

EI-1497

HERBERT SERPA

BIRTHDATE: MARCH 6, 1943

INTERVIEW DATE: JANUARY 15, 2009

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 65

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: ELENA LOCASCIO

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: HERBERT'S SISTERS CLARA (EI-1493), ANDREA (EI-1494), MARGARET (EI-1495), MARY (EI-1496), AND MARIE AURELIA (EI-1498) WERE ALSO INTERVIEWED.

THE AZORES, 1952

AGE: 9

SHIP: RIBEIRA GRAND

PORT:

RESIDENCES:

THE AZORES: MAIA, ST. MICHAEL

UNITED STATES: CAMBRIDGE AND SOMERVILLE, MA

UNITED STATES: SALEM, NH

LEVINE: Today is January the 15th, the year 2009. I'm here in Salem, New Hampshire, with Herbert Serpa, who came through Ellis Island with his family in 1952 in October. I have been interviewing Herbert's sisters, so this is Janet Levine for the Statue of Liberty and the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. If you would start at the beginning and say your whole name, your birth date, and where you were born.

SERPA: My name is Herbert Serpa. I was born in March 6, 1943 in Maia, St. Michael. Herbert Serpa, it was a name that was not my n -- name that I was born with. It was a name that was translated as entering EI -- Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Oh, that's interesting! What was the name you were born with?

SERPA: Humberto. H-U-M-B-E-R-T-O. As a first name.

LEVINE: That was the Herbert part?

SERPA: Yes. And someone read it and said, "Oh, you're Herbert," and I got stuck with Herbert.

LEVINE: Do you think it's a real translation, or not?

SERPA: Uh. (pause) Kind of, but it's, um, it's an awkward translation.

LEVINE: But the Serpa was always Serpa, even in Maia?

SERPA: Yes, that's correct, that's correct.

LEVINE: Okay. And how old were you when you came?

SERPA: I was nine years old.

LEVINE: So that means that you have memories of Maia?

SERPA: Yes, some. I -- I have quite a bit of memories of -- of-- living there.

LEVINE: Well, let me ask you this, because I've spoken to so many of your sisters. How were you treated differently as a boy than the girls were? First in Maia.

SERPA: The, uh -- I think that I was kind of let loose and do whatever I was -- I wanted to do, or could do. And the girls tended to be controlled and their whereabouts was to known by my mother and father all the time. So I think that there was a -- uh, a general difference between my parents treating me and my sisters.

LEVINE: And that was typical?

SERPA: Yes, it was typical. And it also happened in Portugal as well as the United States.

LEVINE: So what did you do for fun in Maia? What can you remember as pleasant?

SERPA: Well, at the time, the things I do remember is that -- later on I realized how poor we were as well as the community was. At that time, because everyone else in the town was in the same condition as we were or a similar condition -- and we had no electricity, like no one else did, or bathroom conditions -- uh, the -- um, you don't realize that you are better or worse off than anyone else. You're the same as everyone. We didn't have television or radios, so therefore we didn't know what was going on -- going on outside our little town.

So I don't remember ever feeling, quote, deprived or poor, okay, and I think that's good. Maybe because I was -- we were isolated in communications. But I do remember things like -- growing up the only toys I ever had were toys that I made. Okay? And they almost -- because of things, the only toys that I was -- of course, I was less than nine years old -- the only toys that I made were from things that I could handle.

And the only thing that I remember making toys all the time of was watermelon. Watermelons were plentiful, and we ate watermelon most of the year because it was a farming community. And I remember the leftover shells of the watermelon -- taking that and making things out of it. Building things, making toys, making wagons. Those were my toys and only toys ever that I can remember.

LEVINE: Now, what happens? The shell gets hard? Like a wood?

SERPA: No, yeah, I cleaned it up. No, you take the inside out after we eat it, and then you clean up the - the inside portion, and then you cut up the outside, which is a hard shell. And you make different designs. Like legos, except I did -- we didn't have legos, and I -- we -- I made my own little wagons, or my own little things, out of watermelon. And I think I did that for years as growing up. And I used to have a lot of them. Those were my toys. And -- so I thought that was kind of interesting.

I do remember -- I must have been about -- between five and six years old -- Christmas came around, and we certainly did not celebrate Christmas like they do in the United States or elsewhere at this time. But I do remember that in the chimney there, I got my Christmas gift, and that was a -- a -- a orange. And that was my Christmas gift. And I think I was disappointed. I don't know what I was looking for, but I do distinctly remember that was the year -- the Christmas gift that I got. But I think that kind of describes the way circumstances were there, with the economy and everything else.

LEVINE: Now, did you have chores? Did you have to help your father?

SERPA: Yes. Because safety and so on, people -- there was no hazard with the crimes and so on. Crimes didn't exist, I don't think. I think the biggest crimes in the area was that somebody stole the chicken from us. So crime didn't really exist that much. The police was very strict. So I think the kids, including myself, were kind of let roaming around to do whatever you wanted. We were isolated in -- in a town of about a thousand people, so it's not that big. So I did do some things.

And I do remember one specific thing that I had to do -- and I think I was about five years old when I started -- is that every Sunday I used to sell kale. Kale is like collared green. And my father used to grow it in the house, in the backyard. We had a -- we had a backyard then. And every Sunday he'd have a big basket on the steps. We were near the church. And I would sell kale in bunches to -- not for money for me, but for money for the family. So that was my chore that I did for quite a while. But I remember doing it as early as five years old.

LEVINE: And what would you do? You'd take the basket of kale and go around?

SERPA: N -- No. What I would do is -- people -- w - since we were so near the church, people would walk by our house, and I would sell them kale as they coming out of the church. So I do remember that distinctly it happened quite often, I guess. In the -- we had a -- I thought it was a big yard, but it -- I've been back since then, it wasn't that big. It was probably about forty feet by fifty feet, in the yard itself behind the house.

But there we had animals. We had -- usually we'd have a pig. I -- I had - - growing up -- some pigeons, some rabbits, and we had some chickens in the yard. And I used to help feed th -- those animals. I also used to do some other things which probably be difficult to comprehend -- is that I remember taking a goat. We used to have a goat. And I used to take the goat out to my father's land th - that he was leasing, and that was about -- probably about two miles away. I would take the goat out there by myself and I must have been at that time in the vicinity of six years old. And -- and then I would bring the goat back.

LEVINE: You'd stay out all day with the goat?

SERPA: Yeah, yeah. And sometimes I would just go to bring my father lunch. He'd be working at another piece of land, and my mother would make up the lunch and I would walk and bring my father lunch. Again, I -- depends which land it was. I don't remember it being a chore about it, but it was a pretty good distance. We did some other things, my father and I. We did some fishing a few times. We never caught any fish, even though we're on the ocean. I don't know why we didn't catch any fish, but we didn't. I know that for a fact.

But one thing we did catch, and that was kind of an interesting type of a story, a couple different times, my father would try to catch birds to eat. Okay? Birds were, um -- like a -- a -- a treat, and so what he did was he -- he -- you would a little area, probably ten feet by ten feet of -- in -- in the land in one of his land parcels that he leased. And when the lea -- the wheat was so high -- a couple inches high -- the birds would come in and eat. And my father would put in a net, like a fishing net, over the wheat. And there'd be a wall there, there was a -- a rock wall that I remember, and we'd be hiding behind the wall. And when there was enough birds eating the -- the wheat, he would pull some string and the birds would be trapped.

LEVINE: In the net?

SERPA: In the net. So we would catch some birds and -- and then we would bring them home and cook them and it'd be a treat. You certainly couldn't have a big meal out of them but this was a special thing. And of

course I remember one time was -- we went out there and we caught a lot of them, and as we walked back to the town, my father put them all hanging on a rod, like a sugarcane. Actually, I think that's what it was, a sugarcane. To show off other people in town that we caught all these birds.

LEVINE: Do you remember what they were, those birds?

SERPA: No, no.

LEVINE: But they were little?

SERPA: They were little, yeah. Yeah. So it's still done in the island, it is still a treat, they still cook that once in awhile. I'm sure like some other countries they do frogs and so on. We didn't do that. But I know we did -- we did the birds. Almost like a sparrow type of thing. And spice it up, and -- and cook it. I do remember that. An -- an -- And another memory that I remember, at that time my father was there, so I must have been about five years old. And my mother gave birth to another son, and -- b - - but the baby didn't live, it died at birth. And I do remember going to the funeral and carrying my brother in a little box, like a shoebox.

LEVINE: Oh.

SERPA: I don't know if it was a shoebox, but it was the size of a shoebox. We didn't have many shoes, so I don't know where the shoebox was. And I remember carrying it from our house to the cemetery, which was about a half mile away with some people following me. I do remember that as a viv -- vivid memory of the -- the burial.

LEVINE: And you were only five?

SERPA: I must have been five, because my father left there when I was seven to come to United States. So th -- he was there that time, so there I must have been in five range, five, six years old.

LEVINE: Was there anything about funerals in Maia that is different than it would be here?

SERPA: I think they're similar. At that time they didn't have automobiles. There was only one person who had an automobile, and that was the doctor. They basically had a -- a wagon pulled by an oxen, and they would have the casket behind it, and have two or three piece band playing something. And the people would follow, and they -- (ringing)

LEVINE: Do you want me to stop?

SERPA: No, that's okay. So people would follow the -- the funeral from where they lived to the cemetery, which wasn't that far. It was probably a

quarter mile, half mile. Everybody dressed in black, and I do remember that the women a -- seemed to be -- all of them seemed to be dressed in black it seemed, but definitely when a -- a husband died, they would dress in black forever. I remember that.

LEVINE: Do you remember your mother or father's reaction to the baby dying?

SERPA: No, no. I don't remember that. I think that because you're in a small community and that happens often, nobody's happy about it but I think it became more acceptable.

LEVINE: It's something that's known --

SERPA: That happens.

LEVINE: And that happens, right.

SERPA: You know? I had -- I remember a couple more people dying. One of my uncles died. He was a couple houses down from us. He was young. I think he was sick for awhile. And -- you know -- he died one day, and then they held the funeral right there. They don't have a funeral parlor at the -- that time, and they'd be buried within twenty-four hours. So I do remember him being -- lying there and dying. And then I remember my grandfather. Same way, he lived in a house diagonally across the street. He had nine sons.

LEVINE: This is your father's father?

SERPA: Yeah. He died in the year when he was a -- I don't know exactly, about seventy-two years old. And we were told that he died because years before, he got a shave from a barber shop, and they cut his -- his -- near his ear. He had a small cut. Got infected, and never healed. And he died from that.

LEVINE: Today, does that sound plausible?

SERPA: Yes. (Levine laughs) Well, there was no medical facilities there. I -- I remember the only medical person was the doctor, and I don't know how of a doctor he was. He did have an automobile, he was the only one in town with one. But I remember getting bitten by a dog -- I must have been a -- somewhere around four to six -- four to five years and having a big chunk of my leg cut off from the dog. And I don't think I got any stitches. But I did go to the doctor's.

And then about a year later I fell down as I was taking a -- a goat to pasture. I was in the vicinity of five years old. The goats went around circles around my legs, and the leg tied -- the rope tied around my legs. I fell down on a rock, and I cut my knee across. And I have -- if that was today it probably would have got a dozen stitches. I don't think I got any stitches at that time. So those are some of the --

LEVINE: Was there any kind of folk medicine that you remember? Things that people used if somebody got sick that were not physician's healing?

SERPA: No. I -- I -- I think it's -- I don't remember any of that. My mother m -- probably does. But I think that I remember things being basic. I remember like, the doctor -- if you wanted a tooth pulled, I remember using a pair of pliers to pull your teeth.

LEVINE: Wow.

SERPA: You know, so basic tools. You know, they didn't have the technology one way or the other to do that. But you -- you -- you did -- you accept it because everybody else is -- you don't have knowledge of anything else.

LEVINE: Right. And I guess people did die, so you accepted that.

SERPA: Yeah, yeah. I went to school there for two years.

LEVINE: So you started when you were, what, seven?

SERPA: I was seven.

LEVINE: Or six?

SERPA: I must have been about seven, because I went through two full years. Two years of school. And th - there, the school system was – you were required to go to four years of school. And that was the required at that time. But I went to two years at that time. Then after four years, if you wanted to progress you'd go to high school.

LEVINE: Would you go to another town?

SERPA: Well, actually, at that time, there was – there was a school – there was an elementary school in town and there was a high school in town. What you would call high school, but now it's hard to envision going to fourth grade and then you'd go to high school. But that's the way the system was.

LEVINE: So what was school like? Can you compare it maybe with the school you went to after you got here?

SERPA: I don't have – I just – I remember the school day there being long. Maybe because it's only four years, but it seems to be long every day. I don't think there was any discipline problems or anything else. No, I don't really remember the school for what it was. The – my – the – that's some of the recollections from there. But I never felt like – that the – I was deprived in any manner. And we always had food to eat.

You know, we thought this was life. I -- I thought at that time that there

was only two things in life you could do there. One of them was to be a farmer, which most people were, or become a priest.

LEVINE: Oh.

