

EI-1103

PHILLIPPA (FANNY) SMERAGLIA

BIRTHDATE: NOVEMBER 2, 1902

INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 1, 1999

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 96

RUNNING TIME: 46:05

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

INTERVIEW LOCATION: RAHWAY, NEW JERSEY

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

SICILY, 1919

AGE: 17

SHIP: DANTE ALIGHIERI

PORT:

RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: Today is September 1st, 1999. I'm here in Rahway, New Jersey with Phillippa (called Fanny) Smeraglia? Smeraglia.

WOMAN: Well, silent J. Smeralia [PH].

LEVINE: Smer—

WOMAN: Smeralia. [laughs]

LEVINE: Smeralia, okay. And [clears throat] Fanny is, at the time of this interview, 96, about to turn 97 in November. And she came on the Dante Alighieri in 1919 from Sicily through Ellis Island. Okay. And [clears throat] this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service.

SMERAGLIA: [clears throat]

LEVINE: Okay, Fanny, if you would say where in Sicily you were born and where you—you were until you came to America.

WOMAN: [speaking Italian].

SMERAGLIA: Ribera. [PH]

WOMAN: Tell her. Ribera.

SMERAGLIA: Ribera.

WOMAN: Yeah, tell—tell Janet.

SMERAGLIA: Ribera.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. I think—let me try it with the English and if we can't do it, then—

WOMAN: That's good. Yeah.

LEVINE: Then it will be a cleaner tape. Okay. What do you remember about Ribera?

SMERAGLIA: A lot of things. When I was small, we used to play a lot.

LEVINE: What did you play?

SMERAGLIA: With the—with the tamborina. [PH]

LEVINE: Ah, the tamborina. [chuckles]

SMERAGLIA: And the kids used to dance in the street.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do—shall we—do you want to show me the tambourine and we—we have the tam—we have a tambourine that you came with—brought with you when you came to this country?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah, this here.

LEVINE: Is this the tambourine that you played with?

SMERAGLIA: This break.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

SMERAGLIA: And—

LEVINE: Did—did you have this tambourine in Ribera?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah. I had it in—my mother bought it.

LEVINE: And do you remember any times when you used it when you were a little girl?

SMERAGLIA: I used to play it like this.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. You want to play it? Can you play it a little bit?

SMERAGLIA: I cannot use my hands.

LEVINE: Oh, you can't use your hands. Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: [unclear].

LEVINE: And did you—and did you dance? Who would—who would be there when you played?

SMERAGLIA: We used to play every day at the Halloween. We used to have a good time.

LEVINE: What did you do on Halloween?

SMERAGLIA: My neighbor used to come and we used to play [unclear].

LEVINE: Did you dress up on Halloween?

SMERAGLIA: No.

LEVINE: No.

SMERAGLIA: Not to go out.

LEVINE: No.

SMERAGLIA: No, we had no men in the house. It was me and my sister and my mother.

LEVINE: Where was your father?

SMERAGLIA: He die.

WOMAN: No.

LEVINE: Did he came to America first?

SMERAGLIA: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: He came. First he came and my two brother and then my sister and then my father. Five years later, we came.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you didn't see your father for five years?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah. Oh, well, we're going to see but was at home.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did he come back and forth?

SMERAGLIA: No.

LEVINE: No, he came here—

SMERAGLIA: Never did.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Then what did he do when he was here? When he was in America, what did he do for work?

SMERAGLIA: Went to work.

LEVINE: What kind of work?

SMERAGLIA: Sewing machining. We used to sewing machining.

LEVINE: Your father sewed on a machine?

SMERAGLIA: No.

LEVINE: No. What did he do?

SMERAGLIA: I—my father bought a machine for me and I used to make home things. Home.

LEVINE: When you were still in Sicily, you used to—

SMERAGLIA: Yeah.

LEVINE: —use the machine?

SMERAGLIA: And my brother, the younger one, he bought his suit, [unclear] suit for this—he couldn't find [unclear]. My father and they—they went to the store and they bought material and made a shirt.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. That was in this country?

SMERAGLIA: Over here.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh. Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: Over here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: I used to go to learn how to work.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, let's talk about Sicily first. Ribera. What—what—did you go to school?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah.

LEVINE: In Ribera?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah, the second [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: And then have go help my father to work.

LEVINE: And what did you work at when you were in Sicily?

SMERAGLIA: Used to have a garden with a—with [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: [unclear] with a long—my two brother was over here. I had to help.

LEVINE: What kind—how big was the garden?

SMERAGLIA: Huh?

LEVINE: Was it—was it big? Did you grow a lot of things?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah.

LEVINE: What? What did you grow?

SMERAGLIA: Well, my father—we have [unclear].

LEVINE: Um, well, he had—he had a donkey?

SMERAGLIA: [unclear].

WOMAN: [speaking Italian].

SMERAGLIA: [speaking Italian].

