

EI-18
GUISEPPE SALVATORE RICCOBONO
BIRTH DATE: JULY 18, 1891
INTERVIEW DATE: 12/19/1990
AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 99
RUNNING TIME: 47:20
INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.
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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 1991

AND JOHN R.

MURIELLO, 2/1994
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: IRV SILBERG

SICILY, 1906
AGE 15

SHIP: CITY OF TURINO
PORT: PALERMO
RESIDENCES:
? ITALY: TOMO NATALI [ph], PALERMO, SICILY
? US: NEW YORK, NY; CLIFTON, NJ

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: There is initial confusion in the interview concerning Mr. Riccobono's birth date. The correct date is July 13, 1891.

SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. We are here at Ellis Island on Wednesday, December nineteenth. We are here with Guiseppe Riccobono, who came to America from Italy in 1906. Mr. Riccobono --

RICCOBONO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What is the date of your birth?

RICCOBONO: The day was a.--.the day I born?

SIGRIST: Yes. What is your birthday?

RICCOBONO: July the thirteenth.

SIGRIST: What year?

RICCOBONO: 18 -- 89, uh, 89, yeah.

SIGRIST: 1890?

RICCOBONO: 18 (pauses), 1889.

SIGRIST: O.K. And where in Italy were you born?

RICCOBONO: I born in ---.the - the name of the town is Tomasonatali [ph], seven mile from Palermo.

SIGRIST: I see. And, let's talk a little bit about your mother and father.

RICCOBONO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

RICCOBONO: Dominic Riccobono.

SIGRIST: And what did he do for a living?

RICCOBONO: Make stone to build a house.

SIGRIST: I see. And did you come from a big family?

RICCOBONO: Big family.

SIGRIST: Yes.

RICCOBONO: Seven b-- seven brother and three sister.

SIGRIST: I see. And do you remember their names?

RICCOBONO: Their name? Yeah. The first one Josie, Joe (that's me), Dominic, Tom, Christine, Frank, Charlie, Johnny, seven - four -- seven brother and three sister: Josie, Christine, uh, and Rosie. Rosie pass away.

SIGRIST: I see. When she was young?

RICCOBONO: Yeah. When she was young.

SIGRIST: I see.

RICCOBONO; Only I, in here now. Clifton, there was -- seven brothers and two sisters.

SIGRIST: I see, I see.

RICCOBONO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And, and you all lived in a house or in an apartment?

RICCOBONO: No, we have a big house for the family.

SIGRIST: I see. And what was your mother's name?

RICCOBONO: Providenza.

SIGRIST: And did she work also or did just your father work?

RICCOBONO: No, no she -- only my father, me and my father.

SIGRIST: I see.

RICCOBONO: I like to get a tissue.

SIGRIST: Tissue. O.K. (pause) Were you very religious? Was your family very religious in Italy?

RICCOBONO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes.

RICCOBONO: Every Sunday my father go to Mass and - and pretty near every Sunday take me also to Mass.

SIGRIST: I see.

RICCOBONO: Not every Sunday because I was the old - the oldest boy and I got take care this -- the young.

SIGRIST: I see, I see. And do you remember celebrating holidays at all? For instance, was Christmas? --

RICCOBONO: Christmas was a big holiday for us. We go to church and wait on the midnight when born is the ba-- the baby Jesus.

SIGRIST: And did, did you have a big meal of something like that?

RICCOBONO: After when we go home; nice, nice meal, everything, you know.

SIGRIST: I see. Did, did your mother do the cooking?

RICCOBONO: My mother do the cooking, yes.

SIGRIST: Was she a good cook?

RICCOBONO: Good, very good cook.

SIGRIST: Yes.

RICCOBONO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did she, did she make something that you specifically liked very much?

RICCOBONO: Yeah. She, she'd -- she make honey from figs. When, in August -- when it was season -- she make honey and use for the Christmas, for the New Year. You know. Special, everything. (laughs)

SIGRIST: And that was your favorite?

RICCOBONO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did, did any? You were the oldest boy, you said, and you had a sister who was older than you.

RICCOBONO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you or your sister work to help bring in any extra money for the family?

RICCOBONO: No.

SIGRIST: No, just your father.

RICCOBONO: Just my father and I help him a little bit because it was, it was another place.

SIGRIST: Yes. Did he work for a larger company of other stone --?

RICCOBONO: No.

SIGRIST: He worked for himself.

RICCOBONO: For himself. Every Sunday morning, go work a couple hours. Ten o'clock, stop. "I gotta go to Mass." So he go the Mass. After the Mass, go next town where he do the business.

SIGRIST: I see.

RICCOBONO: And everybody know him and they order. "I gotta build a house here, I'm no s-I need about - ". You know. And he give the - the idea how many.

SIGRIST: I see.

RICCOBONO: "You work, you finish what you got now and then you come to me." Maybe one week -- two week after, he go see him and he start. And one by one like that.

SIGRIST: I see. So did he build a lot of the houses in your town?

RICCOBONO: [not understood] He was steady.

SIGRIST: I see.

RICCOBONO: Steady. Not over, but steady. Finish one, and start another one.

SIGRIST: I see. Let's talk a little bit about your own house that you lived in.

RICCOBONO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Was it one story or two stories?

RICCOBONO: No, one story.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how many rooms it had?

RICCOBONO: I have four room.

SIGRIST: Four rooms.

RICCOBONO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And did you have running water in the house?

RICCOBONO: No. We have a well outside -- well. We gotta pull with a rope.

SIGRIST: And did you have a bathroom in the house?

RICCOBONO: Bathroom, no.

SIGRIST: No, did -- four rooms for all those children, was it very crowded?

RICCOBONO: Was a little bit crowded, yeah. (laughs) You use [not understood] like a second floor. You know.

SIGRIST: Did a lot of your brothers and sisters all have to share a bed? For instance, did you have to sleep with some of your brothers?

RICCOBONO: We sleep twi-twi-- on each bed, you know.

SIGRIST: I see.

RICCOBONO: Me and my brother Dominic. And the other one -- all the boys separate, yeah.

SIGRIST: How did, how was the house heated? Was there a fireplace? Was there a stove?

RICCOBONO: Oh, that time they -- we have a -- on the middle the one room we have the brazier, with the coal.

SIGRIST: I see.

RICCOBONO: It make warm.

SIGRIST: I see.

RICCOBONO: You see every children near the fire.

SIGRIST: And so that heated --

RICCOBONO: Yeah, but over there it was no too cold like here.

SIGRIST: Right, right. Did you have a garden out back? Did you grow vegetables?

RICCOBONO: In the back, we got a little giardino [garden], we have lemon trees, all tree.

SIGRIST: Really?

RICCOBONO: Yeah, not too many far but about a hundred-fifty feet long.

SIGRIST: Who took care of that?

RICCOBONO: My father.

SIGRIST: He did all of that. He liked to do that sort of thing.

RICCOBONO: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: I see. And did, for instance the lemons, those were the things your mother used to cook with then, yes?

RICCOBONO: Yeah. Got the lemon tree, apricots tree, you know -- fig tree. And across the street -- where they work -- have a little, you know, piece of ground. And they got a lot of figs there.

SIGRIST: Did you keep any animals at all? Did you have a horse?

RICCOBONO: Animal we have. First thing we got two dogs all the time. Because when we sleep -- where we live -- live a little bit out of town like - like in a farm, like.

SIGRIST: Yes.

RICCOBONO: And we were -- was three - three house there. And my father house, his cousin across the street and his sister across the street. Two houses over there and one here.

SIGRIST: I see. Were there lots of family in the area? Did both your parents have a lot of family in that town?

RICCOBONO: Oh yeah. But in town, no.

SIGRIST: But this is outside.

RICCOBONO: This outside, yeah.

SIGRIST: I see. Did you go to school in Italy?

RICCOBONO: I go to school. First I gotta help a little bit him. And then there - there was a train, eight o'clock train. Time to go to school.

SIGRIST: I see.

RICCOBONO: Go to school. And -and I go to school in daytime, you know. I remember when the teacher says this week we gon - we -- gonna have some man from Palermo. He gonna - he gonna show you. We got a -- what you say? I say the campagnola [country] singer. Gotta bring two cents each and -- and then we hear some. So the time come when the man came.

SIGRIST: Yes.

RICCOBONO: Already we give two cents each. And they give a little -- like a little radio with the two holes or something. One you put here, one there. And you hear - and you hear the - the - the farmer sing.

SIGRIST: Really, like an old recording machine or something.

RICCOBONO: Yeah, that time.

SIGRIST: Really.

RICCOBONO: Yeah. That time, the first time. Two cent we pay each. And you hear the campagnola, like one of the farmers sing a song. And one by one put in the ear and everybody hear that.

SIGRIST: Were you surprised when you heard?

RICCOBONO: Oh, sure. (laughs)

SIGRIST: That was very new, right?

RICCOBONO: (laughs) That was new.

SIGRIST: Wow. Did your brothers and sisters go to the same school you went to?

RICCOBONO: The same - same school.

SIGRIST: There was only one school in town.

RICCOBONO: Yeah. There was a school for the girls and school for the boys.

SIGRIST: Oh.

RICCOBONO: Over here the boys and the girls together but over there they was separate.

SIGRIST: They were separate.

RICCOBONO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did your parents read and write Italian?

RICCOBONO My father.

SIGRIST: Were they educated people?

RICCOBONO: My Father was -- my Mother, no.

SIGRIST: I see.

RICCOBO: My Mother -- she make a cross when --

SIGRIST: When she had to sign her name. I see. What was your mother's last name?

RICCOBONO: Loccicera [ph].

SIGRIST: When you were in school did you ever learn about America? Did they ever teach you anything about America?

RICCOBON Little bit. No much.

SIGRIST: But a little bit.

RICCOBONO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: I see. Well, who decided to come to America?

RICCOBONO: My father.

SIGRIST: And why did he want to come?

RICCOBONO: Because he think he had a big family and he wants to make (laughs) money to raise his family better.

SIGRIST: I see. And did he come over before you came or did you all come over together?

RICCOBONO: No, I come -- my father, my sister, and me.

SIGRIST: Came --

RICCOBONO: Together.

SIGRIST: I see. Do you remember your father -- did he ask you would you like to go to America or did he just kind of tell you you were going?

RICCOBONO: Well, he -- he tell me we goin' to America. I say, "Why?" I ask, "Why, Pa?" "Because I gotta big family and I don't wanna s-- I want to give 'em what they deserve." Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you want to come?

RICCOBONO: Well, at that time, what my father say.

SIGRIST: You just do.

RICCOBONO: Do. (laughs) He says, "Oh, we gonna stay over there three - three years and then we come back."

SIGRIST: And how did your mother feel about all of this?

RICCOBONO: Well, whatever my father say, she --

SIGRIST: She did.

RICCOBONO: She do.

SIGRIST: Do you remember packing? What did you take with you when you came?

RICCOBONO: Well, with --we take; make a baul [trunk], like a big box the carpenter make for us.

SIGRIST: Out of wood?

RICCOBONO: Out of wood, on the top that was like that. [he gestures] And your number, over here the key open.

SIGRIST: Yes.

RICCOBONO: And he cut the lock.

SIGRIST: Like a lock.

RICCOBONO: Yeah, lock. And was full all clothes for three.

SIGRIST: Did, oh let me see, did, your mother take any china or did you take any toys? Of course you were older but did your --

RICCOBONO: No, nothing.

SIGRIST: What port did you leave from? What port did you leave from?

RICCOBONO: Palermo.

SIGRIST: You left from Palermo.

RICCOBONO: Yes.

SIGRIST: How did you get from where you lived to Palermo?

RICCOBONO: That time that we -- my uncle had a little horse in the back. He bring to Palermo.

SIGRIST: You were very close to Palermo actually.

RICCOBONO Yes. Seven mil--seven mile.

SIGRIST: So you went by horse and wagon to Palermo. You, your sister and your father.

RICCOBONO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And that was it, right? Just the three of you?

RICCOBONO: My uncle bring me over there.

SIGRIST: Did, did anyone give you a good-bye party or a good-bye dinner or anything like that?

RICCOBONO: No. No.

SIGRIST: No, nothing like that.

RICCOBONO: No.

SIGRIST: Was your mother upset when your father left?

RICCOBONO: Well, she was cry little bit.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Did, do you remember the name of the boat that you.--?

RICCOBONO: Sure.

SIGRIST: What was it?

RICCOBONO: City of Turino.

SIGRIST: Sili--

RICCOBONO: Citta of- of Turino. City of Turino. Italian ship. Small.

SIGRIST: And it was an Italian ship?

RICCOBONO: Italian ship. Small.

SIGRIST: Yes

RICCOBONO: Small ship.

SIGRIST: It was a small ship.

RICCOBONO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What class did you travel? Were you in steerage or were you --?

RICCOBONO: Class. Only one class. There were -- we was about - I no-
- I don't say - about, the most is three hundred people there.

SIGRIST: I see. What did it look like down there? What were the accommodations like?

RICCOBONO: Look like a - was boat, an old boat with no seat, nothing, nothing.

SIGRIST: Were there beds, or -- ?

RICCOBONO: Was beds downstairs, one on top of another.

SIGRIST: Like a bunk bed, sort of.

RICCOBONO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And was it bright downstairs? You probably just had little portholes downstairs where you were. Was it dark down --?

RICCOBONO: Yeah. A little bit dark. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Were there other people from your town traveling with you?

RICCOBONO: Oh yeah. That time there was three, four. We were -- and - and the rest was from the next town, seventeen.

SIGRIST: So you knew some people then.

RICCOBONO: Oh yeah.

SIGRIST: I see.

RICCOBONO: Young people like me there was about six.

SIGRIST: I see. So you had someone you could talk to and be friendly with.

RICCOBONO: Yeah. He was -- my father make a garant [sic] to risk for some of those boys.

SIGRIST: I see.

RICCOBONO: Because he know the father. And garant the son -- they have -- somebody gotta take care of them.

SIGRIST: Let's talk a little bit about the boat ride. For instance, was it a smooth ride?

RICCOBONO: Yeah, smooth ride.

SIGRIST: It was a smooth ride.

RICCOBONO: Rough.

SIGRIST: Very rough?

RICCOBONO: Rough.

SIGRIST: Did you get sick?

RICCOBONO: One time. One time because that day was so rough that they don't give any thing to eat. They give hard bread.

SIGRIST: Hard bread. .

RICCOBONO: Yeah, with a little coffee. Only coffee without milk, you know. And I [not understood].

SIGRIST: Did a lot of people get sick, too?

RICCOBONO: Plenty. (laughs) I know when my bro-- happened to be my brother-law when he - in Amer-- . He stayed three days in sleep over there. He no want to come out. (laughs)

SIGRIST: How about your father? Did he get sick too or --

RICCOBONO: No, my father was --

SIGRIST: He was O.K.

RICCOBONO: Very good.

SIGRIST: Did they let you up on deck every so often? Were you allowed to go up on the deck of the boat?

RICCOBONO: Yeah. All - all the trip there was no chair, nothing. We go on front of -- on the deck, on top, where is the anchor.

SIGRIST: Yes.

RICCOBONO: We sit by the anchor.

SIGRIST: I see. So you'd be out on the, sun shining, fresh air.

RICCOBONO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: When it wasn't too rough.

RICCOBONO: I, when I had a little time I go on the front of the boat and look down the fish - fly fish.

SIGRIST: You could see the fish?

RICCOBONO: Yeah. (laughs) You know, the little fly fish.

SIGRIST: Did, do you remember what they fed you on other days on the boat? What sorts of foods did they give you on the boat? Other than the hard bread and coffee you just told us about?

RICCOBONO: Oh, they give us something like soup.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

RICCOBONO: Yeah. They take it with a big scoop and they - and they put it on.

SIGRIST: Did they give you a bowl to put that in or did you have to bring your own utensils?

RICCOBONO: No, they give us a little bag, you know, little bag when you give to the children, you go to school. And on the - on the top they got a string.

SIGRIST: I see.

RICCOBONO: And everything is tin. Plate is tin, plate. Tin, tin fork and tin everything.

SIGRIST: So you were supplied with everything you needed.

RICCOBONO: Yeah. And when the boat go up because it was rough, go up and you see all this bag (makes a vibrating sound) down. Then they go up, go the other way. (makes the vibrating sound)

SIGRIST: Oh my. (laughs) Did you ever get to meet any of the, for instance the staff on the boat? Did you ever get to talk to any of the, I don't really know what kind of staff you have on a boat, like, like the purser or the sailors or any of the people running the boat?

RICCOBONO: There was - was one down there. He was like a foreman. He open and close and he says, "Now is time to go out." You know, was like a little boss.

SIGRIST: I see. So he let you, he was the one who allowed you to go on deck?

RICCOBONO: Yes. I forget how they call the name but the man he take care there.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how long the trip took?

RICCOBONO: I tell you the truth, I started June the twenty-seven and when we come, when we come here there was a Sunday - a Sunday morning and they - they say, "No, you can't go -- gotta tomorrow morning, Monday."

SIGRIST: Right, because Ellis was closed.

RICCOBONO: Yeah, was closed. So Sunday morning, to me was not too long a trip. I no remember how many days we stay.

SIGRIST: But it was long.

RICCOBONO: But it was Sunday when we come here.

SIGRIST: I see. Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when you pulled into the harbor?

RICCOBONO: Sure. We come in this here, in this place.

SIGRIST: Yes. Do you, um, did, when you came into New York, when the boat came into New York, did they allow you all up on deck so that you can see New York and see the Statue of Liberty?

RICCOBONO: Yeah. We stay on the boat and we see the Statue of Liberty. Now we gotta - now we gotta go down, we gotta pass a visa there. You know. So, it come down and says, "Come tomorrow. Stay in the boat."

SIGRIST: I see. So you stayed overnight in the boat.

RICCOBONO: Overnight in the boat.

SIGRIST: And then what happened after that? What happened the next morning?

RICCOBONO: Next morning we come here.

SIGRIST: I see.

RICCOBONO: And they come down and I don't remember, but we come down and give the name and that's it.

SIGRIST: When you arrived here at Ellis Island, were there lots of people here? Was it very crowded?

RICCOBONO: No very crowded in that time, no.

SIGRIST: So did you have to wait in line or, did you do a lot of waiting while you were here?

RICCOBONO: No, no. That was fast because we no come here on the morning, you know. And it was all right.

SIGRIST: I see. Do you remember, because you and your father and your sister were here, do you remember being inspected at all? Did they check you, did they give you a medical exam or did they do anything like that?

RICCOBONO: No, no medical exam, no.

SIGRIST: So did you, you simply had to show them your papers
that you --

RICCOBONO: Yeah. Passport, yeah.

SIGRIST: I see. Was there someone waiting for you?

RICCOBONO: My uncle and my aunt -- my father's sister and her husband.

SIGRIST: And where did they live?

RICCOBONO: On 13th Street, East 13th Street.

SIGRIST: I see. What did, what were their names?

RICCOBONO: The name -- Gaetana, that's my - my - my aunt. Gaetana.

SIGRIST: That was her last name?

RICCOBONO: Riccobono.

SIGRIST: I see.

RICCOBONO: And the husband was Giarnone, Francesco Giarnone.

SIGRIST: And what did he do for a living in New York?

RICCOBONO: He was work, ah, where he's a pick and shovel.

SIGRIST: I see. Did labor.

RICCOBONO: Labor, yeah.

SIGRIST: And they came and they met you here at Ellis Island.

RICCOBONO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So you went through Ellis island very quickly then.

RICCOBONO: Sure.

SIGRIST: So everything was in order?

RICCOBONO: Everything was in --

SIGRIST: And you met your aunt? And, and did they take you to
their apartment?

RICCOBONO: Yeah. He had a - lot of rooms

SIGRIST: I see - a big apartment.

RICCOBONO: And was 13th Street, and then he says, "You see there -- that building, they gonna finish in another week or so."

SIGRIST: Yes.

RICCOBONO: There was one five story building. So she, my aunt, got eh, she went and rent. She says we got [not understood]. On the top floor was ours.

SIGRIST: I see.

RICCOBONO: All right, we got five room over there cross the street. And then we move over there.

SIGRIST: Now let's talk about your mother, of course, is still in Italy with your other brothers and sisters.

RICCOBONO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Was your father writing to her and sending her money?

RICCOBONO: Yeah, yeah. Send money. My sister write back.

SIGRIST: Back and forth.

RICCOBONO: [not understood]

SIGRIST: Did he get work as a stone cutter in America?

RICCOBONO: No, no, over here, no, no, no stone like th--. Over there they make like -- those block make here. You know. That time there was stone, over here block.

SIGRIST: I see.

RICCOBONO: And it was fifty-five long, fifty-five centimeters, thirty-two wide. You know, but it was solid. Over here, no. The block gotta holes, see. But, an idea like that.

SIGRIST: I see, but he was still working sort of the same.

RICCOBONO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Sort of in the same business. Were you happy to be in America after that long boat trip?

RICCOBONO: After that long trip, you know, little by little then, I think this is my country. (laughs)

SIGRIST: Yeah, yeah.

RICCOBONO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Just a second, we're going to put --

END OF SIDE A

BEGINNING OF SIDE B

SIGRIST: O.K. Let's talk about your first impressions of New York. Now obviously you had come from a small town in Italy. What was it like to see this huge city?

RICCOBONO: Huge city and you see all kind of people.

SIGRIST: Yes.

RICCOBONO: All kind of face. The people - the -- there I didn't - I didn't see colored people. Over here I see the first colored people.

SIGRIST: And what did you think when you --

RICCOBONO: (laughs) Well I think -- I don't know what to think.

SIGRIST: (laughs) Were you frightened? Were you --?

RICCOBONO: No, no. I no afraid but something new for me.

SIGRIST: Yes. Well, and American food too must have been very different than what you were used to.

RICCOBONO: American food, it was -- my father-in-law was here. He had a little store on 13th Street.

SIGRIST: I'm sorry, who had the store?

RICCOBONO: My father-law.

SIGRIST: This is later.

RICCOBONO: Late. And he had a store, 13th Street, we buy stuff over there.

SIGRIST: And, did your, when did your, did your mother ever come?

RICCOBONO: Yeah. My mother come three years later.

SIGRIST: 1909?

RICCOBONO: 1909.

SIGRIST: And did she bring the rest of the family with her?

RICCOBONO: Bring all the children.

SIGRIST: So when you came to America your father got work.

RICCOBONO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you get a job, too?

RICCOBONO: I get a job, very hard to get a job for me. (laughs), especially when reach to 1908 when they make the president. No job, no. I -- I - I go to Pennsylvania for three months, over there.

SIGRIST: To do what?

RICCOBONO: Work.

SIGRIST: To just work?

RICCOBONO: Work, yeah.

SIGRIST: And was that the money that you were making, was some of that money that was sent to your mother, too?

RICCOBONO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Because it must have been very expensive to send, to buy passage for all those people to come over.

RICCOBONO: Well, it was work. You know, my sister got a job in the factory, four dollars fifty a week.

SIGRIST: What was she doing in the factory? Do you remember?

RICCOBONO: She was work in the spin room, where they make the - the wool.

SIGRIST: The thread or yarn?

RICCOBONO: Yeah. Then they take it and put in a box and make another one.

SIGRIST: I see.

RICCOBONO: It's for wool -- wool factory, wool.

SIGRIST: And this was in New York.

RICCOBONO: No, was over here in Clifton.

SIGRIST: Oh, in New Jersey.

RICCOBONO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: I see. And, so anyway, let's talk about your mother coming over. She came in 1909.

RICCOBONO: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: And, and did all, all the rest of the family come over with her? Did anyone stay in Italy?

RICCOBONO: No, all the rest come.

SIGRIST: And, did, she must have come through Ellis Island then when she came. Did, did you go to meet her when she came or did your father come to meet her?

RICCOBONO: My father come here because, you know, he can't come everybody. My father come and then he take it to Clifton.

SIGRIST: I see.

RICCOBONO: We --

SIGRIST: So you had moved to Clifton by then?

RICCOBONO: Yeah. We - we rented a house. When my mother come, everybody live there.

SIGRIST: I see. So you rented a house and everybody moved into the house.

RICCOBONO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Describe the house to me. Was it a big house?

RICCOBONO: Big, yeah, big house. Was five, five rooms. And we - we - - move in that house.

SIGRIST: I see. Now was your sister still living at home, too? Was she living with you? Your older sister.

RICCOBONO: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: And you were still living --

RICCOBONO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: There, too. I see. How did you learn English?

RICCOBONO: I didn't learn much English because, uh, I got a, I got a job, (laughs) you know what I mean. So I got a, I got a job in -- a Bota--, that was --

SIGRIST: In a, in a --

RICCOBONO Bota--.

SIGRIST: A bottle?

RICCOBONO: Botany. Mills

SIGRIST: Oh, oh, O.K.

RICCOBONO: And there was a very big - big factory, there -- about five thousand people. And big, they make stuff, menswear.

SIGRIST: Clothing?

RICCOBONO Clothing. And lady, stuff for the ladies. And it was a big place. So I went over there for job. There was about three hundred people. And then he come, "You speak English?" "No." "You speak English?" "No." They come to me. "You speak English?", "No." "Come in." Take three people, that's all. We go down. They bring me in [not understood]. They have [not understood] and he give me job over there. The other two I don't where they go. Because there are too many.

