

EI-1152

CAROL AND ROBERTO BALSIMELLI

BIRTHDATE: OCTOBER 11, 1938 – MAY 10, 1935

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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SAN MARINO, 1954

AGE: 16

SHIP:

PORT: GENOA

RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: —June 26th, the year 2000. I'm here at Ellis Island with Carol and Roberto Balsimelli, who are married, living in New York. Mrs. Balsimelli was born in San Marino, and Mr. Balsimelli was born in Brooklyn, went to San Marino at five years of age and returned to New York in 1955. Mrs. Balsimelli arrived here on October 18th, 1954 when she was 16 years of age. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and Paul Roper is the recording engineer for the videotape. Okay. Maybe we could start, if you would say, Mrs. Balsimelli, your birth date and where in San Marino, perhaps the address, you were born.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: The Republic of San Marino, Montegardino [PH].

LEVINE: Okay, and—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Which is a little town that belongs to San Marino.

LEVINE: Okay, and the day of your birth.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Oh, October 11, 1938.

LEVINE: Okay. And did you stay there up until you—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Left.

LEVINE: The same little town?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Up until you left. Okay, and what was it that prompted your coming to this country when you did?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Mmm, I really didn't want to come—

LEVINE: What—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: To tell you the truth, but—

LEVINE: Okay.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: You know, I was at that age—

LEVINE: You were 16.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yeah, you know.

LEVINE: So you want to—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: My fath—

LEVINE: —spell out your reasons for wa—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: My father was here and my brother was here.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: And then joined the family. My mother and I came.

LEVINE: I see. What were your reasons for not wanting to come?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Because I had a boyfriend.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And what about your mother? Did she want to come?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Mmm, not really. But she had no choice. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So your father and brother had come before you.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yeah.

LEVINE: How long had they been here?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: My father, I think he came, 1951. My brother, 1952, I think.

LEVINE: And what was your father doing for work in this country when you were—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: A bricklayer.

LEVINE: A bricklayer.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Did he do that in San Marino as well?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yes, uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And how about your brother? Was he of working age or—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yes, he went to work in a machine shop.

LEVINE: And where in New York were they?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: In Long Island.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. And wh—where?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: That he worked?

LEVINE: The town.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: That he worked?

LEVINE: Yeah.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Westbury.

LEVINE: Westbury.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And they were living in what—what town?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Elmont.

LEVINE: Elmont. Okay. So what did you think about the United States before you—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: When I—

LEVINE: —came? What were you thinking it would be like for you?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: I don't know. I—I didn't even think about it. I just came. You know, I had no choice so I just came.

LEVINE: So were you leaving grandparents—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yes.

LEVINE: —aunts, uncles behind?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. Yeah, exactly.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: It was hard. You know, it's hard to leave your hometown.

LEVINE: Did you have any ideas of anything good here? Or you were just thinking you wanted to stay where you were?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: I'm sure. Yeah, I have idea of something good.

LEVINE: Yeah?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Oh, yeah. It's just that, you know, at that age it's ba—you can't take you away from your own place.

LEVINE: Now, had you met your husband before you came here?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: No, over here.

LEVINE: Okay. Okay, Mr. Balsimelli.

MR. BALSIMELLI: Yes.

LEVINE: If you would say your birth date and where in Brooklyn you were born.

MR. BALSIMELLI: My birthday is May 10, 1935, Brooklyn [unclear] Dekalb [PH].

LEVINE: Dekalb?

MR. BALSIMELLI: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And let's see. Were there other p—families from San Marino in the Dekalb area in Brooklyn where you were—

MR. BALSIMELLI: Not that I remember. But there was a group of San Marino people during that time over here, my father and other friends that were already here from—I born here so my father must have been here from the 1929, 1930s.

LEVINE: Ah. And why—why did he come here? Do you know the family story about that?

MR. BALSIMELLI: As I can remember, it was as everybody, for find better opportunity, to find something that he can give you [unclear] in the future to go back [chuckles] in your own land with some kind of better—better living or something.

LEVINE: So do you think the idea was for your family to come, make some money, go back to San Marino?

MR. BALSIMELLI: In the beginning, yes. In the beginning, yes. And then my father had work even for the government of San Marino in—in New York as being elected chancellor of the Consulate of the Republic of San Marino over here. And—and then, beginning the end of—no, actually, the beginning—the United States was not in war yet with Europe—at the [unclear] Embassy, the Italian Embassy and German Embassy and the Republic of San Marino because at that moment the American government was not making [unclear] that San Marino was independent or not. At the return to—with a neutral ship, they were sent back to the origin nation of all the diplomats at that time.

LEVINE: Oh. So he was sent back?

MR. BALSIMELLI: Yes, yes. He could had a chance, they said to him. If he wants to stay here, they would have give him a chance after five or six months of reclusion. I don't remember where they—he's supposed to stay with his family. All—otherwise return to—with a neutral ship. And I think it was a Swedish ship that we board that time to come back—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MR. BALSIMELLI: —to go back. And we went back to Lisbon, and then from Lisbon back down to Italy, via a train.

LEVINE: Oh. Now, do you remember your father's attitudes or thinking about—

MR. BALSIMELLI: Yes.

LEVINE: —what was happening?

