

EI-1469

TERESA D'AMICO MAMO

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LEVINE: Today is February the 21st, the year 2008. I'm here with Teresa Mamo, who came—well, she herself did not come through Ellis Island. It is her family who came through, her grandparents, her mother and her mother's brothers and sisters. The reason Teresa Mamo is being interviewed today is because she is donating a number of articles to our collection. And some of them will be shown in one of our cases in our Treasures from Home collection. So we're just delighted that we could talk with you and that you're giving the museum these beautiful objects. The family came from Sicily.

MAMO: That's correct.

LEVINE: And different members of the family came at different times. [clears throat]

MAMO: That's correct, too.

LEVINE: And why don't we talk about—for this interview, we're really talking about family legend. We're really not talking about biography or autobiography. We're talking about what has been handed down in your family about coming to America. So that's like a little bit different and—but it's equally interesting.

MAMO: Right.

LEVINE: So—so why don't we start? Why don't you say your mother and grandfather's names and when they came?

MAMO: Okay. My grandparents, Rosa Santangelo [PH] and Pietro Sicarella [PH] both came to Ellis Island in August of 1920.

LEVINE: Okay. And they actually weren't the first of the family to come.

MAMO: No.

LEVINE: S—some of the children came before that.

MAMO: That's true. The oldest son was the first to come. He—he wanted to study art. And he was 17 when he came to Ellis Island on his own and was sponsored by an uncle that was already living here. And he was able to provide himself with working by being a barber, and he went to school at night and studied art here in the United States.

LEVINE: Oh.

MAMO: And part of the story was wonderful because he inspired his other brothers to come and other sisters to come. And then tragedy struck him and he passed away, which caused the family to be partly in America and partly in Sicily. And then after discussions back and forth, they decided that they wouldn't leave their brother here alone, and the rest of the family decided to come over and be here—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: —and solidified everything again.

LEVINE: So Giuseppe [PH]—

MAMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: —was the one who was the artist?

MAMO: Yes.

LEVINE: And then he brought his—

MAMO: And—no. He came alone.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MAMO: And then Antonio came.

LEVINE: Okay.

MAMO: And he—he also came alone but traveled with an aunt. It was interesting to find this information out from the computer. When we looked up their—the ships that they came on and the manifest told who else they traveled with.

LEVINE: Ah.

MAMO: So he didn't actually travel by himself but traveled with an aunt and some other cousins.

LEVINE: And he was the ne—he was the next oldest son.

MAMO: Yes.

LEVINE: Right?

MAMO: Yes.

LEVINE: And he—so he came second. And then why don't you go through the—the brothers and sisters in the family and just say their names—

MAMO: Oh, okay.

LEVINE: —and a little bit about them.

MAMO: Okay. Like I—Giuseppe was the first one to come and he came mostly because he really wanted to study art and go to school. And he did achieve that. He did go to school. He—he graduated and he got a—a diploma and he did paint a number of beautiful paintings, which later we found out he'd never signed because he copied them from—from pictures that he found in magazines. But they were really, really excellent, beautiful pictures.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: And the first picture that he had painted, he painted in Sicily. He copied a picture of St. Joseph and the baby, which was hanging in his church. They took it outside for him and he painted it and copied it. And I have that—I have that painting today, and he was 16 when he had done that painting.

LEVINE: I see. So wait. He—he did the painting of a painting that was in—

MAMO: Of—of—was hanging in his church in Sicily.

LEVINE: I see.

MAMO: And then his mother and father, when they came, they brought the painting over with them. And it always hung in their bedroom.

LEVINE: Ah.

MAMO: But now it hangs in my living room.

LEVINE: Wow.

MAMO: And it—it—it is a—a beautiful painting. I mean, to me, its quality is metropolitan.

LEVINE: Really?

MAMO: But it's a copy.

LEVINE: I see.

MAMO: Or it was not an original work.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: And the only original works I have of his are charcoal sketches that he had made when he was studying.

LEVINE: I see.

MAMO: And then—then his brother—actually, it was Salvatore that came first. The younger brother came first.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

MAMO: And then—and he came. Then Antonio came and I think what happened was my—my uncle, Giuseppe, the first one, was in a—a train and I think the door closed on his leg. And the leg had to be amputated.

LEVINE: And he died?

MAMO: No.

LEVINE: [unclear].

MAMO: He did not die of that. And that's why his other brother and two sisters came to take care of him.

LEVINE: I see. Now, did you ever—who, among the brothers and sisters, did you personally know? I mean, oh, you know your mother.

MAMO: I knew all of them except Giuseppe.

LEVINE: Oh.

MAMO: Because he had died prior to my being born. But all the others were still alive.

LEVINE: Okay.

MAMO: And it—he had—he had kind—he had gotten gangrene on the leg and the leg had to be amputated from the knee down on one leg. But he was still alive but then he—he died of some kind of bronchial disease later on. And the—the brothers and sisters wouldn't leave him here alone. They wouldn't go back to Italy. And so that that's when the rest of the family decided they were coming over. And they came together and they came with—Marion and Angelina had come with Antonio. Then Conchetta [PH], my mother had been married that year in February.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: And her and my father, Rosaria [PH] and Nicolo [PH] all came in 1920. They all came on the same ship.

LEVINE: Oh.

MAMO: And they all came and stayed with the other brothers in Manhattan.

LEVINE: I see. Now, what ship did they—did your mother come here on?

MAMO: [paper shuffling] I'll have to look that up but I know I have it in here. Ah, see—

LEVINE: I know some of them—

MAMO: Here, they—m—my mother and her grandparents and her sister, Vincenza [PH], and her sister, Rosaria, and brother, Nicolo, all came on August 12, 1920 aboard the Providence. And they all left Palermo, Sicily on their trip to America.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: My grandfather was 61. My grandmother was 54. The oldest sister was 32. Rosaria was 16. Nicolo was the youngest, 12, and my mother, Conchetta, was 20 and my father, Giuseppe D'Amico, was 23.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, [clears throat] why don't you say where in Sicily the family came from?

MAMO: Right. The family lived in a—a town called Adrano [PH]. And it—it was not a small, small town because, as I learned more about the town, it had more than one—oh, what did they call those blocks? Oh, that they sat around. See, my mind goes on me.

LEVINE: You—you mean like piazzas or—

MAMO: Piazzas.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: It had more than one main piazza.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: And my mother lived in—in one piazza that was called [papers shuffling]—hmm, let's see if I can find any—oh, it skips my mind.

LEVINE: I know she was fond of the garden. Right?

MAMO: Yes, they had—they had a beautiful garden. Oh, I should have the name of the piazza. I'm sorry, I—I—I can't recall—

LEVINE: That's okay.

MAMO: —the name of the—oh, Piazza Um—Umberto [PH].

LEVINE: Umberto.

MAMO: Umberto, it was called. And around the piazza was her home. Her home faced the piazza and across from her home was their church, Santa Chiatta [PH]. And off of the piazza, not—not very far off, there was a Norman castle.

LEVINE: Hmm.

MAMO: And it was a—it was a tall—I don't know if you know what Norman castles—they're squarish.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: And they're very tall. And she of—she often spoke about the castle and that, you know, years ago that a king had lived there. You know, she would make up her own little fairy tale stories about the castle and how beautiful it was. And then down from the castle was this beautiful park then. She loved flowers. My mother loved the garden and flowers. And they had this beautiful park. She would tell me where they could go and see the flowers growing and everything, and she always spoke about the—the park and how she enjoyed the flowers that were in there and—and the trees. And then in another section off the—the piazza was a monastery, and it was a huge monastery that was—I'm not sure which sisters they were. But they were the—they weren't speaking sisters. You could not talk to them. You could visit them through a little slit, or through a doorway you could hand them food, but they would never respond. But they were there and they were well taken care of by—by the community, the—and yet, they also took care of them, because I remember my mother saying that when they had one of the diseases—I'm not sure whether it was smallpox or not—the monastery opened up and took care of a lot of the sick people.

LEVINE: Oh.

MAMO: So it was a very concerned and caring town also.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: And she always spoke very lovingly about her town and she made it sound like it was a huge, huge place.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: You know, because everything was huge to them. And I went to visit the town.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: And—and I said to myself, everything was in a square mile of—of everything. And you—I mean, you could walk it, [chuckles] the whole thing in—in an hour. Do you know what I'm saying? And Mount Etna was right in the background and you could see it. It was just—just a lovely, lovely spot. And I—I was glad they came to America. I wouldn't have wanted to live my life there.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

MAMO: And I was glad that they were adventurous and stuff to come to America—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: —and that they all did come. So, you know, they—they had a lovely family together and they reunited a family, which—and they kept it together. And—

LEVINE: It sou—it's—from reading what you wrote about it, it sounded as though they didn't quite want to give up on Sicily be—

MAMO: Oh, no, no, no. Sicily was over, was—was in their mind always. They had their home there. They would not sell their home. My grandfather did not want to sell it and they kept the home and they rented it, and some cousins took care to collect the rent. And you know, at that time, you couldn't take money out of Italy. You know, they—they had to keep the money there. And they did. They kept it in a bank account and these cousins were wonderful. They took care of—of the house. They took care of renting it. They would use the rent money if repairs had to be made. And they kept it always. And even after my grandparents died, and the brothers and sisters—five of them never married. Three brothers and two sisters lived together all their life. And they lived in—in—in Brooklyn and they bought a home together in Brooklyn and it was a two-family home. And my brother, myself and my parents lived on the second floor. And these uncles and aunts lived—

LEVINE: Oh.

MAMO: —on the first floor.

LEVINE: So you really grew up with them—

MAMO: Yes, yes. I did.

LEVINE: —right in your house.

MAMO: Yes, ab—absolutely. Absolutely.

LEVINE: Wow.

MAMO: They—they were like other mothers and fathers to me.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: They—we were very, very close. They were very endearing and they had four nieces, one—one nephew and three—no, I'm sorry. They had two nephews and three nieces.

LEVINE: You, being one of the nieces.

MAMO: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: The baby of the nieces. And we were spoiled to death, spoiled to death by all of them, especially the youngest uncle, you know, who would—

LEVINE: Nicolo?

MAMO: N—Nicolo, who would take us to Coney Island and all over. You know, the museums in the city. I mean, he would take us under his wing. I mean, he was 12 when he came here so he was really Americanized by the time we were born. If we needed any help in school, he was the one to be able to help us through the language and everything.

LEVINE: I see.

MAMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, now, speaking of language, [clears throat] what did your mother and father speak at home?

MAMO: Well, they spoke Italian quite a lot. They did. As a matter of fact, I remember when I went to kindergarten. My mother always told me that the teacher says, "We have to talk—you have to talk English to her. You have to talk English to her." And they started to. They—they really did. And, you know, they were very caring people and very intelligent people. And I remember my mother teaching herself to read the newspaper, and my father too. My father was very into the language. And they did go to

school to learn the language after they went to Naturalization and they got their Naturalization papers. They went and got—oh, what were—the literacy tests. They went and passed the literacy tests. And Mama would read the newspaper till her dying day.

LEVINE: Wow. Now, would you—were you aware of when they became—did they become citizens? Were you a—

MAMO: They did become citizens. I—you know, I—I—I, myself, wasn't aware when they did it. I was probably too young.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-hmm.

MAMO: But I do have records of when they became citizens.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: And I did—was able to find those papers and—and documented when they became citizens, when—when they became naturalized citizens and when they passed their literacy tests. So, yeah.

LEVINE: Now, did—did—your mother talked to you about the—the objects that you're donating to this museum. Did your uncles and aunts also tell you about these objects?

MAMO: These—these objects were—you know, it wasn't something that the family talked about. These were objects that they saved.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: They had been—I had found them in a trunk. And, well, what happened was, at one point, they all got older. I moved to Long Island, to Merrick. And I—my mother and father came and lived with me. The house that they were living in in Brooklyn had to eventually be sold, and the things that they had there in Brooklyn, they packed up. And all her brothers and sisters had all passed away by the time—by the time she moved with me, there was the only—the oldest sister was the only one that was left living, the oldest sister. And so we—she packed things that she found as she was cleaning out their home. And she took them to my house and she put them in these two big trunks. And, you know, occasionally she would ask to open the trunk and see something or look at things. But for the most part, they just stayed in the trunks.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MAMO: And then after she passed away and I retired from teaching, I would look at these trunks in the attic and I'd say, "I've got to see what's inside of this stuff and go through it." And I—I'd look at the stuff and I'd say, "Well, what am I going to do with this?" I'd says—I—I didn't have it in my heart to sell it, the—I says, "I—I can't—I can't take this stuff and sell it." I says—I called my girls over and I says, "You know, we have to decide what we want to do with this." And I had been to Ellis Island a few times and I said to myself, 'Wouldn't it be nice if I could donate th—some of this stuff to Ellis Island?' And that's how I came to make the decision, that I didn't want to sell the stuff. I—the girls didn't want to necessarily have all of it, and there was a lot of stuff.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: So they kept some of the things. I kept some of the things and some of the things we donated to Ellis Island. And at that time, we didn't realize that Ellis Island would even take it. So it was an experience just donating it and—and having it, you know—we had to send photographs of everything. And then I received a letter that all of the photographs I sent, they would accept everything that I had offered to send. And—and they even came to the house to pick the stuff up because there was—there was enough of it. I mean, the trunks were heavy. I couldn't—

LEVINE: Yeah, right.

MAMO: —really put them in—in the mail and mail them out, you know. So it—it was a—a wonderful experience.

LEVINE: Well, now, did your mother talk to you about the objects—

MAMO: Oh.

LEVINE: —when you were a little girl, when you—

MAMO: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: —were growing up? H—

MAMO: Yes. Some—some of the objects, especially one. She had her mother's wedding gown that her mother had worn when she got married in Sicily. And then when she was living here she was able to celebrate her 50th wedding anniversary. And she wore that same wedding gown to celebrate her 50th wedding anniversary. And some of what I donated was a photo of her in her wedding dress at her 50th wedding anniversary.

LEVINE: Were you present at that?

MAMO: Yes, I was nine months old.

LEVINE: Oh, my goodness. Yeah.

MAMO: I was nine months old at that.

LEVINE: And it mentioned in what you wrote that “Il Progresso” [PH] had done an article.

MAMO: Yes, they did a whole article. They came and interviewed them, did a whole article and asked them, you know, “How did you manage to live through 50 years of marriage?”

LEVINE: [chuckles]

MAMO: And, you know, and they talked about their—their feelings for one another and respecting one another and raising a family of nine children. He says, “Who would have time to get into a fight with having to take care of all those children?” He says, you know, and—and, you know, they went into discussions like that.

LEVINE: Well—

MAMO: And it was an interesting article. It was written in Italian. But I did have it translated.

LEVINE: Oh, really?

MAMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, gee. We—I think we would love to have a copy of that—

MAMO: I—I—

LEVINE: —if you—not necessarily now.

MAMO: —might be a—I might be able to give you a copy of it today.

LEVINE: Oh, well, that would be great. We’d like to have that on file. [clears throat]

MAMO: I have with me or not—I’d have to check.

LEVINE: So your grand—

MAMO: Well, I could check later to see if—

LEVINE: —mother couldn't have changed too much in size.

MAMO: She got a little heavier but my father turned out to be a seamstress and he let the seams out. There was enough fabric inside for him to let the seams out for her wear the—to wear the dress.

LEVINE: Hmm.

MAMO: So it was really an accomplishment. And then we had taken this beautiful family photograph of all the children.

LEVINE: At the 50th?

MAMO: At the 50th—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: —wedding anniversary. And that was one of the pictures that was donated, plus her—her picture of her—husband and wife together for the 50th wedding anniversary. So those were all things that we saved in the trunk because they were big frames. And, you know, when they had the house in Brooklyn, they had them hanging in the rooms. But then we put them in the trunk and they stayed there for 25-odd years, if not more, you know, and that was part of deciding what to do with those pictures.

LEVINE: I see. Well, if we could just back up a minute.

MAMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Maybe you could say—you mentioned Giuseppe was an artist, an—an inspiring artist and—and—

MAMO: Yes.

LEVINE: —came here to—to—to study art. How about the others? Could you say what they did in Sicily and what they did after they came here?

MAMO: Well, when—when they left Sicily, they all studied in school in Sicily. My—my grandfather had a—a decent job. He was a—in road construction. So he—I wouldn't—they wouldn't call them wealthy but he was well to do. And they owned their own home—

LEVINE: Hmm.

MAMO: —which not many immigrants did at that time.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: So they owned their own home. He had a good job in construction. All of the children went to school. My mother finished—they called it the fifth grade.

LEVINE: That was what—that was typical—

MAMO: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: —to go to the fifth grade. Uh-huh.

MAMO: And she was 14.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: And at that time, he wouldn't let her go to school anymore. So I imagine if he stopped her at 14, he stopped the other children from going to school at that age also and then insisted that they study a trade. So they all had to study a trade.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: And at that point, Giuseppe was still studying the art. I mean, because that was—it was known that he—he had this ability. He really had this artistic ability. I haven't found it in the generations to come yet but I'm looking for it to come out. [chuckles]

LEVINE: [chuckles] But apparently, it was appreciated by his family.

MAMO: Oh, yes. Yes, yes, yes. Well, so much so that at 16 when he did this painting, I know that he did it because they took a photograph of him—

LEVINE: Oh, they took a—

MAMO: —taking—

LEVINE: —photo of him—

MAMO: Him painting the painting.

LEVINE: —painting the painting that you have in your—

MAMO: Yes.

LEVINE: —living room.

MAMO: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: And Vincenza, the oldest daughter, was taught to do embroidery. And that's how she made her livelihood here in the United States, doing hand monogramming.

LEVINE: So who taught her? Do you—do you—

MAMO: Well, they had—they had special teachers—

LEVINE: Teachers for that. Uh-huh.

MAMO: —in the town—

LEVINE: Yeah.

MAMO: —that—other professionals that would do it. I mean—I mean, who were they taught by? By the other barbers, by the other sewers. You know, so they went to—to a trade—to a trade person and then they learned the trade. Antonio was a shoemaker. He trained to be a shoemaker. And that's what he also did here in the United States. And he—he was enterprising and at one point he was doing so well he opened what they—he called it the bootery. And he was selling shoes at this bootery. But when the 1920s came and the Depression started, he lost the business. But he opened another business in Brooklyn, also a—but this was a shoe repair shop and a shoeshine shop.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: But it was a shop.

LEVINE: And he—he was a—he had—

MAMO: Right.

LEVINE: —a small business.

MAMO: That's right.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: That's right. Salvatore was a barber and he was always a barber. And he studied it and he became a barber when he came to America in Manhattan. And he stayed in Manhattan. Even though he lived in Brooklyn, he would travel to Manhattan to—to do his barbering.

LEVINE: Do his barbering.

MAMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: Maryann was taught to be a seamstress. Okay. And she worked—she had come early also to America, and she had worked at factories doing piecework. And she was very good at it. So she did very well. Angelina was like Vincenza, did hand monogramming. Hand monogramming. My mother, Conchetta, was a seamstress. There was nothing she didn't know about the business. She could make—you show her a picture. She can make her own pattern from that picture. She could sew dresses. She would make me coats. I didn't shop for a dress till after I got married. She made me even all my honeymoon clothes. [chuckles] Between her and my father, I don't know what it was to shop for a dress. And she would make me coats. When she came to live with me she would make me the curtains for my home, slipcovers for my sofas. I mean, there wasn't anything she couldn't sew—she couldn't sew. Rosaria learned to do beads and sequins. And I remember seeing her working on these beads and sequins by hand. Now, of course, they do it all by machine.

LEVINE: Did she—in—in—in Sicily, she also learned, I guess, to sew.

MAMO: That's—yeah.

LEVINE: That was her—

MAMO: Yes, yeah.

LEVINE: —her trade.

MAMO: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And Nicolo came and went to school here, right?

MAMO: He went to school here. He was educated here. He didn't go to college but he did become a pattern maker, and he—he worked for a nice firm making children's clothing, making patterns for children's clothing. Yes.

LEVINE: Wow, wow.

MAMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Wow.

MAMO: So they—they all—they all had training. They all had apprenticeship and—

LEVINE: [unclear]—

MAMO: —they all found—they all found employment easily in the—in Manhattan at that time. They all were able to pool their resources and buy a beautiful two-family brick house in Brooklyn.

LEVINE: Why don't you say where they—where they went to first i—when they came to this country?

MAMO: Oh, they lived in Manhattan.

LEVINE: I know it—Ninth Avenue.

MAMO: Yes.

LEVINE: You had written. But do you have any sense of whether it was uptown, downtown?

MAMO: Ah, you know what? I'm pretty sure I wrote it down. I went through some of the papers of mine that I had home. [shuffling papers] They were living in Manhattan. Yeah, they were living—the first home they lived in was on 26th Street.

LEVINE: Oh.

MAMO: West 26th Street.

LEVINE: And Ninth Avenue.

MAMO: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: And Ninth Avenue.

LEVINE: Right.

MAMO: Yes. The church that they went to in Manhattan was St. Chiatta Church on 36th Street, 434 36th Street. I found all these addresses on papers, you know, either on the naturalization papers that they had to fill out and had addresses on them or cards that they had received. Yeah, so that—that's the area they lived in, Ninth Avenue and 26th Street.

LEVINE: Twenty-sixth Street. Okay. Well we're going to pause here and Kevin will turn over the tape. And we'll continue.

MAMO: Okay.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

LEVINE: Starting here with—with the second side of the tape. We—we were talking about houses. We failed to mention that Adrano was in Catania [PH], the province.

MAMO: The province of Catania.

LEVINE: Right.

MAMO: Yes.

LEVINE: And—and the house that the family maintained, even though they were in America, was also—that's where that was.

MAMO: Yes.

LEVINE: Why don't you say the circumstances under which it finally was sold?

MAMO: Well, they—another interesting aspect of the house that they had and the fact that they cared about the house was, it was—during World War II, it was badly—it was badly bombed. The home had been severely damaged. And the cousins had written, you know, "What should we do with it?" And they decided to have the house repaired. And they sent all the money to have the house repaired and another story put on, so it became a four-story house.

LEVINE: Now, why do you think that decision was made?

MAMO: I think because they loved the town so that they wanted to keep themselves there as long as they could. And by this time, 1942, my grandfather had died. And I think my gra—my grandmother had died in

'42. So this might—the decision might have been made after she had died. So it was between the brothers and the sisters.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: And they decided that they wanted to keep the house and keep the memory of it.

LEVINE: So in other words, you think that they weren't planning to go back.

MAMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: But they just didn't want to let go of it.

MAMO: No. I—I tell you, the feeling was so strong that when I went to Sicily—

LEVINE: What year was that?

MAMO: Oh, it had to be 2000—

LEVINE: Oh, so they were all gone—

MAMO: Yeah, they were all gone.

LEVINE: —when you went.

MAMO: They were all gone.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: And I was—I was there on my own with my husband. We went on a tour of Sicily. And when I went into the town and I saw the house, I mean, they always spoke about this house. The—it was their home. I mean, they—they didn't want to sell it. They didn't want to sell. Until the oldest sister died, it wasn't sold. So once the oldest sister died, then they—they sold it to the cousin. And when—when I went and I saw the house, the first impression I had was talking to my mother about it and hearing my mother say to me—really, I heard it in my heart—"Send them the money. Have the house painted." The church had been newly painted and it looked beautiful. The monastery had been redone when I was there and they were redoing the—the castle. The castle—I couldn't even go into the castle. They had redone it and turned it into a three-story museum, an archeology museum. It was—it was a town that they just loved.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Can you—can you, in your—in your mind, do you—can you hear your mother saying anything else regarding Sicily or the objects or any—

MAMO: Well, she—she loved—she loved working in the garden up—well, they would call it—behind the village, they all had a place where they could plant and grow things.

LEVINE: So it was outside of the village—

MAMO: Right.

LEVINE: —into the fields beyond.

MAMO: Right, into the fields.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: And—and e—I'm not sure whether they owned a piece of property or the property was community property. It probably was more like community property and they divided places where they could grow things. And she would talk about having—you know, going out there every day to work in the garden. She loved to garden and she loved her flowers. And she liked working in the garden alongside her father. That, she enjoyed. She liked the feast days. She'd talk about the feast days. And they had this one special feast where—and it sounds unbelievable but they would spring this child up on a wire and make him come up over the town. And then the—the child would drop flowers. And I wouldn't believe her, that this—they—they really did this till I saw photographs of it and then read about it in—in other stories about Sicily and about Adrano, that they actually did this once a year.

LEVINE: And this child was dressed as an angel?

MAMO: Dressed as an angel, dropping flowers on the people as he was raised up on this wire.

LEVINE: Wow.

MAMO: And my father was very proud of the town also because he was—at 19, he became an electrician. He was—he received a license to be an electrician.

LEVINE: So I guess that means they had electricity in—in—in Adrano.

MAMO: Well, yes. He was 19 when he put that electricity in. He must have done that in the—if he left in 1920, he must have done it around—after the war in 1918.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: Like that, '18, '19,

LEVINE: Yeah.

MAMO: Depending on when the war ended. But—

LEVINE: So that must have been a—a—a new profession for—for someone in that town. I mean, electrician.

MAMO: Electrician.

LEVINE: Right?

MAMO: Y—yeah. Yeah. Well, his father worked on the railroad. He was a con—not a conductor. He did the switching of—of trains.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: And that was his responsibility. And I don't know whether he encouraged my father to become an electrician or not, but he—my father, by profession, was an electrician. But—

LEVINE: And—

MAMO: —when he came to America he couldn't get a job because they were unionized already. He couldn't get in the union. And my aunt, Maria— [shuffling papers] just a minute.

LEVINE: Ann Marie?

MAMO: Rose—yeah, Ann—Maria Ann taught him how to sew on the sewing machine.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

MAMO: And she taught him to sew on the machine and took him to work at the factory with her, and he became a—a professional at it. And then he became a foreman of a factory, learned all about what had to be done. And eventually, he opened his own shop with a partner. And then he opened up another partnership, a firm called Coquette [PH] on Broadway

where they made beautiful, beautiful bridal gowns. So he—you know, they—they were enterprising.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: They—they wanted to do better for themselves and for their family and then they put all their effort into—into what they were doing. And they loved their town, going back to Italy. They loved their town. They—they always spoke of it lovingly. And feast days would come by and they would, you know, talk about the feast days, how they celebrated them.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: You know, and—

LEVINE: Did any of them go back for visits?

MAMO: My father went back and took my brother when—how old was I? In—no, he came back in 1930, was before I was born. They came in 1930. My brother was nine when he took him over. My mother would never go again because she wouldn't go by—by boat. So she didn't go with them because she had gotten so seasick on the voyage coming here. She would never go back on the boat again. But she did go back with my father the year my daughter was born. The young one here—in what year was she born now? She's 40. Oh, my God, the way the time goes by. And they went back to Sicily then. But my father had gone back. My uncles had gone back on—on and off in trips. The daughters never went back but the—the uncles and my mother were the only ones that ever went back. And they stayed with relatives, you know, sometimes even in their own home. Of course, cousins were living there.

LEVINE: I see.

MAMO: You know, so it—it—it was a wonderful experience. It was finally sold when the last sister died.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: Because she would never consent to have it sold in her lifetime. So after she died, then there were—there were two sisters left. And then they decided to sell it to—to the cousin that—part of the family that had been taking [chuckles] care of it all along.

LEVINE: Well, how about going through the objects that you're donating—

MAMO: Yes.

LEVINE: —to the museum and, if you could say anything—I think we mentioned that, you know, this will go in our Treasures from Home case. And so we'd like to have some statement about them, if you can take them one by one.

MAMO: You want to go through all the papers or—

LEVINE: Well, why don't you just look down the list and if there's—if there's—if there's any object that you have a statement, an anecdote, a—remembering your mother talking about it, anything like that.

MAMO: Well, I remember them talking about having to be sponsored, to—to be able to come as immigrants. They couldn't come on their own. Somebody had to sponsor them to provide a home for them that they would go to, provide a job for them that they might have. So one of the papers they had was the sponsorship through her brother, Salvatore Sicarella. And he had sponsored her and my father and to provide a home for them. And I thought that that paper should be the beginning of the story—

LEVINE: Yeah.

MAMO: —for them.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: And again, it was all the same family ties altogether. Okay. The—they had a family birth record, which was an interesting piece of paper too that I—I—I don't have a birth record that I've made for myself. But this birth record was made for them before they left Sicily, and all the names of the children and when they were born. It was like an official document to see all the names of the children, the—the date of births on it. And they went and got that to bring over with them when they came over in 1920. So I thought that was a document that, you know, was worthwhile having and saving also.

LEVINE: Now, that document was from the city—

MAMO: Yes.

LEVINE: —of Adrano.

MAMO: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: It was an official—it was an official document where they verified their birth dates and everything for record purposes. I don't know why my grandfather wanted it but he had that made and done before they left to come to America. I guess he wanted everybody to know he—where he came from and where his kids were born. It was n—there was no story about it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: And then I had also found with their papers these immigrant—what they called inspection cards. And these are all papers my mother had saved for all these years. She hadn't thrown them away. When I had gone through her things, I found them. I says, "Well, she didn't throw them away. I can't throw them away."

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: And—and part of how I knew that she went to school, I found her report card. She brought that over with her.

LEVINE: Oh.

MAMO: See, they took the time to want to save these things and the documents, I think, were all in good shape. And I said to myself, 'Well, what am I going to do with these? I—I don't want to throw them out.'

LEVINE: Oh.

MAMO: I says, "Ellis Island will want them, won't they?" And you know what? They did want them.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: The passports, I was inspired to send the passports because when I had visited Ellis Island they had an exhibit—I don't know if you remember it, but they had an exhibit of all the passports on this huge, huge board. Well, when I saw that passport and I didn't see my mother's picture in there, I says to myself, 'Oh, why didn't I know about sending that?' Okay. So this was another thing that inspired me when I did find these things. I says, "You know, my mother had saved them. These were part—partial—in that trunk." I says to him, "I have to do something with them."

LEVINE: And also, it shows their picture at the time they came.

MAMO: Right, right. And—and I don't know whether you know but they used my mother's picture, her passport, and my grandmother's passport in an exhibit already. That was a floating exhibit. I believe it was called, oh, Come to the Table in Italian. How did they say—

LEVINE: Oh, yes.

MAMO: Do you remember that?

LEVINE: The food exhibit.

MAMO: Huh?

LEVINE: The food exhibit.

MAMO: Yes, they food exhibit.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: And they used her passport to start that exhibit. And we—I found out about it by accident. We happened to come. It was just before Thanksgiving and my niece and nephew wanted to come to Ellis Island. I says, "Oh, we'll go with you." And we found the exhibit. So I'm so glad that I—I did donate and I'm so glad that I found those papers. And like I said, there were documents that she saved and—and saved it in a way of—that they were preserved. You know, they were saved carefully. And they meant an awful lot to her. And so then—so they meant that much more to me and that was why I—I wanted them saved also.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: And why we donated them and why—I know she would have been happy about it. And it's—some of these pictures were also pictures that hung around the house in these beautiful, huge frames. And you know, after a while they took them down, especially the baby pictures. You know, they got to be an embarrassment to the—to my brother. That was my brother's picture. But then when I found the pictures, I says, "You know what? That's part of the story too." He was a first generation American. He was the first one born here of the family.

LEVINE: What were your mother and—and father's attitude about being in America?

MAMO: Oh, they—they—they were very pleased to come to America and start their—they were young. They were 20 and he was 23. They were a young couple. My mother was lucky. She had all her family with her. My

father was very adventurous and very enterprising, as he showed through—even though he couldn't get a job that he wanted. You know, he—he found a way to succeed and really succeed. And the experience for them was wonderful. They—they—they always talked lovingly about Manhattan, about the coming over and wanting to be here. And like I said, my mother had all her family here. She had no regrets. My father left his whole family. He was the first one to leave. Then another brother came over. He was able to bring another brother over and then he brought the—my—my husband happened to be the oldest. He brought the second son over and then the third son came over. And—and then my grandmother—he brought my grandmother over because she wanted to meet her grandchildren. And she came and she died here.

LEVINE: Oh.

MAMO: But that was a regret for me, that they buried her here and they didn't send her home.

LEVINE: Send her back, uh-huh. Uh-huh.

MAMO: And when I tried to get it done, they told me—not that it's impossible but it's very difficult. So they discouraged me from doing it because she had a beautiful place in the cemetery for her. Her picture was even there. They had—you know, plots were very hard to come by. The cemeteries are small and the land is hard. And they had a beautiful cemetery spot that my grandmother and my grandfather—a sister had been buried there. And now some of the other—two of his sisters remained and they asked to have the plot that my grandmother would have been buried in. So now she can't even go back but we honor her here anyway.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MAMO: But she did come here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: But again, the experience was so positive for him and for my mother that they did send for other family to come over.

LEVINE: Right. When they—when they were on Ninth Avenue, or on 26th Street, w—was there a Sicilian community around there?

MAMO: Oh, yes. Yes, yes. They had a lot of—a lot of their cousins or piason [PH] lived there. As a matter of fact, they even had started a club. I don't know whether [papers shuffling] I sent that paper to you or not. But I'm

not sure whether that was in Manhattan or in Brooklyn. Here it is. They had this organization that was called Lunita Ardornisi [PH].

LEVINE: Oh.

MAMO: That means “a unity of people from Adrano.” Okay?

LEVINE: Yeah.

MAMO: And they formed this organization and I think it—they had started it in Manhattan. As I said, it was an imminent—an immigrant group of people from Adrano that started this organization to help one another out. And then it turned into a big social thing where they would all gather together and meet and celebrate holidays together and—and talk about their town and their country. It—it—the town was very much loved. I mean, even when other cousins would come they would talk about what the town was like and—and how they—you know, they were young when they left.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MAMO: You know, but they were old enough to remember it, not so young that, you know—

LEVINE: Yes.

MAMO: They d—and—and I think they all had positive feelings about the town. They didn’t—they didn’t come—like some—you know, I’ve read some stories about immigrants that came over that were poor, that were hungry. They didn’t go through that. I never had this feeling that when they were in their town that they—oh, you know, they had disease and things like that and, you know, she—Mom talked about that one time when a lot of people were very ill. But they never talked about not having food.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: You know, of being hungry, of coming to America because they—they wanted a better life. They wanted an adventure. They wanted to see something new. They heard about America and they wanted to grow with America. That’s the only way I could put it. This is, I think, the feeling that they had, that, you know, they would hear from other people that were—that came from Adrano and went before them, or come to America, not so much about the streets being paved with gold—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: —but the opportunities that were here.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, now, did your mother or father ever say anything about the move to Brooklyn and why and—

MAMO: Well, my—my mother liked Manhattan but she didn't have her garden. And my mother would do anything for a garden. [chuckles] So—

LEVINE: So Brooklyn was like country, right?

MAMO: Brooklyn was like country.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: So she—I'm sure they looked to get out of Manhattan to—to better their lives also, because in Manhattan they didn't own their house. In Sicily, they owned their house. So here, they wanted to again own property. This was something that was important to them. And they bought the house collectively.

LEVINE: Ah.

MAMO: Do you know what I'm saying? It—

LEVINE: Yeah.

MAMO: —was the group of children that bought the home.

LEVINE: The family, yeah.

MAMO: I mean, otherwise, they probably wouldn't have been able to do it. Again, they were not wealthy but they were enterprising and they were—they were a family group that worked together and pooled their resources.

LEVINE: Now, do you think other Sicilian people from Adrano that were—that were on Ninth Avenue also went to the same section in Brooklyn?

MAMO: Ab—absolutely. Absolutely, because I can tell you where we would visit [chuckles]—

LEVINE: [chuckles]

MAMO: —on the holidays. Like when—

LEVINE: Go ahead. Tell me.

MAMO: When—like on—on New Year's Eve, we would go at the celebrate New Year's Eve and people would come and gather at our house. And they would have these little whiskey glasses. And we'd have a tray full of whiskey glasses. They'd fill up all the little whiskey glasses and we'd wish everybody a happy new year at this house. Then we would put our coats on, walk a couple of blocks to another house where there were other people from Adrano and, again, fill up the little whiskey glasses and take another shot of whiskey. And we would walk down on another few blocks going in another direction. And they wouldn't necessarily own their home. They may have a rented apartment. And we would visit there. Oh, there must have been five or six different places that we stopped—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: —to visit different—different cousins, different relatives, different friends. And they all kind of stayed within the same area, but not all. Some of them stayed, went to other sections in Brooklyn. But a lot of them came to Brooklyn, different parts of Brooklyn. We would take the train and go visit other cousins. Then my father bought a car and we would go with the car and—and Sundays was visiting time. Sundays, we had a big dinner but after the dinner we would always go visiting another family that—that came from Adrano. They kept very close ties with Adrano.

LEVINE: Do you think Brooklyn was like a step up? In other words—

MAMO: Oh, sure. Yes.

LEVINE: —it was—

MAMO: Definitely.

LEVINE: Yeah, you were moving—

MAMO: Yeah, definitely.

LEVINE: —right along. Uh-huh.

MAMO: Yes, definitely.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: Yeah, moving right along. And then out of Brooklyn, the next generation, New Jersey and Long Island.

LEVINE: Long Island. [chuckles]

MAMO: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Right, okay.

MAMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well—

MAMO: That definitely was it. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Yeah. [chuckles] Well, now, let's—let's keep going. We're going with the photographs that I guess used to hang on your mother and father's walls.

MAMO: Right.

LEVINE: And then, let's see, after that—oh, well, then comes the photograph of the 50th wedding anniversary.

MAMO: The 50th wedding anniversary, right. And that to me was very special. Like I said, I was a baby but Mom always talked about wanting to celebrate her 50th wedding anniversary.

LEVINE: Really?

MAMO: She was—as I think back on it, she was not very forthcoming about her—her getting married, when she got married and how things were. And as I was talking to my daughter today on the train, I says, “As—as I got older and after she passed away”—I don't know why I never had the conversation with her beforehand, because we did talk about the 50th wedding anniversary but we never talked about her marriage. And I think she must have eloped and didn't—never wanted to say it, because in the year that got married was the year that her family was talking about leaving for America.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: And I don't think my father's family would have approved [chuckles] of him going without—with them if he hadn't been married. He probably would have taken off anyway because he was just that kind of a guy. But I think that was one of the reasons why they got married that year.

LEVINE: Do you—but she did get married, even though she eloped in that gown.

MAMO: No, no, no. That was my grandmother.

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

MAMO: That was my grandmother.

LEVINE: I'm mixed up here. Okay.

MAMO: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MAMO: That was my grandmother but my mother—

LEVINE: Mother.

MAMO: —always talked about my grandmother's gown and the 50th anniversary party and how special it was—

LEVINE: I see.

MAMO: —that they had this and they started a tradition also. They had—they gave their parents a sil—a gold cup and they had the cup monogrammed with their—their name on it. So we have this gold cup in the family. And because of that gold cup and the—they would show it to me and they would talk about it, the 50th wedding anniversary and the gold cup, when my mother and father were married 25 years, my brother was in the service. And I was, like, 12 and I said to one of my uncles—I says, "You know." I says, "My mother's married 25 years. I have to get my mother a silver cup like the gold cup." So we started the tradition of the silver cup for the 25th anniversary. And that felt—that came about from the—from the gold cup, my grandmother's—

LEVINE: Right.

MAMO: —50th wedding anniversary.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MAMO: And I was lucky enough to celebrate my 50th wedding anniversary—

LEVINE: Did you get a cup?

MAMO: —and have my name, you know, engraved on the same cup with my grandmother.

LEVINE: Oh.

MAMO: And we've passed down the silver cup down through the generation to everybody who was married 25 years—

LEVINE: Huh.

MAMO: —to have their name engraved to keep the cup for—till the next person and give it to the next person down. So we've carried that tradition along.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: And like I said, my mom would have loved to have been married the 50 years but she missed it by a month and a half.

LEVINE: Oh.

MAMO: My father passed away.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: But—and then, too, she had this—this wonderful family picture of the whole family together.

LEVINE: On the 50th.

MAMO: On the 50th.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

MAMO: And like I said, the only one that was missing was the one son that had previously died.

LEVINE: Yeah. And you were just a baby on—

MAMO: I was nine months old, yeah.

LEVINE: —somebody's lap.

MAMO: Yeah, on my dad.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: Yeah, on my dad.

LEVINE: Why don't you say the temperament of your mother and your father? What were they like?

MAMO: Well, it's hard to say. I think my mother was more quiet than my father. My father was very outgoing. He was—he was very social. He liked to do a lot of things for people. He was very spontaneous. He [chuckles]—he would buy things. We would celebrate Christmas and he wouldn't come home till Christmas Eve. And he would always come home late on Christmas Eve and we couldn't understand it. But we all would stay up for Christmas Eve anyway. And then after, we would—we would celebrate Christmas Eve and get our presents on the eve. There was always a trip to the basement. And we would go down in the basement and we would find another surprise there that my father would bring in [chuckles] with the car and whatever. So there was always this spontaneity about him. We would be home. The doorbell would ring. "I have a delivery for you." I'd say, "What do you mean, you have a delivery for me?" "I have a television set that has to be delivered to you." And the television set came. One time in my new home, because he came to live with me in my house, a tree was delivered. He just—you—we were told to plant some trees on the curb and he had these trees delivered. And this is how he was. I mean, as it—as—as a grandfather with my grandchildren, I'll tell you this one little story, which is really just typical of him. He would come home from work and wherever my daughters were—and they would see him come out of the car, they would run to him, run to him, give him a kiss, give him a hug. And he would slip them something, a piece—piece of bubblegum. My—my neighbors across the street says to me—I says—"You know, I come home from work," he says to me. "But my kids never, never come running up to kiss me hello. But they always come and run up and kiss your father." I says, "Well, why d—why do you think they do that?" I—I says, "Well, I know they do it because they love him but I also know they do it because he slips them a piece of gum." [chuckles] So he always had something there for the kids. Kids would come and visit. He'd hand them a quarter. He'd hand them 50 cents. He was spontaneous that way. My mother was a homebody. She loved her garden. She loved her flowers. She had a green thumb. She passed that thumb on to my daughters and they have the green thumb for flowers and growing things. And my mother was productive with her fingers. She always was doing something with her hands. And it was always at home. She was not one that went out. Okay. She enjoyed her family. She enjoyed her home. She would go shopping for food and to pick out the vegetables that she wanted, the meat that she had to have. I mean, you know, those had to be picked out carefully. But it was always for the family. And it was—it was not a social thing for her but she had all her sisters.

LEVINE: Ah.

MAMO: Okay.

LEVINE: Right, right.

MAMO: So it circled—a lot of her life circled around her sisters and the things that they would do together.

LEVINE: Oh.

MAMO: And the things that she enjoyed doing—she loved to knit. She loved to crochet and her hands were always, always busy. They—never idle.

LEVINE: Okay. We're going to pause here and put on another tape.

MAMO: Oh, boy.

LEVINE: You're going really—

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A]

LEVINE: Okay. We're beginning tape two now and I'm speaking with Teresa Mamo. We were going through the objects that h—she is donating to the Ellis Island Museum and one of the big objects is the steamer trunk.

MAMO: The steamer trunk. The steamer—the trunk was always part of the house in Brooklyn. I don't—I—I didn't live in Manhattan.

LEVINE: Right.

MAMO: I was born after they bought the house in Brooklyn so my whole relationship was the house in Brooklyn.

LEVINE: And t—say where that house was.

MAMO: 1755 West 13th Street, Brooklyn. And that's Bensonhurst, not far from Coney Island on—closer to Coney Island. I don't know where—off King's Highway.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: It was a nice neighborhood of Italian people, Jewish people. Matter of fact, Italians on one—one side of the street, [chuckles] Jews on the other.

LEVINE: The other.

MAMO: Jewish people on the other side of the street. And you know what? The similarities in our upbringings were amazing. We may not have eaten the same food but we had the same thoughts and ideas and dreams. So it—it was a very warm community and warm schools and it was a lovely neighborhood to grow up in. It really, really was. But then we all left it anyway, right, to go out on our own. Well, and the house in Brooklyn had a beautiful basement. And in this basement there were two steamer trunks. One trunk, we weren't allowed to open as kids. But the other trunk, whatever was in the trunk that we wanted we could fool around with and—and play with and—and actually, it was filled with old clothes and shawls and shoes and—and what—whatever the—the sisters didn't want to wear anymore. And as kids, we used to play dress up all the time down there in—and my uncle—I even remember him taking pictures of us in all these old clothes and—and how we used to dress up and enjoy ourselves as children. So as—as we got older, of course, the trunk didn't mean anything to us anymore. And it eventually got emptied. But when my mother came to live with me, she packed it up with objects from the house on 13th Street that she wanted to keep. And she filled up two trunks with all these objects that were part of her family's unit that she had saved, things that belonged to her brothers, that she had some strong feelings for, things that belonged to her sisters, that she wanted the memory of them. And—and she took them with her when she moved and came to live with me on Long Island.

LEVINE: Now, did these trunks originally come from Sicily?

MAMO: I—I think they might have been shipped to Sicily when they decided that they were going to come. They were bought and either my uncle sent them or they brought them in—I don't know how these—how did immigrants travel to get these trunks? But these trunks were originally packed, my mother said, in Sicily with the things that they brought over with them from Sicily. And they brought quite a—quite a bit of stuff over with them.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Is there anything you can remember that your mother said?

MAMO: Came in those trunks?

LEVINE: Anything about the trunks that she mentioned?

MAMO: Well, no, other than that they packed it carefully and all the things that they wanted to bring over. You know, they packed all their important papers in the trunk, all their—a lot of their linens that they had made. I mean, the girls were very productive with the needle. [chuckles] And they embroidered an awful lot of beautiful stuff while they were young in Italy. They started very young. And a lot of the things that they had

made, sheets and pillow shams and even articles of clothing that they had put lace on, their long underwear things and slippers with lace on them and nightgowns that they had made, they packed all of that stuff up in the trunks to bring over with them from—from Italy. And they had made quite a few beautiful objects. I have a—a sheet set that my mother and her sister, Angelina, made that my cousin and I used to fight over who was going to keep it when the time came to divide it. And we never used it to sleep in because it had a beautiful scene of a ship on the water surrounded by all kinds of designs. And it was almost transparent. And I've never come to have it framed or used but I have always wanted to do it. And it was—it—but I just haven't gotten to the point of doing something with that. But it's a—it's a beautiful piece of embroidery that's so fine and so beautiful. It's a picture within a picture.

LEVINE: Hmm.

MAMO: And th—that's the kind of work they had done. And they had done a lot of it and it—they brought a lot of it with them.

LEVINE: And that was one of the things you think was packed in the trunk?

MAMO: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: Yes, certain of it. My—my grandmother brought over her wedding gown that was packed in the trunk, which then she was able to wear for her 50th wedding anniversary. And it stayed in that trunk for another 50 years after she died till I came upon it or talked it—seen it with my mother. And, you know, it was well packed away. And again, I didn't want to pack it away again in the trunk for my grandchildren to see. But I figured, 'Let me donate this. It was a treasure that they brought over from home and let's—let's donate it to Ellis Island.' And then we did that. And it'll be a dream come true if it's on exhibit and if they were able to preserve it. I don't know how well, you know, it—it maintained. It was—by now, it's over a hundred years old.

LEVINE: Wow.

MAMO: Yeah. So it was a—it was a nice piece. They had—I—I donated some of the small books that they had, they brought over from Italy, because they were all written in Italian and dated years before they came. So books were important to them. My mother, I know, had a poetry book that she loved.

LEVINE: Hmm.

MAMO: And they had their—the little Bible that I donated and a small prayer book that they had in their language.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: And some of the dresses I donated were dresses that I—I think were worn here that I had found in the trunks but not brought over from Italy.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: Most of the objects that were brought over from Italy—there was a pair of stockings that my grandmother had knitted—

LEVINE: Hmm.

MAMO: —with these thin wire needles. I mean, it was amazing to just see these needles, how she was able to work them and the stitching on it. They were very, very fine stitches and they would use, like, five or six needles sometimes to get that round shape—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: —and work around them. And I know she had made these in—in Sicily and she had brought the needles over with her. And they were an interesting object to find.

LEVINE: Absolutely.

MAMO: Yeah, yeah. And again—again, it goes to show the proficiency of their hands—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: —and how they enjoyed making things. Another thing that didn't come in the trunk but I found later in the trunk—this was an object my mother took from the house in Brooklyn and brought home—brought to my house, and it was a—a flag that—an interest—an infantry banner flag from World War I that belonged to her—one of her brothers.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: And when he—when the war—when the—World War I broke out he enlisted in the service in the American Army. And he became a soldier in the American Army. He was a PFC and he was sent to France and served in one of the major battles in France, was even awarded a—a

bronze—oh, they called it a button, I think, at that time. And she always treasured the picture of him—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: —and the flag that he had. And so she—she sa—saved it and held onto that. And another interesting part of the story of World War 1—at that time, America and Italy were allies. And one brother, Antonio, went back to Italy to serve in the Italian Army.

LEVINE: Hmm.

MAMO: And of course, he felt pride of his country above maybe the pride of America like the other brother felt. I mean, you know, they were—they were individual. But they lived together but they had their own feelings, their own spirit and their own ideas of things. So one brother went to the American Army. The other brother went to the Italian Army. And it—it was an interesting story, I—I thought.

LEVINE: Absolutely.

MAMO: [unclear] from World War I. Yeah.

LEVINE: So Antonio and Salvador were two of the uncles that lived in the house—

MAMO: Yes.

LEVINE: —that you grew up in.

MAMO: Right.

LEVINE: And who else was there with them in their—in their part of the house?

MAMO: Maryann, Vincenza. Well, the two sisters.

LEVINE: Okay.

MAMO: And Nicola.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

MAMO: The youngest brother never married.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: Yeah. Angelina married and she lived down the block in a rented apartment.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: And as it turned out, Rosaria—my mother and father and I would—my mother and father were living upstairs. But then as things got bad in the Depression, my other aunt moved upstairs with us and her family, so that we were two families—we were three families living in a two-family house.

LEVINE: Right.

MAMO: And we shared the apartment with my—my cousin, Nicolas and Vincenza, which were the other two—

LEVINE: Children of your aunt and uncle.

MAMO: Right, right.

LEVINE: Well, now, can you say anything else about how the Depression here affected you—you and your family?

MAMO: Well, I was born in '33 so by that time the Depression was—was kind of over or almost over. And I think they pooled resources together. And this is how they survived.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: They pooled resources together. This—as I was saying, this one aunt, Rosaria, and her husband, Guyatano [PH], were living in an apartment in Brooklyn when things got bad. He lost his job so my father said to them, “Move in with us.”

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: So they moved in with us and—and as it turned out, we had two big bedrooms. I slept in a bedroom with my mother and father for many years. My cousin, who was nine months older than I was, slept in the bedroom with her father and mother till the day she married.

LEVINE: Hmm.

MAMO: [chuckles] I ended up getting my brother's bedroom when he got married. Okay, so I was able to have my own room and then my other cousin, the other boy cousin, had a separate bedroom. So there were—there were two little bedrooms in the front of the house, two bedrooms in the back of

the house. We had a big kitchen and a dining room area. It was like an eight-room, then a dining room and a—a living room. So there was lots of room in between. And there was always a basement you could go to for privacy. And there was another bathroom down there so—

LEVINE: And what was your brother's name?

MAMO: Salvatore.

LEVINE: Salvatore.

MAMO: And we all got along really well. I mean, we were raised by different parents but with all the same ideals and concerns and I mean, I had maybe a few better dresses than my cousin had. I had a bicycle and she didn't have a bicycle but we shared. You know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

MAMO: But the love was always there and—and it's still there today.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: You know, and—and I—that's how the family, I think, survived, that they pooled all their resources together.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: And they—they all stayed in this one house in Brooklyn and—and my—my—my brother, he was the eldest of the grandchildren, right, one that really knew the language, plus my uncle, who—who was also proficient.

LEVINE: Nicola, uh-huh.

MAMO: Nicola. And he ended up going to college and he was the first grandson that went to college and I was the first granddaughter that went to college. So we were encouraged to do with our lives the best that we could do.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: Yeah, and we did.

LEVINE: You did, yeah.

MAMO: Yeah, we did.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, now, how about the drafting tools? Do you know anything about that?

MAMO: The drafting tools, I think belonged to the Uncle Giuseppe, who—

LEVINE: Oh, right.

MAMO: —was studying the art. And he did do a lot of mechanical—

LEVINE: Design?

MAMO: —designs and drawings and that my aunts had saved. And most of it was in pencil work or charcoal. He had some paintings that he started and didn't finish. He—he had finished—like, I know of three major paintings that he had finished. I—I can't give you the names offhand. But again, they were copies of pictures. And o—one of them was of an old man and a young girl playing cards together. And one was of a—a—a lion and a lion tamer. And a picture—another one was of, oh, like a rock scene with—I—I can't remember which animal was on. Then he had given them to cousins and I don't know whether he sold them to them when he—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: You know, sometimes they would—might have paid him for some of the artwork—

LEVINE: To keep going, uh-huh.

MAMO: —that maybe he had done to keep going.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: But they're around the family.

LEVINE: Oh.

MAMO: And we have—I had one of a—a—faces of women with a needle dissecting a little man. [chuckles] And I—and it wasn't finished that. But it was an unfinished painting.

LEVINE: Huh.

MAMO: And I took it to a couple of people to—to see if they could finish it. And they said, “You know what? We would never be able to match the tones.” And they said, “You’re better off leaving it as it is.”

LEVINE: As is.

MAMO: So we left it as it is. But it was a disappointment that he had died so young. Al—always a disappointment to the family and to me because we really felt that he could really have been a—a fantastic artist. And as I said, I always look to the grandchildren and to the cousins to see who has a little bit of artistic ability that’s going to come forth. And you—you—they have certain creativeness in them. There’s a lot of creativeness in the grandkids. But not the touch that I would have liked to have seen that came from my uncle.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, different form. Right?

MAMO: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Artistic—a different form.

MAMO: Yeah, yeah. And here are some of the objects. Well, here was the diploma that he had received from one of the schools that, you know, I—I thought if it could be preserved it would be an honor—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: —for him. I mean, he didn’t leave any descendants, you know, other than us, his—his nephews and nieces and—

LEVINE: And his paintings, right?

MAMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: His paintings.

MAMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MAMO: And—

LEVINE: How old was he when he died?

MAMO: Oh—

LEVINE: About?

MAMO: About 30—33, maybe.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: Thirty, thirty-three, something like that. Yeah.

LEVINE: Hmm.

MAMO: And some of these were the undergarments. And I think on all the undergarments, right, they had the lace trimmings that they embroidered on. And I'm sure all of them have objects. And maybe that's what they were tr—these all came over in the trunk from Italy with the embroidery that they did in Italy. And this last, this little handkerchief there of a sampler that my aunt used to have that they would tell her, "Well, make—make the monogram this way," or, "Make the monogram this way." And she would copy it and do it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: And she would sit by a window in the kitchen and she did all her monogram work. And, you know, they would bring bundles to the house and she would finish it and then ship it back, take it back to whoever had ordered them and within that area where we lived in Brooklyn. And she spent quite a few of her later years doing that—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: —till her eyesight started to give. But she always did very fine embroidery. I mean, I have samples of it myself because when my mother made a trousseau for me she had them monogram all the—the napkins with the initials on it and the tablecloth with the initials on. And she and them doing it, making a trousseau for me from the day I was born, I think, because I can't tell you how many tablecloths I've got.
[chuckles]

LEVINE: Can you think of any outings with your—with your uncles or aunts or your parents? Like Coney Island or any of those—

MAMO: Oh, goodness! We lived in Coney Island. I mean, in the summers, if one uncle wasn't on vacation, another uncle was on vacation, taking us to Coney Island. I mean, we were two stops away from Coney Island by the train. And—

LEVINE: Describe Coney Island from a child's eyes when you were there.

MAMO: Well, from a child's eyes, we would—we would—when I would—when we would go with my mother and my aunt and the two cousins that were closest to me in age—one was Nicolas and he was three years older than I and the other cousin that was, like, nine months older than I was. We would go up to the bakery, stop at the bakery, buy a box of whatever, cookies, Danishes. They would put 'em in that, tie them up with all that string that they tie them up. And then the next block we would take the subway, hop on the train for two stops, get off at Coney Island, hop on the trolley, because my mother had to go to the baths all the way south on Coney Island where then they could go into those steam baths after they [chuckles] came out of the beach. So we would go to the beach. They'd go into the water. Th—they would change at the baths because we wouldn't wear our bathing suits from home. We'd wear our clothes from home because we were on the train. So we would take the trolley, go to the bathhouse and change at the bathhouse. You'd get the locker rooms. And you'd change at the bathhouse, get into your bathing suit, leave your clothes in the—in the bathhouse there, walk down to the beach and we'd spend hours and hours there, take our box of goodies with us. And then we'd have to come back, take a shower and dress clean. And they would tempt us to go into the steam room but I don't think they ever got me and my cousin ever to go in there. [chuckles] That was a little bit too much. We—we didn't enjoy that at all but my mother and my aunt, they loved it. They loved it. Then they'd come out and take their cold shower. Today, now, they have the Jacuzzis that people use but in those days it was the bathhouse. So we never really went just straight out from the subway onto the beach. It was always that trolley ride and then the trolley ride back. And we'd often-time miss seeing the rides and stuff like that. But there were the uncles that would take us to the rides when we would go. And then there was my father, who would take me to go on the merry-go-round. I don't know how many Sundays we would spend down at Coney Island while he read his newspaper and I sat on the merry-go-round. I must have gone on around 50 times. [laughs]

LEVINE: Wow.

MAMO: And it was—it was a wonderful experience.

LEVINE: Wonderful for a child, huh?

MAMO: And then we would go to Prospect Park. We would take the bus or we would take the train, or sometimes we were lucky enough. One of the uncles would drive with one of the cars. My brother was thir—13 years older than I was. So he drove often enough too. He had a little car. And my father would leave from the car and he would take us in the winter. I remember winters going to Prospect Park and—and skating there and

coming down the hills and—and doing that. Then the families would always go away in the summer to—it—to me, I remember it being called A—Alley [PH] Pond. And I think it was in Queens somewhere. And it was a park there and we would go have family picnics there with the rest of the families that came from Adrano. We would all meet there.

LEVINE: Hmm.

MAMO: And they would make these thermos—these round thermoses full of pasta. And we would bring these thermoses full of pasta food there. And sometimes—I don't—they didn't barbecue but they would carry the food in these thermoses. They were huge thermoses. And Mama would cook the stuff and—and then we would eat there. They would make sandwiches and we would meet all the other cousins there and the men would play cards and the kids would play baseball and games and whatever. And, oh, we had a wonderful youth, just, just wonderful because they—they were—the family was very, very close and—and very endearing. And they would go away on vacation together to a farm upstate New York. And they—they would go to the farm because they could work it. The farmer would let him go out into the fields. And like I said, my mother loved to garden and gardening. And she would love to go just so she could work in the garden to pick the fresh vegetables everyday and br—brought back the memories of what Sicily was like for them.

LEVINE: Wow. Now, were the farmers also Sicilian, would you think? Or—or—

MAMO: I—I wouldn't doubt it. [laughter] I'll be honest with you. I wouldn't—I would not doubt it. I—I can't remember their names.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: But I—I wouldn't doubt that they were. I mean, I—I have family pictures of this, being up there with other cousins and being very young. Do you know what I'm saying?

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MAMO: So the—the memories—the memories are—are—are all there and they're all really wonderful. They really, really are.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, as the narrator of your family story, why don't you say your birth date?

MAMO: Okay.

LEVINE: And then I'll ask you something else.

MAMO: Okay. I was born January 22, 1933—

LEVINE: Okay.

MAMO: —in Brooklyn.

LEVINE: Okay. [chuckles]

MAMO: In Bensonhurst, Brooklyn.

LEVINE: And you—your husband's name?

MAMO: My husband's name is Nicolas Mamo and he was born on April 4th, 1930. And he—his parents—well, there's a very [chuckles] interesting story there too. His parents also came from Adrano and, as a matter of fact, he's my third cousin.

LEVINE: Ah.

MAMO: So I married my third cousin, even though I remember saying as I was growing up, "I'm never going to marry an Italian."

LEVINE: [chuckles]

MAMO: "I'm never going to marry an Italian."

LEVINE: Why did you say that?

MAMO: Because they were bossy men. They wanted—they wanted to be served. [laughter] They wanted to be taken care of. [laughs] And I was—I was going to be a liberated woman. I mean, after all, I went to college.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MAMO: And then—and then I started writing letters to this cousin, who went into this Korean War service. And he wasn't in Korea. He was stationed in Australia. But as it turned out, when he went into the service my mother went to wish him good luck. And she bought him a—a necklace with a crucifix on it. So of course, he wrote her a thank you note. And of course, she couldn't write English. So I had to write the—the thank you for your thank you note.

LEVINE: Thank [chuckles]—

MAMO: And—and—and so then he wrote me another letter, and then I was in college and my girlfriends heard that I was writing to this cousin. She says, “Well, let us write to him too.” So they all started to write to him. But then he picked my letters above everybody else’s letters. And then when he wrote me a letter he says, “You know, I don’t think you should let the other girls read my letters to you.” I says, “Oh, it’s time to—to think more seriously about what I’m doing here.” And as it turned out, we did fall in love and we did marry.

LEVINE: Ah.

MAMO: And kept the family closer together too. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Now, his first name is—

MAMO: Nicolas.

LEVINE: Ni—Nicolas.

MAMO: Nicolas.

LEVINE: And how many children did you have?

MAMO: We had three daughters.

LEVINE: And their names?

MAMO: Maria, Connie and Roseanne. And—

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And Roseanne’s here today.

MAMO: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAMO: And my Maria happens to live up in Niagara Falls, which didn’t please anybody when she moved up there. But she went to college in Buffalo and met her intended husband up there and settled in Niagara Falls. And I have two grandsons with her, that I’ll be honest with you. I don’t see them often enough but I do see them. And they are good enough boys to want to spend their summer vacations sometime with us. And they’re all in their—their 20s now. One is 25 and one is 23. And last year, one of the grandsons came down with his girlfriend and spent the week with us. So I think that means a lot—

LEVINE: Yes.

MAMO: —about family. Right?

LEVINE: Well, we're just about at the end here of this side. Maybe you could say what it means to you to be the narrator of your family story.

MAMO: Oh, it means everything to me to be able to write this down and hav— having written this story about my mother, having donated these things to Ellis Island, having—I think it gives permanence to the word “family.” And family is what I teach my children all about, that everything is the family. You—you protect the family. You protect your children in the family. You do for the family. And I've tried to do that all my life. My brother died, not young, but young enough. He was in his 60s. But I kept very close touch with my nephews and nieces and their children. And we're very, very close and one of them called even for Valentine's Day to wish us a happy Valentine's Day. I've encouraged them to go on family picnics together, family vacations together, which they've done oftentimes. To me, everything is family and this—this—doing this at Ellis Island, I think, shows them how much I love my family, my past family, my family now and the family in the future, that I want them all to stay together through all of this.

LEVINE: Well, that's a perfect ending. Thank you so much. I've been speaking with Theresa Mamo, who is talking about her family and the objects that she's donated to the Ellis Island Museum. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]