

EI-133

ROSARIO JOSEPH SCORDO

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

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SICILY, 1922

PORT: NAPLES

AGE 18

RESIDENCES: SICILY: RIPOSTO

US: PLEASANTVILLE, NY

SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Wednesday, April 8, 1991. I'm here at the Ellis Island Recording Studio with Rosario Scordo, who came from Sicily in 1922 when he was eighteen years old. Good morning, sir.

SCORDO: Good morning.

SIGRIST: Could you please give me your full name and your date of birth.

SCORDO: Rosario Scordo.

SIGRIST: And your birthday, please.

SCORDO: Oh. That's June 10, 1904.

SIGRIST: I see. Where were you born?

SCORDO: In Sicily.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the town?

SCORDO: Riposto.

SIGRIST: Could you spell that, please?

SCORDO: Yeah, sure. R-I-P-O-S-T-O.

SIGRIST: What kind of a town was this?

SCORDO: Well, I don't know. It's a pretty good town. All different. Most of the time it's for fisherman, but there's a different trade, a lot of traders.

SIGRIST: Where in Sicily is the town? What part of Sicily?

SCORDO: In Catania, Provincia de Catania.

SIGRIST: So it's on the coast.

SCORDO: On the east coast, yes.

SIGRIST: What did the town look like?

SCORDO: Well, from far away it looks very nice, a little bit down hill, because it's a mountain. They had two mountains behind. Mount Etna. And it was nice, a pretty good village. Right now, when I left it was a small village, but when I went back then it was bigger. It changed.

SIGRIST: Was it a crowded place to live?

SCORDO: Well, it was.

SIGRIST: Did you live right in town?

SCORDO: In town, yeah.

SIGRIST: Could you describe for me the house that you lived in?

SCORDO: Well, the house there, it's a one thing to get through the street. They're very small and narrow. You put one small car in that street, it wasn't too good for that. And the houses, they're all about the same. Made out of stones, lime and stones, and that's it.

SIGRIST: How many rooms did your house have?

SCORDO: Oh, my house was one, two, three, four rooms.

SIGRIST: How many of you lived in that house?

SCORDO: Six kids. My father and mother.

SIGRIST: So it was crowded.

SCORDO: Oh, yeah. (he laughs) It was crowded.

SIGRIST: What was your dad's name?

SCORDO: Philip, Phil.

SIGRIST: And what did he do for a living?

SCORDO: Fisherman. He had a boat.

SIGRIST: And your mother's name?

SCORDO: Agatha.

SIGRIST: Agatha.

SCORDO: Agatha.

SIGRIST: What was her maiden name?

SCORDO: Casciola.

SIGRIST: Could you spell that, please?

SCORDO: C-A-S, S-C, S-C, S-C-I-O-L-A.

SIGRIST: And what was your mother like as a person?

SCORDO: Well, you know the old people, they never go out of the house. They live there, they're born there, they live there, they die there. One thing she used to go to church every morning, every morning, five o'clock, rain or shine.

SIGRIST: So she was very religious.

SCORDO: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: What did your mother look like?

SCORDO: She was not a big woman. A nice looking woman. Very nice dress maker. Everybody went there to have (?) for her.

SIGRIST: How about your dad? Talk to me a little bit about what he did as a fisherman owning his own boat. Did he have other men who worked for him?

SCORDO: Oh, yeah, yeah. They were probably all in the family, the cousins, they all work for him. Their life was to go out, about thirty, forty miles out and set their fishing line over there and go back two days after to pick them up. They used to fish, that's one type of shark that you can't get no place unless it's about a half a mile, a mile deep. They live on the bottom over there. And the meat, the shark, was better than any kind of fish in the water. That's what they used to do. And they used to have a contract to send to big cities in Italy, in northern Italy. They use them in the restaurants.

SIGRIST: So this is what, this is what were primarily going out to fish for, the shark.

SCORDO: That's right.

SIGRIST: When you were a boy, did you ever go out with your father on his boat?

SCORDO: Yeah. When we was on vacation we used to go out. When it was good weather, I used to go out over there and get the (?), when I was a boy. I mean nine, ten

years old.

SIGRIST: Was that, did you enjoy?

SCORDO: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Obviously you became a fisherman later, so. Let's talk a little bit about your brothers and sisters. You said there were six of you.

SCORDO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So who were they? What were their names?

SCORDO: One was Sam, Salvador. Then was Giovanna. Then was Dominick. Then was me. Then there was another sister and another brother. They're still living.

SIGRIST: I see. Did you have your own bedroom in this house, or did you have to stay in . . .

SCORDO: All the boys were together.

SIGRIST: So not a lot of privacy then.

SCORDO: Oh, no.

SIGRIST: Talk to me about sort of everyday life when you were a kid growing up. For instance, what foods did you eat?

SCORDO: Well, the food over there, we used to eat at the time, I don't know about

now, it was mostly fish, vegetables, meats once in a while. We didn't like meat. And not many macaroni, because they say that the Italian people eat macaroni. It isn't true. (he laughs) Never eat it. Maybe one day in two or three weeks.

SIGRIST: You say vegetables. Now, did you have a little garden plot behind your house?

SCORDO: No, we used to buy them.

SIGRIST: Who used to do the shopping for the family?

SCORDO: The men, not the women, at that time. Now I think the woman goes out, but the woman never go to the market to buy anything.

SIGRIST: So it was your dad that did the cooking, or who did the shopping. That's interesting. What was the woman's role in the house? What was your mother responsible for doing at home?

SCORDO: Well, take care of the kids, take care of the house. Many things was, baking the bread once a week, bread, always fresh bread.

SIGRIST: Do you remember your mother baking the bread?

SCORDO: Oh, sure.

SIGRIST: Did you ever help her as a little kid?

SCORDO: No. (he laughs) She wouldn't let me go anywhere near, but she was (?).

She used to get up oh, about two or three o'clock in the morning to make the dough, fix everything, then make the oven hot, and they put it in there, in the oven. After about five or so they, they used to turn it around, the bread, so it would be all cooked.

SIGRIST: Did you have your own bake oven in the house, or did you have to go . . .

SCORDO: No, on the outside.

SIGRIST: Was it just your own, or did you share it with other people?

SCORDO: No, no, no. Our own. Everybody, we had our own.

SIGRIST: Did you have like a little backyard?

SCORDO: Yes. Well, we had a terrace on top. They all got a terrace on top. But in the backyard there's a very small, small, about, I don't know, about fifteen, twenty feet square.

SIGRIST: Like a little city lot, actually.

SCORDO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, that's interesting. So you had your own bake oven there. Talk to me a little bit about school life. Did you go to school when you were a kid?

SCORDO: Oh, yeah. I went to school to fourteen. I go to school, I went when I was five years old to the convent for one year, from five to six, during the day, and then I used to go back. They used to pick me up after school. Then I went to regular school.

SIGRIST: How come you were sent to a convent for just one year? Was that the school only lasted one year, or . . .

SCORDO: No, no. From five to six at the convent. Six, you go to school, regular school. It was before six.

SIGRIST: I see. Sort of like kindergarten, the nuns ran a kindergarten.

SCORDO: You had to pay over there. It wasn't for free. The nuns used to run the place.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any, do you have any memories of being in school with the nuns?

SCORDO: Oh, sure.

SIGRIST: What do you remember when you think about it?

SCORDO: Well, they used to feed us good. That's one thing, they used to feed us good. But if you make a mistake, the stick over there. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Did you walk to school yourself? Did your mother walk with you, or . . .

SCORDO: Yeah. One of my uncles or mother. They walk, but it was a good ten minutes' walk from one end to the other.

SIGRIST: Did you have other family in this town, like grandparents, or . . .

SCORDO: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you have grandparents that were alive when you were a child?

SCORDO: That time, yeah.

SIGRIST: Talk to me about your grandparents. Let's say, how about your mother's parents? Were they alive?

SCORDO: My mother's parents? No.

SIGRIST: But your dad's parents?

SCORDO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And do you remember them?

SCORDO: Oh, I remember them.

SIGRIST: Okay. Well, talk to me a little bit about your dad's parents then.

SCORDO: Well, the father, my grandfather, he was a fisherman, too. He had his own boat. And then the eyes went bad, cataracts. He needed an operation to fix them. He couldn't see no more. Now they all make mistakes once in a while. And there was, he couldn't go out no more anyway if they couldn't see. He used to go out, used to take him out over there, on the boat and stuff, and then they had to go back home. My grandmother, do nothing. Sit down, reading, mending clothes. Over there they knit the socks, they do themselves clothes. That's about all.

SIGRIST: As a kid, did you ever go and stay with your grandparents at all?

SCORDO: They were close by, almost close feet.

SIGRIST: I see. Were both of your parents from this town?

SCORDO: No. My mother was from a different town, a small town.

SIGRIST: How did your mother meet your father?

SCORDO: That I don't know. I know her father was a butcher.

SIGRIST: Her father was a butcher.

SCORDO: Yeah. Her father, I know.

SIGRIST: That's interesting in a country that doesn't necessarily eat a lot of meat, that he would be a butcher.

SCORDO: Well, there were about three or four butcher shops over there. The village was a good size. It wasn't that small. And a lot of people used to fish and eat the fish. It was cheaper than meat at the time, much cheaper.

SIGRIST: Do you remember one way your mother prepared fish? Did you have like a favorite kind of fish and a favorite kind of way of . . .

SCORDO: There's a lot of ways we used to prepare fish over there. You could eat the same fish even every day. You wouldn't know the difference. You know if it was the

same one, you wouldn't. It's prepared a different way that it wouldn't taste the same.

SIGRIST: I see. Hmm. Well, let's talk a little bit about as you're getting older, and for instance how did you start being a fisherman?

SCORDO: Well, I went, I was sixteen years old. Somebody asked my father for letting me go on his boat. To run a boat you have to have a license. You've got to pass the Coast Guard and all that test and everything. So I got the license. It was an ordinary boat, a small boat about, I don't know, about thirty-five, forty feet boat. After that I think there were five of us, four boys. I was the oldest one. So the one new boy, you take a lot of chance, and we took a chance. We had more fish than anybody else. They used to call us until we're crazy. My mother begged us to never go back, stick around. If I was now I'd never do that. It was dangerous. It wasn't easy.

SIGRIST: But you were young.

SCORDO: I didn't think about that.

SIGRIST: You were reckless.

SCORDO: What the heck. A lot of times we had to go different places. We couldn't go back where we come from with the boat. It was so rough we had to go about fifteen, twenty miles out of the way to go to a different place to get in with the boat. The waves over there were rough.

SIGRIST: Were you ever on the boat during a terrible storm?

SCORDO: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: What was that like?

SCORDO: (he laughs) That is like you're in hell.

SIGRIST: Yeah, because these are little boats, right? Well, I mean, they're not huge boats.

SCORDO: They're made to withstand big storm, but that's not easy. You see twenty-five feet wave on top of you till that breaks, that's the end of it, go up, down, go up and down. They break, even if it's a hundred feet boat, cut it in half. Those waves, people don't believe me. Those waves could go about twenty feet high way out in deep water.

SIGRIST: Did your mother worry about you?

SCORDO: Oh, they worry all the time. They used to say to us, "When you get big, if you want fish, you buy them. Don't go get it." "Ma, get away from me." About three times we almost lost ourselves with a big storm, hurricane.

SIGRIST: But you really enjoyed doing it.

SCORDO: Yeah. But after that passed you forget all about it. After the storm pass you forget all about it.

SIGRIST: Did you, were you also interested in capturing this particular kind of shark, catching this, because that's what . . .

SCORDO: Sure.

SIGRIST: Because you got the most money for this particular . . .

SCORDO: Well, that's, there's a lot of money in that. Sometimes for five, six months it wasn't (?), six months or more. My father used to supply the money for the other ones during the boat. But it was a lot of fun going for fish. Those fish sometimes they're about five or six tons.

SIGRIST: Big.

SCORDO: Oh, they're big.

SIGRIST: Did you ever get bitten by a fish?

SCORDO: (he laughs) Oh, not those! And they used to use the liver, they used to use the liver for make oil. The liver is almost the size of the fish. The fish is about one ton, over there you've got about half a ton of liver.

SIGRIST: Wow.

SCORDO: So they used to melt the liver, pass it between screens, (?). And then they used to, the government used to come and check it, seal it. That's the oil they used to use for the machines. I don't know. Okay. We were never supposed to use that oil, one steal it, it belongs to the state.

SIGRIST: That's very interesting. One thing I want to ask you is was your family or

your town affected at all by World War I, that you remember?

SCORDO: I was there. I remember one thing. Most of the time most of the guy came out to America. Fourteen, fifteen years old and you see those bodies floating all over the water. In the water, you know, they used to torpedo ships all over the place. That's a bad impression for a young boy. Sometimes he was dead, his dead, full body over there, and half some place else.

SIGRIST: And that's what you saw, mostly, were the bodies floating in the water.

SCORDO: Oh, yeah. In the water, yeah. We used to see the submarine come up. They didn't bother us. They didn't bother fishing boat at all. If it was a commotion for some reason, they would sink. They would let the people go out, get out the boat and go with the lifeguards, and sink the ship. I remember, see, a lot of the times they used to come up, the subs there, see them, and they go away again.

SIGRIST: Did that ever make you nervous if you saw a sub come up? No, because you knew they wouldn't hurt you.

SCORDO: No. But, in fact, one time we had about four of those fish, take one by one. They would watch it. They wouldn't bother anybody. One time there was three of those big schools. They got them all. They used to let the people go on the boat, get out, put the dynamite, and blow up the ships, and that's it.

SIGRIST: That must have been a very, you say you weren't frightened, but, I mean, very tense.

SCORDO: No. (he coughs) The most extent, these people, dead bodies, here and there in the water.

SIGRIST: And that's what you remember the most, those bodies.

SCORDO: People were dead. Those boys over there. And one equipment on top there. That's war. You can't do anything about.

SIGRIST: Sure. Well, let me ask you, why did you want to come to America?

SCORDO: Well, that's the reasons I got tired. I didn't want to get caught in between another war. Because over there, you know, every twenty years there's a war going no matter what it is. So in 1922 I took off.

SIGRIST: Did you have relatives in America?

SCORDO: My brother, yeah.

SIGRIST: When did he come over?

SCORDO: To America?

SIGRIST: Your brother.

SCORDO: Well, he was in the navy. As soon as he got off the navy he come to America.

SIGRIST: Did he write you letters about America?

SCORDO: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: What did he say? Do you remember?

SCORDO: Not much.

SIGRIST: What did, what idea of America did you have?

SCORDO: Well, the idea, well, to begin with I didn't want to stay. I didn't like it. At that time, especially people with no training, they used to treat you like dirt.

SIGRIST: When you were in Sicily, before you came, when you were in Sicily, what did you know about America?

SCORDO: Nothing.

SIGRIST: You just knew it was a place to go.

SCORDO: Nothing, yeah. A better country. That's all. We knew that. But when I came over to the United States, the first experience I didn't like was they were making the ditches for the building over there, for the Conde Building. And they work in the ditch. When I went over, used to work in the ditch. There was a man on top there, a boss, what they call a boss there. And they started pushing people around. And I was eighteen years old, and he said to me, "Hurry up." At that time I didn't understand what hurry up was. But it was a mistake that he made was he threw some dirt on top of me. I got a heavy wood shovel. He says to me, he was running. I was after him. I would

have kill him with a shovel. But you don't treat people like animals. And then the owner, the contractor saw everything, and he called somebody, he said, "Come over here." I said, "What the heck? What do we got here?" He come around. But then, of course, somebody was (?). He said, "Yeah, it's true. That's how it does." So the man, he called him back in there. He paid him off. He said, "I have a trouble maker on the job, a trouble maker."

SIGRIST: And you were very surprised you would be treated like this.

SCORDO: Oh, yeah. After that I say I want to get a trade, and that's it.

SIGRIST: But, of course, you had a trade in Sicily. You know . . .

SCORDO: Yeah, but not over here.

SIGRIST: Not over here.

SCORDO: So I wanted to get a trade in the building trade. So I learned to do the plaster, do the plaster inside the building.

SIGRIST: Well, good. Well, let's get you to America, and then we can talk about that.

SCORDO: I work. It was nice. It wasn't bad, but still in all, we had to work, we had to produce.

SIGRIST: Sure. Do you remember packing when you were leaving? What did you

take with you when you left for America?

SCORDO: Not much. Not much. One suitcase, that's all.

SIGRIST: Do you remember saying goodbye to everyone?

SCORDO: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: How did your parents feel about you going?

SCORDO: How did they feel? I don't know. I mean, (?). They didn't feel so good, but what the heck. I mean, it was bad stuff for better. Besides, the experience we had on sea with the storms, they all (?). And they know that I didn't, nobody liked that. People still do that, but they're crazy.

SIGRIST: Did you have any regrets about leaving Sicily?

SCORDO: No.

SIGRIST: Did you feel sad when you were leaving, or you were glad to leave?

SCORDO: No, no. I was glad to leave.

SIGRIST: Where did you leave from? What port?

SCORDO: Naples.

SIGRIST: So how did you get from Sicily over to Naples?

SCORDO: By train.

SIGRIST: And then, and then do you remember the name of the boat?

SCORDO: The Condo Rosso.

SIGRIST: Condo . . .

SCORDO: Condo Rosso. C-O-N-D-O R-O-S-S-O.

SIGRIST: And what were your accommodations like on the boat?

SCORDO: Well, on the boat, all the men, they were separate from the women. All the men that they had there, all in like an open room. There was two decks. Well, let's see, about forty, fifty men to each. The women, they had cabins, two or three each a cabin.

SIGRIST: Were these comfortable accommodations, this big room with all these men? I mean, what . . .

SCORDO: They do the best, that's all, because, I don't know. There were two decks, and then they asked which deck you want? I said, "Top one." And of course, although you get somebody that's never been in the ocean, before you know it he'd be all over you.

SIGRIST: That's right. Of course, you know, you're an old hand at being on the water.

SCORDO: It didn't bother me.

SIGRIST: Did people get sick on the boat?

SCORDO: Oh, yeah. Oh! For the first four days it was like a bathtub. Nice. But four days we had a big storm, full four days. Everybody was dead, all over the deck, the smell. You'd die with the smell. There was a dizzy, there was supposed to be a woman to take care of me there. Of course, I was on the edge. But I was eighteen, a few days after eighteen, and I ended up taking care of her. To go into a woman, you couldn't go unless you had a paper to show who you were. So she had to tell them that I was her cousin.

SIGRIST: Was she a friend of the family's or . . .

SCORDO: No, a friend. And I went crazy looking for her. One time she wanted something, and she wanted perfume, and then she wanted an egg, it wasn't cooked right. Some salad. Oh!

SIGRIST: She kept you hopping.

SCORDO: (he laughs) Up and down, up and down, to bother me.

SIGRIST: What did they feed you on the boat?

SCORDO: They feed you. Well, to tell the truth the boat, the food they give you was a lot, it wasn't good. The meat wasn't good.

SIGRIST: Terrible.

SCORDO: Terrible, unless you buy your own food. I only ate the food once in a while, once. Then I have to put down. A steak at that time, a steak was about thirty, twenty-five cents, thirty cents.

SIGRIST: Was there a dining room for you on the boat?

SCORDO: Oh, yeah. And not only that, see, they gave ten dishes and cups, ten to each table, and you had to wash your own dishes. And when it come to me, I was the second one to wash. I said, "All right. I'll wash the dishes." I put them all in the bag they give to you, cups and everything. I threw them all overboard. I didn't want to wash the dishes. I threw them overboard. When they come to eat, "I put the dishes up on the stove. I don't know where they went." They give another set. So by the time come I didn't have to wash them no more, or they would have been overboard, too.

SIGRIST: That's a good story.

SCORDO: But the food was, well, I don't know. It was lousy in your life.

SIGRIST: What's a good memory that you have about being on the boat? What was fun or exciting about being on the boat?

SCORDO: Oh, there was one thing over there. There were people playing accordions, all the people dancing when it was weather, fine weather, it was nice. In fact, if you go on the cruise. But as soon as it started to move around . . .

SIGRIST: When the boat hit the Atlantic, when you were out in big water did you feel different about being on the water than you had being in your fishing boat?

SCORDO: No. Well, I feel that was a big boat. You could never go overboard. It didn't bother me.

SIGRIST: So it didn't really make a difference to you.

SCORDO: No difference.

SIGRIST: Well, how long were you on the boat? Do you remember how long the boat ride was?

SCORDO: About ten days to go across.

SIGRIST: Ten days. All right. Well, we're going to pause right now and Kevin is going to flip the tape and we'll continue with the story.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: Okay. So you were on the boat for ten days. Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

SCORDO: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you . . .

SCORDO: We came in, we come in about, oh, about five o'clock in the morning I come in. I heard all the commotion and I was, people said, "What's going on up there?" And I went up, and the people were hollering, "The Statue of Liberty!" There was a lot of people. They went up, everyone.

SIGRIST: Did you know what the Statue of Liberty was?

SCORDO: No. I thought it was just a, big statue, that's all. A big statue. Then you learn, around you learn those things. And then they were, that's the one thing I'm not sure. There was a disease on the boat. There were two boats that got in at the same time, a Greek boat and an Italian boat. So they both, quarantined all the boat. The boat, both were quarantined. And I don't forget it. Every way, oh, it was days after to come in the States, we had to stay in here. I remember that, the one thing I remember about it, I was, I think I was, we came out, because the food changed, different altogether. There was no more food from the boat. It was different. Everything, I remember, there was eggs, scrambled eggs, milk, some kind of egg, ham, a piece of ham with that. All different stuff that was never got on the boat. That's why I thought we were (?). I remember walking out. But to say the truth, the day we got off of the boat, I don't remember.

SIGRIST: So you were brought to Ellis Island?

SCORDO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And why exactly were you brought to Ellis Island? Because they thought there was a disease?

SCORDO: There was. They found somebody sick. And we had to stay ten days before they let us out. After that, I remember we went to those, people go around to pass the inspection and everything, to the doctors over there. And then you see all different people talking different languages, you know. And the Italian people who were over there, there were about six or eight of us, they took us to the station, to the railroad station, and they didn't leave us. My brother was there. He says to my brother, that's the (?), he said to my brother, "I don't care if he's your brother. I'm responsible until I put you on the train." Then, then he came. He come up to the train, give the conductor there, whatever it was, the papers, and took off.

SIGRIST: Let's talk a little bit about Ellis Island since you were here for ten days. What sticks out in your mind the most from your stay at Ellis Island? What impressed you the most about this place?

SCORDO: Well, what impressed me was that, I didn't know what I got into, if it was good or bad. So I couldn't say. The one thing I could say about there, they treat you good. That's the one thing I can say.

SIGRIST: Here they treated you good.

SCORDO: They treated you good. Nothing like the boat.

SIGRIST: Was it crowded at Ellis?

SCORDO: It was.

SIGRIST: What were your accommodations like? Where did you stay?

SCORDO: Well, I can't remember that. That's the one thing I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Were you allowed outside at all?

SCORDO: Yeah, I was outside. I remember going outside. Now, I don't know if it was when we go off the boat, or where we were at. Because oh, at that time there were so many people, this way, the other way, they have to push you around together.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you were thinking at this time? I mean, were you, were you frightened about being here?

SCORDO: No.

SIGRIST: Annoyed about being here?

SCORDO: No, I wasn't frightened. To me it was a different experience. That's it. That's about all.

SIGRIST: Was the woman traveling companion, was she here also?

SCORDO: Yeah, but not in the same place. Different department. Women were separate. After got off the boat, I didn't see her.

SIGRIST: Did they supply any kind of entertainment for you here?

SCORDO: No.

SIGRIST: What did you do all day?

SCORDO: Nothing. (he laughs) Killed time, that's all.

SIGRIST: There was just nothing to do. Do you remember what kind of physicals, what kind of physical exams you had?

SCORDO: Well, they had, mostly they looked at the eyes and chest, the chest, the lungs. That's about all.

SIGRIST: Do you remember eating at Ellis Island?

SCORDO: Oh, yeah. I remember eating over there. That's what I remember the most, eating at the tables. There were so many tables over there. And they had to wash dishes. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, so, describe to me again how you got off of Ellis Island, how, where you went when you could leave.

SCORDO: When we were leaving from here?

SIGRIST: Yeah.

SCORDO: Well, from here they took to Grand Central Station.

SIGRIST: Who took you?

SCORDO: This man, one man was responsible. We had to go to, we was six or eight

boys. He took over there. He stayed there, oh, about three-quarters of an hour, we went to the train. He put us on the seat, get a conductor, tell him where to get off, the place to get off. He took off, and that's it. When I got off the train it was dark. I said to my brother, "I got to live over here in the woods?" (he laughs) He said, "This is the woods?" He said, "Oh, no, you'll like it. You'll get, you'll like this after a while."

SIGRIST: What was it like seeing your brother again?

SCORDO: Well, my brother was about a year here before me he left, so it wasn't that much difference.

SIGRIST: So where did he take you to then?

SCORDO: Pleasantville, in New York, over here.

SIGRIST: In Westchester County.

SCORDO: Westchester County, yeah. Which is, I go to work, too. They got me job over Manfield place, Eugene Manfield, over there. I didn't like that. Too rough.

SIGRIST: Pleasantville, you said it was in the woods.

SCORDO: Yeah, at night time. At that time, forget it. 1922 there was no cars. Horse and wagons. And believe me, there was only one car in Pleasantville. One car. One policeman. That's all. He got to beat the horse.

SIGRIST: Where did your brother live?

SCORDO: In Pleasantville.

SIGRIST: I mean, what kind of a house or an apartment?

SCORDO: The same house. No, the same house. We pay so much a month, room and board. It was all right.

SIGRIST: And what was the first job he got you, or you got yourself?

SCORDO: The job?

SIGRIST: The first job you got.

SCORDO: For (?), working with Eugene, for Manfield. And the same thing, digging the thing, moving the ground. That wasn't my job. I never wanted to do that. So I, one week was finished. Then I work on the building (?) now, building construction over there.

SIGRIST: Which is what you wanted to do.

SCORDO: Yeah. That's what I wanted.

SIGRIST: Did you, tell me what was the most different about America then, from Sicily? What struck you as being the most different, the hardest thing to adjust to?

SCORDO: Well, it was different. For me it was different because I went from one profession to another, from fisherman to be a contractor. After two years I was on my own, contractor. Sub-contractor, yeah. There was a lot of difference. And it's much

better. I'd say a hundred percent the better.

SIGRIST: And that was the hardest thing for you. How about learning English? How did you learn English?

SCORDO: Well, I went to school, you know, I couldn't go to school, but I supported myself. I went to school for one month, in that school. One month, four times, two hours a night.

SIGRIST: This was like night school.

SCORDO: Night school. I remember the teacher told me, "Go back home and go to high school next year." I said, "I'm going to go to high school? Who's going to support me?"

SIGRIST: Because you were so much older.

SCORDO: I didn't go. I remember she said to me, "You'll be sorry some day." And she was true. Because after about three years I worked in construction I got tired how they push people around. I said, "Nobody's going to push me around like that." After we change again. I became a contractor. I did pretty good until the Depression come down. I don't know if you know about the Depression.

SIGRIST: Hard times for everyone.

SCORDO: Hard times. People killed themselves. That's when I lost all my money, too. I had a big contract, a big development to do, and twenty thousand dollars I had on

my own. That's what I lost.

SIGRIST: Were you still in Pleasantville at that point?

SCORDO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: You stayed up there.

SCORDO: I didn't go up. I started again after, after the other war started. Everything picks up.

SIGRIST: Did you maintain any kind of religious life in America? Were you a religious person at all?

SCORDO: Oh, yeah. I used to go to church once a week.

SIGRIST: Was there a large Italian community in Pleasantville?

SCORDO: No, small. Now it's big. By that time it was small. I imagine about maybe five or six hundred people.

SIGRIST: And primarily they were laborers?

SCORDO: No. They were, people were coming down New York, straight from Pleasantville to New York, working in the city. There were doctors there. Not many, different type people.

SIGRIST: Did you every miss Sicily when you were here? Not at all.

SCORDO: No. When you leave young, you forget all about it.

SIGRIST: When you wanted to leave Sicily in the first place. Did you miss being a fisherman?

SCORDO: Well, yeah. That, yes. I used to go fishing once in a while from, I used to go to Connecticut, in Connecticut to fish maybe once a month, I used to go fishing. That's why I'm in Florida. I said, "When I retire I want to be some place where I'm going to go fishing."

SIGRIST: Sure, big fish down there.

SCORDO: A lot of fish.

SIGRIST: Did you stay in contact with your parents and your family?

SCORDO: Oh, yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did any other members of your family ever come to America to live?

SCORDO: Oh, yeah. Another brother and a sister. Now they're both dead. My other brother was a little older than me, and my sister was young. And I have a brother that's ninety-six. 1896, that makes him about ninety-six years old.

SIGRIST: Ninety-six years old.

SCORDO: Yeah. He still goes.

SIGRIST: Does he live in Florida also, or?

SCORDO: No, he left. His wife didn't want to come over here. She had a store over there, the bigger business, she didn't want to leave it over there.

SIGRIST: Did, talk a little bit about, have you been back to Sicily to visit later on in your adult life?

SCORDO: Oh, yeah. We went three times.

SIGRIST: What is it like when you go back there? What do you feel when you go back?

SCORDO: Different, different. There's nothing, there's nothing left than when I left, nothing. People are different. I don't know. Everything is different. You go in a strange place.

SIGRIST: So it's almost as if you have no connection with it any more.

SCORDO: That's right. You go in a strange place.

SIGRIST: Do you stil have relatives there in the town?

SCORDO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Are they still all fishermen?

SCORDO: No. They're not fisherman. My brother is a cabinet maker. That's what it

is, too, my brother. And the other one is ninety-six years old. He retired, I don't know from what work.

SIGRIST: I see. But it's just, when you've been there there's just almost no connection.

SCORDO: No. I would never like to live there. It's a lot of difference. It's all right to go for a visit, all right, everything's different, but not to live there.

SIGRIST: Well, this is a good point for me to ask your final question to you, although I think I know the answer. Are you happy that you came to America?

SCORDO: Oh, sure.

SIGRIST: Are you happy you made that decision?

SCORDO: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: How do you think your life would have been different if you had stayed in Sicily?

SCORDO: I don't know. I don't think it would have been, uh, to tell the truth, I don't think I would have liked. When I went in 1961 people, I'm not staying. No friend in Sicily. People were not friends with one another. One is afraid for the other one. I don't know. It's funny. I would never like to be like that.

SIGRIST: You're an American now.

SCORDO: Not like over here you can talk anything and don't worry about it. You don't know who you talk to over there. They're still like that. And they're lazy. Nobody works. You see young people, they don't work. How the heck are they living? The government send them money. They get like a pension. No, no pension, so much a month, they give it to you, and people no work.

SIGRIST: Well, that could be the Americans too, to a certain extent. (he laughs)

SCORDO: Well, that way, the young people over there, they don't want to work, except.

SIGRIST: Well, not you when you were young. You were out in your fishing boat and working very hard.

SCORDO: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Those were different days.

SCORDO: I used to go out about two or three o'clock in the morning, and in the afternoon about two o'clock, one o'clock we were home.

SIGRIST: It was hard work, what you did.

SCORDO: That's what it is. But I used to like it. Same thing over here. I used to like to work over here. I didn't say anything against it over here. People, they're good. I mean, you treated people good, they treat you good.

SIGRIST: Sure.

SCORDO: That's the way I figure.

SIGRIST: Well, Mr. Scordo, I want to thank you for coming out to Ellis Island and for spending some time with us.

SCORDO: It was a pleasure.

SIGRIST: And telling us your life story. It was a pleasure meeting you.

SCORDO: It's great to see the place again. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Yeah. They've done a lot of work on it since you were here last. Anyway, thank you very much.

SCORDO: You're welcome.

SIGRIST: And this is Paul Sigrist signing off for the National Park Service with Rosario Scordo.