

EI-1361

ANTHONY VIOLA, SR.

BIRTHDATE: APRIL 20TH, 1915

INTERVIEW DATE: JANUARY 2ND, 2005

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, Ph.D.

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: DENNIS ZEVELOFF

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RESIDENCES:

- **ITALY: BOUNOBITACOLO, SANZA, SALERNO**
- **USA: NY, PEEKSKILL, NY; PORTLAND, REEDSPORT, OR; BROOKSVILLE, FL**

HISTORIAN'S NOTE: A neighbor, Tina, is also present.

LEVINE: It's January the second, the year 2005. I'm here in Brookville--Brooksville, Florida and I'm here with Anthony Viola Sr. who came from Italy in 1922 when he was just seven years old. And he came with his two brothers—let's see, it was—

VIOLA: Giovanni.

LEVINE: Giovanni and Ernesto.

VIOLA: Ernesto.

LEVINE: And he came with his mother.

VIOLA: My mother, and also her brother—my uncle.

LEVINE: Your mother's brother, Giovanni.

VIOLA: Giovanni Amarozzo.

LEVINE: Amarozzo, 'cause that's your mother's maiden name.

VIOLA: Right.

LEVINE: Okay. And let's see—he came from the port of Naples—left from the port of Naples on "The Patria."

VIOLA: That true.

LEVINE: Okay. This is—and I should say that Tina—the across-the-road neighbor is sitting in with us.

VIOLA: Fine. And uh—glad to have her. (All laugh).

LEVINE: Yes, me too. Okay, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. If we could start—if you would say your birth date and where in Italy you were born.

VIOLA: I was in born in the year of 19—uh, April 20, 1915.

LEVINE: Okay.

VIOLA: And I was born in the town in Italy called Bueonobiteacolo.

LEVINE: And would you please spell that?

VIOLA: B-O-O-N-O-B-I-T-O-C-L-O. Buonobitoclo.

LEVINE: Buonobitoclo.

VIOLA: If you translate that to in—in—American, it means Pleasantville.

LEVINE: Oh! And was it pleasant?

VIOLA: And we have a lot of Pleasantvilles in the United States.

LEVINE: Yeah.

VIOLA: Okay.

LEVINE: Are your memories of Buonobitoclo pleasant?

VIOLA: Uh, well they are—in a way they were pleasant -- remembering my grandparents. And my father was a teamster in It—um, and he left Italy in 1920, two years before we did. And his name was Vincenzo Viola and he—and left my mother and we three children. And meantime we—when he left—we moved in with our maternal grandparents. Which was Dominic and uh—Amarrozzo, and my grandmother and na-- town named Sanza.

LEVINE: S-A-N--

VIOLA: S-A-N-Z-A. We spent the next two years away from--because my father was gone--we spent it with our grandparents. Maternal grandparents. In Sanza. And, of course, I remember some (from growing up, from five to seven years old) uh, I'm remember more incidents about Sanza than I do about Buonobitoclo.

LEVINE: Well, when you—when you think about your grandparents what are the memories that—that stick most in your mind?

VIOLA: Well, that—there being a—. Between a age of five I believe, my grandparents died in that—between—in that—between that time.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: And I uh, lived in a house with my grandparents. And—and when my grand (I think I remember more of my grandfather's funeral—you call it) where they carry him on shoulders to the cemetery. And I remember that—knowing that the spirit goes to Heaven. And here I am like five and a half maybe or six. I was thinking about—I—I saw the spirit leave his body and go to Heaven. That I remember.

LEVINE: Hm.

VIOLA: Uh, as a child.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, uh, your grandmother died too?

VIOLA: Yes. She—I believe she died two—before that.

LEVINE: Before that.

VIOLA: While I was in Buonobitoclo probably.

LEVINE: Oh. Uh-huh.

VIOLA: But that was—I was too young to realized.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about your grandfather before he died? When you went to live in Sanza?

VIOLA: Well, the only kno—what I know about my grandfather is that he was an old man (laughs). Much younger than I am right now (laughs). Probably about ten years. And he had a uh—I remember that he had a physical dep--ferment [sic] on—on—under his neck. Looked like a potato. And—and he wore a shawl just to hi—to hide that. And that's--that's all I can remember about him.

LEVINE: How did he treat you? Do you remember how he was with you?

VIOLA: [interposed] Oh, well, we were well treated. I think my—our grandparents loved us because uh—being my father was away. And—and uh—and—and remember that they were used to be baking in—in the house because the ovens were in the house. They were built-in, in Italy. And they used to bake their bread and pies or whatever it is they made. They were had to be baked. Also remember that town that uh, we had a trough running through the house on the inside of the house. Which was a—a—a uh, what'd you call it? A -- because that house—the town is built on a hillside. It was automatic. Uh—what'd we say? We—. In other words—th—th—th—there—there were toilet water running through the house—fresh water.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: Coming from up above the town—there were fountains or whatever how they got their water there—

LEVINE: Streams, whatever.

VIOLA: And it—and then we used a pot under the bed. And then when -- they would throw the pot into that trough (up in head, closed --

LEVINE: Wow.

VIOLA: — paneled --wood paneled). Right?

LEVINE: So the water flowed—

VIOLA: Very kind of primitive, but it worked.

LEVINE: Yeah. So the water flowed, like, under the house?

VIOLA: No—through the house.

LEVINE: Right through the house.

VIOLA: Yeah—because the house built, uh, you know—. What'd you call it—agri—mmm—not (laughs)—um—

LEVINE: Well—well—

VIOLA: The flow is like—

LEVINE: In other words, it flew—it flowed from higher up to down the hill.

VIOLA: [interposed] Yes! And it went down—

LEVINE: [interposed] and it went right through the house

VIOLA: —to the streams down way at the bottom of the town, more or less.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, now, what—what was there, a big pipe? How did the—what was the water contained in?

VIOLA: [interposed] No. No pipes at all. It was a trough—

LEVINE: Oh. Uh-huh.

VIOLA: —made of wood and the water went through.

LEVINE: Wow.

VIOLA: So anybody put anything in it, it went right down through it.

LEVINE: Did other people have that kind of thing in their house?

VIOLA: [interposed] Well—well they probably had about different lines—because they couldn't have one line through our area and not have anything there on the other areas. So must've been—

LEVINE: There were probably like lots of different, separate streams of it flowing through. Wow.

VIOLA: Yeah. Yeah, and of course uh, now coming to—. I used to—look—see—what we call movies now. Is that—they used to—government, I believe—brought a state—brought crew -- crews of people to show on big screens,

movies for the whole town. And we gathered at the center and there was a big screen and—I know what we saw—it was like Mickey Mouse. That was it—[not understood] to Mickey Mouse.

LEVINE: Now was it—was this big screen outside or inside?

VIOLA: Outside. It was outside. Outdoor theater.

LEVINE: [interposed] And what—what would you do bring—(laughs)—you—would you bring your own chairs? Or they had chairs? Or—

VIOLA: Well, I'm not sure what -- if I remember that. But I guess they did, you know—

LEVINE: Yeah, well—

VIOLA: So, the other thing I know about the town of Sanza—because I was born Buonobitoclo but you know—I'm—my—

LEVINE: Were—were they in the same province?

VIOLA: Oh yes. They were maybe—I would say five miles apart.

LEVINE: Oh, and what was the name of the province they were in? Do you know?

VIOLA: Provincia di Salerno. So, the other thing I remember—you know—I never went to school. Because it wasn't mandatory. The little towns couldn't afford schools. And that's the year that Mussolini took over dictatorship in Italy and then he got the education going. Umm, so I never did go to school in Italy.

LEVINE: So both of these towns were small?

VIOLA: Oh yes. I don't know, population wise might have been maybe fifteen hundred—two thousand, you know. In that area, at the time I was there. As I know, looking back, I'd say that—that's about how I figured that out. The other thing is we had no newspapers in the town and we used to have a town crier. Came every night, maybe 6, 7:00 and he would cry out the news. [loud] "Mrs. Valler had a baby boy " And this, you know (laughs). Or whatever happen— happened. The news.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: That was the town crier, I remember that. Yeah.

LEVINE: Huh. That's pretty good. Anything else about the town? Did they have, like, police? Did they have a mayor?

VIOLA: Oh yes. Yes, they had a—a mayor and they had the *carabinieri* which is the Italian Police dep—and—well, that we would—and uh mostly we were also protected by the Catholic Church. We—I remember, as a child going to this Catholic church and uh--and uh—and oftentimes I was invited to have even lunch or—or something with the—with the priest.

LEVINE: Oh. You remember—

VIOLA: [interposed] I probably was an altar boy (all laugh)

LEVINE: You probably were. Do you remember the priest? Do you remember anything about that priest?

VIOLA: [interposed] Uh, not—no—I could not.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Do you remember any—any of the religious observances—any saint's days or what you did?

VIOLA: [interposed] Oh yes. Yes. The—they had, uh, an annual feast, *fésta*. Our Lady the Snow. Which is the patron saint of Sanza.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: Was—is Our Lady of the Snow. And as I found there is a, uh an observant -- . And in St. Louis, Missouri, they have a grotto named Our Lady the Snow.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Huh.

VIOLA: So, uh, that's the patron saint of that town. Each town had its own patron saint.

LEVINE: Did you celebrate that saint on a particular day in the year?

VIOLA: Oh yes, but I can't remember the day.

LEVINE: But I mean, what would you do?

VIOLA: It was like they had a parade. And if some of the older—generations that came to New York back in my time—we had a lot of those feasts back in—in Brooklyn, and in Manhattan. You know, we did. Which, traditionally carried on.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

VIOLA: And they— had the banners and the saints. And they would do-- donate to the maid from the people on the street, for the church. And uh, it still goes on.

LEVINE: Huh. Well did this—did it have something to do with snow?

VIOLA: Our Lady of the Snow?

LEVINE: Yeah.

VIOLA: Well, I don't know how—you see—we—we got her name.

LEVINE: [interposed] Name. Yeah.

VIOLA: But uh, I never got into why they adopted that patron saint.

LEVINE: Yeah. But the statue of the Lady in the Snow, just looked like a woman saint.

VIOLA: [interposed] Uh, yes. Yes, of course. She has no snow on her, no (all laugh). No uh—

LEVINE: —gray.

VIOLA: Yeah, it does—uh, it just is—a—a lady saint.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh. And so, uh—now where did you fall in your family, with your brothers? Were you the youngest ,the middle , or the oldest?

VIOLA: Me? I was—I'm the oldest.

LEVINE: Oh, you're the oldest.

VIOLA: I was the first-born, and uh, my brother John-- no, I'm sorry, my brother Earnest was second born.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: And my brother John was the third born.

LEVINE: Now as the first-born son, did that give you certain—either privileges or duties?

VIOLA: Well, I'll tell you what it did. It gave me a sort of—a feeling of responsibility. Because my father wasn't—was gone.

LEVINE: Oh right.

[loud bird sounds in background]

VIOLA: And my mother was a beautiful woman. She was. She had great, black, dark hair -- right down to—. You know.

LEVINE: Wow.

VIOLA: And uh—and uh—well—and being that when I—especially coming across on the boat from Naples, I kind of, uh, recognized the much—whoever they were, the sailors or wherever—uh, looking at my mother, you know, and—and I said, "Eh! No!" (Laughs).

LEVINE: You felt protective of her.

VIOLA: I felt pro—because—and then of course I used to have to take my little, youngest brother, John, by the hand and guide him around. But that's a—another thing about—. We went from Sanza, we boarded a train. Um, my mother, her brother, and we three and also my mother's other brother accompanied us to Naples. Salvatore, his name was. So—but we were embarking but Salvatore was not. He—at that time. And of course, not too much—we didn't stay in Naples too long but I think we were inoculated, you know to—uh. So, got on ship and the ship took eighteen days to cross. And it was a—kind of a—heh—miserable trip for most of the passengers.

LEVINE: Here, let me put this down, the plate.

VIOLA: Because of—they all seasick.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: Well, the uh, the ship just bobbed in the water. Like the waves were higher than the—the mast, you know. And it -- like a cork -- bobbling eighteen days. Well we kids—didn't bother us, I guess. So we ate pretty good (all laugh).

LEVINE: Were you in steerage? Were you way down in the bottom of the ship?

VIOLA: Y—Yes, I think so, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

VIOLA: I do—I think we were third pass—third class passengers (laughs)

LEVINE: [interposed] third class passengers. Uh-huh. So, your father—you said your father left in 1920?

VIOLA: Yes, he was already here.

LEVINE: So did—do you have any memories of your father in Italy? (A loud crash is heard) Oh!

VIOLA: That—that dumb bird!

LEVINE: I think he knocked himself out.

VIOLA: [interposed] Do you believe that!?

TINA: [interposed] Yeah, he—he knocked himself out to eat.

LEVINE: [interposed] He may be—all right, I'm going to pause it for a second—(tape pauses). I was asking you if, um, if you remember your father. Any—any experiences with your father, before he left Italy?

VIOLA: Uh, my father spent most of his time while I was born and growing up—he was in the Italian army.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: See, the—the he went—he was in the Italian Army and he was probably discharged in 1918. So between the time I was born—1915, those three years—I didn't know him, of course.

LEVINE: 'Cause he was away?

VIOLA: Yes, he—but in between he came home and we had three children.

LEVINE: [interposed] He came home.

VIOLA: (Laughs)Two—two other children.

LEVINE: [interposed] Yeah, right. (Laughs) Right, right.

VIOLA: And that was Er—Ernesto and Giovanni. Uh—now—

LEVINE: [interposed] What—do you remember—

VIOLA: —what I remember about my father in the town of Buonobitoclo is that my father was a—a—a teamster, drove a—a horse and wagon and delivered goods from one town to another. That was—it—it was delivering. Like UPS (laughs)—

LEVINE: Yeah, right.

VIOLA: --now. And—so he had a horse and wagon. And I remember going outside the house with my younger brother, Ernesto, and we went—tried—I guess. Ernesto tried to pet the horse. But the horse—it playfully, I believe, I'm sure it was—he grabbed his arm in his mouth and was to—tossing him up—up and down.

LEVINE: Mmhmm.

VIOLA: And I screamed, you know, or I—and—and my father came out. Ran up and mu-- he got this whip and, boy, did he whip that horse. Well, natural reaction from a father.

LEVINE: Yeah.

VIOLA: And uh—so, anyway that—I remember that incident. That—

LEVINE: Yeah.

VIOLA: And we used to have—I remember we used to have pigeons on a window come in and coo, you know, and we—and we put little corn—

LEVINE: Huh.

VIOLA: [interposed] Uh.

LEVINE: Do you remember your father coming home from the army at all?

VIOLA: No—no, I don't remember -- member coming in—

LEVINE: [interposed] I mean on furlough or whatever.

VIOLA: —and leaving. No, I didn't.

LEVINE: [interposed] Yeah, uh-huh, uh-huh.

VIOLA: Uh, no, I wouldn't remember that.

LEVINE: Yeah.

VIOLA: But—'cause the next time—th—then the first time I met my father—when we, uh, arrived in—in New York Bay. And he came by water taxis as was dark at home, and he boarded the ship before the ship put us on Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: They—they allowed that. To have the parent get on the ship and embraced, and what-not, you know and—

LEVINE: Eh.

VIOLA: There was kind of uh, a, uh crying time (laughs).

LEVINE: Yeah, well I guess your brothers probably didn't even remember him much.

VIOLA: No. I think my brother Giovanni, at that time, of course, didn't remember him. And Ernest, also—

LEVINE: Well you were seven, so was it like three, five, and seven years old?

VIOLA: Seven, five, and three.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

VIOLA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

VIOLA: Uh, so when I was five, it was three and one.

LEVINE: Yeah.

VIOLA: You know. And so, that was—my arrival, as I said in here—

LEVINE: Yeah, on the questionnaire, right.

VIOLA: My arrival in the New York Bay, when I—we all saw the Statue of Liberty.

LEVINE: Did you have any idea what that was?

VIOLA: Uh, yes, because I've heard all the passengers say, "*Libertáte*, eh! *Libertát!*" The Statue of Liberty, more or less. And that I remember, yes. Of course I remember my father coming aboard and hugging my mother. And—when we -- . Now—my entrance into Ellis Island, I—I—it was not a good -- kind of a good, uh—

LEVINE: Experience?

VIOLA: —experience because we were inoculated again.

LEVINE: Hmm.

VIOLA: And it—at Ellis Island that time, the building, they—look—they had bars. It looked like a jail.

LEVINE: Mm.

VIOLA: They did. They had bars and—and we were segregated into rooms. They were big rooms. And then we were processed. And—

LEVINE: [interposed] You remember any of the processing? Exams or—

VIOLA: Well, the doctor, you passed by the doctor who did inoculate us and—and, uh, checked their eyes and whatnot. But we passed through eventually. And—and uh, course my father had uh, a, uh, or everybody else did too.

Got on the boat, we landed on Brooklyn. And he had an apartment in Brooklyn.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: For us, you know, because he—it's the reason he came, was to make enough money to send for us.

LEVINE: I see.

VIOLA: And he did and—

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Was there an agent involved? Do you remember an agent—

VIOLA: No.

LEVINE: —in the—okay. And did you stay overnight at Ellis Island?

VIOLA: I don't think so. We must've got off the boat early morning. We must've stayed over on the boat, maybe, overnight.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: And then, as we, um, de-boarded, you know then we—it took a whole day to process and—and off we went.

LEVINE: I see. Just to backtrack a minute, when—do you remember anything about medical care in Italy? In other words, was there a pharmacist, or who—who took care of you? Was there a doctor in the town?

VIOLA: Uh, I know there were doctors because in—in Buonobitoclo, my brother Ernest may have been like a—at the time—two years old, and I was four. But, I remem—and my father was gone at the time. And I remember my fa—mother being—sitting by the fireplace holding him and rocking him. And he was frothing at the mouth.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: But we—I—but I do remember a man coming in—could've been the doctor, making house call, you know. And to you—what—I don't know what happened with—

LEVINE: Hmm.

VIOLA: But that, of course, they did have doctors.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Yeah, do you remember any other kinds of treatment that people got? In other words, were there folk—were there sort of—did people practice, you know, just common sense kinds of things ?

VIOLA: That's all it had—I believed it. I believed that most everything that happened was through—rested with the people—the family. The mother and father, and uh, I don't remember doctors too much.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah, right.

VIOLA: Yeah.

LEVINE: How about like, nuns and is it—was it—were the schools run by nuns?

VIOLA: There was no schools.

LEVINE: Oh there were no schools, that's right.

VIOLA: No.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

VIOLA: There was no schools. I didn't see nuns either, other than at church—run by the priest.

LEVINE: Right, right. Do you remember what people did for enjoyment?

VIOLA: Uh, people—well, their festivities more or less, I believe, were at home. There was singing, dancing, and—and uh, they played the accordion for music and other instruments. But other than that, there—most of the people who worked, worked on the farms. There was farms all over and I—no I was gots—I gots to say this, that in the town of Sanza, uh, they are mentioned (just like the old American Indians had some kind of a branded (sic) name) Well that—people in that town were branded as having burnt feet. And the reason for that is, I—they always used to have forest fires. Mostly grass fires and the people would go around and—and stamp the fire out with their feet.

LEVINE: Mmhmm.

VIOLA: (laughing) That's how they got, "burnt feet" name.

LEVINE: Wow. Huh.

VIOLA: In Italian that's called *piedes bruciato*. Burnt feet.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So if you were from that town, you sort of had that label.

VIOLA: [interposed] Yeah, yeah. Well, no. My—see, I was born in Buonobitoclo.

LEVINE: Right.

VIOLA: My brother Ernest was born in Sanza. My brother John was born back in Buonobitoclo. And my father came back in Porto Brione [ph]. So we called my brother—Johnny—“burnt foot” (all laugh). And that’s the Society of the Lady of the Snow, which they have one in—a big one in Greenpoint, Brooklyn.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. Uh-huh.

VIOLA: And they have, uh, feasts on, uh, August the fifth, is the saint day.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: In Brooklyn for Our Lady the Snow.

LEVINE: Oh. Uh-huh. Good, okay, um, let’s see. So, would the—in Italy now, just to finish up with that part, did your—did like, would the women get together, either on wash day, or, well you had the water going right through your house.

VIOLA: No, no, that wasn’t for washing.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: That was just for toilet.

LEVINE: Yeah.

VIOLA: I remem—my mother going to wash the laundry. She put out a—a—in a—a big basket. Which is the straw type of fiber. And she would fill it with clothes, dirty clothes, put it on her head, whatever, with a round towel—put it on her head and even put the baby in—in the basket. And I used to tail behind her and we’d go down to the stream to wash clothes. And I used to wade in the ri—in the--that stream and that—they used to bang the clothes on the rocks. Soap ‘em, bang them on the rocks, uh, rinse ‘em in the stream. And then we’d go back home.

END SIDE A, TAPE ONE BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE TWO

VIOLA: Ah well, you know you—I—I remember running into snakes (laughs). I said to my mother, “How come there were two snakes like this?” I said—Oh, she says, “They gettin’ married” “ (laughs).

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: Yeah, those are the kind of answers I remember.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. And how about the men? Did the men gather, either in a café or in a—

VIOLA: [interposed] Well, yes—well the men gathered at the (mm, what’d you—) the center of town, or last, to, uh—

LEVINE: [interposed] Piazza?

VIOLA: drink coffee or—

LEVINE: [interposed] Uh-huh

VIOLA: And they uh, well they—that's—but I never got close to knowing what the men were doing, you know, at my age.

LEVINE: [interposed] Yeah, because your father wasn't even there.

VIOLA: No.

LEVINE: Were a lot of people leaving for America that you were aware of?

VIOLA: [interposed] Mm, I wouldn't know that. How many—I don't know who left and—at the time, same time on that but then -- . Knowing history, you know, it—it, uh, quite a—a few. But uh—to my estimation is I think Mussolini did put the country back in order. With the education, at first, and—and everything else. Un—unfortunately he—he didn't—he went the wrong side in World War II.

LEVINE: Mmhmm, mmhmm.

VIOLA: But—

LEVINE: Um, yeah. Let's see. Did you have any idea of what Amer—going to America meant when you found out you were going?

VIOLA: Oh, I was looking forward to it. You know, something new—experience, you know. Looking—I don't know what, at seven years old—but, and uh, but it, as it turned out, it was the best experience, naturally.

LEVINE: Yeah.

VIOLA: I, uh—we were—I—we were barefoot, running around in the streets in Brooklyn, during the summertime.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

VIOLA: And uh—

LEVINE: Were you in Greenpoint, is that where you settled?

VIOLA: [interposed] Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Greenpoint, Brooklyn?

VIOLA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

VIOLA: That's uh—we are—we—we moved into Woodsa [ph] Street and Java [ph] Street. Kind of a famous location that became notorious in a ways. Of the, uh, mafioso boys. And growing—coming into that area—growing up in that area, and—and also from other areas in Brooklyn, naturally. But there was, eh, famous—couple of famous spots that they—they used to come to. Restaurants, mostly. And they're still there.

LEVINE: And were you aware of that, growing up?

VIOLA: Not at the time. All I remember going—started school—uh, PS 17.

LEVINE: I think you wrote it—

VIOLA: PS—I think I mentioned the school number. And—but I went--

LEVINE: 23.

VIOLA: PS 23. But the f—the first school I went to was not PS 23. Because I was registered to the school and it was on a corner of Union Avenue and Metropolitan Avenue. And Keap Street came at an angle. That building—and that's where I learned my A, B, C, which were all around the room. And I—I--it didn't take me long to learn the language, being seven years old.

LEVINE: Did you—were the teachers—did the teachers give you special consideration, as far as learning English?

VIOLA: [interposed] Eh. It didn't appear to me that there was being special consideration because I think we were all made of ethnic—

LEVINE: There were a lot of kids who had come from some other country?

VIOLA: Yeah. Oh, we were a mixed gr—race there. We were J-- Irish, Jewish, Italian, uh, German. We were a League of Nations. And uh—we all—but we all got gr—along great.

LEVINE: Huh.

VIOLA: You know, it's right there where Williamsburg meets Greenpoint. So anyway, that's where I went to school—then we didn't live on Woodsa [ph] Street too long. I think we must've took about a year and we moved to a next district which was on Frost Street and Manhattan Avenue. Graham Avenue. And then I went to PS 23. Okay. We started school in PS 23 and now this is start of Depression. Meantime, my mother had had a set of twins. And, uh—and that happened in 1923, year after we arrived. Then in 1925 she had a—another set of twins. Now, things were tough and being

the first-born I was delegated to go to work. And uh, my brother Ernest and I, we uh, get up five o'clock in the morning.

And we uh, my father built a pushcart. So he and I would go out and go up and down the—the streets and pick up what they call re—recycling things. That -- we called it junk in those days. And it was anything that was, uh, newspapers, rags, metal, iron, oh, anything was— . You—you could go ahead and—and sell it for whatever we get. So, by time we went down the streets, we got home it was maybe 7:00, 7:30. We put the push cart in a—in a rented storage area and uh, clean up, have breakfast, and go to school—walk to school. Which was about six blocks. Which means also, in the wintertime, snow, or hail or what you went to school. And you walked.

Uh, we never had automobiles, but my father did have a horse and wagon in the United States. He took—picked up, uh—and he did the same thing. He used to go to Manhattan with the horse and wagon, on a twenty-third street ferry, which is no longer there, and it started it from Greenpoint to Manhattan. And I went—rode with him a few times, as I got a little older. And helped him buy—he would deal with the janitors of the apartments for newspapers which they saved to make a few bucks too, you know. And so, that night, carried them up, bundled and put 'em in a wagon. And then finally, we'd get our load—it was a wagon that had the "tinker bell" so they knew we were coming.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: A bell. And uh, we take the ferry back home and my father be sleeping in the driver's seat. And me, I'd be—but the horse knew where he was going. (Laughs) He went to the stable where we belong. And that was my early experience working with my father. And—and other things I did with my father, after that, of course.

LEVINE: How about—did—did—did the Depression really affect your—did they—it really hit your family hard?

VIOLA: Well, yes, it—it did, because, uh, in—in all this time; my mother had ten children. Seven more, besides the first three. And we had to be fed—they had to be fed. And as I'm growing up into my teens and whatnot. I'm—why, I'm hustling to make a dollar. Anyway, I—I wouldn't steal, but any other way I can. I used my part time, my skill. I became a—a proficient pool player (laughs). Yes, and I did play with Jackie Gleason.

LEVINE: Really?

VIOLA: And—but when it came to holiday like Thanksgiving. And the—the pool—p—p—pool halls but there was no work. We used to hang around the pool halls. There was no work. And, uh, Thanksgiving time they had contests about makin' for -- on a pool table and you win a turkey. And, uh, about two, three years in a row I brought—that's the only way we had turkey (laughs) at home. And uh—but there also, the City of New York had—they gave food to the poor people. Let's put it that way. And I used to go and get on line, as we had lines, and bring home the staples, you know.

LEVINE: Flour, sugar—

VIOLA: Milk, fl—potatoes, flour, you know, that kind of stuff. And they used to give us—they called it Christmas basket or the Thanksgiving basket. Yeah. That, uh—well it, the--the, uh the social service type—

LEVINE: Mmhmm.

VIOLA: —department, yeah. Yeah, and but I also remember standing on other lines to get a job. I used to stand in—in the dead of winter, of course. And winter was winters in New York in those days. In—in 20's, late 20's, and early 30's. I used to go to the Department of Sanitation. But you had to be there 6:00 at night to get on line to get hired at 6:00 in the morning. And we had to stand on line all night because they're paying fifty cents an hour. Well uh, some of the police—they had to have police protection because they, you know, these people would break in the line and come in about eight—uh, five o'clock in—in the morning and want to get on line. You know, "Oh, I got my friend there!" No way, you know.

LEVINE: Mm.

VIOLA: Uh, so the police had to protect that. And some of them were kind enough to give us a number and say, "Go warm your hands up." They made the big barrel of fire in a big metal can. And so you go away, you know—

LEVINE: Mmhmm.

VIOLA: And get back on line. So periodically, that's what—what I went through. So on the—the next day they would hire—maybe the line was fifty people but they'd hire th-- thirty. You know, that's all they needed, and so I did that for a couple of years. And as soon as that snowfall was ended, and the snow was cleared of the streets—well, that was it. Wait for the next one.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: That's—that's the way we had to earn our mo--.

LEVINE: Hmm. So then when did you get your first real job—steady job?

VIOLA: Well I tried a couple of 'em. Uh, I got a job through a friend and—in Jamaica. And they were making milk cans. You know, the old milk cans with—what—what, ten gallon capacity. And they had different parts, you know. The—the lid. So they built 'em at this place and I got a job and it happened to be in the summer. Like—. And I went to work and they put me on a, um, uh, it was a line—one man on one side a—and there was a furnace. On the other side used to be a man would dip those in acid, put 'em on these rollers. They'd come through the furnace which would burn the--the outside of the metal. It was red hot when it came out on the other side. And we used burlap for gloves—burlap potato bag—and handle them and brush the rust. Well, I found out that I used to go home, I was all red. So I take a bath. All that rust came off me.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: And not only that, I had to chew tobacco to avoid inhaling all that stuff. Well, I took it— that—stayed there two weeks. I went home, I said to my mother—I said to my mother—I says, "I got laid off." I didn't, you know--she didn't know, of course what—what it -- the job was consisted. But I decided not for me. Anyway that was one of the first jobs. Well, the job I got when I finally got settled back in 1937, I got a job in a—in the millinery district of Manhattan on 36th Street and 5th Avenue making ladies' hat blocks. 'Cause ladies' hats were very much in style, those days. And we used to make 'em out of wood, naturally. And then they would make 'em—and make a dye out of it and then they would—they would—other places made hats by steam, you know.

And that was my—so I worked there for about three years. Until 1940, when conscription—the draft -- was—came into law. I got a number. And of course now I'm getting—well I was in my twenties, young twenties. I decided that I'd been, you know, had such a hard time growing up and—and there was—and I had a, uh—matter of fact, that didn't help too much either. I had

a, uh, disappointed love affair (laughs). I loved a young lady, but she was kept so strict that her father found out that she was dating me—which we used to date three blocks away now, I used to pick her up three blocks away the house, you know. And uh, he was—they were, uh, such a—family and they were—they were – they're tough. As far as protecting the young girl.

LEVINE: Mmhmm.

VIOLA: Well, kind of broke up the romance. And I put two and two together and I said—I volunteered to go to the army. World War II. So I went in as Oct—November of 1940. I joined and from Brooklyn we went to Camp Upton, Long Island. Where we were, uh, graded, might say, and went to Fort Dix, New Jersey for our basic training. Well, of course the war didn't start 'til December of '41, so all the time I been there all of '40 and '41. Getting trained, and I became a Sergeant. And uh, then they moved out my outfit to—across country to—Oregon. And part of our duty—my duty was—I—I happened to be a sergeant in charge of transportation for my company. So they sent me and, uh, my assistants to post, uh, notices on telephone poles and anywhere else with—with notices to the Japanese people to go register at the United States office that was set up for them. And that was my job. I had no idea that those people were put in camps after that.

LEVINE: Well, you didn't know that?

VIOLA: Of course not. I didn't know that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

VIOLA: You know, my job was just put the notices up.

LEVINE: And of course they were in Japanese, I would assume.

VIOLA: Yeah, because there was a lot of Japanese people who—who—who were farmers out there.

LEVINE: Yeah.

VIOLA: And I—I—I felt so much for 'em after that because they were hardworking people. And, uh, well but I—I did run into later—situations where we talked about or that m-- I played golf with some Japanese people and—

LEVINE: You mean this afterwards?

VIOLA: Way afterwards. Yeah.

LEVINE: [interposed] Well, yeah.

VIOLA: Anyway, uh—but that was—at that time I—I was delegated that—they gave—we take orders, you know. So then, of course, uh, while I was there I met—da—dated—met my wife. In 1942.

LEVINE: In Oregon?

VIOLA: Oregon. And she was from North Dakota. And, well we had a---

LEVINE: How did you meet?

VIOLA: Well we met through a mutual friend—a—another girl that I dated, more or less.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: And they worked together. So, uh, as we—we met and we got dating, uh, then we—they moved from—us from Portland to Fort Lewis, Washington. And then of course—I—on weekends I used to take the bus and go down, visit—to meet—date with my wife. She—she had a hou—home. And she had two other girls who lived with her. In other words, there are three girls, paid the rent, because during that—that was wartime and they uh, sit—but she was the “mother”—running the house, more or less. Well, I dec—we decided that, in 19—come along, 1943—well, I could see the handwriting on the wall. I ‘cide—decided that I’m gonna go across, some place. I didn’t know whether it was Jap—Jap—the islands or Europe. But be as it may, we went to Europe from Fort Lewis. All across to Europe. It’s—other people went from Fort Lewis to the islands.

LEVINE: Right.

VIOLA: That was the way the government worked. The Army. And—so we did tried it there—get married, which happened on June 19, 1943.

LEVINE: And what was her name?

VIOLA: Doris

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

VIOLA: Priebe

LEVINE: P-R-E—

VIOLA: Doris Louise Priebe. P-R-E (oh) P-R-I-E-B-E. Priebe. She’s German extract. And, uh—well—be as it may, we said, look, we’re gonna have to have a baby. I gotta leave a baby behind before I go overseas. We knew

that we were gonna move. And so after about two months we were married, I -- s—s—s—I said, “You better go to the doctor, see what’s wrong (all laugh). And she went to the doctor in Fort Lewis, and he prescribed her a— a lotion—um, not a lotion but a, uh—a prescription of—it wasn’t a prescription but it was on a shelf—called Lydia Pinkham. It says a lady in—uh, a baby in every bottle (laughs). That’s was—so she dropped it. She said she hated it, you know. But—and uh, so, sure enough she was already pregnant. Because my son Jim, the first born, was born eleven months after we married. He was born in May of ’44.

LEVINE: And you were overseas then?

VIOLA: Uh, no, I hadn’t left the States yet. May of ’44. I was in Camp Phillips, Kansas at the time. And we were—more or less that was our last stop before we went to port of embarkation. And—but I did go visit my son, and I—I trained hard to become an expert infantry man. And I received the award, while we’re in Kansas, and they gave us time off for—for that. And that’s why I went for it. I, you know, you really went through the mill but I did it. And I went to see my first-born. So came, we had arrangements for her and him to come to Kansas because we were gonna leave. And for her to go to New York and stay with my parents. In Brooklyn.

Well when she got to Kansas, of course she can’t come to the army but I spent—we went—I had, uh, rented a—a room at one of the houses in Salina, Kansas. And we stayed there, and—two nights I guess. And we had Jim and we—we took the drawer out and put him by this bedside so he—he don’t call out (laughs). So he was—grew up in a little drawer (all laugh). Yeah. Well anyway, uh, sure enough we went to—from Kansas right to Boston. That was my port of embarkation. And at that time my wife and child—they went to visit my folks in Brooklyn But Doris (being from North Dakota off a farm and whatnot) she thought that was the—the end of the world in

Brooklyn. Everything was so strange to her. I mean, the people talked different (laughs). They di-- different.

LEVINE: Yeah.

VIOLA: Yes, yes. I don't think she liked it, this, uh, but -- . But in between, at that time of course, we saw each other while I was in Boston before I—. Then next they put us on a ship, and this was the biggest armada that left the United States.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: And we landed in Normandy. It was at the D-Day. And that's where got in to the action then, fighting. I was in the infantry so we fought across France. And hedgerow fighting, whatever we came across. Mountains. 'Til I got into Germany, and that winter I froze my feet. I was, out —well. We were out in all kinds of weather and completely no change of socks or anything. No change of clothes. W—we—the only we kept warm was body heat. We embraced each other on the ground. What with all the firing—machine gun firing at night, which hailing, and oh, we had our—. Well anyways, thank God, we got safely—I got safely through. I—I—I went—I had shells fly by my head. I could hear the whistle of them and they landed ten—ten yards away and KLUMP! They're mud. Didn't explode. You know, but—so I'm—they call me lucky.

LEVINE: Mmhmm. Yeah.

VIOLA: And as you read that, uh, interview with my granddaughter, you'll find a lot more here.

LEVINE: Yeah, okay. Well, so (microphone interference) let's see.

VIOLA: Oh, it was my—I call him “Crib side Joe”(laughs). From the story, eh?

LEVINE: Oh (laughs).

VIOLA: He was born on a crib (laughs). So I call, “Crib-Side Joe.” And his father, I call him Dr. Bed (laughs). My grandson.

LEVINE: Great. So, when you were—when you were in the infantry, were you there when the—when the war was declared over?

VIOLA: No, I was evacuated during the Battle of the Bulge. We were going into the Battle of the Bulge t—to—relieved, you know, the—the—the, uh—the soldiers in Bastogne. But medic—I had had the situation of the frozen feet for about a month. And the people who—medics, in my company, it was—called me over. One night we were in a—in Germany in—in—in German basement house, a house in a basement. And he says, “Tony, come here. Lemme see.” They were blue—black, blue, you know. He says, “I’m gonna send you back.” And that’s when I left.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: And I was—we had to go t—t—t—to enemy fire too to get back. I got my Jeep and geez, they were f—firing at us and—but finally got, uh, out. And I wound up in Paris in a hospital. Then they flew me over to England, in a hospital. I—I never got out. I ne—out of the hospitals. Then they—they went to Glasgow, to Scotland. Got on the Queen Mary and brought us back home.

LEVINE: Hmm. When you think about that time in the Army, how do you think about it now, with all the time that’s elapsed in between?

VIOLA: Well, I—I spent the best—best five years of my life, from twenty-four to twenty-nine in the army. And uh, I got a loss of hearing due to shell blast, and my feet—but I'm lucky. And the reason is because when I came to New York, I used to go barefoot on the pavements—on a hot pavements. Which made my feet tough.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: Just like the Indians in America used to go with barefoot running through desert or whatever, right? I—my feet were tough as leather. So that kept me good. Because I had a lot of eighteen, nineteen year olds in my outfit. They were up there two days and they lost—they had to amputate their foot.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: Because they was, uh, not abused like I was, as far as the foot.

LEVINE: Wow.

VIOLA: So that held me well.

LEVINE: Maybe—maybe you really should be from Sanza, with the burnt feet.

VIOLA: Yeah (All laugh).

LEVINE: Maybe that would've helped you, right?

VIOLA: [interposed] (all laughing) Yeah, you got—you guessed right.

END TAPE ONE, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE TWO, SIDE A

LEVINE: Speaking with Anthony Viola, and I—here's a question for you. How do you think coming here, as a seven year old, and starting life all over again, and having to learn a new language and everything—how do you think that affected you in your personality? In the way you approach things, or how you think about things, or—how do you think it made a difference in like the person you are?

VIOLA: Well—you're saying it as a seven year old?

LEVINE: Well, yeah. Do you think it made a big difference?

VIOLA: [interposed] When I came to Ellis, I was seven and a half, more or less.

LEVINE: Yeah.

VIOLA: But I—I had no thoughts of what I—my personality was—when I was in Italy. But when I came right into Brooklyn, that's where, I believe I g—got my personality growing up with the other boys, and my family. And it was great. It—though it was Depression—no, it wasn't Depression when I got here. 'Cause between 1922 and 19—uh—28, or 29, we were—my father had a good job.

LEVINE: Mmhmm.

VIOLA: He—he was a—a—well, he was a—in a special work. He was doing—and he was working out piecework. And that piecework was that he used to, uh, do rabbit skinning.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: Which they had fac—factories which, uh, they take rabbit skins and marinate it one way or another—treat it. And he used to, uh, peel the skin and—and then the fur was—would make fur coats. So—and that was good job.

LEVINE: So he was able to do that. He only started doing the junk business in the Depression.

VIOLA: No. When he first came to—from—from Italy. (Knock on door, and doorbell are heard) He started doing that—well, you know, we came from Italy in 1922.

LEVINE: Right.

VIOLA: He started doing that back in—up in 1927. (Doorbelling rings again).

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

VIOLA: '28. So—

LEVINE: When things started getting bad.

VIOLA: [interposed] That's when—that's when things started getting good. But—financially, more or less. I think he—you can't believe what I think he—from—from what I heard I think he was making like, two hundred dollars a—a maybe every two weeks, you know.

LEVINE: Wow. That was good.

VIOLA: [interposed] Of piecework.

LEVINE: Yeah.

VIOLA: And he was good at it, you know. And—but, when the Depression hit—

LEVINE: Mmhmm.

VIOLA: --with—and the big family come along—uh, that—. Now what he's saying about my personality is -- I gave my personalities while I was, you know, my young teens. And—and they were, I—I didn't suffer because I always tried to make—. as I matter of fact I used to be a runner for the bookmakers. Ticketed—

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: -- horse bets. And bring it to the bookmaker and—and he'd give me—if I brought ten dollars worth of bets, he'd give me five dollars.

LEVINE: Wow.

VIOLA: So that's why I used to hustle and I—I didn't suffer that way. And—but my personality became—as a gambling, in gambling, you know.

LEVINE: Well the pool hall, and the—and the—

VIOLA: [interposed] Pool hall, baseball. That time Started get into baseball, and uh, I was a very good baseball player.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: I have to say that because I—I got a Dod—uh, a tryout with the Brooklyn Dodgers.

LEVINE: Whoa.

VIOLA: later on. Yeah, the old Brooklyn Dodgers.

LEVINE: Yeah.

VIOLA: And, but the gambling made me—affected my tryout.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: They wanted me to go ahead and sign me up and send me down to Carolina leagues—the little leagues. And I—unfortunately, I—I was lucky those—that week. I made a lot of money gambling with the horses. And so I says, “Ah! They don’t pay nothing.” You know, and this is what affected—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

VIOLA: And you know, your personality grows with that.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Can you say anymore about growing up in Brooklyn? Anything else about what Brooklyn was like back in the 20’s?

VIOLA: Oh, well, Brooklyn was—well those were speakeasy days.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: Where they had the Prohibition was on. And most beer was made at home and some people used to sell it in—in their—and opened up more or less what you call, “speakeasies.” Where young people go gather, girl, and drink beer, dance, music, you know. And—but I—I didn’t get into that ‘til—. I—I noticed what was going on—like I might have been twelve and thirteen.

And—but then the law would (laughs) go into those places and raid them.
And like we used to call it, “raidie.” And uh—

LEVINE: Would it put people in jail?

VIOLA: Oh yeah.

LEVINE: Hm.

VIOLA: They’d take ‘em to jail. And uh, and break up the place.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: Oh yeah. There was—the wreck, tables—just to, you might’ve seen that in some of the movies I guess. But anyway, let me see—what I—I recall that—during those speakeasy days, young—and I was—I used to go and hang around with the older guys—old men. They played bocce ball. Or they played a—amorre [ph]. Bringus [ph]?

LEVINE: I don’t know that one.

VIOLA: Yeah, amorre. Eh, they challenge each other. You—you throw up—you could throw up to five or none, or you know. And they—you have to call and come out right number.

LEVINE: [interposed] Ah.

VIOLA: I’d say, “four!” you know.

LEVINE: Oh, heh-heh.

VIOLA: That kind of stuff. And they used to play as a team. Four guys, one team, four fellows on the other team. And they—they played for a beer.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: 'Kay, I used to hang around them because they needed someone to go get the beer.

LEVINE: (Laughs)

VIOLA: And they used to have a pitcher. 'Mem pitcher? So at the end of the game they'd say, "Hey Tony. All right, go." I knew the house to go to. And they'd pour like three bottles of beer into the pitcher, all foamy, and I'd bring it back to the guy—the fellas who played. "All right Tony, you take the first drink." Oh, yeah, I'd take the first drink outta the pitcher. All foam (All laugh).

LEVINE: Well now would you go to a speakeasy to get it? Or was that not speakeasy days?

VIOLA: Well, the speakeasies were called—were more or less the places that—that just served liquor.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: Whiskey. Oh no, this was home brew joint—means beer.

LEVINE: Okay.

VIOLA: So—but later on I went to speakeasies (all laugh), and drank whiskies.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Wow. Boy, you had a colorful growing up!

VIOLA: Well, in Brooklyn.

LEVINE: [interposed] Yeah, yeah.

VIOLA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

VIOLA: Eh. Someone is there? Yeah, we – we were—then of course remember when 1933—1933 when prohibition was –ost [ph]—now it was legal to have bar in Brooklyn. Oh, everyplace else—the whole country. And—but Brooklyn was something else because they had—the bars opened and they had free lunch. Free food.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: And that food—you could not buy that kind of food today. It was just pure. It—it had all kinds of—like a big buffets style, with the—the best of everything. Cheeses, salamis, uh, hors d'oeuvres of every kind. And you could help yourself.

LEVINE: Hm.

VIOLA: And all you had to do was buy a ten-cent glass of beer. Well, anyway, so us fellas, we used to—young guys at that time—now, 1933, you know, I'm—

LEVINE: Seventeen, eighteen.

VIOLA: Eighteen years old.

LEVINE: Yeah.

VIOLA: So, we go and we put fifty cents apiece. We go to the—the bar and we have ten beers. Ten fellas who fifty cents apiece would make a round—but we eat! And that's what's good about when you drink: you eat, don't affect you. And—but we used to have the places known by what they served. Specialties. Pigs feet, Schaefers (all laughs) they served Schaefer beer but they ser—they—they serve a big hog head cooked in—with cabbage and sauerkraut and all. And all of this, right, you can see and you go up there and slice it with your own—with the knife. Make your sandwich—mustard and—and whatever, and—

LEVINE: Wow.

VIOLA: And ya have your beers or we have—other place where you—they serve, see, mussels. Black mussels.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: Yeah. These places would serve us all you want to eat. It would—marinara sauce, and all, you know. And drink the beer. Other places had their own specialties. Now the go—the state come around and said, “Uh-oh! The Restaurant Association may complain.” So now they had to charge for food (laughs).

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: Well, you know what they charged? Two cents! (Laughs) But they had to stay within the law. But that—they found out right away that—the law didn't want to—to—get—a—to get away with that. Well, anyway, those were days that we—we enjoyed.

LEVINE: Yeah.

VIOLA: And women didn't come into our life.

LEVINE: Oh. You hung around with the guys?

VIOLA: [interposed] Oh, when we had a dance—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

VIOLA: --at the clubhouse. They used to have social clubs. We used to have social clubs. Social clubs means—we used to pay rent, like a—a clubhouse. Had two, three rooms. And we do our cooking in there. And we run dances, on New Year's Eve—on occasions. And—but most of my life was spent with sports. I liked baseball and so therefore I didn't have time for young girls.

LEVINE: Mmhmm. Hmm.

VIOLA: But later on, of course, this changed.

LEVINE: [interposed] You did (laughs). Well, what do you feel very satisfied about that you've done?

VIOLA: I'm very happy with my s—life. I am. I don't think I would've changed it. I don't know if I want to go through it again (all laugh). But I had the best times when I was growing up in Brooklyn. Because I—my family is—at the—even depression time, as poor as we were—my father always made—or borrowed money to make wine. Home made wine in the basement. Which I did help—grind the grape, press the juice out, all that kind of—.

LEVINE: Hmm.

VIOLA: And there were festivities in the house. We lived in a six-family house. And there was only—mostly made up of Torrys [ph]. The name—last name Torry.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

VIOLA: Well because ya—the ow—the owner Frank Torry who used to be my boss in the sanitation. He was a street cleaner. And we used to have street cleaners in the—in—in New York.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

VIOLA: You know, with the broom. And when the wintertime came, he was the boss of the group they hired in the morning.

LEVINE: To shovel.

VIOLA: Eh—to shovel snow.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

VIOLA: And luckily I used to get on his. And he said, “*Goombah*. [ph] [*compare* buddy]” As we call it, “Goombah, Tony, you come with me.” Boy, I go with him, I find out it was a good deal ‘cause he worked in the district. You know, maybe five square blocks. And he knew all the people, being the street cleaner and all. Well, get out there at six o clock in the—seven o clock in the morning. The first thing you know he was taking me—he tell everybody what they had to do, you know. Said, “Come with me.” I—he’d take me to one of his neighbors, uh, th—that he knew, down in the basement, and we have a

couple drinks—shots of whiskey. And that kept us warm. (Levine laughs)
And that's how I grew up, 'cause I li—I knew how—how to d—drink. But I
also—thank goodness I knew how to handle it.

LEVINE: Yeah.

VIOLA: Because every time I went out with the boys, they'd say, "Give Tony the keys
to the car—to drive." They'd drink, and I'd drive, yeah.

LEVINE: [interposed] Mm.

VIOLA: But I drank with them! But I could handle it.

LEVINE: Mm.

VIOLA: That's why they call me lucky.

LEVINE: Ah. So, do you remember when automobiles started coming in and
getting—?

VIOLA: [interposed] Oh, well, the—well, automobiles came in long before I got there
so—

LEVINE: But most people didn't have one?

VIOLA: [interposed] But no one—nobody had too many cars.

LEVINE: Right.

VIOLA: But no cars available meant—as a matter of fact, my father was the first one
to buy a used car. 'Cause I learnt how to drive working with the—a couple of
friends of mine. I grew up—growing up with young boys who had a job of

checking a ca-- cake company delivery wagons. I forgot the name of the company, but the, you know these bread—deliver bread?

LEVINE: Like Dugan's?

VIOLA: But they delivered those—remember those cakes with all the plastic and--?

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: No? Well, American Cake Company.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: Let's put it that way.

LEVINE: Okay.

VIOLA: Well they had charge of—when drivers come in—to check all they brought in and then they had the job of loading the trucks for the next day. The vehicles. They weren't trucks but they were—small vehicles. And now my job was to pull 'em out, back 'em in, and so I learned how to drive. In tight spaces and what not. So, when I was s—sixteen I guess my father bought—he went and bought a car—a Lincoln. And it was a 1927 Lincoln. He bought it—he paid seventy five dollars for it. It had wooden spokes. It had the, uh—the window between the passengers and the driver. Had seats that you would hook back into these—behind the driver and open. And then the back seat. They would have telephone in the car. It was a, uh, limousine of—of the time. And he bought it for seventy five dollars (laughs). It was all a—aluminum body, the whole car. And he bought it because he—he liked to go and go for 'mushrooming' in Long Island. Mushroom hunting.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: Which was a—a big fad in those days. For the old folks.

LEVINE: Mm.

VIOLA: And I was the designated driver (laughs).

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: 'Cause I was the only one that could drive. And I remember taking six or seven of those—his friends—the old fellas. And he always asked me to bring a friend of mine with me. Young guy. Which I did. And we used to go—I'd drive to Long Island. With a-- about two gallons of wine. Food galore. And we used to go out mushroom hunting. And it would take time out to eat and drink and—and bring home mushrooms.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: And I drove that car—nine passengers. Three in the front, three and three (laughs). And, uh, I remember one specific incident that I drove the car—Long Island. I—I got on the first toll road in the United States. You gotta stay—and there was a motor parkway, in Long Island. They're still there, but—but—

LEVINE: [interposed] Robert Moses built all those roads by the—

VIOLA: It cost twenty five cents—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

VIOLA: —to ride that road.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

VIOLA: And it was the—the road like this, you know. Just [not understood] like that, narrow. And I think it was owned by a Whitney's.

LEVINE: Hmm.

VIOLA: And I remember that—now we're on our way home and I checked with my friend—his name was Phil. He's—look, the others are all passing out from drinking wine, or the—the old guys. I said, "Phil. Let's see how fast this can go." Yeah. Ok, so I start. And we had the rotating, uh, miles—

LEVINE: Speedometer?

VIOLA: Speedometer, yeah. It went around.

LEVINE: Oh yeah.

VIOLA: Yeah. So he say, "Oh. Six—sixty five. Sixty-six. Sixty-seven. Sixty-eight. Sixty-nine. Seventy. Seventy-one. Seventy-two. Boom! A—a—a tire blew.

LEVINE: [interposed] Oh wow.

VIOLA: Going seventy-two miles an hour. (laughs) So, I ease the brake, you know. I—I had good sense to drive. And I eased the brake and pulled— the guys woke up, you know. And it was all the old guys, "What happened!?" "What happened?" I says, "Ahh, we got a flat tire." (laughs) So now they realize how fast I was going (all laugh). That I'm really not that innocent.

LEVINE: Yeah.

VIOLA: So—

LEVINE: Did you go on vacations when you were growing up? Did the family go, like, to Staten Island, or to anywhere in—?

VIOLA: [interposed] No, no. There was no time for vacations but in the time when I—after I arrived to Brooklyn from Italy. And I was nine, ten, eleven years old. Uh, Social Service put us in camps.

LEVINE: Oh,

VIOLA: Summer camp. And I remember going—I believe it must have been Yonkers. Because Yonkers was a country in those days. So, we went to camp and it was nice, you know, we played ball. I—I think it was the—well, can't remember. Jack Johnson, the—the big, colored fighter in those days.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: Jack Johnson, who was—they wouldn't let him go past, you know. He was a go—strong guy, but they—they held him back from fighting white guys, you know, in those days. So—but he was at the camp. And he was at--played with us—

LEVINE: Baseball?

VIOLA: Softball. And—and then—this incident had quite an effect on my life. We were at the waterhole. You know, we're gonna go swimming. We got bathing suits, and, uh, I was pretty apprehensive. I'd never been in the water.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: And so I'm standing and somebody just give me shove—made me fall in. I floundered, I thought I was drowning! You know. Of course, but they pulled me out. Well, since then I would not go in the water—to swim. Which, later on in my lifetime, I run a motel, had a big swimming pool for twenty years, I never swam in it (laughs).

LEVINE: Oh. So that stuck with you your whole life?

VIOLA: But my—yes.

LEVINE: Huh.

VIOLA: And affected that—that situation. Just—'course I had four sons and they're all good swimmers.

LEVINE: Eh.

VIOLA: As fact, Tony Julius still holds a record in Peekskill. Fastest time in—in the fifty yard—what do you call it?

LEVINE: Dash?

VIOLA: Not swimming.

LEVINE: [interposed] No, whatever. Yeah.

VIOLA: No, no Butterfly. No, they're just swimming.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

VIOLA: Yeah. Anyway, but that's where they—my sons all learned how—how to do it using that swimming pool. Diving board. And they good—good divers.

TINA: He has a picture.

LEVINE: Hmm.

VIOLA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah, I'll have to see when we get unhooked. So—so, just fill me in with a thumbnail sketch, what happened after you got out of the service? Then what—what did you do then?

VIOLA: Well, I had promised my wife that, as I—we lived in—you know, I got married on the West Coast. And I loved the city of Portland. I thought it was great, beautiful. But, so different from Brooklyn, naturally. But now I'm matured, and I'm raising it—now I've got a family. So, I said—I said. "You know what," I says, "I think we're gonna live out here, if I get through with the war." You know. And that's what finally happened. After I was brought back from the Army, I lived in Peekskill for about—I got this job in '45, and moved up to Peekskill in '46.

We got a—we had stayed with her parents in Brooklyn. And I lived—and—and I got—flounderin' around, looking for work. Coming out of the service, with a family, and I got—two jobs. One, I worked for New York Central Railroad. But that was a job to be taken until we had enough to then rely on the plans we made to go back out West. And—so, that's what happened. I did have opportunity in Peekskill. I was offered a job to go—partnership, lumberyard. Met a n—nice Jewish fella who came in. We started—I started

hauling it up from Brooklyn -- used lumber. At that time after the war there was no fresh lumber. And the used was better than the fresh.

LEVINE: Hm.

VIOLA: 'Cause then there were—I was bringing in loads from—down in tenements they would knock schools, also, down in Manhattan.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: On the East Side. The old buildings.

LEVINE: After the war, they were knocking them down?

VIOLA: [interposed] Yep. Oh, yeah. And they had those oak floorings.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: You can't believe what—you, and—and two by fours were two by fours, you know.

LEVINE: They were really two-by-fours. Well, why were they knocking the schools down then?

VIOLA: Well, because they were old, outdated. And they—and they were, uh, couldn't be useful as—as schools, anymore. Because they were just from the earlys. And they were old, really. So t—to be modernized everything and they—. But there was school—but there mostly were apart—big tenements. And you heard about those old tenements—

LEVINE: [interposed] Sure.

VIOLA: —that they had. Where—when the people lived there, y—you know. I—
which was now on a—along the, uh, you know, near Delancey Street.

LEVINE: Mmhmm.

VIOLA: And, east of that Bowery area.

LEVINE: They call it the A B C's. The Avenue A, B, and C in the Lower East Side.

VIOLA: Well, the Lower East Side, yeah.

LEVINE: [interposed] Yeah, uh-huh.

VIOLA: They called those—they had the same names in Bayonne.

LEVINE: Oh yeah?

VIOLA: Avenue A, B, and C, D. Yeah. And—well, anyway, it was a lucrative s—
starting business but I had promised—so, that's what we did.

LEVINE: So then you went to Portland, Oregon?

VIOLA: Yeah.

LEVINE: And how long did you stay in there?

VIOLA: Well, I—I—I had work to find jobs. Because at one of the jobs I got was
working for the Portland Traction Company, which meant driving streetcars.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: I—I drove streetcars in Portland. And then they changed over to busses. I drove busses. And then we had a catastrophe happen. After seven years we were married, we lost everything because we had a flood. And I lived in the area where the flood was, called Vanport [ph]. And we lost everything we had. The only thing we had was what we were wearing that day. I even lost my bus, 'cause I was evacuating people.

LEVINE: Hm.

VIOLA: I made—one busload of people out. Brought 'em up to four, five miles to the next town. Going back in, by that time everything else—but in the meantime, I was the last bus to leave the second time. 'Cause I told the [not understood], “Hey, we’re looking for survivors.” It happened to be early in the afternoon. I said, “Damn it, we don’t—can’t see anybody. We better get out of here because the water’s filling this area up.” So, when I got to where we were supposed to go out, to the highway, couldn’t make it.

LEVINE: Mm.

VIOLA: So, I had a story about that. In that.

LEVINE: In the—okay. Well, um—

END SIDE A, TAPE TWO

BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE TWO

LEVINE: So, how many children did you have at that point?

VIOLA: Hm?

LEVINE: How many children did you have at that point?

VIOLA: Well at that point we had two.

LEVINE: Hmm.

VIOLA: My son Jim and Bob.

LEVINE: And then where did you go?

VIOLA: Okay. So now we—I got a job managing a restaurant. And—well, in 1955 these—this, uh, good friend whom had introduced me to Doris (to—originally she had been married and family) they were living on the coast of Oregon, called Reedsport. They had a farm there. And they—they tried the restaurant business there. They opened up a café and, well they couldn't handle both. So they called us and said, "Why don't you take it over?" You know. So we went there, did that.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: We started a little restaurant business in Reedsport, Oregon. Met some nice people there. And—and then—well, meantime before that Tony Jr. was born in 1951—1950. And then 1950—1950, uh—1957, Mike was born in Reedsport, yeah. So I got four sons.

LEVINE: Oh, mm-hmm.

VIOLA: Eh.

LEVINE: Oh. So then did you stay in Reedsport, or did you—?

VIOLA: Well, no. The restaurant—we held it for four years. We—we made good money when we started. We worked like the devil because we were open seven days a week! Starting five in the morning—ten at night.

LEVINE: Hm.

VIOLA: How long did that last? You know, we had to --. Besides, we got it closed—you had to—to—. So, anyway, then the—the industry there was lumber. The lumber industry went downhill because we used to depe—depend on the small loggers (as they called ‘em). And—and—but the big companies like Georgia-Pacific and—the other company I forget—they—they put all these people out of business. And so the industry was—was flat and we weren’t making any money. I could—I owed back rent, you know, and so I—we sold it. And we left there and went to Medford, Oregon. My brother-in-law lived there, Doris’s brother. And so we went there. And well jobs were very few— is a small town. And we tried opening up a—a restaurant by leasing the restaurant area of the bar. If the fella didn’t wanna run the restaurant part, you know.

LEVINE: Mmhmm.

VIOLA: And so we did that, but I could see the handwriting on the wall. I talk—now I talked to my brother Giovanni, who’s in New York. And he said, “Tony, why don’t you come out here?” He says, “Here, you know, they payin’ fifteen dollars an hour for truck drivers.” The union that he was in. Well, you know, that sounded good with me so—and so I decided—we decided we were gonna have to go back to New York. We gotta raise four children here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

VIOLA: Meantime, my son Jim was a—a senior.

LEVINE: Wow.

VIOLA: Yeah. And the others following up. So I took my youngest—no, Tony Jr. He was ten years old. And I came to New York. And I lived with my sisters' house. I had two sisters living in, oh, what's that area in—in Brooklyn? By the Sunrise Highway, out there.

LEVINE: Hmm.

VIOLA: So anyway, s—stayed with them and I—I got a job. My brother made sure I got a job with the union, driving. And so I start making a few bucks, dollars. So I sent for—I said, "Give up that restaurant, you know, come on." And we moved back to New York.

LEVINE: Mm.

VIOLA: Eh, then I'm—my folks had moved into Peekskill during the war. Bought a house, two-family. And, so from Brooklyn, that's where Mike was—no, Bob was born in Brooklyn. (Yeah, he was born in Humboldt Street) Anyway, we deci—went up to—move up to Peekskill. And I drove a laundry/ dry cleaning vehicle.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: For laundry—Highland Laundry in Peekskill. Meantime we were—Doris was working as a waitress at the hotel—motel, rather—restaurant in Peekskill, the only one. And then my son went to work as a clerk there—my Jim. And meantime there was—the young manager was trying to go political so I asked him about introducing to the owners, which was a group of people from New York—

LEVINE: [interposed] New York.

VIOLA: Long Island.

LEVINE: Mmm.

VIOLA: And at the wonder—most—memorable man I ever met.

LEVINE: The most what?

VIOLA: The—the guy who owned—the guy who represented the group that owned that motel. His name was Frank Whitman. What a beautiful man.

LEVINE: Hm.

VIOLA: You know, and I said, “Give—let’s have an interview for your job.” because he was gonna run for a political job in this town, Speaker. I said, “We all vote for you!” You know, my whole family, and so forth.

LEVINE: (Laughs)

VIOLA: But he beca—he got it. And so he did introduce us and Frank Whitman and we interviewed, we got the job running this motel. That was 19—take over to 1963. And then from there, a lot of things went on. The New York Jets came to town there. That’s their training ground. And then Joe Namath—that’s a quarterback—you know, he came there. That’s at first place. I met the owner Sonny Werblin. And—we came—a lot of good came out of that. So, we stayed there twenty years.

LEVINE: Hmm.

VIOLA: We gave our children a college education. And after twenty years we decided to retire and come down here.

LEVINE: You came here. Uh-huh, well—

VIOLA: [interposed] That—that's our life.

LEVINE: [interposed] Yeah, yeah. Wow. Well, gee, is there anything we haven't talked about that you think would be important to mention about coming here as a child, and living your life here—?

VIOLA: [interposed] Well, you know what, when I got here, I—. Oh as a matter of fact, before I got here, we had a—a—we bought a motor home.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

VIOLA: When we retired—before we retired we bought it. And we did some traveling with it. So when I retired, yes, we did a lot of traveling with the motor home. I went to Mexico, Canada—I went—we traveled all over, visiting our good friends back out west.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: That we left. And we also had relatives in the state of Washington. My brother-in-law. He moved into Washington. And we did traveling. So—I took—came down here with my—my motor home because I had a nephew who lived in Spring Hill.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: And his name was Anthony Viola (laughs).

LEVINE: Huh.

VIOLA: So we visited him. And he was a single, young man and he—he—and he ran a—he worked for, one of his best friend who o—owned a restaurant here. He—he graduated culinary art school, by the way, in, uh, upstate New York. One of the biggest ones there. And, so, we visit him and we decided well, let's look around here for our retirement, you know. And that's how we got here. And I—I—oh, when I retire in New York, I walked out thinking, "What the hell am I doing here? What—I—I—I wake up in the morning, I was seventy. I says, "Now what I do when I wake up in the morning?" So I took a job with the limousine company. I start driving limousine in New York.

LEVINE: Mmhmm.

VIOLA: In—in Yonkers, by the way. Run to the airport and things like that. Now—

TINA: He was busy.

VIOLA: Then, of course—that—got tired of that. And then of course—then when we came down here. And it wasn't too long after that—Doris got—got very sick. And so for the next ten years, I was—I had the job of taking care of her, you know?

LEVINE: Mmhmm.

VIOLA: So, this went on and my sons just are—now, I'm getting to the age of eighty, you know. And my sons said, "Dad. You're not gonna be able to handle with Mom," So they said for me to put her in a rest home, or something."

LEVINE: Mmhmm.

VIOLA: Well, I said no way. But two years later, I—I did. I had to.

LEVINE: Mm. Mmhmm.

VIOLA: And, that's where I've been. But I play golf, I play cards at—go to clubhouse here, you know, get involved. With whatever activities that we could get involved with.

LEVINE: Mmhmm.

VIOLA: And I met my neighbor here. And we get together some—like, we did—we went to the clubhouse New Year's Eve.

LEVINE: Hmm. Nice.

VIOLA: And, you know, did a dance, whatever.

LEVINE: Yeah. So what are you looking forward to?

VIOLA: Well, I'm looking forward to playing more golf! (All laugh)

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Great.

VIOLA: But I do—have traveled around the country, I drive.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

VIOLA: I have visited my sons where they—they all live in different areas now. California, Kansas City, Long Island, Massachusetts. And I drive.

LEVINE: Great. And what—you must be what, eighty nine?

VIOLA: Yes.

LEVINE: Eighty-nine. Good for you, good for you.

VIOLA: [interposed] Eighty-nine now. Going on ninety.

TINA: Four months.

VIOLA: And I feel like this.

LEVINE: Yeah.

VIOLA: But, uh, and take whatever comes. I'll still drive and visit.

LEVINE: Mmhmm, mmhmm.

VIOLA: Uh, I may be planning a trip to west coast, this coming summer.

LEVINE: Great.

VIOLA: Or maybe a trip to Italy.

LEVINE: Hmm.

VIOLA: Somebody had—one of my relatives—rich relatives (car horn honks)—well, yeah, has offered to—to go ahead and sponsor me for a trip—trip to Italy.

LEVINE: Italy. Oh, nice. Nice.

VIOLA: So, that's what I—well, one or the other, we'll see.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well would you say you achieved the “American Dream”?

VIOLA: I would say so. As healthy as I am, and I rubbed elbows with all the big mafia boys and stayed—stayed away from ‘em. And mind my own business, you know. And come out of it—come out of the War. Call me lucky.

LEVINE: Yeah. That's the perfect place to end. I want to thank you for a wonderful interview.

VIOLA: Thank you. As a matter of fact, the fellas I play golf with—

LEVINE: Yeah?

VIOLA: They have a—we've been together for four or five years and my—some of the guys I play golf with—when I first came here, seventeen, eighteen years now—well, they're dying off. So they have a—a

TINA: Memorial.

VIOLA: Memorial stone at the golf course. And the fella who runs says, “Well, what—what do you want to be put as an epitaph?” I said, “Call me lucky.”

LEVINE: Aw.

VIOLA: And that's what they gonna do.

LEVINE: Great, great.

VIOLA: And when that contact comes, that's where it'll be.

LEVINE: Oh.

VIOLA: You'll find my tombstone on the golf course (Levine laughs). 'Cause I'll be cremated.

LEVINE: Right.

VIOLA: And I told my son, "When you guys get my ashes, I want you to go around the golf course—put a little bit, every hole." (Laughs)

LEVINE: Okay, well I've been speaking with Anthon—Anthony Viola, and it's January the second, 2005. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off.