

EI-170/MOLINARI

EI-170

MARY SARTORI MOLINARI

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

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ITALY, 1920 RESIDENCES: Italy: MANETTO, PROVENCE PIACENZA
AGE 18 PORT: GENOA US: NYC

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Friday, June 12th, 1992. I am here at Windsor Locks, Connecticut with Mary Molinari, who came from Italy in 1920 when she was eighteen years old. Good morning.

MOLINARI: Good morning.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Molinari, could you please give me your name as it was in Italy?

MOLINARI: Maria Sartori.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Sartori, please?

MOLINARI: S-A-R-T-O-R-I.

SIGRIST: And what is your date of birth, please?

MOLINARI: July 18th, 1901.

SIGRIST: Where were you born?

MOLINARI: I was born in, uh, the town is Maretto, the villa Bolderoni. The town is Maretto, the province Piacenza.

SIGRIST: Can you spell all of that, please?

MOLINARI: No.

SIGRIST: Start with the town.

MOLINARI: Bolderone is B-O-L-D-E-R-O-N-E.

SIGRIST: Okay.

MOLINARI: N-I.

SIGRIST: Excuse me. We're going to pause just for a moment.
(break in tape) We're now resuming the interview with Mary Molinari. Let's talk about the town that you were born in. Can you describe what the town looked like?

MOLINARI: Well, it's a small town, just a few family. There's no sidewalk, there's no paved roads. It's just natural. But I loved it. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: What did the houses look like?

MOLINARI: They're made out of stone. There's no heat in it.

They just, they have a stove in the middle of the floor, a wooden stove. No coal over there, just wood. Now it's different.

SIGRIST: Was there a church in town?

MOLINARI: Oh, yes. Yes.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the church?

MOLINARI: San Martino, San Martino.

SIGRIST: And describe the church for me, what it looked like.

MOLINARI: Well, it's really an old-fashioned church. It never been changed, you know, the way I was baptized there, there was never any change. Just a small church.

SIGRIST: What did it look like on the inside?

MOLINARI: Ah, there's wooden benches, an altar, and the railing where you kneel in the altar. They do away with altars now over there too. You know, there's no more altar. But it's a small church.

SIGRIST: Were there stores in this town?

MOLINARI: There's one store, yeah. We have to go away to buy, like to Piacenza. We had to go once a week, you know, to buy.

There's a little store if you want little things, you know what I mean.

SIGRIST: Whereabouts in Italy is this town?

MOLINARI: It's way up on top from the Switzerland.

SIGRIST: Oh, so it's northern Italy.

MOLINARI: In fact, yeah, and my people, a lot of people, they work in Switzerland.

SIGRIST: What did they do in Switzerland?

MOLINARI: Well, they work at the, what they call, you know, when you went from one country in another you had to fill out papers. What you call that?

SIGRIST: Like a consulate of some sort, or . . .

MOLINARI: No, no, no, no. You had to fill out the paper when you enter another country, like when you enter this country you had to fill out papers, because that's another country.

SIGRIST: Right.

MOLINARI: Switzerland. And they work over there, the luggage, when they get off the plane or get off the train.

SIGRIST: Like a customs, kind of.

MOLINARI: Customs, that's what I'm trying to tell you, yeah.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

MOLINARI: Giuseppe Sartori.

SIGRIST: And what did your father look like?

MOLINARI: I never know my father. I never knew him. I don't remember, because he came to this country. I was a little girl. Then he came to Italy, he built a house, then he came back to this country with my mother. I was nine. I don't remember my father. I don't even have a picture of him.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

MOLINARI: Clementine, Clementina.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

MOLINARI: Bozzi. Wait a minute, no, no, no. Gallinari.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

MOLINARI: G-A-L-L-I-N-A-R-I.

SIGRIST: What did your mother look like?

MOLINARI: She was a small woman, a very dainty woman. Yeah, she died, she was seventy.

SIGRIST: And what was her, what was her personality like? What was her temperament like?

MOLINARI: Well, she was a very delicate woman. She was very proud of herself, a very proud woman. But I only knew her for a few years because I only live over here about a year-and-a-half.

SIGRIST: How, what year did she come? Do you remember?

MOLINARI: 1909, 1910.

SIGRIST: Why did she come?

MOLINARI: They built a house over there, and to pay for the house they got to come to this country to earn some money. So my father said, "We're going to this country." We, whoever was left, my two younger brother. One was, I was nine, the other was seven, my younger brother was four. With my grandmother, she was crippled from arthritis, and my people, they came here. And they came in November. In March he got spinal meningitis, he died. He was thirty-one years old.

SIGRIST: He died in America.

MOLINARI: In America, in New York City.

SIGRIST: Do you remember your mother leaving at all?

MOLINARI: I remember my mother leaving.

SIGRIST: Can you describe that for me? What . . .

MOLINARI: Well, I was, I wanted to go with her, I wanted to come with her, but that was impossible. So I don't remember much of that. After that, you know, when I came here I didn't know any more. Of course, he didn't know me.

SIGRIST: And you were how old when she left?

MOLINARI: Nine.

SIGRIST: You were nine. What memories do you have before you were nine of living with your mother in town? What sticks out in your mind when you think about . . .

MOLINARI: Well, she was a good woman, but they work in the farm. My grandmother took care of me, you know. Like I have my grandmother as a mother because she took care of me at home. My mother was always in the fields with my father.

SIGRIST: So it almost wasn't that much different after she left.

MOLINARI: No, no. Because my grandmother took care of me.

SIGRIST: Talk about your grandmother. What was her name?

MOLINARI: Uh, Giovanna. Well, we called her Jenny. Giovanna Cavana.

SIGRIST: So is that your mother's . . .

MOLINARI: My father's mother.

SIGRIST: Your father's mother. What was she like as a person?

MOLINARI: Oh, she was a small woman. Yeah. Very, very religious.

SIGRIST: When you say religious, why do you remember that? What did she do?

MOLINARI: Because she was praying all the time. She was sitting in bed with something over her head with the rosary beads.

SIGRIST: Did your grandmother do cooking? Was she a good cook?

MOLINARI: Yeah, but I had to help. See, her hands, they wouldn't open. One leg was shorter than the other.

SIGRIST: Because of the arthritis.

MOLINARI: So at nine years old I had to do the washing, I had to do the cooking. I had to do the, we used to make pasta. You know what pasta is? They put a stool so I could reach the table.

SIGRIST: Was your grandmother bedridden?

MOLINARI: No, no, no. She was up and out, but she had a hard time to walk.

SIGRIST: Was there a grandfather?

MOLINARI: No, he died when we were very young.

SIGRIST: Can you describe, sort of walk me through your grandmother's house.

MOLINARI: Well, I don't know what you say.

SIGRIST: Um, pretend you're walking through her house, and describe it as you're going, like how you walked into the house.

MOLINARI: Oh, yeah. We had, the floor was made out of stone, so we had a hole in the wall where they keep our water. We had to get the water outside through a pipe, you know. It would bring the water into the house. Now they have . . .

SIGRIST: What kind of a roof did the house have?

MOLINARI: Uh, slate. All slate roof over there.

SIGRIST: And did you have your own bedroom, or . . .

MOLINARI: No. It was just one big room.

SIGRIST: Did your grandmother keep a garden?

MOLINARI: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: What did you grow in the garden?

MOLINARI: Oh, we grow lettuce, leek, pumpkins, uh, Swiss chard.
That's all I remember.

SIGRIST: So you had vegetables. You had . . .

MOLINARI: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you keep any animals at all?

MOLINARI: Oh, yes. We had sheep, we had a cow for the milk.

SIGRIST: Did the cow have a name?

MOLINARI: No. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Now, who took care of the sheep?

MOLINARI: I did.

SIGRIST: How many were there?

MOLINARI: Three.

SIGRIST: Did you have pasture land there, or how . . .

MOLINARI: No. They used to gather all, the whole town, they used to gather all the sheep, and we took turns to go, we took care of them in the field. No, one stayed with them all the time.

SIGRIST: So what did you have to do to take care of sheep? What . . .

MOLINARI: Well, so they won't go, you know, when they see greener grass, you know what I mean, keep them away from it. They have a certain area to stay in.

SIGRIST: Was that hard to do for a little girl?

MOLINARI: No. No, no, we had fun. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Were you ever out overnight taking them . . .

MOLINARI: No, no, no, no, no. We take them home at night. And the cow, we did the same thing. We took turns. You know, to watch in the pasture, so they won't go in the greener pasture where they're not supposed to go.

SIGRIST: Why couldn't they go in the green pasture?

MOLINARI: Yeah, because that was the damage, you know, that was hay to cut for the winter.

SIGRIST: Did your grandmother teach you anything at home?

MOLINARI: She taught me everything.

SIGRIST: What did she teach you?

MOLINARI: Well, I tell you. A long time ago we used to make men's socks. And we used to cut the wool from the sheep. I did that many times. I cut the skin. And she taught me how to thread, because after she died all the women in town they asked me to do that work for them. I said, "I know how to do it. My mother show me." I used to make shirts for my brothers, make dresses for myself.

SIGRIST: So the sheep are really very important.

MOLINARI: They are.

SIGRIST: Can you talk to me a little bit about how you sheared the sheep? What did you do?

MOLINARI: Oh, yeah. You had to tie the legs and lay him down, so with a scissors you cut him. Then you turn him over, you cut

him on the other side.

SIGRIST: Was this a one-man job or a two-man job?

MOLINARI: One.

SIGRIST: Wasn't that hard, to keep the sheep?

MOLINARI: No, it was nice. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did your grandmother have a loom of some sort, or a spinning wheel?

MOLINARI: Yes, she did. Yeah, she had a thing, she was making, uh, things by the yard, like make sheets. She had a big, big, big thing. What do you call it? Weave, weave, yeah.

SIGRIST: Was that hard for her to do with her arthritis?

MOLINARI: No. She used to do it for other people. She used to do it for other people, yeah.

SIGRIST: So she made money at this place.

MOLINARI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Oh, that's interesting. What else do you remember about your grandmother? You said she was very religious. Did you have to go to church with her?

MOLINARI: Oh, yeah. Church, yeah. I had to go to church, yeah.

SIGRIST: Was she active in the church?

MOLINARI: No. No, no. No, no.

SIGRIST: Can you describe how you cooked in this house?

MOLINARI: Well, those days, you know, there wasn't much food. There was minestrone. You heard of minestrone. You heard of polenta? That's cornmeal. Then we made spaghetti. Once in a while we had meat, but there wasn't much choice, you know what I mean.

SIGRIST: Was there a stove in the house?

MOLINARI: A stove in the middle of the floor with a big pipe.

SIGRIST: What was it made out of? Was it iron, or . . .

MOLINARI: Iron stove, it's oblong, with the top, you know, what they call the covered. Those days the pots and pans they went inside the stove because they were black. (she laughs) You had to clean them.

SIGRIST: How did you clean them?

MOLINARI: Uh, we used ashes, ashes from the stove.

SIGRIST: Nothing went to waste, did it? (he laughs)

MOLINARI: No, no. We had no choice.

SIGRIST: Where did you get the wood for this stove?

MOLINARI: Oh, we had to go get them in the field.

SIGRIST: Was this something that you would have gone out alone to do, or did you go with a group of people to go pick wood?

MOLINARI: I went alone. I went alone. My brother, sometimes he helped me. I used to cut trees, you know, for the wood, in winter.

SIGRIST: You had a lot of responsibility as a young girl.

MOLINARI: I had no youth. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, how did you feel about that at the time?

MOLINARI: Well, it had to be done, no problem.

SIGRIST: Did you ever do anything that upset your grandmother?

MOLINARI: No. I loved my grandmother.

SIGRIST: She never got mad at you.

MOLINARI: No, no, no, no. If you did something wrong she was

crying, crying. Not scolding us, never. Never.

SIGRIST: Do you remember your mother and father, or at least your mother after your father died, writing to your grandmother?

MOLINARI: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. She sent us money every month. Every month she sent us money.

SIGRIST: What jobs did they get in America?

MOLINARI: Well, she was working in a glove factory. In fact, I got in on Sunday, it was Easter Sunday. That was April 3rd. The following Wednesday I went to work in a glove factory.

SIGRIST: In the same factory where she was.

MOLINARI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: But she got that job when she came in 1910.

MOLINARI: Yes.

SIGRIST: So what kinds of things did she have to do in the glove factory? Do you know?

MOLINARI: Well, there was a man, he had leather palm, and then you sew the fingers, you know, with the machine. You know, a sewing machine. He had the sewing machine. So I was only a couple of days, I went to work. They were all Italian people.

They spoke for me.

SIGRIST: Do you know what job your father got in 1910?

MOLINARI: Oh, he was in construction work. They used to work, go in the subway with that toolbox. You know, they build a lot of subway in those days in New York.

SIGRIST: That's right. That's when they were building a subway.

MOLINARI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So your father worked on the subways.

MOLINARI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when your grandmother found out that your father had died?

MOLINARI: (she sighs) Yeah. I was visiting a cousin of mine.

SIGRIST: Visiting a cousin.

MOLINARI: And, so somebody came from another town and they mentioned my father's name that he had died, and I ran to tell my grandmother. My grandmother started to cry. So these people, they tried to apologize, "It's not true, it's not true."

But it was true. He was only thirty-one.

SIGRIST: Was he buried in America, or did they send . . .

MOLINARI: He was buried in America, yeah.

SIGRIST: How did you feel about that, when your father died?

MOLINARI: (she sighs) Well, I hardly knew him. I hardly knew him, because he wasn't home long enough for me to know him.

