

EI-1374

ANTOINETTE SCHETTINI

BIRTHDATE: APRIL 4, 1920

INTERVIEW DATE: FEBRUARY 10, 2005

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 84

RUNNING TIME:

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

INTERVIEW LOCATION:

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

ITALY, 1927

AGE: 7

SHIP:

PORT: NAPLES

RESIDENCES:

ITALY: CALITRI

THE US: BROOKLYN

LEVINE: Today is February the 10th, the year 2005. I'm here with Antoinette Schettini, who came from Italy when she was just seven years of age, in 1927. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. And if we could start, if you could say your name when you came to this country as a seven year old girl?

SCHETTINI: Well, my name is Antoinetta Pasqualina Papa Schettini, and I was seven years old. I was born in 1920

LEVINE: Your birth date?

SCHETTINI: April 4th. And—

LEVINE: And your last name is spelled Papa?

SCHETTINI: That's right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, okay, great. Okay, now where were you born?

SCHETTINI: I was born in Calitri, Provincia Avelino, which is within the region of Naples.

LEVINE: Okay. And you, did you live in Calitri up until the time you left for the United States?

SCHETTINI: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Okay. And what was your father's name?

SCHETTINI: My father's name was Vincenzo Ernesto Papa.

LEVINE: And your mother?

SCHETTINI: And my mother's name was [laughs]—oh, that's good, right? My mother's name was Vincenza—I don't remember if she had a second name. I would have to look it up.

LEVINE: Okay, fine, that's all right.

SCHETTINI: And Toggia, her maiden name.

LEVINE: Oh, that's what I wanted to know. How do you--?

SCHETTINI: Toggia, T-O-G-L-I-A.

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

SCHETTINI: Papa. Married—of course, that's how they say, married to someone. And—

LEVINE: And were you—how many children did your mother and father have in Italy?

SCHETTINI: Four, but my mother had a lot of miscarriages. You know, just how many, I don't know.

LEVINE: And where did you fit in the line of the four that lived?

SCHETTINI: Well, my sister, her name was Vincenzina Eleanora, then my brother, his name was Franco Rocco, and then I came along, Antoinetta Pasqualina.

LEVINE: [Laughs] Yeah.

SCHETTINI: And my sister Anna. And then when we came here, my mother had another son, and his name is Claudio--I don't know if he has a second name or not—Papa, you know. But then my mother had a very bad experience, that the doctor said she had a tumor. He treated her for a tumor; instead she had twin boys. They were burned from the medication. And he sent her to a doctor to have a—I can't think of—

LEVINE: To have the tumor removed?

SCHETTINI: No, he sent her there for, you know, when you have a child, and you get rid of it?

LEVINE: Oh, an abortion?

SCHETTINI: An abortion, yes. I couldn't think of the name!

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHETTINI: An abortion. And she was for about a week, all over here and all over there, you know. And thank God my grandmother was with us!

LEVINE: Was this in Italy, or over here?

SCHETTINI: Here! Here in America.

LEVINE: Oh, well let's talk about Italy first. You had grandparents around you in—

SCHETTINI: In Calitri?

LEVINE: Calitri?

SCHETTINI: Yes, my father's parents. He had a big family, you know.

LEVINE: And they were around, growing up, up 'til you were seven?

SCHETTINI: Well, up until I was seven, I don't remember too much of, you know, because my mother used to work in the house. My mother's mother, of course, we were with her because my father came here. Then we lived with her for a while, you know. And then my father decided for us to come here.

LEVINE: Well now, did your father come back and forth before that?

SCHETTINI: No, no. I looked it up, and no, he came here in 1920. That's when I was born. Now, whether he came back and forth, I don't recall.

LEVINE: Do you have any memories of him in Italy, your father?

SCHETTINI: No, no, I don't.

LEVINE: Okay, so how about your mother? How would you describe her? I mean, thinking back to the time before you came to this country--?

SCHETTINI: Right.

LEVINE: What would you, how would you describe your mother?

SCHETTINI: My mother was very, always very busy. She used to make the embroidery by machine. Besides making embroidery, like, the women used to get together, and they would have a frame, a long frame, and they all used to—I have a picture of that.

LEVINE: Oh, that'll be interesting. When we get done, I'd like to see that, yeah.

SCHETTINI: Yeah. I have a picture of that. It was my mother, her sister-in-law, and her nephew, her sister-in-law's son, which was my uncle's son. And so, and of course, friends. They used to get together, and they used to work on the frame, you know. They used to have a long, then, who worked down one side. You know how they--?

LEVINE: So little boys did the embroidery as well?

SCHETTINI: No, no, he was just there, you know, being if the mother was there, she was alone.

LEVINE: Oh, I see, uh-huh.

SCHETTINI: My uncle, I think at the time my uncle was here in America. Then he went back. And I remember my grandmother saying that she wanted him to go back being the war was breaking, the First World War. And he was here, and she didn't want him to be called into the service.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

SCHETTINI: So what happened was she forced him to go back to Italy. "You're an only male in the family. You come here! I haven't got a husband." Because that's how they used to do it at the time! And he didn't want to come, but finally he did. He gave in. They will not call you. It didn't go

that way. He went to Italy, and he was called into the service. And at the first attack, he was killed! He was twenty-four.

LEVINE: I bet his mother felt terrible?

SCHETTINI: My grandmother? Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: On both counts: the fact that she had him come back—[telephone rings]. We're going to pause here.

[Pause in Recording]

LEVINE: Yeah, your grandfather?

SCHETTINI: My grandfather came, my mother's father, came here. And I don't know when. I'm trying to get, you know, I haven't been feeling well, you know, and it's taken a long time for me to find a lot of papers.

LEVINE: Oh, mm-hm.

