

ANTONIO BUFFA (W/ ANTHONY BUFFA)

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SICILY, ITALY, 19 AGE

RESIDENCE IN U.S.: NEW YORK, FLORIDA, HOUSTON, GEORGIA

LEVINE: It is October 20, the year 2000. I'm here at Ellis Island, in the studio with Anton-, Antonio, Antonino, known as Nino...Buffa. His story, uh has a lot of drama and um, he came to the United States three times.

BUFFA: Four time.

LEVINE: Four Times.

BUFFA: Three time I came, one time I goofed. You know, the, the ship it went back after four hours in the Mediterranean. They caught me and it went back, it was uh uh empty ship and uh, the name it was um, the name of the comic, American comic, but its name, I forgot the name, um, Cyrus W. Field, the ship. He, he went back. They caught me and the the ship wasn't making water and it was going to repair in New York and California. But it first was supposed to come to New York. And they told me that before I went to the ship. And I hide. And uh, I was under the, the axe, you know the...

LEVINE: What year was this, when you came on that...

BUFFA: What, same year. See, this was a, that second trip was a goof, uh uh abortion.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. Okay, I'll tell you what lets start with your life before you c-started get, trying to get to the United States. First start to tell me your birth date and where you were born.

BUFFA: Okay. I was born uh, February the eleventh, 1926. In Costa La Mar del Gulfo, province of Trappany, Sicily, Italy.

LEVINE: Okay.

BUFFA: And (clears throat), and I went uh, joined the Italian navy, I was sixteen years old, during World War II. And I came back and I saw a disaster, you know, that everybody was no food, no water, nothing, it was. So first thing I thought of was get out of there. Either, I had two choices: either get a gun like other kids, that-a way, and do crazy stuff, or get outta there. So I, I'm afraid the guns, I don't like it violent, and I...

LEVINE: Tried to get to the United States.

BUFFA: I tried to get to the United States. Even though the United States was my enemy, but the war was over (laughs).

LEVINE: Okay. Well lets start before, up until the time you were sixteen. Lets talk about that first. Uh, what was your father's name?

BUFFA: Giovanni.

LEVINE: (repeats) Giovanni. And uh, your mother's name?

BUFFA: [] You know that's Sicilian.

LEVINE: And wh-, what that was her, her first name or her maiden name?

BUFFA: No. The maiden name was the same: Buffa. They were distant relative, yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, uh huh. Okay.

BUFFA: The same.

LEVINE: Now did you have brothers and sisters?

BUFFA: Yeah, they all here. Two died and the rest are here in uh, Georgia.

LEVINE: Oh. Uh huh, okay. Now um, did you have grandparents when you were little?

BUFFA: Well yeah. Oh yeah.

LEVINE: You remember them?

BUFFA: Yeah I remember them. I remember my mom father which has my name, I took his name. And, and I grew up with them because my father he left me when I was three years old he came to the United States...as a stowaway. But he made it. And it was the depression era then in 1928, and he came back in 1935. So all of this time I didn't know my father, I was with my grandfather. And...my father came back, and we then...and my mother had five more kids. When he came back I was eight or nine in 1938. No – he come back in thirty, uh twenty-eight to thirty-five, I was nine. I didn't know him, but they told me, "that's your father."

LEVINE: So, how, so did he stay back in Sicily?

BUFFA: Yeah. He stayed back.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BUFFA: And then uh...

LEVINE: Wh-, what about your father, did he tell you anything about the United States when he came back?

BUFFA: Yeah, he, well my father never talked to me straight. Because in old times he was very disorganized man. Very uh...

LEVINE: Strict?

- BUFFA: He never, he never talked to me like today father talk to kids, you know. And I hate him (laughs), because I don't know him, you know that's why I started to do this crazy stuff and join the navy. I joined the navy for two reasons: that was the one reason, the other reason was because my father [], came back from the United States., and we were in bad shape.
- LEVINE: Now did you have brothers and sisters?
- BUFFA: Yeah. Then the brothers and sisters started to grow. You know, my father came back and one every year, so five more kids. And...these kids were younger, I was ten years older than them. And I saw the misery and everything uh, uh I don't know what to do to help. And that's when I decided to join the...the Italian Navy. I went in the war in 1942. I was fifteen years and eleven months, almost sixteen.
- LEVINE: What was it like, what did you see in the war when you were in the navy what—
- BUFFA: I was hit in the leg, but that's...was inevitable. Uh uh, how was the war?
- LEVINE: Yeah. Wh- how did it affect you as a fifteen-year—I mean you were really a boy...
- BUFFA: It- It frightened me that I- I'm, I- I could see right now...um....very sensible, I cry easily, very easliy. And I see things about this Vietnam people, that was after my war, and they oh...drugs and stuff. And I'll tell you if- if there was drugs back then I woulda take drugs, you know, it was...but thank god there was nothing like that. But I got affected a lot. And I'm very affectionable guy, I'm very, I don't wanna call myself a good guy. But, I'm, I don't do bad stuff...If I do it, I'm gonna [], you know. But uh, why, I'm very sensible, very sensible, unbelievably sensible.
- LEVINE: So you're sensitive, (BUFFA: sensitive...) sensitive...

You now, another words you think that you weren't that sensitive until you went into the, into the navy? It made you...

BUFFA: Well, I was a little crazy, to tell you the truth—before...

LEVINE: Oh before...

BUFFA: It was a combination of stuff. I was a little crazy maybe because of my father, I didn't know him and I become a rebel, you know. So I did, (stutters) I had a nickname and uh, my town its only fourteen thousand people, we know each other. And they used to call me, uh "Nino []," which means in English uh, "Nino", uh, "the crazy." So I, I was like that. And then, you know with- with the time, the war coming, before, before I joined the navy I- I did other crazy stuff. I wanted to go to Rome and see Mussolini, you remember Mussolini? Eh, why? I dunno why. I wanted to see Mussol---(laughs).

LEVINE: So you did it?

BUFFA: Uh, no, I didn't have any money to go to Rome so I- I stowed away in the train. And I got at as far as, very close to Rome – []. And the police got me, I was twelve or thirteen, I don't remember. And...

LEVINE: You were by yourself?

BUFFA: By myself. The first time I run outta the house I was ten.

LEVINE: Really.

BUFFA: Yeah, I went to Pallermo, it its sixty miles away. Eh, I had a crazy life. But um...

LEVINE: Were you the only child at that time? Before your mother had the others?

BUFFA: No, no no. I had a older brother sixteen months older than me, he died. But he white, he wasn't like me. I was the only crazy. My sister is still

living, Nina, is in Atlanta now. We all are a big family, they all work for my son now, my son he has a phone company, long distance and eh, all the relative came from all over to work for them. (Rustling Noise) Big fellow. And...

LEVINE: So you were crazy and then you- you went into the navy, and did you- did you go in the navy with friends of yours? Or did you just sign up yourself, or?

BUFFA: No. Uh, when I went to the navy, eh, I copied somebody else that was before me. You know, I was really like jealous I wanna be like him, you know kid stuff. And eh, my father already in the army, World War II, they call him. And I was in a different town. My mother, (clears throat) no one signed for me, she has to sign before I leave, and she didn't want to sign. And she- there was no telephone back then, the only few guys had the telephone. So she wrote a letter to my father saying your son is going crazy, he's going to destroy the house if I don't sign, and he, he wrote a letter back that said, "let him die" (laughs).

LEVINE: Well tell me what your mother was like, when you were growing up.

BUFFA: Heh, my mother eh, me...were twins. My mother she loved me more than anybody else. I was during the war, I write four-five letters a day, to my mother. I don't know how much it is to send things though. My mother was like me, she liked opera like me, she liked music like me, and she read a lot, I used to read a lot. Eh, my mother was uh part of me, you know...

LEVINE: Now you- you did your older brother go in the, in the World War II?

BUFFA: No. He was...

LEVINE: He died before that, or no?

BUFFA: No. No, no...he...the war was over. After the war was over then uh, then I start to make those trips over here. And then for me I wind up in Argentina, there there's another story.

LEVINE: OK, well when you first—when the war got over

BUFFA: Yeah.

LEVINE: You came back to—

BUFFA: When the war got over, the war was over, but not with Japan. The United States – Japan stayed in war, but Italy surrendered, September, 1943. So, I went, everybody went crazy, you know all the Italian Navy, or Army, everybody run away. There was no, discipline, nothing, no no nothing. And uh, I was in Naples, and the German was still there and I wanted to go to Sicily to see my family, that they they are alive. I know that the American disembarked in Sicily, but I didn't know that was so easy. I thought they kill everybody, I didn't know nothing, you know. And I was already nineteen and I start to walk in the mountain, and when I was walking I see other column of people walking, going south, all like me. And the German Gestapos, and then we got under the tree and they start to talk I don't know what they're saying, with machine gun (makes mumbling noise) and like this waiting, they knew that we were military, even with the civilian clothes, they knew, of course everything. And eh, then we escape, start to run and the Americans shoot this way and the German shoot between them, we were under fire, on uh, the other side. And then, I thought I got it made, I walk for fifteen days to go to Sicily. That's another story, you know eh...

LEVINE: Well if you want to say anything about it...

BUFFA: If it interest you, I tell you

LEVINE: Yeah, for fourteen days what was it like...

BUFFA: For fourteen days walking, yeah. Really (clears throat) me and other people until I had blood on my feet. We eat fruit from the trees, and uh we got a to uh, [] we rode the train to [], then we go on the other side and go to Sicily. And eh, there was no ferry boat or nothing. After the war was, not even matches, nothing. So we eh, there was guys with um...fishing boat and you had to pay to go on the other side. So I had a little bit money, and I paid for me and other guy and for him too, you know we go to Sicily no transportation, walking again, another five days, finally I got []. My mother thought I was dead because she heard on the radio that my ship was sunk and was sunk, but I- I wasn't on the ship that day.

LEVINE: Where were you?