SIGRIST: I see.

RICCOBONO: And I work there about four - four years. Then I no like. I -- the job was too easy for me. I want to work more.

SIGRIST: A challenge.

RICCOBONO: (laughs) So one day I say, "I gonna - I go-- go out, I go work for myself." I went in the [not understood] - in the machine shop. There was the foreman from there - for the --. "What you want, Riccobono?" I thought, 'Oh yeah, OK, what you - what you want?" I say, "I want to go in business." "Oh yeah. All right," he says, "Here." Give me piece of paper. "Any time - anytime in case the business don't go, you come here, you got a job." I keep. And I was save. After a while I go open a store. And at night, you pass, look, all right -- and you go away... Then the store what I had was kind of small. On night I look across the street. There was a big store. I go. I went over there, I see the sign, the owner, I write down and I went about seven, eight o'clock in the night.

There was porch, I'm gonna talk first. I ringin' bell. Who comes, my boss. He say (laughs), "What you, Joe Riccobono, how are you?" I say, "I come and see." "Come in, come in." All right, come in. In the front room, he got like a little office. "Sit down, sit down." "All right." "Now, why you come?" I say, "The house. I want, I want to rent it" "I sell it to you." I say, "No, I got no money to buy." "All right, I rent it." I rented all the house, because on the top have four and four room in the back. In the store were two room in the back, a big one. I - I rent all the house. All right. Saturday I come and make a list.

Saturday afternoon he come. "We go to the lawyer. We make a lease. You got to pay the water," he say, "and you gotta give me three hundred dollars a month." All right. And I move in the store, and my mother on the top with the children and it work like that. He says, "I make you lease for three years." "All right, you make a lease three years." Don't pass three years, he got a heart attack and he passed away. The son-in-law, he was a engineer and he know me from there.

He came. He says, "You know my father-in-law pass away two weeks ago. Now the children, they want to sell the house. You got a lease." I say, "I -- the lease, I got it in the bank." "You go get it. Tomorrow I come." I bring the lease. He look at it. I say, "How much is it?" "Twelve thousand dollar." "All right, twelve thousand, I take it." But in the same time, before he buy -- I had a store, sell - sell fish. That lady had a store over there. Every Friday morning she's come six o'clock. She wants, she buy carp.

SIGRIST: Buy carp?

RICCOBONO: Carp.

SIGRIST: The fish?

RICCOBONO: The fish. And three, four time then says, "Why don't you buy my place? I sell it." I say and I says, "I can't. I gotta -- first I got to get married and then I --" and she tell me, "I give it cheap." "You give for nothing, I got no money." "I give for six thousand dollars." But then I buy for twelve thousand.

SIGRIST: So you had a house.

RICCOBONO: I had a house.

SIGRIST: You had a house.

RICCOBONO: Yeah. And little by little, I put everything I want over there. Started with the fish, fruit and vegetable. Then started to get, I buy a big truck.

SIGRIST: So you had your whole business.

RICCOBONO: Yes. That's why I don't like - that's why I didn't like it stay over there.

SIGRIST: Were your parents happy that they came? Did your father feel he had made the right decision to come?

RICCOBONO: Sure.

SIGRIST: He was happy.

RICCOBONO: He was happy, yeah.

SIGRIST: And your mother, was she happy? She liked it eventually.

RICCOBONO: Sure she liked it, yeah.

SIGRIST: Where you all lived in Clifton, was there a large Italian population?

RICCOBONO: Italian, pretty good.

RICCOBONO: Yeah. And I started to sell Christmas tree this time of the year.

SIGRIST: But did you have a Christmas tree yourself? Being Italian, did you have a Christmas tree?

RICCOBONO: Yeah. But over here, I sell.

SIGRIST: Yes, but you didn't have one in your house.

RICCOBONO: No, no. I sell vegetables, plants, Happy Easter all the time for about a month--the buns --and then watermelon and I was busy all time.

SIGRIST: Yes, you were a hard worker.

RICCOBONO: Hard worker.

SIGRIST: As your father had been a hard worker.

RICCOBONO: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, I think this is a good place for us to stop. I want to thank you very much --

RICCOBONO: You're welcome, appreciate--.

SIGRIST: For coming here to Ellis island and sharing with us your memories. So anyway, this is Paul Sigrist signing off for the National Park Service.

EI-18/RICCOBONO