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ROSALEE PECORALE FABIO

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HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mrs. Fabio was born in the United States and thus did not come through Ellis Island as an immigrant. At the time of this interview, Mrs. Fabio was the Chairman of the National Committee of the Ladies Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, which is an organization that organizes and holds the annual birthday celebration of the Statue of Liberty.

LEVINE: Today is November 15, the year 2006 – I'm here in the Ellis Island Recording Studio with Rosalee Sabio [sic] – this is a first – it's a unique interview in our collection thus far. Mrs. Fabio is a member of the Ladies Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and she has been chairman, co-chairman at different times, three years ago she was the chairman of the National Committee for the birthday celebration of the Statue of Liberty. And, she was chairman in other years, too, because you have been a member since 1946?

FABIO: No, since 1960.

LEVINE: 1960, you've been a member of this Ladies Auxiliary. Ok, and, let me just say that the Statue of Liberty's birthday, which is when it first opened, is on October 28 every year, and that is when the Ladies Auxiliary has birthday celebration at the Statue, which is attended by a great number of people at different – on different years. Isn't that right?

FABIO: Yes – basically, the National Organization, the National President and her officers come, and also all state – different state presidents from the Ladies Auxiliaries in the area, or even from as far as Texas and California – they make it a thing to come and attend the birthday celebration. And they bring their colors, which is the American flag, and the banner from their state. Many of the Auxiliaries locally bring their American flag and their Auxiliary banner, and some of the districts also bring their banners.

And, it's attended by many ladies, and also the VFW attends, and joins in with the celebration – the National Commander usually comes all the time to the birthday celebration, and he is from all over the United States as well as the National President. Every year it's from a different area of the United States, so – and we have between many five hundred and a thousand people that attend, and also we have what we call the Junior Girls Unit – it's girls between the age of six and sixteen – and they also come and attend the celebration.

LEVINE: Okay, well we'll talk more in depth about what the celebration comprises, but first let me give more of your accolades,

FABIO: Ok! (Both laugh)

LEVINE: Okay? You are presently the State Secretary for the Department of New Jersey, and you have been your Colonia, the Auxiliary president of Colonia, that's number 6061, and then you've been the president of the Middlesex County branch, and then the District and then the State president, so you have served your organization in many capacities over the years. Why don't we start now, you're saying your birth-date and the name that you were born with.

FABIO: Okay, my name is Rosalee, and my maiden name was Pecorale,

LEVINE: P-

FABIO: -E-C-O-R-A-L-E. And I was born May 22, 1935.

LEVINE: Ok, and where were you born?

FABIO: In New York City.

LEVINE: Okay, and did you grow up in New York City?

FABIO: Tille basically, like, sixteen years, and then our family moved to New Jersey, where we reside now – I bought my father's house, so I – we reside in our original home.

LEVINE: Okay, and why don't we say something about your passport to the Ladies Auxiliary (Both laugh)]. Who did you marry and when?

FABIO: My husband's name is Carl Fabio, and –

LEVINE: Oh it's Fabio?

FABIO: Yes, well, that's how I pronounce it (Laughs).

LEVINE: I'm sorry, is it an F?

FABIO: F-A-B-I-O.

LEVINE: Oh, I was thinking it was an S – Fabio, oh, I'm sorry, I've been calling you the wrong name.

FABIO: Oh, alright,

LEVINE: So Carl Fabio – and how did you meet?

FABIO: Well, we originally grew up in the same neighborhood in New York City (Laughs), together, so we're longtime childhood friends. And, then when I moved to New Jersey, well, he came and visited, and we eventually – after he got done serving in the Army, in the Korean conflict – we got married, in 1955 – so we're married fifty-one years.

LEVINE: Wow – and, so, would you want to say anything about his military career, or his activity in the military?

FABIO: Well, he served in the U.S. Army, he was in the Ordinance Division, and he served in Korea for a year and a half I guess, and that's basically – it didn't go further. So after he thinks about, it he said he should've stayed in the Service, it would've been better (Laughs), but – he would've retired, you know – but, he didn't.

LEVINE: Now, is he active in any military organizations?

FABIO: Well, he belongs to the Veteran of Foreign Wars, Department of New Jersey. He served as the VFW post quartermaster for eleven years, and now he serves as the district vocalist – we have – he sings when they require, you know in our programs we sing the National Anthem, and different memorial services that we do, and he was the state vocalist for, I guess twenty years, he was the state vocalist, so,

LEVINE: Was singing part of his career?

FABIO: No, he just started – his father sang when he was younger, and he just all of a sudden starting singing, so (Laughs)– he started making it, and he joined a band, and now he does it on his own, so --

LEVINE: And is it connected to the VFW at all, what he does on his own, or --

FABIO: No it's on his own, but it – like I said, he does the vocals for the VFW, he does -- mostly for their memorial programs or when it's – when we require the National Anthem he sings it, you know, for them, so,

LEVINE: I see, I see – and, how does he feel about your, your activities with the Ladies Auxiliary?

FABIO: Oh he's – after all these years he must be agreeable (Both laugh),

LEVINE: Yeah, you wouldn't be doing it, right?

FABIO: No, he supports me with everything I wanted to do, so – and when you're the State President, when-as I was in '81, '82, I still had small children at home, but – he took, you know, he shared me, helped me share the responsibilities, so --

LEVINE: Ok, well, maybe you can mention how you got involved in the celebration of the Statue.

FABIO: Oh, ok – I don't know when it was, but we, I think in 1973 when the State President from New Jersey - when she came for the birthday celebration -- she asked me to come and help carry the colors, so I was her Chief of Staff at the time -, aAnd, so we – and that year it rained so bad, and we wound up doing our program – they still had the program – in the base of the Statue of Liberty, and here all these ladies with their American flags and banners were

cramped in the bottom of the Statue and, but we still had the celebration, so – and a lot of people attended.

And since then, we just attended every year, for the birthday celebration, and then the National President at one of the times asked me if I would take a higher chairmanship, or then I was the Assistant Chairman also, so, that's how it got started, off and on over the years, so --

LEVINE: Well now, you were chairman three years ago, at one of the times --

FABIO: Assistant, yeah, it was assistant chairman.

LEVINE: Maybe you could describe that day – in others words, like, what happens, does it begin in the morning, does it go through – what are the activities?

FABIO: Well, basically, a lot of the ladies all come in the night before because it's, you know, a long day, and they come from all over the United States, the national people, and – so at that time we were housed in a hotel in New York, but most of the times we were housed at a hotel in Newark, and we would have a bus, and that would bring us over here --

LEVINE: To Ellis.

FABIO: To Ellis. And we would take the ferry, or, for quite a while we used to have a Coast Guard cutter used to come and take us, so it was just like, you know, between, twenty and thirty people, we would go on the Coast Guard cutter, so they would take us right to either Ellis Island, or to the Statue, and --

LEVINE: And then –

FABIO: We would visit, you know, they would visit the Statue, or they would visit Ellis Island, because a lot of the ladies had never been there before and this is their first opportunity.

And then we would have a program set up, and we would introduce the Park Service, who's in charge of the Statue, and present her with a gift, and every year the National President did something different. I remember one time we did, she donated – one of the presidents donated trees, one donated a chair for the museum, one donated, I think a puppet, they had a little puppet stage somewhere in the Statue, ya know, of Liberty, and – and then they would donate speaker systems, or chairs, whatever the Statue needed, they would donate, on behalf of the national organization.

And we would have a little program, and we would have a pledge, and a prayer, and – the Palisades Park, last couple of years, Volunteer ~~Firefighter Company~~ Fire Company, they have a band, and they would come and sing – not sing, but they would perform their music while somebody else sang. And, basically, that would be mostly – the National Commander would come and speak and he would, you know, do a little speech about the Statue and our organizations and all – but there was always a big turnout, always a big turnout, and it was always something special to the Ladies Auxiliary.

LEVINE: Well now, you mentioned something about banners and lining up, why don't you describe that?

FABIO: Ok – at the beginning of the pro—before the program begins, the National President would bring her banner and American flag, and then behind her would line up all the state presidents with their banners, and wherever a state was, if there were local Auxiliaries or district Auxiliaries, they would line up with their state – and then they would, at the beginning of the program they would march in. The national colors would stay at the podium, and the rest of

them would file in and go around, and stand along the sides of where everybody was sittin' with, you know, in the chairs, and they would stand during the whole program, and – it's like an honor, you know – and then at the close of the program they would file back out, so it – it was very nice, and sometimes when the wind was blowing, you would see those flags and banners blowing, and waving in the breeze. It was – like I said, I only remember very few that it really rained hard that we had to go inside – the one year we did do it in – when Ellis Island opened we did it in the, I don't know what you would say, the big room downstairs,

LEVINE: The Great Hall.

FABIO: The Great Hall, yeah – we did the presentation there.

LEVINE: Now, do you personally have any connection with Ellis Island, your family?

FABIO: No.

LEVINE: No.

FABIO: Now, I don't know – I never researched, I guess, to be honest, if, when my grandfather and my grandmother came over, so, I don't know if he came through Ellis Island or not.

LEVINE: Where would they have come from?

FABIO: Italy.

LEVINE: Yeah, well they may well have.

FABIO: Yes, yes – I have to be honest, I never looked into it, but I should, ya know.

LEVINE: And, why don't you say what it means to you to be part of that, of that birthday celebration of the Statue?

FABIO: Well, it means – you know that wish - and pride that our organization has the, takes the time to do this, because it shows that we are a patriotic organization, and that we - show our, pride in the organization, I guess, by doing this program, and showing how much we love the United States of America, and we would – our relatives, all gave their – some gave their lives, and some gave others to protect the United States.

LEVINE: It sounds like the organization has a kind of a military – what do I want to say – that it's organized in a military way.

FABIO: Well, yes, we do, we do some ritual, like at our meetings we do a basic ritual, like to open the meeting and to – we do the Pledge of the Flag, and the National Anthem, at our meetings, and we do a prayer, and we do have a uniform that we wear – I mean but you don't have to, but most of the ladies that are active wear the uniform. And, because we are formed from the Veterans of Foreign Wars, there are fellas, or now, ladies, that served overseas during a conflict – that's what's the difference between American Legion, you don't have to serve in a conflict – but, the VFW, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, have to, you have to serve during a conflict, to be eligible.

LEVINE: And, why don't you say something – I mean, you don't have to be exhaustive at all, but – about the history of the organization, like when it started.

FABIO: Oh, it stated in 1914, I believe - and ~~has~~ been active ever since.

LEVINE: And, and the, the aspect of the Statue of Liberty celebration,

FABIO: That started in 1936, when one of the presidents – I guess - asked what they could do for the Statue, and they decided to make a presentation and to visit the Statue on the birthday celebration of October the 28, so, that has continued since 1936, every year.

LEVINE: So does your husband attend the celebration?

FABIO: Yes he does, sometimes, you know – now that he's not – well he works part time or whatever – but he does attend, yes.

LEVINE: And, do you have much association with the other ladies in the Auxiliary, you know, at different times during the year?

FABIO: Oh yeah – we meet on a national level, they meet like twice a year, they do a conference – they call it Mid-Year, which is maybe March or April – and then we have our National Convention in August, so we meet then, and --

LEVINE: What do you discuss at those?

FABIO: Oh, the different programs, 'cause we do other things besides, you know, we do [ph] Americanism program, which is our primary, and we do [ph] Buddy Poppy. I don't know if you've ever heard of the Buddy Poppy, but it's a little red flower that disabled vets make, and we sell it basically during the month of May, and all the – I shouldn't say sell, it's --

LEVINE: Donations

FABIO: Donations, and all that goes back to help each Auxiliary that does the Poppy drives, goes in their relief fund, and that helps veterans - and their families in distress, in any of our programs. And we have a good youth program that we, we give about ten-thousand dollar scholarship, as a national winner - gets a

ten-thousand dollar scholarship for college, for any school that he wants to attend – he or she, ‘cause there’s been a number of girls that win, and they have them from all over the United States. Every state enters a scholarship winner, and then they go to Washington D.C., in March, and the winner is picked and presented. And everyone that enters receives some kind of a scholarship – the largest is ten thousand, and the least is a thousand – so everybody receives a scholarship.

And now we have what we call Patriot’s Pen – that’s for the seventh and eighth graders. And they do an essay – write an essay – and they also give a scholarship for that, the national organization. And of course they go from the Auxiliary, or the post give an award, and then at the district, and then the state, and then it goes to the national, so these children win some kind of monetary gifts going up the line, so it helps them toward their education. And we have a, the Ladies Auxiliary now sponsors the Young American Patriotic Art Contest – it’s for art students – and that – (Sighs) – I think the scholarship is ten thousand dollars – five thousand dollars for that, either ten or five. They changed it recently - and I have to say I don’t remember - but that goes towards to help their education also.

LEVINE: And where does the artwork go?

FABIO: You mean the winners? Well, they get it – I don’t - they take – they give them back, they give them back to the students, but they go to national, and then there’s a judging, national has a judging on it, and they do five winners, so – and they displayed at the National Convention. So it’s very nice, it gives students – we do a lot of youth programs – you know, sometimes we get some bad vibes, but, we do a lot of good things for our organization.

LEVINE: Are you involved with the Veterans Hospitals at all?

FABIO: Yes, that's one of our other primary programs, yeah – we go to Veterans Hospitals and what they call parties – they either play Bingo, or distribute gifts and refreshments, and, just talk to talk to the fellas, and the ladies now, 'cause there's a lot of women in the service now, so they're also eligible. And, we give out what we call Operation Uplink, it's a phone-card, and fellas overseas and girls overseas can call home, with no charge, so --

LEVINE: That's really nice,

FABIO: And all the Auxiliaries in the nation all donate towards that, so that's what they use that money to buy the phone-cards, and help promote the – help the soldiers that are overseas, or even the ones that are in the hospital, because some of them are not close to home, and they can call home with the phone-cards.

LEVINE: That's a lot of programs – where do you get your money from?

FABIO: Well, that's what it comes from, the dues – each Auxiliary pays dues, every Auxiliary's a different amount. And that goes into the state – part of it goes in the Auxiliary and part of it goes in the state, and then the state sends some of it to national, so that's how --

LEVINE: So it's primarily dues, it isn't like you do bake sales, or whatever?

FABIO: Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes, 'cause we have a cancer program also that we support, and the national organization has a Cancer Aid and Research Program, and every state that donates money to the Cancer Aid and Research program, a percentage – ten to twenty percent comes back to the state, to donate to a research center. Now the last – our, just our New Jersey, just donated five-thousand-six-hundred and some odd dollars to Hackensack Memorial Cancer Center. And over the years, that I remember,

we've donated twenty-five thousand dollars or more to Coriell Institute in Camden, through the state of New Jersey.

LEVINE: That's a cancer institute?

FABIO: Yes, it's a cancer research center – it has to go to a cancer research center. Other states do the same thing, to a research center in their state – whatever percentage of the money they get back. And the ladies raise this by having cake sales, or raffles, or Chinese auctions, or dinners, they have dinners.

LEVINE: What's a Chinese auction? (Both laugh)

FABIO: Okay, some call it a tricky tray - I don't know if that's. T—they put gifts on the table, table; you buy a sheet of tick -- a sheet of tickets. ets, it's all small tickets, and you pick them off and you put them in a bucket with that – say there was a dish, or a camera, or something that you would like, you put your tickets in there and then the ticket is pulled and that would be the winner of the item, so – and the proceeds from that would go to, to make donations.

LEVINE: I see – now are you active in other organizations, or is this your primary,

FABIO: No (Laughs), this is my primary,

LEVINE: This is about all you have enough, enough energy to do, yeah. Well, you do a lot for it.

FABIO: Yeah, yeah – 'cause I'm the treasurer of my local Auxiliary, so I primarily take care of the dues, and whatever money comes in. And membership, which is our primary concern, Cause our members are – 'cause World War Two veterans are – you know - passing away because of their age, and, so, it's

primarily a thing to get more members to join. So now the ones from Iraq are eligible to join.