BUFFA: No. That was another miracle. No, we were in Naples and the Bay of Naples and they send me a form for the guys to get something for the ship from the port [] to Naples. That was a miracle really. And we came back, and the ship wasn't there, and we go to the Navy Commander that says go back to Naples, the ship is in Genoa, they wanna send you to Genoa. We go back there and the next day was the armistice. Then, now I know what happened. The ship, the from Genoa, they replaced us, the five people that were missing and they go towards Malta, they- they allied to surrender. And was between Sardinia and Corsica they got crossfire from the German, the the same German that lied to us, they knew where the ship was going. And they sunk the ship. They sunk the ship, and it was the best, my best friend it was a [] die. Se- uh, seventy-nine survived outta three-hundred and then...

LEVINE: Your best friend died?

BUFFA: Then I got a newspaper, cuz I find him forty-nine years, I find him...and I got a newspaper I didn't bring it, in in Sicily. After forty-nine years, it was my best friend.

LEVINE: And you thought he had died? Did you...

BUFFA: No. No, no, he didn't die, but a lot of people...I wasn't on the boat because they send me...So my mother thought I was dead, you know. They hear the radio, she wasn't [] yet, or she was crying and everything. So I come back, they said that I was lying and everything, and the people knew me for too long, told my mother I was coming. And it was uh, whew. Then when I started thinking about this, uh when I see the masonry there, he goes, why you going in the navy, you know you eat everyday, you don't know what's happened, you know. You're so full of pep that you wanna kill somebody, you wanna win the war, you know. You- you're not realizing what's going on, and I didn't know anything about politician, I don't know, I was a kid! You know, sixteen. So, eh, when I come back and I saw the misery, I said, I gotta get outta here, and then all my friends with the pistol guns, German guns, even even uh, bombs they have everything you know...

LEVINE: Grenades...

BUFFA: Grenades...after the war ended, ev- everybody was armed. And Sicily, especially Sicily, you know they form a lot of bands, like you know I gotta get outta here. And I did. But, I from here they got they got 'em in the ship.

LEVINE: Well tell them how you...

BUFFA: Wait Wait—they gotta hear. How, When I got caught and everything. Everything is significant.

LEVINE: Yeah. You tell what you did. Where did you get the sh- where did you get the ship that you stowed away on first?

BUFFA: Ok uh, first of all to get the ship I had to go minimum Naples. There was no American ship come to Sicily, I didn't see any. So Naples, you gotta have money for the train...I had no money. And uh, well the first trip, what I did I had an uncle in America, because at that that time they started to communication, my uncle used to send clothes for us and my coat, I sold that and I, I paid a ticket to, from Pallermo I didn't leave from Naples, I didn't know where I went. It was maybe two hours []

and then a stowaway and it go to the bathroom, when control [] . And find out I made it to Naples, and uh...Naples I went to the port, and I see this ship, []. I saw the the American flag [] carved with a hole.

LEVINE: Wait. Just a second, this was not the Carp, this was the Daniel Drake first, no?

BUFFA: Daniel Drake. Daniel Drake. I confuse. The Daniel Drake. It was a liberty ship, you know the war, after the war, no during the war they they they made all of the ships for transportation for the military in Europe. And they made so many, one a day, you know the liberty ship, it was...very fragile, some of them they, they open up in the ocean. They were weld, weld, no...I don't know I forgot (trails off)

LEVINE: The welding was not good, in other words, so they...

BUFFA: Well welding, instead of with regular, it was with the bolt, but this was a while...but anyway, I know this about this after, I- I- liberty ship, and I saw this, this boat, and uh, there was no way to get up there...you know, I didn't want to go up to a ship with American [] underneath there, but a lot of people go and work over there, the the cargo. They will put in uh, all the [], its uh, old broken steel from the war the bombs that the Americans troops, they destroy everything, so they took all the steel and bring it back to the United States because Italy, had no, no mill for steel – nothing, there was so that, that's why they were put in the Daniel Drake. So uh, what I did, my friends and walk a little bit, I went to White Hook, I got a pencil, one like this, like a [], see uh people that work. The American kids, little kids too, you know. They saw me pass by with the pencil, but I was working. And uh, and uh, I did it purposely, I ran towards the block. Soon as I got there, everybody stop they want to eat and I went down the hole, and I would get out of there. Then the, the [] cargo, the next morning they, they sail.

LEVINE: So you were down in the hole with the scrap metal?

- BUFFA: I was down the hole with...scrap metal, I find that it was dark, and I find that uh, what do you think shall, what do you call that—talk. It, it was rag to me, it was broken in front like this and upside down [laughs]...
- LEVINE: So you were underneath...
- BUFFA: I was underneath like a dog...uh...then...at night time...being that I wasn't [], an Italian neighborhood, I know a little bit about ships, you know...I say well I gotta go to the life saver, ship to get food. And, and I find food, I find uh, this hard, very hard...its not a bread, its something like it stay months and its still uh...
- LEVINE: Hard Tack.... they call that?
- BUFFA: We called it lead in Italian, I've never seen it here. Its ok...food. And then there was cans...
- LEVINE: Why was it in the uh...
- BUFFA: In the life...in the lifeboat? Always...always, you'd eat today.
- LEVINE: Oh I see they keep food in the lifeboat, ok, yeah.
- BUFFA: There was pistol, for light, you know the pistol, if the boat sink, you shoot and it goes like this [gestures] all luminesque, I don't know what they call it.
- LEVINE: Like a flare.
- BUFFA: Yeah, but I didn't care about that. I got water left, there was uh...[pause] I don't remember, cans...I got cans, water, and I got cans of the other stuff...I got several stuff. I go down the next night and then by the fourth or the fifth night, I say [clears throat], wow its too much they're going to catch me one day, you know, all this, because I go in the dark over there and [difficult to hear, scratching noise on tape]...there are so many people that, I see one, around the front. So

after three, four days I got a lot of stuff, like this, and one can fell down and made a noise. And the guy flashed light right in my face, [makes noise, laughs]. They said “Hey!” as they start to scream in English, I don’t know one word in English, I’ve never seen it. So, he had a pistol. And after I find out that he was never supposed to have a pistol, in the cellar. But the guy had a pistol. Put the pistol in my back and pushing me all the way in the stairs until we went to the captain, and then they hide the pistol, you know? But I don’t know where he hide the pistol, nothing, I don’t know...they start to ask me questions, “either you get out, or you pay somebody to get on the boat,” I didn’t pay nobody, I didn’t have no money, you know. How?...this and that. And then went to the part were out of the kitchen, I said, “this guy came with a pistol,” “you sure?” “Yes, you put it in my back.” And then I find out later that he got fired when they got in the United States. [] Gone. And then...So they put me to work in a[]

LEVINE: What did you have to do?

BUFFA: Oh, the salad to go eat, and I used to go kitchen and get the...I learned how to say “bacon and egg,” [laughs] I go to the kitchen say, “bacon and egg!” I go over there, bring it to them...and then, they put me paint...scratch paint, you know, paint. Uh, and um...

LEVINE: How m—How long was the trip? How many days?

BUFFA: Uh yes, here somewhere, maybe fourteen days or some...they will find it here, they got everything, I didn’t even know they got it all this. But the name, exactly the way I was remembering the name of the ships is exactly.

LEVINE: Oh good.

BUFFA: So...then I had problem with an officer, because I was a little crazy like I told you, you know...and this guy used to call me “sino [?] amigo,” with his finger like this [gestures] and I said to him in Italian I say, “[.]” And the guy, got pissed off. He called somebody, they got me in the— they put me in the hole that was a pipe like this, and they put their hand

around the pipe with a handkerchief, it was []. I don't care, I was young, I was come from the war. But then they came...everybody sympathize with me, they came and they gave me food, the salads weren't enough. And then, after one day, they free me, and there was another officer, the other officer, he was Italian descent, and I told him that guy's no good, he talk—you know, tried to help me out. And when we got in...Brooklyn, he [pauses] he—was with a girl, I thought it was his girlfriend in his cabin, he took em to his cabin, because they waited for the immigration police to take me...here. So he put me in the lavatory, and there was a pipe with the handkerchief, like this, handcuff, how you say? Handcuff?

BUFFA: Handcuff.

LEVINE: And he started to kiss his girlfriend, and [mumbles]. Then, he had to go, and immigration didn't come yet. And this was Friday, and uh...I remember it was Friday because there's something gonna come up now. The tear off, he give me...he told me tear it off, take care of him. So he took his ticket, to to him, he didn't handcuff in the chair like the other guy did, he leave me alone. The guy was of Italian descent, he talk to me, he says, [], he says I'm gonna help you. "Oh good." So he gave me the key. He went into the first office cabinet and he get another set and I got a key, I don't know what he did. He gave me a key, and I had a pocket like this, and I said, oh here, "What am I going to do with a key?" You know. He said, "They don't come...today is Friday, they don't come today, they don't gonna come until Monday, because I don't think they work on Saturday...so you're going to have time to escape, wherever he puts you." He wanted to know if I had relative over here, I told him about my uncle, the doctor, Peter Buffa. I gave his phone number and everything, everything was set, he was supposed to help me. He went away, and they had to put them in the cabinet again, where the other officer...he went away and two hours later they come and get the immigration... So I came over here and...

LEVINE: What do you remember when you first saw Ellis Island? How was it like?

BUFFA: I remember, I remember it wasn't America, and I was like you go to the moon or mars, you feel great, you feel...you made it to the United States. Even though I was in jail, I wasn't in jail...I was detained. But uh, I don't care, I was in the United States, really difference today. Its not like this anymore. I was [], there's no idea to describe this, and I tell you one day, send me back with the []. I got back to my town. I was received like a hero, fiesta. Everybody come to me say, "Nino, I sell my donkey, I sell my horse, take me with you." I say, "I didn't make it" [laughs]. But they say, "but you went to the United States!" "Yes! The only soil I seen is Ellis Island, I saw the Statue of Liberty, but I don't see no liberty." That was it, the statue of liberty. But I was, they don't care. They just wanna go and make...I said I go a long time. And the second trip came. The second trip, which is it...

LEVINE: Ok, why don't you just say how long you stayed at Ellis Island...at a time.

BUFFA: I—I stayed on Ellis Island, I arrived, I have it written down from here, I arrived at 16 April, and they deported me June 19th.

LEVINE: Ok, now can you talk a little bit about those two months, when you were here?

BUFFA: Ok. Those two months, it was um...big place where we stayed, we play cards, and there was this guy, he would pay cigarette for everybody, candy, he'd buy everything. I say what is this Santa Cruz, you know. And it was Lucky Lusciano—I didn't even know who Lucky Lusciano was. I bet you don't know either...

LEVINE: Lucky Lusciano?

BUFFA: Yeah...he...[]

LEVINE: You'd say who he was...for the tape

BUFFA: I don't know what...I don't know anything about mafia, even though I come from mafia country—you know...Sicily...but I know zero but...

This guy is Mafioso...and I learned about him. He was always giving everybody. We play cards, we would play soccer, and one game there was a big game between the Italian and Spanish. We made a game Italian and Spanish. The Italian...I didn't play. The Italian made a goal and they started to fight, young kids in 19 or 20...punching each other and everything. And then, the fight proceed, into the cafeteria with forks, and somebody was hurt. They even must have a record here for this. Somebody was hurt. You know how they did it too...all the forks out...and we don't eat with no more forks, he had to cut the meat with a spoon. No knife, []. One of the men of this big fight that went to the t- the table, and waited until the table was off [laughs].

LEVINE: Did a lot of people see it?

BUFFA: Well, uh, I would say, when I came they did "ugh", they make noise when somebody new comes. And I say about 50 or 60. There was only one girl, but at a used table though. She just stayed. We see the girl on Sunday on the church. There was one girl, I don't know from Russia or from England...Olga. Only one girl and there every man. Ugh, she wasn't Catholic, she was different religion, but they did the mess over here with all religion, and we went to the Catholic, and we went to the Protestant, we went to see the girls...[laughs] because they don't care, and to stay away from my room, you know go to the church, or you change it everyday. It was nice, they came somebody came played piano...there were those shufflers. It wasn't like a prison, it was um, we played soccer. First of all, I didn't know what breakfast was. Over here, you go breakfast, this and that... "Oh my god! I'm in heaven!" You know, eat—food. That, that was great, I didn't, I didn't want to go back [laughs].

LEVINE: Well tell me, were there people, a lot of people that were from Italy? Or were there people from lots of places?

BUFFA: All over the country. Ok. There was this guy, two guys that I met. One from Argentina, that later I got a story, I went to see him. His name was, Victor, I don't know his last name. His- his, grandma he says was Italian and she used to leave uh "Avenida del Parade"

(spelling?) And then I went to Argentina, I look for that. And the other guy name was Gonzelito, he is from Spain, but he couldn't come from Spain because of Marco, [] de Spain, so you came from France...with the ship, I don't know what name of the ship. We met on Ellis Island, we made friends, the next trip I find them over here...twice.

LEVINE: Really.

(HERE BRETT BATES TAKES OVER)

LEVINE: Now were these people here, were they being detained because they had stowed away? Or were they being detained for other reasons? Do you know?

BUFFA: No. Mostly they were waiting for deportation. Then there was a bunch of guys, they were prisoner of war are here. Italian prisoner of war. They told me they came from Fort Mar...Fort Marmot something, I don't know what place. There was a prisoner camp over here. But it was like Germany prisoner camp. They told me that go out, the girls go visit them, their relatives and everything. So they were deported. And **Marincorp ???** there was a lot of them, 15 or 20, I don't remember. They knew a few words in English. They were here. And they deport them. And...

LEVINE: Anything else you can remember?

BUFFA: playing soccer...eh?

LEVINE: Anything else you can remember about those two months before you were sent back?

BUFFA: The most thing I remember is the second trip when the guy died. The first those friends that I met, my relatives **whosidebeck ???** his father and he came to come visit me, give me money, stuff. I was in heaven. I went back with some money coming from the United States, it was a big deal.

LEVINE: And Lucky Luciano was here that time? That first time, was that when Lucky Luciano was here?

BUFFA: Lucky Luciano was here...he went back...Yes! The first trip. Was the first time. And he went back a few days...I even remember, years ago I used to remember the name of the ship. It was a passenger ship. Mine was a passenger ship too, but it was American. He went back with **Ucalna Santuna???**, something like that. One passenger ship that used to come here every month from Italy. There was no plane back then, no airlines.

LEVINE: So he went back before you did?

BUFFA: Yeah, a few days before. Matter of fact, I thought he came with me but he didn't. Because my mind is not as perfect. Sometime I sit and think and think and think then I say, "No, he went back with the regular passenger ship, Italian." And then I hear that he died in Naples. Heart attack or something. He went to Napoli and he came to Cuba, he came to the United States and nobody know because the guy mafia. He did everything.

LEVINE: What was he like as a person?

BUFFA: I can tell you how he looked like. He was a regular stature, a little higher than me, much higher than me. Dark, and he had....violo at he head, I don't know...

LEVINE: Dimples?

BUFFA: Holes. Holes in the skin. You know people they got that skin...?

LEVINE: Yeah, like a pocked skin.

BUFFA: Yeah. He was handsome, he wasn't ugly. And he was...you know he was mafia, you see somebody, it was Santa Claus, buying things...smiling...and I say "Why this guy doing this?" Maybe I thought rich. And then later on I find out who this Luciano is. I don't

know Al Capone, I don't know nothing. And this guy, he was with Al Capone and then separate from him. And he had his own family, mafia, whatever you call. But must you have records...and doesn't say anything about Luciano here but it says everything about me. First trip, like I say, I eat a lot, ooo food, you don't know. I had ??? and then I go back, and they put me in jail for 3 days waiting to find out if I was a criminal or anything. And then they found out I was okay and they let me go. And then my father, he didn't get mad at me because he finally realized that I had the guts to do this. He realized he wasn't enough to feed 8 kids. No he fabricated 8 kids. But where was he? When we were 3 he came into the United States. Depression era, nothing. He came back, and five more kids, no food, no work, you know? That's not nice. But...

LEVINE: So how then you stayed back at home with your mother for a few more months, right?

BUFFA: Yeah.

LEVINE: You came back September 26.

BUFFA: Exactly. No, no no.

LEVINE: No?

BUFFA: During this time it was my second abortion trip, with Cyrus W. Field, that was the name of the ship.

LEVINE: Cyrus W...

BUFFA: Cyrus W. But it's not the W. Field the comic because I find out later over here in the United States, I went to the library and I find that this Cyrus W. Field was a magnate, what do you call? A rich guy. A magnate.

LEVINE: Oh, a magnate.

BUFFA: Something like that. New York, Pennsylvania, I don't know. The name of the ship was Cyrus W. Field. And this ship, this was an adventure incredible that I don't believe it myself. The ship left the port 5 hours, it go back just for me. It's unbelievable. But I tell you what happened. This time I had help...Manuel Corey...I don't know how to pronounce it. C-O-R-E-Y. The guy was working machine. And I promised him, I said, "My uncle will give you \$1000 if you take me into the United States." Because my uncle, the doctor, is dead. I can talk about him.

LEVINE: He was a doctor?

BUFFA: Si. Yeah. Mother Cabrina Hospital. He used to work there. He used to make \$200 a month as a physician. Oh here it says everything. When they were interrogating him, his wife. My uncle...so I told this guy, "Manuel" – because went to **?????** to say hello to my family and Boom, I don't know how I got to Napoli again, I got to Napoli. I had a little bit of money from here, my uncle, and everything. And I saw this ship, and I talk to this guy. Oh, there was...one guy helped me. They was deported. He was delinquent. This guy was a delinquent, and he was deported with me with the **Mariancarp**. And during the trip, he start to talk to...I dunno. I say "Why they send you in Italy? You don't even speak Italian." He said, "Ah, I had a little a trouble," in Italian, broken Italian. There was him and other guys, too. People they lost their citizenship paper because of too much delinquent. I don't know what they did. They killed somebody, or they're really bad. And this guy during the trip he said, "When are you going to try again and come and see me in Naples?" He went to Naples. He was young. But his mother was living in Italy. And he went to his mother's house. He gave me the address. So I went to see him, and he took me into the port, and he talked to this guy Manuel Cury, Corey, how you pronounce it. He talked to him and says, "Take him to the United States, his uncle, Doctor Buffa so-and-so, gave telephone number, he give you a thousand dollars." And this ship was...water was coming through the ship. It was not a big deal, otherwise they don't leave the port for the United States, little bit of water. And he put me underneath the axe, you know, the propeller axe. Underneath there there's not

much space. Water full of oil, mud. He put me there. He says I'm going to take you out of here. But he never did because people used to come, I hear their paces in my head. Tack tack tack tack. And they go with the flashlight, look at the machine, the pump, they were pumping the water that was coming in. And one...I was right near where the damage was. I don't know why he put me there.

LEVINE: You were right where the water was coming in?

BUFFA: Where was the water was, yeah. It was all water, mud, and oil. I was like, when this guy saw me, he put a flashback in my eyes, he thought I was an animal of some kind or monster. He started to scream, "Ahhhh!" And then everybody came over there, flashlight, they got me again. Captain, how you get up, he was mad, real upset. Then I find out if they don't send me back, any stowaway they catch on a ship they gotta pay so much money, I don't know, the company. They call...whatever, they gotta pay. I guess that was the only reason why he turned back. We were almost to **Ge????** from Naples. "You came back!" And one of the officers say, I was all wet, it was September, wasn't too cold. But I was cold, all wet. And one of the officers say, "You know how to swim?" I say, "Nope" though I know how to swim, I don't want to tell you. I say No because I know what the intention was, give me a life jacket and dump me in the water. Because they try to call all the fishermen. It was almost light, daylight. And they call with the thing like that...

LEVINE: Megaphone.