SERPA: Okay? That was it, that was all I could see. And so one of my early goals was to be a priest. That – that changed later on when more opportunities became available. But that's common in my recollections. I do remember some things like after my father left and came to United States, my uncles took me to the lands with them quite often, keep me busy. I used to think I used to help them work, but what can you really do with six, seven years old? (both laugh)

At that time I thought I was working hard, but I'm sure that I was just a nuisance to them. But they treated me very well. I remember going with them quite often in those – those trips. Now I do have – I don't know if you've seen this, you probably have –

LEVINE: Yeah, is that the book Andrea made?

SERPA: She – No, but I don't know if she – if she – this is not Andrea's book, but there is a – see, I don't have one either. It's a very pretty community. Did she give you any pictures? Andrea?

LEVINE: She's going to.

SERPA: Okay. 'Cause this just shows you – I took my son there in 1982.

LEVINE: Oh, isn't that beautiful?

SERPA: This is my son riding a horse. It's just a pretty area –

LEVINE: Very nice.

SERPA: -- pretty town, and we went there visiting him.

LEVINE: This was for the fiftieth anniversary?

SERPA: Yes. yes. So -- but the point is – I – I seem to have wandered around a lot. I remember some memories with the – we used to have a big black dog, almost like a German shepherd, but it wasn't a German shepherd. And we had it for years. And my father used to tie them up, and he used to always break away and eat the eggs of the chicken. And that was important because we needed the eggs for food and money. We used to sell those things.

So after doing this several times my father tried to get rid of the dog and he gave the dog away to someone in another town. And – and that lasted about a week. The dog found his way home. And then a month later, my father gave it to someone else, another town farther away, the dog came back. And finally, on the third time he gave the dog away, he

didn't come back.

But – I know that he was – my father didn't want to give him away, but he kept eating the eggs all the time. He broke away from – no matter how my father tied up that dog, he would break away from it and eat the eggs.

LEVINE: What about religion? Can you say anything about the festivities or religious occasions?

SERPA: Well, there seems to – to – I remember a lot of festivals that – we were two, three houses from the church. And actually most people were only a couple blocks from the church, because small town. But there seemed to be -- the church was an important part of our lives. I know that we went to church every week. It was – we just did, so did everyone else. It was the social center of the town.

You kind of hang out after church on the steps and so on. They used to have – and they still do – a nice yard next to the church, and people would mingle and chat – whatever it was there. There was always festivities. I do remember some of the holidays that happened in the summer – especially in the summertime.

They'd decorate the streets. They - by decorate the street, they go out in -- into the woods and so on and collect wildflowers. And they – they decorate all the streets on the town. And there's a parade that goes through it. They carried Jesus – the statue of Jesus – through -- through all the streets. It's a big ceremony, they still do it today. And in that everybody gets dressed up.

I remember people – some of them walking on their knees following the statue. Very – showing suffering. And as part of one of the church festivities, there is one holiday where they share food with the very very poor, and this - the church is part of that.

So what they used to do was to – usually some members of the community who had more money or more – more animals, they would contribute some animals for this festival. And this – I remember cows and sheep and so on. And those animals would be slaughtered and the – then the meat would be distributed as part of the procession to everybody who – who needed it.

Bread and meat. And it became like a long weekend ceremony. Everybody would have soup, meat, bread as part of it. So I do remember that.

LEVINE: You know, your sisters talk about how much your mother and father helped the people who came here with nothing. Did they do anything like that over there that you know of, or was that just not an issue over there?

SERPA: W – Well, the issue was – there was -- they knew – everybody knew each other, there wasn't e - enough to share. Times were that difficult. As I see it, you know, now -- there – surprisingly in that small little town there, even my mother recently – people who lived three doors down and south – which is only like, four more houses – that was considered the – the -- the bad part of town, where the poor people lived and so on, and that was only like two houses away from us.

But on the other side, three more houses north of us, that was the better part of town. So – but people were segregated by – just like they are today. Who lives in the better -- better part of town and so on. And I do remember my mother feeding some of those people who had nothing in that area. Not a – flocks of them, but individual people. And –

LEVINE: How would you describe your mother as far as her temperament, personality, growing up in Maia?

SERPA: Well, I think that the – she was always busy. I think that the very difficult to -- to bring up all these kids and feed them and clothe them. And she used to make all the clothes for us. She used to make some fabrics, she used to make all the clothes we had. Whether it was the guys – my father, m -- me – my sisters. So you make all the clothes, you do all the ironing.

There was no electricity. So I do remember her ironing clothes. There was an iron. She – she had one of those ovens that you make – you bake your things in, like bread and so on with – with you burn wood. And you take the – the hot coals, and you put it inside the iron and the iron gets hot, and my mother would iron with that. So everything is harder. You know, today you plug in the iron, okay, it's easy.

And I remember on the outside, in the yard – and it's still there today – she had a – a washboard made out of stone with all the ridges on it. The – the washboard was about two feet wide by about six feet long, and it bends into a little water basin. And she used to wash her clothes there – all our clothes there.

So every job was much harder than it is today. And then you have to tend to all those kids that she had, cook all the meals. You can't have a good temperament, you know? (both laugh) But she was good at it. But I – I – she w – yell at us, and we get our little – little backslap type of thing when we needed to be in line.

LEVINE: Now, is there anything you would want to say – did you know your grandmother? Your mother's mother?

SERPA: I re -- Yes.

LEVINE: Do you know the story of her coming to this country and then being sent back and then her coming again?

SERPA: Yeah. I've heard it. I don't know if it's the same – the episode that I heard was that she came to the United States – well, first of all, she w -- she had sons here in the United States at that time. And she came at – to the United States, I don't know the year. I think it was 19 - ?

LEVINE: 1904 was the first time that I rem – someone saying.

SERPA: Yeah, yeah. Sure. She came here that time, and she had family here. She came by boat from Portugal. And she landed in New York, and while she was there, you were not allowed to leave the boat unless somebody was there to pick you up. And the – she – the boat was –

boat, ship, was there for a number of days, and nobody came to pick her up.

The person who was going to pick her up apparently got delayed taking buses and so on and didn't get there on time. As a result of that, the ship left and took her with it, and instead of landing in New York and staying there, she ended up going back to Italy. And – where she stayed s --several months, before she could get transportation back to Portugal. That's what I had heard.

LEVINE: Okay. So then she decided to come back again?

SERPA: Yes. I don't know the – the – any story regarding that.

LEVINE: Okay.

SERPA: How – how she came back.

LEVINE: Well, she came back and your mother was born here, right?

SERPA: Right, right. My mother was born here and she stayed here until she was sixteen.

LEVINE: So do you know anything about your mother and her attitude about –

SERPA: Well, she was very angry and upset that she – she – that her m – that her mother wanted to leave the United States, because she was sixteen years old at that time and what child at sixteen years old wants to be moved, especially to a strange land, different language and everything else.

But apparently the economy at that time – I think it was about 1929 – was very bad here. They couldn't – there wasn't enough to go around work wise or anything else, and apparently they thought they could do better back on the islands. So my mother did not have any choice in going back, but she was very upset, and I think she was upset forever that she had to leave.

In fact, after going back to the - St. Michael, later on she met my father. Before she got married, she made him promise that if they got married, they would come back to the United States. That was part of the deal. O -- Otherwise, she wouldn't – she wouldn't have married him.

LEVINE: Do you think your father wanted to come?

SERPA: I don't think so. I mean, when you look at things, if you're twenty-two, twenty-five years old, or later, as he was, and you grew up in a certain area, why would you want to leave to a strange land, you know? Where – where y -- you don't know anything, the culture or anything else. But I think in the end, he decided that he would go, and that was about 1940 – 1942, 1943.

And I think that was because the economy was so bad in Portugal at that

time. There was no future for anyone. He had a lot of kids. And he – my mother finally convinced him that he should come to the United States, and then – I think it was about 1942 – they applied for admission to the United States at that time. And my mother had her two brothers in the United States. And – so they thought the application process was gonna be pretty simple and smooth.

However, because of restrictions on immigration and so on, it took them seven years to get accepted to come to the United States. So he finally got accepted about 1950 to come to United States, and he was able to put his few dollars together enough to pay for passage, but he did not have enough money for all of us to come over. Do you want me to go on? So he came to the United States in 19 –

LEVINE: Can you say what you know about what happened when he got here, before everybody else did?

SERPA: Yes. So he came to the United States about 1950 with the goal to save some money – enough money for us --the rest of the family to come. So he looked around for a job. He couldn't find any job. He came to -- originally to Rhode Island and my mother's brothers owned businesses there.

One of them was a plumber, one was on the golf course and some other businesses. So he asked her brother that – if he could work for him. And my – so my father worked for him on the farms and so on for about six months. And – my m -- but my mother's brother was not happy about my father being there. I don't know why, whatever it was.

And he told my father he had to find a job elsewhere. So he's my father – at that time my father was about forty-four years old. Not knowing any English, really no skills – he was a farmer. So he went to an – my uncle's brother Joe and asked him if he could get him work in Rhode Island – 'cause there's two brothers there. And Joe said no, he had n – no place to – for him to work.

So with that, he – he knew some family in Cambridge, Cambridge Mass. And he communicated with them to see if it would be okay, if they could help him find a job. So he was able to take a bus to Cambridge, and he moved in with this family in Cambridge and they fed him and so on. And the family found a job in Cambridge working in a paper factory doing a laborious job for a number of years.

LEVINE: This family, were they from St. Michael?

SERPA: Yes, yes. That's how he knew them. And he waited and worked and worked in the job. At that time he was making a dollar an hour. And he was able to work and save his money, and within two years he saved enough money for us to come to United States. He saved enough so that he rented an apartment in Cambridge, near Central Square. And he got it fully furnished, and as he told us he had twenty-five dollars left after paying our passage and he had all these kids to feed and whatever else he needed to do. So it was –

LEVINE: Did you have expectations about this country? Did your father write home or did you have an idea of what you coming to?

SERPA: No, we really knew nothing. At least I didn't have any expectations, I didn't know what we were going into. We came over in a freighter, a boat, ship. I think there was only 11 passengers.

LEVINE: Do you remember its name?

SERPA: No.

LEVINE: I think Mary mentioned its name... something Grand [ph].

SERPA: Yeah, Mary or Aurelia will know. I - I d – so we came. I think the trip took seven days, from St. Michael to –

LEVINE: Do you remember the trip?

SERPA: A little bit of it. I remember most of the time we stayed in the cabin. There was – there was only I think eleven passengers, and we were like nine of them. (Levine laughs) So there wasn't a lot – I know we ate well, because I remember that. I remember the captain, the small crew. Most of us – I wasn't sick, but some of the g – sisters were sick. And we just kind of seemed to stay in the cabin through. There was no place to go, it was a freighter. And I think they were carrying wheat. I remember the smell of the – of the boat. We were confined in a little space and that's really my only memories of the trip.

LEVINE: Do you remember coming into the New York harbor?

SERPA: Yes, I do remember someone specifically calling us out. Must have been the captain, because he must have known we didn't know about the statue of liberty and the entrance into New York. And we were – we did get up on the – the deck to look at it coming in. You know? We didn't know the meaning, we didn't know anything. I mean, we were kids, and we came in October.

And – I do remember that once we landed – kind of a little bit of interesting story is that in – when we were on the dock there after we landed, there was a little stand there of somebody selling – we thought was ice cream. In Portugal, looked like – like an ice cream that -- that – that we saw in Portugal, so we thought this guys was selling ice cream. And we were hungry and so on.

And so we asked my – my father, who met - met us there, if he would buy us some ice cream. So he gave us some money, and the guy is, like, standing over there. We went over there to buy some ice cream.

And so we bought for each, and then we find out it wasn't ice cream, it was hot dogs. (Levine laughs) So we didn't know what this thing was, this hot dog – we'd never seen one. And it had mustard on it as I remember. Most – we started eating it, none of us liked it. (muffled laughter) I don't think anybody finished it even though we were hungry. We said, "Who could – you know, who could eat this kind of thing?" You know? So we all remember that pretty well. That was –

LEVINE: Now, was this at Ellis Island? Or on the mainland, at Battery Park?

SERPA: I think this was on the mainland.

LEVINE: Do you remember Ellis Island at all?

SERPA: No, no. I think it was just a lot of activity, a lot of confusions. We didn't know where we were. You know, we were in the boat for seven days.

LEVINE: Do you remember any first impressions from the first few days or weeks or months?

SERPA: What I remember was the – the – the – how cold it was.

LEVINE: October, yeah.

SERPA: At that time, I don't know why, maybe it was a cold spell at that time, but I remember it being very, very cold. And of course we had no winter clothes or anything. And I had a pair – one pair of shoes, that were Sunday shoes. The – so I remember being very cold. Freezing. And so there was nothing happy about that.

LEVINE: How did you get from New York to Cambridge?

SERPA: The – someone picked us up. My father picked us up, and somebody drove us, but I don't remember who it was.

LEVINE: Somebody with a car?

SERPA: Yeah. And then we would – there was happy, it was a big apartment, we thought. And -- although – (someone walks in and says hello)

LEVINE: Hi. Let me just pause here.

PAUSE TAPE. RESUME TAPING.

LEVINE: Okay, we're resuming here. Let's see, where were we? We're talking about – we did the ship, the first impressions –

SERPA: First impressions.

LEVINE: and then you went to Cambridge by car.

SERPA: Correct. And we saw our apartment. We were pleased with the – the apartment, the furniture and so on. And – that was our orientation to the United States. That's all we saw. And w – we really did not have an education, the background what to expect. I know that my two older

sisters started working sometime after we got here. And I went to school.

The school that I went to was only a couple blocks from there, and I guess because of my age and so on – anyway, I went to the second grade. I was nine years old, and I think that's like – I probably should have been in the fourth grade. But – so I was in the second grade there. And I – I remember the classes there were – I used to just sit in class not understanding anything because there was no educational programs to teach foreigners how to speak English.

But I guess little by little, I was able to pick up some. And I was always pretty good in math, and I was always able to do math. And I do remember the teacher after a while realizing I was just sitting there, not able to comprehend a lot of it. I used to go to other classrooms doing math. So I would go – I would do math in like three different classes just for -- to keep me busy and occupied. And so that's how I got – transitioned into the American school system.

LEVINE: Were there other immigrant children in your class?

SERPA: No, no. No. They – so that was the second grade, so that was in the fall.

LEVINE: Who else went to school with you?

SERPA: The – Teresa went to school. Margaret. Helen.

LEVINE: They were school-age when you came?

SERPA: Yeah, yeah. We were all school-age. The – the oldest, Aurelia was – I think was sixteen at that time, and Mary Grace was – I think one was sixteen and one was -- almost seventeen. And so they – they went to work. We needed them to work to help the family and that's what they did. And they went to school nights. The rest of us went to school full time. I do remember that – like the first year was through the second grade, and – in the second year, I went to the – I started in the third grade and after about three months I – I assume that I started learning more English and they pro – promoted me to the fourth grade. So that year I did two – two different grades.

LEVINE: Did you made friends at first?

SERPA: Yeah, I never remember us being lonely or anything like that. I – I think that kids were friendly to me because I remember playing games, especially on our street. Playing games with marbles and other things with other kids in the neighborhood. I – I do remember the neighbors being very good to us.

I remember specifically a family across the street from us and there was a – a family there – with a fellow named Oliver. And him and his wife were very good to us. They're the only ones that we knew there with an automobile. I think it was a Big Olds Mobile [ph]. And he used to be s – seems to be polishing that car, but every once in awhile, he would take us out for a ride, and that was a big treat. So – people were nice to us.

And I do remember that first year another nice thing that happened – being part of the United States was that – over Christmas we really didn't have any expectations for anything. We didn't know what to expect or anything else. But we had a visit from Santa Claus at Christmas, and there is a – in – in Massachusetts, there is a – a – the Boston Globe has a Christmas Santa Claus that they have a fundraiser for and so on.

And somehow somebody submitted our name to them and they came to the house and gave us a lot of gifts for Christmas. That was totally unexpected and we remember that as a great treat. Then we've always rem – remembered that was nice. My memory of the neighbors and so one was very positive. They did not fr -- object to us or frown on us in any way.

LEVINE: Did you get the greenhorn label?

SERPA: No.

LEVINE: No?

SERPA: No, I don't remember any of that. I remember being part of them. I even remember joining like the boy scouts and – so I think that – I assimilated with the neighborhood. I was – you know – I – I think there was – I didn't think – I didn't see any problem with it. Never had any problem with it. And then – in growing up, in assimilation to the United States, I g – got my first job when I was eleven years old.

So I was here two years, and one of those unique jobs of life, which I did for almost three years. It's that – down the street, there was a – a blind man named Mr. Fowley [ph]. And he was blind due to an accident, he was about forty years old at that time. And he requested my mother if I could work for him. And the reason that he wanted me was – is that – he worked in a factory in Cambridge making brooms with all kinds of handicapped people.

And then after work, he wanted to go out and sell those brooms to the public and make some money. But in order for him to sell those products, he needed a seeing eye dog, and in that case was me. And he wanted someone short, and I was small at that time. As – because in walking for him, he wanted someone he could put his hand down on his shoulder and follow.

So – I worked with him, he used to pay me two dollars a day. And I worked for him – um – six days a week. Every day after school I would go from – I was eleven, hardly speaking English – I would go from the school. I would take a bus and meet him up in the factory where he worked, in [not understood] Square, which was about two miles from where we lived. And this eleven year old kid now, couldn't speak English and taking buses wherever.

So I used to pick him up every day after school. And then, because he had an accident late in life, like he was thirty years old or so, he remembered how to get around by buses. So I used to pick him up and he used to bring with him a – a big stack of brooms and whisk brooms [ph] – whisk brooms are the little ones – to sell. And every day he would pick a different neighborhood for us to go to.

And we would go from where – where we picked him up, and we would usually take one or two buses somewhere to some community. And we would go and knock on doors. Most of those communities were two or three family houses. And we – I'd go knocking on doors and ask if people wanted to buy a broom made by the blind man. And –

LEVINE: So in other words, he'd wait on the sidewalk and you'd go up and knock on the door?

SERPA: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. And we would sell those brooms. When we sold those brooms, we'd go home. Take a bus or two buses, we'd go home. And that's the end of the day. We usually would want – most always he would buy me a treat. A candy bar, something like that. If it was like a Saturday, it was a longer day, I would get table top pie, those little tiny ones.

LEVINE: Actually, an Ellis Island immigrant started that company.

SERPA: Oh.

LEVINE: And that's funny. Were people receptive to the brooms?

SERPA: Oh, yeah, I did that for three years with him. We did every day Monday through Friday and then on Saturday he didn't work at the factory so I used to just go pick him up in his house and then we'd go farther away

on the Saturday because you had more time. And he would bring twice as much – twice as many brooms on Saturday. And – when we sell them, then we go home. Except sometimes after we sold them on a Saturday he would want to go to a bar and drink a couple beers. So I used to just sit at the table there and have a ginger ale or something and he'd have a couple beers while he's releasing some pressures of life.

LEVINE: So what kind of a man was he? How would you describe him?

SERPA: He was a very nice, cordial guy. He – he was, you know, satisfied with his status in life, being blind and so on. He seemed to know a lot, considering he was blind, but like I said, he -- he was not blind until he was over thirty years old. But he was very nice and I was able to save a lot of money. It was two dollars a day, and at that time I didn't have much expenses. And I remember after my second year there, I wanted to buy myself a treat. So at that time, I – I really wanted a radio. I bought a Motorola transistor [ph] radio for sixty dollars, which was a ton of money at the –

LEVINE: Sixty dollars?

SERPA: Sixty dollars. But I never bought myself anything before, but I did buy that radio. I held it for many, many years. That was the only thing I remember splurging on for myself. Otherwise the money was saved for school.

LEVINE: Do you think that experience gave you anything or taught you anything?
Do you think you gained from it besides just the pay?

SERPA: I don't know how I -- I did it. It was probably the hardest job in my life, because I was a little kid -- you know, eleven, twelve years old. I really didn't have any English speaking skills, not much, and yet every day you're walking the streets with a blind man. I couldn't see doing that today or -- or -- or asking anyone else to do it. So -- but at that time, he was a nice guy.

I -- I didn't see it as being that hard except the cold, walking the streets, taking buses. We used to stop at the Salvation Army in Central Square when we were -- when we were in that area. And they used to let me go to Salvation Army and I used to buy some comic books, which I could easily read. And I would buy a stack of them and that would last me awhile. No, so he treated me well. I never saw that as a -- a harsh experience, but in looking back, I don't know how I did it, you know?

LEVINE: Yeah.

SERPA: For that age and -- and -- and what the job really was. But he was a nice guy, and he helped me out indirectly. I -- I worked, I transitioned into the American life, learned a little bit of language, and I saved some money. I didn't -- my father let me keep that money for myself, and that actually was kind of true for my growing up, is that anything I earned I tended to save, whereas my sisters who did not go to school [not understood] they had to contribute to the house. So I saved whatever I earned.

LEVINE: The idea being that you would go on to school but they wouldn't?

SERPA: Right. We never said that, but yeah. I think that's – there were – I was hoping they were hoping that – that we knew that my family could not afford any school. So I – I was working and anything I saved, they let me keep. I had other jobs after that. I don't know if you want to talk about other jobs, but –

LEVINE: Yeah.

SERPA: So I did that from eleven – from when I was eleven years old until I was fourteen with the blind man, Mr. Fowley (ph). And then at fourteen I was getting taller, and I was – it was more difficult for Mr. Fowley (ph) to hold his arm on my shoulder. Besides, I was getting very tired of selling brooms door-to-door and I could speak English much better by then.

So at fourteen I got a job in a grocery store near Harvard Square. And I – I worked there every day – six days a week – plus go to school of course. And there – they used to give me seventy-five cents an hour for doing that. And – b – basically a grocery –

LEVINE: Bag?

SERPA: Bag, put stuff on the shelf, do whatever. And I was there for two years 'til I was sixteen. And - And then after that, I transferred to - I worked in Stop Market (ph?), another large grocery chain. But there – I changed

because my boss in the grocery store wouldn't pay me a dollar an hour. So I went to Stop Market where they paid me a dollar an hour. And – I worked for two or three years there, and - to fill – that was part time while I went to school. In addition to that, I used to do some work with a neighbor of ours in Summerville. You've been to our house in Summerville, you know that kind of neighborhood.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SERPA: About two – three or four doors behind us, there's a fellow there named Joe Silva. And he used to make bleach in his house.

LEVINE: He used to make what?

SERPA: Bleach. Household bleach. Okay? And we used to help him make the bleach, bottle it, put labels on it. And then on Saturday we'd go sell the bleach. We used to sell it mostly in three family houses, it seemed. We used to sell seven gallons for a dollar. And the biggest problem I remember that is that you have to lug the seven gallons up to the second or third floor of people's houses. So we – I did that for a couple years as a part-time job with him.

LEVINE: Now your father worked at Stop Market, too. Were you there at the same time?

SERPA: For a short time. Then they asked that one of us get transferred because they had a policy about family members working the same store. So I volunteered I – I transferred to another store in Water Town. So I worked in a Water Town store for about – over a year. And my father w – in Portus Square, working. I held many jobs. I worked always. And I'm kind of rambling on.

LEVINE: No, that's good. How was it for you – assuming your father was your role model, but he actually didn't have the same kinds of values, attitudes, that most people in and around Summerville, Cambridge had? Like your role model wasn't a typical male role model. So how did that work for you? Can you say anything about that?

SERPA: Well, the role model that my have – father had for me was that I knew that he was a very good person. He worked very hard and he did everything he needed to do for his family. And he – he worked two jobs – two jobs for seventeen years. He retired when he was seventy-eight from his second job. And the – so he was a role model from the sense of getting along with people. He got along with everyone at all levels.

I think that most people liked my father because he was a good person. And that to me was the role model. He certainly was not the role model for what I want to do with my life, but in – in – in relationships and as an individual, never mind the career, he was the role model that I wish I could be. Because he was – he- he was the pure definition of a good man.

LEVINE: Did you have a role model for this culture that was more?

SERPA: No, no. No.

LEVINE: Yeah. You kept up the religion in this country?

SERPA: Yes, we did. We had the – there's a church in Cambridge which is probably two miles from where we lived. We always went to church there, because it was a Portuguese and most people were Portuguese. My father and us knew most of those people. So the answer is yes, we kept our religious beliefs, and we were active in the church. So that did not change, and I think that – that kept – the Portuguese community together. It was a way to meet every Sunday plus festivities. It was a strong influence of everyone.

LEIVNE: Can you say anything about the Portuguese community here? How you were involved?

SERPA: Well, the – the – the Portuguese community here didn't have many central activities except surrounding the church. The church and the local grocery store in Cambridge St. that was Portuguese. Okay? Where we used to go every Saturday – my father and I used to walk from where we were to there. It was about a mile or so. Go there, do our grocery shopping. Why? Because there was a Portuguese owner there.

So you – you tend to migrate there for that reason. The church and – people were struggling. There wasn't that many Portuguese people in Summerville at that time. There wasn't like a lot of activities for the

Portuguese people to do. They were busy trying to make ends meet. They didn't have much. And s – several of them over the years lived in my father's house until they could make life go on. So it is not like you could embrace local community events and so on. The community was surrounding the church.

LEVINE: And how are you in relation to your sisters? You were treated differently, but can you say anything about having all those sisters and being – well, Louis was born here?

SERPA: Yes.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SERPA: No, Louis was born there.

LEVINE: There, but he was a baby.

SERPA: Yes. He was – he was almost four years old when we came. So he really doesn't have a lot of recol – recollections there. Well, my sisters, there – I remember because there were so many of them, they were given all the duties of the house, and there was always arguments between them as to who's gonna do what. And – but I never got any of those duties, so I just – I was kind of laid back.

I think I used to kind of hide from all of that. So – they took care of the – the meals, the – the clothes, and all that. And I didn't do any of it. Not that I was expected to or avoiding it, it was just delegated to them and I guess I was happy about them. And my sisters still kind of hold it against me today, but it's all in good fun, you know?

LEVINE: Yeah, I think so. I think one of your sisters told me for your communion, your mother remade your father's – the pants from your father's wedding suit?

SERPA: Yes.

LEVINE: Can you say anything about your father's wedding suit, first of all?

SERPA: The – the –

LEVINE: The jacket of which I'm bringing back to Ellis Island.

SERPA: I really can't. I would like to s – say something, but I – I do remember the s – my mother making the suit for me. But I don't know any – any more than that, really.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SERPA: I know she could make everything, and she did make everything. Even after she was here in the United States for many, many years, she made clothes for my sisters, and then their kids – my sisters' kids – as they were growing up. My mother would make all kinds of things. If Halloween was coming, she would make a Halloween outfit for the kids. My mother – if she saw something on a magazine she could copy it and make it.

She was very intelligent and very skilled, especially with her hands. I think if she was born today in the United States she could have been very successful in a variety of things, because she saw something, she could do it. Even though she never did something, she could see through something and say, I know how to do that. And she would do it. Whether that's to repair a chair, make a dress, or other things.

She – even in her age, she never liked tv too much, but she liked to listen to politics and she had her own opinions about politics and so on. I think she would be – well, she was a good mother. I think she would be a highly successful professional person if she was born today in the United States. She was a go-getter, hard worker, and a problem-solver. By that I mean, not about a family problem solver, but if she saw something, she could see how to solve it. And I think I have a little bit of that/

My father did not. My mother used to be always angry at him because he couldn't solve some – how to repair something. Even though she never repaired something, she would look at it and say, "that's how you do it." Kind of – so she was an interesting person.

LEVINE: Yeah. And apparently she mellowed – that’s what your sisters have been saying –

SERPA: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: - over the years?

SERPA: Yes. Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: Can you say anything about the changes you saw in your mother?

SERPA: Well, I think she mellowed after the kids got into their twenties. Up until the – they – ‘course, the girls were not allowed out of the house, okay? Until they got married. And if they were out of the house, they better be home by ten o’clock at night or something like that. And if they got home eleven or whatever, they – there might be an argument as to why they were so late. And I don’t think my mother mellowed until the youngest was in their twenties.

You know. Woman growing up, so on, she’s supposed to be home with her parents until she gets married, that’s the thing. But the boy – he can do – there was n – almost no rules. But I never stayed out all night or anything anyways, so – but w – we had a different set of rules. And so my m – mother really mellowed probably after my father retired. And I think maybe beca – I think my father’s life and my mother’s life became much better after they retired.

The kids were grown up. They had a little bit of money. Plenty of food. They never went anywhere, but they thought they did. They thought they were rich. And I think that – in the basic things of life, they were. You know? They had a nice house, they had food, their kids were doing whatever. So I know both of them were much calmer after they retired.

LEVINE: How do you put together in your own mind – wait, let me stop and then restart here. Okay.

SERPA: I remember I must have been about fifteen, sixteen years old. I used to always think in Portuguese, okay? Whatever it was before I say something would always be in Portuguese, and then come out in English. Then all of a sudden one day it – maybe I was fifteen or sixteen years old – I started thinking in English. Okay?

And that seemed to be a turning point. But I – ever since then, I see myself as American. Okay? And I'm not – I'm not separating or – or – myself from Portuguese, but I feel like I – I was – grew up here. And I have a – an environment here that I'm very pleased with. And – so – I don't th – I don't think that – maybe I've actually stepped back from being Portuguese. Not that I'm against it. I feel myself is that I am an American, okay? I enjoy being an American. I was an American citizen when I turned sixteen, on my sixteenth birthday.

And I – I never looked back. This – this was the place that I am and belonged in. So I – I don't think that – that – I didn't have those issues, where my father and mother did. Especially my father, because he grew up in Portugal, and that – that's a whole different thing. But maybe

because of my age, whatever it was, is that I always realized that even though I wasn't born in the United States that I was as American as anyone.

LEVINE: Do you speak fluent Portuguese?

SERPA: Pretty good. Enough to understand almost anyone. And I can read a little bit of it.

LEVINE: Okay. Would you think coming here as a nine year old, do you think – starting over again and that whole transition, do you think that that had an impact on your personality, or any traits that you have that stem from that kind of life changing experience?

SERPA: Well, I don't know if I was born with the – the attitude of – of working, but maybe because we needed help financially, work never bothered me. I thought that was part of nature, my life, and so on. So like I said, I worked selling kale when I was five or six, which is not much but it was something that I did.

But at eleven selling brooms door-to-door for three years, and then working grocery stores and then doing other things. One job after the other. I think that kind of molds you, as to what you expect out of life, and I think that the – the answer is that if you want something in life, at least in the United States, you have the ability to work and get there. Now, you may have to work forty hours a week, you may have to work eighty, depending on what you want to get.

But if you want it, all you got to do is work. And you should not – no work was ever beneath me. I never thought of – I was too good to do this job in my life. So therefore it was just work to make money and do the best job you can while you're at it. And then you move on. And I learned to – to look at life as – take life as little segments of life. And I used to tell my sons this. Never look at life and say, "What am I going to do the rest of my life?" Because I don't think anybody knows.

So what I learned was is, look at life in little segments, like two or three years. Do the best you can with those two or three years. Those are short-term goals, achievable goals. And then when that ends, you see where you're going. And that way becomes more realistic, more manageable. And – and that's kind of what I did in life. I didn't plan it that way, but that's what I ended up doing.

And I've had incredible number of jobs over my – over my life. And I was able to do all these little jobs going through school. But I was able to pay for my college, a hundred percent for myself. When I left college, I didn't owe a dime. And I did it all because I worked through – through school. You know, I can tell you how I did it and whatever, but that's what it comes down to is you – you – I did it because I needed to. I needed spending money, I worked to get it. I knew I couldn't call home and say, "Dad, send me a hundred dollars."

I never did ask, because I knew they didn't have it. So if I wanted something, I – I'd just work and save for it. So I guess that's – that's what I learned. And I think – and I – and I – and – I worked for Dunkin Donuts for quite awhile. I put a lot of people in business. And –

LEVINE: So you went to college and then after that, what did you do?

SERPA: Well, I went to – to college. At that time, I got the chance to go – I got accepted to Boston University, Boston College, and U. Mass. And I remember trying to choose which one to go to. And I had a thousand dollars saved at that time. And Boston College and Boston University was about nine hundred dollars a year to go there, not including living there. And U. Mass was almost a thousand a year to live there.