WOMAN: That's [unclear] but she wanted to know—

SMERAGLIA: [speaking Italian].

WOMAN: What do you tell Janet?

SMERAGLIA: We had tomatoes, [unclear], peppers, all the things, the cucumber.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. What kinds of—what kinds of meals do you remember from when you were a little girl in Sicily? What kinds of food did your mother make?

SMERAGLIA: Tomatoes and big squash, the longer one. Oh, we used to make a lot of—

LEVINE: Yeah, what was your favorite?

SMERAGLIA: Tomatoes and the cucumbers.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: We used to [unclear] like a bread.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did your mother bake bread?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah, used to make bread.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember that?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah. Make a big loaf like this around.

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LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did you help your mother cook too?

SMERAGLIA: Not much.

LEVINE: Not much. Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: Because I used to go with my father.

LEVINE: To the field. To the garden.

SMERAGLIA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: He had no boy. I had to go.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: That's why I quit school.

LEVINE: I see. You were the o—oldest one still in Sicily because your sister came here?

SMERAGLIA: Over there.

LEVINE: Right.

SMERAGLIA: Over here was the other one and the other one that die.

LEVINE: How did the other one die?

SMERAGLIA: I don't know. I never remember.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Were you a religious family?

SMERAGLIA: Huh?

LEVINE: Were you a religious family?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah.

LEVINE: How did you celebrate different religious holidays?

SMERAGLIA: In the house. We used to have everything in the house and we had a bigger home.

LEVINE: Oh. No? Did you go to church?

SMERAGLIA: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And do you remember any—any church holidays? What was it like when you celebrated a Saint's Day?

SMERAGLIA: Oh, St. Joseph.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMERAGLIA: St. Lucy. In June, the holiday, we used to go to church every Sunday morning.

LEVINE: Do you remember Christmas?

SMERAGLIA: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: What happened then?

SMERAGLIA: We had much like over here though.

LEVINE: Much like this? No.

SMERAGLIA: Just a little bit.

LEVINE: What did—did you—did you have presents?

SMERAGLIA: No, no.

LEVINE: Did you have good food?

SMERAGLIA: Was no money and no—like, we had here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. How about Easter?

SMERAGLIA: My sister was younger than me.

LEVINE: How about Easter, the—wh—Easter Sunday? Do you remember Easter?

WOMAN: [speaking Italian]

SMERAGLIA: Oh.

WOMAN: That's Easter.

SMERAGLIA: Used to have the—the eggs were there, big dish with the ricotta and eggs and a little bit of bread with [unclear]. Oh, was delicious.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: My mother used to make over here too.

LEVINE: Oh, she made the same thing over here.

SMERAGLIA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Yeah. And [clears throat] let's see. Did you—did you celebrate any Saints' days? What did you do then? What did you do on St. Lucy or St. Joseph?

SMERAGLIA: On a Sunday? [unclear] holiday? Oh, we used to have dinner. Somebody used to be the [unclear] and we used to help with the cooking and [unclear]. It was like one thing where everybody [unclear].

LEVINE: One family?

SMERAGLIA: You used to be like a [unclear] where everybody together.

LEVINE: Ah, uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: All the neighbors would come?

SMERAGLIA: All the neighbors together.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. You remember your house?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah.

LEVINE: What was that? Could you describe the house you lived in there?

SMERAGLIA: Was on old house. My great grandmother give it to my mother—

LEVINE: Oh.

SMERAGLIA: —when she got married. She got a bigger home and she make one room the second and the third in the front—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: —for the boy and the girl in the back and my mother in the [unclear].
Was my grandmother mother.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: And I used to [unclear] her. She was a [unclear] lady.

LEVINE: You remember your grandmother?

SMERAGLIA: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Tell me about her. Tell me things you did with your grandmother.

SMERAGLIA: Oh, my—all the—all the grandmother was the best one.

LEVINE: What was she like?

SMERAGLIA: Used to do everything for us. We used to have a land with a lot vini
[PH].

WOMAN: They had vines.

SMERAGLIA: Yeah, we used to go all the time over there where my great
grandmother.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: She was an old lady.

LEVINE: Can you remember any times you and your grandmother did
something together?

SMERAGLIA: [speaking Italian].

WOMAN: Do you remember any of the good times spent—

LEVINE: With your grandmother?

WOMAN: [speaking Italian] Mama Bonida [PH]?

SMERAGLIA: No, Mama Katerina [PH].

WOMAN: Mama Katerina [speaking Italian].

SMERAGLIA: [speaking Italian] Bonida.

WOMAN: Oh, her great grandmother.

SMERAGLIA: Great grandmother.

WOMAN: Oh, she remembers her great grandmother.

LEVINE: Great—

WOMAN: Well, her grandmother died at 96.

SMERAGLIA: [speaking Italian]

WOMAN: Oh, she slept with her great grandmother.

SMERAGLIA: She couldn't sleep alone, was old.

