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DENA CIARAMICOLI BURONI

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ITALY 1920

AGE 8

PORT: NAPLES

RESIDENCE: ITALY: MONDAVIA, PROVINCE PESARO

US RESIDENCE: FRANKLIN, MA

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today with Dena Ciaramicoli Buroni, who came from Italy when she was eight years old in 1920. Okay. I'm very happy to be here today, and I want to start by asking your birth date.

BURONI: 5/26/12.

LEVINE: And where were you born?

BURONI: I was born in Mondavio, Provincio de Pesaro, Italy.

LEVINE: Is that the region?

BURONI: The region is like Hopedale, Boston. See, Boston is our capital, right, of Massachusetts? Pesaro was the same thing.

LEVINE: Pesaro. How do you spell that?

BURONI: P-E-S-A-R-O. Very easy.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. Yeah. All right. So did you live in Mondavio until you left for the United States?

BURONI: No. We moved when I was a little older, to this little town called St. George, my mother and I. We had an apartment. And we, I went to school further down the street about, oh, maybe five or six houses down. Because I, and I wore, going to school I wore wooden shoes, and I'd go click, click, clack down the street. I'll always remember that.

LEVINE: Did other children wear wooden shoes?

BURONI: Not everyone, not everyone, no. But a few of my friends did. It was sort of like a, how would I say it, a symbol, you know.

LEVINE: A fad?

BURONI: A fad, like, right.

LEVINE: And so were you like about five years old when you moved?

BURONI: I would say I was even younger, about four. Right.

LEVINE: Well, do you remember anything about Mondavio?

BURONI: Mondavio? Uh, the thing I remember most, see, there's so many things to tell you, that I had a tumor under my chin here and I was operated on in the hospital in Mondavio. I was four years old, I remember. And, see, you can see, they operated right here. I still have it here. And I remember in my mind the lights in the operating room, you know, and then before I went out I could hear my mother screaming outside, "They're going to kill my daughter, they're going to kill my daughter." And then I was out, and then the operation. You know, then I was fine. Right.

LEVINE: Do you remember the house you lived in?

BURONI: Uh, yes.

LEVINE: Can you describe it?

BURONI: Yeah. It was an apartment house. We lived upstairs. Two families lived upstairs. And my mother and I lived together. We had a fireplace, and the bed was in this one room we had, actually. And I would go out and go to school, then I would go out in the summertime and pick grape, you know.

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In fact, I used to steal them from the farmers. (she coughs) One day I left the scissors there, they knew who it was. It was me. (she laughs) And they get my mother. And, oh, it was, I don't know, I have so many little, little memories.

LEVINE: Oh, they're wonderful. So whatever you remember, please tell me.

BURONI: (she coughs) I had, also, as a child, I must have been five or six then, I had earaches. And my mother would send me to, see, they're superstitious, you know, over there. She would send me to this woman that was nursing a child, and she'd put milk in my ear. And I'd be walking all alone, because Italy has a lot of the hills and mountains, you know, and I could see all these shadows, and I was scared to death. All alone, she would send me.

LEVINE: Was this supposed to be good luck to have the . . .

BURONI: No, it was supposed to heal my earache.

LEVINE: Oh, you had an earache.

BURONI: Yes, an earache. That's right. The milk from the mother's, she was nursing, supposedly was supposed to heal my ear, my earache.

LEVINE: Did it?

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BURONI: I guess so. Yeah, I guess. Then I remember my mother had two sheep, you know. And she'd send me out to take care of them. And they were so stubborn. And they would just halt right there, and I couldn't move them, and I'd be crying my head off, you know. These are all little things that come to my mind as a child. Unbelievable.

LEVINE: Now, what did you have the sheep for?

BURONI: Just as, I think after they grew up they killed them to eat.

LEVINE: For food.

BURONI: For food. Right. For meat, right. What else do I remember? I remember one day my father wrote a letter to my mother and he wanted us to come over here. And my mother was not for it. She didn't want to come, you know. She was thirty-three years old, you know, and she was settled in Italy, you know. It's not, it's an age where you don't want to leave your home. You know, your friends, your relatives, you know, the home town. And she said, "If I had two children . . ." You see, my brother had already died just before. I was a year-and-a-half old when he died. She said, "If I had two children, I would never go to America." So she, when my mother received that letter, I started jumping up and down. "We've got to go, Ma. We've got to go to America." Because America in those days was, you know, something like astronauts going up to the moon now, you know. It

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was unbelievable. Really, people, now, too. I went to Italy and you come from America and they look at you like, you know, you're something.

LEVINE: Well, what had you heard about America before you actually came?

BURONI: I heard about America that people would say, I didn't know, but this is what I would hear people talking, that money came just like that. You could just pick it right from the trees. (she laughs) Honest to goodness, it's unbelievable, right? And the houses, oh, wait a minute. They moved houses. You know, they do, right? Because over there they're all cement and you don't move homes, you know. What else? What can I tell you? Oh, when we received this letter, finally my mother decided that we should go. So two relatives of ours were with us, you know. Two young fellows. My cousins, two cousins, fellows. They were about nineteen years old, I think. So they came with us, and as I mentioned before, we got on the bus. The bus, this was about midnight, you know. And I was half asleep, and we got on the bus, and my stomach was upset all of a sudden. And I, what would you say, what would you call this, I threw up. I didn't know what to do with it. I didn't have any handbag, so I kept it in my hands. Oh, God, I'll never forget that.

LEVINE: You were on the bus?

BURONI: On the bus, yes. I was never on a bus, you see. It upset me. So we

travelled to Naples on, no. First we took the train to Naples. Wait a minute. I don't know where, the bus stopped somewhere to get the train. Don't ask me where, I don't know. But we took a train. And we landed in Naples with the train. My mother had her baggage. This, I'll never forget this. My mother put one, she made one big bundle with a sack, like, you know, and she sold it. And she put all my grandmother's jewelry in it. And she put it over the bus, over the compartment, you know, where you keep your luggage.

LEVINE: Overhead.

BURONI: Overhead. Well, we were riding in Naples, and all of a sudden it's time to get up and go, and this young fellow, I can see him now. He took my mother's bundle and went off with it, and my mother's jewelry with it. I can still see it, honest. This young fellow. I said, "Ma, Ma, Ma!" And he was gone in a flash. And then we got on this boat. The name of the boat was "Pesaro", the same as the capital of where I was born. Can you imagine that? We got on this boat and it was wicked. When we get to Naples all, I don't know if I should say this, but the people in Naples are dirty. They got on the boat, and they did all their duty on the floor. Putrid, the stench was unbelievable. And the marines, you know, the fellows that work on the ship, they took a hose and washed everything out. Oh, we were down in the underneath. What do you call it?

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LEVINE: The steerage.

BURONI: The steerage, yes. All we had was a porthole, you know, to look out. Oh, my God. Do you know what it cost to come over then?

LEVINE: How much?

BURONI: Fifty dollars. Fifty dollars. On the boat, I do not remember too much. I remember, the main thing I remember is my mother was seasick all the way through until we got to Ellis Island. She stayed in bed . . .

LEVINE: How long?

BURONI: How long? We left Naples the ninth of December. We didn't arrive until the ninth of January on the next year. One month. I think it must have been one of Christopher Columbus' boats. (she laughs) Well, on the boat, I remember a few things on the boat. I remember them feeding us with the tin plates. It was like a soup, very salty, with a little pastina in it. That's about all I remember. And I would feed my mother, because she could not get up. She was helpless.

LEVINE: Was there a dining room?

BURONI: No, no dining room. Not in steerage. Dining rooms were on the second class and first class.

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LEVINE: So what did they, how . . .

BURONI: They gave it to us where, right there, you know. Wherever they were, you know. Right on the cots, or whatever. As we, well, as the boat, we were coming over, I remember sneaking here and there, because I could sneak, you know, when you're a child you sneak up the stairs, you know, looking here, looking there. And I saw the first class and the second class with the round tables and the tablecloths. You know, my God, my eyes opened, you know. (she laughs) Then one day, this I will never forget. One day I'm just leaning over the ship, you know, right in the water, over the bannister, the railing there. All of a sudden these four men, they come up from nowhere. I don't know where they came from, and they had this, like this rack with something on it they were carrying over their heads. You follow me? All of a sudden I looked out and there's a body went right in the ocean. So someone died. That's what they did with them when they died. Out you went, to the fish. Right. I'll never forget that. What an impression it made on me, really. And we arrived in, by the way, I had a rash behind my ear. When we arrived in New York, New York Harbor, we had to stay on the ship for one week while my rash behind my ear healed. They would not let us off. See, people over there, you must have read something about it, that people committed suicide, you know, instead of going back. Because if you were not in perfect health, forget it.

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LEVINE: So were you afraid that you were going to be sent back?

BURONI: Well, no, I didn't think of those things. I was too young. My mother did. See, right? And after I healed, my ear healed from the rash, we were in the dining area there, and we waited. And the questions they asked. And all those men. They were mean.

LEVINE: This is at Ellis Island?

BURONI: Yes, right on Ellis Island, yes, when we landed there. After my rash healed up, they let us in, see.

LEVINE: I see. And then, tell me about that, Ellis Island.

BURONI: Uh, it was very frightening because the men were not very nice. They were rude. They just pushed you along like you were a bunch of, you know, a bunch of cattle. That's how they treated you. And we went from one man to, they examined you all over, you know. You have to pass the test. And I guess we passed it because we, you know, we made it to the States. And from there we must have, see, I must have been on the Hudson. I remember I woke up. See, half the time I was sleeping. I was small, you know. And I remember I woke up once and all the lights, I said, "Oh, my God." This must have looked like heaven. It must have been the Hudson River. I think, in my mind. (she laughs)

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LEVINE: Do you remember anything about the examination in particular?

BURONI: Uh, no. I remember they examined my eyes, but I don't remember what they say in the pamphlet what they did with the hook. I don't remember that. I don't remember that, no. I think they did that earlier, in the 1800's, I think. I don't think they did that. Well, they didn't do it to me. I don't know.

LEVINE: Now, did you have to have steam showers and all that, too?

BURONI: Well, let me tell you, honey, when I came over here on Ellis Island my head was full of bugs. Awful. We landed, after we landed, well, we were on the ship, and then we went to, I guess we took a train. We took a train from New York to Franklin. Don't ask me, I can't remember these things too well. But I remember going through, it must have been going through New York, you know, in the woods. Like, I remember the woods. I guess the train goes, you know, right. And we landed in Franklin, and the first, well, there were two cousins of mine. Myself and my mother. We were right in front of the theater with the tags on. How adorable. (she laughs) And all of a sudden, I'll ever remember this, I see this man and a young fellow on a trolley. They had trolleys then, you know. And my father, after I found out it was my father, his eyes were looking at us, because he knew my mother, see. Because I didn't know this. My mother didn't see him. I did.

