

EI-015

CHARLES (COLEGERO) RIZZUTO

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INTERVIEW DATE: 12/6/1990

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

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TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 1/1994

SICILY, 1919

AGE 11

PASSAGE ON "THE DANTE ALIGHIERI"

Oral Historian's Note: This interview was conducted in a nursing home and the recording is filled with extraneous background noise. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of the Oral History Project, 1/28/1994.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. It is Thursday, December 6, 1990. We are here with Charles Rizzuto who came from Italy on December 8, 1919. Mr. Rizzuto, could you please tell me the date of your birth.

RIZZUTO: February 15, 1908. Wait a minute. I think it was 1908.

SIGRIST: Okay. And what was your name in Italy?

RIZZUTO: The same, Rizzuto. But my first name was Colegero.

SIGRIST: I see. And what were your parents' names?

RIZZUTO: My mother's name was Fara, F-A-R-A. My father's name was the same as mine, Colegero.

SIGRIST: And talk a little bit about your parents. What did your father do?

RIZZUTO: My father left Italy to come to this country by himself, and I was born then, and my mother was expecting my brother, which is dead now. And he come over here in this country to work or do something, which was usually necessary for us to do, for him to do that. And then we come over.

SIGRIST: Okay. When did, uh, what did your father do when he came to America? What job did he get?

RIZZUTO: He was a laborer.

SIGRIST: I see. And did he send money back to your mother?

RIZZUTO: Sometimes.

SIGRIST: And you said that you were not born yet when he left.

RIZZUTO: No. I was born.

SIGRIST: I see.

RIZZUTO: My brother, a younger man, a younger boy, was born a couple of months after he left.

SIGRIST: After he had gone. Well, so what did your mother do while your father was gone? Did she work?

RIZZUTO: No. We had, I hate to say this because then they think that I'm bragging or something, we had quite a bit of property. And my uncle, my mother's brother, a young boy, wasn't sixteen yet, used to take care of everything. We sold what we made, whatever it was. We rented out the land. We had somebody grew something on it, they'd give us something, something they kept, you know. It was no problem.

SIGRIST: I see. Did you live on that property?

RIZZUTO: Yes. No, live on the property, you mean stay?

SIGRIST: Did you live on that property?

RIZZUTO: No. We lived in town. We had a little town there.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the town?

RIZZUTO: Campo Reale.

SIGRIST: And that was in what part of Italy?

RIZZUTO: Sicily.

SIGRIST: That was in Sicily. Did you have a house, or did you have an apartment, or?

RIZZUTO: House. Apartments were scarce.

SIGRIST: Did you, was the house, was it a one-story house, two-story house?

RIZZUTO: A two-story house. Now, see, about this house, two-story house, people may think different. We lived upstairs. There was a stairway in the middle of the house, and one side was our house, one side my grandfather lived, my father's father. On the other side we lived. As a matter of fact, I don't want to seem to imply that I'm something else, we took the part of the house that had a large room, a very large room, and there was, our bed was put up on a platform where, when my grandfather used to entertain somebody. You know, entertainers. It was very nice. It was a very big, large room, no wood. The floor was

tiles, Sienna tiles, you know, about ten inches square.  
Beautiful, a beautiful house.

SIGRIST: This was all on one floor, then, you said, this big room was on one floor.

RIZZUTO: Yes, on one floor. And my grandfather lived across the foyer on the other side of the house.

SIGRIST: What? Did he have a job, or was he . . .

RIZZUTO: Who?

SIGRIST: Your grandfather.

RIZZUTO: No. My grandfather retired a long time before I left.

SIGRIST: And he lived alone.

RIZZUTO: No. He had eleven children, God bless him.

SIGRIST: Wow.

RIZZUTO: Nine boys, two girls. He didn't have enough (?). And his wife lived in the same house. He had a little foyer and the four of us would meet there. The four of us, when I say four of us, my grandfather, my grandmother. This was a step-grandmother. And when it was cool at night, Sicily is very seldom cool at night or any time. God Bless Sicily. ( he is moved ) When I talk about Sicily I get a little bit emotional.

SIGRIST: Well, we can talk about something else, if you'd like, for a minute. Let me ask, um, some questions about, did you have a garden or anything like that?

RIZZUTO: In town, no.

SIGRIST: No.

RIZZUTO: No, there was no room for a garden in town. In town was all stone houses.

SIGRIST: I see.

RIZZUTO: On the street where I lived, where we lived, was all owned by my grandfather, all the houses there. And every time one of us boys got married, he gave him a house. And when the girls got married he told them, "Let your husband give you a house." It's a fact. I mean, it's no. And it was a really nice arrangement.

SIGRIST: By the time you were a child all of your grandfather's children were out of the house, right? None of them still lived with him.

RIZZUTO: Yes. No, no, they were all married and they had, his children had children older than my father.

SIGRIST: I see. Now, getting back to your father, you said that when he came to the States he was a laborer. Now, was he sending money back to your mother?

RIZZUTO: Sometimes. When they were, how much can he make here, fifty cents a week at the time? They make so much money. So, but we didn't have, we couldn't depend on whatever he sent. He wanted to come over here because the girls were freer or something, and we had the property to live on, that we could live on. But then, again, my uncles, all of my father's side, they never missed anything. It was, they make wine, they give us wine. They always were around.

SIGRIST: So you had everything that you needed?

RIZZUTO: Huh?

SIGRIST: You guys were . . .

RIZZUTO: Well, everything that we needed, not so, because we had our stuff to live off. You see, we had a field. You know what sumac is? Sumac is a plant.

SIGRIST: Oh, yes, sure. I know what you mean.

RIZZUTO: They make clothes and dye out of it. We had a field of that, and we used to sell that. Somebody would come and chop it off and sell it. Then another part of the country we had land to plant grain, mostly wheat. And my uncles on my father's side, together, were touching. And they used to take care of that, and absolutely trustworthy relations. They'd take care of that. And we had some grape vines. And my uncle ( he laughs ), Jesus, his grape vines, I got to tell you something. My uncle as a young boy, wasn't sixteen yet. And I thought he was a giant. And you know where some honey was, beehives, the owner. So he went there to pick some. Well, the bees were there, and I'm there, so he says to me, "Duck under a vine." In Italian. If I say it to you in Italian you won't understand it, right? And I ducked under a vine, and these bees felt like the roar of a plane, it seemed to me, going over my head.

SIGRIST: But you didn't get stung.

RIZZUTO: No. They went over me.

SIGRIST: You were lucky.

RIZZUTO: Lucky. If my uncle wasn't there I wouldn't be so lucky. I wouldn't be talking to you. ( they laugh )

SIGRIST: Now, were you very religious? In Sicily was your mother, did she take you to church, or . . .

RIZZUTO: My mother was religious.

SIGRIST: And what denomination?

RIZZUTO: Catholic. When we were in Italy I used to take her to church every Sunday, bring the chair for her. Because there was places to sit but they were wooden benches.

SIGRIST: Was it a big church, or a small church?

RIZZUTO: Oh, a nice-sized church for a small town, all made of stone, and it had a great bell. And I used to take her Sunday mornings to church. After church, see, this is going to be a little bit difficult for me to say because I ask her how much money she wanted to give to the collection. ( he pauses ) She say to me, she say to me, "You're the man of the house." She left it up to me. See, the Italian money at the time was so splint into one hundredth of a lira. And we had half a cent, and down below. So I pick up a penny, and I show it to my mother. She went outside. "You do it." ( he is moved )

SIGRIST: How much younger was your brother than you? Because you have a younger brother.

RIZZUTO: Twenty-two months.

SIGRIST: I see. And just the two boys.

RIZZUTO: That's all.

SIGRIST: I see. Did, was Christmas and Easter a big holiday celebration for you, or do you remember anything . . .

RIZZUTO: It was.

SIGRIST: It was.

RIZZUTO: Not Easter so much, but Christmas we all met at my grandfather's house, my mother's father. And . . .

SIGRIST: He lived in the same town.

RIZZUTO: Oh, yes. In the same town, a little further away, even further away from the church, and we'd go spend the holidays there.

SIGRIST: I see. Did he have, was her side of the family very large? Were there lots of relatives?

RIZZUTO: Whose side?

SIGRIST: Your mother's side.

RIZZUTO: My mother's side wasn't too large. She had, well, it was pretty, now that I think of it, she had three sisters, two brothers. So that's five people, that's large enough. Considering Italian men, you know, it's not too large. And . . .

SIGRIST: And that's where you would spend the holidays, Christmas, anyway, always with them, that side.

RIZZUTO: Christmas, yeah. New Year's we didn't, we didn't make such a big deal New Year's, just Christmas and Easter were real religious holidays for us.

SIGRIST: I see. Did you go to school at all while you were . . .

RIZZUTO: I went to school in Italy, in Sicily. As a matter of fact, I was regarded as a pretty intelligent boy. I'm not pinning medals on me. And, see, when my mother and my father, my father in this country started making arrangements for us to come to America, my uncle, one of my father's brothers, the oldest brother, he was the mayor of the town. He didn't want me to come here. So my mother almost agreed with that, because he wanted me to continue schooling in Italy. And my father wouldn't agree. He kept sending letters, you know. Finally we came, we all came. Me and my mother and my brother came. My father was already in this country.

SIGRIST: I see. So you saved up enough money to come, or your father was sending some money.

RIZZUTO: He was sending. He was saving up enough money. We sold a lot of stuff that we grew, that was grown.

SIGRIST: What stuff? You mean, like furniture?

RIZZUTO: Huh?

SIGRIST: What sort of stuff did you sell? Furniture?

RIZZUTO: No, no, no, no. Things we grow.

SIGRIST: Oh, that's right. You said the grain and the . . .

RIZZUTO: Things that grow, grain and stuff like that. And then we had, our uncles, my uncles in the house that took care of some of our stuff, very honest, very honest. They sold, they did anything they had to do, and they give us money or something.

SIGRIST: Do you remember packing up or anything? Do you remember what you took with you when you left?

RIZZUTO: When we left . . .

SIGRIST: When you left Sicily?

RIZZUTO: Well, one thing I do remember, we had beautiful mattresses. A mattress is something to sleep on. And they were made of pure wool, inside wool. So my mother, we wrote to my father, and he wanted those mattresses. That's the only thing I remember. We also, wait a minute, I remember something else. We also brought a flask of wine, about ten gallons or so. It was illegal. So we let it down the side of the ship. When it got down it was my father in a rowboat, and a cousin of mine. This thing, you know, floats. They put it in the boat. The boat wasn't ours, so my uncles, or my cousins belonged to somebody, we

were, we would rent it out and he'd come along, but I think the guy was a wiseguy. He took the wine. ( they laugh ) He says, "I'm not allowed to take wine aboard, you know, in town."

SIGRIST: When you left Sicily, do you remember what port you left from?

RIZZUTO: Oh, sure, from Sicily. Palermo.

SIGRIST: And do you remember the name of the boat?

RIZZUTO: Now, we left Palermo because they didn't have a big dock or a big something to accommodate a large ship. So we had to go from Palermo, Sicily to Naples, Italy and then get aboard.

SIGRIST: And do you remember the name of the boat that you came over on?

RIZZUTO: Oh, sure, I remember. How can I forget? Dante Alighieri.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And what class did you travel on the boat?

RIZZUTO: Second.

SIGRIST: Second class. So you had a cabin?

RIZZUTO: Huh?

SIGRIST: Were you in a cabin?

RIZZUTO: No. Second class at those time was the same as sleeping on the floor.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Was it, do you remember the trip over in the boat at all?

RIZZUTO: The trip?

SIGRIST: Do you remember coming over to America on the boat?

RIZZUTO: Oh, sure I do.

SIGRIST: Was it a rough ride or was it a smooth ride?

RIZZUTO: Sometimes it was smooth. Sometimes the ocean was as flat as this floor. Sometimes it was rough.

SIGRIST: Did you get sick?

RIZZUTO: I don't remember. I know it was me, my mother, my brother. So, there was a girl there, a young lady. She used to come over and pick me up every morning. My mother liked that.

SIGRIST: This was on the boat.

RIZZUTO: On the boat. On the Dante Alighieri, the boat. And she would take me around the ship. More or less she was

lonesome. She was traveling alone, and she was maybe afraid of these boat romances, you know. And . . .

SIGRIST: Was she Italian also?

RIZZUTO: Yes. And she would take me around with her. And she taught me two words. What to say to my father when I first see him off the boat, you know. I'll be looking, and he'll be in a rowboat below. And she taught me, "Hello, Pop." ( Mr. Sigrist laughs. ) Don't you think I forgot one time? I was so nervous I forgot. ( they laugh )

SIGRIST: Hello, Pop. Was the boat very crowded? Do you remember?

RIZZUTO: Not too much.

SIGRIST: Not too bad.

RIZZUTO: No.

SIGRIST: And do you remember how long the boat ride took?

RIZZUTO: Sure, I remember. How can I forget? Seventeen days.

SIGRIST: Seventeen days. Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when you came into New York Harbor?

RIZZUTO: No.

SIGRIST: No. So anyway, you've been on this boat for seventeen days.

RIZZUTO: Seventeen days.

SIGRIST: And you arrived at Ellis Island.

RIZZUTO: We arrived at the New York port.

SIGRIST: Yes.

RIZZUTO: Then from there they brought us to Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: And how did they do that?

RIZZUTO: Oh, I forgot.

SIGRIST: They ferried you over to Ellis.

RIZZUTO: Maybe it was just a walk. I don't know.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about Ellis Island? Do you remember anything about Ellis Island? Do you remember being processed at all?

RIZZUTO: Huh? Any what?

SIGRIST: Do you remember being processed? Do you remember any

medical exams, for instance, or anything like that?

RIZZUTO: Listen, medical exams, the fellow should have had the exam. He had something with his brain. And it was filthy, Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: It was filthy.

RIZZUTO: Absolutely filthy. All kinds of bugs crawling on the floor. You would be afraid to step on them because you can hear them crackle. ( Mr. Sigrist laughs. ) I'm telling you, it was very filthy.

SIGRIST: Was it very crowded? Were there a lot of people there?

RIZZUTO: Some. I think we weren't crowded, you know.

SIGRIST: Do you, were you excited? Were you nervous? Of course, you were very young, I realize.

RIZZUTO: I was young. I was born 1908, we came in 19, well I wasn't too young. One thing I have to remember, my mother crying.

SIGRIST: Why was she crying?

RIZZUTO: ( he is moved ) For filth. ( he pauses ) My mother was a very religious woman, and she damned the day that she set foot on the boat that took us here.

SIGRIST: She was very unhappy to be there.

RIZZUTO: She was very unhappy after she saw Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Because it was so dirty.

RIZZUTO: So filthy.

SIGRIST: And she, she was expecting something different?

RIZZUTO: At least cleanliness.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. I see. Were you on Ellis Island very long?

RIZZUTO: I don't think so. I think my father somehow arranged us getting out of there.

SIGRIST: I see. So you went through very quickly, then.

RIZZUTO: Very quickly, yes.

SIGRIST: You didn't stay overnight or anything like that.

RIZZUTO: Yeah. We went through very quickly.

SIGRIST: I see. And who was at Ellis to meet you?

RIZZUTO: Where?

SIGRIST: Did someone come to the island to meet you when you arrived?

RIZZUTO: Ellis Island?

SIGRIST: Did someone come to Ellis Island to meet you?

RIZZUTO: My father.

SIGRIST: He came.

RIZZUTO: He came. He was already there. We didn't stay too long.

SIGRIST: Right. And then where did he take you?

RIZZUTO: For an apartment in Brooklyn. At that time they had horse-drawn taxis and it so happened we saw a kid on skates. So my brother says he wanted a pair of shoes with rollers on them.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the address in Brooklyn where your father, do you remember the address that you went to?

RIZZUTO: I sure do. Number Two Walton Street.

SIGRIST: Walton Street.

RIZZUTO: W-A-L-T-O-N.

SIGRIST: Huh. Was this an apartment?

RIZZUTO: An apartment. Not really, it was some kind of shop, you know, where the store would be.

SIGRIST: Yes, on the ground floor.

RIZZUTO: On the ground. And we lived above that.

SIGRIST: I see. Was it a, did you have one room, did you have two rooms?

RIZZUTO: We had three rooms.

SIGRIST: Three rooms.

RIZZUTO: And a toilet in the hall.

SIGRIST: Did you have running water in the apartment?

RIZZUTO: Yes, but we had no running water in the toilet. ( they laugh )

SIGRIST: Did, your mother must have been very happy to see your father.

RIZZUTO: I suppose so.

SIGRIST: Very relieved, probably, after all of that.

RIZZUTO: Oh, sure. She was happy.

SIGRIST: Well, all right. Let's talk a little bit now about you being a little boy, or what were you, ten or so, right, in America. And how did you learn English?

RIZZUTO: English? Well, I didn't have too much trouble learning it. I learned it. I have to tell you that I, well, I told you this. I'm not bragging. I was, the point is I was very intelligent. As a matter of fact, from the fourth grade, in Italy, I'm talking about, I was asked by my teacher to take a test that will put me in high school, from the fourth grade, instead of waiting to go through fifth and sixth. I took the test. I passed, but then the war broke out, and you know how miserable war can be and everything. Then I got hurt and I got hurt. I fell off a horse. Not, we were carrying wheat to town from the country.

SIGRIST: In Italy, in Sicily.

RIZZUTO: In Sicily. And I was kneeling on a horse. These bags, they were, they make it, they sort of make a platform on top of the horse, and I was kneeling. So these kids came along and said, "Anybody could kneel. Let's see you stand." These kids, when I tried to stand, I fell down and broke my arm. I had a compound fracture of my right arm. There was an old woman that lived nearby there. She had a shack. She got a bandanna, put it around my neck, and put that. So, and then I went over to my aunt. An aunt of mine was married to my father's brother, and she hollered. She saw me on top of a jackass now, a slow-moving animal. Not a horse any more. The horses during that time, they were slow. You couldn't rush them anyway. So she hollered it was me. They used to call me a nickname in Italy. You're not interested in nicknames, are you?

SIGRIST: Oh, sure. Tell us.

RIZZUTO: Sure. My nickname used to be Liddu.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

RIZZUTO: Sure. L-I-D-D-U.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. What does that mean?

RIZZUTO: L-I-D-D-U. That's all I can tell you. ( they laugh )

SIGRIST: How did you get that name? Who gave that to you? Who started calling you that?

RIZZUTO: Everybody. My grandfather, my father's side had a lot of family, nine boys and two girls. (?) There were ten boys, because one of them died, and then my father came along and took the other guy's name. And everybody name, like I was, I told you my name, Colegero. I was nicknamed Liddu anyway.

SIGRIST: I see. Did they call you that? Did your family call you that?

RIZZUTO: Yeah, they called me. Yeah, sure.

SIGRIST: Really. So that's what, when you were in school in Brooklyn did kids call you that?

RIZZUTO: No.

SIGRIST: No. That was only a family name.

RIZZUTO: They called me Charles, Charlie. Because we went to, I went to register. My cousin took me.

SIGRIST: To register for school in Brooklyn.

RIZZUTO: To register for school in Brooklyn. And he told, he answered the questions for me. I couldn't possibly. And she could not spell my Italian name, Colegero. She couldn't spell it. So she gave me Charles.

SIGRIST: I see. So that's how you ended up with Charles.  
( they laugh )

RIZZUTO: She said what's the difference? Charles is easier.  
( he laughs )

SIGRIST: How did your mother go about learning English?

RIZZUTO: She didn't.

SIGRIST: She didn't learn English. She didn't.

RIZZUTO: No, she learned some, like yes and no. And she really didn't have to. We were home and all that, you know. It's hard.

SIGRIST: Was it an Italian neighborhood where you lived?

RIZZUTO: Absolutely.

SIGRIST: I see.

RIZZUTO: It was a Sicilian neighborhood. As a matter of fact, all my relations seemed to live not . . .

SIGRIST: Do they still live there?

RIZZUTO: No. Now there's factories and stuff like that there.

SIGRIST: I see. But at that time?

RIZZUTO: At the time they were living out there. We all lived there. So we got a place on Walton Street, which was miserable, so we moved out of there and we went to live at 81 Hopkins Street.

SIGRIST: Still in Brooklyn.

RIZZUTO: Still in Brooklyn. It was nearby and it was where all the relations.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: What was your father doing? Was he still, you said he was a laborer, but what did he do, specifically, at this point?

RIZZUTO: He was a brusher for fur factories.

SIGRIST: I'm sorry, what kind of factories?

RIZZUTO: Fur. They used to make, they used to dye rats and rabbits. French rabbits, because our rabbits, see, they weren't strong enough. And he used to give the finishing touch.

SIGRIST: I see. Did, well, what sorts of things did you do in Brooklyn, being a kid? Did you go to the movies, or . . .

RIZZUTO: Being a kid did I go to the movies?

SIGRIST: Did you play with the kids out on the street? What kind of things did you do for fun?

RIZZUTO: Play with the kids out on the street. As I said, I didn't have any trouble learning the language. It was a Sicilian neighborhood. We were well protected by people that would, by boys that would try to get fresh because we didn't speak, you know. But our friends in the neighborhood, they took care of that.

SIGRIST: Was your mother ultimately happy that she came to America, even though she was so unhappy?

RIZZUTO: I don't know. I never, I always thought she wasn't, but she never . . .

SIGRIST: She never said anything.

RIZZUTO: She never said anything.

SIGRIST: Did you finally, you graduated from school in Brooklyn?

RIZZUTO: In Brooklyn, I had a teacher, her name was Mrs. Hillbrand. She had me take an R.A. test. Do you know what an R.A. test is?

SIGRIST: R.A.? No, I don't.

RIZZUTO: Rapid Advancement. And I passed, and I was ready. I was in the sixth grade. I didn't have to go to the seventh or eighth. I went automatically to ninth grade. So it's very nice. But in the ninth grade, then you find different boys, older, very much older than me. And, uh, you know the way that boys and girls can get in a lot of mischief. And I was taking up a

course, commercial Spanish. But then I met a friend of mine, a friend, we became friends. Boy, that was the ruination of me. Goodbye commercial Spanish and all that.

SIGRIST: Did, what was your first job that you ever had?

RIZZUTO: My first job?

SIGRIST: Yep, over here.

RIZZUTO: Over here. Well, you didn't expect me to work in Italy.

SIGRIST: Well, you fell off a horse loading wheat. ( they laugh )

RIZZUTO: My first job, I remember it. I remember my first job. It was in a place that they made tools or boxes and stuff like that, so I went ahead with it. They were paying me, at that time they were paying me about fourteen dollars a week. And then we didn't want more like that. We said the heck with this and dumped the job and then I got a job with the Edison Company. You know what the Edison Company is?

SIGRIST: Edison, doing recordings?

RIZZUTO: No. Edison Electric Company.

SIGRIST: Oh, yes. Okay.

RIZZUTO: Those are the, they supply it throughout the city. I got a job with them. And right away they pay me twenty-four dollars a week. Hey, that's some increase. But then the telephone company was looking for employees. I went over there while I was working for the Edison, because I met a funny guy there, at Edison there. And I went over to the telephone company. Their employment office was nearby. And they had me fill out an application. She says to me, "When do you want to start?" I says, "How much? You want me to start, I'm working already." I could see my way through, they were going to pay me eighteen dollars a week. Now, I was making twenty-four dollars a week. These people must think I'm crazy. I says, "No, I don't want the job." But I should have taken the job. I don't know. It's so long ago it doesn't matter.

SIGRIST: Really. So did you work for the Edison Company for a long time, or . . .

RIZZUTO: For the Edison Company? Nine years.

SIGRIST: I see. And then what happened? Just sort of fill me in, sort of quickly, on the rest of your life. The high points, hit the high points.

RIZZUTO: The rest of my life? I'm eighty-two, eighty-three years old. You want me to put it down in a day or so? ( they laugh ) I worked nine years for the Edison, and I worked, some friend of mine gave me a job. He was an electrician, and I

worked in that department, doing electrical work. And then I, like I tell you, I went to work for the Edison, and then I worked at the navy yard.

SIGRIST: At the naval yard, you said.

RIZZUTO: The navy yard in Brooklyn. That was . . .

SIGRIST: Did your parents stay in Brooklyn all this time, or did they ever leave, or . . .

RIZZUTO: No, we stayed in Brooklyn all this time.

SIGRIST: But by the time you were working at the navy yard you weren't still living with them, or were you?

RIZZUTO: Oh, I was living with them.

SIGRIST: You were living with them.

RIZZUTO: I was living with them until I got married. I think I got married in 1947. That was way up in age.

SIGRIST: Did you fight during World War II?

RIZZUTO: Huh?

SIGRIST: Did you serve during World War II?

RIZZUTO: No. I worked in the navy yards in World War II. I fought with my supervisors. That's what I did. ( he laughs )

SIGRIST: What did you do at the navy yard?

RIZZUTO: Electrical work.

SIGRIST: You did electrical work.

RIZZUTO: See, I was so sure that we're doing something wrong, and my boss was a supervisor, the first man I met. And then he was promoted during the war. He was promoted to the title of quarterman, just one grade above supervisor. So I was doing something, all of a sudden I put the wire on, liven up the wire, and I got a flash. So there was this fellow, this quarterman, oh, I turned the tide right away. I says, "This is your fault." He says, "Why is it my fault? Why didn't you check?" Well, anyway . . .

SIGRIST: Were you hurt? Did you get hurt?

RIZZUTO: No.

SIGRIST: No.

RIZZUTO: So he's bothering me, how to do this kind of work that would be this way, not to get it into some kind of trouble. I says to him, his name was Ryan, I says, "Ryan, leave me alone."

I says, "Go do bossing some other place." I says, "I don't want you to talk to me." So he's still bothering me. We were working, we were trying to hook up a line, and the battleship Iowa was, we had two ships. At that time it was 45,000 tons. The Iowa and The Washington. So there was, at the railing, all kinds of people waiting for me to get done, and this guy's bothering the heck out of me, this guy named Ryan. So I motioned upstairs. I says, "Come down here." I know I shouldn't have done that, but I did it. And Ryan didn't like it, but he never said. So the lieutenant commander come down. He didn't even talk to Ryan, he come over and talk to me. Of course, I was the one that called him. He says to me, "You know what you're doing?" I says, "Yeah." I tried to explain that Ryan was bothering me. He says, "You know what you're doing?" I says, "Yeah." So he turned around to Ryan ( he laughs ), he says to Ryan, "Leave him alone." And I knew I was going to get transferred. The next day I was transferred.

SIGRIST: And you were glad to be transferred?

RIZZUTO: Huh?

SIGRIST: Were you glad to be transferred?

RIZZUTO: No.

SIGRIST: No, you wanted to stay.

RIZZUTO: No. But then we had some fellow so smart in electrical wiring that he really knew his onions. It was him and there was a couple of them I'll never forget. There were some girls down there where I'm rooming at. One of the girls says to me, "You never forget things." Why should I forget? Things that you want to remember, you keep them in the back of your head. When you want them to come forward, they do come forward. So the next day I was transferred to ship's work. One job I hated was ship's electrical work. I didn't like the cable they were using, but that's what they had to use, that's all it is, that's all arranged. And so when I went over to see the foreman there was another fellow there outside where I put my tool box down. He was a plumber. He had the same trouble I had. Too much, so what did the bum do? He had my tool box welded onto the deck. ( they laugh ) So I go to pick up my box and nothing. I could move as easily as I could move, my box. There was a tripper there. You know what a tripper is? A tripper is someone who trips.

SIGRIST: It makes sense.

RIZZUTO: No. They even up whatever it is that tripped my tool box off the deck. So I told this plumber. I says, "I'm going to get off this ship." So he says, "You ain't going nowhere. They ain't going to let you off." I says to him, "You forget this is a free country." And I get off the ship, and there's this (?) at the end of, what they call those things? Anyway, the end of the thing there. He says to me, "You can't get off this ship." I says, "Since when?" So I hit him with my tool box. So he let me off.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

RIZZUTO: And then I went AWOL. For twenty-one days I didn't go to work. So I went to register for armed service. There was this girl over there. She says to me, "Why you want to register?" I says, "I don't like to work." She says, "And where are you working?" I said, "In the navy yards." "Oh," she says, "the navy yard." The eastern seaboard admiral was Admiral Marquad. Huh? Ever heard of him?

SIGRIST: Yeah. It sounds vaguely familiar.

RIZZUTO: Marquad was the admiral. She says to me, this girl, she says, "Admiral Marquad won't like that." She says, "Go back to the navy yard." She says, "You can't register. You can't even get another job as long as they know you're working there." So I went back to the navy yard.

SIGRIST: This is the same yard in Brooklyn.

RIZZUTO: Huh?

SIGRIST: This is the same navy yard in Brooklyn.

RIZZUTO: In Brooklyn, yeah. Oh, we had a beautiful yard there.

SIGRIST: Well, it sounds like you were very busy back at that time.

RIZZUTO: Oh, yeah, back at that time, because, see there was one job I could really do, and this Ryan wouldn't let me do it until I called for help on the bridge. Then he kept away from me. All because, see, once navy officer is there looking what I was doing as a civilian, he was my boss regardless, Ryan. He told Ryan, "Leave him alone." He left me alone. Of course, then I was transferred and all that.

SIGRIST: Well, you've been, you know, I think this might be a good point to end the interview. You gave us such a wonderful picture of Sicily when you were growing up.

RIZZUTO: Oh, I didn't say anything about Sicily. I was just getting started. ( they laugh ) Don't look at your watch.

SIGRIST: We're going to be doing, who's that woman we're doing, Mrs. Marchone, we're doing, after this, too. So we're going to have to end the interview now. But I want to thank you very much for sharing your life with us.

RIZZUTO: Well, I loved it.

SIGRIST: Yeah, it was fun. And I just want to thank you. Thank you very much.

RIZZUTO: Glad to have met you.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

RIZZUTO: So long.

SIGRIST: And this is Paul Sigrist signing off for the National Park Service.