LEVINE: What was your great grandmother's name?

SMERAGLIA: The old one? Katerina.

WOMAN: Katerina.

SMERAGLIA: And my mother mother, Laregia [PH].

WOMAN: Laboria [PH].

SMERAGLIA: Laboria. That's right.

WOMAN: Right.

LEVINE: [chuckles] So—so it was your great grandmother who had the vines?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah, two.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: Two grandmother had it.

LEVINE: Oh, they both had it. Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: Two.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: We used to [several words unclear] mother, and my father too.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: We used to have it every night before [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What kind of personality did your great grandmother have?

SMERAGLIA: [unclear] lady, used to go to church, used to be nice with her neighbors.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMERAGLIA: My mother [unclear] used to do.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: Used to sew [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: Teach [unclear] how to crochet.

LEVINE: She taught you how?

SMERAGLIA: I still do.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. So were you the favorite? Were you the favorite—

SMERAGLIA: Oh.

LEVINE: —with your great grandmother?

SMERAGLIA: I used to do everything she said. Grandma—I [unclear] say no. I used to say all the time and she used to go crazy for me.

LEVINE: [chuckles] Uh-huh. And how about your grandfathers? Did you know them?

SMERAGLIA: Oh, no.

LEVINE: You didn't know them.

SMERAGLIA: She die a long time.

LEVINE: Okay, okay. So what was school like for you?

SMERAGLIA: School?

LEVINE: Yeah.

SMERAGLIA: I went to the second grade.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMERAGLIA: And then had to go with my father to work.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMERAGLIA: And I quitted school.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. And do you remember any kind of things you did for fun that you—any games you played or—

SMERAGLIA: [unclear] Saturday. Saturday we used to be home.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what would you do? What would you do on a Saturday?

SMERAGLIA: Oh, play with my neighbors—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: —or my friend. Everybody's dead now. I have nobody. You know—

LEVINE: You've lived a long time. Yeah.

SMERAGLIA: I'll be 97.

LEVINE: [chuckles] Yeah. Okay. Do you remember when you were getting ready to leave—

SMERAGLIA: What?

LEVINE: —Ribera? Do you remember when your mother was packing up to leave?

SMERAGLIA: No. But was during the week, eight o'clock in the night that we used to [unclear] together. And the man came and say, "You're going to leave tomorrow morning," and left four o'clock in the morning.

LEVINE: How did you leave?

SMERAGLIA: To the train we went.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: It was so far from home.

LEVINE: Did a lot of people come to say goodbye before you left?

SMERAGLIA: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: What happened? Did—was there a party or—

SMERAGLIA: All of my neighbors came. A lot came to the station.

LEVINE: How did you feel when you were leaving?

SMERAGLIA: I feel a little [unclear].

LEVINE: You feel—

SMERAGLIA: I feel [unclear] left all of my friends. I had a lot of friend.

LEVINE: You—were you sad when you left?

SMERAGLIA: [unclear]. We used to call the comari [PH]. You know what I mean?

LEVINE: [unclear]?

SMERAGLIA: [unclear].

WOMAN: [unclear].

SMERAGLIA: All of my good friend, we used to be comari.

WOMAN: It's a [unclear]. You know, it's a close friend.

LEVINE: Yeah. Did you have a godmother or a godfather?

SMERAGLIA: Yes.

LEVINE: Yeah? Who was that person?

SMERAGLIA: Her name Rose Cotino. [PH]

LEVINE: And what was she? Was she a friend of your family?

SMERAGLIA: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: She kind of [unclear] from rich people.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And was she—h—how—what did—how was she with you? What kind of a—

SMERAGLIA: Well, she got marry and she had a home and she [unclear] next door from us. And that's why I asked her to be my grandmother. She was so happy. And I was happy too. I had her.

LEVINE: What are the—what are the duties of a godmother? What does a godmother do?

SMERAGLIA: We used to sit down and crochet, make stockings, a lot of little things. And then I was about 12 years old. I went to teach her how to sew.

WOMAN: She hadn't learned to sew.

SMERAGLIA: Teach her learn how to sew.

LEVINE: And where did you go?

SMERAGLIA: In the same town.

LEVINE: In the same town?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah, about five blocks away.

LEVINE: And this was a person who taught young women how to sew?

SMERAGLIA: No, no.

LEVINE: No? Who—

SMERAGLIA: Was a lady used to work with everybody. People used to give [unclear], make clothes [unclear].

LEVINE: I see.

SMERAGLIA: I used to have a lot of girls work.

LEVINE: Oh, so you went to work for her?

WOMAN: Yes.

SMERAGLIA: Yeah.

LEVINE: And you helped her make clothes for people?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah, [unclear] pay. I want to learn.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. It's like an apprenticeship? Something like that?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And so what kinds of things did you sew when you were there?

SMERAGLIA: Everything. We used to make men's shirts, ladies' dresses, kids' clothes, everything.

