

**EI-1460
ROSE MANZELLA POLATORE
BIRTH DATE: APRIL 12 1909
INTERVIEW DATE: JUNE 27th 2007
AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 98 YEARS OLD
RUNNING TIME: 56:06
INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE
RECORDING ENGINEER: JANET LEVINE
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: AMANDA CARELLA
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: NOT REVIEWED YET**

**ITALY, 1921
AGE: 12
SHIP: AMERICA
PORT:
RESIDENCES:
ITALY: PALERMO, BAGARIA
NEW YORK: BUFFALO**

LEVINE: Today is June the 27th, 2007 and I'm here in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania, with Rose Manzella Polatore (sniffs). She came to this country when she was twelve years old, in 1921, and she came here with her mother, and her two sisters—[leaves off]

POLATORE: [continues] and one brother

LEVINE: And one brother—

POLATORE: That's right.

LEVINE: And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. If you would say for the tape again, your birth date.

POLATORE: Oh, you want to know my birthday?

LEVINE: Yeah.

POLATORE: It's regular right age is 19—[starts again] 1909. Date: April, the twelfth

LEVINE: [interposed] Okay

POLATORE: [continues] 1907.

LEVINE: Well, let, let's—why don't you explain?

POLATORE: [superposed] The right age is 1907 (taps the desk with each number)

LEVINE: Okay.

POLATORE: And then was 1909.

LEVINE: Okay.

POLATORE: [interposed] Okay.

LEVINE: [continues] Why don't you explain, explain how come?

POLATORE: How come? Okay. The family was big. My father had a horse [Giac? ph]: that horse was sick all the time. So finally, [not understood] sent a letter each other in America and Italy, joking around, they said: "We throw the dishes away after we eat." My father told Orego [ph] "Oh, we go America," and so we come America, and [tears] poor me! I was young, I had to work. Go in the country, 1921, I think it was April or May, but they were all taking to go and work in the country. So followed here, 1922. (Knock on door) we went

LEVINE: [interrupts] Wait, we're going to pause here—

POLATORE: [superposed] mm-hmm.

LEVINE: (writes something) Okay. Uh, wait, okay we're continuing here

POLATORE: [interposed] They—they were throwing dishes away it was a paper dish (sniffs). So my father said: "boy, let's go America." So they came here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

POLATORE: So when they come here, he don't know how to talk. But was my uncle, he had a little business in concrete work he was working with him. Then one of the other brother give a job see it was a [not understood], I can't remember my mind it turns sometime—

LEVINE: Okay.

POLATORE: I'm hundred years old, so—he give him a job there. Then all at once, I don't remember —just telling you what I remember—

LEVINE: Yeah.

POLATORE: We stay home. So we had to raise a family. I took my mother place that she was working and I used to watch the kids.

LEVINE: Ah. Well let's go back first—

POLATORE: [interposed] see?

LEVINE: —to life in Sicily

POLATORE: [interposed] oh

LEVINE: You—you were in Bagaria

POLATORE: [superposed] Not in Italy! School (pauses) I go—oh, what do you call—like a dressmaker.

LEVINE: [interposed] Oh

POLATORE: I learn embroidered—

LEVINE: [interposed] uh-huh

POLATORE: —after school go over there in a class and I do that kind of work. Stretch the stitches and the cloth, canvas the treads and then here we had to work on it.

LEVINE: I see.

POLATORE: After that, we came here, we tried to do the same thing. They want it from nothing.

LEVINE: Oh.

POLATORE: But it took—take a long time to do that kind of work.

LEVINE: Yeah.

POLATORE: Then they give my job to my mother. And then I took my mother job. They should have did the baby.

LEVINE: Oh. Uh-huh

POLATORE: [interposed] see?

LEVINE: Well tell me what you remember—you were twelve years old when you came.

POLATORE: Yes

LEVINE: [continues] So, what your life before you came—

POLATORE: Yes

LEVINE: [continues] What did, what—were you a Catholic family? Did you grow up Catholic? Were you religious?

POLATORE: Oh yeah! I used to go church, oh yeah.

LEVINE: [interposed] Yeah

POLATORE: Real religion I was, what's right is right

LEVINE: [interposed] Yeah

POLATORE: In Italy I used to go church after (stumbles) sch-school, after school, I used to go—the other school to embroidered.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

POLATORE: After [not understood] I come too. So, my father was too jealous and we could—we would do work at home. They want to pay for peanuts.

LEVINE: Yeah.

POLATORE: Peanuts, peanuts is why my mother got a job in a tailor. She know how to make dresses, and she work after, I took her place because I knew she was gonna get a baby.

LEVINE: [interposed] Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

LEVINE: Okay, well going back to Bagaria—

POLATORE: What?

LEVINE: Bagaria? Where you—

POLATORE: [interrupts] Bagaria is a small town—

LEVINE: [continues] Yeah, describe it, tell me what it was like there.

POLATORE: Well, I'm gonna say something but (pauses) years back, everything was different right?

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

POLATORE: They had—excuse me—a kitchen here and a horse here. When my mother marry my father she know that Bagaria they had the style. My

mother says: "Yeah, I marry you, but I don't want the horse in the kitchen." So, the house they married, there was a land too, and they built one room for the horse.

LEVINE: Ah.

POLATORE: So that's why—

LEVINE: [superposed] So what was your mother like, tell me what—

POLATORE: [superposed] Palermo. Palermo was better.

LEVINE: Oh. She was from Palermo.

POLATORE: [interposed] Oh, oh was very nice.

LEVINE: So—

POLATORE: [continues] She lived with Grandma because her husband died. It was in a war time, number one or number two, I forgot, I think it was number tw—

LEVINE: [interrupts] number one

POLATORE: Number one?

LEVINE: Mm-hmm

POLATORE: [continues] Yeah, because I was young

LEVINE: Yeah

POLATORE: Yeah. So that's why we live in there because my father went in the army.

LEVINE: Ah, ah. Do you remember when your fa—

POLATORE: [superposed] and when he came back

LEVINE: Yeah.

POLATORE: We like it, because he heard that we were throwing the dishes away. So we came America after they invite us—listen to this one

LEVINE: (laughs)

POLATORE: So we took the dishes in wash, my father says: ‘You say you throw the dishes away!’ Paper dishes, not *these*.

LEVINE: Ah!(laughs) I see!

POLATORE: [interposed] He thought you had to be rich here!

LEVINE: Yeah

POLATORE: [superposed] you don’t have to work. That’s why I not come ‘til after, because he couldn’t raise—raining every day sometimes he couldn’t have no money—

LEVINE: What did he do for work?

POLATORE: Concrete, at times

LEVINE: Over in—?

POLATORE: In Buffalo. Oh, in Italy with horse? I don’t know what kind of job he had. But he was working on a horse

LEVINE: A horse, uh-huh.

POLATORE: That I don’t remember what kinda—but he used to come home every night.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

POLATORE: He used to come home. I don’t know what kind of job he had. See?

LEVINE: Yeah. But you didn't work alway—

POLATORE: Huh?

LEVINE: You didn't work. When you were in Italy you didn't work, you were only twelve

POLATORE: I was—I was going to school, I was twelve years old

LEVINE: [interposed] School

POLATORE: But over here, I didn't go to school. We started go in night school

LEVINE: Oh!

POLATORE: For senior citizen paper. See?

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. Now, were you, um, were you the oldest child?

POLATORE: No. My oldest dau—uh, sister died.

LEVINE: Oh. In Italy?

POLATORE: I am the second. And the third is dead. My, I say my older brother, but he was much younger than me. He's dead. But the younger one is living.

LEVINE: I see.

POLATORE: We still have three sisters and one brother and me.

LEVINE: And when you came here it was your oldest sister?

POLATORE: yeah

LEVINE: [continues] and you, and your

POLATORE: [finishes] and the third one

LEVINE: and the third, and then the brother, the little boy

POLATORE: [superposed] that's right

LEVINE: Yeah, that's okay. Okay, um, what—can you say anything else about life in Italy? Anything that you remember?

POLATORE: Well—

LEVINE: Your grandmother—

POLATORE: The only thing I remember is that my uncle used to make a cook uh those rich people like here they had uh Crystal Beach, they used to go in a summer time, I stay over there. They had them too: one my uncle used to cook for them

LEVINE: Oh

POLATORE: And where my grandmother used to live was here; open the door for the rich people and my uncle used to go in a building. Every summer time they used to there. And my uncle was cooking there.

LEVINE: Hmm. I see. Yeah.

POLATORE: And I used to go to school there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh

POLATORE: At Bagaria then, it was different. Palermo I liked, better school. At Bagaria—just, just like here. For instance, when you go in a country, one country's good one country is no good. Plain English, right?

LEVINE: Right, right. Yeah. So uh (clears throat), what was your mother's name?

POLATORE: Pardon me?

LEVINE: Your mother's name?

POLATORE: Oh. Uh (taps desk), Morana.

LEVINE: Morana? And—

POLATORE: A single name.

LEVINE: And—

POLATORE: [superposed] And her married was Manzella [ph]. That's it, right?

LEVINE: Right, right. So M-O-R—

POLATORE: [continues] A-N-A

LEVINE: That was her maiden name. And what was her first name?

POLATORE: My mother?

LEVINE: Yeah.

POLATORE: Josephine.

LEVINE: Josephine. And your father, what was his first name?

POLATORE: Mike.

LEVINE: Mike. Okay. And did they ever tell you how they met?

POLATORE: (pause) No.

LEVINE: [simultaneously] No.

POLATORE: I don't remember at all

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

POLATORE: They were always there, you know?

LEVINE: Yeah. What did you do for fun? When you were in Italy? What did you do to enjoy, for enjoy—

POLATORE: No fun at all in Italy. Go to school. Go to school to learn how to embroidered. Go home, finish studying, and go back to school. I never had a good time when I was young, and I never had a good time after my husband died. He died at fifty-five and he left two kids, honey and I [not understood]. I had to raise my kids, and here I am.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well now how did you—why did you—did your father come first?

POLATORE: No, that's another story.

LEVINE: Okay, tell me that.

POLATORE: He says "I go." When was the time to give it the day to come, stay back. He don't want to come alone. That's why there are those pictures.

LEVINE: Oh.

POLATORE: Yeah, see? Because he had his picture already. My father.

LEVINE: Yeah, I see.

POLATORE: So my mother say, "It's too time he been saying no no, what the heck is going on? I got no money to spend." So then he say "I think we all go together." So we went with him together.

LEVINE: Ah. And what—where did you go? Well, do you remember the trip? Do you remember the voyage? You came on the ship America. You went to Napoli—

POLATORE: [superposed] I think it was in Palermo.

LEVINE: Oh, Palermo?

POLATORE: [continues] I think it was in Palermo, took the boat. It wasn't Napoli, no.

LEVINE: Okay. And—and

POLATORE: They could straighted out, they could do that, because that's the only one and they're small and they're

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah. Well, now do you remember the voyage on the America? Do you remember the voyage?

POLATORE: The village?

LEVINE: The voyage, when you were on the ocean, on the ship?

POLATORE: Oh. I remember the food, I didn't like it. Poor my mother, whatever she had. We couldn't eat, we couldn't eat what we were served. Then they started pizza, and we like pizza. We started eating pizza every day. And then so much that we used to go out too in the old country. We never go out, the boat goes. We go third floor up, we get dizzy, we had to stay one week downstairs where the bed was.

LEVINE: Ah.

POLATORE: And what to eat? Pizza everyday! And that's the story.

LEVINE: And so do you remember when the boat came into New York?

POLATORE: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

LEVINE: What was that like?

POLATORE: That was uh, Statue of Liberty, we were so happy, so we all get off. Then my uncle came and pick us up. I remember

LEVINE: [interposed] Yeah, uh-huh. Do you remember Ellis Island, at all? Do you remember Ellis Island?

POLATORE: No, I was twelve years old.

LEVINE: No? Okay. So your uncle picked you up, your uncle, and where did he take you?

POLATORE: Over his house.

LEVINE: And where was that?

POLATORE: I think my uncle used to live in Palermo first.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

POLATORE: Yeah. We stay there, and then when move my father--father city, Bagaria.

LEVINE: I see. But—

POLATORE: Then they bought the house, the way I told you

LEVINE: Yeah

POLATORE: With the horse back there, there was the same one and still it was when we came in Buffalo. Still was that house, finally they sold the house.

LEVINE: So did your uncle who picked you up, in New York, did he take you to Buffalo?

POLATORE: [interposed] My uncle, yeah he took oh, I remember those, we came in Buffalo, yeah, that's all I remember my uncle.

LEVINE: Yeah

POLATORE: Because they wrote that I remember that my mother say “Put some mark in a shoulder so we know that, that’s you, you are my brother.” So he put a mark on a pocket.

LEVINE: (laughs)

POLATORE: So my mother was looking for the (laughs)

LEVINE: Yeah, so, when you first came here, you were a little twelve year-old.

POLATORE: [superposed] For sure.

LEVINE: So how would you describe yourself? What kind of a little girl were you, a little twelve year-old girl?

POLATORE: Well, really, I was a kinda shy, see, yeah

LEVINE: [interposed] Oh

POLATORE: I couldn’t go out, that’s one thing, my father was too strict. I couldn’t go out, twelve’s year old. He started with the twelve years old. So we couldn’t go out

LEVINE: Uh-huh

POLATORE: Then, uh, we stay about a week or two. Screw [ph] Street, in Buffalo,

LEVINE: Oh

POLATORE: Screw [ph] number twelve.

LEVINE: Ah!

POLATORE: Yeah, my uncle. See my uncle and my aunt they were cousin. So he was my mother brother, and she was my, my father’s sister.

LEVINE: Oh! Uh-huh, uh-huh. So you stayed with them?

POLATORE: Yeah we stayed there for a little while until we could rent a house. Then that was another story. Too many kids they couldn't rent a house. And my mother had to lie, one less.

LEVINE: Ah

POLATORE: That's why we had to go in a country to make a little money to buy the house. To strict it was, too strict.

LEVINE: Yeah

POLATORE: That I remember yet but the others, I don't remember.

LEVINE: So you say you went into the country to make some money? Yeah.

POLATORE: Work for beans

LEVINE: Yeah, tell about that.

POLATORE: Oh yeah, see? Now that I started to go senior citizen, they treat you nice, so we all say something, I say "gee, I didn't even say nothing yet." So we had green beans. I say 'I'm going to make them laughing. I said: "Ladies and gentlemen, I came 1921 from Italy and 1922 I went to pick beans. I wonder if these are my green beans I used to pick?"

LEVINE: (laughs)

POLATORE: (laughs) They laugh. I say: "the green one was a penny a pound. The yellow was more light, it was a penny and a half a pound." We had to pick the beans.

LEVINE: Wow.

POLATORE: We raised a family like that. Then I took my mother job, sewing, then then one I go take my mother job, I think it was a nice guy, a nice

foreman, used to a coat once in a while to show me, took it home to show me how to do it. Took me one day to make a coat that time, everything by hand, everything now, everything by machine. So I go to work, one day, one coat.

LEVINE: Wow.

POLATORE: I had to do it. One day more more more. Then I was speedy, took me a half an hour.

LEVINE: To make a coat!

POLATORE: Make to finish a coat, half an hour. After that.

LEVINE: (clears throat) You must have been very good.

POLATORE: For sure. Thread a little, boom boom boom boom boom. Piss work, piss work. Nothing day-work.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

POLATORE: So.

LEVINE: So did you go to school in this country?

POLATORE: Oh yeah. I went in night school, for a senior citizen, I mean for

LEVINE: citizen

POLATORE: [continues] citizen paper. Yeah, I did go.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, so, in other words, you didn't go to school regular school, you went to night school, because you were working?

POLATORE: [interposed] No, because when I come in we did. One of my aunts did try. Not too many kids. So we can put a teacher for two or three girls. So then a year later, then I don't remember how it turn out, I started to

go to school. I don't want to go to the garden, twelve or thirteen then I was. I couldn't talk to the teacher. Then they put me first grade, one week, second grade another week, third grade, another week, then fifth grade, we had to go to a different place all the class. I said: "Wait, I don't understand," I say to myself, but I did go with the class. Then I got mad at myself, they were all singing! What is it to sing? I couldn't even talk! I turn around, I see a lot of teachers in the back. I don't care, I gotta go, and say something Italian, let's see if they understand me.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

POLATORE: I call one teacher, I say: "Me no [under]stand." I say—just like that I remember. "Me no stand," I say. I said just like this, she must understand, she says "Come on"

(knock on the door)

LEVINE: Wait, we're gonna pause here. (Stops recorder, then restarts it). Okay, okay, we're continuing here. You were, you were talking about when the class was singing and you couldn't understand English, and you said that you were going to tell some teacher

POLATORE: [interposed] Yeah, yeah I couldn't understand. Yeah, so the lady understand, I think she was Italian, because I was talking Italian, I couldn't talk English at all.

LEVINE: Yeah

POLATORE: So she says: "This, not for you," just like this, "no good, no good", that I understood, "no good, no good." She say, she gimme a note, you have to go night school, no day school. So I started to go night school.

LEVINE: I see. So then did you work during the day when you went to night school. When you went to night school, did you work?

POLATORE: Oh yeah

LEVINE: [continues] during the day

POLATORE: [interposed] I had to go to work. After my mother had a baby, then I had to go to work.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you took your mother's job,

POLATORE: That's right—

LEVINE: [continues] and then your mother didn't go back to work, you stayed working sewing

POLATORE: [interposed] No, yeah, yeah, I took the job. After half an hour, I finished the coat, yeah. And then our poor boss, he used to give us extra, after years years used to give us extra, and I don't know. No Fourth of July, and no Sunday, work all the time.

LEVINE: How many days—

POLATORE: [interrupts] No Holiday! Used to bring work at home. Was a Fourth of July, can never forget that. My sister was over two years older than me and we used to work. I said: "Look, let's finish all today to celebrate Fourth of July tomorrow", so we work until three o'clock in the morning.

LEVINE: Oh!

POLATORE: The foreman came in the afternoon and he look, he see everything clean he says "What's going on?"

So I say—his name was Mike—"Mike why you looking around?"

He say: "Did you do any work yet?"

Oh I say "Mike, it's the Fourth of July we're joking, it's the Fourth of July, who wants to work?"

Then my mother says: "No, the work is all done."

LEVINE: Ah! (laughs)

POLATORE: So, we took the work and we went home, instead of waiting the following day, that's what we did. When they had extra work, they used to give it to us to make extra money.

LEVINE: I see.

POLATORE: And here I am today.

LEVINE: Yeah.

POLATORE: My husband died fifty-five, and if I want it or not, I had to work to raise two kids.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

POLATORE: And here I am.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. [Addressing third person] Would you like us to take that off the table? Does that make a difference?

WADE: Oh her purse?

POLATORE: This? Yeah

LEVINE: The bottle?

WADE: Oh the bottle?

LEVINE: You fine?

WADE: Doesn't, it has to be, whatever I'm happy. I go with the flow.

LEVINE: (laughs) Okay. Okay, well—

POLATORE: What is your name? I think I know you? Your face—

WADE: Oh, uh it's Bill Wade. I'm a photographer here in Pittsburgh. Now you're not from Pittsburgh though. You're from Buffalo, is that right?

POLATORE: I am from Buffalo

WADE: Oh, okay.

POLATORE: You too?

WADE: No

LEVINE: No, he's from Pittsburgh.

POLATORE: Wow, my mother says we were seven alike and maybe she was right. That's why—

LEVINE: Your mother said what?

POLATORE: We were seven alike

LEVINE: Oh. Seven people are like each other?

POLATORE: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: There you go

WADE: So somewhere in the world there are six hundred people who look like me?

POLATORE: [interposed] You learn something else, you learn something else today.

LEVINE: [interposed] Yeah, right. So did your mother have other things she said, certain ideas that your mother had, can you remember things that your mother tried to teach you like ways she wanted you to be?

POLATORE: The only thing she was teaching us: "Listen to your father", "What are you going to do that's your father", He was too strict, I'm sorry to say this, I couldn't go here to there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

POLATORE: 'specially when I was a widow. He thought

LEVINE: Oh, even when you were

POLATORE: [continues] He thought I was single again. We sit once in the porch with him, poor lady cross the street and she call me, I say I'm going over there. "Oh no. You got only one father." Just like this. You're gonna stay here (smacks the table).

LEVINE: Mm.

POLATORE: And I stayed there, not to make argument.

LEVINE: Yeah. Was your father strict with your brother?

POLATORE: Oh yeah, oh yeah—everybody!

LEVINE: Everybody, uh-huh.

POLATORE: Now gonna tell you something else now.

LEVINE: Okay.

POLATORE: We used to go to work my older sister and I that weather was real bad we went to work there was a night we had to go to night school and the weather was bad. We went to work and coming back my mother

had everything ready. In case we had to change clothes changing in cold.

Soon as I sit down, I need, "Oh girls, don't go to school, the weather's so bad!"

I said to myself: 'Look, the way I could hire myself is to take a belt, but I never use it though. Take a belt off.' I say "Daddy, the weather was bad, just like now. You didn't tell us, don't go to work, we need to work. And walk!" I say. "Not a streetcar. We walk. If it's good to go to work, it's gonna be good to go to night school."

He didn't say a word. We eat, we walk out, this is my sister, my older sister. She goes like this: "Rose what kind of guts you have to answer Daddy?"

I say "Mary"—her name was Mary—"I filled up until up here." (Bangs fist on table) We went to school.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

POLATORE: To go to work he didn't say nothing! Because we didn't go out, maybe there was a fellow in the class. He couldn't talk to us, that was a shame. If my father was talking to you, he didn't like that.

LEVINE: Yeah. So—

POLATORE: He didn't like that.

LEVINE: So how did you meet your husband?

POLATORE: Oh, I meet my husband that his father and my father they know each other. So, there was a butcher there (laughs) in Buffalo. They used to go shopping in Italian place so father see, my father see the guy there. He goes and buy the meat. He says: "What are you doing here from Chicago, Illinois?" That's how come. But how did I—the other guy, he didn't know how to read and write. So (laughs) he drive him to the

place where the butcher was. They were a relation or something, I forgot that. Anyhow (long pause) what happened? (laughs) Ah signor. He [Polatore, Rose] says, "I wanna go and see my father, but I don't know how to drive. I know how to read and write." So he says "I drive you" and he drives me." He drive here over there. That's how come. So he saw me and I told him if you want me, you have to live in Buffalo, because he was in Chicago, Illinois, "otherwise I'm sorry," I say. I don't want to get married, to see my father like that.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

POLATORE: He used to get a babies, I used to cry. I don't know why. Seven kids, my mother had, five girls and two boys.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. And did you—

POLATORE: He hardly work

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

POLATORE: He hardly work.

LEVINE: So did you tak—

POLATORE: I got married when I was thirty-five because I didn't want to get married.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Why didn't you want to get married?

POLATORE: Because I don't know why, because I figured then I gotta have babies. I used to cry

LEVINE: Yeah

POLATORE: I never was happy when my mother had a baby.

LEVINE: Did you take care of the babies?

POLATORE: Why sure, we all did.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

POLATORE: Chop chop, I been chopped. Then my husband died. Was the worst for me.

LEVINE: Yeah. So what was your husband's name?

POLATORE: How?

LEVINE: What was your husband's name?

POLATORE: Polatore—oh Frank, Frank.

LEVINE: [interposed] Oh, Frank, Frank, yeah. So you had a nice marriage?

POLATORE: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh

POLATORE: [continues] Very good marriage.

LEVINE: Yeah

POLATORE: Yeah, he was nice guy too, one eleven years I stay with him.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

POLATORE: Yeah.

LEVINE: And then you had two children?

POLATORE: Yes.

LEVINE: And what are their names?

POLATORE: [interposed] She's the younger one

LEVINE: Carol? And what's the other one's name?

POLATORE: Joanna.

LEVINE: Joanna.

POLATORE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.(sniffs) So did you then—you didn't work while your husband was alive?

POLATORE: No. He was a butcher.

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

POLATORE: [interposed] Yeah. We had a business then, yeah.

LEVINE: Ah, uh-huh.

POLATORE: Yeah. He had to die, that's my destiny.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

POLATORE: And here I am.

LEVINE: Was your husband anything like your father? Was he strict with your girls?

POLATORE: Well, not, no. Mm-mm. My daddy want us cut ours hair—nothing. Not even the pants. Long pants, long dresses. When I got married, I learned how to wear pants. And he didn't like it, say "Frank, why you let her wear pants?"

"She wants to wear pants, let her wear pants." Yeah, he didn't like that, my father didn't like that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

POLATORE: He thought it had to be. Because he was Italian, his father was Italian, see?

LEVINE: Yeah. Now, was that an Italian neighborhood in Buffalo?

POLATORE: Oh yeah, Dandy [ph] place (slaps hand on table)

LEVINE: Oh.

(They laugh)

LEVINE: Tell me, tell me about what the neighborhood was like. In Buffalo.

POLATORE: Dandy [ph] place they called it—

LEVINE: Yeah

POLATORE: That—that—that little town. I call a little town.

LEVINE: Uh-huh

POLATORE: All the Italians place, when they come from Italy, they used to go there (continually taps table). But when we came from Italy we didn't go there in the place. We went over my aunt house.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

POLATORE: See? And we stay there until we rent the house.

LEVINE: I see.

POLATORE: Yeah. Oh, then the trains! (Laughs)

LEVINE: Did you like it?

POLATORE: [interposed] The mafia. Know the mafia?

LEVINE: Yeah?

(They laugh)

LEVINE: So did you like it in Danty [ph] place?

POLATORE: No

LEVINE: No?

POLATORE: We used to go once a year with a Feast of St. Joseph. They used to have a proposition [meant procession] yeah, every year they used to do that

LEVINE: And what would they do? In the Feast of St. Joseph?

POLATORE: Well, mass. Dance. They have all that thing, just like here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

POLATORE: [interposed] Once a year. Or a parade, or around they used to walk. Was a., was a three or four block, they call it. Danty [ph] Place.

LEVINE: I see. Uh-huh.

POLATORE: Right near, near the used to where used to get the boat to go a Crystal Beach

LEVINE: [interposed] Oh. Uh-huh, uh-huh.

POLATORE: That's—that's where it was.

LEVINE: So what did you do for enjoyment? What--

POLATORE: [interposed] Nothing! Don't you hear? I couldn't go no place!

LEVINE: Well, once you got married, what did you do?

POLATORE: [interposed] Ohhh. I went umm, (bangs fist on table) Florida.

LEVINE: Oh.

POLATORE: Here's another s-s-trick there. He say "We're going to Florida, with my sister who's over there." So we thought we had to stay there. But he know already, if we get married stay in Buffalo, right, otherwise say nothing.

LEVINE: Wait wait wait, say that again. If you're married, you stay in Buffalo.

POLATORE: I ask him, if he wants me, he have to move in Buffalo. Because he used to live in Chicago, Illinois.

LEVINE: Why didn't you want to go to Chicago?

POLATORE: I don't want, I don't know why.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

POLATORE: Oh. I gonna tell you, on the ride, he had one niece, and one nephew. The mother's dead, and used to raise them. Me, I say "I go over there, they not a baby. They have a breakfast, they [not understood] everything to me?" I didn't say that to them.

LEVINE: Yeah.

POLATORE: But I think it myself. I say "Frank—you want to marry me?"

"Yeah."

"I'm not gonna live in Buffalo"

"I'm not gonna live in Chicago"

Okay. So we go Florida. Now the sister over there, she was tough, she thought. We stood there three months, and me, I keep my mouth shut. Every morning: "Rose, did you change your mind? Did you want to stay over here?"

I say "Whatever Frank say, I do." That's all. Three months I stay there, because they thought I—I—had to stay there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

POLATORE: And then, I don't forget then what they did to my husband. When my husband died, I go for collect for whatever they call, if you're widow—

LEVINE: Insurance? Yeah? Uh-huh.

POLATORE: [interposed] Whatever—there is a name, but I forget. I go there, and "There is no Polatore here, working." He was working for him, and you paid the tax there whatever—

LEVINE: [interposed] Oh, uh-huh, income tax, uh-huh.

POLATORE: Used to keep the money he—he didn't get nothing, I didn't get nothing.

LEVINE: Ohhh. Uh-huh.

POLATORE: See? Crook.

LEVINE: From the butcher?

POLATORE: [superposed] Relation! Relation! (slaps hand on table)

LEVINE: This is a butcher shop?

POLATORE: Yeah!

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

POLATORE: See, he had—he had a butcher too, he had a butcher, and then he had that—oh I can't think of the word right now—the whiskey, saloon. Yeah, the saloon.

LEVINE: Oh. Uh-huh.

POLATORE: What he did to my husband, he shouldn't do that.

LEVINE: No. No! That made it hard on you, that's why you had to work! Uh-huh, I see.

POLATORE: It's all right. But I win at least. They thought I go Florida, "Stay, stay, stay!" three months then it's because the pocket's getting empty. So we came.

LEVINE: You came back to Buffalo?

POLATORE: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

POLATORE: They know us working for butcher. No money after spendin' three months there.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

POLATORE: See what kinda guts?

LEVINE: Yeah.

POLATORE: [continues] Even a relatives.

LEVINE: Yeah.

POLATORE: [continues] Some are good, some are—they're nothing, not even a penny. They don't worth a penny. (taps table)/

LEVINE: [interposed] Uh-huh. Well (clears throat) what do you think (clears throat again) how do you think coming to this country made a difference in the way that you are? In other words, what difference do you think it made?

POLATORE: [interposed] Well the thing that the way I told you, that read the pap— read the letter, and it say: “We throw the dishes,” so he think: “Ohh, America, they throw dishes away. Must be real rich.” That’s how he change his mind, my father. But then

LEVINE: But he wasn’t a hard worker, your father. No. So your mother and you, and probably the other girls worked?

POLATORE: Yes, yes. I slave more than them. Because the others they all got married, but I didn’t.

LEVINE: I see. I see.

POLATORE: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, now we’re gonna pause here for a second. (Noise from the tape recorder).

WADE: You suggested moving the purse, maybe that is a good idea—

LEVINE: (Moves purse) There. That’s good. Okay. Okay, so it sounds like you married a man who was very different from your father.

POLATORE: [interposed] Oh yeah, I had no trouble. Honest to God.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

POLATORE: He thought my father had to listen, my husband to him, but he didn’t

LEVINE: [interposed] He didn’t. He didn’t listen to him

POLATORE: [interposed] He didn’t. He didn’t.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Now, can you think of any kinds of things that your mother or father taught you about being good or living your life, things they wanted you to—

POLATORE: Nothing, nothing nothing.

LEVINE: Nothing? Nothing. What was your mother like? What was her temperament, what was her personality?

POLATORE: [interposed] Oh my mother was nice temper, but my father had a hot temper.

LEVINE: Uh-huh

POLATORE: [continues] A very hot temper.

LEVINE: Yeah

POLATORE: Because in the old country before, now he changed it to like over here. The way he change here he change in the old country. The old country was real strict.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

POLATORE: I remember twelve years old I used to hear hollering because a mother didn't want to go out with the boys, they used to elope.

LEVINE: Oh.

POLATORE: See? That was no good.

LEVINE: Yeah

POLATORE: Me? I had a argument with the nails. I had a nail polish.

He said "What are those?"

I said "polish."

"Go and take it off."

I said "I try." I said "Daddy, no matter what I put on it never come off." I had to lie. He says "How long it takes?"

"Well depends," I say. If I wash the dishes less, If I—more

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

POLATORE: [continues] Maybe a month. For one month, I polish my nail polish for one month. After, nothing. No lipstick, nothing. When I said I couldn't go here to there! (taps table) To go to work here (bangs table), but to go to have a good time? Never. (bangs table) That's why I don't understand.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. So are you glad you came to this country?

POLATORE: Oh yeah, I was happy in one way, but then when I couldn't go no place—

LEVINE: Yeah, mm-hmm.

POLATORE: I had to stick to it. I told my mother: "It's too bad," I say, "I don't go away from here on account of you but if I was with Daddy only, I would been out a long time ago."

"Okay, do it for me," she says.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

POLATORE: [continues] She covered up everything

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

POLATORE: [continues] She was a good mother. She was a good mother. I can't complain for her

LEVINE: Now did you become a citizen?

POLATORE: Oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah.

LEVINE: Did you have to take a test?

POLATORE: Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah. I pass.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, good, good. And um, so, when your husband died, you had to back to work?

POLATORE: Oh yeah. I had to.

LEVINE: And what did you do then?

POLATORE: Tailoring.

LEVINE: Tailoring.

POLATORE: Tailoring. Oh yeah, oh yeah.

LEVINE: [continues] And so you raised your two daughters by yourself?

POLATORE: [interposed] Oh yeah, oh yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

POLATORE: My mother died, my mother didn't make me pay the rent because they had a house. When my mother died, he comes over, I want the rent. Ahh—(hits table)

LEVINE: Who, who?

POLATORE: My father.

LEVINE: Oh.

POLATORE: See?

LEVINE: You were living with your husband in your mother and father's house?

POLATORE: When my mother—when my husband died my mother say, “You stay in here. I don’t make you pay the rent.”

LEVINE: I see.

POLATORE: See? Then the things change. I had to pay the rent, and I had to pay something else too. I got mad. I went in City Hall. The way I told you, I told them, 24 hours I live LBJ apartment. So, then I say “Go ahead now, you have a turn.” When the time they got together, they thought I was gonna have another turn again. I said “What’s smart one, it’s gotta be a smart one in the gang right?”

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

POLATORE: That’s you turn. I had my turn a long time ago. I said “No more turn for me.” That’s the time I quit. I didn’t take care of him.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

POLATORE: (clears throat) He was eating free and I was working. Every night! (laughs) There’s another one, a tough one. Every night he wants a spaghetti. [not understood] say in Italian dire [not understood] in the water, all right? Not even that. I get home, put a kettle, that’s a broken record. Now maybe you could put that in a paper.

LEVINE: (laughs)

POLATORE: “Rooooose. The water’s boiling.” “Rooooose, you know how I want the spaghetti.” “Rooooose not too cooked, not too raw.” Every night! Broken record! (bangs table).

LEVINE: So you took care of your father then?

POLATORE: Oh yeah! I was a widow, it was my turn. Day and night! And then hear the news every night, broken record. Every night.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

POLATORE: (clears throat) Now I'm having good time, in my old age.

LEVINE: Now tell me, what brings you joy in your old age? What brings you pleasure that you do now?

POLATORE: Oh what I do now?

LEVINE: Yeah.

POLATORE: (laughs) I go senior citizen, and I gotta my own place, one room, I got everything in there. Anytime I want to eat, I eat. Anytime I wanna cry, I cry. Anytime I wanna dance, I dance. Anytime I go to bed, I go to bed. And I do everything by myself until today. To cook, I don't cook, because I'm afraid. But I buy the stuff cooked.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

POLATORE: I put it in the refrigerator I go and lit up and then I eat. Because my daughter comes from work, she's gotta cook and I eat about eight-o-clock that's no good for me because I gotta get the pills.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

POLATORE: That's why. Otherwise, I have to wait. I can't wait. Five-o-clock, I put in the oven, I warm it up, I eat, I wash my dishes (bangs table) and I watch a t.v. (bangs table). That's all I do now.

LEVINE: Now—

POLATORE: [continues] Now to wash my clothes my older daughter wash the clothes and she buy the groceries for me. Carol, she takes me to the doctor—if I need anything extra, she does for me. And here I am.

LEVINE: Now do you live, do you live with your daughter or in the senior citizen

POLATORE: [interposed] Daughter, they call a garage room upstairs.(clears throat)

LEVINE: Oh, garage room.

POLATORE: It's long, three times long as this.

LEVINE: Oh I see.

POLATORE: I got my parlor, my bedroom set (clears throat) clothes closet (clears throat, bangs table), bathroom set, everything set.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

POLATORE: Yeah.

LEVINE: So this is a good time for you.

POLATORE: For me, that's good. Anytime I wanna go down, I go down. (Bangs fist). But I do I tell you the truth, I set my own race, I change the station any station I want

LEVINE: (laughs)

POLATORE: [continues] If I go downstairs, I gotta watch what they want. And me I don't like some stations, so I stay.

LEVINE: So you're free now, you have your own freedom?

POLATORE: [superposed] Oh free I'm free.

LEVINE: How do you think about your Italian side and your American side?

POLATORE: Well (clears throat),

LEVINE: Do you want to stop and have some water?

POLATORE: I got water here.

LEVINE: Yeah.

POLATORE: (drinks water). Well depends. See I was raised more an Italian.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

POLATORE: If I go to America, it's little bit different. See? It was like like--like a beginning, when my husband died. Stick to America. Had to be with my father. When my mother was living was better. But then, change again—what are you gonna do?

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

POLATORE: It's all right. But to go out? I could go out? That's the time I kill. I didn't like that idea, even I was a widow, I couldn't go out. I couldn't even go across the street!

LEVINE: So that's why you like your life so much now, huh?

POLATORE: Oh sure.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

POLATORE: I'm home alone, if I wanna go down, I go down (bangs table).
Between you and me I don't wanna bother them.

LEVINE: Yeah.

POLATORE: I said to myself, why gonna listen what they doing? I don't wanna hear.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

POLATORE: I don't wanna hear. If they wanna tell me, okay, if they don't, that's okay too. I said 'I had my trouble before.'

LEVINE: What gives you a lot of satisfaction that you've done? In your life? What makes you feel happy and satisfied? That you've done in your lifetime?

POLATORE: [interposed] Well for me, I figured different in a way, because I was—I could see I was raised different.

LEVINE: Yes you were, uh-huh

POLATORE: Account of my husband died. We stayed together eleven years. Eleven years together.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm. Not so long, huh.

POLATORE: Not so long.

LEVINE: Yeah.

POLATORE: And I said my life be suffer here or suffer there. My husband was sick for a while. Then he had a heart attack and a stroke, both at the same time. See? No, he was too good to me. I didn't work while he was living. I had to go back after.

LEVINE: So the best time in your life was when you were married?

POLATORE: [interposed] Eleven years, that's it.

LEVINE: Those eleven years. Uh-huh.

POLATORE: [interposed] Yeah, yeah. I used to go with him, lotta time.

LEVINE: Where would you go? Where would you go with your husband when you went out?

POLATORE: Go for ride. Mostly we go to Chicago, because he's, his relatives were there. Almost once a month we go over there.

LEVINE: Oh, yeah. Uh-huh.

POLATORE: We used to go out for rides. We used to go restaurant, eat lobster in a restaurant. We used to go.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

POLATORE: Yeah. And that's that. That's all I could say my life.

LEVINE: [interposed] Yeah.Okay.

POLATORE: When I die, go back again like a [not understood]. Like a [not understood] for my father. I do everything.

LEVINE: Yeah. Okay.Well is there anything else you can think of that we haven't covered? Anything that you want to say?

POLATORE: Not that I remember. You—you want to know anything else?

LEVINE: Uh, well I wouldn't mind hearing the story about how you had to put your age a little bit older.

POLATORE: Account of my father. Because he want us to go to work. Because then you can start work young, you gotta be the age.

LEVINE: Right.

POLATORE: So they had to do something (bangs table), and my mother said "Gee, there's a cousin like—like my daughter, same name," a cousin.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm

POLATORE: I write a letter to the priest and they sent it, the birth certificate, that's the only way, because they wanted birth certificate to work in the shop

LEVINE: Now th—was that in Italy? Or here?

POLATORE: [interposed] No here. H-here.

LEVINE: Here, uh-huh.

POLATORE: [interposed] Daddy sent a letter in the old country to the priest

LEVINE: [interposed] to the priest, uh-huh

POLATORE: [continues] because the others they were in the old country, it wasn't here. If it was here, it was easy.

LEVINE: I see. So he got the birth certificate of your cousin so you could get to work two years earlier?

POLATORE: [superposed] Oh yeah! Oh yeah! Oh yeah, oh yeah, turn around and go to work.

LEVINE: And why did you put on the hairnet?

POLATORE: To show the age, older!

LEVINE: (laughs)

POLATORE: Why sure, if I were comb my hair straight they'd see I was a baby yet.

LEVINE: So what—what job did you get then?

POLATORE: Oh, there used to be uh, the track put antique cans, to put the tomato in a can

LEVINE: Yeah?

POLATORE: [continues] they give me a stick, but then they changed it. When the can used to get stuck, onna—

LEVINE: On the belt?

POLATORE: Onna, onna rack

LEVINE: Yeah?

POLATORE: I used to get a stick and push it

LEVINE: (laughs)

POLATORE: [continues] onna track

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

POLATORE: That's the first job they give me

LEVINE: Uh-huh, like a conveyor belt? It was like a belt that was moving the cans?

POLATORE: [interposed] yeah, yeah, yeah. The moving—yeah

LEVINE: [interposed] Uh-huh, uh-huh

POLATORE: And I used to do that. Then work in a stock, get the full can of tomato, beans, whatever it was put it from here, put it in the shelf. Then when the people come they used to get put it in the box as ready so they could get the boxes and go

LEVINE: Uh-huh

POLATORE: Yeah, yeah yeah. Then a piss work [possibly incorrect], outside picking beans. That I hate. I used to hate that. But I had to go.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now did your sisters do that too?

POLATORE: Oh yeah, everybody! Why sure! Oh yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

POLATORE: On Sunday we go out and pick, uh, pears, peaches, oh yeah. There was no Sunday, no holiday for us.

LEVINE: Uh-huh

POLATORE: [continues] We had to work.

LEVINE: Did you go to church on Sunday?

POLATORE: Oh yeah, the church was right there

LEVINE: Uh-huh

POLATORE: Small church, you know?

LEVINE: Yeah

POLATORE: Oh yeah. You wanna put a bow we had to have a procession. I put a bow on I had to take it out (bangs table). Ahh—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

POLATORE: I don't know why was like that, I don't understand.

LEVINE: Well—

POLATORE: I don't understand why it was like that

LEVINE: Well you deserve the good life you have now

POLATORE: Huh?

LEVINE: I said you deserve the good life you have now

POLATORE: [interposed] Yeah, yeah. Now I could say I have a good time now, but not before.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

POLATORE: Oh you could go out, but not us.

LEVINE: Okay, well (clears throat), if there is anything else you can think of

POLATORE: [interposed] That's all I think, that's all I think, that's all I think, that's all I think

LEVINE: [continues] I think we more or less covered—covered everything. Okay. Okay

POLATORE: [interposed] That's all I could say, my mother was the best

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Yeah.

POLATORE: Every night a broken record, "Rooose." Every night. (bangs table).

LEVINE: Yeah. Okay, well I think we'll close here, I wanna close here, I wanna thank you, for your interview

POLATORE: Thank you

LEVINE [continues] It will be at Ellis Island now

POLATORE: [interposed] Yeah

LEVINE: And so you have, uh, grandchildren? And great—you'll have great-grandchildren?

POLATORE: [interposed] Yeah, seven, I got seven grandchildren. Great-grandchildren

LEVINE: Seven? Uh-huh, so..and their children will be able to go to Ellis Island to listen to you

POLATORE: [interposed] Yeah (laughs)

LEVINE: (laughs) Okay, well I want to thank you. I've been speaking with Rose Manzella Polatore—

POLATORE: That's right

LEVINE: [continues] and it is June 27th, 2007. This is Janet Levine, from the National Parks Services signing off.

POLATORE: The son. The first—so I had to take care of him. She used to go to work and I had to take care of him, the son. (Laughs). So one day, the weather was bad, I couldn't go drive over her house. So my son-in-law bring the baby, where I used—LBJ. You ever heard of LBJ?

LEVINE: Yeah

POLATORE: [continues] the first building they building?

LEVINE: Oh it's a building?

POLATORE: [continues] LBJ on Main Street in Buffalo

LEVINE: [interposed] Oh, oh—okay

POLATORE: Okay. So, he bring the baby there. Before that, I used to go in the morning. There was a smart lady, that she see me in the elevator, she come in the elevator. And she goes like this: "Rose, where you go so early in the morning?" I said to myself: "Boy, she must be nosy."

LEVINE: Yeah

POLATORE: [continues] I said, I'm not gonna tell her where I'm going.

LEVINE: Yeah

POLATORE: I said "I'm going see my sugar daddy."

LEVINE: (laughs)

POLATORE: Okay. Then the weather was bad one day. The way I started. So, he bring the baby where I used to live: LBJ. And she was there too. When my son-in-law goes the baby was with me.

She come over she say: "This is your sugar daddy?"

I say: "That's right, this is my sugar daddy."

LEVINE: (laughs)

POLATORE: Then my grandson grow up! In the summertime, he was slow learning. I used to take in the summertime, in the morning, different places. No school, I used to go different place. So, one day, next door of my daughter, maybe his wife must have pass away. And he called me says, "You want any greens?" He say "My wife die, I can't eat all this." My grandson was eleven years old, when the mother come, "Ma, grandma's got a sugar daddy."

LEVINE: (laughs)

POLATORE: Now I started to go there, a senior citizen, and he say "you got any sugar daddy?" And I told him same story. And what I got stopped anymore, he say "sugar daddy"

LEVINE: (laughs) Ohh, that's cute!

POLATORE: So I say: "When I was single, I didn't have a daddy. I got it now in my old age."

LEVINE: (laughs) Okay. We're signing off here again.

END OF INTERVIEW