So I chose U. Mass for financial reasons. Nobody me I should apply for financial aid or anything, so I never did. So I went to U. Mass, I had enough money to get by the first year. So I went to U. Mass for four years. I'll tell you how I got by at U. Mass. Kind of interesting anyway. So I went University of Massachusetts.

I had a thousand dollars to get by the first year. At the end of the first semester I got a job there working in a sorority washing the dishes and serving the girls for dinner. They gave me my meals for nothing. And – th – the second semester I joined the fraternity and did the bookkeeping there and got my room for nothing.

So I saved some extra money by doing that. And I did that for four years. And then in my sophomore year, in addition to that, I worked in the sandwich truck selling sandwiches at night door-to-door. An individual had a truck who sold – made sandwiches and sell them. And [not understood] three days a week that would give me spending money. So I did that for three years of my schooling. And by doing that and working summers, I was able to pay through school.

And here's a kid who didn't know much English and so if I can do it, other

people can do it easier. I do remember that in sophomore year, towards junior year in high school, talking about going to college. I had taken the SATs to go to college, and I'd done okay in math, but English was very weak. Understand me because I didn't know English. So I talked the guidance counselor there, and I used to go to – th – to my free class. Whenever I had a free class I used to go there and study for the SATs for almost a year and a half, so that I could pass the college boards. So I did well enough to get accepted to those schools.

LEVINE: So then what did you do when you graduated?

SERPA: Well, I – the war in Vietnam was going on, so I joined the U.S. Marine Corp reserves at that time. So I went in the – which was a six months full active duty, which took me through the December of 2007. Then I had a – I had a job lined up with Exxon Corporation – the oil company – as an accountant. And I went there and worked in New York. And as an of – in an office worker there. There was eight hundred accountants and I was one of them there. I have a l – long history of different jobs, so I don't know if you want to go in –

LEVINE: Oh, okay. Let me ask you another question. What do you feel very satisfied about? Something that you've done that you feel proud of, that you feel really accomplished something?

SERPA: The – well – well, I've – I've held a lot of different career jobs, and one of the c – career jobs was to work for Dunkin Donuts for a number of years, eight years. And that job was to find new franchises for the business.

And I put a lot of people in business that became very wealthy. I helped a lot of people I knew who were hard workers but had no skills. And they managed to put some money together, put a down payment on the Dunkin Donuts. And years later, through their hard work and so on, they became multi-millionaires. I did that for a lot of people.

I'm sa – I'm very satisfied with what I've done. I've done a lot. I – I u – I used to try to – to get ahead substantially in looking for the pot of gold. Some things succeeded, most things you don't. But I've had a lot of different business experiences. So my life has been rich in experience. I've done well, my family has always been well taken care of. So I'm – I'm – But I – I – I guess the – I have a good relationship with anyone, but I have put a lot of people in business that have been highly successful. And some of them members of my family.

LEVINE: Yeah, I know. It's been mentioned. Are there certain things – values, attitudes – that you've passed along to your children that you think were given to you by your parents? On the other hand, are there things that have been very different from what was passed on to you?

SERPA: I think you pass on things not so much by sitting your son or daughter down and saying, "Here's what I'm passing down to you." I don't really remember doing much of that. Every once in awhile I would do that. But I think that what my father passed down to me and maybe what I passed on to my sons is just by example. I've been there for them whenever they needed to be.

I've – like, my father never had a chance to watch me play sports. I – I played some sports in high school. But I watch my kids play sports as

much as I could. [not understood] But they know that I work hard. They also know that I get along with most people. They – they probably have never heard me – almost never heard me say any four letter words to anyone, whether it's them or outsiders or whatever. That you can have a good life without vulgarity, whether that's in the house or outside the house.

I think that the respect, the – by demonstrating how I respect the people in the house that my family, as well as outsiders, is just – they see it. And I think that they have that. I remember an example – my oldest son – only once did he say a vulgar w – word in the house. And I reprimanded him. [not understood] I was totally upset with him. And he was reprimanded dramatically, he couldn't believe it. But it – it's – and – and I told him that that is the one thing that is not tolerated. Him not to have respect for his mother. He said something.

But the point is, they see that in th – in th – their surroundings, and I think they absorb that, because they're also very good. I don't see them, even today as older adults, speaking as many of the young people do, with all four letter words. They don't. I think they – I know they're good people, my two sons. And I hope that they have some of those values that I have.

But I don't think that you can just sit down with someone and say, "Here's my values, take them." I think it's a long process, and I don't think you do it intentionally. Either they have it or they don't. You know? And when they step out of line, you show them that this is not the way to act and why. You know, my father – I don't ever – ever heard a vulgar word from him in his whole life. And I'm not quite that good, but I – I – I don't use that language with anyone, even with people I – I – I dislike. I don't call them n – names or use any kind of language like that.

LEVINE: Is there anything that you can think of relevant to coming here, starting a life, living your life, that we haven't covered that you think we should talk about.

SERPA: No, I've – I've lived a very full life, with work. It's amazing how much you fit in a day, as I've done for almost – most of my life. And when people don't do much with their life, it's their fault. Because there is a lot of time in a day, as I've done throughout my life. And I didn't do it intentionally, but because of that I think I've lived a fuller life. I've – I've enjoyed most of it. You know, I went to school, I played sports, but I also worked. You know? And I still couldn't speak English much, and yet I had good friends.

LEVINE: What are you looking forward to now?

SERPA: Slowing down a little bit. I have a little trouble doing that, but I am trying to slow down a little bit. Enjoy the life of the – that I have, my wife and I, and enjoy our sons a little bit and what they do and help them a little bit. Because my life has been busy, we like to do more – a little more travel. Li – a little more toned down. Enjoy – instead of running around doing different things. Enjoy the day-to-day. I get up every day, even now, around six o'clock, and I'm busy doing stuff all day and I enjoy all of that. I don't want to sleep my life away.

LEVINE: Are you technically retired now, or semi-retired?

SERPA: I'm – I'm technically retired in March.

LEVINE: Oh.

SERPA: This year.

LEVINE: Oh.

SERPA: But I – I have a very hard time believing that I'm that old.

LEVINE: I know what you mean.

SERPA: But I guess I am.

LEVINE: Okay. Is there anything else you'd like to say before we close?

SERPA: No. It's just – it was a difficult thing for my family to come to the United States, but it was a blessing for us growing up. You know, we love it here. And those people who are here, grew up here, and – and think that foreigners are taking their opportunities are wrong. That the opportunities are there, they just don't want to go out and grab them. And I see it all the time.

LEVINE: Well, I want to thank you for a great interview.

SERPA: No, no.

LEVINE: I was speaking with Herbert Serpa. This is Janet Levine. It's January the 15th, 2009, and I'm signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW