

EI-182

FRANCES PIZZOTTI POLLETTA

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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ITALY, 1920

AGE 20

PORT: NAPLES

RESIDENCES: FERRANDINO, ITALY: WEBSTER, MA

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today with Frances Pizzotti Polletta, who came from Italy in 1920 when she was twenty years old. Today is June 24th, 1992 and I'm here in Mrs. Polletta's home in Webster, Massachusetts.

POLLETTA: Right.

LEVINE: I'm very happy to be here, and I want to first start out by asking you your birth date.

POLLETTA: My birthday is April 14th.

LEVINE: April 14th. And the year you were born.

POLLETTA: Nineteen.

LEVINE: 1900.

POLLETTA: That's right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. And the name of the town where you were born in Italy?

POLLETTA: Ferrandino.

LEVINE: Ferrandino, okay. And you lived in the same town, Ferrandino, until you were twenty.

POLLETTA: Yes.

LEVINE: Now, could you tell me about the town? What's that town like?

POLLETTA: Nothing special. It was a nice town.

LEVINE: Was it big?

POLLETTA: A very good size.

LEVINE: Yeah. And what did people do there?

POLLETTA: Oh, any kind of work.

LEVINE: Was it a farming place?

POLLETTA: Well, my sister, one of my sisters, she go to my mother and father's place to work. And I stay in Ferrandino, had two families that had no water in the house. So I fetch the water every day long, carry the pan.

LEVINE: Where did you get the water?

POLLETTA: They had to open fountain in the city, the town.

LEVINE: So did lots of people go to the fountain?

POLLETTA: Sure.

LEVINE: To get the water.

POLLETTA: To get the water, the water run all time.

LEVINE: And how did you carry it?

POLLETTA: By hand, the pan.

LEVINE: And how often would you go?

POLLETTA: Well, I go three times a day, each two family, and the rest I clean the house, my house. My mother go to work, and I take care of home. The next day I do the same thing again. And there was one lady, she was a widow, she had two grown-up daughters, but she was afraid to let them go to school all alone. And she hired me to go along. One was almost older than I was. But she no trust that, you know.

LEVINE: To go to school?

POLLETTA: No, to go, to take the girl to the school, just walk

together. She want to make sure that she went to school safe and everything goes fine.

LEVINE: So that was a job you had?

POLLETTA: They paid me for that. She was a widow. She was really nice, a good family.

LEVINE: Now, did you go to school?

POLLETTA: Yes.

LEVINE: And do you remember the school that you went to?

POLLETTA: This, no. There was, they used to call the Familial School for Girl, and boy, Musket for the boy.

LEVINE: They were separate?

POLLETTA: There was a name, that's all. I went until the sixth grade.

LEVINE: And was it a Catholic school?

POLLETTA: Yeah. No, it was a public school.

LEVINE: Public school. Uh-huh. What do you remember about school that you liked?

POLLETTA: Well, I liked it. There was no law at that time to

push to go to school where I come from. But I did it. My two sisters, they don't want to go to school, and nobody bothered. But I told my mother, I says, "I want to go to school," so she let me go.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. You're the only one of the children who went?

POLLETTA: Yeah, that's right.

LEVINE: Do you know why you wanted to go?

POLLETTA: Because I liked to be writing and read.

LEVINE: Now, in your family there was your mother, father.

POLLETTA: No, just my mother.

LEVINE: Just your mother.

POLLETTA: My father was here in the United States.

LEVINE: Your father came first.

POLLETTA: Yes.

LEVINE: And what was your mother's maiden name?

POLLETTA: Francesca.

LEVINE: Francesca was her first name?

POLLETTA: Yeah.

LEVINE: And her second name before she . . .

POLLETTA: Francesca Pase Pizzotti.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And how do you spell her maiden name? Do you know?

POLLETTA: My name?

LEVINE: No. Your mother's maiden name, before she was married.

POLLETTA: Pase.

LEVINE: P-A . . .

POLLETTA: S, give me the pen. (she writes) (she pauses)
(voices speak off mike)

LEVINE: After a little break. So you spell it P-A-C-E?

POLLETTA: P-A-S-E.

LEVINE: S-E, P-A-S-E. Okay. And Francesca.

POLLETTA: That's it. Francesca Pase Pizzotti.

LEVINE: Okay. And your father, what was his first name?

POLLETTA: Antonio Pizzotti.

LEVINE: And your brothers and sisters. What were their names?

POLLETTA: My sisters?

LEVINE: Brothers and sisters.

POLLETTA: I don't got no brother.

LEVINE: No brother.

POLLETTA: I had two sisters, three sisters. One in Italy, she's dead, and two that came over here after. I come one my older sister, the oldest one. She was twenty-six, I was twenty. And that make me understand, see, if I don't come, without her she could not come, because she didn't know how to write or read. So when I reach on a Battery there, everybody got in, they make me read for her and for me. That's it.

LEVINE: Okay. So what were your two sisters' names?

POLLETTA: Susan.

LEVINE: Susan.

POLLETTA: Yes, Sunta. That's the Italian way.

LEVINE: And how about the other one?

POLLETTA: Uh, Josephine. Josephine.

LEVINE: And do you remember the house you lived in?

POLLETTA: Over here? In Italy? Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: What was it like?

POLLETTA: Rotten.

LEVINE: What?

POLLETTA: Rotten.

LEVINE: Rotten? (they laugh) Was it big or small or . . .

POLLETTA: Oh, it was big enough, but old-fashioned.

LEVINE: Old-fashioned. Uh-huh. And how was it different from this house, say. What's the difference?

POLLETTA: Over here?

LEVINE: Yeah.

POLLETTA: Everything.

LEVINE: Like what?

POLLETTA: Everything around. The way you see it, that's the way I got it. I rented it for vacation there for a couple of week, but I died to come home.

LEVINE: Oh, really.

POLLETTA: I mean, how much I love, I like Rome, but no, I says oh, I not go back, back home.

LEVINE: Because it's a lot more primitive than your house here, right?

POLLETTA: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, you didn't have running water. Is that right? You had to go get the water.

POLLETTA: On my farm. Yes. But not in Rome.

LEVINE: Not Rome, no.

POLLETTA: Over there they had hot water in the house.

LEVINE: So you had to get water.

POLLETTA: Help with the labor, (?), used to call one lire.

LEVINE: And what did your mother do? Did your mother have to

work when your father was here?

POLLETTA: She worked like a man.

LEVINE: Yeah. What kind of work did she do?

POLLETTA: She would dig and plant and pack, everything, work on the garden.

LEVINE: And what kind of, was it a farm town?

POLLETTA: It was too close and not too far. I have to walk in the morning and night.

LEVINE: What kind of things did people grow in and around?

POLLETTA: Like over here. Everything they plant they pick it up. See, my brother, when I went to Italy, that's not my brother, my nephew, and he had a big farm. He had everything. Over here you have to buy everything.

LEVINE: Did you grow things to eat for your family there when you lived there? Did you . . .

POLLETTA: I never went. Far away to go.

LEVINE: Did you grow what you ate? Did you grow vegetables that you also ate?

POLLETTA: Yeah, they do that. Yeah, like over here, broccoli, beans and peas, corn. In fact, when we come back say goodbye to my sister that time, my natural sister. He had a big bed of corn grown, already clean. And he had wheat, oh, yeah, grain. He says, you see, the miller pick it up and take out the (?). Molido, they call over here. They grind to make the flour. They had a (?) flour and add white flour with the grain. They enjoyed it. I mean, I like to say all that, because I forget it. But still I wanted to come back over here because it was my family or whatever. I was dying to come back.

LEVINE: Well, did you remember your father?

POLLETTA: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: When did your father leave? How old were you?

POLLETTA: Oh, that's a big guess. I don't remember my father at all. I think I was maybe six, seven years old. I mean, I lost his age completely. I don't remember. But now we're going to go, I remember when I reach over here.

LEVINE: Well first tell me, before you left, before you left your town. How did it get decided that you would go?

POLLETTA: My father called the family.

LEVINE: He called?

POLLETTA: I mean, he requested to move over here.

LEVINE: He wrote to you to come.

POLLETTA: Yes. He sent enough money for four people. But the war broke and they shut up the port and everything else, and my mother remembered we used to go to Rome to refresh the passport, to stamp again, to wait. So the war was over and we go on, there was a leader there. He said you have to wait for five months before you travel because they were afraid that the bomb was underwater yet. They had to make sure. So when he called my mother says, "All right." But the money my mother had for the trip was gone, and it wasn't enough.

LEVINE: How long was it from the time you were supposed to leave until you did leave?

POLLETTA: To take the boat? Oh, maybe pretty good one hour and a half, or more than that. From my place to Naples, that's where we get out on the boat, in Naples, Italy. And we travelled fifteen days.

LEVINE: Do you remember leaving your town to go to Naples?

POLLETTA: Huh?

LEVINE: Do you remember when you left your town?

POLLETTA: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Did, was it a sad time because you were leaving?

POLLETTA: For me it was.

LEVINE: What did you, why didn't you want to go?

POLLETTA: Just because I was feeling like I didn't want to come, and I let my father know that. I write a letter to him. I says, "You're going to push me," I says, "you're going to be sorry." And I wrote that because I was mad.

LEVINE: You really came for your sister's sake. Is that why you came?

POLLETTA: That's right. For my sister's sake, that's God's truth.

LEVINE: So you didn't really want to come.

POLLETTA: Because if I don't come, she can't come. My mother was disappointed. Everybody else in the family home.

LEVINE: So you were the only one in the family who would read and write.

POLLETTA: That's right.

LEVINE: So you came with your mother?

POLLETTA: No. My mother come 1921.

LEVINE: And you came in 1920. And so it was just you and your sister?

POLLETTA: My younger sister came with my mother.

LEVINE: So you came with your older sister?

POLLETTA: The older sister.

LEVINE: And was there a big farewell when you and your sister left?

POLLETTA: Oh, yes. We had kind of a good night the night before.

LEVINE: What did you do?

POLLETTA: Well, I came through, I see a lady, just about like that. Nothing else (?). She came and she (adjusts her position), my arm. She came and she brought me a little package like this, two package. One Vincenzo and another one was Candido. (a telephone rings) Two sons she had, Maria.

LEVINE: Can somebody else get that? (discussion off mike)

POLLETTA: So she had two son over here, (?). And they says, you please, she (?). I hope to God they want you, (?) old lady. I hope to God (?) cemetery (?) marry my son, which I did. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Now, what did she give you? I didn't understand.

POLLETTA: She give me a package of cigarette, a pack of cigarette. One was Marcitonia, I remember the name. The other one was Virginia. I never forgot that.

LEVINE: And she gave you that to give to her son?

POLLETTA: Right. That's the gift that she sent to the son. She can't do anything any more, was an old lady, that way.

LEVINE: Did you know her son from before?

POLLETTA: Well, I used to like that, because if I want to say yes, was too far away. I never, but, you know one another, but not to be friendly. Come a (?), when I reach, my cousin, we went to the house. I says, "I got this my cousin Dominick." He says, "Dominick, you know this two party?" "Oh, yeah." He said, "I work down at Betts."

LEVINE: Down where?

POLLETTA: Betts, a shoe shop, Betts. I says, "Yeah." He says, "Who give you this?" I says, "Your mother." He says, "Well, we're going to arrange that we're going to go some night to the house." So they took me down to the house. She turned out to be my sister-in-law and my brother-in-law. And the other brother, the one I married, he was there, too. So it was, I'm shocked because my (?) was too strange for him, but we see it like that. And I says, "Oh, shake hands." I was so happy. I says, "Your mother sent this." I says, "And to Candido." He says, "That's me." I says, "I know which one is Vincenzo." I said, "That's for you." He shook hands. I says, "Thanks so much." He start to cry. He likes his mother very much. He was the younger one in the family. So that's it. So then we started to be friends. Today, tomorrow, next week. One wrote a little letter, and they ask to my father, later on, say you could let her to get married. So (?). I was working at Steven's.

LEVINE: What's Stephen's?

POLLETTA: Steven, tha's a big mill there.

VOICE OFF MIKE: It's the largest woolen in the world, a smoking mill.

POLLETTA: So I was working there.

LEVINE: You were working there. Well, what did your father say when . . .

POLLETTA: Well, my father had (?). We get out of the train, and there, on the station over here, and he motion to me. He look at his clock, watch, he says, "You wait. Eight o'clock." Never say that. The (?) says, "Your father going to come pick you up." So we went. Nobody was inside there, just the man in the window for ticket. So I heard a little noise outside, talking. And I get up, and I just say to them, my sister says, "Where are you going?" I say, "Shh." So I just opened the door a little bit, I see all the men that were working on a railroad truck, the one that carry the fork or the shovel, all working men. And my sister says, "Shut the door there." And I (?). She call out my name, "Kikina." It was a nickname. My father heard that, he was in that group. He say, "Gee, that's my daughters!" He knew we was going to come but he didn't know the day. Because of the boat, they're locked on the water. They all was scared. So when he come, and my sister recognize a little bit, because (?). But definitely (?). So we had a nice day in New York, to my cousin and the family.

LEVINE: So what was it like to be around your father after

you . . .

POLLETTA: Oh, I love my father very much. But just like separated, lost forever. The way he looked, the way he was. But when I see I think everything come back in a minute. Yeah.

LEVINE: And, well, let's back up a minute. When you were leaving you went to Naples.

POLLETTA: Yes.

LEVINE: Now, how did you get from your town to Naples.

POLLETTA: By train.

LEVINE: By train. And how long did it take you?

POLLETTA: It take a couple hours, more than that.

LEVINE: And then did you leave right away, or did you stay in Naples?

POLLETTA: No, we stayed, we spent a night in Naples.

LEVINE: And why did you spend a night there?

POLLETTA: Because the boat wasn't ready. So they give us a room. They go with money, to trip.

LEVINE: The steamship company. Did you stay in a place with a steamship?

POLLETTA: Yeah. And they paid for the room for us. So in the morning we get up, we have an alarm. Wait till the time come, somebody lead us, they wanted people with the baggage. That is the time they take it in on the boat.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you took with you or what your sister took? Do you remember anything that you packed to take to America?

POLLETTA: It were all strange people, some you know, some you don't know. It was always different.

LEVINE: Well, did you have a suitcase?

POLLETTA: Yes.

LEVINE: What was in it? Do you remember?

POLLETTA: Clothes.

LEVINE: That's it?

POLLETTA: That's it.

LEVINE: Your sister, too?

POLLETTA: That's right. She lost it, too.

LEVINE: Do you remember how, you lost it? (Mrs. Polletta laughs.) How did you lose it?

POLLETTA: We just missed.

LEVINE: When did you lose it?

POLLETTA: I think it was in New York. We got everything when we get out of the boat. But I fell. I even twisted my foot, I get off lame. There was those big ropes there, up high, and I was so fresh to go by them. I walk outside, and I fall. One man take me up. I says, right away I walk lame. My foot never did get over that.

LEVINE: And that was getting off that boat?

POLLETTA: Yeah. Maybe it was still on the boat. So half of the way to go because it was a lot of people. The boat was full. I don't know how many.

LEVINE: Were you down in the bottom of the boat?

POLLETTA: That's right. They used to call it third class.

LEVINE: It was a big dormitory.

POLLETTA: Yeah. He had a wall, he had a piece of everything

(?) on the night.

LEVINE: Was it bunk beds?

POLLETTA: Yeah.

LEVINE: And a lot of them in one big place?

POLLETTA: Oh, yeah. And it was a lot more.

LEVINE: And did, where did you eat when you were on the ship?

POLLETTA: We're going to go up and open air, and they put the table. It was six from my home town. We know one another. So they put six together. And my sister was sick. She had, she's sick the second she come in on the boat. She was sick all of the fifteen days. She never eat.

LEVINE: Was she seasick?

POLLETTA: She was like this. So they give you vaccination, and the vaccination went wrong. She had an arm big like that, all red. Every day she had to go to take care of that. And they told her if the arm don't get better by next week they're going to send you back. And she was real scared to death. She don't want to go back. I don't blame her. But I was the one a little stronger, yes, whatever. (?)

LEVINE: So do you remember when the boat came into New York Harbor?

POLLETTA: Sure, I remember that. We get out there, and they used to call Batteria. You have to walk a little ways, with a bag and a hat. And we reached there, then it was too far, really. So when we were inside there, my God, the people was back. And my sister, she was holding on to me, because I got, that put in line. So when I reach there the man lead me to go to read. It was like this, glass on the top and the writing was on the bottom. So I have to read everything what was there, what they mean.

LEVINE: You could read it?

POLLETTA: Yeah. So I says in Italian, I say to him. I says, "I come to my father." All those words. "My father call us to come over here to be with him, and later on my mother going to come with my sister." That was one for me, another one was for my sister, the same thing. I have to sign my name and I have to sign her name. They'll let you go, you know. Still you can't go to land. They lead to another room. So they took my sister, and she disappear. I was scared to death. I says, "Oh, my God, where is she now? They're going to send her back in Italy." I don't know what to think. Because I see the chalk that they

some letter on the back. They're going to stand, like a "C". So I don't know, to me. But later on I see the people we come together all disappeared to one place or another, because we don't come all on the same place. One they go Chicago, Philadelphia, whatever. We don't see no other company we get to eat. So, but finally I was just (?). I see when a man look at me, just look, but he no move. But when I see my sister, they open the door, she come back. I says, "Where you were?" She says, "In there." She says, "They check my eye, gave me maybe some physical check up." I says, "Are you all right?" She says, "Yeah." She didn't talk too much. She was scared. I was the one with the big mouth. I don't like it, but I have to do for her and for me. So anyway they told us to go sit in here (?), we went to sit. No more boat and no more our friend. So we sit and we was feeling angry. I see then that was a little store, now I say that. I know it was a store. I says, "It must sell food." So my sister said, "Where are you going?" It was from here maybe to the garage, my garage. And I see the stuff there. They had bananas. I never see banana before. I see the man walking by, he had a banana, he had a crackers, he had bread. I says, "Oh, I'm going to see what I want." So the man ask what I can do. I said, "That." I pointed to a banana. I say, "Yeah." I said, "That." He said, "Money." He put the three banana in the bag. I said, "A box of crackers." All

right, put in a bag. And I see the bread, the same thing. So I was going to see how much it cost, I was going to see, and I had in my hands like this. He says, I don't know if it was five dollars or whatever. I went like this, and I take off the money. (Mrs. Polletta disturbs her microphone as she demonstrates her gestures.) I take it out. So he give me the change, but it was Italian money, but he give me back American money. He give me three dollars back. I said, "Geez!" And I see the lady along there, and I tried to make my sister laugh. I says, "Look." "Ah, I don't want to see that." She was still afraid. She don't believe she was on her way out. So we went. At the same time we started to eat a bit, a piece of cheese. The conductor come. He went like this. He motioned pick it up the baggage, to follow him. So we followed him, not too far gone. We were still near the water, practically. And we get in. I thought it was hours. But when we get in, when we sit I can feel the water.

