

EI-1261

JOSEPH MARTELLINI

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RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: Today is October the 28th, the year 2002. I'm here at Ellis Island in the Oral History Studio and I'm with Joseph Martellini and his wife, Wendy.

MARTELLINI: Wanda.

LEVINE: Wanda. Sorry, Wanda.

MARTELLINI: [chuckles]

LEVINE: Wanda. And [clears throat] he came from Italy in 1930 (he remembered March 30th, 1930) when he was 12 years of age, and left from Genoa on the ship, the Augusta.

MARTELLINI: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Could you tell me [clears throat] your birth date and where in Italy you were born?

MARTELLINI: November the 7th, 1918. Porto [PH] St. Elpidio, Italy. Marche, Italy.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Maybe—I know you spelled it for me before, but if you would spell it so when the person's typing this out they'll—

MARTELLINI: Oh.

LEVINE: —be able to have it.

MARTELLINI: Okay. That's Saint E-L-P-I-D-I-O, St. Elpidio, Marche, which, M-A-R-C-H-E.

LEVINE: Okay. And did you—did you live on St. Elpidio until you left at 12 years old?

MARTELLINI: Up until we—yes, yes.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, your mother, what was her name?

MARTELLINI: My—well, my—Rose.

LEVINE: And her maiden name? Did you—

MARTELLINI: Her maiden name was Renzi—R-E-N-Z-I.

LEVINE: And—

MARTELLINI: And I think some of her relatives had come over here earlier though in the 19—early 1900s.

LEVINE: Oh, really?

MARTELLINI: Yeah. I—I never—I forget which ones they were but it was like a brother and even her—I think her father had come over here. But then that one's just for a short time and then they went back to Italy, you know.

LEVINE: I see. So your mother probably had heard stories about this country? Do y—did she ever talk about that?

MARTELLINI: Well, not too much. Not too much. She just sort of mentioned—used to mention that her father had been over here but didn't stay long because he didn't like it.

LEVINE: Oh, he didn't like it.

MARTELLINI: [laughs]

LEVINE: Oh, no. [chuckles]

MARTELLINI: He couldn't talk English, you know, and he says they—they gave it up. [sniffs]

LEVINE: It was tough.

MARTELLINI: Yeah, it was tough.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MARTELLINI: Tough living.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

MARTELLINI: Tough living, really.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MARTELLINI: So—but my mother really—she loved America, you know, at the beginning until—of course, when she got a little bit older she got sick and she wound up in a—in a home and died there.

LEVINE: In this country?

MARTELLINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MARTELLINI: In this country.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what about your father? What was his name?

MARTELLINI: His name was John, Jovani [PH] in Italian. [chuckles] But he was a great father. Yeah, he was a great father.

LEVINE: Why was he such a great father?

MARTELLINI: Well, he was just a real family man, you know. Nobody—nothing was so important as his family and that was it. You know, and he worked hard all his life and—

LEVINE: What did he do? What did he do in Italy?

MARTELLINI: In Italy, he was a pharmacist in Italy but then during—now, Mussolini, when Mussolini took over Italy, he was anti-fascist and him, his two cousin and a—two more people, was five of them—they were all anti-fas—they were the leaders of the underground against fascism. But one night, they came and I remember I was in bed with my grandfather but I heard all the commotion and noise. They came in and beat my father up and almost killed him, you know. He was almost dead, really. And they told them, unless they joined the Black Shirts, you know, the—Mussolini's people, the—they wouldn't—they wouldn't live long. So they all got away from Italy, ran away from Italy. I don't know how they managed to get on a boat somewheres. I think they went in Genoa—in Genoa—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MARTELLINI: —and got a boat and went to South America. Then, from South America, worked down there for a couple of years. Then they all went to Canada for the simple reason that the United States w—didn't take any immigrants from South America at the time, but they did take some from Canada. So after he lived in Canada for about a year or so, he immigrated here to the United States and then became a citizen later, you know, and called for us, sent for us and—

LEVINE: Wow.

MARTELLINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything else about Mussolini or the fascists or—

MARTELLINI: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: While you were there?

MARTELLINI: Cer—yeah, we were—because of my father, we were curfewed to the—to the house. Six o'clock, we had to be in the house. We couldn't go out of the house. And until I joined, after I was seven—yeah, seven years old, I joined what they called the Junior Black Shirts, the Barilla [PH]. They called them that. And then they r—they lifted up the curfew after but I had to join the Black Shirts, you know.

LEVINE: Mmm. You mean once you joined the Black Shirts you could—you didn't have the curfew?

MARTELLINI: That's right. I took off the curfew.

LEVINE: Wow.

MARTELLINI: They rescinded the curfew after I joined the Black Shirts.

LEVINE: Oh. Uh-huh, uh-huh. Do you remember seeing, like, things that were going on at that time? I mean, I know you were just a boy but—

MARTELLINI: Well, you remember a lot of com—

LEVINE: —how had things changed?

MARTELLINI: —a lot of commotion, people being afraid, you know. Like, even the women were very, very afraid at the time—

LEVINE: What would happen to them? What could happen?

MARTELLINI: Well, the Black Shirts, usually they did whatever they wanted, you know. They could come in and even rape some of the women, you know. But I don't remember too much but I heard, you know—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MARTELLINI: —them talk about it. But anyway, it was—it was terrible, really, terrible living there, went hungry. I know we went hungry quite a bit. I remember that. And then when we came over here, we came over here during the Depression, at the height of the Depression, 1930. And m—my father wasn't working then. [unclear]—he had bought a home but he was ready to lose it be—and then till Roosevelt started this home—some sort of a home mortgage protection and finally, all they had to do was just pay a little bit of the interest and they saved the home, you know, and—

LEVINE: Mmm.

MARTELLINI: It was—over there, during the Depression, just about like 1928, '29, oh, we all went hungry. We ate fish because we lived by the sea. All we ate was fish. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Hmm, hmm. So in other words, there was a Depression in Italy prior to—

MARTELLINI: Oh, before—

LEVINE: —your coming here.

MARTELLINI: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: And then you came here and we were having one too.

MARTELLINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Wow. That's not good luck. [laughter] Now, okay, so [clears throat]—so how about the rest of your childhood? You say you had grandparents. Did—do you remember them?

MARTELLINI: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. I remember my grandfath—two of my grandfathers.

LEVINE: What do you remember? When you think about them, what do you—

MARTELLINI: Well, I used to sleep with them because their—our house was only so big, you know. Us—my brother and I slept with my grandfather and my sister slept with my mother.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MARTELLINI: We only had two bed—small bedrooms.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MARTELLINI: And—

LEVINE: So one grandfather lived with you?

MARTELLINI: Oh, yeah. He lived—yeah. Until he died, really.

LEVINE: What—what do you—

MARTELLINI: Well, he died about two years a—no, about three years after I left. After we came to this country—

LEVINE: Ah.

MARTELLINI: —then he died at—at the age of 92.

LEVINE: Wow.

MARTELLINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: So w—did you ever do things with him besides sleep [unclear]—

MARTELLINI: Well, you know, he took me fishing—I was a kid. He used to be—he used to have a lar—large commercial boat. You know, where 20 men would get on and go out and do commercial fishing, you know, with—with the oars and like that. And—and he used to take me out with him once in a while, you know. But then sometimes [chuckles] I'd follow him in the evening because he loved to drink. He could drink a gallon of wine and think nothing of it. And sometimes, he'd start staggering so I had to help him come home, you know. [laughs] He held onto me. [chuckles] Oh, it was funny. Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: So you had what? A brother and a sister?

MARTELLINI: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MARTELLINI: A brother and a—

LEVINE: And where did—

MARTELLINI: My brother was younger.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MARTELLINI: And my sister was three years older than I.

LEVINE: Right, okay. So what was your sister's name?

MARTELLINI: She—my sister was a very studious girl in her age when—in Italy. She—she knew nothing but books, reading all the time. [chuckles] I think she still does it. But she used to read all the time. She never experienced anything. She didn't know what was going on over there. I'm telling you. She's—she says, "How do you remember all those things, Joe?" I—well, I says, "I was there. You wasn't. You were in a dream world."

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MARTELLINI: She was, really. She tol—she's read—studious. She was going to go someplace but then when we came over here it was a different story. We came over here during the Depression.

LEVINE: Oh.

MARTELLINI: She had to go work in a clothing factory, a sweatshop at those days.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MARTELLINI: It was nothing but a sweatshop. And I went to work in a furniture factory in a—you know, in a glue room. Terrible, ugh!

LEVINE: Mmm, well—

MARTELLINI: [exhales sharply]

LEVINE: Well, talking more about Italy—oh, first, well, what was your sister's name? What is her name?

MARTELLINI: Madeline.

LEVINE: Madeline.

MARTELLINI: Yes.

LEVINE: And your brother's name?

MARTELLINI: John.

LEVINE: He's—

MARTELLINI: John, Jr.

LEVINE: He's John, Jr. Oh, I see. Okay. But he was the youngest.

MARTELLINI: He was the youngest, yes.

LEVINE: Um—

MARTELLINI: He went in the service and became disabled American veteran and he died young too.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. Okay, well, growing up, were you religious?

MARTELLINI: Well, over in Italy, we were. We—I was altar boy in Italy. [chuckles] But you know, came over here though, no, not too much. Went to church but not very religious, you know, like it was over there. Over there, you were almost compelled. You know, if you went to school, to the Catholic school, you had to serve mass, whether you wanted to or not. [laughs]

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

MARTELLINI: It was nice but we had a lot of fun in school. We were—the—the boys there—the priests on Sundays, like, or Saturday, they used to have a—a game room, pool table and all there. We would get us all to play. Well, in Italy, something like that was very important because there wasn't too much things to do over there, you know, during that time.

LEVINE: I see.

MARTELLINI: Uh-huh.

LEVINE: So the church kind of was a social point, in a way.

MARTELLINI: Yeah, it was, very social point. Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, now, like this town of—of St. Elpidi—pidio—

MARTELLINI: Pidio.

LEVINE: Pidio. Could you describe—what—what was it like? Was it a city—

MARTELLINI: It—it was a—

LEVINE: —or a—

MARTELLINI: Nah, it was a small town, just a small town, more or less like a fishing village. And it was the—the population, I believe, was maybe 2,500 at the time or 3,000, somewheres like that. Of course, now, it's a lot different, you know. We went over there. It's—we hardly rec—recognized it. But very small town and it was divided in two section. They had a river, small river run between—and we called it North and that's the South, you know. And that's where the women all used to go to wash their clothes, you know, with this big boar—a board, you know, wooden boards and beat the clothes. They had a r—and on the rocks, too, they had rocks. They beat the clothes on the rocks. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And was that like a social place for women—

MARTELLINI: Yeah, they—

LEVINE: —to get together and talk?

MARTELLINI: Certain days, you see about 30 of 'em all gathered right there in one spot. You know, I guess it was a gabbing time. [laughs]

LEVINE: Right. When you were a boy, did you go there with your mother?

MARTELLINI: Yeah, I car—helped her carry clothes sometimes, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MARTELLINI: Because while they were dry, she carried them but I used to carry either the board or sometime when the clothes got wet they were pretty heavy, so I help her carry some of the clothes in a basket.

LEVINE: Hmm, yeah. Wow.

MARTELLINI: But we also raised silkworms over there.

LEVINE: Oh, tell me about that.

MARTELLINI: We had an attic in our house. We raised silkworm and my mother used to go out and cut a lot of the branches off of the trees for them, mulberry leaves. We used to get a lot of mulberry leaves, the twigs and all and make bushes out of them. Then that's the way you—the cocoon—the silkworms would grow and make the cocoons, you know, and the silk. Then we used to pick the silk off the cocoons and my mother would spin it, you know, things of that sort.

LEVINE: Wow. So did she—

MARTELLINI: [chuckles]

LEVINE: What did she make out of it?

MARTELLINI: She sold it. They—they—and they all got into the—they made the silk and then they sold it to a, like some—there was a—a central place where you took it and they distributed—you know, they bought it from you. Then I don't know what they did. They sent it to certain factories, I guess, you know.

LEVINE: Hmm. So would you—

MARTELLINI: But my mother did w—she had the spinning wheel. She always made something, you know, but not much. We more or less did it for the—because you pick up a few dollars, you know, pick up a little bit of money.

LEVINE: Would you get a lot of silk, like, out of—I mean, it seems like—

MARTELLINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: A little worm—

MARTELLINI: These—these—I mean, it looked like a most—today, I think it was—must have been a million silkworms, you know. I mean, the cocoons, the whole area up in the attic was all loaded with cocoons, you know, and you—I mean, and you take these cocoons, it was silk all around it. See?

LEVINE: Oh.

MARTELLINI: And you take all the silk, all by hand, you know, and you put it in a basket and you'd get maybe five or six baskets of silk.

LEVINE: I see.

MARTELLINI: You know, big baskets like that. See? And then, I forget where my mother took it. I don't remember where sh—she used to take it. Sometimes, she used to keep and make something, you know, with it on her spinning wheel but not too much, because it paid more to sell it—

LEVINE: Sell it than—

MARTELLINI: —than it did to make things.

LEVINE: So it would be like—the attic was like a big room full of these—

MARTELLINI: Big. Nothing up there but raising the silkworms.

LEVINE: Wow.

MARTELLINI: [chuckles]

LEVINE: Did a lot of people do that? Silkworms?

MARTELLINI: Yeah, quite a few did that, was doing that in those days, yes.

LEVINE: What else went on in that town? I mean, what did people do for work for money?

MARTELLINI: Mostly, make shoes. Shoemakers. I guess about 50 percent were fishermen and the other 50 percent were shoemakers.

LEVINE: Hmm.

MARTELLINI: That's all there was in that town. They had—they had a chemical plant there but they didn't hire that many people, maybe 50 people, you know. That's about it. But most of them were ma—shoemakers and—and fishermen. You know, they're fishing for a living. They fish for a living because their fish used to go—but the thing is this, fish, you don't keep there. You know, there is no ice. There wasn't ice or anything. I mean, people came from all over. Even the towns up above came down, picked up the fish, took it home and you cook it and you eat it right fresh. Everything is fresh. You know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MARTELLINI: Because you had no way of keeping the fish.

LEVINE: Right. So let's see. Was there anything else about your childhood there? Did you go to school once you got here?

MARTELLINI: I went to school a year and a half.

LEVINE: Here?

MARTELLINI: I went—they put me in the first grade. I went there and went to the sixth grade, passed to the seventh grade. I had algebra in the fifth grade over in Italy, came over here, they put me in the first grade until we learned English, you know. [sniffs] And a year and a half, I went up to the eighth grade and that was it. But I had to go to work. I—during the Depression, I was working on the ice truck at the same time I was going to school.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

MARTELLINI: So I had to—had to stop school and went to work because we had to eat.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

MARTELLINI: Yeah. My father only had one day's work, maybe one day a week at Bethlehem Steel then. My sister made a few dollars in a sweatshop and I made about six dollars, six, eight dollars on the ice truck working.

LEVINE: Mmm.

MARTELLINI: And we kept going. We paid for the home, you know, helped to pay the house and we ate.

LEVINE: Well, how would you compare the school that you attended in Italy with the school that you attended here?

MARTELLINI: Oh, in Italy, was about—my God, much more stricter over there. You don't fool around. First of all, you were allowed to be punished. If you didn't do your homework or you didn't do this, especially in the wintertime, you—there's—was no heat in the schools, you know. They used to have a little pot up there with fire, you know, coal, with a—and you were allowed to go up and warm your hands all the time, you know. If you didn't do your homework, you don't warm your hands all day. And then if you were bad inside of the class, if you were one of these smart kids, they had a little pan up in the front with little pebbles, little stones on, make you kneel on that thing for maybe a half hour until the darn stones went through your knees, almost, through your skin. Oh, man. You don't forget that, I'll tell you that. So, oh, gosh.

LEVINE: So you did your homework.

MARTELLINI: Oh, you darn right. [laughter] Ah, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MARTELLINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: So why was it that you—who did you travel with when you came here?

MARTELLINI: Actually, my sister and my brother and my mother. That's all.

LEVINE: Why was it that [clears throat]—that the four of you came here when you did?

MARTELLINI: Well, what had happened, [clears throat] should have been here a year or so earlier. In 1929, we were ready to come over here. We had the passport and everything. But that's when the ba—my father sent the money to us through the Bank of Sicily and the Bank of Sicily went up.

LEVINE: Oh.

MARTELLINI: Just like over here, you know, and he lost all his money. So—and a friend of ours, who has a restaurant in—in Little Italy in Baltimore—

well, he was a neighbor of ours over in Italy. He felt sorry for my father, you know, and he loaned him the money. He loaned him the money to get us—you know, to pay for the passage and finally, we came but we had almost lost a year. So we came down here in 1930 instead of 1929.

LEVINE: I see. So your father had settled in Baltimore.

MARTELLINI: Yes, he was there.

LEVINE: Why did he settle in Baltimore? Do you know?

MARTELLINI: Yeah, because he got a job at Bethlehem Steel, see, and that's—was so hard to get a job, you know, in a factory like that. Bethlehem Steel was a dependable place to work, you know, usually lifetime job. And so once he got that job then he was able to, you know, send for us.

LEVINE: Well, now, I for—I'm sorry.

MARTELLINI: And he became a citizen. He too—he became a citizen while he was working at Bethlehem Steel. You know, he studied and took his citizenship. You know how they do it. They [unclear] 200 people and give 'em all citizenship all at one time. [laughs] So—

LEVINE: He didn't have to go up and answer questions individually or anything?

MARTELLINI: No. Well, he had to fill out the—the papers, answer the questions on paper, though.

LEVINE: On paper.

MARTELLINI: Not verbally because—

LEVINE: No.

MARTELLINI: —they could hardly talk English. But he could read and he could read English. He had learned to read English and he learned to speak rough, you know. Very broken English. But he managed. He was a determined man.

LEVINE: Yeah. So what—he was a pharmacist in Italy.

MARTELLINI: In Italy, yeah.

LEVINE: And he came here and he—

MARTELLINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: —he—

MARTELLINI: He couldn't talk English so he just went to work. He gave it up, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Uh-huh.

MARTELLINI: He served in the army over there as a pharmacist too.

LEVINE: Oh, really?

MARTELLINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well—

MARTELLINI: Until before World War I. Then when Mussolini took over, that was—that was it.

LEVINE: Well, now, to be a pharmacist over there, did you have to do an apprenticeship or anything like that? Do you know?

MARTELLINI: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. See, he—he went to school for it over there and you served a—or not the—of course, over—over there, the apprenticeship would have been maybe a year or two years.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MARTELLINI: You know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MARTELLINI: Not like over here, you know. But they—more or less, they usually learned with practical experience, more or less, working under other doctors or not—other pharmacists, you know, and that's how they learn over there.

LEVINE: Yeah. So he—but he found the job in—in Baltimore but did he go to Baltimore for the job or did he go to Baltimore—

MARTELLINI: No, he—he—

LEVINE: —and then he found the job?

MARTELLINI: No, he came—no, he came to Baltimore because a lot of his friends from the same town in Italy had migrated here in Baltimore.

LEVINE: Oh.

MARTELLINI: He had a lot of friends here from—from our same town in Italy.

LEVINE: From Elpidi—

MARTELLINI: Yeah, from St. Elpidio.

LEVINE: La—Elpidio.

MARTELLINI: See? And when he came over here, he got a place to live down there. They helped him, you know, to get a—find a place. And he went and then went to look for a job down in Bethlehem Steel, and he managed to find a job. He got the job.

LEVINE: Hmm.

MARTELLINI: See?

LEVINE: So do you remember getting ready to leave? Do you—

MARTELLINI: Oh, evidently. Oh, my God, yes. The whole town was out. [laughs] Yeah, the whole town was out—

LEVINE: [unclear].

MARTELLINI: —saying goodbye to us. My gosh. Everybody was talking about it. “The Martellinis are going to America,” of course in Italian.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MARTELLINI: Yeah. And when we left, my God, I believe half of the town was there to say goodbye to us.

LEVINE: Ah.

MARTELLINI: My grandfather cried because I was his favorite, you know.

LEVINE: And—and how did you feel, leaving?

MARTELLINI: Oh, I cried too bec—because he cried. [laughter] I remember that. Oh, I hated to leave him. He was so good to me.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MARTELLINI: Yeah, he was like a father, really, to me because my father was over here, you know. So—

LEVINE: Yeah.

MARTELLINI: It was very nice.

LEVINE: Yeah. So you—how far was it from Elpidio to—

MARTELLINI: Where I got the boat?

LEVINE: —Geno—right.

MARTELLINI: I'd say about—that would be about, at least, I would say about 90 miles or 80—between 80 and 90 miles away. Yeah.

LEVINE: So did you—what did take for transportation to get to the port?

MARTELLINI: Whether you believe it or not, we took a train. But before that, we used to ride the horse and buggy. Horses with a carriage, that's where we used to go anywhere. When we used to see my uncle, who was in the hospital at—at the province or [unclear] Genoa, we used to get there with a horse and buggy. That was about 35, 40 miles away, you know. But everything over there—I don't know. I don't remember seeing an automobile—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MARTELLINI: —in our town. Well, everything over there—I—I don't remember seeing an automobile—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MARTELLINI: —in our town. I had never saw an automobile.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-hmm. So getting to the port was—did anything happen when you were traveling from Elpidio to the port?

MARTELLINI: No, not too much. It was just a lot of hassle because, you know, all foreigners and—in in the boat, man, they were crowded. It was very crowded but it was good. They had good food, you know, and it was [unclear].

LEVINE: Were you in the third class? Were you in—

MARTELLINI: Third class.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MARTELLINI: Yeah, third class.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So, anything happen on the passage over?

MARTELLINI: No, nothing. A lot of people got sick because, going through the—I'll never forget this, through the Gulf of Gibraltar there between Spain and Africa, going across there, we had such a bad storm. My God, the people that got sick! Oh, God! Whew! Terrible. One day only and that's it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MARTELLINI: They were all sick. I didn't get sick because I was used to the sea with my grandfather. You know, we had—had water all the time.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MARTELLINI: See.

LEVINE: So w—do you remember when the ship came into the New York harbor?

MARTELLINI: Oh, my gosh, yes. Oh, yes.

LEVINE: What was—

MARTELLINI: Everybody was up on the deck. Every—"La Statue de Liberta!" [PH] That's all you heard, "The Statue of Liberty!" That's—you know. Man, everybody r—[chuckles], "New York! New York! New York!" When we got off—man, we got off, oh, it was pretty crowded. It was something like in some of those pictures you see out there, really—exhibits really were actually the way it was happening.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MARTELLINI: And that's still alive and when you went through Ellis Island here, Christ, with them zig-zaggin, one place to the other, you know, just like cattle. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Well, tell me about Ellis Island. What happened? What—what did it look like and what did you hear and what—

MARTELLINI: Well, of course, you know, when you're a kid, you're looking around. You're looking at the building, said, "My God! What a tremendous building." You know, in Italy, we never saw anything that big. You know, so we says, "God, look at this! Look at this." But then when you saw all those people, the crowds, I don't know. It must have been—of course, to me it must have looked like 10,000 people. But at least—I know it was at least a thousand people in line with me and the rest of us, you know. And we're going from one to the other, the examiners. You had doctors, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah, and what did they do?

MARTELLINI: They had doctors. Well, some of them gave you shots, you know, if you didn't have—of course, I don't remember what it was for. But I know if you didn't have a—if you weren't inoculated for something, they gave you a shot. You know, they gave you a shot. And—but they kept pushing you down the line, "Come on! Come on! Move, move, move!" Real fast because everybody's still—moving real fast. It's all that crowd. You know, it was such a crowd.

LEVINE: So—

MARTELLINI: I guess the last I—last—maybe while the ship was unloaded—unloading all the passengers, you know, because there could have been several thousand people. I guess it was several thousand people on the boat. Yeah, because it was really crowded.

LEVINE: Had you had some examination over there?

MARTELLINI: Yes, yes. We did.

LEVINE: In Genoa in the [unclear]?

MARTELLINI: No, before that. We had to have it in the—when—I think a note on the passport, attached to the passport, I believe it was, that we had taken this inoculation, you know, certain inoculations. But I don't think we had enough. I think we were missing one of—I don't know. I don't remember whether there was four, really, but I know we got a shot.

LEVINE: Hmm. And then how about either the eye exam—did you have a—a mental test—

MARTELLINI: No. Yes.

LEVINE: —too?

MARTELLINI: They—well, they—I don't know what kind of a test but I remember the eyes. You know, they examine your throat, the ears and all that. And they asked a few questions to my father, you know, but—

LEVINE: They asked it to him, not to your m—oh, well, your mother couldn't speak English.

MARTELLINI: Couldn't speak English. She couldn't speak English.

LEVINE: And, huh, so—so you were in a long line and you—

MARTELLINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: —were being moved along.

MARTELLINI: Oh, yeah. A long line and I don't forget that.

LEVINE: How long did you have to be here at Ellis?

MARTELLINI: I guess it took several hours, really, before you got through. I know—I only remember vaguely but I'd say at least two or three hours [unclear].

LEVINE: Do you remember the meeting with your father?

MARTELLINI: Oh, my God, yeah.

LEVINE: What was that like?

MARTELLINI: Yeah. Oh, that was great. My father hugged us, you know. Of course, he hugged my mother first. [laughter] Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. And—

MARTELLINI: It was something.

LEVINE: Was your mother interested in coming here initially?

MARTELLINI: Well, because of him, naturally. You know, she says, "It's all right. We're going over to see your father. We're going to go over there with—to your father." And that's it, you know. And I—I didn't like it. I cried. I wanted to go back. Oh, God! [unclear]—when we moved

into Baltimore, I couldn't speak English. You know, everybody—a lot of the kids makes fun of you, you know. And I got very belligerent. Then—then some of the boys—I lived in Highland Town temporarily until our house was finished, about two miles away from there. And then when we moved into our house, in the neighborhood was a lot of Italians. And a lot of the boys there could speak English and Italian, so then it wasn't too bad because they—they start teaching me words, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MARTELLINI: And so it was—it was pretty good then. You know, I felt like I was more welcome.

LEVINE: Hmm.

MARTELLINI: Yeah, and I started to learn a few words, you know, mostly cuss words at the beginning. [laughs]

LEVINE: So [laughter]—so you—did you—were you called a greenhorn? Was that a word that was used that you remember?

MARTELLINI: Well, I don't say that—because we had—we used to wear short pants, you know, over here—over in Italy. I came over here. All I had was those little short pants. Well, they used to have a name for 'em and I can't tell you the name for 'em. [laughter]

LEVINE: You mean the b—the kids had a name for them?

MARTELLINI: Yeah. [laughs] They thought it was—it's funny, you know. Then afterwards, after about a—two months or—about a month or so, then my mother bought me long pants. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Ah.

MARTELLINI: Then I was okay.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MARTELLINI: [sniffs] And it was [unclear].

LEVINE: So, it—would you talk a—a little bit about what you said earlier about your father was putting money on a house.

MARTELLINI: Yes.

LEVINE: But then the Depression made it too difficult.

MARTELLINI: Well, he—he sent the money to us through the Bank of Sicily and the bank went—went up—you know, went bankrupt, was [unclear], you know. They closed down, lost—everybody lost their money. And we had to postpone our—our passage because we didn't have the money.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

MARTELLINI: So then a friend of ours—friend of my father down here in Little Italy—his name was Mr. Meliga [PH] (I remember that), loaned him the money to—says he felt sorry for my father, you know, because my father had worked very hard. He says, "Your father worked so hard. He had nothing but pork and beans and bread, just to save enough money so he could bring you over, you know." So he loaned him the money and then we were able to come.

LEVINE: And then you said he—your father then was only working like a day or so a week.

MARTELLINI: Yeah. Well, he was working pretty good until the Depression. Then—and everybody was—nobody was working, really. He liked doing—he made one day a week, you know.

LEVINE: So—so that's when your sister then took a job. She dropped out of school.

MARTELLINI: Took a job in a sweatshop, yeah.

LEVINE: And did you know anything about that, what—what the work was like or what the condition—

MARTELLINI: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. I knew the people that had the shop. I know one of the sons. We were friends, you know, in—we lived in the same block or up—when we moved up into Baltimore. And I used to go down there once in a while with him, with the boy, you know. And the way they used to work, my God! Nah—

LEVINE: What?

MARTELLINI: It is a—a hot, always hot in there, dirty. You know, always dust flying. Well, in those days, though, you had to expect it. There was nothing else, you know, so—and then I was lucky to get a job. First,

I worked on the ice truck and then I wen—I got a job in a furniture factory gluing pieces, like legs and arms, you know, for sofas and all that, gluing them all together like that. And then in 1935 I went to work at Glen L. Martins [PH].

LEVINE: What's that?

MARTELLINI: Martin Marietta. Martin Marietta, in those days. And that was like a f—friend of the family helped me get a job down there. Oh, it was all right after that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So for the fir—while you were still going to school is when you worked on the ice truck.

MARTELLINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Then you dropped out of school to help—

MARTELLINI: To help work, to—that's right.

LEVINE: —make money. And at first—

MARTELLINI: I took some correspondence c—let me tell you, I took correspondence courses. I don't know if you remember, in the old day—well, no, you might not remember. [chuckles] But in the old days, used to have matchboxes and there it had advertisement, you know, commercials about—

LEVINE: I remember that.

MARTELLINI: And, "Take this course." You know, "We'll give you a high school diploma," and all that stuff. And I took a couple of those.

LEVINE: And did that help?

MARTELLINI: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. I got books and learned, maybe, blueprints and everything, you see.

LEVINE: And—and that helped you get the job that you got?

MARTELLINI: Oh, yeah. Well, then I went to—then, also went—1946, when I came out of the Na—I went in the Navy in 1942, came out of it in 19—J—January the 1st, 1946. Then in 1946, I went to work in home improvements on my own.

LEVINE: Oh.

MARTELLINI: Yeah. See, because 1935 through '38, I—through '39, I worked from, some in Glen L. Martins and some at Bethlehem Steel. And then I went to work in construction, right, and learned—learned things on construction. Then I went to work on home improvements in 1946. Then from then on, I've been in it ever since.

LEVINE: Wow.

MARTELLINI: I've been in construction ever since.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Oh. So—so you said that—did you say that President Roosevelt passed a bill that helped your father hold onto the house?

MARTELLINI: Oh, yeah. Oh, most people would have lost all their homes. Most people would have lost homes. The—I forget the name of it. The—the National Mortgage something—

LEVINE: Oh.

MARTELLINI: —that he passed—he passed the bill that they—they could not foreclose on your house if you could just pay the interest only, no principle. And that was in effect for about two years. And then till—you know, things started to pick up when Roosevelt came in. You know, everything picked up pretty good. Jobs were more available. Not—not as good but it was better than it was in 1930 and '31.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MARTELLINI: Right?

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MARTELLINI: So—because went in '32 and things became a little bit better. Was more progress going on, you know, in work and everything. Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: So—so what happened with your sister? Did she—did she stay working in the sweatshop for a while or—

MARTELLINI: She stayed there till about, I would say, 1936, '37. S—but as things got better, even in the sweatshop, after that because I think in 1934 she started taking the work at home—

LEVINE: Oh.

MARTELLINI: —instead of going back to the shop. They used to give her the—the—the work to take at home.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MARTELLINI: So u—she used to pick it up, take it home and do the work at home and then she'd just take it back. You know?

LEVINE: Yeah.

MARTELLINI: So that was much better. Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah.

MARTELLINI: Than working in the shop itself, because that was—they were sweatshops in those days, believe me.

LEVINE: Well, how did she take to being here in this country, your sister?

MARTELLINI: At first, I guess she felt like I did. She didn't like it, you know, says—but we both got used to it pretty well after a while, you know. She met a couple of friends—yeah, a couple of lady friends, girlfriends, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MARTELLINI: In school. And she managed.

LEVINE: H—

MARTELLINI: She learned—she learned English very good, you know.

LEVINE: How about your brother?

MARTELLINI: Well, my brother—we went—he went in the service in 1939. Before that, well, he was a little bit too young to work. I think he worked on a—oh, yeah. No, he went to work in the WPA at the time.

LEVINE: Oh.

MARTELLINI: Work Progress Administration, I believe it was called at the time.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MARTELLINI: Yeah, Roosevelt started that to give boys a lot of work, you know, because a lot of unemployment. And he went to work for that. Yeah, I remember that. And he stayed there—

LEVINE: Do you remember what he did with the WPA? What kind of work?

MARTELLINI: I—I really don't remember what he did. He worked at a—somewheres about—doing irrigation.

LEVINE: Oh.

MARTELLINI: You know, doing irrigation down near the river, so somewheres like that at the time. They were—anything that was government work, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MARTELLINI: The—oh, the—where the government was involved, you know, in the—in the forest and things of that sort. Rivers.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MARTELLINI: You know, so he went to work there.

LEVINE: I see. Well, do you remember the buildup to World War II?

MARTELLINI: Oh, yeah. Oh, sure. Certainly, I do.

LEVINE: What—what—what star—what—what changes took place in—in your life that—

MARTELLINI: Well, even during Mussolini's reign up to 1930, Hitler had his youths then. You know, but then in the '30s, '32-like, Hitler really became more popular. You know, propaganda really is what did it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MARTELLINI: Became more popular but then I think when—during the election, he lost the election at the time. But then they had s—a reelection later and he was elected to the chancellorate, you know. And—

LEVINE: Do you remember this country? I mean, when we were—I—we weren't at war in the very beginning but do you remember, like, things that happened in this country? Like War Bonds or—

MARTELLINI: Oh, cer—certainly, I remember that. My gosh. Yeah. As a matter of fact, I was working at Glen L. Martins, which was a defense plant at the time, you know. And I went, worked in a small parts department. Then I went to work in a shipyard in—I quit there. I went to work in a shipyard down—Bethlehem Steel. And then when war started breaking out in Europe—I mean, Germany invaded Poland and all that, you know, everybody went into defense work down there because we were helping the—we were helping England and all the other countries over there. And then I went in the service. I mean, it was recruiting time. They were recruiting people to go in the services. Of course, we hadn't entered the war yet but they were recruiting people, you know, to build up an army.

LEVINE: And how did you feel about going in the army?

MARTELLINI: I felt all right. I think it—I felt—Hitler, he didn't—needed to be broken down. Period. He was cruel, you know.

LEVINE: And of course, you had had the experience of seeing your father getting beaten up—

MARTELLINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: —as a—as a boy.

MARTELLINI: Well, that's right. That's what it was like. Yeah. Hitler was no different. Hitler was even worse, I believe.

LEVINE: So you think your brother felt the same way about—

MARTELLINI: Well, my brother—I don't think he understood too much of it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MARTELLINI: He didn't understand much of it.

LEVINE: But he signed up—

MARTELLINI: Yeah, he signed up too. So, yeah, he didn't do any work anywheres except the WPA. I believe he was—I think he was there, my God, until—until he went in the service.

LEVINE: Hmm.

MARTELLINI: Until he went in the service.

LEVINE: So where were you sent in the service?

MARTELLINI: Well, first went to San Francisco. Then we went over to the Midway Islands over in the Pacific. And we were attached with a submarine fleet, you know. We had a—first, we was on my—on what they call a submarine tender. We f—we carried all the ammunition and stuff for the subs. Then later, I was transferred to what they call an auxiliary repair dock, which, you know, for—if a submarine was damaged, we used to go out, pick it up, s—sink it—sink the barge down and pick the ship up and bring it on in.

LEVINE: Wow. So you were in the Navy?

MARTELLINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

MARTELLINI: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Mmm, wow.

MARTELLINI: I was in the National Guards three years before that, but when they asked me to—what—what branch of the services I wanted, I didn't want to be in the Army because I'd automatically went into the Army if I'd said, "Okay," you know. So—

LEVINE: Why did you want—not want to go to the Army?

MARTELLINI: Oh, because I had enough experience in the National Guards [chuckles], marching. [laughs]

LEVINE: Yeah—

MARTELLINI: Maneuvers and all that.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MARTELLINI: I said, "No, I don't want this." So I went in the Navy. I figured, "It's much better in the Navy. It's more drier in the Navy, even though you were out in the water. But you're—it's more—more dry out there. [laughter]

LEVINE: So do—were you glad that you made that choice?

MARTELLINI: No, no. I liked the Navy. The Navy—

LEVINE: Yeah.

MARTELLINI: —was very good. I'm sorry I didn't stay in it, really, but—

LEVINE: Really?

MARTELLINI: You know, after a while, you—after a couple years—

LEVINE: Well, you got out after the war was over, right?

MARTELLINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. But wh—what—do you remember what your thinking was at that point? Why you decided to not stay?

MARTELLINI: Yeah, well, the captain was trying to force me to stay. He says, "Joe." He says, "I'll make you chief petty officer in three years," he says, "if you stay with me." Because my—he was a—a captain that spoke six different languages. See? And he liked the way I spoke Italian. As a matter of fact, I used to censor all the letters that he used to get in Italian. You know, because a lot of—a lot of the words he didn't understand, see? And he used to say, "Joe, what's this mean? What's this mean? How do you say this? How do you say that?" He could talk Italian pretty good, you know, but a lot of things, he didn't. So we strike it pretty good. He used to invite me out to his cabin, you know, and talk, just sit down and talk, read the mail

LEVINE: Hmm.

MARTELLINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MARTELLINI: So—

LEVINE: So when he said he'd make you a chief petty officer in three years, were you tempted?

MARTELLINI: No, I wasn't interested. I wanted to get back, wanted to get out and get back home. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Yeah. Okay. So when did you get married?

MARTELLINI: Before I went in the service, 1939, got married. I had two daughters. My wife and I never—never got along, really, so—

LEVINE: Do you think your marriage was prompted by that fact that you were going to go off to war?

MARTELLINI: No, no.

LEVINE: No?

MARTELLINI: Uh-huh, no. No, not at all.

LEVINE: Oh. Okay, so what—

MARTELLINI: No, at first, I think we were—you know, we felt something for each other but later, hmm, not—not my type. [chuckles] That's all.

LEVINE: H—what are your daughters' names?

MARTELLINI: Theresa and Madeline.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. And—and now, you have another wife?

MARTELLINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: And Wanda.

MARTELLINI: Right.

LEVINE: And what's Wanda's maiden name?

MARTELLINI: Cartw—Bravewright—Waybright.

LEVINE: Wade—W—

MARTELLINI: W—

LEVINE: A-Y—

WANDA: B-R-I-G-H-T.

LEVINE: B-R-I-G-H-T.

MARTELLINI: G-H-T.

LEVINE: Okay. And—and let's see. When you look back on it—when you look back on coming to this country as a 12-year-old boy, do you think it shaped you? It shaped your personality? That event, that changing of cultures and starting over again somewhere else?

MARTELLINI: Well, I thi—I think what it did, more or less, as time went by, I got more ambitious to get somewheres, you know, to make something of myself. And then in 1946, I decided, “I’m going to go in business for myself.” And I’ve been in it ever since, you know. Of course, then I started building new homes, you know, construction.

LEVINE: Wow.

MARTELLINI: Yeah, construction so I’ve been a builder of homes ever since.

LEVINE: Now, do you—you think you wouldn’t have done that if you—if you had stayed—

MARTELLINI: I don’t think so, no. I don’t think so.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And what would you say were your greatest satisfactions? When you look—

MARTELLINI: When I look back?

LEVINE: —back? What—what—what do you think you did or happened that you feel good about, feel satisfied?

MARTELLINI: Well, I feel good that [clears throat] everything turned out better than what I thought when I came to this country, you know. After a couple years, I was still—had doubts, you know. I liked it but I still had doubts. But I think after—overcame that feeling, I don’t know, I think it was just a—just great. You know, I just loved this country then. I—I—my God, I used to get into arguments and fights, anybody that used to talk against this country. You know, whether they are Italians praising Italy or Germans praising Germans. Yeah, I used to get very [unclear] because no country in the world would ever give anybody a chance like they—like they’ve given me. See? I mean, I think—I didn’t have the education then but I still made something of myself. So everybody has a chance to do something. I remem—see, the problem is they haven’t had experience like we’ve had as children over there. You had to do what you were told to do. You had to go what you had—where you were told to go, you know, while you are under Mussolini’s reign. And there’s nothing you could do about it. And to talk about your government the way you want to. Say you don’t like the—for instance, “I don’t like him. To hell with him.” You don’t say that over in those countries. You know, and that’s what made you appreciate this country so much.

LEVINE: Hmm, uh-hmm.

MARTELLINI: So I—I love this country.

LEVINE: You know, I forgot to ask you something and I think you have probably some good stories. Your first impressions. When you first came to this country, things that you saw that you had never seen before.

MARTELLINI: Ah, my God. It was shocking, really. It was amazing. It was amazing to see New York. I mean, there's some of the—of course, didn't have the buildings like you have now. But still, they had buildings up there, you know, crowded in so much. Automobiles. My God! I says, "Look at them automobiles!"

LEVINE: Oh.

MARTELLINI: Ev—everything was amazing that you saw over here.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MARTELLINI: One disappointment we had was everybody over there says, "The [unclear] are painted with gold." Well, they wasn't painted with gold. [laughs] But, oh, I—I think it was—gosh, it was so amazing to see this country. Hmm.

LEVINE: Huh. How about the t—what'd you do, take a train from New York to Baltimore?

MARTELLINI: Uh-hmm. Yes.

LEVINE: Do you remember getting to Baltimore and—

MARTELLINI: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: What'd you find when you got there?

MARTELLINI: Well, it was the—no—nothing exciting because we went from the train onto a friend's house because my father's house hadn't been repaired or finished yet, wasn't ready to move in. So we had some friends that had took us in for several months, you know, until our house was finished. And it was very nice. You know, it was in Holland Town in Baltimore. So it was just ordinary.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MARTELLINI: You know, ordinary, but nothing like New York. When you first come there, after you saw or seen part of New York, you know, then you go down there, nothing like it. You know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MARTELLINI: Especially when you see the Statue of Liberty. Oh, God.

LEVINE: [coughs] You—you knew that? You knew what it was?

MARTELLINI: Oh, yeah. Well, they everybody knows the Statue of Liberty in Italy or anywhere, any country. That's the first thing you know—

LEVINE: Yeah.

MARTELLINI: —is the Statue of Liberty. When you see the Statue of Liberty, that's it. You're in America. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Well, you mentioned when we first met about the different people here that you had never seen.

MARTELLINI: Especially the—

LEVINE: Was that here at Ellis Island?

MARTELLINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: With the—why don't you tell the story—

MARTELLINI: Well—

LEVINE: —of the trunk?

MARTELLINI: After we left Ellis I—you know the Immigration Department. I don't know where—I forget where my father took us. He says, "Look, I'm going to get the tickets for the train." You know, for the train. He says, "Now, you sit on this suitcase." He says, "Don't you move." He figured I'd get lost, you know, me and my brother. We sat there. My sister was with my mother. She was sitting on a bench. I remember that. She sat on the bench and we sit on the suitcases. And this black man, big black man came by to pick up the suitcase. My father must have told him, you know, suitcases there. The porter. Scared me to death. I mean, I was scared to death. I think my eyes jumped out of my head, you know, and started screaming and hollering for my father. I just—oh, my God. Says, "Where—where you are going?" [laughs] I—well, in Italian, said, "[speaking

Italian].” He said—[chuckles] he says, “Quiet.” He says, “Everybody—you can see a lot of ‘em over here.” Says, “It’s not a—you know, nothing to worry about.”

LEVINE: Yeah.

MARTELLINI: But at first, you know, it was funny. It was very funny. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Well, how about what you have in mind to do that you’re looking forward to now?

MARTELLINI: Well—

LEVINE: Are you still doing any work at all?

MARTELLINI: Yes, I’m building a house right now.

LEVINE: Really?

MARTELLINI: Yeah, I expect to maybe build one more after this and then I think I’m going to quit.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MARTELLINI: Yeah, because I—my age has got the best of me, I guess. I’m—because I have a defibrillator, you know, and a pacemaker and—

LEVINE: Well, you certainly look good. You don’t—

MARTELLINI: —and have triple bypass. And I had all that kind of—

LEVINE: Oh, really?

MARTELLINI: —stuff, you know, so—

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

MARTELLINI: So I should take it eas—a little bit easier. But—

LEVINE: Well, what are you looking forward to?

MARTELLINI: —I don’t have to do the work. What—what do you do? You sit in a house all day? The doctor says, “Sit in a house all day. You do the same thing that you’re sitting outside all day,” because I don’t do any work, you know. I le—I got men to do all the work, you know, so it’s better than sitting in a house, worrying about this, worrying about

that. You're outside. You're meeting people. You're doing this; you're doing that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MARTELLINI: Much better.

LEVINE: Well, after you do the two houses, then are you looking forward to doing anything else?

MARTELLINI: I really don't know. [chuckles]

LEVINE: [chuckles]

MARTELLINI: My wife wants me to quit, [chuckles] to take it a little bit easier, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MARTELLINI: Well, how much easier can I get it, can I take? You know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MARTELLINI: And we go to Florida. We have a little place in Florida and we go down there for a couple months of the year, you know. And so I'm really not killing myself. It's—it's nothing that—nothing that will strain any more and—be anymore strain on my heart than what I'm doing. I think it would be more of a strain at home, sitting there worrying, nothing to do. You don't know what to do. You know, you got the lawn to mow but how much lawn can you mow? [laughs] You only got one. And that's only in the summertime.

LEVINE: I—people I know who retire, they say, "I don't know how I had time to work. I'm so busy." [laughter] That's what everybody says. I don't know. But let's see. Just to—to talk about this place, does this have a special meaning, Ellis Island, for you?

MARTELLINI: Yes, it does. Yes, it does because I remember when they first started that program. Iacocca started, you know, was going to—wanted to—to getting donations and all of that—

LEVINE: Yeah.

MARTELLINI: —you know, at the time. And I says, "Man, that's great." I says, "To forget a place like there, with all these foreigners came through, it's a shame because that's what made this country, really. You know,

and it's true. Ninety percent of this population here, I think, was from foreign immigrants.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MARTELLINI: When it comes down to it, you know.

LEVINE: If you go back far enough—

MARTELLINI: You go back far enough—

LEVINE: —everybody came from—

MARTELLINI: Yeah, you go back within a hundred—140 year, 150 years, I think most of 'em were immigrants who came over here.

LEVINE: Did you have contact with, mainly, Italians who had either come over or who had been born here? Or would—were you in communities where there were other ethnic groups?

MARTELLINI: Oh, no. There were other ethnics—groups. Yes, there were Polish. There were Bohemians, Germans. As a matter of fact, friends of mine were all different nationalities but mostly, it was Italians. I think the bigger majority of them were Italians in the area. But it was a m—mixed ethnic groups, which would have made it nice, you know. You know—

LEVINE: How did they—

MARTELLINI: And there was no prejudice at that time.

LEVINE: Not—not—

MARTELLINI: No.

LEVINE: There was no problem—

MARTELLINI: No.

LEVINE: —with mixing the—

MARTELLINI: No.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

MARTELLINI: No.

LEVINE: And were the—from St. Elpidio, did you—did you have, like, a lot of people that you knew that had also come from that little—

MARTELLINI: I didn't but my father did because they were before my time.

LEVINE: I see.

MARTELLINI: See. They we are during his time. See, he had quite a few that—I know there was at least 12 of them living in—down in Little Italy, what they called Little Italy in Baltimore. You know, and my father used to live down there when—before we came over here, see.

LEVINE: Now, how did your mother—

MARTELLINI: So—

LEVINE: —and father finally—they both liked being here or they—

MARTELLINI: Afterwards, yes. But it took—it took 'em a—it took my mother a few years but my father, he loved it because he didn't even want to go back, visit to Italy.

LEVINE: Hmm, uh-hmm.

MARTELLINI: Because you know, it was—in Italy, it was a lot of poverty, no matter when. Even up to—up to 15, 20 years ago, there was still a lot of—was still a lot of poverty over there. Now, it's pretty good but mostly a lot of poverty and no—my father had no desire to have gone back to Italy at all.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MARTELLINI: He loved this country. He liked this country. It gave him a living. He brought his family over. They live—li—we lived a lot better than we would have in Italy. That's for sure, you know.

LEVINE: As—you mean as far as the house and the—

MARTELLINI: House—housing, food

LEVINE: —[unclear].

MARTELLINI: Food. Everything, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MARTELLINI: Oh, yeah. Because houses over there—gosh, shacks cost so much you couldn't afford 'em.

LEVINE: Huh.

MARTELLINI: Yeah, small houses. We had two houses willed to us when my grandfather died and—but the people were so poor over there, they—we rented them out to—they couldn't pay the rent. So we deeded them over to 'em. Just—

LEVINE: Oh.

MARTELLINI: —forget it. Let 'em have 'em and that was it, you know.

LEVINE: Oh.

MARTELLINI: Because it was bad.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, we're near the end of the tape. Is there anything else that you can—

MARTELLINI: [chuckles]

LEVINE: —think of before we close that you might want to say relevant to coming here as a 12-year-old, living your life out here, really—

MARTELLINI: I think that was the greatest adventure of my life, coming here and going through Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Hmm.

MARTELLINI: And I'm not kidding. I—it was a—my God! When I think back of all the people that were behind me and in front of me, God! It—you know, I says, "My gosh. Look at—what's this? A bunch of cattle." You know. [laughs]

LEVINE: It turned out all right though, it sounds like.

MARTELLINI: It—oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah, great.

MARTELLINI: But there was never—out of all those people, you never heard any commotions. Everybody followed in line with their papers in their hand. Remember, that. We had the papers in our hands.

Everybody followed in line, in and out, in and out and no commotion, no pushing or nothing. You think, you know, my God! With all them people, you think, 'Hey, come on, move! Yeah.' It's just the—the Immigration officers, whoever they were—"Come on." They kept pushing us, "Come on. Move, move, move."

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MARTELLINI: [laughs]

LEVINE: But they were—the people were—were they frightened?

MARTELLINI: No. No, they just—you know. You know, they used to imitate something like the foreigners, say, "Hey"—you know, like that. [laughs]

LEVINE: Yeah. But I mean, were you, like, afraid that maybe somebody would be sent back? Was that a—was that a—

MARTELLINI: Yeah, my brother. We had a—a little bit of a problem with my brother. They were afraid that they were going to send him back. But then I don't know how this came about but somebody stepped in. I don't know how this came about but to save—they saved us from—they saved my brother from going back to Italy because my brother was actually mentally—was a little bit shy, like real shy, a little bit handicap in—in his vocabulary and everything else and slow in everything.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MARTELLINI: See? And he overcame it later but at the time he was—so they thought he might be, you know, something wrong with his mind.

LEVINE: So did they—

MARTELLINI: And—

LEVINE: —give him those mental tests, the blocks—

MARTELLINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: —and all that?

MARTELLINI: Uh-hmm. Yeah, they gave him—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MARTELLINI: —a mental test and that's why they—they were going to send him back. They put him on a side and we were worried, you know. I forgot to tell you that. And I don't know. It was an Italian from the Italian Council somewheres came in and I think he more or less stepped in, you know, to verify something. So they—they finally let us in.

LEVINE: They said he was okay.

MARTELLINI: Yeah, he was okay and they let him through because my father was a responsible person and so was the family, you know. It's not that he's going to be abandoned in any way, you know. But that was [unclear].

LEVINE: Yeah.

MARTELLINI: Yeah, that was very close at the time.

LEVINE: Right.

MARTELLINI: That was the only—the only prob—little problem that we had and the only thing that worried us at the time, and that was it. But after the Council, whoever—I—somebody from the Council, from the Italian Council came in and stepped in. It was—held us up for about maybe 45 minutes until this was resolved.

LEVINE: Oh.

MARTELLINI: See, and I remember that.

LEVINE: Ah.

MARTELLINI: So—

LEVINE: Okay. Well, that's—that's great. And I want to thank you so much. I've been speaking with Joseph Marten—Martellini.

MARTELLINI: That's it.

LEVINE: And this has just been a wonderful interview. I'm so happy you—you came today with Wanda for the—for the annivers—the anniversary of the birthday, the birthday of—

MARTELLINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: —the Statue of Liberty.

MARTELLINI: That's it, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, that's great. Okay, well—

MARTELLINI: Well, I certainly appreciate everything. I appreciate this interview because it brings back—

LEVINE: That's great.

MARTELLINI: —my—

LEVINE: You're going to think of everything on the way home.

MARTELLINI: That's right.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

MARTELLINI: When—no, when you're home, you think about one thing one time, another thing another time. But you never come through with all that. You know?

LEVINE: Well, that's wonderful.

MARTELLINI: And—

LEVINE: And now you'll have the tape.

MARTELLINI: Oh, man.

LEVINE: So—so you'll be able to share it with other people too.

MARTELLINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: So I want to thank you—

MARTELLINI: I appreciate—

LEVINE: —very, very much. Okay.

MARTELLINI: No, I thank you.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off.

EI-1261/MARTELLINI

[END OF INTERVIEW]