SCHETTINI: Because I want to know when he came here, how he got to California. And I don't remember what my grandmother said, whether he was working with Getty or the Rockefeller's.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

SCHETTINI: You know, with the oil, and all of that? But then, she insisted he—he wanted them to come here, and she said, "No, I'm going into a country, I don't know the language, their people, blah, blah, whatever," and she didn't.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SCHETTINI: And so he went back, and within three months, after he went, he caught malaria, and he died. He died very young. My mother was seven years old when my grandfather died, and my grandmother was left with four children. And she had to work!

LEVINE: Wow. [Sneezes] Excuse me. So why did you—[sneezes] sorry. Why did your father decide to come here when he did?

SCHETTINI: I have no idea!

LEVINE: No, well you were just born at that point?

SCHETTINI: Right, right.

LEVINE: And so, when you think of your life there, those first seven years, what are the things that you remember the most?

SCHETTINI: Well, what I remember the most is, you know, there are certain things it's very hard to describe. They're not hard to describe, but you know, it's—

LEVINE: Like, what would you do? Did you go to school?

SCHETTINI: Oh, yes!

LEVINE: And so what would be, like, a day? You'd go to school, you'd come home from school. What would you do?

SCHETTINI: Oh, like children would do: go outside and play, and you're not telling your mother where you're going! You know.

LEVINE: [Laughs]

SCHETTINI: And of course, one day she was looking for me, and there was a blind man. And he used to sit in front of his house. And my mother would go, and he could tell by their walk who it was! And so he says to my mother, "Who are you looking for?" "I'm looking for my daughter," she says. "Oh," he says, "Piedi legge?" Piedi means feet, and legge, you know, very—how would you say it in English? Very—

LEVINE: Like, light?

SCHETTINI: Very light footed.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHETTINI: And so, she says, "Yeah." "She went that way!"

LEVINE: Oh!

SCHETTINI: [Laughs] He knew every walk! Of course, you know, even if you could see, and you're deaf, you know, more or less you have an idea what is going on. And I remember going—see, it's like a slope. The street was like a slope was, going up, and then there was a big area where people used to meet, and especially the men, you know, and all that. And they would have, like, a band playing. There would be all of these Catholic parades.

LEVINE: Like a festival? Yeah, like a Saint's Day?

SCHETTINI: Yeah, the saints! They have so many saints, they would have a holiday for almost every week, you know. That's an exaggeration, but, it was that. And—

LEVINE: And when it was a Saint's Day, you'd have a parade?

SCHETTINI: Oh, yeah, they used to have a parade. We used to have singing. At one time, I remember they would have, up in the air, like a wire, and they would get a child. And I remember being put up there as a child, and that it would [unclear], like this! [Laughs] And it would sort of like slowly go to the other end, but I don't remember after that what happened. And they used to have a feast. They would be selling pottery; they would be selling whatever they were making.

LEVINE: What did that town produce? What kind of a town—was it agricultural?

SCHETTINI: Well, I really don't remember too much of what they produced, but I do remember my father's father had a mill, where people used to, you know, get their grain. They would go there, and in a big area they would have like a big canvas round, and the women, with two—they looked like rolling pins, but it was about an inch thick, you know. And they would have two sticks, and then they would have like a leather, you know, that was attached to this one and the other one. And then they would beat the grain.

LEVINE: Wow!

SCHETTINI: Young women, and laughing, and they would be singing, and they would be telling stories, you know, but in the mean time they were working. And then they would take the wheat, and bring it—they didn't have to go far, of course. They would walk, you know, because it's all one big area, and the factory was there to make the farina, to make the flour.

LEVINE: Oh. So when they were making that, when they were hitting that wheat, there was no mechanized thing that was--?

SCHETTINI: No.

LEVINE: --separating the wheat from the chaff?

SCHETTINI: No, Not in those days. Not in those days--not in little towns, anyway.

LEVINE: Yeah, right.

SCHETTINI: You know, but that's what they used. That I remember very clearly, you know. And I remember, you know, like [unclear] high, and they were rather in a lower piece of area, where my grandfather had the mill. And a little above there, in the street, you would go a little ways from there, and there would be a big cross. The cross meant that's where the cemetery was, you know? [Laughs]

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHETTINI: And I used to go, and I remember one time going to my grandmother's property, you know, where she had—there was wheat, there was, you know, a tree with walnuts, and pears, and a little grape. She had a little big everything, which she used to work, you know. And in the morning, I think in the morning she used to go and work in the bakery, because they made their own dough. They made their own shape, and then they would bring it to the, where they had the oven, to cook. And my grandmother worked there until a certain time, and then she used to go to work in the fields, you know. She had to support herself, she had to support the children, but in the mean time, all the years, you know, that she did that. And also, she had a house built, and she used to be right next to the men, and making sure they were doing it right.

LEVINE: Now, she's your mother's mother?

SCHETTINI: My mother's mother.

LEVINE: And she came here with you?

SCHETTINI: No.

LEVINE: No.

SCHETTINI: My grandmother came—of course, when we came here, you were able to work in the house. You know, you had factory machines, or you worked making Christmas balls.

LEVINE: Oh, what they called home work?

SCHETTINI: Yeah. Everything was home work. But then what happened was, the government stopped having—because I remember my mother making linings for the ladies' coats. And that was in the summer! And working on the heavy linings, it was like—

LEVINE: With no air conditioning, in a, probably, tenement, right?

SCHETTINI: Right, right, right!

LEVINE: Well, first let's finish with Italy, and then I want to hear all about that in this country. Okay, so your father, what, he decided he wanted his family to come and join him?

SCHETTINI: Yes, yes. My mother didn't want to come, but he said, "Well, look, we're going to try over here to have a better life," you know, whatever, because they really didn't talk. They usually would gather together, the elderly, and they would discuss it and things. Children would run here, run there. And, but, how and why? You know, sometimes children didn't know!

LEVINE: Yeah, right.

SCHETTINI: Because they spoke among the elderly. And the children were there; they would play, and they would sing, or whatever they would do. And he, so he came here, and he had us come.

LEVINE: Now, how did you know? What did your mother say or do that led you to know that she really didn't want to come?

SCHETTINI: You see, there's a lot of things in those days that children weren't involved in. If you happened to be there, and you would hear, and then it would be interesting, and you would, with your hearing, you would listen to what they were saying, things like that. But they didn't involve the children too much in certain things in those days. And I'm sure that it must be also with many other nationalities, you know?

LEVINE: Oh, yeah. I think that's true.

SCHETTINI: So it was really—

LEVINE: So you didn't know? You just knew that you were coming? [Laughs]

SCHETTINI: Yeah, I was coming.

LEVINE: Right.

SCHETTINI: And so we came.

LEVINE: Do you remember getting ready to come? Getting ready to leave for America?

SCHETTINI: No.

LEVINE: What you brought?

SCHETTINI: No, no, no.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything you and your mother brought with you? Do you remember leaving home? Saying goodbye?

SCHETTINI: I remember only when we were by the port, you know, that we had to get on to the boat, which is another story there! [Laughs]

LEVINE: Go ahead! [Laughs]

SCHETTINI: I love music. I always sang, you know. And what happened was when we were by the boat, and they would, the guy would count heads: one, two, three. He says to my mother, “Senora, quande testa?” meaning how many heads? And she says, “There are five.” One, two, three, four. “Senora, only four!” you know. “Sol quando quatre.” She said, “No, se cinque,” because we were four children, and her, was five. One, two, three, four—again, he counted. So he says to my mother, “You count.” So she counts: one, two, three, four—and I wasn’t there! So what happened was that there’s, part of the, the soldiers, you know, the soldieri, they have a metal hat, and with a plume over there. And they were playing the music, and I, as a music lover, at that age, I left where my mother was, and my brother and sisters, and I followed the [Italian]. My uncle, who happened to be marichale carabinieri—now, marichale, I don’t know how it’s translated in English. It was like maybe a captain, or something like that, of the police. He came to see us off. He says, “What happened? What’s the matter?” They make my name, Antonietta, Tonina would be a nickname, you know. And he says, “Why?” She says, “We can’t find her! I don’t know what happened to her,” so on and so forth.

And all of a sudden you saw more policemen [laughs] all over the place, you know? And so finally, he happened to be near a store or a house, and there was a man. He says, “What’s going on here? Why are all these policemen?” you know. And my uncle said, “Well you know, my niece is missing, and we don’t know where, what happened.” And I don’t know what they said between each other. Then he says, “Is it a blonde girl, about seven, and she’s dressed like this?” He says, “Yeah!” He says, “Go after the [Italian], and you’ll find her there!” [Laughs] And so that’s another story that, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah. Oh, that’s cute.

SCHETTINI: And that’s the only thing. I remember the story that—my mother kept saying it over and over again, too. And but, and that is something. And after that came the part where I said, you know, I told you about my hat blowing away.

- LEVINE: Yeah, well tell that, for the tape. Now, were you on the ship when your hat blew off?
- SCHETTINI: Yes, I was by the railing. That's when I—
- LEVINE: So the ship, you all got on the ship, and the ship was sailing--?
- SCHETTINI: Yeah, the ship was going, doing its job, going away from Naples, you know.
- LEVINE: Yeah.
- SCHETTINI: And I see this thing, this monstrosity, you know, where [unclear]! I says, "Oh, my God!" And do you know, to this day—not until this day—but it's a while that I know the Rock of Gibraltar, that's what it was, and that my hat was blown away. I says, "Look at that! It's going back to its country, and I'm going the opposite direction," you know?
- LEVINE: Can you describe the hat?
- SCHETTINI: Yes, beautiful straw hat. You know, how they made things years ago, they don't make them today. Even the clothing. The clothing are not the same. They're not—you don't know if you're dressed or undressed, you know. And it doesn't have the value that it had years ago!
- LEVINE: Right.
- SCHETTINI: And—
- LEVINE: So this was a well-made straw hat?
- SCHETTINI: With a ribbon around, and you know, a bunch of fake cherries on it, you know. And they were beautiful. And I—oh, I always dreamt about it. Even now, that I'm at this age, I dream about that, seeing it flowing away back to Naples. I'm crossing, and there the Rock of Gibraltar. My brother is driving all the sailors crazy, you know! [Laughs]
- LEVINE: So did you feel terrible when you lost your hat?
- SCHETTINI: Oh, yeah! Yeah. Because that was something simple, made well, and it was something, you know, that today they don't have it that way.
- LEVINE: Yeah. Well, so tell about your brother, and his escapades on the boat.

SCHETTINI: [Laughs] Well, that was the only escapades that I saw, but I'm sure he did other things.

LEVINE: [Laughs]

SCHETTINI: Because my brother was a—even until just before he died, he was, always made people laugh, you know. He did a lot of things to my grandmother. Oh, she wanted to kill him! [Laughs] He would pick her up, run all around the rooms downstairs, because it's like a one-family house. He would pick—I remember one day he comes home. I'm in the kitchen, and my grandmother is there. And the kitchen was big like this here, a little wider. And we had the table in the middle there, and then there was, like, the stove, the sink. And he picked her up, ran all around the table, ran through the rooms, through the hall, back again. Then he ran upstairs with her, through the rooms upstairs, down again! Oh, well she baptized him, I don't know in how many ways. But she said that she was going to get him! [Laughs] And he was always full of life, my brother.

LEVINE: Now which brother was that? You just have one brother?

SCHETTINI: The oldest brother. It was the one that came with us, you know, the three daughters and my brother. And then my mother became pregnant when she came here, and that's another.

LEVINE: Well, first tell about the ship coming into the New York Harbor. Do you remember that part?

SCHETTINI: Would you believe, I don't remember? Because I think being that my mother was always so sick on the boat, you know, we were not allowed to be alone, you know, to go roaming the boat. The only thing, what I remember is sitting—my mother was sitting down. She had my youngest sister, who was only eleven months old. And there was a man at the desk, and there were papers, and things like that. And that is the only thing I remember!

LEVINE: Do you remember the reunion with your father?

SCHETTINI: No! It's very odd that I don't remember that.

LEVINE: Well, he was, yeah.

SCHETTINI: Well, you know, you were in one place, and they would ask the wife, or the sweetheart, whatever they were, questions, and things like that. And then I think you would go and meet them someplace else. That I don't remember, but I do remember that we were—I don't know if it was

a relative, or a paisan, who had a car, came to pick us up, you know? And I remember going through the Brooklyn Bridge: dark, dirty, you know? And you come from a town which is always clean, the air is clear, you know, and then you come to a place like this here—it's very, should I say, disturbing?

LEVINE: Yeah, disappointing, I guess.

SCHETTINI: Yes.

LEVINE: So in other words, you went to Brooklyn?

SCHETTINI: Yes, went straight to Brooklyn, and that's where we stayed. And then it was like from one place, to another, to another. My father—we came just before the crash, and there were a lot of men that weren't working, as you see in pictures, you know, the bread line. So of course, my father was one of them. He wasn't on the bread line, but still in all, because you had relatives here, and they would try to help you out. My mother did a lot of different work. And I remember my mother crying. She says, "I left a beautiful, clean country to come here?" For five years my mother did nothing but cry. But then, you know, you have to get used to the environment. And every time she would hear something going bad, you know, the Mafia, this, that, the next thing, she would move. But where you move now? You have them all around you?

LEVINE: Yeah.

SCHETTINI: But not only the Mafia—I'm not talking the Mafia only of the Italians. You had all kinds!

LEVINE: Right, right.

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE ONE, SIDE B

LEVINE: Do you remember any other first impressions, like, you know, your impression of the Brooklyn Bridge? Those first few weeks and months, any things that you can remember that you thought were so different here?

SCHETTINI: Well, no, because we weren't allowed to go out alone.

LEVINE: Oh.

SCHETTINI: You know, and when my father used to go looking for jobs, my mother always had the door locked, and trying, you know, to keep us safe, because she didn't know the country. She didn't know what was going to be. So one day what happened was, there was a big knock on the door. My mother went, "Who is it?" Speaking in English. And she got nervous. And we had, the building is on the corner of Broadway and Hancock Street in Brooklyn, and it comes, sort of, almost to a point. And we had the train crossed right across, and I used to turn all colors from the smell of the smoke, you know, the gasoline. And we weren't used to that; everything was clean.

You know, like Heidi, the story of Heidi? And you go up the mountain, everything is clean. Everything, and then you go down into the city, it's totally different, you know? And so what happened was the building was attached; it was two on each floor. And it was the bathroom—not the bathroom, but just—how would you say?

LEVINE: The toilet.

SCHETTINI: Just the toilet, in the hall, and two families had to share that, you know. It was very difficult for anyone that came, especially from a countryside, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SCHETTINI: And so he—the guy was banging on the door. So my mother got onto the fire escape, knocked on the window. And her name was Teresina, Theresa. And she goes to my mother, "Vincenza?" you know, in Italian. She says, "There's somebody out there! He wants to come into the house! I don't know him!" So her husband and her sons used to go, in the summer they used to sell ice, the Barese people, that's what they used to do. And in the winter, they used to sell the [unclear]. But every twelve o'clock they used to go up, she would cook and they'd go out—they would eat at home. So here you get three or four men with butcher knives! [Laughs] Scared the hell out of the poor man! And he says, "What do you want," you know, best way they were able to. He says, "I just came because the school said her children haven't gone to school!" So the guy there, they turn around, "How could they go to school if they just came?" I don't know why they sent this man, this poor man, who got scared the hell out of him! [Laughs] With those butcher knives! And he says, "I just came to say that if the children don't go to school, they have to go to court, or they'll take them away," or whatever he said to them. And they turn around, "How could they be

out of school, if they just arrived a short while ago?" I don't think we were there a month when this happened, you know.

LEVINE: Was it really unsafe, or was it your mother that was just scared, because she didn't know?

SCHETTINI: Well no, my mother was scared. You would be scared, too!

LEVINE: Sure.

SCHETTINI: You come in. Maybe you're here not even a month, and you come, somebody's knocking on the door, practically knocking it down?

LEVINE: Yeah.

SCHETTINI: So you're going to call for help, you know. And there were very nice people, very nice. We remembered them for the longest time. In fact, I still remember, you know, their living next door, and hearing stories, and whatever. It wasn't easy. You know, when I hear people that come today from other countries, of how bad they have it—they don't know how lucky they were—they are! You get an apartment, you have the bathroom, you have a kitchen, you have heat, you have hot water. At that time there, you didn't have that!

LEVINE: Right.

SCHETTINI: You had to get one of these metal basins to take a bath! You had to—they really had, we really had it really bad—really bad—in those days. And when I hear people complain today, they get off—how, if you have no money, how come you come into the States by plane, a whole family? Then you're going back and forth. And then they say, "Oh, we have it so bad!" And then if people want to start an argument with you, because they happen to be, one day, with somebody. And I don't want to mention, you know—I didn't know his name, but where he came from, because he says, "Oh, I'm just throwing this over here. I want you to know that we people from such and such a place, that we are dirty." Finally I had it up to here, and I says to him, "First place, you don't know nothing about what people have gone through. You came here; you have a bathroom, you have heat, you have hot water. And you have things put on the palm of your hand. You get off the plane, and you get already the government helping them."

LEVINE: Like welfare, you mean?

SCHETTINI: Welfare! There was a woman who wanted to get welfare. When the guy went there, and they were talking, he says, "Well, I can't give you

welfare. You can't have welfare." "Why not?" He says, "Because you have a sewing machine there." She said, "The sewing machine isn't mine. It was loaned to me until I get on my feet, but in the mean time, I need help." We weren't able to get any welfare at the time.

LEVINE: This was when you first came, when things were bad?

SCHETTINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, tell about the homework, and what your mother did.

SCHETTINI: Well, my mother, she did almost everything. They used to have these doilies that they used to put on the table. And there was about an inch or two of cloth that had to be cut, you know. And if it was, like, a zigzag, you had to cut it that way, to get rid of that piece of material. And you had to press them. You had to pick up the work, bring it home, and bring it back, which was a lot of waste of time. Where they could have had somebody bring the work to you, and pick it up, and you know, continue. No, you had to do everything.

My mother worked on the doilies, pressing, and we had to help. Then she got a job, which another paisan of ours, to sew—a lot of the stuff was handmade, hand-sewn, and you had to go to the factory, pick up the men's jacket, and you had to sew the silk lining onto the sleeves. And then you had to, you know, I don't know if they—they couldn't press it, because they didn't have the proper iron to do it. So they went, and he, they would go back and forth. Whereas some of them—thank God my mother didn't have to bring a machine on her head, because you had to have your own machine to go to work, to earn a few pennies, to survive!

And it wasn't easy. It wasn't, you know. [Laughs] It wasn't funny to my mother, though. When we lived—we moved near, on West Eighth Street, in Brooklyn, you know, in Bensonhurst, my father tried to have his own business. Whatever reason, it didn't work out, and you have debts. And my mother, you know, we had to work extra. And then she worked also on the [pause] making, you know, they used to have the hats with all pearls, and all the sequins. And she worked on that. And there, my brother drove my mother crazy. She's working, and what happens? She sees the thing going. She goes to look—and he's pulling the strings, because you had to leave about this much, about six, seven, eight inches—

LEVINE: Inches, uh-huh.

SCHETTINI: --of thread, because then to continue whatever you were doing. And he would—he's pulling all the strings underneath. This brother of mine was unbelievable! And at that time we were living in Bensonhurst, and

we had a coal stove. And of course, my mother would get up in the morning, and start the coal stove going, to give us heat. And one morning she went to get a piece of wood to start the fire going, and then the coal. She goes and touches—she thought it was a cat. It was a big rat! [Gasps] My mother screamed, and ran into bed, shoes, and covered her head! [Laughs] And my father says, “What happened?” And she says, “Oh!” and she tells him the story that she thought it was a cat. I said, it was a rat, a big one! So, you know, it—people, I’m telling this story. Like maybe some people say, “Oh, she’s going in too much of detail.”

LEVINE: Oh, no, no! The detail is perfect, yeah!

SCHETTINI: And you know, they should realize that in those days, people, it was like from hand to mouth!

LEVINE: So your mother really had to work, because your father, during the Depression, couldn’t find work sometimes?

SCHETTINI: No, my father wasn’t the only one. You saw the bread line in the [unclear]?

LEVINE: Yeah, sure, oh yeah, right.

SCHETTINI: And it isn’t that the men didn’t want to work.

LEVINE: It’s that they couldn’t find jobs.

SCHETTINI: Couldn’t find jobs, and certain things, the women were able to do that kind of a job, whatever they were doing. Like my mother—she was a seamstress.

LEVINE: Right.

SCHETTINI: And—

LEVINE: So you say you helped her? How did you help with the home work?

SCHETTINI: Well, we had to take turns, when we came home from school. We had to sit down by the machine, and we had to help sew, because my mother had to have some time to herself, you know, even to go and wash her face, or have something to eat. But at that time there, was that my mother sent for my grandmother, and my grandmother didn’t want to come! She says, “It’s a different country. You know, I have all my relatives here.” So she says to her, “Ma, you have no one here of your immediate family.” Because my aunt went to South America, to

Argentina, because just as it was my uncle's number to come here to America, they closed the—how would you say it?

LEVINE: I know what you mean.

SCHETTINI: Yeah, I can't think of the word, either, to come here.

LEVINE: Right.

SCHETTINI: And he says, "Well, I'm not going to wait another God knows when." He says, "I'm going to Argentina!" And that's where he went. He went there, my aunt went there, with her five children, now. And like my mother, she got—her last child was a girl, and she got her in Argentina; she became pregnant there. But my aunt had a different type of a life, because she was already very good in the fields, you know. So they would have a little yard in the back, and they would grow certain things. And my aunt also was like a—my brother, I think, took after her, because she was ready to burn the goat, her neighbor's goat, because [laughs] the goat would go over, and eat whatever she was growing, you know! And—

LEVINE: So she had a country life in Argentina?

SCHETTINI: Yes.

LEVINE: And your mother was in the city?

SCHETTINI: Well, my mother was a little more delicate, you know, more delicate. She wasn't like my aunt, which was, you know, rough! But a total—two sisters, totally different, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, just tell me a little bit about you. You went to school. How long did you stay in school, and when did you leave, and why?

SCHETTINI: Well, I was, I think, sixteen. At the time, they had continuation school. You went a half a day a week. And then you went—then I would take the train, and go up and meet my mother, and my sister and brother, at the factory. And then I would work four and a half days, which would end up that sometimes we worked on Saturdays. You know, you weren't supposed to. But, you know?

LEVINE: What kind of factory?

SCHETTINI: It was, the one that I remember was a blouse factory.

LEVINE: Mm, where was that?

SCHETTINI: That was in, I think somewhere in East New York. Italian people, you know, that had the factory. And they closed the factory, never telling anyone.

LEVINE: That they were going to close, uh-huh.

SCHETTINI: And so my mother found out where they lived, and she went to them. "You owe me money." She says, "Oh, [unclear]." "Either you will, or I'll go to the police." They didn't. My mother goes out. There was that poor policeman, he was so tired, because he worked nights, and he was on his way home. And he was telling her, "But I'm on my way home!" [With Italian accent] "Mr. Policeman, come!" Well, I tell you, my mother got that eighty dollars! But you don't know how many hours! And we were four working for eighty dollars for that week!

LEVINE: Mm-hm.

SCHETTINI: It was really, really bad during those days. How'd we do with the crash came, forget about it! But what I'm telling you about, all of this thing here was after, because until my father got a job. But my mother still worked, until she was sixty-four, sixty-five.

LEVINE: So when did you meet your husband? How did you meet him?

SCHETTINI: Well, my husband, I met him through my mother's sister's brother-in-law, because that's how they met, you know. In those days, families got together: "Oh, she's good for you." "He's good for you," or whatever. And my husband was not from the same town. As I said, he came from Salerno, Provincia Salerno. And he didn't come from there! He was born there, taken to Italy when he was two. His mother already had two children before him, and they died! They were each two years old, they would die on her! So when she saw that my husband was starting to change colors, and things like that, and she already had the fourth child—she had four children. She had two die, and then my husband, and the sister, you know. And she told my father-in-law, "I want to go back to Italy." He says, "Why?" "Well, it seems that every time—I have four children. Two of them already died." She said, "And these two, this one here," which was my husband, "He's starting to look the same, like the others." Whatever it was, it used to kill the children, you know. And I don't know what it was that they have.

Well anyway, so she tells her husband, "Either you come with me back to Italy, or otherwise I'm going alone. I'm taking my two children and go back." So they went back to Italy. And she got another six children; they all survived! His mother had ten children. And my mother would have—I think, my mother also had about—

LEVINE: But they died?

SCHETTINI: But they died!

LEVINE: Well, isn't it good she went back, huh?

SCHETTINI: Yes.

LEVINE: She probably was right.

SCHETTINI: For his mother, yes, it was!

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. So what was his name, your husband?

SCHETTINI: My husband's name was Fabio Schettini.

LEVINE: Schettini.

SCHETTINI: I don't know if he had a middle name. I have to look up into his papers there. Well, anyway—

LEVINE: So did you keep working after you got married?

SCHETTINI: No, my husband didn't believe in that. He says, he figured he was, there was, like, ten and a half years difference between the two of us, you know. But we had a lot in common. Both loved music, we both loved [unclear]. We were family oriented, and all that, and that's what he wanted, you know. But at the same time, he went to school thirteen years, evening school, and he graduated from City College. And he was here alone. His father stayed with him just year, to make sure that he was okay, and you know. And he left with a family that was, came from the same town. She was born here, but the family, the mother, the father, they were born from the same town that my husband came from, and she took very good care of him. And my father-in-law said to her, "I'm leaving him to you as your own child." She says, "You have nothing to worry about," you know. And he stayed with her for seventeen years, until we got married!

Now, when he told her that we wanted, he wanted to get married, and so she says, "What are you going to do? You're going to get married?" She says, "You still have almost two years of college. You're going to give everything up?" And he says, "No, I won't." And of course, she was after him for that. And then she came over, she did the things that his mother would do, you know, to meet the family, so on and so forth. We got along great. And she, you know, and the first thing he said, "Look, when I came to meet you, I came with intentions of

marriage.” He met me on a Sunday night. He goes home, he writes me a letter. And he said his intentions were honorable, you know. And so he said, “But, you’ve got to understand one thing: I have still more two years of college. So don’t pressure me, or otherwise it’s off.” He was quite honest in his beliefs, you know.

LEVINE: Mm-hm.

SCHETTINI: And my mother said, “No, everything is fine.” She met the family that he was living with, and we got along great. But what happened was, we met. Something happened, and we didn’t see each other for about, a little over a year. I sent him a Christmas card, and it was like an angel on the Christmas card. So when her children saw it—because I didn’t put it in an envelope; I just mailed it. Of course, that’s—and where you put the stamp and everything. And he goes, and he says, so his, they take it, and they put it underneath the Christmas tree. My husband never got to see it, until after! And when this poor woman saw what was happening, that he hadn’t seen it, and it was under the Christmas tree! Because it was an angel, you know. So for them, Catholics, they were—so anyway, he saw it. He read it, and after a week or two, he got in touch with me. You know, we got together; he came to my house.

And so, it happened that, during the break of the war, in 1941, you know. And my mother said to him, “You know, I’m going to tell you now,” because he was called in. He had a 1-A, so he was called in to go into the service. And they never told me anything until way after we were married. Because my mother says to him, “Look, you might be called into the service. If you come here, my husband isn’t going to let her go out with you, because you’re a soldier. You know, you don’t know what’s going to be, blah, blah, blah.” And she says, “If you get married, whatever your do, you do.” You know, “That you were to come, you go out. But if you’re not married to her, my husband isn’t going to let you.” So it ended up that within three or four months we got married.

I became pregnant right away; I had my first son. And then I got a daughter, and then I couldn’t stay with my parents, because I had children. I had an apartment upstairs, which my mother converted. You know, they called it the parlor floor, you know. And so she put a kitchen. There was already a bathroom there. And but I says, “Ma, I can’t stay here. I need more room, because the children have no space. If I want to invite people, I can’t invite, because the children are sleeping.” You know, so finally we got our own place. And she wouldn’t let us go into rent, so we had to buy!

LEVINE: So what did your husband do?

SCHETTINI: Well, my husband was a tailor from Europe.

LEVINE: Oh!

SCHETTINI: He was studying—I don't know if he was going to go, if he continued in Italy, but his mother, like he wanted to continue studying. And the mother says, "I can't send you to school. You've got to work." Because in Europe, if you're in a little town, you had to go out of your town, go in to the city, to continue your studies. And the mother says, "I haven't got the money to send you there." She had a big family, you know. But my father-in-law came back to America, and then he went back. No, no, he came to America, and my mother-in-law said, "You know, you want to study? Go back to your country." So my husband says, "What do you mean? This is my country." She says, "No, you were born in America." She says, "Write to your father and have him take you in, to go to America." And that's what happened. And there he was there for about a year, to make sure that my husband was capable of taking care of himself, being he knew, already—see over there in Europe, in the small town, they made you do, being a barber, a tailor. Because you had to know more than one art, to take care of yourself.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

SCHETTINI: So he came to America. He got a job, and my father-in-law was working with the city, and he used to take care of, like a supervisor, taking care of the people that were working. You know, like the way they do now, underground, and the pipes, and the gas, and the electricity. So he says, "Well, okay." He says, "I'm going to go back, because I can see that you can support yourself." And that's what he did.

LEVINE: Mm-hm.

SCHETTINI: But he never wanted to go back to stay. Well, what happened was the Second World War broke out, and he couldn't come anymore, you know. And I'm fortunate. The sister that was born after my husband, she died—she had four children. Her husband was a person of a war in England.

LEVINE: Oh.

SCHETTINI: And she, at the time there was the occupation of the Americans, to go over, the Germans ran away, whatever they did. And there was a place where they had wheat. So she went there to get wheat, and what happened was, that wheat, the Germans, before they left, they poisoned the wheat! And of course, you know, you mix it together, you

don't know what. so my sister-in-law got sick, and the four children got sick. The children threw up all of that, but with her it stayed inside, and whatever happened, she died from that.

LEVINE: Oh, wow. We're at the end of this tape, so I'm going to stop here.

SCHETTINI: Okay.

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE TWO, SIDE A

LEVINE: Okay, we're starting here with Tape Two. And you were talking about, you had an infection on your skin, on your head? On your head?

SCHETTINI: Yeah, right on top of here, you know. And the doctor who was taking care of me in Italy said I was, it would take time, because sometimes the skin, it takes a while before it really heals the way it's supposed to, you know. And he says, "No, you could go." So when I got here, and he touched, I says, "Oh!" you know? So he looked more, and then he says, "Oh, well, she cannot stay here. She has to go back." My mother says, "Why?" He says, "Well, you know, she's got a sore on here." Well, the skin was sore, you know, because when something is healing, you touch it, it's going to hurt. And she says, "But the doctor said it was okay." She said, "If she was not well, they wouldn't have made us go through."

LEVINE: Mm-hm.

SCHETTINI: "But if my daughter goes back, we all go back." Then I think he made somebody else look at it, and things. I went through.

LEVINE: How did you originally get the--?

SCHETTINI: I haven't the slightest idea! No, I don't know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SCHETTINI: You know? And they, you know, and so of course, when they, what we went through. And then that's when I remember being on the deck, where the guy had the desk, and my mother was sitting. You know, let's say this is the desk. My mother's over here; the guy is over here,

sitting. And the four children, you know. She had my younger sister on her lap. She was only eleven months old. And then I remember the part where we were on the bridge, the Brooklyn Bridge.

LEVINE: The Brooklyn Bridge, yeah, yeah.

SCHETTINI: That it was dark and dirty, and of course, like I told you before, when you come from a countryside, the air was clear. Totally different! I don't know if we had lights or not. But it was like, you know when you see the old-fashioned films, with the lampposts, and they go putting the lights on?

LEVINE: Yeah.

SCHETTINI: And that's how it was over there.

LEVINE: Right.

SCHETTINI: And it's—

LEVINE: So there were a lot of changes that you encountered, yeah.

SCHETTINI: So we went back. Well, I didn't want to go back, because I wasn't prepared. You know, like even with clothes, it's winter. I needed a coat, so I, a friend of mine, you know, loaned me a coat to go to Italy! Of course, him and my son did things so fast! Didn't give me time to—because I needed a coat!

LEVINE: Well, do you think coming here from Italy, do you think it made a difference in the kind of person you are? Do you think the fact that, you know, you started out in one country, and came as a child to this one—what difference do you think that made in you, as a person? Like, your personality?

SCHETTINI: Well, I think I've continued being still the person that, so far as my way of thinking of music, you know. When I went to school, I, the music teacher—she used to keep me after classes. And I, she made me sing a song. The name of it is [Italian]. Now, I'm going to find out what that means, you know. But it's a beautiful song, very sentimental, you know. And I would sing, because I sang soprano. And she used to keep me after class, and she used to play the piano, and I would sing!

LEVINE: Oh. Can you remember any of it? Could you sing some of it, or as much of it as you remember?

SCHETTINI: Well, I remember just one stanza. There's two.

LEVINE: Oh, go ahead.

SCHETTINI: But the thing is that I don't know how my voice—

LEVINE: That's okay. It would be nice to have it on there.

SCHETTINI: But, yeah, I knew a lot of songs. Even now, I—unfortunately, I can't find a place to get song sheets!

LEVINE: Mm.

SCHETTINI: Because a lot of them, especially now, things that I would sing, in Mulberry Street you can't get them. Because it's not Little Italy anymore! That's Chinatown!

LEVINE: Yeah, I know.

SCHETTINI: Seems like China came there, you know. And it was—

LEVINE: Would you sing the stanza that you know?

SCHETTINI: Well, yes, I'll sing it, and I hope I do well, insofar as the voice! [Laughs]

LEVINE: I'm sure you will.

SCHETTINI: Because I'm not a professional, you know. But anyway, it goes: [sings in Italian]. I can't sing! My voice isn't [unclear] enough.

LEVINE: Oh, you can tell, you have a nice voice.

SCHETTINI: You know, I just gave, but there are days I can sing great, and there are days, you know. It's one of those things that, first place, my voice sounds raspy right now, you know.

LEVINE: Oh, I can tell you have a beautiful voice. Let me just ask you a few last questions. What do you feel proud of? What do you feel satisfied at having done, and it makes you feel good?

SCHETTINI: Well, it makes me feel good that I was very good to my parents, and my parents were good to me. My grandmother—my children were all brought up by my grandmother. She brought us up first, and when my mother went out to work, she was the boss. And you had to listen to her! She was good to us, but at the same time, we had to go—how you say? The straight and narrow?

LEVINE: Mm-hm.

SCHETTINI: She made you do what you had to do. And it's—then when I got married, I lived most of my life with my parents, not—together, you know, eating, the first year. But then, once I had my first child, my second child, you know, it's time to be on your own. And that's what I told my daughter. [Laughs] It's—and my children were brought up by my grandmother. We didn't live in the same house.

LEVINE: I see, uh-huh.

SCHETTINI: But after 1956, I think, we moved into the same house, because my mother bought a house on West Street, between Y and Z in Brooklyn.

LEVINE: Was that the same area?

SCHETTINI: It was a two-family. No, no, no.

LEVINE: Where did you settle? You settled in Bensonhurst?

SCHETTINI: We settled in, I think it was called—oh, gosh! I can't think of it.

LEVINE: Your daughter's here. We're just about done, Linda. Well, where you first settled, when you first went to Brooklyn—what part of Brooklyn was that?

SCHETTINI: It was East New York. No, no, it wasn't East New York. I don't remember what they called that area. It's around Bushwick Avenue?

LEVINE: Oh, Bushwick, you said?

SCHETTINI: We were on the corner of Broadway and Hancock.

LEVINE: And then, where did you then go, after you were married?

SCHETTINI: And then we went to East New York, and we lived there quite a while, from one place to the other, until we went to Bensonhurst.

LEVINE: Bensonhurst, okay.

SCHETTINI: On West Eighth Street.

LEVINE: All right.

SCHETTINI: And Bait Parkway. That's where my father had the business. But we lived on West Eighth Street and Avenue O, which was a little—it was

within walking distance, you know. And then we moved to East New York. We sort of, until finally, you know, my mother said, "Well you know, it's time we get our own place." Because the landlady said to my mother that my brother—well, he wouldn't come in later than twelve, you know. At that time, it was, even for the men, it was strict. And he would take his shoes off in the vestibule, then enter the building, and you know, we were on the top floor. And the landlady said to my mother, "You know, your son came home, and he woke us up." So my mother got mad, and started to yell at my brother. My brother said, "How could I wake them up? I took my shoes off before I entered. I took them off in the vestibule," you know. So my mother says, "From here to there to there? No, I need a new—we need to--"

LEVINE: To have your own place, right?

SCHETTINI: Yeah, and that's what she did. And she bought a house not far from, the same block that her sister's brother-in-law lived, because he made her get the house, you know. And from there, we [pause] you know, then—my husband at the time, we found out that he lived just a station away!

LEVINE: Well now, did you stay in Brooklyn?

SCHETTINI: Yeah, no, we stayed in Brooklyn.

LEVINE: Well, let me ask you a final question. Do you think, for your mother and for your father, do you think they found the American dream here? Or do you think--?

SCHETTINI: In a way, yes.

LEVINE: In what way do you think they did?

SCHETTINI: Well, they were free of doing what they—because when they were in Europe, in small towns—you know how it is, even here in America—it was, everybody was watching over somebody else: what you were doing! Over here, they were free to do what they wanted.

LEVINE: Yeah, that's a good point. I never heard anybody say that, but yeah, it makes sense.

SCHETTINI: Because in Europe, my grandfather and my grandmother on my father's side, you know, he had a big family. And it was something where you had to—they watched every step.

LEVINE: Every move you made.

SCHETTINI: Whether it was right or not, they had something to say.

LEVINE: [Laughs] Okay!

SCHETTINI: And my mother had to always, you know. And then, of course, her mother used to say, you know, "Watch what's going on here," you know. But that's how it was in those days!

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Well, is there anything else that you'd like to bring up before we close? Anything that we didn't cover that you think you'd like to say?

SCHETTINI: Insofar as--?

LEVINE: Just coming to this country, and living your life here?

SCHETTINI: Well, after a while, my mother appreciated—well, because she got herself out of, you know, of hunger and things over here, where in Italy, we had food, because my grandmother had a beautiful piece of property. There's one story I would like to tell you about.

LEVINE: Okay.

SCHETTINI: We were in Italy. As I told you, you know, there was a big cross and that was the cemetery. And past the cemetery, you would enter the fields. And in the fields, just before you come to the fields, there was a big area where—you know how they have the fountains, animals, and things like that? And over there, there was a big fountain, and they had the head of a lion, where his [unclear], and the water coming out. And I used to say, "Oh, I drank over there," you know—and I could have drowned, too! [Laughs] Because it was so, you know, deep enough, especially for a child, you know. Past the fountain there was a big, they used to call it castelo, the castle. So you had it—if you were the two cents, you know, you were better than the one penny. The three cents, you were a millionaire! [Laughs] So it was very high, and it was, like, like stones, you know, all around, very high.

And there used to be—there was the house up there. And there was a peacock! This peacock would come, and very regal, like, and open up its tail! It was beautiful! You could see the colors. And he would be there, very regal, you know? And then after that, you would see the fields of wheat, where entering my grandmother's property. And she had the place where they called il bosco, which is the forest, you know, and that was hers, also, which thank God she was able to have that, because this way it gave them heat in the winter.

LEVINE: That sounds beautiful.

SCHETTINI: And then also, they were able to cook, because you didn't have what you have today. And then there would be, after that there would be the, you would come to an open space. She had a few rows for grapes that grew, and she used to make wine, and she used to sell it! Whatever she was able to do to bring up a family, you know? There would be a pear tree, a walnut tree, and she had—I forgot what. I know she had more, other things growing, but I don't remember. I know they were there, but just what. but it was really—and I always took off by myself, and I used to go and look at the fields. It was really beautiful. I still see it before me. I see that peacock, so regal, so royal! [Laughs]

LEVINE: Wow!

SCHETTINI: Beautiful colors, you know?

LEVINE: Yeah.

SCHETTINI: And it really—

LEVINE: It really was a disappointment, when you got to Brooklyn? [Laughs]

SCHETTINI: Oh, yes! [Laughs]

LEVINE: Okay, well I want to thank you. This has been a really interesting interview.

SCHETTINI: Oh, I hope so!

LEVINE: You remember a lot, and you really can tell it so well. So thank you very much.

SCHETTINI: You're welcome.

LEVINE: I've been speaking with Antoinette Schettini. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW