

EL-1276/CICCONE

EL-1276

GERALDINE CICCONE

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- **ITALY: TEORA**
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LEVINE: Okay, today is July 27th, the year 2005, I'm here at Ellis Island, in the studio, with Geraldine Ciccone. She came here when she was just nine years old, in 1919, coming from Italy, through the port of Naples on the ship the American. Okay, this is Janet Levine for the National Park service, and Kevin Daily is running the recording equipment for this interview. If we could start, and if you would say your birth date, your birth date again. The day you were born.

CICCONE: October the 15, 1910.

LEVINE: Okay, and what was your name when you were born?

CICCONE: Geraldine Ciccone. No, Geraldine Racioppi.

LEVINE: Racioppi is R-A-C-I-P-P-I.

CICCONE: That's it.

LEVINE: And where in Italy were you born?

CICCONE: Teora. I don't know the name of the street.

LEVINE: Okay, and that's T-E-O-R-A, and it's the province of Abeleen[ph].
Okay well, now what was your mother's name?

CICCONE: My mother's name was Contrera(?)[ph]

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

CICCONE: Her name, her maiden name was Cordesca. C-O-R-D-E-S-C-A.
Cordesca.

LEVINE: And your father?

CICCONE: My father's name was Mariset[ph] Mariana Racioppi.

LEVINE: Mariana? That's a-

CICCONE: Marciana, there's a "c" in between but we used to call him Mariana.
Yeah, cause I called my son Mario like him

LEVINE: Oh I see, okay. And what did your father do when he was in Italy?
What did he do for work?

CICCONE: He was a brick layer. He always did that, even he was here.

LEVINE: I see. Now, Teora. Was a little town, a village, a little city?

CICCONE: Well, not too big but it was a pretty nice size. Not too big, but it was
about, at least an hour away from Naples, with the train.

LEVINE: And when you think back of Teora, when you close your eyes and
think about your first nine years, what are the things about it that
come back?

CICCONE: Yes. Well I think about it a lot.

LEVINE: Do you?

CICCONE: Because when my mama was working on the field, I used to help,
pick up the weeds you know, and everything. And I miss, I tell my
sons all that you know, I did a lot of things like that.

LEVINE: Now was this an agricultural town? What did they grow?

CICCONE: Oh yeah, they grew up everything.

LEVINE: Like what?

CICCONE: Wheat, corn, potatoes, all kinds of vegetables, they did all on their own land. But my mother used to do all that, my father used to go back and forth to Italy. He came back and forth two or three times.

LEVINE: To this country.

CICCONE: To this country. And then the last time he came he brought us all over here too.

LEVINE: I see. Now, when you, the things that you grew, were they just for your own family to eat?

CICCONE: Oh yeah, oh we didn't-

LEVINE: You didn't sell them?

CICCONE: We didn't sell nothing, no.

LEVINE: And did you have any animals?

CICCONE: Yeah. My mother had the pig, two goats, the donkey. (laughs)

LEVINE: And what did the goats, did they give you milk? The goats?

CICCONE: Oh yeah, yeah. My mother, we had the house in country too besides Teora. Yeah it was Teora, but this was in the city. But in the country we had another house where she had the, like the chickens, the goat, the donkey. It was out in the country then. And we used to go to the town and the city. And my mother, my mother used to go sometime when she had the little pigs, she used go, they used to call her (?), a fair, you know, and she used to sell the little pigs. And I was about six years old then, and I got lost.

LEVINE: At the fair?

CICCONE: At the fair, I got lost. Some woman picked me and brought me over to her house. She sat me on the window sill, and she gave me peanuts to eat and everything, and then my mother found me there, you know. It was lucky. But I was only a kid too, I got lost in between the people. (laughs)

LEVINE: Well it sounds like you had enough to eat.

CICCONE: Oh yeah, we weren't poor, no. We had enough to eat. But the government didn't want you to have too much. So my mother used to build the hole in the ground and put the sacks of flour in the dirt, so we would have enough for ourselves.

LEVINE: And would this have been during World War I?

CICCONE: Yeah, that was when the World War I was on, see.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, can you say anything about your father going back and forth? What do you remember about that?