LEVINE: So did you learn all that when you were there?

SMERAGLIA: Oh, yeah. I learn about it.

LEVINE: How long did you stay there?

SMERAGLIA: About—till I come to this country.

LEVINE: Oh, so you—and you went when you were 12?

SMERAGLIA: About five years.

LEVINE: Wow.

SMERAGLIA: She was good lady, really good, the way she teach everybody.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And how many other girls were there when you were there?

SMERAGLIA: Oh, it was about five.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: One friend, she came to this country to see me.

LEVINE: Oh.

SMERAGLIA: It was from her home [unclear].

LEVINE: How—how long had you been here when she came to visit you?

SMERAGLIA: Oh, about four years.

LEVINE: Oh.

SMERAGLIA: And she came.

LEVINE: And did she stay?

SMERAGLIA: No, she went back.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: She came alone.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: Another friend, they came with her mother.

LEVINE: Another friend came with her mother?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah. She stayed about two months with me and then she went back.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember their names? Do you remember the names of your friends?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah. Diminica Acray. [PH]

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: Diminica Acray.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: She was good like a sisters [unclear]—

LEVINE: Is she the one who came by—

SMERAGLIA: Yeah.

LEVINE: —herself?

SMERAGLIA: She was here [unclear] my age.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Yeah.

SMERAGLIA: I [unclear] all of the lady in the [unclear]. We used to call them comari. Everybody used to call me, "Come on and [unclear] comari." And I [unclear] everybody.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember when you got to the port where you— where you got on the ship?

SMERAGLIA: What?

LEVINE: When you were about to take the ship to come across the ocean to America, do you remember that when you got to the port?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah, it was [unclear]. I forgot it.

LEVINE: The n—the name of the ship or the name of the port?

SMERAGLIA: Oh, the name of the ship we came.

LEVINE: The Dante?

SMERAGLIA: Dante Alighieri.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: Dante Alighieri. It's a beautiful—

LEVINE: Tell me about the ship. What was it like?

SMERAGLIA: The ship [unclear].

LEVINE: It what?

SMERAGLIA: The ship [unclear].

WOMAN: Oh, the ship went down.

LEVINE: The ship went down. Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: Down [unclear].

LEVINE: But what was it like when you were on it?

SMERAGLIA: [unclear] was the [several words unclear] come this country.

LEVINE: Oh. Who were they?

SMERAGLIA: The men used to take care the people that come to this country, make all of the [unclear].

LEVINE: The papers?

WOMAN: It's an agent.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember an agent helping your mother and you?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah.

WOMAN: That's who she's talking about.

LEVINE: Yeah. And what did the agent do? He got your papers?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah. We came over here. There was my sister and my two brother.

LEVINE: And your father.

SMERAGLIA: And my father.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: And my mother's sister and my mother brother. They had came over here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: Ah, yeah.

LEVINE: How was it saying goodbye to your grandmother and your great grandmother?

SMERAGLIA: Oh, she feel bad. She feel bad we left.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMERAGLIA: The older one, she die before we came. My mother's mother still live a long time.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Did your mother want to come to America?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah. Sure. Got [unclear] over here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How did you feel? Did you want to come?

SMERAGLIA: I feel good. I feel want to come to this country because I'll be alone over there. Me and my mother and my sister. What'll we do?

LEVINE: You wanted to come because your family was here too?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah, [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah. Okay. And wh—did anything happen on the passage on the Dante Alighieri when you—when the ship was coming over, anything happen aboard ship that you remember? What was it like on—onboard ship?

SMERAGLIA: I forgot. It's a long time.

LEVINE: Do you remember when the boat came into the New York harbor?

SMERAGLIA: We got it from Naple. [PH]

LEVINE: Did—

SMERAGLIA: We got the ship from Naple.

LEVINE: From Naples.

SMERAGLIA: [unclear] Palermo.

LEVINE: Palermo to Naples.

SMERAGLIA: [unclear]

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: Naple. That's why. And we stay 20 day.

LEVINE: Long time.

SMERAGLIA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Was the ship—was it rough? Was the—

SMERAGLIA: Oh, it was beautiful. It was like a home.

LEVINE: Really? Did people dance and sing and all that on ship?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah. But was [unclear] being from hometown people.

LEVINE: There were others?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah.

LEVINE: You knew them?

SMERAGLIA: I remember they were on. They say the one of the [unclear] over here.

LEVINE: One of the family over here?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah. From the other side.

WOMAN: I don't understand.

LEVINE: I don't know.

WOMAN: There's another family here.

SMERAGLIA: [sentence unclear].

WOMAN: Oh! One woman—one woman is still living that came onboard ship and it's your—[unclear], your father's cousin.

SMERAGLIA: Oh.

WOMAN: His grandmother and grandfather came on that ship too. But— [unclear]—

SMERAGLIA: Yeah.

WOMAN: —and Mr. [unclear].

SMERAGLIA: Grandmother, yeah. [unclear].

WOMAN: But [unclear]—

SMERAGLIA: Yeah.

WOMAN: Louis Sorolas [unclear]. [PH]

SMERAGLIA: She [unclear] was marry, she got over here [unclear].

LEVINE: Ah! Wow!

WOMAN: Oh, so that's the only one living then, right? Only [speaking Italian].

SMERAGLIA: Ah.

WOMAN: [speaking Italian].

SMERAGLIA: [speaking Italian].

WOMAN: Yeah, they all—

LEVINE: Yeah.

WOMAN: The family all died.

SMERAGLIA: And everybody died.

LEVINE: So what did you do for 20 days aboard ship?

SMERAGLIA: Walk around. I look everybody.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SMERAGLIA: You know, when [unclear] you better be friend to everybody.

LEVINE: Did you enjoy the ship?

SMERAGLIA: Yes.

LEVINE: Remember when the ship came into the New York harbor? Do you remember? Did you see the Statue of Liberty?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah, all of the—my family came at the—before they boat had stopped.

WOMAN: Yeah.

SMERAGLIA: Everybody came up [unclear] and—

LEVINE: How—what—was your family in a boat?

SMERAGLIA: No, outside.

LEVINE: Oh, outside.

SMERAGLIA: Yeah.

WOMAN: Outside the ship.

SMERAGLIA: And then [unclear].

WOMAN: See, they call it the Battery, Ellis Island. But the—

SMERAGLIA: And they [unclear]. My sister, she was younger than me. She had a navy blue sweater. She [unclear] and she said, "Wait a little bit." And she make a mark over here this way. She think it was something wrong with her. And that's why she had to go.

LEVINE: What—was there something wrong with her?

SMERAGLIA: Nothing. Just the stain from the sweater.

WOMAN: That's the one that she said she had—they—they thought she had [unclear].

SMERAGLIA: You can bring in [unclear] sickness over here.

LEVINE: So did you have to stay at Ellis Island?

SMERAGLIA: No.

LEVINE: No? Did—did—when did you see your father?

SMERAGLIA: My father?

LEVINE: Yeah.

SMERAGLIA: Soon as we get off of the boat, my father, my brother, my sister, my aunt, my uncle.

LEVINE: What was it like to see them again?

SMERAGLIA: It was really good to see the family again.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah. And then where did you go? Where did you go when left the ship?

SMERAGLIA: We went to live at [unclear]. This was in New York and we went to live at [unclear]. We had a lot of friend there with whom the same town.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: That's why we used to live. The [unclear] used to come from the same town.

WOMAN: They all lived together.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

WOMAN: Do you want me to ask her—

LEVINE: Did she go to New York first?

WOMAN: Ma, [speaking Italian]?

SMERAGLIA: Huh?

WOMAN: [speaking Italian].

SMERAGLIA: [speaking Italian].

WOMAN: [speaking Italian].

SMERAGLIA: Oh.

WOMAN: So that's what she wanted to know.

SMERAGLIA: Oh. My mother had a brother. They had a [unclear] store where we stay a couple of days. And then he came to [unclear] take [unclear] home. We used to stay there two weeks.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMERAGLIA: It was [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And do you remember when you first got to America? Do you remember any things that were new to you that you saw that you had never seen before?

SMERAGLIA: Ah, no. Well, my mother had a sister and the sister, she had a [unclear] daughter like me, my age. And I told her [unclear] a lot of things [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

WOMAN: [sentence unclear].

SMERAGLIA: Yeah. We used to go out together. We used to go to work together.

LEVINE: Did she help you learn English?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. What was her name?

WOMAN: Bonnie.

SMERAGLIA: Bonnie.

WOMAN: Bonnie.

LEVINE: Bonnie. Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: Bonnie—

LEVINE: So what is—

SMERAGLIA: Belala [PH]. Bonnie Belala.

LEVINE: Okay. What were some of the things you and Bonnie would do?

SMERAGLIA: A lot of people—now, everybody's a grand—

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. So did—did you go to work then?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah.

LEVINE: What did you do?

SMERAGLIA: I work in kids' dresses.

LEVINE: Kids' dresses?

SMERAGLIA: Wasn't much money. I never like it.

LEVINE: You didn't like it?

SMERAGLIA: No. Seven cents an hour.

WOMAN: [laughs]

SMERAGLIA: This was 75 years ago.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: And I went to work in the cigar factory. And the month I was there I made \$50.

LEVINE: Wow!

SMERAGLIA: Oh, I used to do the punch.

LEVINE: What's the punch?

SMERAGLIA: Pay—somebody put the finish in the cigar.

LEVINE: When you finish it off?

SMERAGLIA: No.

LEVINE: No.

SMERAGLIA: I used to start it.

LEVINE: Oh, you started it? Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: I used to make good money.

LEVINE: Did you still—

SMERAGLIA: My father was so happy. He say, "You making more than me."

LEVINE: [chuckles] Were you making more than your father?

SMERAGLIA: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Wow.

SMERAGLIA: I used to start at seven o'clock. I used to work a lunch hour.

LEVINE: Oh, did you get piecework? The more you did, the more you made?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: Piecework.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: I did a lot of little things.

LEVINE: What did you do after you left the cigar factory?

SMERAGLIA: Went to work in the blouse—make blouse. Oh, I work there, really good.

LEVINE: Did you like that?

SMERAGLIA: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: I learn about [unclear] to do. I used to make a blouse, a blouse to finish up.

LEVINE: The whole thing? Uh-huh. Wow. Did you ever work at home? Did you take wor—sewing at home—

SMERAGLIA: Yeah.

LEVINE: —to home?

SMERAGLIA: Taking work from the shop, no.

LEVINE: No.

SMERAGLIA: No. I used to do things [unclear], like sweater for my brothers, dress for my mother, for myself. My sister, she was marry.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

LEVINE: When did—how did you meet your husband?

SMERAGLIA: Me?

LEVINE: Mmm.

SMERAGLIA: I was working. I come home [unclear]. And my husband was working [unclear]. There was a good friend, [unclear] my friend. That lady, she say, “[unclear] he get marry?” She say, “I don’t know nobody.” She say, “[unclear], marry her. She make good money [unclear] cigar factory.” That’s why.

LEVINE: Did you—did you like your husband?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah, he was a nice man.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: Too bad he die young.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What was his name?

SMERAGLIA: [unclear].

WOMAN: Mama, what was his name? [speaking Italian].

SMERAGLIA: [speaking Italian].

WOMAN: [speaking Italian].

SMERAGLIA: Manuele—Manuel. [PH]

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: He had appendicite [PH] burst during the night. We went to the doctor next morning. He said, “You got [several words unclear].” That’s why. He don’t believe it was the appendicite.

LEVINE: Oh.

SMERAGLIA: I said, “Make him [unclear].” We go to the hospital and that’s why, next day, he die.

LEVINE: Hmm. So how many children did you have?

SMERAGLIA: Three.

LEVINE: And their names?

SMERAGLIA: Two girl. See, Josie [PH], the first one. [unclear], the second. Joey. Joey was the younger one, was 11 years old when the father die.

LEVINE: Hmm, uh-hmm. Wow. So then did you—here, why don't we pause here for a second?

SMERAGLIA: Okay. Three woman. Nobody had a name. Lana [PH]. And we see that [unclear]. I said to my mother, "I don't want to stay with the old lady. I want to do some." I said [unclear], "Give me one cent. I'll buy you crochet." And I crochet. She said, "We have no money." We have a chicken. I took one of the feather from the wing and I started crochet. And I crochet since that time.

WOMAN: Still doing it.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

WOMAN: See that?

SMERAGLIA: I still doing it.

LEVINE: You're still doing it! Isn't that won—oh, this is a—oh. That's beautiful. That is lovely.

WOMAN: That's what she's doing.

SMERAGLIA: When you [unclear] nice.

LEVINE: Isn't that pretty?

WOMAN: That's yours, Janet.

LEVINE: Oh, really? Oh.

WOMAN: That's yours.

SMERAGLIA: I make [unclear], tablecloth [unclear].

LEVINE: This is lovely.

SMERAGLIA: [sentence unclear].

WOMAN: [speaking Italian].

SMERAGLIA: Yeah.

WOMAN: That's yours.

SMERAGLIA: That's for you.

LEVINE: Thank you. That's beautiful.

SMERAGLIA: [unclear] some paper. Wrap it up.

LEVINE: Thank you very much. [laughter] Thank you. I'll think of you when I see it.

SMERAGLIA: Okay.

LEVINE: Thank you. [clears throat]. Okay. So, let's see. Were you—you were here when the Depression came. The Depression—

SMERAGLIA: Ah—

LEVINE: —in this country. How—how did it affect you and your family?

SMERAGLIA: I was—I was working, take care of my kids. She was marrying when my husband die. The other one, she was about 13 and Joey's 11.

WOMAN: We were all young when he died.

SMERAGLIA: [unclear]. I raised my [unclear].

LEVINE: You raised them yourself?

SMERAGLIA: I won't ask nobody for [unclear]. Nobody.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

WOMAN: Ma, she wants to know [unclear] Depression [speaking Italian]. [unclear] Depression. [speaking Italian]. That's what Janet wants to know.

SMERAGLIA: During the Depression, my husband was working [unclear]. He got laid off. For four years, he [unclear] work one day.

WOMAN: That's right.

SMERAGLIA: We manage.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SMERAGLIA: I used to make the bread at home. I used to do everything.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMERAGLIA: We had to do.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMERAGLIA: I work my life.

LEVINE: You worked hard.

SMERAGLIA: Yes.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: I raise my fam—the three kids [unclear]. I was alone.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

SMERAGLIA: Nobody helping me.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

SMERAGLIA: Thank God I did it.

LEVINE: You were strong, uh-huh. Uh-hmm.

SMERAGLIA: Yeah.

LEVINE: So what would you say has given you a lot of satisfaction in your life? What—what has made you happy over your lifetime?

SMERAGLIA: Huh?

WOMAN: [speaking Italian]

SMERAGLIA: Oh, I'm happy. I'm happy I'm still alive—

LEVINE: [chuckles]

SMERAGLIA: —to take care of my kids.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Yeah, uh-huh. To what do you attribute living such a—such a long time?

SMERAGLIA: Hmm?

LEVINE: How come you think—why do you think you've lived so long?

SMERAGLIA: Well, I had to.

LEVINE: You had to?

WOMAN: She had to. [chuckles]

SMERAGLIA: Sure. To raise the family.

WOMAN: Oh, she sees [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

WOMAN: She's not understanding it.

LEVINE: Yeah?

SMERAGLIA: [unclear].

WOMAN: She wants to know, [speaking Italian].

SMERAGLIA: Ah.

WOMAN: Well—

SMERAGLIA: [speaking Italian].

WOMAN: She's given herself a lot of courage, she says.

SMERAGLIA: [sentence unclear].

WOMAN: [unclear].

SMERAGLIA: I still want to stay.

WOMAN: Oh, she still wants to stay. [chuckles]

SMERAGLIA: [sentence unclear].

LEVINE: You still want to stay?

SMERAGLIA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. That's wonderful. Well, you have a nice family. I can understand why.

SMERAGLIA: I want to see my grandchildren get married.

WOMAN: They get [chuckles]—

SMERAGLIA: They have been one marry.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

WOMAN: Oh—

SMERAGLIA: My granddaughter, son is marry.

WOMAN: Great grandchildren, she's talking about.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: I'm so happy.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh. Well, you had a nice great grandmother so then—

SMERAGLIA: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: —you'll have—you'll be a nice great grandmother, huh?

SMERAGLIA: She—the only one, she was 107 years old when she die.

LEVINE: Really?

WOMAN: A hundred and—

SMERAGLIA: She was a rich woman.

LEVINE: Who was that?

SMERAGLIA: My grand—great grandmother.

LEVINE: Was 107?

SMERAGLIA: She was rich when was young.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: She give my mother house.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

SMERAGLIA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Did you ever want to go back to Italy? To Sicily?

SMERAGLIA: I did when—

LEVINE: When?

SMERAGLIA: —to see my nephew. See, I had a sister, the old one—

LEVINE: Who stayed.

SMERAGLIA: —she die over here.

LEVINE: Oh.

SMERAGLIA: She die. She had one son was over there, got marry. I want to go see him. And I went in 1952.

LEVINE: And did you go back to your house where you lived?

SMERAGLIA: Oh, yeah. I see all of my friend.

LEVINE: And what was it like for you?

SMERAGLIA: Oh, like a—be over there again. I stay only three months.

LEVINE: Did you want to come back then?

SMERAGLIA: Oh, yeah. Had to go to work. I work over [unclear]. God bless. [unclear] my machine and he got the same work on—coming back. I used to do a [unclear] thing. The [several words unclear]. A lot of good work.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: I work 27 years.

LEVINE: Oh, wow. So did—did you think that maybe you might want to stay in Sicily?

SMERAGLIA: [unclear]?

LEVINE: When you went back to visit? No.

SMERAGLIA: I had my family over here.

LEVINE: Your—yeah. You—did you feel like you were an American?

SMERAGLIA: Everybody is here, America. I [unclear] to be [several words unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

WOMAN: She said, “I don’t want to stay [unclear].”

SMERAGLIA: [unclear] what I’ll be doing.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So are there any ways of—that you learned as a—as a girl growing up in—in Sicily that you keep—are there any traditions or any ways of doing things that you still have, even though you’ve been in this country—

SMERAGLIA: Oh, today is a different world.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: The kids today do like [unclear].

LEVINE: What’s different?

SMERAGLIA: The kids, they don’t like what [unclear] used to do over the other side, help the father, the family. The kids today don’t do that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

WOMAN: [unclear]

SMERAGLIA: Go to school, go to work when they get big.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. You’ve seen a lot of changes, huh?

SMERAGLIA: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: What are some of the things that used to be every day that we don’t have anymore?

SMERAGLIA: Everything change.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMERAGLIA: Used to be so nice, the [unclear]. All the things used to be. No more now.

LEVINE: What are some of the things that have changed that you can remember?

SMERAGLIA: The world. Everything. Everything, it change.

LEVINE: The war?

WOMAN: The world.

LEVINE: Oh, the world. Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: Everything.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Do you remember when the Second World War came? Do you remember? Did it affect you or your family at all?

SMERAGLIA: No. Thank God, we had no trouble.

LEVINE: Had—

WOMAN: Ma, [speaking Italian].

SMERAGLIA: Oh, yeah. But in a [unclear]—

WOMAN: No, no. Second World War.

SMERAGLIA: Oh, yeah. She got marry.

LEVINE: She got married. Uh-huh.

WOMAN: She thought you meant the First World War.

LEVINE: Oh. You remember the First World War when you were still in Sicily?

SMERAGLIA: Yes.

LEVINE: What do you remember?

SMERAGLIA: A lot of people, they die. Every [unclear] used to be a friend, [unclear] of somebody die. They used to cry all day.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Was that the flu—influenza or was that the war?

WOMAN: Espanola [PH].

SMERAGLIA: Ah—

WOMAN: Espanola. [unclear], Espanola.

SMERAGLIA: Oh.

WOMAN: That's what she wants to know.

SMERAGLIA: Espanola.

LEVINE: Yeah, tell me what happened with the Spanish flu. What—what did you see that happened at that time?

SMERAGLIA: All of the [unclear] with that Espanola, we went to bed, make [unclear] when I get up. I touch my head. [sentence unclear]. Got no head. My head like [unclear] nothing. Thank God, my family, nobody die. Nobody.

LEVINE: Do you know why—how you got better? Do you know how you got better? What did you do to get better?

SMERAGLIA: Nothing. We used to have a good friend, the doctor. Used to be because he treated my grandmother. He used to come every day. They used to give him everything himself. Run by—used to say, "Run by. I'll take care." That's why I did. It was a lucky thing [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, wow.

SMERAGLIA: Thank God.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMERAGLIA: I [several words unclear] today. Nobody. I have for myself everything.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SMERAGLIA: I work. I work. That's all I did. If it was my son, when I was 65, he say, "You're going to stay home now." That's why he say, "You stay home because you working so long." [unclear] at home. I crochet. I did a lot of little things.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Were you ready to stop working?

SMERAGLIA: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: I have a lot of [unclear] I want to finish up.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Yeah. Okay. Well, is there anything else that you can think of that you might want to say about coming to America and living here—

SMERAGLIA: [unclear]

LEVINE: —all your life?

SMERAGLIA: I'm happy I'm here. Over there, what I have to do to [unclear]—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMERAGLIA: I had to go to work [unclear]. Over here, it's a different—

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I think maybe this is a good place to end. I want to thank you so much.

SMERAGLIA: Oh, [unclear].

LEVINE: It's a—very, very nice talking with you.

SMERAGLIA: That's [unclear].

LEVINE: And then you'll get the tape. Your family'll have the tape of you telling about your life, coming to this country. And then a tape will go at—in Ellis Island so people can come and listen to you.

WOMAN: Isn't that something? That's great.

LEVINE: Okay?

WOMAN: [sentence unclear].

LEVINE: Okay. I—I've been speaking with Fanny Smeraglia. [chuckles]

WOMAN: Smer—that's all right.

LEVINE: Who came from Sicily at 17 years of age on the Dante—

SMERAGLIA: Seventeen.

LEVINE: Seventeen.

SMERAGLIA: I was—November the 2nd.

LEVINE: Wow, and you—

SMERAGLIA: [unclear] November the 20.

LEVINE: And you're about to turn 97.

WOMAN: Yes.

SMERAGLIA: Yeah.

LEVINE: So you will have been here 80 years.

SMERAGLIA: [unclear]. Yeah, I got married two years later, the second [unclear] I was in this country.

LEVINE: Two years after you came to this country.

SMERAGLIA: Yeah, we came December the 10 [unclear]. I got married December the 10, 1921.

LEVINE: Wow. Oh, okay. So that makes it—and do you think that—did you have a big wedding? What kind of a wedding did you have?

SMERAGLIA: It was nice. It wasn't too big.

LEVINE: W—was it in the house?

WOMAN: Yeah. [unclear]

SMERAGLIA: Yeah.

WOMAN: [speaking Italian].

SMERAGLIA: [speaking Italian]

WOMAN: [speaking Italian]

SMERAGLIA: [speaking Italian]

WOMAN: Oh, all right.

SMERAGLIA: Across the street there was a hole.

WOMAN: There was a hole.

LEVINE: And you—

SMERAGLIA: With a [unclear] and have a [several words unclear]. [several words unclear] the hole and the [several words unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: It was [several words unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: Oh, it was wonderful.

LEVINE: It was wonderful?

WOMAN: [unclear]

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: [unclear] got marry—

WOMAN: Oh.

SMERAGLIA: —we got the shower there. [unclear] nothing.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMERAGLIA: Now—

LEVINE: Very nice.

SMERAGLIA: Was it ever good.

LEVINE: And you had a lot of friends.

SMERAGLIA: Ah, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. Okay. This is Janet Levine. I'm signing off for the National Park Service.

EI-1103/SMERAGLIA

[END OF INTERVIEW]