MR. BALSIMELLI: Very strictly.

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

MR. BALSIMELLI: Yes. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Please—

MR. BALSIMELLI: Very, very, very strictly.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MR. BALSIMELLI: And his attitude. His attitude was at that time very nationalist and for—for Europe, for—be proud of—of the European thinking and especially the Italian political view in that way.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. So he was proud of what, exactly? [unclear]

MR. BALSIMELLI: Well, when you're a minority, like, for instance, San Marino, for instance, Italy, and you want to compare with a nation as powerful as the United States, you have that—you want to show the—you are somebody. That is his [unclear]. Yes.

LEVINE: So when you—wh—do you remem—can you remember going back as a little boy of five years old?

MR. BALSIMELLI: As a little boy, yes. I—I remember that we start in Lisbon and we took this train that he went through the—I pronounce to you in Italian, Pirina [PH], that mountains they are from—that they would go so slow. Then actually, you can get off the first—

LEVINE: Car [chuckles] and get on the last—

MR. BALSIMELLI: Yes, and get off on the last one. You know. And [chuckles]—and—and then we went on the—we was received because there was a group of diplomats from the Italian government. At that time, it was fascist at that time, during that period of time. And then we traveled and we reached the Republic of San Marino.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. [clears throat] Let's see. Do you remember what struck you about San Marino, never having seen it until you were five years old? When you first got there, those first days and weeks, what was it like for you?

MR. BALSIMELLI: The cows.

LEVINE: Yeah? What about them?

MR. BALSIMELLI: Something I never seen.

LEVINE: Ah.

MR. BALSIMELLI: The—the—the—the pulling of the material with the horses, with the cows and something like that struck me the first [unclear]. If I had to say what it—and I was attracted to the—the country. That was—that—what hit me the first time.

LEVINE: Well, you were a city boy, really. Right?

MR. BALSIMELLI: Right. Well, city boy. Silly—silly, five years old.

LEVINE: Five-year-old boy. [chuckles] So—let's see. So you must have started school then in San Marino. Is that right?

MR. BALSIMELLI: Yes, I went to school in San Marino and then I move in school in Ravana [PH] where I finish my—let's say, like a high school, a superior high school. And then, at the age of 18, 19, I came to the United States.

LEVINE: I see.

MR. BALSIMELLI: I went to school and I was—I had a diploma printed.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. Now, is that pretty typical to go out of San Marino for the high schooling?

MR. BALSIMELLI: If you want to take some course that is not for—for instance, for outside of the learning—the story, the regular story. You want to become an electrician or a plumber or something like that in San Marino—in the territory of San Marino was not that type of school. And so you had to go outside of San Marino and I went to a college then. It was hold by the Salazian [PH] priests in Ravana.

LEVINE: I see. What did—made you decide to learn about printing?

MR. BALSIMELLI: It was something then. Then it was story, then one day I would come United States again and we thought in learning printing it would be a good position to have to find a job in Uni—if—that they ever come back to the United States.

LEVINE: Now, was your father thinking he would return here?

MR. BALSIMELLI: No.

LEVINE: No, but you were thinking you might?

MR. BALSIMELLI: Yes. No, my father was thinking that I should return here. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Oh, your father thought you should return. [chuckles]

MR. BALSIMELLI: Yes. [laughs]

LEVINE: But you would just as soon have—

MR. BALSIMELLI: I [unclear] them—yes, I did like to come back, for some reason. Yes, I wish that I—and the sit—situation even of the family that [unclear] to was not that good. And—but then, like I said, 19 years old, 18, we find a way to afford the trip to United States.

LEVINE: Ah. Now, did you have family—

MR. BALSIMELLI: Over here?

LEVINE: —in San Marino?

MR. BALSIMELLI: In San Marino, yes. Yes.

LEVINE: Like grandparents?

MR. BALSIMELLI: No, they died already.

LEVINE: But—

MR. BALSIMELLI: Yes. But—

LEVINE: Did you have aunts, uncles?

MR. BALSIMELLI: Uncles, yes, I did. Uncles and—right now, no. But at that time, yes, I had sister—sister [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did you have the sense that that was your true home after you were there for a while?

MR. BALSIMELLI: I really—it's very—it's very hard to look into that [chuckles]—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MR. BALSIMELLI: —to [unclear]. But I never felt maybe if I—if I said to them the first time then they come to the United States, then they felt, 'Oh, my God. I want to go back to San Marino.' That expression will never—it didn't come to me.

LEVINE: It didn't?

MR. BALSIMELLI: Never—no.

LEVINE: No. Uh-huh, uh-huh.

MR. BALSIMELLI: The only things that come to when I put my foot in the pier because it was devastating, the pier. [chuckles] It was ugly where the [unclear].

LEVINE: Oh, you—where did you—where did you come in?

MR. BALSIMELLI: Over here in New York. I don't know which pier it was but [unclear] over here in New York.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. Well, let's—let's turn back to you for a minute, Carol, about coming here at 16 years old. Do you remember leaving? Do you remember—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: —packing?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yes, definitely. My mother did all the packing.

LEVINE: Did you bring anything in particular that you wanted to have here?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Just clothes.

LEVINE: Clothes. And your mother, did she bring—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: I don't remember but—

LEVINE: —anything valuable?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: I remember clothes. I remember—valu—we didn't have much valuable things at that time.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: So I don't remember anything else.

LEVINE: Do you remember leaving for the port?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yes.

LEVINE: And—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Genoa.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, Genoa.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Mmm.

LEVINE: Did—did—I mean, did people come ab—around and say goodbye?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Ah, yes. Because we—we knew a few families in Genoa, friends of ours. So they ca—they came to the boat.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: To say goodbye.

LEVINE: Was there anything about that little—that leg of the trip, leaving San Marino and getting to Genoa?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Ah—

LEVINE: Was there anything in that time [unclear]—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: We—we were on a train. It was a train ride. That's it. I—I don't remember anything else.

LEVINE: Did you stay in Genoa for any period?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yeah, we stayed—I think we came the day before, and the day after, we left. I think. I'm not sure.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So you had relatives there?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: No, it was only friends.

LEVINE: Friends, friends.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Okay. How about the journey, the sh—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: The ship?

LEVINE: The passage? Yeah.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: I—I couldn't wait to get here; it was so long. Nine days. It was—it was too long. You just see water. It's all you see is water and water and water everyday, everyday. It's—I don't know how—I don't know the, you know—cru—people go on cruises. You see. You know, I went to a cruise. I enjoyed it. But that time, no.

LEVINE: Were there other young people around your age—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yes.

LEVINE: —on the ship?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yes. I—I—

LEVINE: Did you—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: —made friends with a girl.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yeah, with a young girl.

LEVINE: Did you ever maintain the friendship—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: No.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. So do you remember when the ship came into the New York harbor?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Uh-hmm. Yeah.

LEVINE: And, I mean—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: It was ugly, like you said, [chuckles] the port—the pier, it was so ugly. You know what impressed me when I went through New York City?

LEVINE: Hmm-uh.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Sale. Sale. You know when everything is on sale?

LEVINE: Oh.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: All the signs, “Sale, sale.” Because in Italian, it’s sale [PH]. It means sold. I said, “Why come all the signs with sold on it?” [laughter] That was my big—biggest thing when I got to this city—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: —in a car.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And who met you?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: My father and my brother.

LEVINE: And what was that reunion like? I mean, you hadn’t seen them in, what, three years?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Oh, one year, two years.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: It was nice.

LEVINE: Yeah?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yeah.

LEVINE: So you—so you didn't want to come but then you couldn't wait to get here because the boat—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yeah.

LEVINE: —trip was so awful.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Right.

LEVINE: And then after you got here, wh—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: It wasn't awful. It—the boat was beautiful. You just get bored everyday looking at the water, you know. There was a lot of things to do. But, you know, it was nice. I liked it.

LEVINE: So—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Five days would have been enough. Nine days, you know, is way too long.

LEVINE: Now, did you have any examinations whatsoever?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yes.

LEVINE: Where did you have them?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Genoa.

LEVINE: In Genoa. And what was the extent of it? What—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: They—

LEVINE: Describe what they did.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: What do you call when they—

LEVINE: Vaccination?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Vaccination.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: And then they—they examine you with—go through a—an examination.

LEVINE: Was it pretty thorough, would you say?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: No, not really.

LEVINE: No.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: No.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Okay, and so then once you got aboard ship, you—you were finished with the examinations?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Oh, yeah. Definitely.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. So where did your father and brother take you and your mother when you got here?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Oh, to Long Island. That's where we lived—they lived.

LEVINE: To Elmont.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yes, to Elmont.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what—once you got there, how did—what did you do? Did you go—were you finished with school or were you—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: In Italy, yes. And over here I went to work.

LEVINE: Where did you go?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: On a factory.

LEVINE: What kind?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: They used to make coats, woman coats.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Near Elmont?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yeah, in Elmont.

LEVINE: In Elmont, uh-huh. So—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Walk—walk—walk distance. We used to walk because at that time we didn't have a car to—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: So it was walking distance to the—

LEVINE: I see. Had you worked before you left San Marino?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yes.

LEVINE: What had you done over there?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Sewing.

LEVINE: Sewing?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yeah.

LEVINE: In a factory?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: No, in—

LEVINE: Or in a home?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: —somebody's—somebody's home.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. I see. So you were experienced. I mean, you—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yes.

LEVINE: You could make a—an outfit?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: And then when you went into the coat factory, you probably specialized, right, in some aspect of the coat?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Well, we did—you know, in the beginning they—they don't let you go on the machine right away. So you—you folding the clothes or you—you cleaning the threads and doing stuff like that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: I didn't go to a machine right away because the machines over here, they were all electric and we're not used—we weren't used to that machine yet.

LEVINE: Oh, because you didn't have electric machines?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: No.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Oh, so you did everything by hand then?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: No, the—the foot.

LEVINE: Oh.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: You know, the machine with the foot?

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yeah, that—that kind of machine.

LEVINE: I see. So wh—how long was it until you graduated to using a sewing machine or one of the machines?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Oh, about a year.

LEVINE: A year. And then what was it? Was it—did you have a specific job in the factory, or did you do a little of this or that?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: I don't remember. I don't know. I did so many thing. I—I worked in so many factories and I did so many different things.

LEVINE: Oh, you—you went to—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Different places, yes.

LEVINE: Were you—what prompted your moves to different places?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: I don't remember. They probably didn't have any more work in that factory. Then I went someplace else.

LEVINE: I see.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: That's—would be the reason that I moved.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And so how about your boyfriend? I mean, were you thinking that you were going to be reunited with—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: No. [laughs]

LEVINE: No. [chuckles] That was—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: We wrote to each other for nine months and that was it.

LEVINE: I see. I see. So how did your mother feel about being here, like that first year?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: She liked—she liked it in Italy better.

LEVINE: Oh, she did?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Wh—why did she? Do you know?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Because we—you know, it was hard for us, coming over here at that time. We didn't have any friends. We had a few relatives and we left off, you know, family there and friends. So you know, you want to be where you were born at that time. Now, it's different. Now, everybody comes and goes very easily. At that time, you had to take the boat. You know, it was in—it was not an easy trip like it is now.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. How about the language? How was that for you?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: I learned.

LEVINE: [unclear]

MRS. BALSIMELLI: I went—I went night school.

LEVINE: Oh, night school?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Now, did you and your family become U.S. citizens at some point?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yes, I did. My mother didn't, my father didn't and my brother didn't.

LEVINE: Oh, so you went and you took the test?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yes.

LEVINE: You went—uh-huh.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How did you feel about that?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: I loved it. Yeah, it was a good feeling. I'm very proud.

LEVINE: Yeah. Okay. Well, let's—now, let's see. Where—let's switch back to your arrival.

MR. BALSIMELLI: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: And you were a printer then, or you'd done an apprenticeship?

MR. BALSIMELLI: Yeah, well, I have the diploma to be a printer.

LEVINE: Yeah? And then did you go looking for work as a printer?

MR. BALSIMELLI: No. When I arrived, I had a friend that—that's supposed to pick me up. And I was at the pier and I see two people that were embracing each other. And they were two people. Then they were looking for me and one thought I was the one. And they thought—then they were [chuckles]—he was looking for him and not me. And I was there right in front of them. It was like coincidence that I find them. Anyway, I decide to go to the older man of the two friends. And for the first time as a job, I went to a San Marino people, which had a business in champagne and was take cases out of the truck, of champagne and put it in. And the good thing is for lunch we had champagne.

LEVINE: Oh. [laughter]

MR. BALSIMELLI: And—but that was job that I hold for about, I would say, two or three months. And then I move in Long Island right in Elmont

where she was. And I find a job as a—in a machine shop because it's for printer with a union. At that time, you ca—it was very hard to get in. It was very, very hard to—I need to work. And so I start as a machine shop and to be a machinist. And all my life I just been a machinist and then I open up my own place in 19—let's see—1969, '68. And from that day to today I have my own machine shop.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. What's the name of your shop?

MR. BALSIMELLI: RB, Robert Balsimelli.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And—and do—you—you employ people in—in the shop now?

MR. BALSIMELLI: Yes, not the—it—it always was a shop of two or three mens. And I employ people when I need it because I have a [unclear] machines, so I do everything. I'm the president. I'm the—the setup man, the toolmaker and everything else.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Well, as somebody naïve about machine shops, like, what kinds of jobs do you take in?

MR. BALSIMELLI: Oh, jobs that actually you don't know for what they're going to be used, because you going to receive a subcontract, blueprints from other companies. But it is [unclear] working, which it can be having in boxes that can be for airspace, aircrafts or hospitals, small bushing or pinions or screws. Then [chuckles] you actually don't know where they go.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. I see. So how did you both meet each other?

MR. BALSIMELLI: It was a cousin of hers and brought me over, her house and—and we met. And then—

LEVINE: Did you like each other right away?

MR. BALSIMELLI: No, is—I couldn't get out because it was a happy family and I was surrounded by her—her family—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: [laughs]

MR. BALSIMELLI: —so I couldn't go no place. I was completely—

LEVINE: You were surrounded?

MR. BALSIMELLI: Yes, I was sur—[laughter] I had to surrend. [laughter]

LEVINE: I see. I see. So how about you, Carol? Did you—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Me, I tried to—I didn't want to go out with him so I—you know, but he was coming there every night. I couldn't get rid of him. [laughter]

LEVINE: He was surrounded and you couldn't get rid of him. [laughter] Yeah. So did you have a big wedding?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yeah. Well, yes. Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah? And—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: —were there a lot of San Marino people from—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yes.

LEVINE: —San Marino—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Uh-hmm, at the wedding.

LEVINE: —as part of your—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yes.

LEVINE: —community?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yeah, around that time were—it was more people that came from San Marino. So we were quite a few.

LEVINE: Were—were—were you wanting to marry someone from San Marino? Would that have been—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: No—

LEVINE: —your first choice?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: No.

LEVINE: No.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Doesn't ma—didn't matter.

LEVINE: Yeah. How about you? Did you—did you—

MR. BALSIMELLI: No, I didn't [unclear]—no.

LEVINE: Were you particularly interested in somebody from San Marino?

MR. BALSIMELLI: No.

LEVINE: No.

MR. BALSIMELLI: No.

LEVINE: Were you trying to become Americanized? Did you want to become Americanized? How did you feel about that?

MR. BALSIMELLI: Automatically. I didn't—it was in me, I think, so—I didn't—like I said to you, I didn't feel no—no nostalgia of the—of the Republic of San Marino once I was in the United States. Just—I just walked in.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-hmm. How do you think about it now, this San Marino side—

MR. BALSIMELLI: Hmm.

LEVINE: —of you and the American side of you? How do you think about those two aspects of yourself?

MR. BALSIMELLI: It is a debate inside the—in—in everything, there's the pro and the not pro. But I would say that San Marino, it is—it is in the same parallel of United States in their thinking of republic and in their way to see democracy. And San Marino showed up in history, like in the brave history. Then the United States show their way of democracy. And—and actually, we are very proud because I have two citizenship. I am United States of America and citizen of Republic of San Marino. And we are very proud in our peculiar nation to be a—to be a star in—in—in the life of democracy, never been in war, always been independent, always helped the people when they need, like the United States. So I was, I think [unclear] two—I'm proud to be a citizen of the two countries, definitely.

- LEVINE: Hmm. Uh-hmm. Now, have you gotten—you've gotten involved in the San Marino—in the consul at—
- MR. BALSIMELLI: Ah, that—it happened [clears throat] because I got involved in the San Marino community as part of the [several words unclear], which is a association in the United—in New York of San Marino people. And then there was the people over here. Then they send a note to San Marino to elect me if it was possible to elect me consul of the Republic of San Marino in New York, which, after that, naturally, as you know, you have to have the okay, the federal okay from Washington to be recognized as consul of the Republic of San Marino and that the American government okayed that. So thanks for the immigrants. They were here. They—they want me to be their consul. It's not that the government send me to be the consul. It's the [unclear]—in our way, we are—we are very different as a nation. Usually, as a nation who'll send—in my case, it was the immigrants over here that they want me to be—
- LEVINE: Uh-huh.
- MR. BALSIMELLI: —consul general of the Republic of San Marino.
- LEVINE: Yeah. W—why do you think they wanted you? I mean, what—what do you bring to the consul that [unclear]—
- MR. BALSIMELLI: Oh, because I—I don't know. They liked me as a person, most likely, and because I even, when there's some kind of a problems to help in our country, I try to dedicate my time, my effort to bring—to help and satisfy in their request in the Republic of San Marino.
- LEVINE: I see. So the Republic of San Marino, on occasion, with people here, the San—
- MR. BALSIMELLI: Marino—
- LEVINE: Marinese—
- MR. BALSIMELLI: Yes.
- LEVINE: The—are—are helpful. What kinds of situations—
- MR. BALSIMELLI: Well, the power of attorney, if you have a property in San Marino. If you have—defending your right in [unclear] of your land and, political wise to give him an opinion what is better for

an immigrant, and what direction is better—then he has to stay for—to be even an American citizen. And so on and so forth. Passport for San Marino person, to renew a passport; otherwise, to give him a visa, if the passport is not ready. And so it's—any other—it's—any work in a consulate, naturally, in a miniature way, because you cannot pretend San Marino to be Italy or to be France or other nation, but as a consul general of any other nation.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

MR. BALSIMELLI: With the—with the particular difference that every nation, as you know, is a—is a wheel. They—they changing their consulates and they—they are moving from here to San Marino [unclear] of—peculiar way of nation usually keeps his own consulate if nothing major happen in their position with their—

LEVINE: Oh, I see. So you could stay in this position for some years?

MR. BALSIMELLI: I'm already—what is it, around—I think it's about 20 years—

LEVINE: Oh.

MR. BALSIMELLI: —that I'm in this position.

LEVINE: I see. I see. So until the people would have a change of heart [chuckles] or until you wanted to leave—

MR. BALSIMELLI: Right—

LEVINE: —you probably will need—

MR. BALSIMELLI: Yes, I will do something completely wrong or disturb the face of San Marino, something like that. I don't think so then it should be any change, because even I was consulate when even San Marino was different type of political party in power. So it was not a—I was not chose—choose as a political person.

LEVINE: Right, right. Now, apart from the individual problems and issues that the consul deals with, have there ever been instances where it was a larger San Marino problem or issue that the San Marinense in the United States came to the assistance of the people there?

MR. BALSIMELLI: Well, right now it is. For instance, it is the—the renewal of the new law of citizenship of Republic of San Marino that is—I think is going to be the most outgoing discussion and debate that the San Marino [unclear] will have in San Marino in October, in the new October when we're going to go with representatives of the San Marino people and see how the government will come out with the new law of citizenship of Republic of San Marino. As you know, our citizenship is [unclear]. If you were—it comes from the [unclear]. It's not coming from the soil like in United States. You have to be generated by a generation in San Marino. So now, we got to see with the modern way if they going to keep it up or, for instance, if they going to say, after five or six generation, then you are not anymore in San Marino. You cannot be considered a Republic of San Marino citizen. So this is a big battle that is going on right now. I'm pulling for the immigrants in San Marino, pulling [chuckles] for changing in a way; then restrict a little bit the [unclear] to be repeated and repeated and repeated.

LEVINE: I see. Well, you—you feel that, as long as you've got blood, that San Marino—

MR. BALSIMELLI: I think so—

LEVINE: —[unclear] should go back as far as—

MR. BALSIMELLI: I—I—I don't feel it because I am here. I feel it because is—is good for the nation of San Marino. They have always—everything to gain and nothing to lose. But some people in San Marino, in a very [unclear] way, they think, 'Oh, why? They don't know nothing about this country. Why should they keep this position?' You—San Marino had nothing to lose, everything to gain by keeping this tradition.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So now, this being—San Marino being a democracy—this will be debated by—

MR. BALSIMELLI: Yes.

LEVINE: —[unclear].

MR. BALSIMELLI: Right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MR. BALSIMELLI: It will be debated. In October, we will have a meeting for four or five days with the authority of the Republic of San Marino. And all representatives of the community in foreign country of the Republic of San Marino will be at that meeting and we will have a debate with—with the authority of Republic of San Marino.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And how about you, Carol? Do you—do you have a—do you have a stand on the—you know, the bloodline of San Marino—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: [unclear]

LEVINE: —as far as citizenship is concerned? Do you feel it should go back to [unclear]?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: I think—I think so.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: It should. We are—we are the, you know, blood [unclear] and we should stay. And our children should keep it too.

MR. BALSIMELLI: It is that—[unclear] is a very particular thing to understand. First of all, some—I can understand to be a United States citizen—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MR. BALSIMELLI: —which now United States give this dual citizenship to everybody. I could understand that maybe United States, a power nation like United States said, “Well, if you are over here, we need you as a man to fight here or fight there. If you are dual citizenship, maybe, you cannot be dedicated. But Republic of San Marino is so small, never have a war. It is so neutral. Then I think, so then even that is not in the exception, like it could be for a big nation like United States.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-hmm. Carol, how about you when you came here and started working in the factories and all that? Did you want to become Americanized? Was that—was that something you ever thought of?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Ah, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yeah, after I got here I started to like it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: I was—you know, I missed my boyfriend but I started to like [laughter]—

MR. BALSIMELLI: Don't laugh, you. [laughter]

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you remember when you started changing so that you were actually liking it? Wh—what it was that made you feel more happy here?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: When—well, when I met Bob and then we started going out together. And then ever—everything was fine.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: I felt—felt—you know, I felt secure. Then we got married and we had children. So now, more Amer—Americanized than somebody who's—I've been here 45 years.

LEVINE: Oh, wow. Do—how do you think about those two aspects of yourself, the San Marinese and the—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: I'm very proud to be a San Marinesan.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: And I'm also proud to be an American.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Because I like [several words unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. What are your children's names?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: The older one is Robert, Junior. Sylvana [PH] Denise.

LEVINE: So once you started having children, did you continue to work for a while or not or—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: I—off and on. My mother used to watch them. Like, I was working and then maybe one time I stayed home. I was—not all the time. I didn't work all the time.

LEVINE: And how about—well, your mother as well as yourself. But what are the cultural things that she held onto as—as being San Marinesan?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: San Marinesan. I think the cooking.

MR. BALSIMELLI: [laughs]

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yeah, the—we never—we never stopped cooking. Somebody—no—

LEVINE: Wh—what was that—how would you describe that cooking? I mean, wh—what was it she made or—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Ah—

LEVINE: —what was it that made it San Marinese?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Oh, there's one thing that looks like a taco that they call it piadina and that everybody loves, and those two girls in the back here love it. [laughter]

LEVINE: How do you spell it?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Piadina? P-I—pia—A-D-I-N-A.

LEVINE: And what is it?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: It's like a bread.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: You eat it as a bread.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Well, there's a lot of things, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: We made that they don't make here.

MR. BALSIMELLI: [unclear].

LEVINE: What else can you think of that's a dish that—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Pasa—pasatelli [PH]. It's another—it's a soup dish. It's made with cheese and breadcrumbs and eggs and lemon peel. It's very good. Cook it in broth, chicken broth.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. How about anything else about the culture? [clears throat] How about the literature? Is there—is there—is there any writing that, you know, comes from San Marino?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: No, it's the same as Italy.

MR. BALSIMELLI: About what?

LEVINE: Well, is—are there any particular books that, you know—

MR. BALSIMELLI: Of San Marino?

LEVINE: Yeah.

MR. BALSIMELLI: Or—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Not [unclear].

MR. BALSIMELLI: There's one—there's one—of language or history?

LEVINE: No, just about the place.

MR. BALSIMELLI: Of history?

LEVINE: Yeah.

MR. BALSIMELLI: Yes, there's one from Professor Rustie [PH]. And maybe the girls in the back can help me. And one is from Professor Balsimelli [PH] and is either two or three b—is one from Professor Bonelley [PH]. There are a few books.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MR. BALSIMELLI: It's the real Republic of San Marino from the time—from the year 301, San Marino [unclear]. Actually, history goes back to 301.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MR. BALSIMELLI: We're—we started our living. Not me. That's too old for me.

LEVINE: [chuckles] Yeah, not you. Okay. How about song and dance? Is there—is there something that is San Marinense about—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: It's Italian.

LEVINE: Certain songs? Certain—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Not really.

MR. BALSIMELLI: No, it's—you have to understand that San Marino comes from a region of Italy. Right? It's like—San Marino can be like Monaco, France, when it comes from a region.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

MR. BALSIMELLI: And actually, it's got the custom of the region of Italy, which is surrounding us, which is called Romania [PH].

LEVINE: Oh.

MR. BALSIMELLI: Yes.

LEVINE: I see. Okay, so [clears throat] when you look back on it now and you think about coming here as a 16-year-old, do you—do you think that the experience changed you somehow? I mean, you already were 16 when you had—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yeah, I think it did.

LEVINE: You changed your whole life, you might as well say.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Right, yeah.

LEVINE: H—how [unclear]?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: I'm glad I—I came here now.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: I think it was—you know, it's better for me than stay over there at that time. Now, over there, it's beautiful. I mean, very weal—everybody's very wealthy and they live very well. At that time, it wasn't. So coming over here [chuckles] made me a little more—I don't know how to say it.

MR. BALSIMELLI: [unclear]

LEVINE: Well, do you think—I mean, do you think it had any effect on your personality or your character? You—you know, having had to start from scratch?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Mmm, no, not really. No. No.

LEVINE: How about you, Roberto? Do you think that coming here left an imprint on you—

MR. BALSIMELLI: Yes.

LEVINE: —personality wise or character wise? [unclear]

MR. BALSIMELLI: Yeah, especially politically.

LEVINE: Oh, in what sense?

MR. BALSIMELLI: In what sense, that over here you felt the freedom. And where during the period that I left in San Marino, due to the fact that it was, at that time in—even in that region of Italy, most—the party in power was the Communist Party. And being over here, you—and—and realize then politically, if you didn't open a radio, television, nobody cares. And where the people over here cares only to go to work, make money. And who cares about politics? And where, over there, first, you have to say, "Well, if you want a job, you have to be in my party; otherwise, you don't have a job." That really—it was a shock and I liked it very much, even if it was a shock. But I liked it very much and I appreciated very—the liberty that you have and the opportunity. Then if it's not a job here, you can find it there. It was no problem for that. You don't have a so-called, say, "Can I have a job?" Is only question to go and look for it and you will find a job. That was the impact.

LEVINE: I see. So it sounds like you're of the belief that if you're willing to work you—you can make out—

MR. BALSIMELLI: If you can—

LEVINE: —here.

MR. BALSIMELLI: Yes, as the song says, "If you can not make it over here, you don't make it no place."

LEVINE: Oh, is that a song?

MR. BALSIMELLI: [laughs]

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Okay. How about—what would you say, each of you, have been your greatest satisfactions in your life?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Have some more—more money than we are over there. That's a—that's a satisfaction, I would say.

MR. BALSIMELLI: Mine, to be the biggest country in the world.

LEVINE: Oh.

MR. BALSIMELLI: The powerful nation in the world is a tremendous [unclear].

MRS. BALSIMELLI: I guess we don't think the same, huh? [laughs]

MR. BALSIMELLI: No. With me, is a tremen—I can go anyplace. I come from United States. That's the biggest and the powerful nation of the world.

LEVINE: You mean, to be a citizen here.

MR. BALSIMELLI: Yes.

LEVINE: And to go—uh-huh.

MR. BALSIMELLI: And to live—especially in New York, because for me, New York is the capitol of the world. [sentence unclear]. You can say whatever you want to say. But when somebody comes from New York, oh, New York, New York. New York is New York. There's only one in the world. Yeah.

LEVINE: [clears throat] Is there anything else that maybe we haven't talked about that has to do with coming here and making your life here, that—

MR. BALSIMELLI: In way of family?

LEVINE: Well, sure.

MR. BALSIMELLI: In way of family, it was politically, because like I said, my father was a Democrat and maybe more close to be on the right side of democracy than not on the left side. And so it was very tough for our family, being a place then. In that moment, left—

the left wing was all in power. And—and so that is maintained and just to get out of that system of—to be obligated to think only one way and—and obey. That was the main thing.

LEVINE: So I guess political freedom was a big—

MR. BALSIMELLI: For me, yes. Personally.

LEVINE: [unclear] freedom.

MR. BALSIMELLI: Personally. Not for everybody because I don't say then that San Marino was a—a place there was like a Russian or whatever it was. But anyways, especially on our side in my family, we felt it a lot, the—the political different mentality of—of—maybe because we came from the United States, maybe because my father was over here. Maybe because my mother was over there. So they could not actually agree to this left wing then it was in power at that time in—in Italy.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Would it be a fair statement to say that originally your family came here for a better life? But then when they tasted the difference of the political climate, they found—

MR. BALSIMELLI: Well, then they been caught in the system because it was war. And then they—[chuckles] the same thing was no return for them. It was no back away from it. It was a bridge—then it broken. It was no return at that time.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. And once—once you did return, I suppose your father's ideas had changed somewhat?

MR. BALSIMELLI: No. When I return to San Marino?

LEVINE: Yeah.

MR. BALSIMELLI: No, my father is—like I said, it was one piece or whatever he believe, he born with it and he died with it. And nothing would have change it. And so I did have to help him a lot because of his—with his mentality, it was very hard for him even to, I would say, position himself in a—during the time that I was here and young. And I would send him money to help him out in his old age, which now I'm in it.

LEVINE: So how did he—did he fit back in in San Marino? He never came back here?

MR. BALSIMELLI: Not—not really. Not—he never fit in anymore in San Marino. Never. Never. Never with—with his mind, with his way of thinking. Never. He had always a little bit of—you could see in him that he always had a problem.

LEVINE: Hmm.

MR. BALSIMELLI: And so has my mother.

LEVINE: Is that because San Marino had changed?

MR. BALSIMELLI: I don't—

LEVINE: [unclear]

MR. BALSIMELLI: —think so is because San Marino has been changed. I think so because it's his own fault, even in my father to be so stubborn in his mentality, not to adopt himself in what has been offer you. It is his own fault and he had a rough time after the period of the war, and I think it's his own fault, most of it. If he could have balance a little bit more the situation and not be just, you know—he would have opportunity, better opportunity.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you think—as head of the consul, do you think you—what do you think you learned from your father? Or what do you think you'd do differently?

MR. BALSIMELLI: Fighting.

LEVINE: Fighting?

MR. BALSIMELLI: Yes.

LEVINE: [chuckles] How do you mean that?

MR. BALSIMELLI: When you want to achieve something, not surrendered.

LEVINE: I see. So you took the positive from your father's life.

MR. BALSIMELLI: I hope so. [laughs]

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MR. BALSIMELLI: And from my mother, patience. [laughs]

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How about you, Carol? What—what do you think you've taken from your mother and from your father as far as character or attitudes?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: I don't know.

LEVINE: Maybe you passed along to your children the same kind of things they passed along to you? Or maybe you wanted—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: I can't think—

LEVINE: —to be different?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: I don't know. I can't think of anything in particular.

LEVINE: Yeah, you'll think of it when you go home, I'm sure. [laughs]

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Yeah. [laughs]

LEVINE: Okay. Is there anything else, Carol, that you can think of about—about coming here, living here, spending your life here and being part of the—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: We going back—we go there every year, which is very nice. I see my—my aunt. I mean, she's 86 years old and she wants me all the time. She says, "You better come back next year." And it's nice to see the—you know, they make the—the—what do you call that? [unclear], that day, October 1st is a big ceremony. It's nice to see, to be in it.

LEVINE: What is that?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: That, they change the—the—the government—

LEVINE: Oh.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: —every six months.

MR. BALSIMELLI: No, the head of the government.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: The head of the government.

MR. BALSIMELLI: The government is [unclear].

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Every six months—

MR. BALSIMELLI: Five years in power.

LEVINE: Hmm.

MR. BALSIMELLI: We have two—you—you know by now. We have two—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: [unclear] regions.

MR. BALSIMELLI: Like two presidents. And the government will choose from the 60 senator, let's call them. [unclear], we call them; we can't have senator—will stay in power for two year—for six months. And before they can be reelected, there has to be a transitory time of two years before those two people can be reelected.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MR. BALSIMELLI: It's a system that has been [unclear]—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: It's a very beautiful country.

MR. BALSIMELLI: —for—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Very beautiful.

MR. BALSIMELLI: —for many generation, for the question to not give the opportunity to somebody to be—become from a republic to become a dictator and have the power to stay with money and to take care [unclear]. Especially some people with big families. You know, you can have a—look at the telephone book—you can have a hundred people with the same families. [unclear] can't go in power, stays in power a long time and—

LEVINE: Ah.

MR. BALSIMELLI: —is dangerous to—to democracy or to the cause of republican ideas.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MR. BALSIMELLI: Anyway, we—as you know, we got the—your President Lincoln is our honorary citizen of the Republic of San Marino.

LEVINE: Hmm.

MR. BALSIMELLI: Because San Marino was the first nation then recognized what Lincoln did for the slavery, for the famous [unclear]. And

[clears throat] send them and recognized him as a man, that he fight for equality and liberty, and elected him as an honorary citizen of the Republic of San Marino.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So—

MR. BALSIMELLI: So we have ties with the United States for way back.

LEVINE: Yeah. That's very nice. Okay. Before we close, is there anything you would like to say?

MR. BALSIMELLI: First of all, I got to thank you.

LEVINE: Thank you.

MR. BALSIMELLI: And it was—I thank you because you are very, very—I thank everybody here, very nice, and especially to help the two girls and the San Marino Immigrant Museum. Then I hope then one day it will create something and everybody will be proud. And if I can be any help, yes, I'm here.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. Thank you. And Carol, maybe if you could end by telling what is it about San Marino that's so beautiful?

MRS. BALSIMELLI: It's so old and everything is in stone. Everything is stones. It's just so beautiful. Every—even the—even the roads are all stone, tiles.

MR. BALSIMELLI: [unclear].

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Inside the city. You can't drive inside the city. You got to walk it.

LEVINE: Oh.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: It's a small city, you know, but you got to walk inside. So that's just beautiful. I mean, every time I go there I appreciate it more than I did when I lived there.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Okay. Well, maybe that's a nice place to end. Thank you so much—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: You're welcome. Thank you.

LEVINE: —for the interview.

MRS. BALSIMELLI: Thank you.

LEVINE: And I've been speaking with Roberto and Carol Balsimelli, who came at different times, or—

MRS. BALSIMELLI: One year apart.

LEVINE: —one year apart. And [clears throat] this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service.

[END OF INTERVIEW]