CICCONE: Well, I don't remember too much because he used to come and he used say, he used to help my mother do a lot of things while he was home, you know.

LEVINE: You mean fix the house, and fix the-

CICCONE: Yeah, fix the house, help the cook, and everything. But, then he used to come back, he used to like to come to America all the time, back and forth, because one of my sister was here. And she got married out here.

LEVINE: I see. So why don't you say how many children were in your family

CICCONE: Six.

LEVINE: And where do you fall? Were you, you weren't the oldest-

CICCONE: No, no. I was the, let me see. My sister Emily was next to me. I was the next to the youngest. She was born in May, and I was born in October, but then my brother was two years older than me, and then it went on and on like that. My sister Angie was two years younger than my brother. And one of my sisters was older, she had to have her own passport. Her name was Rose.

LEVINE: Well now, did your father send money back when he was here?

CICCONE: I guess so. I don't remember that because I was young, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah. Did he ever tell you things about America when you were a little girl in Italy, before you came?

CICCONE: No, he never said too much. But he said some day he was gonna take us to America, and we had a nice house in Teora. It was all

marble. It was up and down. All marble, with a big bedroom and everything. It was beautiful.

LEVINE: Now was your mother and your father, were their mother and father from the same town? Teora?

CICCONE: Yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: So in other words the whole family started there and was there for a long time?

CICCONE: Yeah yeah, yes. That's right.

LEVINE: I see. So did your mother, did you have aunts and uncles, grandparents, what kind of a family did you have over there?

CICCONE: My mother, my mother had a, her mother was living, and she had her father. I remember when her father died.

LEVINE: Can you remember the funeral?

CICCONE: Well yeah. My mother said gee, his name was Frank, said gee, he's too sick, if I wait too long, if he dies we can't dress him no more, because years ago it was hard, you know. Now they embalm you when they fix you up. So right away she put him on the donkey, you know, and everything, and she went because we were in the country, and we went to the city, the town where we were, and that's where he died. Yeah. I remember the funeral too.

LEVINE: Why don't you describe what you remember about that.

CICCONE: The, they had a funeral not like here, like they have now, you know, but just a plain funeral. They carry you, you know like that, and then you're not too far from the cemetery either, so everything, everything was okay.

LEVINE: Do you walk? Do you follow the-

CICCONE: Oh yeah, yeah. We walked, yeah. And, but my mother felt bad, you know.

LEVINE: She was close to her father?

CICCONE: Yeah, because when my, when her father died, there was nobody, it was her. Everybody was either to America or everybody, you know, it's hard. Everybody was going back and forth to America. They said they go to America to find adventures so they could help themselves better in life.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So was it the men who were going back and forth?

CICCONE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Not the wives and children, just the-

CICCONE: Not the wife and children. It was all alone. Only the first one daughter, that he brought here the first time.

LEVINE: Right. And then did that daughter stay here?

CICCONE: Oh yeah, she got married out here.

LEVINE: So she didn't go back and forth like your father?

CICCONE: No, no. She never went back. Because she got married, and then she got her own children. She has seven children. And she died young. Forty-four years old.

LEVINE: Okay so tell me what your father was like. What kind of a man was he? What kind of a personality?

CICCONE: Oh, he was a good man. Sometime when my mother used to set the table, to eat, he used to sing, pour a glass of wine (laughs)

LEVINE: Can you remember any of those songs that he would sing, in Italian?

CICCONE: No, no.

LEVINE: So he had a nice personality?

CICCONE: Oh, he had a good personality. Very good. He treated my mother very well. Yeah.

LEVINE: And how did he treat you?

CICCONE: Oh good, good. Everything we had to go someplace, he'd say to me, you come to me, you know. And then we used to board a bus, we didn't have no cars then, you board a bus and go where you had to go. So he was a good man.

LEVINE: Can you remember him coming back from America on some of those times when he returned?

CICCONE: No, but the last time he went, he died, he died in Italy. But they didn't bring the body here, you couldn't afford it probably, I don't know.

LEVINE: Oh, so in other words at some point, he brought your mother and his children to this country, but then he continued to go back.

CICCONE: Yeah, he went back once. And when he did go back, he got sick out there, and he passed away. He died with pneumonia.

LEVINE: So, why did he go back after his family was here? Do you know?

CICCONE: No, he just, maybe he just felt like going. Yeah.

LEVINE: And how about your mother, what was she like?

CICCONE: Oh, she was a nice woman. She worked hard. She worked hard on the field, and she used to cook for the people that she had working on field, and she used to bring them food in the afternoon and everything. It was good. She was a nice woman.

LEVINE: And do you have any personality traits like your mother? Are you like your mother in any way?

CICCONE: Well, I liked my mother. I think so.

LEVINE: In what way would you be like her?

CICCONE: Huh?

LEVINE: In what ways would you be like your mother was?

CICCONE: Well because, every time she did something, she used to tell me what to do, you know, so I did it. And I did everything she told me to do.

LEVINE: So you learned from her, how to cook?

CICCONE: Well, not too much. I tell you the truth, I learned more from my mother-in-law. (laughs) My mother-in-law was a good cook, and I learned how to cook from her too. I still make sauce for them, for the whole family.

LEVINE: Wonderful.

CICCONE: I do. I make the sauce for a whole month. I make four containers, so once a week they have the sauce. And everything worked out alright, and then when I went to school, in New York, I had to go to the kindergarten, because I didn't know nothing, but they passed me right away. I went to the 7th Avenue School, they called it.

LEVINE: Well, just getting back to Italy first, did you go to school there?

CICCONE: No.

LEVINE: No. So you hadn't been to school at all when you-

CICCONE: No school, no school in Italy.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And can you remember getting ready to leave to come to this country?

CICCONE: Oh yeah.

LEVINE: What, what was that like.

CICCONE: We had a lot of company, you know, the neighbors, and my mother had coffee, giving everybody coffee and everything. Yeah.

LEVINE: So what to your lovely house, after the family here?

CICCONE: Oh my mother sold everything. My mother sold everything before, before we left. If we'd wanted to go back home, we had nothing left.

LEVINE: So in other words, your father came several time before. One of those times he brought your older sister Rose. She got married and stayed here.

CICCONE: No, not Rose. Philimonia[ph]

LEVINE: Oh, Philimonia[ph]. She got married and stayed. So, did you remember Philimonia[ph]?

CICCONE: Oh yeah.

LEVINE: When you first saw her in this country, you still remembered her.

CICCONE: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. How about religion, was your family religious?

CICCONE: Yes. Went to St. Lucy church in Newark.

LEVINE: Oh, how about in Italy? What did you go to?

CICCONE: In Italy, I don't know the name of the church. They used to say (?) but I don't know the name of the street either.

LEVINE: Okay, and, but, can you remember any occasions, religious occasions over there, that you celebrated or-

CICCONE: Yeah, like Christmas. From home, from the country, we used to have a torch. You know those big candles like, real big big?

LEVINE: Yeah.

CICCONE: We lit them and we used to walk all the way down to the church on Christmas eve, and go to the church in the city. Yeah. We, because we didn't have no church up in the country, and we walked, we walked. And you had to walk about three miles. (laughs)

LEVINE: So would the whole town do that?

CICCONE: Oh yeah, yeah. Oh they used to have a good time.

LEVINE: Did you have a Christmas tree, like we have?

CICCONE: No, no.

LEVINE: It was all about baby Jesus and religion-

CICCONE: Yeah that's it, that's it.

LEVINE: Okay. Is there anything else you can think of, about your life over there, that maybe you missed after you came here, or you liked about it over there?

CICCONE: Well, I'll tell you the truth. I didn't miss nothing. I liked it here better, better than over there. Because now they got everything now, in Italy too. But in the time I was there, they didn't have no running water, you had to go to the brook, whatever it is, to get water, they put the thing on their head like the barrel and bring water home. But, when I came here it was different, they had everything, they had running water and everything, so I thought it was much better.
(laughs)

LEVINE: Okay. Well, so let's talk about your mother. Everybody came to your house and your mother served coffee and everybody came to say goodbye, I guess.

CICCONE: Oh yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: And did you bring anything with you, as a little nine year old? Did you bring anything you wanted of your own?

CICCONE: I don't know what my mother brought, but I didn't have nothing.

LEVINE: Yeah, okay.

CICCONE: I didn't have nothing, because we went to Naples and then in Naples we stayed about seventeen days.

LEVINE: And why was that?

CICCONE: Because they didn't have no boats ready to come. And they had to feed the whole people that were waiting for the boat, and they had a table from here, let's say about two blocks, and they cooked for everybody in Naples. And we had to wait in line.

LEVINE: So a lot of people were waiting for that boat.

CICCONE: Yeah, a lot of people waiting, like we were waiting, somebody was waiting from someplace else but they all were waiting for that boat.

LEVINE: Now did you stay in a hotel? How, where did you sleep?

CICCONE: Yeah, yeah. In the hotel.

LEVINE: Was it connected with the ship company or anything?

CICCONE: No, I guess so, I guess so, because then the hotel, you know, was good but sometimes the toilets were, the people flush, and-

LEVINE: So in other words, were you in like a dormitory?

CICCONE: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: So it was a lot of people waiting for that ship.

CICCONE: Yeah, that's it. That's it.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about Naples?

CICCONE: Yeah, I remember the people that were delivering things, and they used to put the rope down, they put the food in the basket, and they roll it up, and they bring it in. I thought it was fun, you know. (laughs)

LEVINE: Had you ever been to Naples before?

CICCONE: No.

LEVINE: No. So now how would you describe yourself, as a little nine year old girl getting ready to come to America? What kind of a little girl were you?

CICCONE: I was okay, but the only thing, on the boat I didn't like nothing. I couldn't eat. The only thing I ate was chocolate, bar of chocolate. (laughs)

LEVINE: Why couldn't you eat?

CICCONE: I don't know. It used to get me upset. And then I didn't like where we sleep. We didn't have the first class, we went down, in the boat downstairs, you know.

LEVINE: And what was that like?

CICCONE: No good. When the boat started to go everybody was- (laughs)

LEVINE: So it was a whole bunch of people packed together, and everybody was getting sick, huh?

CICCONE: Oh yeah.

LEVINE: And so, you said, what was the date you arrived?

CICCONE: I departed from the fifteen of November I think.

LEVINE: Let's see, you left your home on your birthday.

CICCONE: October.

LEVINE: On your birthday. You have to spend seventeen-

CICCONE: Almost a whole month. We got on the boat about a month later, and we stayed on the boat seventeen days.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. Now, I think you said you arrived December-

CICCONE: The fourth.

LEVINE: December the fourth, and could be, cause your nephew, or your mother's nephew was born in November.

CICCONE: Little boy, my nephew was born in November, yeah.

LEVINE: So you arrived December 4th, 1919. Okay, when you got to this port of New York, do you remember everybody getting onto the deck of the ship?

CICCONE: Oh yeah, you know everybody was happy, everybody, you know walked fast, it was good. Everything went fine.

LEVINE: Do you remember when the Statue of Liberty came into view? Did you see the Statue of Liberty when you first came in?

CICCONE: Yeah. That's the time that I was afraid.

LEVINE: Why?

CICCONE: Because I didn't feel good. My eye was sore, and I was afraid they'd leave me there. (laughs)

LEVINE: So, so then you came to Ellis Island, and describe what that was like, what you remember about Ellis Island.

CICCONE: It was big, a big room, we were walking around, we had something to eat, and then I described all those old-fashioned suitcases, or, you know, the things you put, the cedar chest, you know the Italian style, years ago they were wrapped up for the iron and everything.

LEVINE: You mean the cedar chests were?

CICCONE: Yeah, they, you know, they call them la gosh[ph] in Italian.

LEVINE: And so it would be, it would be like a chest, but it would be wrapped around?

CICCONE: Yeah.

LEVINE: And what would mostly be in those chests?

CICCONE: Well, all, what you call, clothes. Clothes. Sheets, blankets, my mother brought a few blankets, regular silk blankets from Italy, you know. Everything like that. Everything was good.

LEVINE: Can you remember the clothes you wore? Were your clothes, did you, the clothes that you came here in, did you keep wearing them or did you change?

CICCONE: No, no. They changed. Everything changed, because everything was funny, then the panties, they were so big, they call them bloomers. (laughs)

LEVINE: So you were here with your mother, your mother came here with four other children and you-

CICCONE: Five.

LEVINE: Five children. Your mother and five children.

CICCONE: We were six, the whole six together.

LEVINE: Well the one was here, no?

CICCONE: That's seven. No, let me see. Philimonia[ph], Angie, Jerry, me, Emily, and Rose. Six, yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. So, do you remember, oh so what about your eye? You were afraid about your eye, and-

CICCONE: Yeah, I had a scar on the eye and I was afraid that, I said gee, maybe they me here. So I was hiding around, so-

LEVINE: You were avoiding the doctor? You stayed away?

CICCONE: I was avoiding the doctor, yeah. But then, the doctor passed and he never looked at my eye anymore, so I was alright.

LEVINE: Did you have food here at Ellis Island?

CICCONE: Food?

LEVINE: Yeah, were you served a lunch or a dinner?

CICCONE: No, not when we came. We came straight home after we board the train.

LEVINE: Do you remember if you were here for very long? At Ellis Island, were you here for awhile, or did you stay overnight-

CICCONE: No, no. We didn't stay overnight. We got off, when we got the boat and everything my father was ready for us, so there's a lot of people and they call your name. As soon as they called our name, my was there to pick us up, see.

LEVINE: What was it like to see your father when he met you?

CICCONE: Oh, it was a happy occasion. It was a happy occasion. So, then-

LEVINE: Did you remember your father, when you-

CICCONE: Oh yeah, yeah. My father just passed away when, let me see, he was seventy years old, oh I remember him because I had my son, the one that died, my first son died, which sugar diabetes, and he was sixty-seven when he died. My son was about five, six years old. He used to kick my father in the legs. (laughs) He used to tease him, my father used to tease him. Yeah, I remember my father, yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, well, so your father met you at Ellis Island?

CICCONE: Yes.

LEVINE: And they called your name and then your father was right there.

CICCONE: And then we left.

LEVINE: And then you left Ellis Island. And when you say you took a train, do you mean a subway, or, where did you go? You went to Newark?

CICCONE: We went to Newark. Right to Newark. And my mother, my father had the rooms ready for us, beds and everything, on 14 Drift Street.

LEVINE: Are you saying D-R-I-F-T? Drift?

CICCONE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Which is your street in Newark. And in that area, were their other people from your hometown?

CICCONE: Yes. They were there, yeah. A few of my cousins were living right on the street, one on 21, one across the street, because they came before us, you know.

LEVINE: So did you know some of them from Italy? Did you know your cousins?

CICCONE: I didn't remember them, no.

LEVINE: Okay, we're going to pause here and turn the tape over, and then we'll continue.

CICCONE: Okay.

LEVINE: Okay, so you took a train and you got to Newark, and your father had an apartment?

CICCONE: Yeah, three rooms.

LEVINE: Three rooms. And can you remember it at all? What did it look like, the apartment?

CICCONE: Oh, it was pretty nice, not the best, but it was pretty nice. He had a couple of beds in each room, and besides that he had two sewing machines (?) ready. Some Singer sewing machines. I still have at home.

LEVINE: With a treadle, with a foot pedal?

CICCONE: Yeah, yeah. And he had two. I still got one at home. The other one my sister took, another time.

LEVINE: So why did he have the two sewing machines?

CICCONE: I don't know. Maybe he figured we were all girls, you know, and that's it.

LEVINE: So when you first got there, were you surprised at anything? Were there certain things that you were surprised to see, that you didn't know about before?

CICCONE: No, well I was happy because I'd seen my sister with the baby, yeah. And I used to take the baby downstairs, for a walk, and he, I call him all the time on his birthday. He says "I know you was going to call me."

LEVINE: Okay, so the neighborhood, were, there were a lot of people in the neighborhood.

CICCONE: Oh yes. It was nice, it was very very good. The neighborhood was fine. The people were so sociable, you know. Good people, good people. Everybody, they were all Italians anyway, but mixed from all different towns, you know.

LEVINE: So did your mother like it when she came here?

CICCONE: Yeah, she was very happy yeah.

LEVINE: She didn't have to work as hard maybe.

CICCONE: That's it. She didn't have to work that hard no more.

LEVINE: And how about your father? He was laying bricks?

CICCONE: Oh, he was still working as a lay brick. Yeah. He used to make, like, concrete in the cellars, cell bottoms like.

LEVINE: Oh, concrete floors like in the basements.

CICCONE: Yeah, yeah. That was his job.

LEVINE: I see. Was there anything, like when you went to school you said you didn't know any English. And so what was learning English like for you?

CICCONE: It was hard, it wasn't too hard but I started, when they started me to talk like Little Bo Peep, Little Ms. Moffatt, I learned right away, because they didn't keep me in the kindergarten right away. They passed me up right away, because they knew that I understood, you know. And, I liked the school because there the teachers liked me because my arithmetic was fine. My arithmetic was so good that she used to give me the papers to mark for everybody. I told my family that. I said, my great-grandchild, she's so smart, you know, I said they take after me, because I was smart too when I was young. So they laughed, they laughed, you know. But my husband, he was a good man too because he picked up everything right away.

LEVINE: Now did you know him, when did you meet your husband?

CICCONE: No, I met him. I met him out here.

LEVINE: When you were a little girl or when you were grown up?

CICCONE: No, I was seventeen years old. I met him, we went, I went to a wedding on my girlfriend, one of my girlfriends got married, and he was usher for that party. I met him, he asked me for a dance, I danced with him, and then after that he asked me out, and of course I got married young because my father did like a long, years ago they didn't like you to stay too long with a guy. Well today everything is different, anyway. (laughs)

LEVINE: So your father thought if you're gonna like him, you're gonna marry him

CICCONE: Yeah, yeah. At first he said no, he said-

LEVINE: Why would he say no?

CICCONE: He thought I was too young to go out, you know. But then he said it's ok, he said I'll give you only one more year, one year time, but I stayed it more than one year. But I did get married young, but my husband was very happy. He was happy, we got the child, I was eighteen when my son was born. I got married in July and he was born the next July. (laughs) A year later.

LEVINE: So, when you, when did you stop school then? How long did you stay in school?

CICCONE: Oh, I stopped school when I was fourteen.

LEVINE: And why did you stop?

CICCONE: I was ready to graduate, because you go to one school, was up to the fourth grade, then I went to McKinley school, was up to the eighth grade. My father said, he took me out of school, because I was fourteen. And then I had, I went to work for twenty-seven cents an hour.

LEVINE: Where did you work?

CICCONE: Faber, they call it.

LEVINE: What is that?

CICCONE: Faber, they used to make rubber bands, rubber, on Dickerson street.

LEVINE: And so, it was a factory?

CICCONE: A factory, yes.

LEVINE: And what was it like, working in the factory?

CICCONE: Well, it was good but it was dusty. Too much, they used to throw the dust out so the rubber wouldn't stick together, you know. It was, we had to wear a cap. Not too good, but it was good enough.

LEVINE: So twenty-seven cents an hour. Now that must have been in, well it was approaching the depression. Do you remember the Great Depression?

CICCONE: Oh yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: How did that effect you and your family?

CICCONE: Well, not too bad because I used to, I used to even sew coats home, home work. Men's coats.

LEVINE: When you were working at Faber?

CICCONE: Yeah. You know the coats, when I couldn't go to work, I used to sew coats home, all around the arm, the bottom, the back, for fourteen cents a coat. Now, they make \$300 a day, some people. (laughs) That's true.

LEVINE: Yeah. Now when you worked at Faber, how long did you stay there?

CICCONE: I didn't stay too long.

LEVINE: Where did you go after that?

CICCONE: Then I got married. I got married and I went to the international lady garment worker.

LEVINE: And how did that happen? How did you happen to-

CICCONE: That happened because my sister knew somebody, I didn't know how to sew, so she said to this woman, "Gee my sister needs a job." Because it was, it was depression, you can't say no, so she took me in and she showed me how to work, and I learned from her, and it

was good. From then on, I worked a long time, the name was Harry Goldstein, the-

LEVINE: In Newark?

CICCONE: In Newark. He was a, he was such a nice man that he used to buy lunch for us sometimes, you know. It was good, it was good. I worked for them for about thirty-five years.

LEVINE: Wow. So what kind of work did you do when you were in the factory?

CICCONE: That, so nice, so, I used to be special. I used to feed this thing, I had to put the thing around lace, it's got to be straight, it's got to be right in the center, otherwise it wouldn't have been good. (laughs)

LEVINE: So this was ladies clothing you were selling?

CICCONE: Yeah. Lady's garment worker union.

LEVINE: And did you ever have a strike?

CICCONE: Oh yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, tell about that.

CICCONE: Oh, that's terrible.

LEVINE: What happened?

CICCONE: When we used to go to work, the boss hired a boss, when people got offered a certain place, they used to get beaten. One of my friends got beat up so good.

LEVINE: A woman?

CICCONE: A woman, yeah. It was bad, it was bad when the strike was on. So then, because the boss didn't want to join the union, so he joined, then he joined the union, and it was alright.

LEVINE: Now were you striking for something in particular? Do you remember what your demands were, what it was that you wanted?

CICCONE: They, no, they wanted them to join the union. The strike, they wanted a union.

LEVINE: They wanted to have a union in the factory.

CICCONE: Yeah, union in the factory. But the boss didn't want to join, but when he seen that he couldn't do nothing so-

LEVINE: He did. And did it get better after you had a union there?

CICCONE: Oh yeah, it was okay. I mean we paid that five dollars a month, but it wasn't bad, at least, I still get my pension.

LEVINE: From the union?

CICCONE: Ninety dollars a month. Since I quit, I got my money back. (laughs)

LEVINE: Oh, your five dollars a month you get back. (laughs)

CICCONE: Yeah, I get ninety dollars a month. Some girls didn't want to join, they made believe they were full ladies or something- now they didn't get nothing, if they're living you know. But most of the friends are gone, cause I lived a little too long I guess, you know. (laughs)

LEVINE: Well you look like you're doing fine and you're having fun. So when the union came in, did anything change for the better?

CICCONE: Yes, it was better. It was better with the union. Because, some bosses they take advantage of the- not all the boss. My boss, Goldstein, he was so good I tell. He was a good man. Good man. And if you went to work a little overtime, he used to give you time and a half. And if they needed some work, he says "could you come tomorrow," because I didn't want to work on Saturday, so he says "can you come in tomorrow to help because I'm a little behind?" He used to go out and buy lunch for you and everything for those few hours that you worked. I mean, you can't find a better man, so when he closed he says "the party's over." He closed the place because he couldn't keep up with it. But anyway, he was getting old too. He lived pretty long, now he's gone too.

LEVINE: Did you do the home work when you were working for the International Ladies-

CICCONE: No, no. No home work. I did home work when I wasn't working with the union then.

LEVINE: Okay, so let's see. So you had your first son a year after you got married, and then you had, how many other children did you have?

CICCONE: That's it, that's all. Mario. He was born 1938. Nine years later.

LEVINE: Oh. So you had two only children?

CICCONE: That's all. Two children.

LEVINE: So, let's see. Well when you look back on it, coming here, as a little nine year old girl, do you think that made a difference in your personality? The fact that you started out in one country, came to another country, and started over, what do you think that-

CICCONE: Yeah, I think so. I bettered myself. I went to school. I did everything, you know. I worked, I raised a family. Yeah.

LEVINE: What do you feel very proud of? What makes you feel proud, or satisfied, that you did in your life?

CICCONE: I feel proud that I have my mother and my mother in-law, they were both sick all the time, until the end. And I used to pray, dear Lord, let me be with my mother when something happens. And it happened during the light, so I lived at one apartment, and she lives in the other apartment, and my brother knocked at the, knocked down, and I went up and my mother was there, she was almost gone, she was real sick, then we called the doctor, the priest, because we're Catholic. The priest came over, even during the night he came, gave her the last rites and everything, and that's it. And then we had a funeral. But I, that was the hardest part but I felt so bad when she was gone. So then, I didn't want to live no more over there on Sussex Avenue. So I moved and everything, I bought my own house then. We bought our own, my own house. Because I didn't want to move before that because I was taking care of my mother. And I was happy that I was with my mother-in-law when she passed away too.

LEVINE: Now did she live with you?

CICCONE: No, she didn't live with me, but I used to go there every day. I used to go every day. What are you going to do. I find myself better off here. Whatever I did was worked out. I worked one place. Everybody was saying "go to the defense place, you get more money." You know then was, they make more money at the defense place, and the poor people in the sewing they couldn't get no work.

LEVINE: But you stuck with the sewing.

CICCONE: And I stuck to the sewing. So my son says to me, "you should have went in defense, maybe you would have made more money." I said, "what good is it? I don't get too much anyway." I get a little bit every month but-

LEVINE: Do you remember when World War II was, we were building up towards World War II and we got involved in the War?

CICCONE: That was bad.

LEVINE: What do you remember about that time?

CICCONE: I remember that, I told you, you couldn't keep too much food, they would take it away from you. They wanted to give it to the people maybe that need it, I don't know. Cause I was young, I was young. But my mother used to hide it.

LEVINE: So did, during World War II, did anybody in your family go to fight in the War?

CICCONE: World War II. My father. My father went, but I don't think he stayed too long. I don't know, I tell you the truth, I don't know how long he stayed. But he was in the War. And one of my brother-in-laws, on my husband's side, his brother, he was in the War. He got shot, you could have seen his mark on the nose all the time. His name was Pat. But he didn't get no pension either.

LEVINE: Do you remember when the War was over?

CICCONE: Oh yeah, everybody was happy. Everybody was happy. But I remember when the War started too. Second World War II, the seventh of December. I remember that. That was bad.

LEVINE: It was shocking right?

CICCONE: Oh, that was shocking. But then I was young. I was married already then.

LEVINE: Well how do you think about being Italian and being American? How do you put those two things together in your mind?

CICCONE: Well, people say, I'm still Italian, I still got the Italian talk like, I don't talk so good English, but for me, I think I'm okay.

LEVINE: I think you're just fine.

CICCONE: And so, that's it.

LEVINE: You still cook, cause you still make the tomato sauce.

CICCONE: Oh yeah, yeah. I made it the other day. I said to my son, "you better stick around because I don't know if I could lift up bags." Because if I lift up the- I'm alright, but all of a sudden you get a pain and you might drop something, I said "who wants to clean the floor then?" You'll never clean. And that's it. What are you going to do?

LEVINE: Well what are you looking forward to now?

CICCONE: Now I'm looking out for, to see my children grow up. My grand, great-grandchildren. They're always having a party. One, Mario's daughter's got two. The son that's with us that's got one, and another one coming in February. But the other one is four years old, it's okay. It's good. But that little girl, God bless her, Amanda, the son's, my grandson Joe, that little girl, she scare me. She call me Gami [ph], big Gami. "What are you doing?" I was cutting potatoes. "What do you cut those potatoes so small for? My mommy don't do that." (laughs) You believe it? She talks. She's such a smart thing. God bless. But the father's happy with them, and he's happy there's another one that's coming too. At least they'll have two. The other one has got two, that's four. And Mario enjoys them, their grandfather. They call him Pop-pop. And the mother, they call her, one of them calls her Mimi. Mimi. (laughs)

LEVINE: Now do you feel some special connection to Ellis Island? Do you feel like you got a special connection to this place?

CICCONE: I don't know, I feel like, that they got my name on the wall, on the thing. They got my name all over, on a couple of things. That's it.

LEVINE: Well, now your voice will be here too. Your story, what you remembered about coming. Is there anything else that you can think of, that maybe I didn't ask you that has to do with your coming here and starting over.

CICCONE: No, that's it.

LEVINE: I didn't ask you-

CICCONE: No, that's it, but a few years back, when I was married fifty years, I got an invitation from Washington, from the President, saying congratulations. I forgot which president it is. I was looking for it, I was gonna bring it with me. And somebody wrote it and told them that I was married fifty years and they send me a congratulations card. I was so happy to hear from the president. (laughs)

LEVINE: Oh, that's wonderful. Okay, well if we, I think we've maybe covered what we need to, and I thank you very much for a wonderful interview. It was a pleasure to speak with you. And this is Janet Levine and I've been speaking with Geraldine Ciccone, who came here when she was just nine years old. And, I did forget to ask you your husband's name.

CICCONE: Peter.

LEVINE: Peter. Peter Ciccone. Okay, well this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm signing off.

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