark.

SENATOR: Did you have any other family members that were in the United States?

IANNELLI: No, just my aunt. A lot of friends, we had a lot of friends.

SENATOR: Okay. Did you feel, how did you feel about leaving Italy? How did your, how did your mother feel about leaving Italy?

IANNELLI: Ah, she felt bad because she left her mother. See, and we were young kids. That's all.

SENATOR: How much luggage did you and your mother pack?

IANNELLI: What did you mean?

SENATOR: Did you, how much or how, did you bring a lot of clothing, and things like that with you to the United States?

IANNELLI: Oh, yeah. My mother used to make all my clothes. She was a dressmaker. We didn't have to worry about that.

SENATOR: What other items did you take?

IANNELLI: That's it, just the clothes. What do you want me to tell you?

(they laugh)

SENATOR: Okay, thank you. And who came to America with you?

IANNELLI: Me, my mother, my brother, my sister. Three of us.

SENATOR: Three of you.

IANNELLI: Yeah.

SENATOR: So just one of your brothers and then a sister came with you?

IANNELLI: One brother and one sister, yeah, we were three kids.

SENATOR: Three kids, great.

IANNELLI: I was the oldest.

SENATOR: Okay. And how did you get from, or From which port did you leave?

IANNELLI: Naples.

SENATOR: Right. Describe um, what was the name of the ship?

IANNELLI: Oh, wait a minute, I remember. I got to think. "President Wilson."

SENATOR: Thank you. What happened before you got on the ship?

IANNELLI: Nothing. I was all excited to come to America.

SENATOR: Was there any process, anything you had to do to exit Italy, to leave Italy?

IANNELLI: No. The only thing I had to do when I came to America take care my mother, my sister, my brother.

SENATOR: What time of year did the ship depart?

IANNELLI: You mean what time did we dock?

SENATOR: Was it fall or winter?

IANNELLI: Oh it was, we were here in, in April, I think it was in April. In April we came here. April the thirteenth. 'Cause I remember it was my father's day, that's Saint Anthony.

SENATOR: Can you describe the accommodations on the ship?

IANNELLI: Very good. I used to take all my family. I used to go to the kitchen, get a fruit for my mother because my mother got sick.

SENATOR: She did?

IANNELLI: She did.

SENATOR: What was she sick from?

IANNELLI: She was sick from the boat. She used to throw up all the time, she don't want to eat. She can't smell the food and I was a young girl. I used to go in the kitchen. That's a lot of fun. I used to go and get the fruit for her and my sister and my brother. My brother was a little boy, three years old.

SENATOR: How old was you sister at the time?

IANNELLI: Three years younger than me.

SENATOR: And you were how old?

IANNELLI: I was fourteen, she was twelve.

SENATOR: What class did you travel in? Was it, did you travel in first class, second class...

IANNELLI: No, no, no. Down, down, downstairs.

SENATOR: Downstairs, down in the...

IANNELLI: In the boat, yeah. We didn't have the special place, no.

SENATOR: Okay. Was the voyage rough or smooth?

IANNELLI: The water? Ah, yeah it was tough. But I was a kid, I used to laugh at everybody. (she laughs)

SENATOR: So describe the other people on the boat?

IANNELLI: Oh, all our friends.

SENATOR: There, were there other people that you knew from Italy...

IANNELLI: Yes, yes.

SENATOR: ... that were also going?

IANNELLI: Yes.

SENATOR: Could you tell me a little bit about that?

IANNELLI: Oh, I don't know if I could tell you about them, no. Look I remember for myself, I got to remember for the people? (she laughs)

SENATOR: No, no, no. (she laughs) Were there a lot of people that you knew?

IANNNELLI: 'Cause I remember when we came, everyone on the boat, all the people on the boat. You know after we come, after we had to come, after we came to America. And my father came with the little boat, you know the little boat, and there was about fifty people on that boat and somebody asked me, "Which one is your father?" "There he is." I called him. "Pa, I'm over here. I'm in America."

SENATOR: Describe what it was like to see your father again.

IANNELLI: Oh, it was exciting.

SENATOR: Yeah.

IANNELLI: Oh yeah.

SENATOR: Was it, was it , so was it very, was it...

IANNELLI: He was a good man.

SENATOR: Did you interact with any other people on the boat in first or second class.

IANNELLI: The friends. Oh yeah, I used to walk all around the boat. Now I can't remember everybody on the boat. (unintelligible) (she laughs)

SENATOR: No, that's not what I'm asking. Did you befriend any other travelers besides those you already knew?

IANNELLI: What do you mean?

SENATOR: Did you meet new people?

IANNELLI: Yeah friends, yeah all friends. Then we came to America but I don't see them no more.

SENATOR: Of course. How did you feel when you saw New York City for the first time?

IANNELLI: I was a little but excited, but that's about all. But I got used to America right away.

SENATOR: Did you?

IANNELLI: Yes 'cause I went to work right away. See, my mother was a sick woman and when she was sick she had one sister. And my father, to make her happy, remember she wasn't happy over here I don't know, we moved to Jersey. And when we moved to Jersey instead of me gave the transfer to go to school, I went to work. And the first job I got in the laundry. (she laughs) Fold the cloths you know. I just, but I was big. And then another job I got in the button factory, make, work at a machine, make the buttons. And that's how we got along. Except when we got enough money, we moved back to Brooklyn. And my father rented a house, we had a nice home and we did all right since then.

SENATOR: So when did you move from Brooklyn?

IANNELLI: After two years we were in America 'cause my father couldn't take care of my mother no more. She used to get headaches all the time so, she, the best was make her go over to her sister. And she, you know, and she was happy with her sister. She was depressed because she left her mother there, she left another sister, she left, she left her family, see?

But then she got used to it too. Then after two years we were in Jersey, we went back to Brooklyn. And when I, we went back to Brooklyn, I got another job in the dates factory, like they make the dates.

SENATOR: Dates?

IANNELLI: The dates, you know, the dates you eat.

SENATOR: Oh okay. (Mrs. Iannelli laughs)

IANNELLI: And I went to work again. And I remember like if it was today, my father used to wait for me for that little play I used to make, twelve, thirteen dollars a week to buy food for the house because the business was very slow that time. But then he got all right.

SENATOR: So your father worked as a barber in Brooklyn?

IANNELLI: Yeah.

SENATOR: And then did the entire family move to New Jersey?

IANNELLI: To Jersey and my father was still in Brooklyn. Once a week, he used to come and see us.

SENATOR: Oh, okay, okay. And where in New Jersey were you living?

IANNELLI: Newark.

SENATOR: Newark. With you aunt and your mother.

IANNELLI: My mother, yeah.

SENATOR: And you, and who else were you living with?

IANNELLI: All of the family that my mother knew.

SENATOR: Okay. What about your brothers and sisters?

IANNELLI: They were with me too. My sister went to school and my brother was a kid, then he went to school too. I was the only one that I don't go to school.

SENATOR: Did you go to school at all in the United States?

IANNELLI: No. I started yeah.

SENATOR: Where did you start?

IANNELLI: Catholic school it was, I remember. It was a Catholic. And I had a lot of trouble over there with the kids. They used to make fun of me because I was Italian.

SENATOR: Really.

IANNELLI: And I used to fight with the kids. Yeah, yeah.

SENATOR: Can you tell me a little more about that? What did they used to say to you?

IANNELLI: They used to call me "geep." [ph] (she laughs) The "geep" [ph] yeah I used to beat them up. (she laughs)

SENATOR: Did you meet new friends?

IANNELLI: Oh, yeah.

SENATOR: So for how long were you in school, in Brooklyn?

IANNELLI: A couple of months.

SENATOR: Do you remember any teachers?

IANNELLI: The nun.

SENATOR: Could you tell me about...

IANNELLI: Ah, I don't know her name. You want me to remember the nun's name?

SENATOR: No, not the name, just if you remember, if you have any stories about going to school in Brooklyn.

IANNELLI: Not that I know. I don't think I liv-.

SENATOR: Okay. And then, could you tell me a little bit about the work you did in New Jersey when you moved?

IANNELLI: I tell you, I worked in the laundry.

SENATOR: What was that like?

IANNELLI: Like we'd be folding the clothes in the machine. And I was with a colored girl, she was on that side and I was on this side. We used to fold the sheets together. And I used to get on top of the fence 'cause I was small. (she laughs)

SENATOR: How did you feel about leaving school and going to work?

IANNELLI: I feel bad but then I, I see the situation. My mother was sick, she only depended on me. So I helped my father with the barbershop, too. I washed all the towels for him, and I get the barbershop ready. It was a lot of help.

SENATOR: Okay. And when did you move back to Brooklyn?

IANNELLI: Oh I think after three years, about three years.

SENATOR: Why did you move back?

IANNELLI: I moved back 'cause my father had the business over there. So my mother got used to, you know, to America and that's how we got back again. And she put up a nice home, my father put up a nice home. And then we got work. I work all the time anyway.

SENATOR: Who did the cooking...

IANNELLI: Me.

SENATOR: in the house? You did.

IANNELLI: I used to go near my mother, she was in bed, I used to go over with the pots, "Ma I got this in the water?" "You want to put more tomatoes?" She used to tell me and I did it.

SENATOR: Could you tell me about the kind of food you ate, a little more about that?

IANNELLI: I told you, all the kinds of vegetables we had all the time. Escarole, sting beans, potatoes, what else you want to know? (she laughs)

SENATOR: Was it, was it similar to the food you ate in Italy?

IANNELLI: Oh yeah, we were healthy then.

SENATOR: And where did you get you vegetables from?

IANNELLI: The guys who used to come around with the wagon. When they used to come around, my mother, she used to make us shop.

SENATOR: And there was someone who went around with the wagon in Brooklyn?

IANNELLI: No no, I'm talking about while we went to Newark.

SENATOR: Okay.

IANNELLI: And we had a fish store downstairs. I remember like it was today. Every time I used to get paid, my mother used to make me get twenty five cents of varieties of fish. We used to get along all right. Then that's, on the weekend, my father used to come and we had a, yeah know, big party. You know we were happy with the family. And he used to stay for a couple of days and then he used to leave again.

SENATOR: Can you tell me about the apartment that you lived in, in Brooklyn? Where you lived in Brooklyn.

IANNELLI: In the back if the store, I'm telling you. The barbershop was in the front and in the back my father put (unintelligible) you know and we

used to sleep over there for a while. Then we went to Newark and when we come, back we find a house and we live different.

SENATOR: After you left...

IANNELLI: After we left yeah.

SENATOR: When you moved back to Brooklyn...

IANNELLI: Brooklyn yeah.

SENATOR: ...where did you live then?

IANNELLI: Columbus street.

SENATOR: Can you describe the barber shop and living behind it? How many rooms were there?

IANNELLI: There were about two bedrooms, the kitchen, and a little dining room. It was all right, comfortable.

SENATOR: And how about the home in Newark?

IANNELLI: Newark, we had four rooms, two bedrooms and my mother with the three kids.

SENATOR: Okay. What was the neighborhood like...

IANNELLI: Nice...

SENATOR: ...that you lived in, in Brooklyn?

IANNELLI: Nice people. Yeah. There was my mother's sister, there was all our cousins. She had all her family, she was happy then.

SENATOR: The neighborhood in Brooklyn?

IANNELLI: No, in Newark.

SENATOR: Of which ethnic groups were the other people there, were your neighbors?

IANNELLI: What kind of people they were?

SENATOR: Yeah, where were they from?

IANNELLI: In Italy, they all Italian people. The whole gang. (she laughs)

SENATOR: And how, can you describe the house at all or the apartment where you lived?

IANNELLI: I remember you go in, when you walk in we had the bed-, the kitchen. Then you walk to the next side. You know all sides, then the bedroom one after the other, four rooms. They were all right. We did all right 'til we got married then, you see. You want to know how I met my husband too?

SENATOR: In a little bit. (Mrs. Iannelli laughs) We'll talk about that in a little bit.

SIGRIST: Actually we're going to pause for a moment. (Break in tape) We're resuming now.

SENATOR: Before we go on, could you please state your date of birth.

IANNELLI: 1912.

SENATOR: The...

IANNELLI: July the sixth.

SENATOR: Thank you. Okay. We're going to back tract a little bit, to Italy and talk about your grandparents. Can you describe them?

IANNELLI: My grandmother, she was old when I met her, then she died. We got the letter that she was dead. And then we didn't go there too often 'cause we didn't have the money to go back and forth. We stayed here a long time. After I got married, I said I go to Italy every year.

SENATOR: Did you go to Italy at all when you were young?

IANNELLI: No. The first time when we come to America.

SENATOR: And were these grandparents your father's...

IANNELLI: My father...

SENATOR: ...your father's side or your maternal grandparents?

IANNELLI: My father's family? Yeah, he had a sister, he had a mother, he had a father, he had his family. And my mother had her own family, I

mean my grandmother. My mother's side. We met the whole family, everyone, we were all right.

SENATOR: And did you spend time with them?

IANNELLI: Oh yeah.

SENATOR: Can you describe what it was like to say goodbye to your grandparents?

IANNELLI: Oh, very bad. That was the worst part, when we had to leave them. But then they got used to it, we got used to it.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SENATOR: How did you feel at the time?

IANNELLI: I can't remember now how I feel at that time. (she laughs)  
You want me to remember too much. (they laugh) I remember my grandmother. She used wor-, be in the big building. She used to be like, career of the people, they used to come in, she used to take care of the

people that came in. But she didn't have no husband. That's how she used to make her living, the old lady. But she was all right.

SENATOR: Was this in her own home?

IANNELLI: No, it was in the building where she worked, where she lived.

SENATOR: And you said that one grandparent lived upstairs from you in Italy?

IANNELLI: That was my grandmother, my father's mother.

SENATOR: Your father's mother.

IANNELLI: Yeah. The other one was my mother's.

SENATOR: So which one worked taking care of people?

IANNELLI: Nobody. What do you mean take care of people?

SENATOR: You said that one of your grandmother's visited homes and went to a big house and took care of, or worked there, took care of people.

IANNELLI: I guess so, I don't know.

SENATOR: Okay. Could you tell me about seeing the Statue of Liberty for the first time?

IANNELLI: Oh yeah, after ten years, I seen. The first time we didn't go. After then ten years we went.

SENATOR: Could you tell me about seeing it when you first arrived...

IANNELLI: I was surprised.

SENATOR: ...at Ellis Island?

IANNELLI: Yeah, I was surprised. Everybody when we used to be back with the boat said, "Oh, we're Americans, we're Americans, the Statue of Liberty," they said. Everybody was clapping. Everybody was all excited. I was a kid. I said I cried I wanted to go right away. My father said, "Well it will take a little time you can't go right away."

SENATOR: And what was or describe the other travelers' reactions to the experience?

IANNELLI: We used to go to the farm. You know, at that time there was no motel, hotel. We used to go two, couple of weeks. Yeah.

SENATOR: When you came into New York Harbor and first saw the Statue of Liberty, how did other people on the boat react?

IANNELLI: Like me. (she laughs) They were very nice.

SENATOR: How did you get from the ship to Ellis Island?

IANNELLI: With the ship? People, I mean, my father came to pick us up.

SENATOR: Describe your reaction to seeing Ellis Island for the first time.

IANNELLI: Oh I was all excited. I was an American. I said, "Ma, see we're in America now." No more in Italy. (she laughs)

SENATOR: How did your family feel?

IANNELLI: Ah, they were happy for us.

SENATOR: Your other or your traveling companions?

IANNELLI: Yes, oh yes. We got along nice with everybody.

SENATOR: How do you feel about Ellis Island?

IANNELLI: Beautiful.

SENATOR: Can you describe why you feel that way?

IANNELLI: I feel that way, that's how I feel. What do you want me to see Naples right away? (she laughs)

SENATOR: Describe the things and people that you saw at Ellis Island.

IANNELLI: Ah, the people. Friends you mean? Yeah, but I don't remember all their names.

SENATOR: That's okay. But what about other people that were there.

What was it like to be at Ellis Island?

IANNELLI: It was nice. It was all excited, all the people excited.

SENATOR: How were you treated by the staff at Ellis Island?

IANNELLI: Very good.

SENATOR: Can you describe what happened while you were there?

IANNELLI: Nothing happened. I don't remember anything happened.

SENATOR: I think that Mrs. Barbini would like to add something.

(addressing Madeline Barbini) Would you like to say something?

SIGRIST: Speak up, speak out Madeline.

BARBINI: Why don't you tell them that when you got to Ellis Island, what happened to your sister. She had something on her head...

IANNELLI: Oh yeah, that's right. You want to know that, too. See she remembers. Yeah she had the sores, you know, like all, like all sores on the head. And the nun was there and they reject her. They don't want her to, to stay in America. They wanted to keep her there. And I know my father had a lot of trouble that time and then they let her go free.

SENATOR: So for how long were you detained at Ellis Island?

IANNELLI: The same day.

SENATOR: It all happened on...

IANNELLI: Yeah

SENATOR: ...the same day.

IANNELLI: The same day.

SENATOR: Do you remember how many hours it took?

IANNELLI: I'm sorry, I didn't have a watch with me at that time. (she laughs)

SENATOR: That's quite all right. (she laughs) So what exactly happened? How...

IANNELLI: You come out of the boat. You know. Then there's a nun and the nurse and they check your hair, they check everything. And when they checked my sister she had the sore on her head. But she was sick all the time. And they didn't want to make her come to America, they wanted to send her back. And I know my father had trouble for that, but then it's okay. My mother took care of everything.

SENATOR: Who did your mom talk to or what did she do to take care of it so that you sister...

IANNELLI: My mother did. My moth-, she bought the stuff, she put the medicine on the head, she took care of her and then after two weeks they went back again and they okayed.

SENATOR: Okay. So, we've you already said that your father came to meet you at Ellis Island, what happened then? Did you, earlier Mrs. Barbini mentioned that you had to pick your father out of a line.

IANNELLI: Oh I pick him out of all the men. They was all on the boat, they were on the boat. And we were on the boat and they were down. They ask me, "Where's your father?" And I see my father right away. I said, I got all excited when I see him anyway.

SENATOR: Why did they ask you to do it and not...

IANNELLI: Nothing. They tell me, "Where's your father." And I said, "There he is." My father started to wave me and I started talk to my father.

SENATOR: Okay. All right, well, let's jump ahead and talk a little bit about learning English.

IANNELLI: Learn English? By myself.

SENATOR: What, can you describe the experience for me?

IANNELLI: What's the experience? People used to talk, I used to pick it up because of them. I don't go to school to learn how to speak English. You can see that I don't speak good English either.

SENATOR: Of course you do. (they laugh) Did you learn English at all in school, when you went school in Brooklyn for...

IANNELLI: Yeah, it was Ick [ph] street. The street where the school was? Yeah it was on Ick [ph] street.

SENATOR: Can you describe the building for me?

IANNELLI: The building like a school.

SENATOR: Okay and where was that located...

IANNELLI: In the same block where we move in.

SENATOR: Okay. How about your parents? Can you describe what it was like for them to learn English?

IANNELLI: Oh they were talking the broken English.

SENATOR: Okay, how long did it take them to learn a little bit of the language?

IANNELLI: I don't know? I can't remember how long it took them.

SENATOR: Did they...

IANNELLI: I don't know.

SENATOR: Okay, okay. Did you speak English...

IANNELLI: Broken English yeah.

SENATOR: ...English with them as well?

IANNELLI: No, me and my sister. She used to go to school and she used to tell me how to talk.

SENATOR: So your sister helped you?

IANNELLI: Oh yeah, my sister. She's dead now, my sister. She was two years younger than me.

SENATOR: And your parents, did they speak English or Italian with you?

IANNELLI: Italian. They don't know how to speak English, how they going to speak English? (she laughs)

SENATOR: Can you describe what it was like for them to live in America?

IANNELLI: Oh, they were happy. I know my mother made a lot of friends. They used to take her to the doctor because she don't speak English. It was all right. We got no complain about America.

SENATOR: So you went to an Italian speaking doctor?

IANNELLI: No, my mother always had friends to speak Italian, speak English and she used to go with them. Are we finished?

SENATOR: No, not yet. (they laugh) If that's all right.

IANNELLI: Well I'm sorry if I don't give all the information.

SENATOR: No, you're giving me wonderful information.

IANNELLI: What ever I remember, I can tell you.

SENATOR: Okay. No, it's great, it's great. I'd like to talk a little bit about what it was like for you to work.

IANNELLI: Well, it was hard for the beginning. Then I got used to it. I was afraid of the colored people. When I was a kid and I was a young girl too. Then I got used to it then, they liked me, I liked them. I made friends with them too. It's all right.

SENATOR: Did you work with people of, or what were the nationalities of the people that you worked with? Where were they from?

IANNELLI: They, they from every place. Like today, they took all kinds of people.

SENATOR: And now, you said you first worked in Newark.

IANNELLI: In Newark, yeah.

SENATOR: And what was the...

IANNELLI: I tell you, in the laundry.

SENATOR: In laundry, okay. And then after that you worked a factory.

IANNELLI: My aunt take me with her and I make two dollars more a month. (she laughs)

SENATOR: Really. Can you describe what it was like to work in the factory? What kind of...

IANNELLI: For me it was fun 'cause I was a kid. I was happy that I don't go to school all right? (she laughs)

SENATOR: How old were you when you worked in the factory?

IANNELLI: I was about fourteen years old. I was big you know.

SENATOR: Okay. How much did you make in wages a week?

IANNELLI: How much? Ten dollars a week, twelve dollars, maybe overtime at thirteen dollars. And my mother used to, my father used to give me one dollar. Every time I got paid, one dollar. (And he used to get the envelope.?) Not like today, the kids, they buy everything they want.

SENATOR: What did you do with the one dollar?

IANNELLI: What do I do?

SENATOR: Did you just keep it and save? Or...

IANNELLI: No, I used to buy, maybe if I need stockings, if I need a dress, if I needed material to make a dress.

SENATOR: Okay. Can you describe the working conditions in the factory?

IANNELLI: Very bad. For a young girl it was very bad. But I, I had a lot of fun. For me it was nothing, my mom used to cry. She said, "She's so young, she got to go to work." But that's all right. We did all right. Then I met my husband over here and he came from the same place that I come

from. And my mother got good friends with him. And, and I got married, I was twenty one years old. I've got five daughters.

SENATOR: So, for how long did you work at the factory?

IANNELLI: How long I work? Since we moved. When we moved from Brooklyn, a couple of years. Yeah, couple of years.

SENATOR: And why did you stop working there?

IANNELLI: I, I got another job when I went to Brooklyn, my father got it for me. He knew somebody and they had the dates factory. You know the dates you eat, that was a factory. And I used to pack them. And I used to make fifteen dollars a week. At that time it was a lot of money.

SENATOR: Do you have any stories about working in the date factory?

IANNELLI: No.

SENATOR: Anything you can remember?

IANNELLI: I used to be happy with all the kid, all the people there.

SENATOR: Were there every any strikes or union activity?

IANNELLI: Oh, I don't remember that. I remember go to work and take the, the money and shut up. (she laughs)

SENATOR: Okay. All right. Well we're, just more of a general question. Were there certain things that you did in Italy that you continued to do in the United States?

IANNELLI: I used to play with the kids in Italy no matter what I did. I didn't do anything. I come over here, I went to work. Then I got married, then I got four kids, five kids.

SENATOR: Were there any games that you played in the United States?

IANNELLI: No not too many. We didn't have too much activities. Today it's different, they got everything.

SENATOR: Were there any differences between practicing your religion in Italy and in the United States?

IANNELLI: Oh no, I pick it up right away. I got my first communion too. The first year we here I remember, my mother made the dress.

SENATOR: And so what happened with your mother? Could you talk a little bit more about her illness?

IANNELLI: Ah she was sick. She was nervous because my father was away, she was with the kids all the time you know, she used to get nervous. Then when she moved to Newark, she felt better because she had her sister over there, and she had her cousins, she had a lot, a lot of people that she knew from Italy. See (she felt herself most safe like.?)

SENATOR: And did she move with you to Brooklyn, to be with your father?

IANNELLI: No, my father used to pick us up every week to take us to the barbershop. He used to do my hair, he used to do my mother's hair. No we had a good relation.

SENATOR: Did anyone else come over to the United States after you had arrived? Anyone from Italy that you knew?

IANNELLI: Yeah, my father's brother, my uncle, he came.

SENATOR: And when did he come?

IANNELLI: When did he come?

SENATOR: How many years after you had arrived?

IANNELLI: Oh, a couple of years later. He used to come back and forth, he used to work on the ship.

SENATOR: Okay. Did anyone that you know return their country, return to Italy?

IANNELLI: No.

SENATOR: No, everyone stayed in the United States?

IANNELLI: Once you come to America, you forget Italy. You forget everything.

SENATOR: Describe how your parents adjusted to being in America.

IANNELLI: What do you mean? They were happy. My mother was happy after that, you know, she got used to the people. Then I started to

go to work and then we used to make a little money more. Everything would be better, was better.

SENATOR: How do you define your nationality today?

IANNELLI: (she laughs) What do you mean how do I define?

SENATOR: How do you define, do you, do you feel that, or (she pauses) I think a better question, when did you become a United States citizen?

IANNELLI: When I got citizen? My citizen paper? Oh, after I was married.

SENATOR: Okay. Can you describe what that was like?

IANNELLI: It was nice.

SENATOR: What was it, what was the process like?

IANNELLI: No because I married my husband, he wasn't citizen. See I had to become citizen and then I make him become citizen. And he was citizen too from me.