BUFFA: Megaphone. "HEYYY!" They were busy fishing. Nobody came. Then they guy ask me if I know how to swim. I say no. And then what they did, they put a rope ladder, you know those, they put it on the outside and they give me the life jacket. And then I say "Wait a minute. Give me a carton of cigarette" because I know the Italian people they were dying for cigarettes. And I went like this "HEY!" and everybody came running, the fishermen, for the cigarette, so I find a way. I still fall in the water. I went down to go in the boat...the guy took me home, he took me to his house. I was a kid. They dried my

clothes and everything, feed me, and then I give them the address of the guy, the delinquent guy...he saw me go on the boat. He saw me leaving. The boat left, he saw me. I said okay. I go knock on the door. He said "What are you doing here?" I said "The boat came back." He said "No!" "Yes!" Okay, then when we saw the **newberry** victory, that was it. So the second one was abortion. And then I got this. I came over here and they got me. And this time...biggest story of here, about this. How they got me, I was almost dead, they put me in the hospital. Everything here. Five days, no water, no food. I don't even know how I get up there. And then I go on the top and the door was locked from outside. When I got in it was open. And I remember every night like the first trip, I used to go to the life boat. And this door was broken, boom boom boom boom, the boat was rolling the door. All of the sudden, no more boom boom. I said, Ah! They lock it from outside. So I stayed there for five days, no water, no food. Then I got up, and I got a piece of steel, I don't know what it was, a piece of chain, and I heard the door and I was saying "aqua" – I was delirious. And some Puerto Rican seamen understand aqua, agua, they say agua, no. First of all they hear the voice and start to scream. They open up, I fell down on the floor, they took me to the hospital. And they gave me so much water to drink, and I was real sick. It was worse. Fever and everything. So I was three days in the hospital, and then-

LEVINE: In the hospital on the boat?

BUFFA: On the boat. There was a doctor, or a nurse, I don't know what it is. But anyway, then they put me to work again. And then I came over here.

LEVINE: Was that a passenger boat, or was it a cargo?

BUFFA: No. Never passenger. The passenger only on the way back. And I went back, the same company. You see, every...this boat, I don't know the name of the company, but Marine Carp and Marine Shark, they're the same company. So the Daniel Drake, the Newbury must be the same company. Because they say over here, they say, that they

send me back with a ship of the same company. They're responsible to take you back. It says everything in here.

LEVINE: Okay. We've got 15 more minutes before we need that.

BUFFA: Okay. And then when I came Newbury ??? I got here, I was already like one of the guys over here: I know everything. And this guy...

LEVINE: Were there people here that you know?

BUFFA: Oh yeah. Police. Immigration police. A guy they used to call Mr. Chito. "Chito" means a little mouse. He say "Heeey! You back! You never learn how to come over here!" I said "How am I going to learn if I got no money?" Not possible. So he used to fool to around with me because he was the only one who speak Sicilian. And then you get in a big place and everybody "Heeey!" The other people, they do this with anybody that come, the new people. They make a lot of a noise with anything – shoes on the table, big noise. And then I find two guys that I knew from before, the ones from Argentina. Then I met them in Argentina five years later – that's another story. How I end up in Argentina. First here I got over here, then the relative come and visit like usual and say, "What can we do?" Nothing they can do. They try, I got all kinds of ??? over here, my uncle, my aunt, they work, they want me to stay here...responsible, and so and so. Not only that, they sent me to jail because I was...they told I can't come back before one year and one day.

LEVINE: Okay. Now where did they send you? Don't...Where did they send you to jail?

BUFFA: They sent me 427 West Street. Federal detention. Must have a record over there, too. Federal detention...it's near Pier 25 in New York. And I was there for 60 days, something like that. During this time, I met people there because...I wasn't the Italian, the only stowaway. There were criminals there. People were...federal criminals. One guy I met – not friendly, no you gotta make friendly when you're there – and this guy, I said, "Why are you in here?" He said, "I stole a stamp."

“A stamp and you got six months?” They lie. Who knows what they did? I don’t care. So he told me, “You want to come to into country? Oh, I change with you.” Okay, you cannot do that. Said, “I find you a girlfriend. She’ll get married with you.” And he find me a girlfriend, Frances **Escuito**. I remember those names. You ask me what I leave in Georgia, I don’t remember. Frances **Escuito**, 1049 **Glenmore** Avenue. Brooklyn. So she was 20, I was 20. She was blonde, and she had a kid, one year old kid. But he told me that, but I thought he was kidding. One day they call me, “Go, you’ve got a visit.” I thought it was one of my uncle because they come and visit me. I see this blondie, I don’t know, maybe a cousin. She say, she speak English. And then a few words of that, say, “Me, **Cugina**, I’m your cousin.” “Oh, cousin.” She lied. Because you can visit nobody there until you’re a relative. So we talk, I don’t know, somebody was listen, but I say, “Do you want to this? I mean, marry me so I can stay here?” And she said, “Yes.” Okay, so it’s like a contract. And then he talk to my uncle, his father, they inquire and they told her I cannot get married here, I got to go to Italy first, and she got to come to Italy and marry me there. And she had no, I had no money. So this, finished. And that was before...no, that when I was in jail, what do you call it. And even that was not so bad. Food, piano player,worse today, I would never go there. But I was thrilled to get into the United States. I knew they were going to catch me, but I don’t care. I just wanted to go.

LEVINE: Now, could you say any more about that jail? Were there a lot of people in it?

BUFFA: A lot of people...and that’s the first time I heard about drugs because there were people that were screaming at night, lot of big noises. So I asked somebody, “What’s the matter with these people?” He said they take drugs. I said, “What drugs?” They explained to me but I don’t know nothing about drugs. But there was...federal offence. There was a kid, he was 19, younger than me, he taught how to play ping pong in the **????**. We go to **????** there was like a net. Oh, excuse me.

LEVINE: That’s okay.

BUFFA: There was a net. And we played ping pong over there. Something I can tell you about that, I remember right now. Sometimes I'm talking and it comes to me.

LEVINE: Yeah, go ahead.

BUFFA: This is...I don't know if I did the right thing or not...they put me to work in a bakery. First they put me to work in laundry. We did all the laundry for the military, navy, I don't know what. But work for nothing. One dollar a day, one dollar a week, I don't know. So we did that. And then I didn't like it. I couldn't breathe. It was real bad, the steam and everything. I said put me someplace else. You don't have to work, but I wanted to work. If you don't work, you go to the library and read, and I don't want to read all the time. So they put me in the bakery. In the bakery, we make bread...and I burned my arm at one time. And there was this young man, used to come over there and pinch the pasta that was done. And I'd say, "Take your hands off that!" And once or twice he used to come. I said, "Why you don't go at somebody else. Why do you pick at me?" He never stopped. I grab a knife, I start to run. I never did that in my life. I never had a weapon. But I was so upset. And I follow him and he went the stairway to go upstairs because that was ??????. And I grabbed the elevator. He saw me and he started to run. It was a chase, and then the police came and they got me. He said, "No more knife, no more bakery." But they didn't do nothing to me. Absolutely nothing. That's the only thing I remember. Then I remember an old me. He was sad all the time. You know I speak Italian. He was ?????? But he has expression for me. He said, "You try so many times that someday you gonna come to the United States." He gave me courage. We became friends.

LEVINE: What was he in for? Do you know?

BUFFA: Even if I tell you, they never tell the truth. Everybody was in for nothing in there. Who knows? They don't tell you. Only one guy I ask, and he told me "stamp." You don't go six months in jail to steal a stamp. Now to me it's ridiculous now. Back then I believe anything they said. I remember there were people who played music come in for

?????. Like over here too. Then back here. Waiting for Marine Shark. For another boat to go back. And my third entrance over here, “Heey! He’s back!” Because the second time they put me in jail, and then back here to get on the boat.

LEVINE: So you were getting applauded when you came here and when you went back to Sicily.

BUFFA: Not just me, anybody. Anybody that get in fresh. But I get probably more because they know me! Even the police applaud, the guard, the immigration wing. Okay so second trip. Second trip is where the drama started. This is drama. I was coming from the cafeteria, coming to the place where we stay all day and play cards. I can’t picture right now where it is. I think it’s...when you get off the entrance on your right. Someplace. Where we came in. Where the dormitory?

LEVINE: Well the one we have set up is right here on the balcony. But there’s another building that was used, too.

BUFFA: I can’t remember. I remember the separation of stairs, I remember the big hole, I remember when we played soccer outside. Now they got the names. They got my name, too. My daughter put...

LEVINE: Oh, on the wall of honor.

BUFFA: The wall of honor. So I remember, that wasn’t a wall. There was a soccer team, field. So I was coming from the restaurant, what do you call it, the cafeteria, and I see this guy “Ah! What are you doing here?” I know the guy from my town. His name was Batista. And he, his father owns the movie theater...there was a movie theater there. So I know him right away. “Ooo, what are you doing?” “Hey, we came with the Wucan...” I don’t know what ship it was. That’s why I can’t find the guy that jump in the water. I can’t remember the ship. And he present everybody. One was his brother, one was the hope I got of to find out about this guy that jump in the water. This guy still alive. One guy still alive. But I got to chase him, I got to find. At this moment I don’t remember the name. **Crociatta Delisme**. And one was this guy

movie actor in Spanish ????. First thing you ask me – I told you this downstairs, remember?

LEVINE: Yeah, but say it for the tape.

BUFFA: Okay, first thing you ask me, “How you escape from here?” I say I escaped. “How you want to escape...?” Water all around. First the wall over there was not so much freedom like in the hospital. I said, “Maybe if we go to the hospital, maybe we got a chance over there.” Because that’s for the Coast Guard. And we did a lot of horrible things to go to the hospital. I’m not going to tell you because some of the things are disgusting. But we went to the hospital. Went to the hospital – I want to escape, too, it gave me more courage. My friend, the one that knew me, the guy that he father owns the movie theater, Batista, they put him isolated, right away. He had TB. Tuberculosis. So...

LEVINE: He really had it?

BUFFA: He really was sick! So they put him – he couldn’t escape or nothing, separate. His brother, *Cruisata*, the movie guy, and the Spanish guy, and me, we had a bed in the hospital. And they us like a pajama, wide pajama, with red stripes. And the coast guard, he had white pajama with no stripes. And I want to make a phone call so bad. I went...a guy that was...there was a telephone in a cabin...the guy in charge. I say in Italian, “Telephone! Telefono!” And so the gay or something. He went “Hehehe.” Oh oh, okay. I make, I call his grandma. My uncle’s mother-in-law. She answered the phone. And she don’t know English at all, thank God. I spoke in Sicilian. That I’m back from the hospital...from the jail...

LEVINE: You’re on Ellis Island.

BUFFA: Uh huh. Made a phone call. Then I went to the room with all the beds and I find my name – they put all the names...you know the hospital they put your names – and this guy came, one guy work over there, fixing the bed. I don’t know, nurse? I don’t know who he was. And

he said to me – he speak Italian perfect – he says, “Your name is Buffa?” I say yeah. He said, “You know Vincent Buffa?” I said, “I’ve got an uncle Vincent Buffa.” He says, “Staten Island?” Yes, Staten Island.” “He’s my friend.” Oo, I say I want to escape. And everybody was listening. The movie guy that I told, he followed this lady. He was in lovely, really, *perdudo*. He was lost in love with this lady. He was a handsome guy. He made...his movie name is Ray *Agolote* I find yesterday on the computer, my son find. And he work on this movie. I say, “Why in hell you come here stowaway? You’re a movie star.” Because was in love with this lady. This lady come back from the war with her husband from Italy with the passenger ship. And he jump in the ship. My friend, who was by himself with his brother and the other guy, they made all in the ship in one day. So you escape. I say, “How are we going to escape?” He said, “I got a friend, this guy that work over here-” I don’t know if I should say these things.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BUFFA: You sure?

LEVINE: Yeah I’m just watching-

BUFFA: I mean everybody’s dead now. Because this incriminate other people.

LEVINE: I mean it certainly adds to the story.

BUFFA: They all dead. They all dead. But he says, “The only way you can escape is you can go on the boat. I bring you across, civilian clothes.” Because we don’t have civilian clothes. He says, “I’ll go to your uncle, bring you to your uncle.” I take care of the other guys too. He say, “My friend works on the ferryboat and he’s on vacation. He’ll be back in two weeks.” Ahh, two weeks. So we got to wait two weeks. And the same night, the guy was so in love he couldn’t wait two weeks. And he jump in the water, him and the Spanish guy. And then the Spanish guy came back all wet. Now you got a bridge. Towards, I don’t know, the closest? From the hospital. He went...the hospital wasn’t like here. It was more free to go on the beach. And the other

guy came back and said he died. Then I told my uncle when he came to visit me. And then he came back, my uncle, with the newspaper. They have newspaper here, I don't know, it show they found his body after five days in the New York bay.

LEVINE: Okay, we're going to stop here because it's the end of this tape. And we'll take a break, and then we'll resume.

BUFFA: Sure. How about-

(END OF TAPE 1.)

(TAPE 2)

LEVINE: Okay. This is the beginning of Tape 2. I've been speaking with Nino Buffa. And here we have Nino's cousin, Anthony Buffa, who was born in 1/23/27. And he visited his cousin at Ellis Island with his uncle.

A. BUFFA: And father.

LEVINE: And father. Okay. So now just if we could set the stage a little bit. How old were you when you came here to visit?

A. BUFFA: I got to say, maybe I might have been 17, 18 years old.

BUFFA: 19.

LEVINE: Oh, that's true because-

A. BUFFA: 20? 19. Okay.

LEVINE: Okay, so you're around 20 or so. And do you remember coming to Ellis Island? How'd you get here?

A. BUFFA: I remember coming to Ellis Island but I couldn't remember anything that happened. I couldn't give you any information on exactly what

went on. All I know is that I visited him. The first time I met my cousin Nino was when he was here in Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Uh huh. So you came with your father and your uncle?

A. BUFFA: Right.

LEVINE: And did you know anything about why your cousin was here or...do you remember what you knew?

A. BUFFA: Not really. My father was trying to visit his brother's son. So he turn me along so we could meet each other.

LEVINE: And do you remember your first impression of your cousin?

A. BUFFA: Not really. It's too long ago.

LEVINE: Do you remember what the place looked like? What struck you?

A. BUFFA: Vaguely. I can't even remember when I was single. But it's...right now, I'm going to be married 50 years tomorrow and that's the only thing that's on my mind right now.

LEVINE: Because tomorrow you're having a big celebration, right? Yeah.

A. BUFFA: That's right.

LEVINE: Okay, well, do you remember seeing other people here?

A. BUFFA: No.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything?

A. BUFFA: No.

LEVINE: ...How you got here?

A. BUFFA: Well we came by boat.

LEVINE: Was it a ferry boat like the Circle line?

A. BUFFA: Yes, something like that.

LEVINE: Now you were 20. So...

BUFFA: 19.

LEVINE: 19...Were in the war? Were you involved?

A. BUFFA: No, because of my hearing, I was rejected.

LEVINE: Uh huh.

A. BUFFA: But I was man behind the gun. I worked in the naval supply yard. I worked on the Bon Hom Richard, the New Enterprise, so I helped in the battle of the war.

LEVINE: In the Brooklyn Navy Yard?

A. BUFFA: The Bayonne Annex. Brooklyn Navy Yard couldn't take these large ships so they put them in the Bayonne Annex.

LEVINE: I see. Now you were born here.

A. BUFFA: In Brooklyn.

LEVINE: Yeah.

A. BUFFA: But I lived most of my life on Staten Island.

LEVINE: And your father, he came from Sicily?

A. BUFFA: Castella Mara d'ell Gulf. ??

- LEVINE: Would you say he had any Sicilian ways about him?
- A. BUFFA: Well my father was the type of a man that helped everybody. When income tax came around, he would do everybody's income tax. And all he would get was maybe a carton of cigarettes in them days. He helped an awful lot of Italian people that weren't...He learned everything while he was in this country himself. I wouldn't like he went to college or anything like that. Whatever he learned was through himself in this country. And that knowledge that he had, he would use it to help other people. That's the kind of a man he was.
- LEVINE: Did your mother come over, too?
- A. BUFFA: Along with my father. I think they met onboard ship. She's from **Baugina????** in Italy.
- LEVINE: And he?
- A. BUFFA: That's the name of the town.
- LEVINE: Where was he from?
- A. BUFFA: Castella Mara d'ell Gulf. That's Sicily also.
- LEVINE: So they must have come over as young men and women.
- A. BUFFA: Absolutely.
- LEVINE: Did you live in an Italian immigrant community?
- A. BUFFA: From what I know of, he had...his first quarters was on a barge. He lived on a boat. And...
- LEVINE: Do you know where the boat was?
- A. BUFFA: Somewhere in New York harbor. And my brother, who was the oldest, was – I don't know if he was born on the boat or not, I doubt it – but

from I'm made to understand, in them days they didn't have the kind of money like the way the families are today: two cars in every garage. It was a little tough for them to live. But anyway, my father was the type of a man that made people believe that he was wealthy. If you were visit him, he would have a big bowl of peanuts and pretzels and everything, and the people would, "Oh, he's got money." But it was just an impression. I'm speaking that way because he's my father. I mean, these are the things that I was told, that I was made to believe. So, since he's my father I believe it.

LEVINE: Did your mother and father keep any ways that they brought with them from the old country? Were they...?

A. BUFFA: Well. Their mother lived on Staten Island. She lived to be 101. And the way that I know of the ways that they had are she would be out there in the sun, in the summer time, with a board and some tomato paste. And with a stick, she would be stirring that there tomatoes in the sun until it started to dry out and become a paste. And that's how they made tomato paste. The old fashioned way. So I guess that's they brought over from Italy, their ways. That's one of the things that I remember.

LEVINE: Do you remember – okay one last question – were there any attitudes or any ideas that either your grandparents or your mother or your father tried to instill in you? Any ways they wanted you to be, or lessons they wanted you to learn, or...?

A. BUFFA: Not really, no. We were five children. And my brother entered the service and he fell down from a parachute. And they rejected me, I wasn't in the service. And three sisters, two of them weren't old enough, and at the time they weren't taking women. That's as far as I could remember.

LEVINE: So did your mother and father come through Ellis Island?

A. BUFFA: I don't think so, no.

LEVINE: Okay. Is there anything else you can think of about this place-

A. BUFFA: Not really.

LEVINE: -this, your...

BUFFA: Father was a big shot Republican.

A. BUFFA: Well, I don't say big shot, but he knew a lot of politicians.

BUFFA: He's the one that make Verazano Bridge called Verazano Bridge.

A. BUFFA: He helped.

LEVINE: Really?

BUFFA: Yeah. You don't know that.

LEVINE: How did he...?

BUFFA: He fight with the Rockefeller about this. They want to call it Narrow Bridge. And he said, "No. You want Verazano, you..."

A. BUFFA: Well he doesn't have a strong pull, but he helped in the fight.

BUFFA: He was the one that the ??? right before that.

LEVINE: Okay, well all right. Thank you very much.

A. BUFFA: You're welcome.

LEVINE: I've been speaking with Anthony Buffa, who's the cousin of Nino Buffa, who I've been interviewing. Okay, we're going to pause here.

LEVINE: -resume here now. I'm speaking with Nino Buffa, who was the original person I was interviewing. We were talking about the two men

who escaped and the one who didn't come back. And then your uncle brought you the newspaper.

BUFFA: His father.

LEVINE: His father.

BUFFA: He brought the newspaper with the story. They find the body after five days in the New York bay. Yeah. I can't remember his name, but I know the movie that he work in. The name of the movie was "**Itrea Algolote**," which means "the tree lily equal." Equal? How you say that?

LEVINE: Angel?

BUFFA: No. Equal. No, an animal. Bird. Equal.

LEVINE: Oh, eagle.

BUFFA: Eagle. "The Tree Lily Eagle." It's about pilots. He was one of those in this movie. And like I said, he followed this lady, and then they...I told you about the hospital, no?

LEVINE: That you got admitted to the hospital and that's where they escaped from.

BUFFA: That's where they escaped.

LEVINE: But you didn't escape. You didn't try.

BUFFA: No, because I didn't even know. The same night, they sneak away, him and the Spanish guy. And they jumped into the water. Then we saw the Spanish guy. He came back all wet. He was shaking. He says, "He died. He drowned." And the next day, they start asking questions and everything. And I was afraid we were going to have trouble here because we all went to the hospital at the same. And the same night

these two guys jump in the water. But we have no problem, the only thing, we were no more sick.

LEVINE: You went out of the hospital.

BUFFA: Yeah, no more sick. We came back here at Ellis Island, I mean the other half of Ellis Island.

LEVINE: So you gave up your plan of trying to escape?

BUFFA: Yeah. After that, that discouraged me. Not only that, they started to investigate it, ask questions and everything. So we said we better get out of here. But one of the guys still stayed there because he was really sick. Batista, the one that I knew, the only one that I knew.

LEVINE: He had tuberculosis.

BUFFA: Yes, tuberculosis. And I don't know what happened after because I got deported. I don't know. Those people, they're dead now. The only one that's alive is Cociatta. I don't know where he is, but I got a friend, and maybe through another friend I can trace him. But I don't know what good it would do.

LEVINE: Were you able to visit your friend who was in the hospital for TB?

BUFFA: No.

LEVINE: Were you able to go see him?

BUFFA: No.

LEVINE: No.

BUFFA: After that night, we were shaking. Everything was like, "Whoa, they're going to get us," and stuff like that. We were afraid.

LEVINE: Okay. So then you came back, and how long did you stay then at Ellis Island after that? Just roughly.

BUFFA: They send me back on the Marine Karp on December the 19th. I stay until December.

LEVINE: And then you went back to where? Naples?

BUFFA: Went back to...I think I went to Genoa.

LEVINE: Genoa.

BUFFA: I can't remember that. I can't remember if it was...At one time it was Naples, I don't know if the second time was Naples. I can't remember that. And then on the ship, on Marine Shark, I met all these people like the first time. There were a lot of delinquent people deported because they were bad people – I don't know what they did.

LEVINE: In other words, these were people that were born in Italy, but they committed some kind of a crime in this country.

BUFFA: Several crimes. Because they would tell me after, if you only commit one crime, they don't take your citizenship papers. But they probably were very bad people. They had to get rid of them. Some of them, they were prisoners of war, like I told you before. Some bad people. And boat trip, there were no stowaway. I was the only stowaway in the deportation. The Marine Shark...but I was like a passenger. They gave me a number to eat at the table, like I was a passenger. Of course the company paid, the company that took me over there.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BUFFA: They pay for everything.

LEVINE: And then you made your way back home?

BUFFA: I went back home and like usual, people come, "I want to go with you next time!" Because I begin to be annoyed but I cannot make it. Hey, try again. During the trip on Marine Shark, I always think about the future, the next trip. So I talked to some sailors, and I gave the same offer with the first trip, I said, "My uncle will give you \$1000." And \$1000 back then was a lot of money. He used to make \$200 as a doctor. But he would have done anything for me. His father, too. But he didn't have enough money, the other one. So I promised these two boys, sailors...so I went.....Genoa, now I remember. I took a train from Genoa. I went to Sicily. And then I go back to Naples because from Genoa, they were supposed to go to Naples. I go back to...this time I had company, my fiend Lilo Mutagio. He...I never wanted anybody with me. But this kid, he was...his brother was a friend of my brother. And he wasn't a friend of anybody, I used to know him a few days, he came from Africa, his father was in Africa working. And he was already a mason, so 20 years old. He told me, "Maybe I'll bring you luck if you take me with you." So we got to Genoa, stowaway in the ship. Went to Genoa, and there was...Oh, it wasn't in Naples. I'm a little bit confused because this is 54 years ago. And when I'm talking thing is coming back in my mind.

LEVINE: Okay. Go ahead.

BUFFA: Was Genoa. We went to Genoa. The Marine Shark, that was after, that we figured out when it's supposed to go to the United States again, it come back to Italy. And I figured it out, the date more or less...the two guys, they told me more or less when they coming back. So we went to Genoa and we were about two days early. I asked somebody on the port over there, the Marine Shark is due to come in in two days. And we were three days with no food or money. And there was a ship going to Argentina. The name was Argentina. The ship name was Argentina, go to Argentina, a Panamanian flag, and Italian people, the captain. I told my friend, "You want to go to Argentina?" He said to me, "Argentina? What is that?" I said, "Let's get out of here! Three days we no eat, we got to go somewhere." He said, "Let's go." Okay, so I said to him, "You do exactly what I do." Because I was already two trips in United States. "You do exactly the way I do. And don't mess

up.” And back then, it wasn’t easy to get on a boat. It wasn’t easy getting to port. So there was a ladder, not a ladder, what do you call it?

LEVINE: Gangplank?

BUFFA: Plank. No plank. Passengers go up there. That was a passenger ship. It goes like this and then it goes like this. And over here, the beginning, people with the passport, and the check the passport, suitcase and everything. So I went to this side, from the middle of this side. And I jump in, and I told him to do what I do. So I walk...people with the suitcases in the walk. And I walk up and I turn around and he was still there on the dock. He never made it. Because by the time I was up, the people disappear, there was no more a lot of people. When there’s a lot of people, the police he don’t it. Nobody else. I can’t explain this is English. I wish...

LEVINE: I see a crowd of people.

BUFFA: I’ll explain with my hands!

LEVINE: Yeah.

BUFFA: Okay, the water goes like this. And then it goes like this. I went from here – I didn’t go here. There’s a crowd of people. From here, they don’t see me here. So I jump. And the moment I jump, no more a lot of crowd. And my friend, he couldn’t jump. So I was already what am I going to do, ready to turn around, and he find a way that the people were, and he jump and he step on somebody’s foot. Somebody with...those people that work that you pay to bring your suitcases, one of those. And I went like this: “Shhhhh.” Silence.

LEVINE: Yeah. Go ahead.

BUFFA: So we got up there.

LEVINE: A stevedore.

BUFFA: Huh?

LEVINE: A stevedore. I think you call a stevedore. The people that carries the things up.

BUFFA: No, they're not stevedore. Stevedores is the people that work on the ship. This is people that used to be in Italy a lot, in the town, in the city. You pay them to carry a suitcase or something.

LEVINE: Oh, oh okay.

BUFFA: We call a "faquini." But I don't know in English.

LEVINE: Okay.

BUFFA: But anyway, we got up there, and we start to get a handkerchief, and we say, "Everybody, byebye boom."

LEVINE: Like everybody else.

BUFFA: Then I hear the bell, I say, "Let's go eat." He say, "Where?" I say, "Come with me." There was numbers...those ships are not like today. Everybody with numbers... So we sit there, we sat to eat and somebody came, "Oh number 72, this is my seat." Okay, move this way. Then the other one, okay. But we ate. Because there was a lot of confusion the first day. On the second day, less confusion. We sleep in the bathroom, me and him. That trip was interesting for this. The ship was full of fascists, the whole ship. Cornel the general, the were all friend of Peron. Italy lost of the war, the fascists disappear. They were refugees. They go away to Argentina because they afraid for prosecution in Italy. And every night we mingled with the passengers. We were sleeping in the bathroom, one guy sit, the other guy stand, then we change. Every night we go with the rest of the passengers singing all the fascist songs. Because it was the era. And then they catch a lot of stowaway. Eighteen before us. And they are nuts. And in the microphone, they said, "If there are any more stowaway, give up. Don't worry, we won't send back to Italy, Peron is this, that, and in

favor of people, they need people to work.” And my friend wanted to say let’s go. I say, “No, it’s better. We don’t know yet. This is talking. I want to make sure. Because I don’t want to go back to Italy.” So we go see whether those guys...and I don’t know if it was a fortnight, or after of four or five days, we got tired of sleeping in the bathroom. We went in one of the holes. It full of ...it was a gyp car. It was covered. We went down there. In the morning, they open the top because they were supposed to clean or whatever, and someone shine the light on us, and we start to run. And we mingled with the passengers. And they started to talk, “Those two kids, please give up, don’t run around, I know who you are.” But they don’t know. And my friend wanted to say, and I said “Wait...Not yet.” Then the night we went to sing again with the rest of the fascist stuff. And this Cornel, his wife and his daughter, he tell me, “Poor kids, I wish I knew where they hide, who knows, they are hungry.” Because they were saying on the radio, was saying, on the microphone, “You must be hungry. Give up. We help you.” And he tell me, “I wish I know where they are. I would help them.” And I look at my friend, and he look at my eyes. And I say, “I know where they are!” He said, “Where, where?” I say, “Right here, one, two.” And we went, and he took in his cabin, him and his wife and his daughter. He went to get food, they come back with food, we ate in there. And he said, “Look, give up. Because we are friend of Peron. Everybody here is friend of Peron. They are not going to send you back to Italy.” I say, “Fine, okay.” And we went, and we go up and the captain got real upset because we were already 20, 18 and 2 more. They was husband and wife from Tenerife in Spain. The island, Tenerife, you know where that is? It is in the Mediterranean. It’s a Spanish island, but it’s not in Spain. Canary Island. Husband and wife. So 20. He got mad, real mad, the captain. Then going back, when were sleeping on the bathroom, one night I see a pair of legs alongside us, because the bathroom got that much space between one bathroom and another. And I was scared because he stayed there a long time. I say, “Lilo, my friend, there’s somebody dead.” “He’s just going to the bathroom.” I said, “Well, it’s been a long time.” So I opened the door. This was like psychopathic...same time I opened the door he opened the door. We look at each other, facing, we close the door and he close the door. After that we present ourselves, we are

stowaway. After that they knew there was somebody else. They knew about this guy. But they don't know who he was and what table he eats. Nothing, zero. And this after several days already it was very difficult to eat at a table because they organize with numbers...I don't know how he did it. So they came, three officers, I remember I that. And we were eating and they came to our and ask for passport, and I said, "We don't have no passport, we're stowaways." Oh yeah, okay. People don't have their passport. And I saw the guy at the next table, and I said "Lilo, look who's there." And they were looking away. My heart was beating. I say, "What's going to happen now?" So they got to his table. And they started with one guy, another guy, and so on. When they got to him he got annoyed. He say, "Lemme eat!" Because they disturb him, they want a passport. And they didn't know it was him. So they say okay, I'm sorry. He finished his eat, his coffee, his cigarette. He said, "Please give me a light." They give him a light, he says, "I'm a stowaway." They grab him by the neck, they took him to the captain. And he ruin everybody. Because he was so upset the captain, all these people, it's got to be an organization, and they lock us up, everybody. All 19 of us in one place. But the passengers see us through the window, hablo, what do you call that, and we got all locked up. And then the passengers protest and they let us free, because oh young people, we didn't do nothing, we just wanted to go to the United States. They put us to work doing different stuff. Then the guy, one of the guy that I met twice, okay. One of the guy I met twice. We were in Argentina. We were in Argentina. Okay, we had nobody there, no relative, no friends, nothing. People who knew about in the newspaper – we came in the newspaper, first page – and I had one page by myself, Ellis Island and all that, the story. And the only suitcase we have was newspaper with underwear. We don't have nothing. That was it. And they said in the newspaper, "That's the only thing!" But they talk good about us, and the political Peron, good, receiving these people, and et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So we do have no work. We wait for somebody to come and pick us up. And they come, immigration, it wasn't a line to line to like this, we were free, free to go. But we don't know where to go. They came, they want a mechanical worker, I don't know anything about mechanics. Until somebody came looking for mason. My friend was a mason, not me, I was a little bit a mason,

that's all, because the war, I didn't have no time to be a mason. When I was a kid. So the guy paid...I don't know what he paid, he pay after something, the entrance, whatever you call, and we went to. Before that, we were 3-4 days in immigration. We go out, we took trolley car, and they ask for ticket. We don't have no money, for 5 cents, we don't have it. And we showed the newspaper – we had the newspaper – and I say “Peron.” They look, “okay!” That was that. So we go around the city, Buenos Aires. So then this guy came and we worked for him, then I...six months later we become a contractor, me and my friend. We start to make a little bit of money. We are a big job, and I call my father and my sister first in Argentina because I was...they make me legal right away. It wasn't like over here. It was easy over there. So I bring all my family, all 8 brothers and sister, in Buenos Aires.

(END SIDE ONE)

(BEGIN SIDE TWO)

BUFFA: ...These friends of mine, they came with me still there, they got married and everything. And then from there, in 1952 I get me another trip stowaway, and this is not recorded, because they didn't catch me.

LEVINE: You stayed in Argentina?

A. BUFFA: In Argentina in 1950 I got married.

LEVINE: Oh.

BUFFA: It would've been 50 years now, I'm not married anymore. But it would've been 50 like two months before him, in August. In 1950 I got married in Argentina, and in '52 I had one daughter, which is now 49. She was months old. In 1952...no in 1950 I put myself in the Italian Quarter. They told me you had to wait seven years. But I couldn't wait seven years, I still wanted to go here. Argentina wasn't for me. I.. '52, I had a friend...I was already in the merchant marines, but I couldn't get a ship that come to the United States. I was in the river there, the ??????. A friend of mine, his stepfather was on a ship

that come to the United States. The ship name was Candonero, an Argentina ship. So I talk to him, he says I can make it work over here, gimme papers to go to the reunion hall to get...they need a, I was already a pilot during the war. I go to the union, and you're not going to believe who I see in there. This is 1952. And the last time I was saw him was 1946 on Ellis Island. The Argentine guy...Victor...his grandmother was living in Avenida del Parrot. I saw him, "What are you doing here?" I know little bit of Spanish, so we talk. And he says, "I'm going to Granadero...Grandadero is the name of the ship." "You're going to Grandero? I'm going to Grandero!" How? And he show me. He took my place! There was no more...there was only one pilot, and he was a pilot, so they got him. I went to the reunion and it says, "No, you're ready." So this is it. I told my friend's father, I say, "Please, I got to go to the United States, take me as a stowaway." He say, "I got to make some money." I say, "I bring you people. You want more people? I'll bring 3 more people to him," and so he put me in for free. I'm in the hole. And we stop at Puerna Buco, Brazil. This was all dark, all bags, I don't know, we stop at Puerno Buco to put coffee in the whole. He says, and came and says, "Get out. And tomorrow we put you back again." And we to coffee shop in the port itself. We drink a little coffee, do this, do that, and I was reading the newspaper but I don't understand nothing in Portuguese, you know. Who comes in the coffee shop? Victor. Victor got on the ship as a sailor, as a pilot, and Victor I am away in Puerno Buco now, away from Buenos Aires. And he see me there, what is he going to think? We've got the same history as stowaways at Ellis Island! So I call him, I stuff the newspaper, I say, "Don't talk to my friend." "What's the matter?" "Shut up." Because even though I don't think he was going to squeal on me, I wasn't going to take no chances. He would've been 100% that as soon as he see me there in Puerno Buco he said you stowaway. I madder this time. We mad, we suffer a lot, but we made it that week. Came to New York, I went to see my Uncle, I say, "One year, I make some money working," went back...4 years later there was revolution, guerrilla revolution, 1956, remember that?

LEVINE: Mmm hmm.

BUFFA: Guerrilla revolution, the quota...I was already seven years in quota, 57. They Ungedion people, the congress over here vote for make refugee from Hungary. Because they were fighting against the Communists. And nobody came. So they took from the Italian quarter, because the laws were different. And that's the way I came. And my uncle, his father, make the offer there for support. He had to show how much money he makes, him and his wife. And I came and I give ??? me, my wife, and my daughter. And my son, I had already another son.

LEVINE: Now you were coming from Italy? Or you were coming from Argentina?

BUFFA: When I came here legal last time, it was Argentina with Italian Quota. Because I was still Italian. My son was 3 years old, John, my daughter was 5. My son is of a telephone company, long distance, no this guy was 3 years old. He doesn't respect me like a father because he is a rich man. But that's beside the point.

LEVINE: Why don't you say your wife's name and maiden, and your children's names?

BUFFA: Yeah. My wife, Rosa. Maiden name is Canarozzo. C-A-N-A-R-O-Z-Z-O.

LEVINE: And your children's names?

BUFFA: My children...I'll start with Geraldine, which now she changed her name, Geraldine, she's 49, cause 1957 from here... John is the second one, he was three, he is 44 or 45, I can't remember now. Then Vincent. Vincent lives in California. He's a musician, made a few records but he never got anywhere. Then...okay...Michael. Okay. But I got two more that they came after. I got married and that didn't work out. In Italy. And I got one Italian kid, son, now he's in the United States, he works with his brother, and he's a big shot to him too. And he speak English much much better than me, perfect. And I got a daughter...

LEVINE: And what's his name?

BUFFA: His name is Antolio...Antol for short, Buffa. He kept my name. Then...not that I'm a womanizer, whatever you want to call, but I had another love story with somebody else that happened...because I had a problem with my wife. And we had a daughter, somebody take her away for adoption, and she find me four years ago. She's 35 now. Her name is Susan. Last name is different than mine because of that...Patrico. And she also work for my son. They all came to Atlanta to work with us. Then I got a lot of grandchildren.

LEVINE: Well tell...after you came here on the Italian quota from Argentina, it was with your two children and your wife?

BUFFA: Yes.

LEVINE: And where did you settle?

BUFFA: I went to...first of all I went to my uncle's, his father.

LEVINE: Did you have to come through Ellis Island?

BUFFA: No.

LEVINE: No.

BUFFA: Ellis Island was no more.

LEVINE: Oh okay, because it was after 1954.

BUFFA: No more Ellis Island. But when we went swear in over there in American Consul in Argentina, the gentleman over there, he look at my...he says, "What are you, mafia?" I say, "No, look at my hands, I'm working." I even got a lot a letter I wrote to Impeliteri, the mayor, this is a copy of the letter, they gave it to me now. In Italian, but there's a translation somewhere. I say, "Please, you Italian, make me come to the United States."

- LEVINE: How did you feel when you finally got here legally?
- BUFFA: My wife didn't want to come over here because she was 20...29, whatever, and the mother was in Argentina, and the father was in Argentina. She was also from Sicily. I met her in the trip that I make from Argentina, like I told you I was a pilot. Finally I got on a passenger ship going to Italy. And I met her on the way back. She was a passenger. Anyway, she didn't want to come over here, her mother and father was there. And we went to swear, I swear, she didn't even raise her hand. But they don't notice that. But then she become very emancipated...how you say that, with television and everything, you know. In Italy and Argentina, the men was more macho than here, you know the way it was. Over here I lost all my power. Thanks to TV.
- LEVINE: She became a liberated woman.
- BUFFA: But back then...I grew up like that. But I'm open-minded...It work out anyway. We had problem but I wait until my young son was 19 before I divorce her. Then decided to come here.
- LEVINE: So you settled here, you settle here in New York at first?
- BUFFA: First in New York, yeah. I went to live with my uncle. Then one month later I rent a house on the next block. And that was ten years. Then I become builder after about a couple of years. I built a few houses in Princess Bay, I build his house, with no money, just the cost. And not only that, I gave the money to put the money down for the bank, I find them the bank and everything, because my uncle, his father, took me to this country. So the least I could do was that. And then after the divorce, I had some financial problems and everything. I left New York and went to Florida. I live in Florida 10 years. Then from Florida, I moved to Houston, Texas another 10 years.
- LEVINE: Were you still building? Is that what you were doing?
- BUFFA: Building, build a house, or do...I went up and down, up and down. The last time down, I was doing stucco. Everything related with

construction. And then my daughter was, she married, she was in Georgia... But all this time everybody follow me. First in Argentina, everybody follow me. Argentina, New York, everybody from my family. And the family become bigger and bigger because of marriage, the kids and their kids. Now they're all in Georgia, because my daughter, 60...Buffa. Because of my son's business. And everybody come from far away, and he treat them unbelievable. They get in, they sit over there, and say, I'm your cousin, and they sit and they got a job. Without asking him. And that's the way it is. He has a good heart. With me it's a big heart, but I don't know, we don't get along together. Maybe because of his mom...I don't know. Anyway, I'm happy, old man now. Back to my old house. Too bad I couldn't see the dormitory and the place where I used to eat. Someday.

LEVINE: Yeah, maybe. There's what they call the Kitchen/Laundry building is supposed to be the next one.

BUFFA: I remember vaguely...I can't remember exactly. I remember it was a big huge place with lots of windows. Every time I got in, "ooh, you," play cards, stay there. And there was a place where they sell candy, cigarettes. I remember all that. I remember there were a lot of Puerto Ricans. I say, "Why you Puerto Ricans come here stowaway?" They American. They told me because they don't want to pay 50 dollars for the boat, for the ship. Ready to be deported. American. This doesn't make sense. But there was a lot of Puerto Ricans.

LEVINE: This was the last time? The last time you were here, you mean?

BUFFA: Both times.

LEVINE: Both times.

BUFFA: Yeah. Because I was here within months, that whole year '46 was between boat and Ellis Island and West Street Federal Detention the whole time.

LEVINE: Do you think all your trials and tribulations of getting here and stowing away and everything, do you that made a difference in the kind of person you are? Do you think it affected you, your personality your character?

BUFFA: I don't think it affect my personality. Like I told you before, I'm very sensitive, touching. But I don't know if I got to attribute that to the war, I think so, mostly. It make me knowledgeable of life over here, a more open mind because I was really old fashioned, now I open my mind to anything the young people do. I don't like it, but I listen. But...I always felt that I got a good heart. I don't know if it's true or not, but I... and nothing change a bit over here. I tried to have a lot of friends. I have a lot of friends. But mostly my friends are my relatives. Or this guy was nothing to me, he was my friend. And I got lots of girlfriend and boyfriends...I don't want to call girlfriend and boyfriend, friends. Man friends. I learned I be more – in the United States – more tolerant, that's the word? More tolerant. One thing I don't like, I begin to like money a lot. That's part of the game. But I think what do I want before, a piece of bread...

LEVINE: Do you think you've become Americanized? Would you say you have?

BUFFA: I don't think so. I don't know, because I'm surrounded by family, by Italians, all the time. Like in Georgia, there are not many Italians there, but my family is so big that I always, someone in the house, my sister, my other brother, always, I have no chance to...I always thought about America. I told you about American people. They're very educated...what do you call...they have more...like I give an example: I go to Italy every year now. I go over there and the one thing I don't like in Italy, you go to line in somebody, they cut in front of you. I'm not used to that, I'm used to here. I like over here the way things are more organized, more disciplined. But this is different. The heart. I don't say they got no heart here. But we talk with the hands, we told with this, we don't use this a lot. Over here they use this a lot, the head. And this a little bit less. Frankly I'm talking to you the truth, the way I feel. But I never say they're bad people. They're just different.

In Italy we got this difference too but we don't notice it. North of Italy, they more or less, even their food is almost close to this. But I come from the South, and I have this problem to acquainted everyone I go north of Italy, because it's like in the United States.

LEVINE: Do you think of yourself as Italian?

BUFFA: I'm thinking myself Italian. I told my kids, too. But I told them to respect the United States because they give you everything. If it wasn't for the United States, we don't have nothing. But they think like me, especially the younger one. The one with the money, he think like Italian too but he don't want to give me the satisfaction.

LEVINE: So if you had to do it over again, what?

BUFFA: I'd do it like that. Immediately. Sometime, when things go bad, I say, "Ah, who made me do that?" You know why? Because I go to Italy now, I see everybody with the cars, beautiful cars, beautiful homes, everybody, it's "Why in hell didn't I stay there?" But when I was there, there was disaster. If I would've waited 3 or 4 years, yes. But I couldn't wait another 3 or 4 years. And I go with a gun in my pocket, and I'd be dead or in jail or something. So I say this is enough for me. Let me get out of here. I don't have no regret. But sometimes...I'm happy the way they I come out. Because I'm 74, I feel good, maybe I got a little sugar stuff, but who cares? I feel good, I feel good mentally, I feel happy. I don't feel any pressure or anything. And I can say thank God I came to the United States. Really. Sometime when I'm a little bit pissed off, it depends, but all in all, I'm very glad I came.

LEVINE: And how do you feel about this place? Ellis Island?

BUFFA: I feel like I was a sick and now I'm a doctor. You know the difference from...or prisoner, and now I'm on top. I see this like I'm free to go and come, you know I can go take the car, the boat, and get out of here. I think "Ohhh Ellis Island!"

- LEVINE: But it doesn't sound like the way you talk about, it doesn't sound like you have really bad memories of being here.
- BUFFA: No, I was so happy. I wanted to stay here. Free food! Are you kidding me? Everything...the things I saw, the United States...for me, for everybody in my town, everybody where I live, it was like today you go to the moon. It was unreachable. Sometime only the few fortunate, they have a father there, or wife. It was unreachable. That's why every time I came back from here, everybody came: "Nino, United States! America America America!" They want to know how's America. I say, "I don't see no America. I see the Statue of Liberty like this, 20 feet from me." But you were there! Yeah I was there. That was a big thing. An unbelievable huge thing. I got a very good memory that the food, the enjoyment, the friends, and even West Street wasn't bad over there compared to-
- LEVINE: Where?
- BUFFA: 427 West Street, Federal Detention. Compared to...Italy, the way it was Italy, the way it isn't today.
- LEVINE: Do you think being really physically hungry, not having food, do you think that left an impact on you?
- BUFFA: I cannot tell you. I tell you this: when I was hungry in Sicily, after World War II – I was home – and I see my kid's brother, my kid's sister. I forgot about my angry. I was thinking about that. I wanted to go rob somebody, I wanted to go do bad things. As a matter of fact, I was already dead, to help them. I was lucky to have a few friends reach, father had farms. And they gave me flour...you know flour like you make bread? And I take home. But that wasn't enough for everybody, no. So that was my main thing. To get out of there and help my brothers and sisters. And I did it.
- LEVINE: You brought them all over, did you?
- BUFFA: Huh?

LEVINE: Were you responsible for your brothers and sisters?

BUFFA: I took everybody.

LEVINE: Everybody.

BUFFA: I took them to Argentina first. Because over here, you send me back. You, I say you, you send me back. I don't like Argentina, but I always was thinking about here. But I make money, I call everybody there, and like I said, I put myself in a quota, and in between I became a stowaway, '52, stay here one year, '57 I call home. This is the best country I've ever seen for everything. Even now I get involved in politics, I watch a lot of politics and everything. I was a Democrat and then I became a Republican but I'm not registered. I'm very happy to be part of this. And I'm very happy to see I'm an American citizen. But my kids, I always tell them, "Hey, don't forget you're Italian. Italian blood." We all do that, the Italian people.

LEVINE: How would you compare when you were in Argentina with coming here?

BUFFA: Argentina, the first couple of years, it was okay. Lot of food, lot of work, you don't make a lot of money but it was okay. They give a chance to take it home to my family, Italy, Italy was so bad. Compared to here even the Argentina say...see everybody look at the United States like you do like this in a tree and the dollars they come down and they rain from the sky, which is half true, because you don't do that, but you find dollars. But other places you work and there's not much... I compare the United States with Argentine...I give an example right now: when I went...I don't know if it was in Naples. One of the ship, there was a passenger I try to get up...I didn't tell you about that. There was another ship.

LEVINE: When was that?

BUFFA: No...no...that was...the ship was...oh, I forgot. There was another ship. Was one of those two, the Marine Carp or the Marine Shark, I don't remember. I was...it came to Palermo. I went to Sicily, and then I go to Palermo, and me and my father and my brother – how can I forget this! – this...see, talking. My father and my brother Damiano, which is dead, they came to Palermo, they decided two sailor that I talk to these two sailor. Not the one before this other two. And they're supposed to bring me there. I get in. They put him in the cabinet and the passengers, the Italian passengers get up and they find a kid with Scarlet Fever. It's sickness, infectious. And they say, "Everybody get down." They got to disinfect the ship. And my friend say you got to get out, otherwise we all going to go out. And I went until a pile of mattress. When I start to smell the stuff I went away. I didn't want to die over here. And there was no way I could go back. They couldn't make me go back. And that was the time when I took the Newbury Victory. So it wasn't this ship, it was this. Because after this I took the Newbury Victory. It wasn't the Marine Shark, it was the Marine Carp, the one with the scarlet fever, the one that I didn't do nothing. Okay, where were you before this? What were we talking about?

LEVINE: We were just...

BUFFA: I was going to example about Argentina. When I was in the port, they are asking people where you going. They call **American carpe de vetza**. It means with the shoes, the clothed shoes. The poor, they call the poor America South America and the rich America North America. All the people in the port were saying that: "Oh, you're going to poor America. You go to rich American." Even though my father came here and didn't do much because it was the Depression Era, I knew that this was a rich country, I knew that I could grow my family here good. It didn't work out right with my wife, but they're all okay, my kids, they're all in good shape. So I'm very happy.

LEVINE: Now did you become a citizen?

BUFFA: Yeah. I become a citizen 19...63, or 64. Let me see if I got in my...

LEVINE: And what was that like for you?

BUFFA: Huh?

LEVINE: What was it like when you became a citizen?

BUFFA: When I became citizen, it was like they make me God or general or something.

LEVINE: So you have dual citizenship, do you?

BUFFA: No. My brother does. I got to do it, but I don't...

LEVINE: Okay, well we're just about at the end of the tape. We have a minute left. Is there anything you'd like to say before we close?

BUFFA: No, I want to say, I'm so glad I came, I hope a lot of people hear about me, and they see how good has come into this country. I don't what else to say. I'm happy to come here. And I'm happy to meet you.

LEVINE: Well thank you. And I think this just been a wonderful interview. I'm so happy we were able to do this.

BUFFA: Maybe someday we'll see you again. We'll come listen, I'll bring my grandchildren.

LEVINE: Bring your greats and your grandchildren and everybody. Okay I've been speaking with Nino Buffa, who came here several times, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm signing off.