

EI-125

TILDA De MELLO KELLY-GRIMM

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KELLY-GRIMM: Tilda De Mello Kelly, and I live at 16 Foxcroft Road, Albertson, Long Island, New York. I came to America in 1925 from Brazil.

LEVINE: Okay. Let's . . . This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today with Tilda Kelly-Grimm who, at her home at 16 Foxcroft Road in Albertson, Long Island, New York. It is March 22, 1992. Tilde Kelly-Grimm came from Portugal, having lived in Brazil. Came from Brazil, to Portugal, to the United States in May 1925 when she was eight years old. Well, thank you for consenting to be

interviewed today, and let me begin by asking you your birth date.

KELLY-GRIMM: I was born on April the 12th, 1917, so my seventy-fifth birthday is coming up next month.

LEVINE: And where were you born?

KELLY-GRIMM: I was born in Manaus, Brazil, the State of Amazonis, which is in the northern part, right under the Equator, a thousand miles up the Amazon River, which runs east and west, different from our Mississippi River. (break in tape)

LEVINE: Now, do you remember much about that town, Manaus?

KELLY-GRIMM: Manaus, no. I barely remember my grandmother's home. As I said, I had malaria and so they tell me that I was going into a coma and I had been treated with quinine which in those days was all they had to treat malaria. And my father also was coming down with malaria. So the doctor recommended that we all get out because otherwise I would really die. It was getting that critical.

LEVINE: How old were you?

KELLY-GRIMM: I was about four. I was about four at that point. And that's when we left and went to Portugal, and stayed there three years, and then came to the United

States.

LEVINE: I see. Well, now, do you remember anything about the time when you were in Brazil? The town, or . . .

KELLY-GRIMM: I barely remember my grandmother's home, as I say. I probably was a sickly child and it was a case of just lying in bed, feverish. The fever would make me very hot and then very cold, up and down like that. And so I really don't remember much about that.

LEVINE: Your grandmother's house?

KELLY-GRIMM: Yeah, more than my own.

LEVINE: What do you remember about that?

KELLY-GRIMM: Well, I remember being in bed in that one room and they also had a living room, but I don't really recall too much about it.

LEVINE: Now, is Manaus where the opera . . .

KELLY-GRIMM: Yes. Manaus is the city where the opera house exists, and it was recently renovated and brought back to its one-time splendor and Caruso came from Europe, as well as other artists at that time, because it was a boom town for rubber.

And my grandfather had a rubber plantation. I guess that's why they were there. And my mother taught school and taught to the children of the plantation workers, and they were of all ages. I had a picture here one time where they were, you know, it was a colony. And school was held in the biggest building, but it still had a dirt floor and a tin roof. So very hot during the day and cold at night. And my mother would be away all week teaching and then she'd come back I guess to a more, you know, civilized place. After all, she was teaching where the workers were on the plantations, and it was all rubber trees and I guess dense forest, and she got, she also had bronchitis very bad, which later in life turned out to be asthma for her, and she had asthma very bad.

LEVINE: Well, what was your mother's name, her maiden name?

KELLY-GRIMM: Uh, she was one of six or seven children, and her name, they named her Alpha, not that there was any Greek background, but she was the first one born. A-L-P-H-A, Alpha. Miranda was her last name. The D-E, they sometimes attach and it means "of", just like in other nationalities. The Irish have Mac, and the Scotch, and it means "son of." So you would get five or six children in a family, some of them might decide to use the D-E and they might not. Otherwise everybody in South America or Brazil would be alphabetized under the letter D. So Miranda was the last name.

LEVINE: And what about your father? What was his name?

KELLY-GRIMM: His name was John Albert DeMello, M-E-L-L-O, which was a very common name in Brazil, Mello. Even now the President of Brazil, his name is Mello. And he had a, his minister of finance or something, a young lady, also, but they said they were no, not related, and neither am I related to the President of Brazil.

LEVINE: Did your father have much family there in Brazil?

KELLY-GRIMM: Well, he had sisters and brothers, but they all got scattered, and the parents died at a very early age. I mean, they died when he was six months and his older sister was just about eighteen or nineteen and she married a man that came from Portugal and took him with them back to Portugal. And I remember the one of his brothers married a Peruvian lady, so they were all in different parts of Brazil. But the only one I know about is this oldest sister of his. He has, oh, I met another sister in Rio, too, at the time I was there in 1970. And, in fact, she was my godmother. She had seven children.

LEVINE: Well, then, your father had returned from being raised in Portugal.

KELLY-GRIMM: And Europe, yeah.

LEVINE: To Brazil. Uh-huh.

KELLY-GRIMM: Back to Brazil when he was about eighteen. And they sent him there because this, you know, brother-in-law of his, which was like a father, had raised him and he had some kind of a business down there. And so my father was sent there to take care of that.

LEVINE: And now did you have any brothers or sisters in Brazil?

KELLY-GRIMM: I, uh, I had the one brother, but he died when he was about three. He had pneumonia, and he died within two or three days. We were on vacation somewhere and he got ill, so he died quickly. So he was the only brother. Otherwise I was brought up alone.

LEVINE: And was there an extended family in Brazil? In other words, like your mother's family, or . . .

KELLY-GRIMM: Well, my mother's sister had married this fellow who was of Portuguese descent, and he was in Fall River, Massachusetts. He was down there in Manaus, I think. He was a great sportsman and he was sent by some zoo here in America or something to catch, to bring back snakes or something. I heard the story that one of his snakes had babies in my grandmother's basement. (she laughs) And that didn't make him too popular. But they married and came up to Massachusetts where he was from, and then they made another trip back to show their son, you know,

Rudy was about, uh, one year of age, and then she had another child, Lillian. But she was the first one that came up, my mother's sister Nilda. And she was like, my mother was the oldest. Nilda might have been number third or fourth. My mother had, there were five girls and one brother in her family. And they all came up. Nilda came up first. She married. Then another sister, Elsie, or Elsa, and then a brother.

LEVINE: Came up to the United States.

KELLY-GRIMM: Came to the United States, and they were in Massachusetts. Then they came down to Brooklyn, because by that time my parents had come. As I said, my father couldn't find work in Fall River. We came to New York. We lived in Brooklyn. And then the last ones to come up was Grandma and the two other sisters, Dena and Zilma. Zilma was the one next to my mother in age.

LEVINE: Now, getting back to Brazil, do you remember like food that you ate there, or do you remember . . .

KELLY-GRIMM: I don't know. The Brazilian diet, I guess, being in the tropics, it must have been plenty of tropical fruit, bananas and mangoes and, you know, avocados and assai is another. It looks like another grape, blue, small, and I love that. And it's funny how as you get older the taste of some things might come back to you, and I did eat quite a bit of that little blue fruit when I was there the second time.

LEVINE: How do you spell that, do you know?

KELLY-GRIMM: Um, I think it's A-S-S-A-I-R. R, I guess. Assai. Or maybe without the R. Assai. I'd have to look it up. But by the time my grandmother had come down, they had already left the northern part of Brazil because of the climate, even for them, and the fact that my grandmother was a widow. She was left a widow at age thirty-five. My mother was sixteen and she helped raise the others, and that's why she was teaching school. It was really a normal school diploma my mother had, which happened in this country too, and then later on they upgraded their education. But she taught school down there. And that's all the schooling I had, from my mother, as far as, and it was all in Portuguese. I could write my name and read and everything. And books, I even have a small book there. And it wasn't until I arrived in the United States then that they said I could count up to ten, and that was about all, I guess, my father hurriedly might have taught me on the boat coming over.

LEVINE: Well, do you remember anything about the trip from Brazil to Portugal?

KELLY-GRIMM: Not really, no. I was too sick. My mother was nursing my father and I because we both had malaria. So the trip from Brazil to Portugal couldn't have been very, very nice and, you know, we gradually got over the malaria.

LEVINE: Do you remember Portugal very much?

KELLY-GRIMM: Portugal, I remember my aunt's house, and I remember where we lived in the suburbs of it, and the church chimes, and my father and I would dance in the kitchen to those chimes. And I remember since Portugal has a lot of grape vineyards, and the men would crush the grapes. And I remember seeing them in those days. Now it's done all in mechanical or, you know, ways. But they would wash down the men's legs and feet and so on, put them in these big vats to crush the grapes with their feet, and I remember that. And I remember we had rabbits. We lived in the country, and my father travelled I guess a good two hours to get in to work. So that's the way it is with so many places where people take a lot of time to get to work. (she laughs)

LEVINE: What did your father do for work?

KELLY-GRIMM: Well, he worked in the bank, and he always had, you know, background office work and clerical work. That's what he did.

LEVINE: Now, was the house that his sister lived in, your aunt, was that a grand house?

KELLY-GRIMM: It was. I would compare it to brownstones in New York City because it was brick and it was in the city and I remember it being very, you know, a big staircase.

And she had, she was well-to-do even though she was a widow for many, many years, and I never met, you know, her husband had already passed away.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. But you mentioned earlier before we turned on the tape that your father had grown up in that house.

KELLY-GRIMM: Yeah. He was educated in England, too, so they must have sent him away to school as well as being in Portugal.

LEVINE: Now, what, do you remember any, did you go to school in Portugal?

KELLY-GRIMM: No. I didn't go to school until I arrived here. As I say, my mother taught me and we, you know, I was just about seven, eight, going on eight. April.

LEVINE: Do you remember the children there?

KELLY-GRIMM: Well, I played with my cousins. As I say, my aunt had four afterwards, you know. She didn't have any for ten years. My father had all her attention. And then there were two boys and two girls that were born, and I used to play with my girl cousins, and they're still living. I mean, me and Elena.

LEVINE: And are they here in this country?

KELLY-GRIMM: No, they're in Portugal. They live in Portugal and I have a first cousin

in Rio and I correspond with her. Amelia is her name. They say Amelia in Portuguese. But I write to her and she's inviting me to come down now because my father, and my father remarried my stepmother, are both deceased. So if I went down to Rio I could stay with Amelia.

LEVINE: Well, do you remember any games you played as a child in Portugal?

KELLY-GRIMM: No. We used to cook. My aunt had a cook, and there was a patio off the kitchen, and I remember we had a little tiny stove. How we heated things, I don't know. It might have been just make-believe. But whatever they were making we would make believe we were cooking something or other. And playing and . . .

LEVINE: Do you remember foods that you . . .

KELLY-GRIMM: They had a seamstress. Oh, no, it was beef, they eat a lot of beef and they eat rice and, I don't know, some vegetables. In Portugal maybe more vegetables than they would in Brazil.

LEVINE: Okay. And is there anything else that when you think of the time that you spent in Portugal those three years that you remember particularly?

KELLY-GRIMM: Well, I broke my leg in my aunt's house because there was a big, it was like a pool but it was above the ground and it might have measured maybe, say, six

by ten, and there was goldfish there, it seems. It was a goldfish pond. And she had a nice backyard. And then there was this big wheel that you would turn the wheel and the water would go into this pool. And I put my stomach on the, you know, the handle of this wheel, and I went up and of course one of my legs got caught on the spoke and I was thrown right down. And nobody wanted to pick me up. They thought I was lying in a pool of blood, and the cook came out, and then I remember going to the hospital in Lisbon there where we lived, in El Porte. Not Lisbon, El Porte. And it was in a horse-drawn carriage because there were no cars, but it was maybe four horses or whatever, to the hospital. And I remember the doctor, I had panties on, and he slit the side of it, and he had a little knife, you know, to cut, and I thought he was going to cut my leg with that. (she laughs) Not realizing what it was. But there were a few cars in those days. And even where we lived in the suburbs, in the morning I remember they would go out and look on the road, if a car had gone by in the morning, they would see the tire tracks, see.

LEVINE: Now, what prompted your family to decide to come to the United States?

KELLY-GRIMM: Well, my mother's sister had married Daniel Days, and his name probably was Diaz, but they changed to Days because that, the translation of Diaz is Days. And so he was writing to my father always urging him to come up to the United

States. But we went to Europe because my father wanted to introduce his wife and child to his sister who had brought him up. So that's the reason we went there. And we stayed there. As I say, we lived in the suburbs and he had this long trip to go into work, but after being there three years he realized that there was no future either for him in Portugal. And since his brother-in-law, my mother's sister's husband, was writing to him all the time urging him to come to America, we decided, well, we'd better come. And I think my father probably borrowed money from one of my aunt's friends because I don't think my aunt, or I heard she wasn't too anxious to have him leave. You know, even though we didn't live with her, she thought that was the wrong move, or just didn't approve of our going, leaving to go to a strange country. So that's the way it went. And we travelled up the coast until we got to Southampton, England, and then waited for the S.S. Olympic, Cunard steamship line. And when I was working years later, because I also worked for export and import, and I had taken up Spanish in high school, and I saw the S.S. Olympic going down the Hudson River. They were scrapping the boat and I had read about it in the paper years later. So I graduated from high school in 1937 and then years later, of course, on Long Island here, I attended some classes at Nassau Community. I'm proud of my nine credits. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Great. Well, let me ask you about your mother. When she was in Portugal was she teaching school, or was she working?

KELLY-GRIMM: No. We lived in the suburbs, and there would have been no way for her to get back and forth. And I was still young, so there was no one else around, you know. She was (?).

LEVINE: What were her feelings about going?

KELLY-GRIMM: Well, she wasn't too happy, I guess, like in most, in a lot of cases, my father probably had married someone she didn't approve of, my father's sister, because they had money and so on, and so they looked upon the fact that my father married my mother, even though she was, you know, educated and so on in Brazil, it wasn't somebody that maybe his sister would have picked out. So from that point there wasn't that much of a good feeling between my mother and the aunt. We didn't live with her, but I guess she always had more money and decided that he could have made a better marriage or something. And in Portugal I do remember, as I say, my aunt had very well-to-do friends, and we did visit somebody that was a countess or something and her estate, and the seamstress made dresses for my cousins and for me. We all had beautiful little dresses and we went to this estate for the day or whatever it was. So that was in that era.

LEVINE: Well, now, when you were living there in the suburbs it was your mother . . .

KELLY-GRIMM: And father and I.

KELLY-GRIMM: . . . and father and you.

KELLY-GRIMM: That's all.

LEVINE: And what about the person who was helping in the house?

KELLY-GRIMM: Well, I guess, I don't know, I don't remember. I don't know who did it. It was a very small house. We had, you know, maybe about four rooms or something, and it was a cement block house or something. But it was in the suburbs. We had a big yard, and I remember we had rabbits that used to dig great big holes, and then my mother would have to put her hand way down there and grab this rabbit to come out. And when I came to this country I was wearing a little velvet coat that had a collar. It looked like mink, but it was rabbit fur, you know, white with the little dots. But in Europe, as I say, my aunt had money, but they would turn things inside out, a coat, for instance, and make another coat for a smaller person, a child, out of a man's coat, for instance. Nothing was, you know, thrown away, and they had a seamstress, she had a cook, she had a seamstress. So, you know, they did these things.

LEVINE: Well, now, you had somebody who lived with you in Brazil then, but she didn't come with you to Portugal?

KELLY-GRIMM: She did go to Portugal, yeah. Her name was Nazare, Nazareth, I guess, in the translation. And she was a black girl that my parents had taken in before I was born and she was only about two years of age when they more or less adopted her because her father was in jail and I don't know where the mother was. But it was just an act of kindness, or people did this just to, if they took a liking to the child, she was only two or three, so she certainly wasn't helping my mother. As she got older she did, you know, in her teens and so on, and then it was a case of teaching them how to set a table or to do different things. And she was with us while we were in Portugal, but then when we were to come to America, my father heard that blacks and the white population did not mix and did not, certainly, live in the same house. And since we didn't know where we were going to live, we knew we were going up to Fall River, Massachusetts, but it was still America. And so my father and mother decided the best thing would be to send Nazare back to Brazil, and she was about eighteen, and they knew somebody there, and they sent her to live with a family. But she did get pneumonia the following year, and so she passed away. She didn't live too long.

LEVINE: Okay. So you boarded from El Porte. You went, uh, where did you then get, when you were ready to leave, where did you leave from?

KELLY-GRIMM: I'm really not sure whether we had to travel to Lisbon, or whether El

Porte was a big enough stopping point for this boat, and it was a different ship, I mean, to go up the coast of Europe. Excuse me. (break in tape)

LEVINE: We're resuming now after an interruption of someone coming to the door. Okay, so you were, you went up the coast from El Porte by some other ship.

KELLY-GRIMM: Yes. And stopped at Cherbourg, France for one day, and then we went on to Southampton, England, and there we waited a week for the ship that was to take us to America, the Cunard Line, S.S. Olympic.

LEVINE: Do you know why you waited a week?

KELLY-GRIMM: Well, I guess ships didn't, you know, come and go that frequently, and people had to wait, for some reason or other, until there were enough to board the ship.

LEVINE: I see. So you didn't have, do you know if your family had a ticket and everything in advance?

KELLY-GRIMM: Oh, my father planned everything and he had it well in advance the whole trip, from the time we left Portugal and going right up the coast. In fact, there was this fat fellow, Portuguese, too, and he started talking to my father on the boat. And he said that he had paid much more for his passage than, I don't know if he was joking, than the three of us. But no, my father had everything well, you know, planned, I guess.

Just how it was going to be.

LEVINE: Do you remember leaving? Do you remember how you felt?

KELLY-GRIMM: No, I really, I wish I could, you know, have that vivid. I remember this incident with the fellow, and he was travelling with this, a bird, a canary or something in a cage with him. He'd sit at the table and the canary was right there where we were sitting in the dining room of the ship. I remember that.

LEVINE: Well, then, were you, you weren't in what's called steerage?

KELLY-GRIMM: No, I don't believe so, or, not at all, no. Maybe on the Olympic, I know my father arranged for us to move, maybe from a lesser cabin or steerage to the cabin. That I had heard that, you know, had happened, but we were, you know, travelled. I don't remember any of that steerage.

LEVINE: Do you remember, do you have any memories of being aboard ship?

KELLY-GRIMM: Uh, not too much. Just walking around. We used to have more pictures, but my father took some, you know, when my parents separated. He even took my passport and things like that, and then we didn't get all the pictures that we could have had taken on board.

LEVINE: Do you, so do you remember approaching Ellis Island?

KELLY-GRIMM: Well, we went, we went up on deck and like everybody was trying to, you know, get a glimpse, early in the morning, as soon as we were approaching. But we had an exam by doctors there at the Ellis Island Center. And they put some kind of a number, and that my father also had, because he kept these different things, and they put on a great big pin, and we each had a number on our coat, outside garment. And then I remember they gave me the, a Uneda crackers, biscuits, and the small container of milk.

LEVINE: Had you had that before?

KELLY-GRIMM: And I had that. Well, I never, I guess I never had milk in a container, you know. Those little containers, they have a half a pint.

LEVINE: You mentioned before you had a new coat. Do you remember what you were wearing when you arrived?

KELLY-GRIMM: Well, I came with, there was a velvet coat and it had a little white collar, but it was, the collar looked like mink but it was rabbit that they had, you know, we had rabbits and I guess they cured it, the pelt, and made that little collar for it. And it was probably made by either my aunt's seamstress, or maybe my mother, I don't know

which. Probably the seamstress.

LEVINE: Do you remember your mother and father? Were they dressed up? Do you remember what they were wearing?

KELLY-GRIMM: Not too much. I don't, you know, they probably had some kind of coat, because we knew we were coming to a cold country. Even though we arrived here in May, but it was still in need of a coat. So they had to have a coat. And I don't think we had too much baggage with us. I don't remember any big trunk or anything like that, you know. It was in the house. And my father found a, the room in Mrs. Olsey's Rooming House in Brooklyn, and that was at 389 Eighth Street, Brooklyn, near Sixth Avenue, and the school was right down the street. Because my father was always interested in getting as close to, you know, convenience and school. And one morning I insisted that it was eight thirty and it was only seven thirty and it was very cold and my father said, "No, it's not time yet." But I guess I was very, very anxious to go to school having never attended school. So I went down there and everything was closed. The school had a great big iron fence all around it, and not a soul around. So I went back up the street because it was only, the house was about a half a block up, and then my, I knocked on the door, and my father wouldn't let me in. You know, he was trying to teach me a lesson. And I stayed out there for a few minutes. Then he let me in.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Well, now, you went right to Brooklyn?

KELLY-GRIMM: Well, no. We went to Fall River, Massachusetts because that's where my Aunt Nilda and her husband and son, Rudy, lived. And we were there for four months, and my father was writing to different, well, he couldn't find work up there because Fall River was a mill town and all the industry up there was factory work. And so he then wrote to different companies in New York. And the day he was to leave, he played the violin because he had violin lessons from the time he was eight until he was about seventeen or eighteen. So the day he was leaving with that violin under his arm to go to New York, a letter had come and gave him employment. I think it was Fraser & Company, Fulton Street, New York City. So he went to work there, and then after a few weeks or a month or so, then he sent for me and for my mother to come from Massachusetts to Brooklyn, where he found a room. And it was a parlor room, and it had a two-burner stove, but very little. And my mother worked on 12th Street at the Ansonia Clock Company. And Mrs. Olsey more or less looked after me. She pulled me on a sled the first time I saw snow, and whatever her daughter, her daughter was about seventeen. But whatever, a doll or something was around, Mrs. Olsey would let me play with Gertrude's doll. One was one that had the, you know, porcelain head, a great

big doll. And one time I didn't feel well, Mrs. Olsey would put a hot water bag on my stomach. Whatever it was she kind of looked after me and that's where we lived for a year. And every Friday we went to a movie, my father, mother and I. On 9th Street there was the Prospect Theater. And they had maybe five, six acts of vaudeville and probably more than one movie in those days. And when we came out my father, there was a little tiny store where you could have a hot dog or he'd buy me a Love Nest candy bar. And so that was our beginning of life in the United States. And later on, of course, my mother's other sisters and grandmother came up and joined. There were about twelve of us in the whole family at that time living in Brooklyn within trolley distance of each other.

LEVINE: Great. Getting back to Ellis, do you remember anything that you or your mother or father brought from Portugal?

KELLY-GRIMM: Well, I brought the little teddy bear. My father bought that on board ship, and it's a little tiny bear about three inches high or so, and I still have that.

LEVINE: And did you stay at Ellis, do you know? Or were you just there briefly?

KELLY-GRIMM: I don't think so. I think we, uh, you know, moved on and got on that Day Line going up to Fall River. I don't remember sleeping there at all.

LEVINE: Now, Fall River . . .

KELLY-GRIMM: In fact, I think they had . . .

LEVINE: I'm sorry, go ahead.

KELLY-GRIMM: Okay. I think there were not too many accommodations for people to stay over. If you were all right they would either put you in the, you know, on a, tell you to go on your way wherever you were going, or else you'd be in the infirmary if you were ill or if you were going to be sent back there was another place that they put people in.

LEVINE: But you don't remember it as being a long, like the exam, or the physical exam.

KELLY-GRIMM: No, it wasn't anything too, well, it must have been, you know, maybe an hour or two, and we had to wait our turn and I remember that Great Hall. That came back to me as I visited recently. And the benches or something where we sat. They had long tables.

LEVINE: Were you, or were your mother and father, afraid that you might be turned back? Was that something that you remember?

KELLY-GRIMM: No, I don't think that they heard too much of that. I don't think there

were too many of their nationality coming to the country at that time. I don't think there were five hundred Brazilians throughout the United States. And so when we were up in Fall River it was all Portuguese, not Brazilians, but anyway, of course, it was the same language, and my father wanted my mother to pick up English as soon as possible, so he would say to her that she couldn't shop or go to the stores, as they call now the bodegas, or the local stores where you could be there many, many years and never have to learn English. So she shopped in the supermarkets that were strictly, you know, just English-speaking. And the whole idea was to learn English and, as I say, I knew how to count up to ten and that was it. But they said that within a few months after I attended school, playing with the children outside, and they only spoke English, I quickly picked up English and spoke English.

LEVINE: Do you, was it confusing at first?

KELLY-GRIMM: Numbers were, I still seem to think in Portuguese when it came to arithmetic, for some reason.

LEVINE: And how about your mother and father. Did they become citizens?

KELLY-GRIMM: Yes. My father immediately, and my father, and my mother right after that. And I voted, at that time you had to be twenty-one years of age to vote, and when I became twenty-one I voted and gave my father's citizenship number, and that's all you

needed. And the fact that you were voting showed that you wanted to be an American. But what happened was some years after that, in fact, I was already on Long Island and I heard about some family, husband and wife and two children, and the wife was not born in this country, she was a foreigner, and I don't know if it was Cuba at the time of the Revolution, but they gave clearance to the husband and two children but not the wife. And I said, and I thought to myself, "That could happen to me." So I decided I'd better go for my own papers, and I did. I applied and I went right here in Mineola, 240 Old Country Road, Mineola, where I many years later went to work in that same building for the health department. But I went there and it didn't take more than a year or two after I applied for what they call a Certificate of Derivative Citizenship. So now I had proof, and I had to have that when I took the civil service test anyway years later. And, so that's how it went. But when I was there before the gentleman there and he showed, he said, "Do you know who this is?" And it was my passport picture, which I recognized because my father had also had one. And he didn't let me keep it, though, so I guess that went back to Washington.

LEVINE: Well, did your mother and father, (referring to the microphone) just be a little careful with that because this will pick that up, did your mother and father retain many ways that they had from Brazil or from Portugal once they came here? Were there any ways they kept?

KELLY-GRIMM: Well, outside of liking certain foods, for instance, you know, we more like to eat rice than potatoes, you know that. But otherwise my father and mother both liked fish a great deal because, you know, and they ate a lot of fish, and my mother prepared flounder or whatever. And I was never a great fish eater and I guess being a child, you know, you gradually got to eat more fish. But outside of that the Brazilian main dish is called feijoada. That's F-E-I-J-O-A-D-A. And it consists of the black beans and it consists of pigs' knuckles, I guess, and carne secca, which means dry beef, or nowadays you could prepare a pot roast to go with this rice and beans and they also have sausage, chorizo, which is, you know, sausage. Or they also serve it with a slice of orange, just like when you have turkey in America you have the cranberry sauce. And mint with lamb, well, the Brazilians eat the feijoada has a little orange, you know, slice, section to it. And of course they like to have their potent water is caixaca which is made out of sugar cane and it's their gin. Caixaca is well-known, just like the vodka in Russia, but caixaca is the thing there.

LEVINE: Do you know how to spell that?

KELLY-GRIMM: It's C-A-I-X, I think, A-C-"sedil"-A, I think that's how you'd spell it. But that's one, I mean, they have other, but that's the national dish, the feijoada.

LEVINE: Would you say the Portuguese community that you knew or lived alone

also wanted to become Americanized as soon as possible, like your mother and father, or not so much?

KELLY-GRIMM: Well, as I said, there weren't too many Brazilians here, and my father actually and mother thought that it would be best not to cultivate other Brazilians or Portuguese, and we didn't. We didn't grow up with too many, you know, not until many years later when I was maybe almost a year before graduating from high school there was this Portuguese gentleman that my father knew. He owned a two-family house on St. John's Place in Brooklyn. And I remember going to his house, and in those days they entertained in the kitchen. He did. It was the, socializing was between this Mr. Campos, C-A-M-P-O-S, and my father. And one would talk for ten, fifteen minutes, and the way they spoke was, in Portuguese, of course. And I'd be sitting on a straight-backed chair also in the kitchen listening to these two gents back and forth. And they would describe something in two, or what they meant in two or three different ways to make sure that person understood. But that was the way of the time where you had plenty of time to express yourself and you did. It wasn't a case of nowadays the children say, "You know, you know." And everything is spit out right away without any, too much definition. So the two of them carried on like that, and maybe it rubbed off on me a lot, because I can speak and write Portuguese. And being the oldest of my cousins, there's about twenty years difference, well, five years difference between me

and Rudy. Rudy's father was the one that lured my father to come up to America. So Rudy's five years younger, but the other cousins, as I say, by the time their mothers came and they were learning English pretty fast, so they were conversing in English more than Portuguese and to this day my cousins do not retain the language. But I did because, and, of course, Grandma still made believe she didn't understand, although she understood a lot, she didn't speak it. But they, you know, they weren't exposed to as much as I was. In the very beginning when we got here, no one knew English, you know.

LEVINE: Well, how do you feel about that heritage now?

KELLY-GRIMM: Well, I feel that I should have taught my children how to speak Portuguese more than I did. But then again the background in those days, they weren't emphasizing your roots, and it was the idea of becoming Americanized and assimilating as fast as possible. Forget the past, forget where you came from. So that's what that was all about. Now I regret it. But, as I say, jobs I had were also in export/import. And I worked for Ponds Extract Company, and the name of the company was LaMont Caulis, and I was in the Ponds Export Division, but the company had Nestles and it had different other products. There were sales representatives. But before that I had worked for strictly one or two girl office, you know, work and small companies. And the one time I was fired, I was fired by a Brazilian. (she laughs) So he was exporting

refrigerators and different things from this country. Before Brazil really got going on manufacturing and all, getting, you know, different companies down there, Westinghouse, to manufacture. So everything came from here. But anyway business was bad and I was the last one in and the first one fired. So I said to myself, "I'm not going to work for any Brazilian. I'm going to almost forget that I know Portuguese or Spanish and can translate letters. I'm going to work for a big company." So I did, and I went to work for LaMont Caulis. And they were a big company, and I did very well. I went from sixteen dollars a week to twenty-five dollars a week in 1940, and I worked there for five years until I was pregnant and left to have my first child.

LEVINE: And how many children do you have?

KELLY-GRIMM: I have three. I have two girls, they're two years apart, and the boy is seven years from the first one, so they're born in 1946, '48 and '53. And two are in Florida these days, and one is here a half-hour away. She's the one that has the four grandchildren, three boys and a girl.

LEVINE: And so you have three children and four grandchildren.

KELLY-GRIMM: Right.

LEVINE: And how do you feel now about coming here and, I mean, are you glad

you did it or . . .

KELLY-GRIMM: Oh, yes. Because I feel that I'm very American, since I didn't attend school anywhere else, and I regret I don't know more the history of Brazil, but I certainly feel that I'm very much part of, the American dream certainly worked out for me. And, as I say, I'm very, very thankful my father did migrate to this country because Brazil is a great country, and he'll always say, "Brazil is the land of the future." There's so much natural wealth there, but to get it out is something else, and there's always some drawback, whether it's political or corrupt or what, but things just don't, you know. And sometimes they set aside money to pave the street over and over again and it never gets done, that kind of thing, in these small towns. And, of course, the big towns in Brazil are mostly in the south these days because the further south you go in Brazil, the nicer the climate. It's just opposite from the United States. And so if you were in Europe or someone else and you were going to migrate, like the Japanese, they have a big Japanese influx, Italian and Germans and all nationalities, and they do not go where I was born in Manaus. They go down to Rio and they go down to other, to Santos, they go to Bella Orazonte, Santa Caterina. These are all big places, and some of them have very large German or Italian or, you know, I know a family in San Paolo, and it's the fifth generation, and his name is Robert, Roberto Schleier, S-C-H-L-E-I-E-R. And his ancestors came from, I think, Germany, and they, you know, were going to Argentina,

but the ship stopped in Brazil, and so that's why they were there. So we have the same history, almost, as the United States, where the only people in Brazil were the Indians, just like in this country. And they are now being pushed back, like we pushed back years ago, and the Homestead Act, if you could farm, or whatever, the land was yours, and they pushed the Indians away. And in Brazil they're doing the same thing. And even in very recent years now where they're trying to, uh, you know, tear down the trees, and they're blaming all this global warming on the fact that the Brazilian forest is being done away with. And they try to make the northern part of Brazil acceptable to agriculture, but they found out that it's not suitable for that, the ground is just not. So they really tore down a lot and they pushed back the Indians and saying, "This is going to be yours." And the same thing, homesteading, if you were up there and if you could farm it was yours, and they built roads now, the Trans Amazon Highway, not only connecting Rio, right up to the new capital which is Brasilia. And there was no connecting roads or anything in the beginning. They dropped everything by helicopter into that town, again because it's a religious country it was said that this is the place that, you know. And so President Kupahek, I think it was, about twenty-five years or more, he almost bankrupted the country by trying to move everybody, all the government offices, from Rio. That capital is now no longer the capital of Brazil. It's Brasilia, B-R-A-S-I-L-I-A, and it's between the north and the south, in-land. And now those roads they've made connecting the northern part where I was born and Rio and the other part,

it might take you three days by bus to go from the north to the south. And where I was born to the Atlantic Ocean is a thousand miles, so it means quite a few days. I didn't go back. Frankly I was afraid that mosquito would find me again. (she laughs) But, you know, it's one of these things. I regret that I didn't go back there because now instead of rubber plantations there where I was born they have, and I met some young man that worked up there five years, and he says there's Sony and all these other different companies manufacturing probably computers and radios and all of this. And it's a free-duty port on the Amazon River. So, you know, this is where it's now thriving again as a different kind of thing, and they restored the opera house, and I would love to see it. And they have trips, even in our travel sections, showing people that are going up the Amazon and taking the trips, you know, to out of the way places. And I did meet three women that, when I was down in Florida last winter, and at Disney or someplace, started talking to these ladies, and they were from Seattle, but they had just come back from a trip to Manaus, so I was very happy to meet them and to see what they had done. They had taken this cruise, gone up the river, and sometimes they sleep on, you know, and they have some hotels up there, whatever it is.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything else that you can think of that you'd like to say about having come here?

KELLY-GRIMM: Well, I appreciate the fact that you took the time, Janet, to interview

me. And I've enjoyed Ellis Island and I want to go back, because I've gone with groups, and each time we have very little time from the time we're told to get on line again and don't forget to get on that ferry by one thirty and, you know, from the time we leave here and get there and look around it gives us very little time. So if I can maybe visit on my own or, you know, where I can really explore and take more time.

LEVINE: Let me make, I can perhaps make arrangements for you to go.

KELLY-GRIMM: I'd love to do that.

LEVINE: Okay, well, thank you very much. I've been talking with Tilda Kelly-Grimm. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service on March 22, 1992 here in Albertson, Long Island, New York.