SENATOR: So he was the citizen first.

IANNELLI: Yeah, me first.

SENATOR: You first.

IANNELLI: Me first, I got it from my father.

SENATOR: Okay. And when did your husband come to the United States?

IANNELLI: I think about the same time I came.

SENATOR: Okay, okay. And you said you were married when you were twenty one. How did you meet your husband?

IANNELLI: Oh how I meet? It was in the holiday and we had some friends in the building, we went to see this friends, and all of a sudden my husband used to board, you know used to board with the people. He came down and he see me and he fell in love with me. (she laughs) And a couple of years later we got married.

SENATOR: Okay, so he came, he came down to your father's house?

IANNELLI: Oh yeah, yeah.

SENATOR: Um hum, um hum. And could you please name your children?

IANNELLI: The oldest one is named Jenny, after my mother-in-law. The second one is Marie, after my mother. The third one, Annie because I wanted a Saint Ann that's like Ann. The fourth one is Madeline, this one. (she gestures to Mrs. Barbini) And the fifth one was Susan. That's it, no more.

SENATOR: Okay, five daughters.

IANNELLI: Five daughters.

SENATOR: Wow.

IANNELLI: Thank God they were good, all of them.

SENATOR: Where did you live with your husband and your family? After you got married, where did you live?

IANNELLI: I lived two blocks away from my mother, where my mother used to live.

SENATOR: In Brooklyn?

IANNELLI: In Brooklyn, yeah.

SENATOR: What are your feelings about America?

IANNELLI: Very good, I got no complain.

SENATOR: And you mentioned that you went back to Italy a couple of times.

IANNELLI: Oh yeah, that was when my husband was work and he used to get a vacation and I used to go when the kids were big, not when they were small. When they were small they had to work. (she laughs)

SENATOR: So how old were you when you went back to visit?

IANNELLI: To visit?

SENATOR: Italy.

IANNELLI: I was married, yeah.

SENATOR: Can you describe what it felt like to be back there?

IANNELLI: Oh it was nice. I see, I met all my husband's family. I met a lot of people. And then we started to (one to one?) used to go.

SENATOR: Did you see your, the town, did you go to Naples, to where you were born?

IANNELLI: Oh yeah. I wanted to go in the carriage. I was like a kid, you know, with the horses.

SENATOR: And were there still family members there?

IANNELLI: Oh yeah. Then I remember every one of them. Every time we go we used to visit them. We used to go to my father's family, my mother's family, it was all right. (break in tape.)

SENATOR: We are resuming because Mrs. Iannelli....

IANNELLI: Yeah, I used to go to the beach right with the kids. And I used

to pick up the rocks, the little rocks. When I used to go home, I stick the rocks and everything outside the house. That was when I was in Italy and I used to sing to the people. (she sings in Italian.) You understand that now?

SIGRIST: Well what does that mean? What does that mean in English?

IANNELLI: In English, "bring me the money." I gave it to the, the, you know to, the (she pauses) you lost me. (they laugh)

SIRGRIST: Are there any other songs? Do you want to sing one more song for us while we're going?

IANNELLI: I don't know what song.

SIGRIST: A nice Italian song. When you cook, do you sing when you cook?

IANNELLI: Oh yeah, all the time.

SIGRTIST: All right, what do you sing when you cook?

IANNELLI: I don't know, let me think.

SIGRIST: (To Mrs. Barbini) Madeline?

IANNELLI: Madeline, you remember...

BARBINI: You can sing a song, (Italian) you know about the boy because you always had girls. Sing that, sing (Italian.)

IANNELLI: Okay (Italian) (she sings in Italian) That's all. (they all applaud)

SIGRIST: Brava!

SENATOR: Oh, thank you. (break in tape)

IANNELLI: Anything else you want to know? (she laughs)

SENATOR: Okay, that's a good place to end the interview. And I want to thank you Mrs. Iannelli...

IANNELLI: Okay, thank you. I want to thank you to come to my home.

SENATOR: It was wonderful...

IANNELLI: And you meet my daughter.

SENATOR: ...and so nice to meet you and to meet your daughter.

IANNELLI: And her son, her son, that works over here.

SENATOR: Yes, yes okay. This is Krista Senator signing off with Fanny Iannelli on Tuesday the 31<sup>st</sup> of August 1999 with the Ellis Island Oral History Project.