LEVINE: And you, and he had left when you were one year old?

BURONI: Yes, yes, yeah. And my mother was in bed with my brother. He was born. But he died over there. So my father, he was with a good looking young fellow. It was my cousin, but I didn't know at the time, you know. And he came over to us, and of course he kissed my mother and shook hands with the other two cousins. And then my mother says to me, "This is your father." "Oh," I said. "Where's he been all this time." (she laughs) You know? I didn't, I never missed him, never. No.

LEVINE: And what did you think when you first saw your father?

BURONI: I don't know what I thought. It didn't do anything to me one way or the other, really.

LEVINE: And what was it like getting used to him, after you didn't have a father?

BURONI: I don't know. It was sort of strange. And then my father. He did one thing that I didn't like. He went, well, the first night, when we landed there, we went to my uncle's house. And they had dinner and all this, and my uncle, my father had the, played the organ. Not the organ. The, um . . .

LEVINE: The harmonica?

BURONI: The harmonica. So he was playing music. And that first night, between

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my uncle and my father, I could count up to a hundred. The first night they taught me, you know. They didn't speak English too well either, you know. (she laughs) Oh, gosh. And let's see now, let me think where I am now. (she pauses)

LEVINE: About your father.

BURONI: My father, oh, then they found out, when they started, you know, undressing, and they looked into my hair, I was full. They had to go right to the drugstore and get something to just kill the bugs. I was loaded with them. It was really awful. And then I went to school to Milford in the next town over there. And they kept me in the first grade for about a month, and then they put me in the second grade.

LEVINE: Now, you had been in school at St. George, in Italy.

BURONI: Yes, yes, yeah. Right.

LEVINE: What was the difference in the two schools?

BURONI: Well, I tell you. Over there I was the favorite, the teacher's favorite. Over here I got stuck in the back because I was a guinea. That's right. They don't, no one liked me. Then we lived in Milford with my uncle for about seven or eight months. Then my father moved to Hopedale. This is where I've been all the rest of my life. And he worked at Draper

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Corporation as a molder. And I went to school in Hopedale. I don't want to be, what's the word I want to use? Wait a minute. I've got it, but I can't see it. (she pauses) Hopedale was the worst town to live in for immigrants because it was an English town. Hopedale over here, the factory, was all English people, and they did not like the Italian people in the town. I went to school there and you don't know it was hell over there. The kids just did not like you. They made fun of you. They called me names coming home from school. Until finally one day I beat one of the girls to no end, and she was my best friend after that. (she laughs) Right.

LEVINE: Now, were there a lot of other Italian families?

BURONI: There's quite a few in Hopedale, yes.

LEVINE: And were there other immigrants from other countries as well?

BURONI: Not that I remember. No, no. This was a very, very English town. Very. You know, they, well, in fact, Draper was from England. He's the one who opened the factory over here. It was a cotton mill. You're right. Now it's closed. Right.

LEVINE: Well, now, did this girl stay, you stayed friendly with this girl?

BURONI: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. (she laughs) Oh, Lord.

LEVINE: How about clothing? Did your family try to make you as American as possible as quickly as possible, or did they retain the Italian . . .

BURONI: No, they dressed me because my mother had a friend and she took me shopping, you know, in Milford, and they bought me, I looked like the rest, the rest of the children, after. Right. Because my mother was very clothes-conscious.

LEVINE: Oh, really.

BURONI: Yeah, she was, really.

LEVINE: In Italy as well?

BURONI: Uh-huh, uh-huh. In Italy I was the best-dressed girl because my father would send a few dollars and all my clothes were hand-made from a dressmaker. And my friends in Italy, when they found out I was coming to America, they didn't like me either because, you know, "You're going to America? You're better than we are." Coming to America, you know, it's status quo, you know? (she laughs)

LEVINE: Do you remember what you wore when you came to America?

BURONI: I had a dress, a pin-striped dress I had. It was pretty. It was hand-made. My mother had it made. Nothing but the best. The shoes were all hand-

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done, all hand-made in Italy, you know. Very nice shoes. I was well-dressed. I can't say I looked like a ragamuffin.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about the style that it was at that time?

BURONI: My mother had skirts over there all the time. She wore skirts and blouses. And after she came over here, she never wore a skirt. She hated them. I had a regular dress. I wore a regular dress. But my mother wore skirts and blouses.

LEVINE: Long skirts?

BURONI: Long skirts and blouses. And she hated them.

LEVINE: And then what did she wear when she came here?

BURONI: She bought dresses, one-piece dresses, yes. She was, my mother was a very good-looking woman. In fact, I had her picture done over from the passport. I have it right over here. I'll show it to you after. She was thirty-three years old. She was a beautiful woman. I look more like my father.

LEVINE: Were you, well, you must have been very close to you mother.

BURONI: I was. I was. If it wasn't for me my mother would have died on that boat because no one would have fed her. And then over here she spoke, she learned a few English words, but not too much, because she stuck with

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her friends, you see. They congregated together, the Italians, you know. And of course, she hated the country, you know. She says, "Look what they brought me over here." Because Italy does not have woods, you know. It's sparse, it's all countryside or cities. That's how Italy is. She said, "Look at this, what they brought me, in the woods." She cried. Oh, she hated it.

LEVINE: Did she ever come to like it?

BURONI: I guess towards the end she did. In between middle age, like that, after, in her forties. She liked it. Yeah, she did. But they missed Italy. So did my father.

LEVINE: Now, what did your father do?

BURONI: My father was a molder.

LEVINE: Now, that means make molds?

BURONI: Big molds, yes, on the floor. He worked like a Trojan.

LEVINE: What . . .

BURONI: Over here in Hopedale at the cotton mill.

LEVINE: What were the molds . . .

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BURONI: They made looms. That's what they made, looms.

LEVINE: Now, what did he do in Italy before he came?

BURONI: He was a farmer. He was a farmer.

LEVINE: So did your mother work at all?

BURONI: Never. She never worked a day. No. Just stayed home and, you know, took care. And then I had a sister. My sister was born over here. She was ten, eleven years younger than I was.

LEVINE: What was your mother's name and maiden name?

BURONI: My mother's name was Clementina Luzietti.

LEVINE: Could you spell Luzietti?

BURONI: L-U-Z-I-E-T-T-I.

LEVINE: And your father's name?

BURONI: Was Ciaramicoli.

LEVINE: I mean his first name.

BURONI: His name Eliseo. E-L-I-S-E-O. Eliseo.

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LEVINE: And how about your brother's name. My brother's name was Evo. My father loved that name. There was a rich person in the town, and he thought it was something, you know.

LEVINE: Was it E-V-O?

BURONI: E-V-O, right. Yeah. (she laughs)

LEVINE: And then what about your sister who was born here?

BURONI: My sister was named Mary, and at the time my sister was born my father's mother had died. Her name was Maria, so we called her Mary, see. Yeah. Mary died. My sister died. She died of cancer of the lungs fourteen years ago. I'm alone. I have no family. I have children, but no family here at all. That's why I keep going to Italy. They're all over there. Nobody came over. And they still won't come over, even the young people. They're afraid to fly. Can you imagine that, at this time and date, you know? Young people won't fly? I said, "Look at this." I tell them, I said, "My mother and I came on a cattle boat." And it was. You know, that boat was like, did you see Roots? Kunta Kinte, or whatever?

LEVINE: I didn't.

BURONI: Oh, you didn't? Well, this is how we came over on that boat. Everybody over one another. There was no space, nothing. And they stole, if you

could. They'd steal whatever you had. It's the same old story.

Everybody, it's like now. Everybody steals.

LEVINE: Is there anything else about life in Italy? Do you remember, first of all, were you religious?

BURONI: Yes. Oh, very. Catholic.

LEVINE: And how did you, what did you do of a religious nature? I mean, how did you observe?

BURONI: Over there? Well, you went to church, and they observed all the saints. They do now too, you know. It's not like here, you know. I just heard tonight that you can't pray anywhere over here outside of the church, right? Congress has passed a law. Yes, they just passed it. Nothing. No prayer-centered graduations, nothing.

LEVINE: Huh. Well, then what, how did you, on like a saint's day, what would you do in Italy?

BURONI: Well, they'd have processions, and it was very nice. I mean, this is how they entertained. Entertainment over there is they observe all the saints. And it's like that now, too, you know. And they have processions, and everybody goes to church, and the neighbors go in from house to house. Everyone is sociable, you know. It's a different living. Over there they

have, like, the center of the town, even though the town is very small, it's a piazza in the center of the town, and people gather there. And they play and they talk, you know, and they pass the time. It's, now, too, it's like that over there. It's not like here. Here, if you don't have a car, you're stranded, right? Not over there, because everything is the center, you see.

LEVINE: And then, let's see, what else. How about food? Do you remember any food when you were in Italy that you particularly liked?

BURONI: No, it's like over here. We had macaroni and we have soup and meat and all this. It's about the same. Although over there tastes better because it's natural, see. Even now, my relatives over there. You should be there, the food that my niece cooked, you wouldn't believe. It's the same as I cook, but it tastes different. Because there she runs to the garden for this, runs to the garden for that. You know, they have everything. Italy's a beautiful country. You should go if you ever have a chance. It's all coastline, mountains and hill. Little towns on top of a hill. Oh, they're just beautiful. I was there this, just a month ago. I was at my niece's house, outside of Rome. There's Saint Angelo, it's called, the town. It's up on the mountain. You should see it. And then they had, it was the feast of Saint Anthony, June 13th, and they had fireworks, and we could see them. I wanted to snap, but my camera was too small, too far away. Beautiful.

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LEVINE: Do you remember . . .

BURONI: I have such a, I'm so a European. I'm both. I can't leave this country. When I'm here, I think of over there. When I'm over there, I think of here. So what do you do?

LEVINE: Well, it would be good if you could be happy when you're here, and happy when you're there.

BURONI: Well, I'm trying to be. (she laughs) But then, you know, it takes a lot of money to keep going over there, you know. (she laughs) That's the problem.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you or your mother took with you?

BURONI: When we came over?

LEVINE: Any things that you, yeah.

BURONI: My mother took, I'll never forget this. My mother took a mattress made of wool, lamb's wool. And they still have them over there. They believe in it. (sound of clock playing music) That's my clock that I just bought in Italy. I'll show you. Every hour it plays a tune, Mozart and all this. Beautiful. Then it rings the hour. Speaking of going back to mattresses, I don't like them. But my mother, they are so set on those mattresses, they love

them. I think it's because they keep warm, you know, in the winter. Right. But they're lumpy. They're not comfortable. My back ached. I suffer from backaches. I didn't like them. I said, oh, she said, "Oh, this is a woollen mattress." You know, one day, I slept in more beds than George Washington did this time. She said, "This is wool." "Oh, really," I said. "Why? Don't you have one?" "No, I don't have one." They think everybody lives like they do, you know. (she laughs)

LEVINE: So what else did your mother take besides the, uh . . .

BURONI: No, every, she'd take the mattress, you know what they do with the mattress. You have to take it apart every year and pull that yarn so it won't be lumpy. Then you have to make the mattress over again. Finally she threw it away over here because she wanted me to help her. I used to go to the movies when I was young instead. I said, "Ma, bye." (she laughs) Let's see. What else did you ask me?

LEVINE: What else did she bring with her?

BURONI: Not, hardly anything else. All she brought was that jewelry, then, and some clothes. I don't know, oh, she brought towels and stuff like, linens. In fact, I still have her linens right here. Dishcloths, really, with her initial on it. Unbelievable.

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LEVINE: Now, your father. Why did he decide to come when he came?

BURONI: Because things were bad over there. There was nothing over there.
Nothing at all for him to do.

LEVINE: I see.

BURONI: And besides, his brother. Well, he had two brothers. They were all both
over here, his brothers.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

BURONI: Now everybody's dead. Everybody's dead except me. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Well, you look healthy.

BURONI: I don't intend to go yet. (she laughs) Do you know, I travel to Italy all
alone with three suitcases?

LEVINE: Good for you. Good for you.

BURONI: You know, I'm not a kid any more, you know. Right? It's a hassle. It's a
hassle to travel. Good thing I got nice relatives. They pick me up at the
airport. My grandson brings me to Boston, Logan. Another grandson
picks me up when I come home. Because my daughter has six children.

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And over there I have my cousins pick me up at the Leonardo da Vinci Airport. Then they bring me back. In fact, this time I had first class service. My cousin's brother works for Alitalia Airlines, and he took me right to the gate. It was fabulous, really.

LEVINE: Well, tell me what you brought, as a child. Did you take anything?

BURONI: Me? No, I don't remember. I really don't remember what I brought, no.

LEVINE: Well, how about, um, the send-off? Was there any . . .

BURONI: You mean, coming . . .

LEVINE: When you left Italy with your mother.

BURONI: Well, my mother's relatives all were, you know, all getting together.

LEVINE: Like your grandmother?

BURONI: Yes. No, wait a minute, no. My mother's mother was, my mother's mother died, my grandmother died when my mother was ten years old. No, so I didn't have a grandmother.

LEVINE: Did you have a grandfather?

BURONI: My father's mother was there. I remember her slightly, not too well. And my father's father. He was a mean son-of-a-gun.

LEVINE: Strict?

BURONI: Very, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember any of his ideas that you . . .

BURONI: Oh, he was, I don't know. He wasn't very good to his wife. One of those. I'd rather not talk about it.

LEVINE: Okay. Do you remember, like, did you have a send-off? Did they . . .

BURONI: You mean in Italy? Yeah, sort of, but I really don't remember too much. I really don't. I can't picture it in my mind, what happened. I know people came to the house, you know, before we left, to give their best wishes, but I really don't remember. Like a big party, you mean? No, no, no. They don't have big parties in Italy.

LEVINE: What about your friends? Did you have friends?

BURONI: I had a very close girlfriend, and I still see her, you know, when I go over. Right, yeah, yeah. The others are scattered. In fact, one girl that lived in the same house in Saint George with us, she came to America. I don't know where she is. She came over here, too. No.

LEVINE: Do you remember any games that you played when you were in Italy

before you came here?

BURONI: No. My mother made me do housework. I never played games. You know what I did for games? I learned how to make macaroni pasta, on her cedar chest, because, you know, it's low, see. I didn't play games, no.

LEVINE: Did you, were you, did you have, were you comfortable as far as financially . . .

BURONI: Yes, yes, yes. Because my father was here, and he'd send us some money. You know, we were comfortable. We didn't have much. We had one room, my mother and I. But she had her folks, and they'd come to see us. We'd go down to see them in Italy.

LEVINE: Where did they live?

BURONI: Not too far away.

LEVINE: Oh, in the same town.

BURONI: In the same town, right. I do remember one day I went to visit my grandfather. This would be my mother's father. See, her mother died, but her father was, lived to be a ripe old age. And over there they lived together, you know, on the farm. The in-laws, the sons get married, they all live together. Because at one time at my mother's house, there were

thirty people living in one house.

LEVINE: Really.

BURONI: Really. And I went back and took pictures of the house and I walked up the stairs where my mother walked. And it gives you a very strange feeling in your stomach, believe me.

LEVINE: Thirty people in how many rooms?

BURONI: In one house. Uh, well, they sort of gathered together, let's put it that way. But the house was big. Because my mother talked about that house when she was old, also. She said, "I'll never forget that house."

LEVINE: Do you remember that house?

BURONI: I don't remember that house, no. She told me where it was. So I, in fact, when I went back to Italy, no one knew where it was until my cousin found this old fellow. He found it. Well, it's a long time ago, and my mother would be over a hundred, you know, now. Uh-huh. See? But going back to when I visited my grandfather, I remember this distinctly. One of the sisters-in-law had children. And she came down, we used to play downstairs. See, the houses in Italy don't have a cellar underneath. The houses are built, the first floor is where the cows are. They keep the animals there, you know. Then upstairs would be your first floor, where

over here it would be your second floor.

LEVINE: Is that where you kept the sheep?

BURONI: No. This was my grandfather's house now. No. Oh, he had more than that. He had a farm, and he had everything. But this day I went down to visit my grandfather. And you had to go through winding roads and sort of country. There was no one around, you know. No houses. So I played with the children. You know, my relatives there. And finally one of the sisters-in-law came down with, I forgot if she had fruit. I think she had fruit, or cookies. I can't remember. But she gave, I guess she didn't like me. Because she didn't like my father, so she took it out on me. That's what I came to find out. So she gave all her children something, and she ignored me. She didn't give me anything. So I got so angry, and I left. I started walking home. I was only about four or five years old, you know. I started walking home, and it's quite a way. It must have been at least, I think, three or four miles. From when I went back now, you know, I judged it, you know. And all of a sudden, I guess my grandfather missed me, and my mother must have missed me. So anyway, my grandfather found me. But in the meantime while I'm walking alone, I told you, these deserted country roads, this old man saw me, and he said to me, he had a cane. I can still see him. He had a cane, and he said, "Why don't you come over?" He said, "I'd like to do something to your legs and make them

crooked." He was going to hurt me. So I ran in the field all alone, and then I guess my grandfather came. See, I can't vision everything, you know. But I remember that old man. He tried to hurt me. He was going to hurt me. See, there's bad people all the time, no matter what generation you're at. (she laughs) So finally, you know, I reached home. My mother was there. And of course I got the Dickens. You know why, I get very hurt. My feelings were hurt because she never gave me anything. She ignored me altogether. Who was I, you know? I was a person, like her children.

LEVINE: Can you remember any teachings or ideas or values that your mother tried to instill in you?

BURONI: Well, I was always taught not to steal, and to be good, to be smart. I was smart in school. I was an honor student over there. And finally I worked myself up over here, too. Because, see, my father did not believe in school, you know. He made me, I couldn't go to high school. I just went to the grades, grammar school. And I was so . . .

LEVINE: Was your father strict?

BURONI: Very strict, yeah. And he wanted, in his mind, he wanted me to go to work, because when he registered me up at Town Hall, he put that I was a year older than I was. So I must have been about, over here. Now, this is

over here. I must have been about fourteen years old, and my father wanted me to go to work. See, I don't have good memories of my father. Evidently, I think from growing up without him. And he didn't know me, he didn't feel that I was, he wasn't close to me. We weren't close. We got close as he got old, when he was very old. And my sister, she was born here. That was another story. But I wanted to go to school. The principal of the school over here in Hopedale came up to the house and wanted to know why my father would not send me on to school. I was a very intelligent girl. I loved school. I loved history, I loved geography, English. And it just, abruptly, everything stopped. You know, it was, I've got a lot of hurts in my life, very.

LEVINE: So what other ways was your father strict with you?

BURONI: Oh, I couldn't go out. I couldn't, I had to, "Stay home and help your mother do housework." I couldn't go out with my friends at all. He wouldn't let me. That's, oh, yeah, that's, I don't like to think about too many things. Yes, it hurts.

LEVINE: Can you think of any sayings, you know, how maybe your mother or father had sayings that they would often use to express some ideas?

BURONI: Well, it was, the dialect Italian they used. It wasn't the real Italian, you know. Because the first time I went to Italy it was in '72, and I said to

myself, "Well, Dena, you'd better refine your Italian, because they're not speaking the same as you are." Because, you know, they spoke the farmer's dialect. You know, the little country dialect. You must have heard of these things.

LEVINE: Yeah. But were there any things that they would say like, you know, "A stitch in time," or . . .

BURONI: No. Oh, my mother was superstitious. Oh, God. She used to say to me, "Don't sing on Friday because you'll cry on Sunday." Those things, right? (she laughs) What else did she say? Oh, she would drive me nuts. And I didn't believe in those. I didn't, you know. I was like a radical kid. I never do, I don't believe, I'm not superstitious at all like that.

LEVINE: But she believed.

BURONI: She did. Oh, Lord. What else did she believe in? Oh, God. She believed in so many things that I can't really remember too much now.

LEVINE: If you think of something, you can mention it. Let's see. So when you stopped school then, you went to work. And where did you go to work?

BURONI: I went to work at the elastic shop in Milford. It was a big loom. It scared the Dickens out of me. And I worked there for two days. Then they wanted my birth certificate, because they knew I wasn't old enough. I

never went back. I didn't get my birth certificate and I never went back. And my father was angry, and too bad, I didn't go. I took care, I stayed home and took care of my sister, because she was born then. My mother always ailed. She was ailing. My mother ailed all her life. I think she had problems, too. You know, today they have a, you go to, you know, to, with therapy, you know. In those days you don't enter therapy. You help yourself, or too bad for you, right. But my sister was born, and she could have had the world at her fingertips. She could have gone to school. She could have gone to college. Instead she decided to get married. Me that I wanted, I couldn't get it.

LEVINE: So you stayed home and took care of your mother.

BURONI: And my sister, yeah.

LEVINE: And then when did you meet your husband?

BURONI: I met my husband when I was about fifteen years old.

LEVINE: And how did you meet him?

BURONI: He was a friend of my father's, but he was a wonderful man. Thank God for that, because I was so dumb. Fifteen years old, never went out. I got married at sixteen, you know.

LEVINE: And how old was he?

BURONI: He was twenty-six, going on twenty-seven. Yeah.

LEVINE: So how, what was the occasion that you happened to meet him?

BURONI: Well, he would come to the house with my father, and from then it progressed, you know.

LEVINE: Now, what did he do?

BURONI: He was a molder also.

LEVINE: And that's how he knew your father, uh-huh.

BURONI: And my husband died from working as a molder in Hopedale, because his lungs were filled with silicone. He died seven years ago, and he had the respirator for four years. It was very, very sad. In fact, I was with his people just now when I went over.

LEVINE: Well, what was it about him that attracted you to him?

BURONI: Well, he had, he had personality plus. I was sort of a moody kid, you know. He swept me off my feet, you know. He had a car, you know. In those days who had a car? A Chrysler, he had. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Was he like a "life of the party" type?

BURONI: Yes, he was. Yes. Always joked around and fooled. I wish one of my grandchildren were here. They loved their grandfather, yeah. It seems as though the children always love their grandfather more than their grandmother, somehow. I don't know. Maybe the grandmother is an old witch. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Maybe the grandmother tells them what they can't do.

BURONI: Yeah, probably. You know, she's got a big mouth, right. (she laughs)
But grandfather just took it in his stride, you know.

LEVINE: Well, now, how did, how many children did you have?

BURONI: Two.

LEVINE: And what are their names?

BURONI: My daughter's, Anita, is Anita. She's five years older than my son. My son's name is Richard. When we had the boy, my husband said, "That's it. No more kids." I was twenty-two years old when I had him. I didn't have no miscarriages or nothing. That's it.

LEVINE: And now you have grandchildren?

BURONI: Oh, I have, my daughter had six children. One daughter, and five boys.

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My son has two, one of each. So that's eight grandchildren. Now I have seventeen great-grandchildren. Lordy, lordy. Some came in through divorce, ta-da, ta-da, you know. (she laughs) But.

LEVINE: Wow, isn't that wonderful. Sounds great.

BURONI: Yeah, my oldest great-granddaughter is in college down here at the University of Rhode Island, is it? Yeah, Jennifer. I can't believe I got this far. That's what everybody says.

LEVINE: Can you remember when you first came to this country, things that you saw or heard or that happened that struck you as so different from where you were coming from?

BURONI: Well, I'll tell you. When I first came here, my father's friends, they would come to the house. And we still lived with my uncle in Milford. And they all would give me five cents, ten cents, you know. And so my mother put them in the bottom in the drawer, in one of the bureaus. Well, every morning when I went to school, I took this five cents, this ten cents, and bought candy. All of a sudden my mother said, "Where's the money?" "It's gone." (she laughs) And then this nice lady bought me a doll. To me a doll was something out of this world. I loved that doll like it was a child, you know. And it was . . .

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LEVINE: Who was the woman who bought you the doll?

BURONI: Oh, God, she's dead. She's . . .

LEVINE: Was she a neighbor?

BURONI: No, she was a friend of my parents, an older woman. Her name was Mrs. Petrini, I think.

LEVINE: Was that your first doll?

BURONI: My first doll. That's right.

LEVINE: So you didn't play with dolls.

BURONI: No, no. I told you. I had to make pasta. (she laughs) And doing housework. Yeah, right. And going out and helping my mother. She would go in the fields as a helping hand, and I would help her, you know. Like with the grape and picking vegetables and such. Things like that. See, you don't play with dolls over there, no.

LEVINE: Well, uh . . . (she pauses)

BURONI: My mind goes blank, too.

LEVINE: Is there anything else that you can think of that has to do with the fact of being born in Italy and then coming here? Oh, I know what I wanted to

ask you. The fact that your father came so much earlier, and then, do you think that created any kind of a problem between your mother and father. Because I've been talking, this is very common, that the father came earlier.

BURONI: Right, right, right.

LEVINE: And I've just been, I see that in some instances it caused a real problem because the wife got used to not being with the husband. And then sometimes when they were reunited it really didn't work any more.

BURONI: Right, right. I think you're right, because they fought a lot. Yep. They fought a lot. And it made me nervous, you know, because I, very nervous.

LEVINE: And do you think it had something to do with the fact that they were separated?

BURONI: It must have. Well, I wouldn't know. You know, now I think about it, but then, you know, when you're a child. It must have, you know. Like the same as, with me, I didn't care if my father was never there. You know, because I didn't have one for seven or eight years. You know, I grew up without a father, as a child. And those are the times that you need a father, right?

LEVINE: Well, how do you think it was perceived? I mean, was it better for your

father to have been in America sending money? Or would it have been better . . .

BURONI: Not really, because he didn't send that much. My father liked to drink. So we, you know, we had enough. You know, like I said, I was dressed very well, and things, I had everything. I couldn't complain, you know. But my father didn't save much money, believe me.

LEVINE: And how about your mother? She didn't really want to come, and then she wasn't very happy being here.

BURONI: At first she wasn't happy at all here. And evidently it must have been marital problems, because they fought a lot.

LEVINE: And then do you know why, I mean, if she turned out to be happy that she had come, do you know what it was that made her feel . . .

BURONI: I guess she got accustomed. This was it. She was not going to go back.

LEVINE: She never visited back.

BURONI: No, she never went back. She never even, she would have liked to, but never even thought about it. There wasn't any money, besides. I know my father would have liked to have gone back, too. Because he talked, I think this is what makes me so happy to go back to Italy. My father, that's

one thing about my father. He always talked about Italy. Like after supper, he would talk about all these streets and what he did over there. And, you know, he mentioned all the little towns where he went. And when I went back and I saw all this, you know, and it just, I don't know. The first time I went back to Italy was in '72, and he went to Rome. We went on a tour with a friend of mine, Alba Sabbatinelli. And she said to me, one day I met her, she said, "Do you want to go to Rome?" I said, "I'm ready." (she laughs) I went to get my passport and off we went. It was just nine days. That was the biggest tease of my life. Because what I saw over there. We stayed in Rome. Then I had a relative over there, and they took me to the country where, see, Rome's a city, you know. Then you have to go out in the country, on the Adriatic side. That's where we lived. Well, I had forgotten, not that I had forgotten, but I couldn't picture Italy like that. No one has, no one would know the feeling I had when I saw that country over there where I was born.

LEVINE: And your father used to talk about these things.

BURONI: All the time. He always talked about Italy all the time. His friends over there. His mother, you know. He was close to his mother, you know. Very close to his mother. Now, see, when he married my mother, my mother used to tell me these things. When he married my mother, the first night, they don't go on honeymoons, you know. They go in the same, in

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the house. And he said to her, in the bedroom, my mother always said this to me, and I'll always remember, he said he told her, "My mother comes before you." To his wife, to my mother. See? It's not like this today, right? (she leaves) You leave your . . .

LEVINE: Was his mother alive when you and your mother came here?

BURONI: Yes. Yes, because she died when, my sister was named after her because she died at the same time. Yeah, she was alive. I forgot if he was alive. I forgot about the father. No, I think he had died before. Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, did your father, well, you were too young to know if in his actions he ever put his mother ahead of your mother.

BURONI: Oh, he did. He told her. Oh, yes, he did. Yes. (she laughs) Yeah. Wives over there don't, you know, they just, well, you know. They're just wives.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BURONI: Not today. It's changed.

LEVINE: Well, and it's the fathers, the husbands, that are strict.

BURONI: Right.

LEVINE: And it's the mothers who are more or less compliant?

BURONI: Yeah. They're subservient. Is that the word you call it? You do what your husband tells you. I went to Sicily, when was it, in '85. In '85, no, I went to Italy with my sister in '74, and we took a tour and we went to Sicily. Sicily is a beautiful, beautiful, my God. The fruit, oh, we went up to Mount Aetna. They will filming Star Wars up on Mount Aetna. And we went to this little town up on the hill and we went to this church, and they were waiting for the bride to come. So I said, "Gee, I would love to see the bride and see how they do things when they marry." Well, she never, somehow it was about an hour, and we said, "Now, where's the bride? When is she coming?" So one of the natives said, "You know, today is her day. She can come whenever she wants. Tomorrow she's her husband's wife. She can't do what she wants." See? Especially in Sicily. They're like that today, you know, over there. That's another. They don't consider themselves Italian. They're just Sicilians. They're in an old, and the homes over there are not Italian looking. They're all Moroccan, like from Morocco. Because they're close to India.

LEVINE: Well, we have a few minutes left. Is there anything that you would want to say, sort of reflecting on your life and starting out in Italy, then coming here and settling down.

BURONI: I feel like I'm in the middle of the ocean. When I'm there I want to be

there. When I'm here I want to be here. I want to be in both places, and I can't do that. That's my, it's not a punishment, but I wouldn't stay, I wouldn't live, I thought about living over there when my husband died, you know. But I stayed, I went there right after he died, and I was with my relatives for about five weeks, and I visited hospitals. Don't ever get sick in Italy. They're not like over here.

LEVINE: So you wouldn't want to live there.

BURONI: No. For that one reason, no. Because we are spoiled over here in the hospital. We have nurses. My husband died at Framingham Union. He was treated like a, I mean, they did everything. Over there, if you don't, if you are hospitalized and you do not have a family to do for you, to come every day and wash you and take care of you, forget it. Now, too, yes.

LEVINE: But you feel like you're, you don't want to not visit there. You want to visit.

BURONI: Yes, I do, and the people are so nice, yeah. I like to.

LEVINE: Could you say anything about the difference between the two places as far as you are concerned?

BURONI: Well, scenery and all this is just different. The houses, they can't understand how, why our houses are built with wood. You see? There's a difference. Oh, yes. It's, and they eat, they have a different lifestyle.

They don't eat breakfast in the morning. They have dinner at noontime. All the family comes. Kids, everybody, married or not, they all come to dinner.

LEVINE: Would that have been true when you were growing up?

BURONI: Yes, yes. Yes. It's a very family-oriented country. It's not like over here. You know, the kids don't go to the television and eat their dinner. You stay at the table with the family.

LEVINE: Do you feel that you are more American than you are Italian, or . . .

BURONI: Yes, yes. No, more American, yes. Because I've been here since I was seven or eight, you know. I'm more American.

LEVINE: And are you happy that you came here?

BURONI: Yes, yes. In a way. And then I wonder, what would my life have been like if I had stayed over there. You know? Right? Does it make sense? I might have had a better life, or worse. Who knows? They live very well over there now, believe me. If you go over there now, they all have two and three cars, they have beautiful homes, and living expenses are very high over there. Children's clothes cost, for a little dress, about eighty dollars. Yes. In fact, I have a book, I was reading tonight that the mothers and fathers spend at least five hundred and fifty dollars for the child when

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it's born, for clothes.

LEVINE: Okay, well, we're just about finished with the tape. I want to thank you very much.

BURONI: You're welcome. Thank you for coming.

LEVINE: It's a very, very interesting story. Thank you. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and it is June 24, 1992, and I'm here in Hopedale.

BURONI: Right.

LEVINE: Hopedale, Massachusetts, with Dena Buroni.

BURONI: Right.

END OF INTERVIEW