SIGRIST: Do you remember ever having to work outside of the home of your grandmother? Did you ever take a job in this town?

MOLINARI: No, no. We had a little farm. We worked on a farm. We raised wheat, some other kind of grain. I don't know what they call it. But we work on a farm.

SIGRIST: And then you sold that?

MOLINARI: No, we used it. We made bread. You know, we brought it to a mill. They made flour out of it.

SIGRIST: Explain to me how you made bread in those days.

MOLINARI: Well, we used to use yeast cake, but we kept a piece of bread. Like today I make bread, I kept a piece on the side. The next time I make bread I use the other piece. That make them swell.

SIGRIST: Did you have a table or something in the house where you . . .

MOLINARI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And how did you bake it?

MOLINARI: Oh, we baked it, those days we baked it, once in a while rent an oven, you know, when you make a lot. But usually we bake it in the fireplace. They build a big fire and then the floor is, I don't know what it's made, it's smooth, the white bricks. And then they clean it and they put the bread, they put a big top over, and cover it up and roll it in ashes, hot ashes, and take an hour, it would bake.

SIGRIST: Is this like a town oven, a communal oven of some sort?

MOLINARI: No, no, no. Each family, they have one. Each family have a fireplace.

SIGRIST: So this was in the house.

MOLINARI: In the house.

SIGRIST: I see. Um, did you go to school at all in Italy?

MOLINARI: Yeah. I went to school in Italy. Then I skip one

grade and I even have one year high school, but the teacher didn't teach me. I don't think she knew anything about high school either. My grandmother made me stay home. But I went to school after I came to this country.

SIGRIST: When you were in school in Italy, can you describe the school for me?

MOLINARI: Well, they were all together. First grade, second grade, they were all together. The teacher, she was teaching all together.

SIGRIST: What did she teach you? What were you learning?

MOLINARI: Well, a lot of arithmetic, and reading and writing. I was only eleven years old when I graduated. I was supposed to be twelve.

SIGRIST: Because you were living so close to the Switzerland border and other European countries, did they teach you a language, German or . . .

MOLINARI: No. Now they do. No, then no.

SIGRIST: What other family members did you have in this town, if any?

MOLINARI: Oh, they were all related there. We were mostly

related, each one. Yeah, they're all cousins over there.

SIGRIST: On both sides? Did both your . . .

MOLINARI: On both sides.

SIGRIST: Do you know how your parents met?

MOLINARI: Yeah. My mother was supposed to marry somebody else.

Then my grandfather, he said to my father, he says, "How come did you let her go?" He said, "Why don't you move?" My father didn't have the nerve. He was poor. He was afraid to ask her.

Then he asked her, and they got married. But she was supposed to marry somebody else.

SIGRIST: Was she from this town also?

MOLINARI: No, no, no, no. No, she wasn't from the town.

People, they used to work for rich people. They used to get, like, work on the farm, and to pay they get so much, one-third.

That's how they make their living. Then in the end they came to live with us, with my grandmother. I had two grandmothers.

SIGRIST: You had two grandmothers. You mean your mother's mother?

MOLINARI: My mother's mother and my father's mother.

SIGRIST: So you all lived in this house, then.

MOLINARI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Oh, well, so it's you, your two brothers and then two grandmothers. What was the other grandmother like?

MOLINARI: Oh, she was adorable. She was nice, yes. She was a little more up-to-date, you know, because she travel a lot.

SIGRIST: She was a little more sophisticated.

MOLINARI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was her name?

MOLINARI: Louisa. Louija.

SIGRIST: And when you think about that grandmother, what's the one memory that sticks out in your mind about her?

MOLINARI: Well, I know, I loved her too, but I was more attached to my other grandma, my father's, the one that brought us up. Because they didn't live with us a long time, just a couple of years. And their son, he bought land, and they move into a place that he bought.

SIGRIST: But in that town?

MOLINARI: No, no, out of town.

SIGRIST: When you said that your people worked for rich people, what did they do?

MOLINARI: They worked in a farm. They worked in a farm. And the pay, they get one-third for what they're raising.

SIGRIST: It's a hard life, isn't it?

MOLINARI: It is a hard life, yes. That's the way it was.

SIGRIST: As a girl growing up in northern Italy, what did you know about America?

MOLINARI: I didn't know much about America. In fact, when I came over, I didn't like America. Because we landed in New York City. You know, dark hallways, you know.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever write to tell you about . . .

MOLINARI: No, no. No, no, no. She just wrote to us, you know, and sent us money to live.

SIGRIST: So you really didn't know a whole lot about what the country was.

MOLINARI: No.

SIGRIST: Why did you decide to come?

MOLINARI: Because she made me come.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about that.

MOLINARI: I was supposed to get married over there with a cousin of mine. I was supposed to get married. And I wrote to her, she said, "No." She said, "I want to know you before you get married." She said, "If you want to go back," she says, "I'll pay your way, you go back." So with that, I came back, I came over. So once I came over I see that life was much easier, it was beautiful over here, all dressed up and go to work. Go home, you had your supper ready. I says, "I'm not going back."

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about the process of coming over here. For instance, do you remember having to get your papers, or anything like that?

MOLINARI: Oh, yeah. We had to go to Milano to get our papers. Yeah.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did you have to show them?

MOLINARI: Not as much as today, you know. But, I mean, just, we had, we needed the passport. We went to the immigration in Milano. I had to take my two brothers. They were younger than

I am.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you each their names of your, what are the names of your two brothers?

MOLINARI: My older brother was Giovanni.

SIGRIST: And how much younger is he?

MOLINARI: He was two years younger than I am.

SIGRIST: And then the other brother?

MOLINARI: And three years younger than I am, my other brother.

SIGRIST: And what was his name?

MOLINARI: Luigi, they put that.

SIGRIST: I see. How long of a trip to Milan is it from where you were?

MOLINARI: Oh, I would say, I don't know how many hours. About five or six hours. (listening to her children who are also present) One hour?

SIGRIST: Now, how did you get to Milan?

MOLINARI: By train.

SIGRIST: Was going on a train a new experience for you, or had you been on a train before you went to Milan?

MOLINARI: No, I'd been on a train before. But, you know, Italy was easy for me to travel because, you know, I know the language.

SIGRIST: Do you remember packing?

MOLINARI: Yeah. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: What did you take with you?

MOLINARI: We had a suitcase. I noticed on Ellis Island they have trunks. They had pillowcases where they kept the clothes.
(she laughs)

SIGRIST: Yeah, yeah. Is that what you took, a pillowcase?

MOLINARI: No, I had a little trunk.

SIGRIST: And what did you actually take? Do you remember?

MOLINARI: All the clothes I have. All my clothes that I made over here.

SIGRIST: Do you remember saying goodbye to your grandmother?

MOLINARI: She was dead. She died when I was sixteen.

SIGRIST: Oh, she had died.

MOLINARI: When I was sixteen, then I was in charge of everything.

SIGRIST: So when she died was the other grandmother still living with you?

MOLINARI: No. The other grandma, no, she moved. She was still living, but she was out of town.

SIGRIST: Let me just ask you, sidetrack for a minute, do you remember when your grandmother died?

MOLINARI: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you talk to me a little bit about, perhaps, the funeral and, um . . .

MOLINARI: Well, I remember, like, her leg was like that.
(she gestures) And the priest, he took her leg, he broke it. He broke it to make her fit in the casket. And at that time there was so many dying. They had the flu, influenza. And she was carried to the cemetery by oxen, because they didn't bring them to church any more. There was too many. And they tried to keep the disease, you know what I mean, away from one another, so they didn't brought to church. From the home to the

cemetery.

SIGRIST: When she died, she died at home.

MOLINARI: She died at home.

SIGRIST: When she died, what happened? What happened next?
Did people come into the house?

MOLINARI: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, they, you keep them in the house. I remember I was trying to fall asleep. She was sitting up, just saying her prayers. All of a sudden she went down, and I can't hear her breathing any more, so I call my aunt that she live with us, and she died just like that.

SIGRIST: Um, okay. Do you remember leaving the town? Did you say goodbye to anyone in this town when you left?

MOLINARI: Definitely. They all came to say goodbye to us.

SIGRIST: How did you feel about leaving this town? I mean, how did you feel . . .

MOLINARI: Well, it's a bad age to leave. Eighteen, you have all your friends out there. Girlfriends and boyfriends. You know, and it's hard to leave because you don't know what to expect.

SIGRIST: Where did you, what port did you leave from?

MOLINARI: Genoa.

SIGRIST: And how did you get to Genoa?

MOLINARI: Uh, by train.

SIGRIST: Were there other people from this town . . .

MOLINARI: Thirty-one. Thirty-one. That was the first ship that left after the war. So we didn't dare come before because there were mines in the ocean.

SIGRIST: So there were thirty-one of you from this town.

MOLINARI: Thirty-one from all, and I knew most of them.

SIGRIST: Are your brothers with you?

MOLINARI: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Who were some of the other people? Who were some of these thirty-one people?

MOLINARI: Well, I won't know them any more.

SIGRIST: But were they relations or . . .

MOLINARI: No, no, no, no. Different town, all different town.

SIGRIST: How long did you have to stay in Genoa before you got on the boat?

MOLINARI: Oh, not long. We went right on the boat. Yeah, we were on the boat.

SIGRIST: And what was the name of the boat?

MOLINARI: Oh, now. When I went back to Italy it was The Constitution.

SIGRIST: The Savoie? You wrote here on the paper . . .

MOLINARI: What is the name?

SIGRIST: The Savoie.

MOLINARI: Savoie.

SIGRIST: Tell me . . .

MOLINARI: It's not there no more.

SIGRIST: Tell me what the boat looked like.

MOLINARI: Oh, it was nice, you know what I mean. But the only thing, we had to sleep on bunks with the army blanket. Probably never been washed.

SIGRIST: Was it one big room you were sleeping it, or was

it . . .

MOLINARI: Yeah, one big room.

SIGRIST: So were there men and women in that one big room?

MOLINARI: Yes, and children.

SIGRIST: And children. What was it like to see a boat? Was this the first boat you'd ever seen?

MOLINARI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What did you think, looking at this thing?

MOLINARI: I think there was an awful smell, when you go to the bathroom, they put disinfectant. Ehh, it smelled. It made me sick.

SIGRIST: How long was the boat trip?

MOLINARI: Thirteen days.

SIGRIST: And tell me a little bit about what the trip was like going across.

MOLINARI: Well, we knew everybody, so we went upstairs and had fun. You know, you weren't supposed to stay downstairs unless you're sick. You've got to go up in the fresh air. So they

give us one plate. You had one plate for the whole, how many days we stayed on the boat. We washed that plate, then we went for food again.

SIGRIST: What did they give you for food?

MOLINARI: I forgot, but it wasn't bad.

SIGRIST: Did you get sick?

MOLINARI: No, no, no, no. Oh, no.

SIGRIST: You didn't get sick.

MOLINARI: No.

SIGRIST: But everyone was sick around you.

MOLINARI: No, some of them. Some of them, yeah.

SIGRIST: Was it basically a smooth trip, or was it, was it . . .

MOLINARI: No, it was a little rough, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you like being on a boat?

MOLINARI: No, I get seasick. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you remember coming into New York Harbor?

MOLINARI: Yeah. I remember I see the first colored man. I never saw a colored man before. He was all dressed in white, and that color black face, I got a kick out of that. He was a sailor.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

MOLINARI: Oh, yeah. I almost went back because I wrote to my mother that I was coming. A sailor came. He said, "You want to send a telegram to your mother?" I said, "Yes." And so my mother lived on Worth Street, and there's a street named White Street. On White Street there's a lot of factories on the East Side. How do I know from Worth to White? So they sent it to White Street. She never got the telegram. And then the last boat, people, they came on Sunday. They came with the boat to visit the people. And with the last boat that came, this friend of mine's mother came. She said, "Go tell such-and-so that her children are here." And she was home crying because she said, "My children didn't come." The following day we would have been deported back.

SIGRIST: So you were at Ellis Island at this time.

MOLINARI: Ellis Island. That's right. We slept there.

SIGRIST: All right. Well, let's talk about Ellis Island now.

What do you remember about Ellis Island? What did it look like?

MOLINARI: Well, it wasn't like today. I think we went last year.

SIGRIST: What did it look like then, in 1920?

MOLINARI: It was an old building with all these suitcases. The worst part of it, I think I wrote on the paper, they had a big, long table, and the benches on both sides. So the first time it went up, they took all the food. They brought them up. Of course, we were greenhorn because, you know, I never went anywhere. And these people, they mostly travelled. So we had no food. I had a cup of tea without sugar. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Was that unusual for you to have tea? Had you . . .

MOLINARI: No, no, no.

SIGRIST: Was Ellis Island crowded?

MOLINARI: Very, very. There were a lot of people there.

SIGRIST: What was it like to be with all these different kinds of people?

MOLINARI: Well, you're kind of confused, you know what I mean.

You don't know anybody.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: Do you remember them examining you at all?

MOLINARI: Oh, yes. We got an injection before we left, and they examined us before we came off to see if you were healthy.

SIGRIST: What did they do for examinations?

MOLINARI: Well, they examined us before we came off to see if you were healthy.

SIGRIST: What did they do for examinations?

MOLINARI: Well, they check, you know, what they call it?

SIGRIST: Your heart.

MOLINARI: Yeah. They check, I forgot, it's so many years ago.

SIGRIST: How many days were you at Ellis Island?

MOLINARI: How many what?

SIGRIST: How many days, you said you stayed over at Ellis Island. How long?

MOLINARI: Uh, two days.

SIGRIST: And what did the, where did you sleep? What did it look like?

MOLINARI: Oh, we had a bed. We had a separate bed. You know, we had privacy. I could see the light from New York. Yeah, we had privacy there.

SIGRIST: Were your brothers with you?

MOLINARI: Yeah, but they slept in different rooms, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did, so did your mother finally come to get you?

MOLINARI: Yes. They came to get us. They came in the dusk, almost dark. My mother, my step-father, my uncle. They came, and then I, you know, they identified themselves. So the following morning they came early. So we were in a cage, the three of us. So they made me swear, "That's your mother." I said to myself, yeah. I says, "I don't think so." I didn't know her after ten years, you know. She didn't know me, of course.

SIGRIST: What did it feel like to see a mother that you really didn't even know?

MOLINARI: Well, I was happy to get to New York, I was happy to

come and join her. I was happy.

SIGRIST: Were your brothers a handful to take care of?

MOLINARI: No, no, no. They were good kids. They were good kids. We were very close.

SIGRIST: So your mother and your step-father come and they take you off of Ellis.

MOLINARI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And where do they take you?

MOLINARI: We used to live on 175 Worth Street, Worth.

SIGRIST: Can you describe their apartment for me?

MOLINARI: Well, we went up in a dark stairway. We live up on the second floor. There were three rooms, the kitchen and the bedroom and the living room, and I slept in the hallway.

(she laughs)

SIGRIST: You slept in the hallway. (he laughs)

MOLINARI: Yeah. They had those folding beds.

SIGRIST: Was, what was the neighborhood like?

MOLINARI: Well, it's near Chinatown. I could hear. At night,

you know, there were a lot of crimes down there, I'll tell you that. Call the police and things like, it was a nice neighborhood. We had an Italian grocery store down in the same building. No, not same building, on the same street. It was all right.

SIGRIST: Did you have electricity in the apartment, or was it gas light?

MOLINARI: Oh, yeah, yeah. Everything. We have a bathtub there, everything. Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about your mother and your step-father. Tell me how they met.

MOLINARI: Well, my mother, she was over here for eight years, then she married, she met this man. He was working for a newspaper. He was maybe the best man that ever lived, best father that anybody could have.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

MOLINARI: Giovanni, (she pauses) (her son whispers to her.) Fiori.

SIGRIST: F-I-O . . .

MOLINARI: R-I.

SIGRIST: Fiori. And was he an Italian immigrant also?

MOLINARI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did he come over?

MOLINARI: He came over when he was a youngster. And him and his friend, they opened up a newspaper, Progressa.

SIGRIST: And that's what he was doing.

MOLINARI: Yeah, he was working for Progressa until he was, until his death.

SIGRIST: What did he look like?

MOLINARI: Oh, he was a handsome man. He was nice, very nice.

SIGRIST: Tall? Short?

MOLINARI: He was tall. He was a big man.

SIGRIST: All right. (he clears his throat) Excuse me. Let's talk a little bit about getting adjusted to America. You told me a little while ago you didn't really like it. Why?

MOLINARI: No, in the beginning. Because I missed all my friends. You know, I had girlfriends over there, there were five of us about the same age. We used to go out and sing and

have a good time. And over here we didn't know nobody, and it didn't take me long to make friends.

SIGRIST: Were there other Italians in the neighborhood?

MOLINARI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me about learning English. How did you learn English?

MOLINARI: Well, I didn't go to school until I moved to Windsor Locks.

SIGRIST: What year was that?

MOLINARI: 1931. No, no, 1927.

SIGRIST: So, but you were in New York for seven years.

MOLINARI: I was in New York, but, see, I got married, a year-and-a-half I was here. A fellow from the same town, my people know him well. So then we had two children right away. When my children went to school, they didn't know a word of English.

SIGRIST: So you only spoke Italian then, when you got here.

MOLINARI: Always, always.

SIGRIST: And so your mother and your step-father only spoke

Italian in the house.

MOLINARI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Now, your brothers must have gone to school.

MOLINARI: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Were they learning English?

MOLINARI: Yeah, especially my young brother. He went to regular school.

SIGRIST: So did he help out somehow?

MOLINARI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you learn any English from him?

MOLINARI: Oh, yeah, I learned some from many of my friends. See, when I came to Windsor Locks, then I went to night school.

SIGRIST: Tell me about the first job you got.

MOLINARI: Well, in New York I worked in a glove factory. When I come up here I worked in a tinsel mill.

SIGRIST: Tinsel.

MOLINARI: Tinsel.

SIGRIST: Like Christmas tree tinsel.

MOLINARI: Yeah. They make, they make all kind of tinsel. They make wire for the airplane. Now it's closed, there's no more. They're closing.

SIGRIST: Talk about working in the glove factory, because this is a place where your mother worked.

MOLINARI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me what your job was specifically.

MOLINARI: Well, they keep for how many weeks, you learn. They pay you so much. But then they put you on piece work. And I liked it.

SIGRIST: Who were the other people you were working with? Were these immigrants also?

MOLINARI: Oh, they were there quite a few years. Yeah, they were here, yeah.

SIGRIST: So you were working with . . .

MOLINARI: Friends, you know. They had spoken for me. They were talking, you know what I mean.

SIGRIST: Young women mostly?

MOLINARI: Young women, yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about what you liked about New York. What did you like about it? I know you didn't like it.

MOLINARI: Well, I liked that we used to go to the show. Walk from, I used to live in Manhattan, we would walk up to 14th Street, a live show.

SIGRIST: What kind of a show?

MOLINARI: Well, any, I can't remember that, the show. But it was live, you know, on the stage.

SIGRIST: Were they in Italian, or were they in?

MOLINARI: No, no, no, no.

SIGRIST: So that didn't matter.

MOLINARI: No, no.

SIGRIST: What did you not like about America the most? And I don't mean about you were missing your friends, but what about it that you really disliked about New York?

MOLINARI: Well, not that I really disliked. It didn't take me long to get used to it. You know, I liked it. I wouldn't live

down there even if they give me a free rent now, but I liked it at that time. That was nice.

SIGRIST: Did you Americanize yourself in any way? Did you change the way you dressed?

MOLINARI: Oh, I did. I try. Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: What did you do?

MOLINARI: Well, I tried to imitate the girls, what they were doing, you know what I mean. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Would you say that your mother really sort of held onto her old-world ways, and your father because, your step-father, because they were, so they didn't necessarily encourage you to Americanize?

MOLINARI: No. Well, I forgot. I forgot.

SIGRIST: What do you think, when you think back on your life, what do you think influenced you the most from your mother and step-father? What kind of old-world values do you think that you still carry with you?

MOLINARI: Well, they give me so much love, you know what I mean. I mean, they really cared for me, and I accept, you know, the way of living, and they were really good to me.

SIGRIST: Your step-father really accepted you . . .

MOLINARI: Oh, he was one of the best, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you think that, I want to ask you a question about your mother, do you think your mother was really glad that she came to America?

MOLINARI: Well, I heard her talking to other people. She never advise anybody to leave children because, see, we weren't attached to her. We were attached to my grandmother, because she's the one that brought us up. My mother support us, but, you know, that don't mean anything. That mean, people that bring you up, that you were attached to.

SIGRIST: How long did you live with your mother and your step-father? Until you got married?

MOLINARI: A year-and-a-half.

SIGRIST: So you got married in what year?

MOLINARI: 1921.

SIGRIST: And what was the name of your husband?

MOLINARI: Modesto. Modesto Molinari.

SIGRIST: And can you tell me your children's names, please?

MOLINARI: Joseph Molinari, Catherine Merrigan and Bobby Molinari. I got three, two boys and a girl.

SIGRIST: I see. And tell me just a little bit about your husband and his background.

MOLINARI: He was a hardworking man. He built this house, he built all these houses on top. He had a house, he was twenty years old, near the river. We move from New York, and we had the flood. I got scared, so he bought this place up here. So he built houses up here.

SIGRIST: You moved to Windsor Locks in what year, again?

MOLINARI: 1927.

SIGRIST: And you lived in a different place?

MOLINARI: We lived four years down there near the river, four years.

SIGRIST: And you said there was a flood?

MOLINARI: Oh, yeah. The river came out and flooded all the place, all the yard was full of water. Then he bought this place here and he built this house.

SIGRIST: And so what year was that?

MOLINARI: Uh, 1931.

SIGRIST: Are there a lot of Italians in Windsor Locks?

MOLINARI: No, not around here, no, no. In town there was some.

SIGRIST: When you moved here, did you feel isolated because of that?

MOLINARI: Yes, a little bit, because I had all my people in New York. My mother, father, my brothers and my aunt, they were all down there.

SIGRIST: I see.

MOLINARI: But he wanted to come up here, so we came up here. And now I like it.

SIGRIST: I'm going to ask you two final questions. One is how do you think your life would have been different if you had stayed in Italy?

MOLINARI: It would have been different, it was better here, much better here than Italy.

SIGRIST: Are you glad you came here?

MOLINARI: Yes, I did. Yes, I am.

SIGRIST: Good. Well, I want to thank you very much for having me come out, and for recording your story. This is Paul Sigrist signing off for the National Park Service with Mary Molinari in Windsor Locks, Connecticut.