LEVINE: I see – so I guess the Ladies Auxiliary, the ladies can continue even if their husbands are deceased,

FABIO: Right, yes, yes – you can join under your eligibility of your husband, or your father, or your brother, or a stepfather if you – if he raised you from an early age, so, that's how the ladies can join, under their eligibility. But the Veteran has to serve in a campaign on a foreign soil, so that's the eligibility of Veterans of Foreign Wars.

LEVINE: Do you find you have a lot in common with the other ladies that are involved with this Auxiliary?

FABIO: Oh yeah, we – you know, basically most of us are family people, and have children, and work together, and we're all for one cause, so we're very active, yeah.

LEVINE: Well why don't you mention your children, your children's names?

FABIO: Oh, okay – I have my Christine, she's my oldest, and then I have Susan, and then I have Ellen, and then I have Anne Marie. So --

LEVINE: So they technically could become,

FABIO: They're all members,

LEVINE: Oh they're all members?

FABIO: They're all members of the Ladies of Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars of Colonia. And I also have two of my granddaughters, are members. 'Cause they're twenty-six and twenty-two and --

LEVINE: And they're members because of their grandfather?

FABIO: Yep, or they can join under their father, because my oldest daughter, Chris, her husband Bob, he also served and they could join under him. My other daughters don't have eligibility except through their father.

LEVINE: I see.

FABIO: Yeah, so – and I have, I have two more, two grandsons, and a granddaughter, but they're ten, six, and four, and then I have two great grandsons that are eighteen months.

LEVINE: Wow – okay, and, this is an off the wall question, but, what do you, would you say has brought you a great deal of satisfaction, that you've done?

FABIO: Well, helpin', helpin' the members, helpin' the community, 'cause we do a lot of community work also. I mean, we basically, if the Girl Scouts or the Boy Scouts need anything, or if the church needs anything, we do a Thanksgiving basket. And this is -- this is on the local level, and, but, ya know, every Auxiliary primarily does it – and we, at Thanksgiving or Christmas, if there's a needy family, we give, we donate a Thanksgiving basket to them, and, hopefully it would make brighter holidays for them. So, I think it's just the idea of us all working together, to help one another.

LEVINE: Okay, well is there anything that I haven't thought enough to ask, that you can think of connected with the Ladies Auxiliary or the celebration at the Statue, or any other aspects that you can think of?

FABIO: I don't think – I think I talked enough (Laughs).

LEVINE: Well I think you, you gave – I can see why you were chosen, to represent your group, and, I think we have probably covered it.

FABIO: Yeah, basically. And, like I said, the national president comes from all over the United States, so every year its from a different section of the United States. This year, Linda Mita, who, she's the one that asked me to I guess, when they, when you spoke to, I guess our national organization, she was the one that recommended me – she comes from New Hampshire – and I've known her a number of years. And the girl from previous years came from, one came from Alabama, one came from Kansas, so the new one coming up is going to come from the state of Washington, so it – they come from all over the United States. And we have, in New Jersey, we have one past National President that's still alive – we've had three others, but they're all deceased now.

LEVINE: Well, so do you feel that, do you feel like you're part of a very large --

FABIO: (Laughs) Oh yes, a big family. And, I know quite a few, so when I go different places to visit, I know a lot of people. We also have – well, what's coming up this weekend is the, our Eastern conference, and that's where all the states from the East get together, and we do programs, and talk about – all our state presidents talk about what they do in their state, so it gives somebody else an idea of what they can do to promote the organization. So --

LEVINE: Well great – well thank you so much, this has been an interesting interview, it will be a plus in our collection,

FABIO: Oh, thank you! (Laughs)

LEVINE: And I guess maybe I'll see you at a celebration,

FABIO: Oh I hope so soon. (Laughs)

LEVINE: For the Statue one of these days.

FABIO: Next year!

LEVINE: Next year, right,

FABIO: Comin' up – but it'll be October 28, so whatever, rain or shine, we'll be here.

LEVINE: Okay, and I have been speaking with Rosalee Fabio, who has been a member of the Ladies Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars in many capacities. And her reason for being interviewed by us, is that she has been chairman several times of the celebration of the Statue of Liberty on October 28. Okay, this is Janet Levine, for the National Parks Service, and I'm signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW