

EI-128

CONCETTA Di VESTI ZITANI

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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WEST BABYLON, NY

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 2/1994

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 5/1994

ITALY, 1910

PORT: NAPLES

AGE 18

RESIDENCE: ITALY: CARPINO

ZITANI: La Tosca.

LEVINE: Okay. You want to try it now?

ZITANI: (sings "Vissi 'darte" from Puccini's Tosca in Italian)

LEVINE: (interrupting) Beautiful. Let me . . .

ZITANI: (she continues the aria) (break in tape)

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today in West Babylon at the Berkshire Nursing Center with Concetta Zitani, who came from Italy to the United States in the spring of 1910. Mrs. Zitani remembers herself being sixteen. However, given her birth date and the time of arrival it would maybe be eighteen years of age. I'm very happy to be here, and I want to remind you you must speak English so I

understand.

ZITANI: I do the best. Because, you know, in English. (speaks in Italian)

LEVINE: Okay. Now, I'll ask you.

ZITANI: Wait! (speaks in Italian)

LEVINE: No, wait. What I want to ask you is do you remember when you left Carpino, Italy?

ZITANI: Oh, I was sixteen years old.

LEVINE: Yes, now, do you remember Carpino? What was Carpino like?

ZITANI: Well, I couldn't describe Carpino today because when I was there I was just, you know, the (?) and all this. (?) the paper. You know, before, excuse me. Before, the people there, the (?), they were very close. What did they think? Just five years old, taking the kids and sending to the country, you know, no country. Nobody think, they're making us all (?) education. Nobody no talk about it before.

LEVINE: Do you remember the house you lived in?

ZITANI: Well, yeah. My house, it had two (?). And it looked out . . . (speaks in Italian)

LEVINE: In English. Can you tell me about it in English?

ZITANI: My house, they call castle.

LEVINE: It was a big house?

ZITANI: A big house. And there was all of the street, you know, between and coming down. My house. And then they have a, of course, profession, these thing. The way they marry the men, they give apartment in the house. And this (?) my house. My (?). (a rustling noise is heard)

LEVINE: What was your mother's name?

ZITANI: My mother Bramande, Maria Bramande.

LEVINE: And your father's name?

ZITANI: My father DiVesti.

LEVINE: And you had brothers and sisters?

ZITANI: Well, no. Well, you see, I don't remember. I don't think I have a brother. I don't think I have a brother.

LEVINE: Well, I think you had two sisters, Theresa and Rose.

ZITANI: Well, I have the sister.

LEVINE: Do you remember . . .

ZITANI: Let me see. Rosine. And Therese.

LEVINE: And Therese. Okay. Now, do you remember packing up your bags to come to America? Do you remember getting ready to come?

ZITANI: Well, what the thing to bring.

LEVINE: What did you bring?

ZITANI: We bring things we eat, you know, because . . .

LEVINE: What did you eat?

ZITANI: Oh, everything. Everything in the hamper, they brought. No cholesterol, no sugar. Because we can't eat, we know. Because a lot of doctors are from my family.

LEVINE: Now, do you remember going to Naples? Do you remember when you went from Carpino to Naples to catch the big boat to come to America?

ZITANI: Yeah, yeah. We no have no plane at that time. No talk about that time, because that time, I can't answer anything. We never have anything. You know, excuse me, if you want to know something. (speaks in Italian)
You know, a lot of, (Italian), like (?), my people. (?) (Italian)

LEVINE: Now, do you remember when you first came to Hoboken? To Hoboken, when you came to the United States and you went to Hoboken?

ZITANI: You know why we came to Hoboken, because the boat at that time, they (?) Hoboken. You know, at that time, (Italian).

LEVINE: You have to say in English.

ZITANI: That boat, they finish, you know, (?). You know what means? They stopped a lot.

LEVINE: They stopped the boat in Hoboken.

ZITANI: Yeah. And at that time they were stopped, the (?) one come at the same time, stay here too. And all of the, excuse me. All of the supposed to dock this, all Hoboken.

LEVINE: Do you remember being on the boat at all, the boat when you came?

ZITANI: No. Not interested in the boat. No, no (Italian).

LEVINE: Well, you know, I think maybe the best thing to do would be if you could sing me another opera. Would you want to sing once more before we finish? You want to sing? You like when you sing. You want to sing again?

ZITANI: First de La Tosca. (Italian)

LEVINE: Okay. Now, do you want to sing one more song?

ZITANI: (She recites the text to an opera aria in Italian, and then talks about

various operas.)

LEVINE: See, I can't understand you when you speak in Italian.

ZITANI: Look, the same thing. Because (Italian).

LEVINE: Okay. Now, this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here with Concetta Zitani and we are in West Babylon at the Berkshire Nursing Center. Mrs. Zitani is one hundred years old.

ZITANI: Yeah. She is right.

LEVINE: I am signing off now. Tell me again, in English.

ZITANI: Excuse me. The little town, one town we stop one boat. They want to tell me stop our (?). And (?) goes away, wants to go. Because at that time nobody think (Italian)

LEVINE: In English, English.

ZITANI: I have a soprano voice. (Italian)

LEVINE: Did you sing when you were a little girl?

ZITANI: Yeah, ummm.

LEVINE: Did you sing in church?

ZITANI: I had two brother. They went to finish, because (?) school. (Italian) I

don't know. You know, you can't talk from today.

LEVINE: Yes, it's very different, isn't it.

ZITANI: No talk about today, today what do they think?

LEVINE: Let me ask you this, and tell me in English, okay? When you were in Italy, when you were in Carpino, what do you remember about Carpino?

ZITANI: Nothing. Miseria. Miseria (Italian).

LEVINE: In English.

ZITANI: You don't have anything.

LEVINE: You didn't have anything.

ZITANI: No. (Italian)

LEVINE: And did your father come to America first?

ZITANI: No, no. I lost my father. I have a second father. My, then a long time, my father, my second father, they was Guiliera.

LEVINE: Guiliera?

ZITANI: Yeah. (Italian)

LEVINE: In English. Say it in English.

ZITANI: Everyone, the children, big. You know (?). (Italian)

LEVINE: English, English.

ZITANI: (Italian)

LEVINE: Can you say it in English?

ZITANI: My father very big party for my birthday.

LEVINE: Your father had a big party for your birthday?

ZITANI: I lost my husband. I marry, we have very short life, my husband. So I think I have three children. I have one, I have two boys and I have Theresa. (a rustling noise is heard) (Italian)

LEVINE: Say it in English.

ZITANI: I have to take this, my children, and bring to the, the boy. No, yeah, to school.

LEVINE: You had to bring your boys to school?

ZITANI: No. (Italian) I lost my husband.

LEVINE: Yes.

ZITANI: So they leave me, they leave me three children. As soon I have to go, you

know, send the children to, I said I take the children to school. I went to work. My children (?), the boys from my children.

LEVINE: Now, what did you do when you went to work? What kind of work?

ZITANI: When I lost?

LEVINE: What did you do, after you lost your husband, what kind of work?

ZITANI: This is what I say. I lost my husband. So I was (?). As soon I sent my children to work on a farm. I send my children in school. I went to work. I go, three children, all of mine . . .

LEVINE: You raised your three children by yourself?

ZITANI: I raised three children.

LEVINE: That's wonderful.

ZITANI: When I start to work, they leave. (Italian)

LEVINE: Let me ask you this question.

ZITANI: Anything you want, ask.

LEVINE: Thank you. Okay, now, since you came to this country, are you glad that you came here? Are you glad that you came from Italy?

ZITANI: I don't think so.

LEVINE: No? You'd rather be . . .

ZITANI: Because if we had a house, all right (?). But (Italian).

LEVINE: Speak English.

ZITANI: My town there was opera, (?). Everything was coming in America.

LEVINE: Not like that.

ZITANI: Everyone they have to (?) for the house, you know. They take me back three times.

LEVINE: Three times, wow.

ZITANI: I went nice, special. And I come here. I come. For the boat, not for plane, because we don't have no planes. (Italian)

LEVINE: In English. Say it in English.

ZITANI: We have the time. (Italian)

LEVINE: Can you tell me, do you remember when you saw the Statue of Liberty, when you were on the boat and you came and you saw the Statue?

ZITANI: (Italian)

LEVINE: Remember when you were on the boat you left Italy and you came to the

United States?

ZITANI: We came on a boat.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, how do you feel about being one hundred years old?

ZITANI: Nothing!

LEVINE: Nothing?

ZITANI: This is the thing. (Italian)

LEVINE: Can you say it in English?

ZITANI: It's a hole I see, you know. (Italian)

LEVINE: Can you say it in English?

ZITANI: When they most of the vacation, this student they come in the town, because they (Italian).

LEVINE: In English, in English.

ZITANI: (?) grammar school. (Italian)

LEVINE: You like to speak Italian more than English, don't you? (they laugh)

ZITANI: When I come in America, my town, we never have no dance, dance. We no have no school to dance. I look the feet. They take it to dance, I

dance. They ask me to start a school of dance. (Italian) My husband, he's different. They come from a rich family. (Italian) You know, (?)?

LEVINE: Yes.

ZITANI: (Italian)

LEVINE: Can you say it in English?

ZITANI: We make the bread. (Italian) My father-in-law, staring like this. (Italian) Anything. (Italian)

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I'm going to sign off now. This is Janet Levine.

ZITANI: Anything you want to see you come to me.

LEVINE: I want to say I liked talking to you very much even though I don't understand Italian.