LEVINE: The ship moving?

POLLETTA: The ship move. I says, "Oh, my God." My sister, that's all she had on her mind. I said, "We're going back to Italy." Somebody laugh. They were Italian, we went a little out on deck. That's we see the Liberty statue. So I'm talking to my sister, I say, "Look, La Madonna." I thought it was the

Madonna. I don't know why, God bless. And we go back and we sit, and it come the dark. I think it was five o'clock. It was another conductor again, and make like this. It's five o'clock train. We go New London and we get, I couldn't get a job, but I had work. We reach (?), no longer (?). Just five minutes to five. So we get out of there, the conductor come again. Lead inside the station, and we sit. It was full of people. We didn't know nobody, and nobody know us. So we sat there, and all the people go by, back and forth.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: I said, "Geez, I see the man." I don't tell my sister that. I see the man go back and forth. What he want? I was kind of scared. But then the people started to slow down, he come. He says, "I can ask to work, please." I said, "I understand." Then he started talking Italian. He says, "I want that place there, Palazzo. He says, the motel, everything. He says, "I got a business, and I got coffee and doughnuts downstairs. My wife work there. And I see you two girls ain't got nobody over here, not to say hello, not to give a glass of water." He says, "I offer you my." He was a very nice man. He says, "You're going to stay here overnight, I won't trust it. You have to sleep on those, you know, those, on a seat." My

sister says, "Yeah?" He says, "Yeah." So we follow him because it was right across the street. It take two minutes, we have to stop for the car. After we get in there there was the smell already kitchen. And he says, "Get in." We get in, it was one step. He put us to sit on the stool by there, and we drink a coffee. He says, "Have a cup of coffee, doughnut." He says, "On my honor." He was a real nice gentleman. So we eat. Then we lead upstairs. It was one floor. And we passed a couple door. Before the door, he take off his key, a bunch of keys and he open the door. It was a bedroom. He said, "That's the best I can do it." I introduce to his wife first. He says, "Sure, it's a good thing, go ahead." So he opened the door. He said, "That's the bed." There was a bureau, a beautiful room. I never seen in Italy that. Clean carpet. I was real impressed. And I says, "Grazie." And I said, "Thank you very much." He says, "Not yet. Tomorrow morning a train will come five o'clock. The conductor says that again. Ten after five, he have to go away all night, to the five o'clock train. But he come, he was more gentle. He come, he knock on the door. He say, "If you hear my name, open the door, you know that's me. And I do better than that." He says, "I'm going to leave the key right inside. If somebody else want to open they can't open because the key was in." He says, he was a real gentleman. He come, it was a half past four, to take the five o'clock train to

come over here. It don't take long, but long enough. And that's it. (A man makes an off-mike comment in Italian.) Oh, come on. (they laugh)

VOICE OFF MIKE: You didn't tell us where the toilet was.

POLLETTA: No, that's a shame, no. God forbid, God forbid. He was nice, that man, for everything. But he didn't show us where's the bathroom. So when we get up in the morning we didn't know where to go. Where do we look? There was a door. I didn't want to bother the door. I says it may be somebody else. So we went the other side. So we wait a little bit. What are we going to do? I can't hold it. So I sent a telegram to my father because he take all of my dress over here. The telegram reach there, we was there already, over here already. I ask my father, I says, "Repair a little damage." I says this, that. He says, "What do you want me to do, send the money to that guy?" "Well," I says, "he do a lot of thing. He did a lot for us. We have no place to go." He says, my father never work. (?) better. My mother, she started us off straight, and we started to grow up, but she never said much. What I seen with my own eye, rest her soul. She didn't send nothing after the man to clean the carpet. I'm sorry, it's not that. I said, "Gee, all your life, and now you can't do yourself." There was another one. My father didn't want to work over here, and had

enough. I had a big family. And besides, a crippled boy, you know, that take a lot. That's my life.

LEVINE: Let's see. Is there anything else about the voyage or coming into New York or . . .

POLLETTA: Just a second. Mark, get me water.

LEVINE: Is there anything, when you first got to this country, was there anything that struck you as different, that were different from anything you had experienced.

POLLETTA: I got (?). We find everything, we don't have any. Every easy way, everything. When we landed to my cousin over here, then it was too far from the station. I see the sink, the water run in the house. You open the jars to make a coffee, and we don't have any of that. I find all the convenience, we never had it. And I thank God He put me in this world and this land.

LEVINE: So were you glad you had come? Soon after you got here, were you glad that you had come? Because you weren't too happy about coming here in the beginning. You didn't want to come that much.

LEVINE: Not that much.

POLLETTA: But then when you came here, did you like it right away?

POLLETTA: Oh, yeah, I like it. I find my brother over here, he was waiting for us. And we had a bigger store, Jewish, and we had the best clothes in Webster. So the day after this, he said, "Come on." Bring us to the store. He dress up, everything what we needed. I says, "Am I keeping my dress?" He answered, "No." He says, "That's hell. Throw it away." He didn't want me to wear it. And I also liked that dress. My shoes, I had shoes made. Just the same, he wanted me to throw them away. Anyway, he dress up from the shoes to there.

LEVINE: Did he want you to throw away your clothes because he didn't want you to look like an immigrant?

POLLETTA: Maybe things like that, but instead there was a lot that I have to keep. Anyway, I have to get right outfit after.

LEVINE: Do you remember what clothes you came over in?

POLLETTA: Huh?

LEVINE: Do you remember the clothes you had on when you came?

POLLETTA: Dress, yes. It was handmade.

LEVINE: What were they like?

POLLETTA: They were (?), but I never seen anything over here like it. Something like that. And they had a big three button on the front. It was cute. I liked it because it was special, somebody made for me. My sister says, "They're good enough." She was glad, after. And my shoes were nice shoes. They were tennis shoes, same color what they got over here. And that's everything handmade. No machine. They stitch the shoes. They go this way, then the needle go there, another one go over here. That kind of stitch. I remember all that. So little by little and little by little. When I think about my sister, she never have gone out to the door. She sit and she started the crochet. She make a little bedspread. Me, I have to go to work. My father says, "Go look for a job." (they laugh) I says, "What?" "Go look for a job." I says, "What's that?" He can't speak English either. (they laugh) I can't say that. So my girlfriend, she was half French, but she learned to speak Italian so plain. She says, "He wants you to go to work." I says, "Why don't you go to work?" To my father. He says, "(?), don't go to work." He was (?). Anyway, I have a girlfriend of mine, she found me a job at Stevens. And that was an easy way. I don't know what was harder, to find a job, because you have to change a lot of things, the way you work. But I told them, "Give me easy job. No tough, no do this and no do that." Just

put the work inside a (?) a day, if you have the next row. So he did. He was a German guy, a nice gentle man, tall, moustache. And he come. So he give me the job. And the two girls, the, one was my cousin, says, "Now we teach you something. First," she said, "the bus is going to come tomorrow morning." And I asked where. She says, "At the job." I says, "What you want me to do?" She says, "You're going to go like this: Good morning." She says, "You say 'good morning.'" The next morning she says, "You're going to do the same again." I says, "Why do you ask me?" She says you like the job, you say a little bit. But I got a paper to make talk me like that. I last about three weeks. (they laugh) I tell you, I went through my hell, and that's what I am. That's awful. But I was nice. They were very, just I would feel sorry for my sister because she never eat a bit, nothing at all. She was real sick.

LEVINE: Well, then, um . . .

POLLETTA: I was sick. I was sorry because she was sick, and I was mad because she push me to come. That's it. But after I forget. I enjoy it, my life, the best I could.

LEVINE: And then your mother came the next year.

POLLETTA: My mother the following year, it was 1921. She come to me by the mill. Some French girl deliver to my cousin. So

when I see my mother she says, "Oh, my God." Oh, I was so happy then.

LEVINE: What was your mother like?

POLLETTA: Oh, she was a nice lady. You know, any time she write a letter, she wanted to know what I'm doing. And I lied to her. I says I go to school and I got nothing else to do. All the while I go to work. I go make a (?) for Domenick. When she saw me I says, "Oh, my God, that's not my daughter." My sister says, "Oh, yes, she is." She come closer and closer and she cry and I cry. It was real happy and sad for a long time. She says, "You're telling me you used to go to school." I says, "I did." I says, "I graduate." (they laugh) I don't want to tell her what I was doing. Poor my mother. You know how long she live over here? Nine years. She no live long, and she no wants to go neither.

LEVINE: Were there some kinds of things that your mother tried to have you learn? Are there things that your mother taught you that she wanted you to . . .

POLLETTA: My mother, she don't know nothing at all. She just take the way my father want, so he did the best. He says, "You stay there, you don't got nothing at the job." The job, just like a laborer, I'm in jail there, go to work every morning.

And he says there's no future. So my sister, she really wanted to come, but me, I was different. I don't want to come. And I told my father in a letter. I says, "If you push me," I says, "you'll be sorry." But I never did nothing, just talk. I like my father just the same. But I like my mother, but I don't want to come. But I was also pretty good. I went to work at Steven's, and after I started he had a little shop upstairs, for the blouse. And I was a little bit smart in that. I used to sew a little bit. They have a dressmaker right next to my, where I used to live. On a Saturday night if she had a lot of work to finish the people from the farm, they all come back on a Saturday and I pick her up to buy things. I says, "You got whatever it is to be done?" She says, "You want to help me?" I says, "Sure." There was another girl named Bianca, Biancina. Every day we worked on a Friday night. She came a couple of lire, and was happy.

LEVINE: Were there a lot of Italian people in Webster when you came?

POLLETTA: Well, there were a lot, but now it's all gone.

LEVINE: Were there a lot of other immigrants from other countries, too?

POLLETTA: But there was no one to come from my place. I mean,

don't mix. A couple, they come from Sorbino. That's not too far from our place. Some from (?). That's a city for Italy, that place. And Aladri. That's where my sister was living, Aladri, another sister. But to see real people from where I used to live, I don't see. Because I had a lot over here, relations. All the Pizzotti, that's all my relations. That's over fifty or more. But I used to be a secretary practically over there. Everybody know I was writer, I know how to write and read. Those old-fashioned people. They all come with me every day, write me a letter, and I write to parents, to family. There's nobody to write and read. My husband says, "Why don't you charge a lot of money?" I say, "Are you crazy?" And still today, just I stop now. It was my natural role.

LEVINE: How was it for you to learn English? Was it hard to learn English?

POLLETTA: Well, I want to say yes, I want to say no. But I went to school for five weeks at night, night school, and the teacher was a real, give me good credit. Because after you learn what it means a letter because I realize the friend, a lot of things. She say, "You catch up fast." Usually she tell me what it was. I says, "Why you don't know that before?" "Because it was easier for me to take a job." Then she put on the blackboard. I went five weeks over here to night school.

(?)

LEVINE: And then did you become a citizen?

POLLETTA: Yeah. It was 1940 I become a citizen. And it was hard. Today they give away all the time. Because it was also during the war, and they wanted to know a lot of things, for the Nazi come over here. They try to be boss. They says, "You will not get accepted for that." I don't know if I got to say yes or no. I fill a lot of paper. But I had my daughter, thank, there she is. She was a real smart girl. She was in high school already. And she says, "Ma, they ask this word, you say no." She says, "You want to remember." I says, "You (?). She have to pick up that. You're going to turn like we are." You says, "No." So she teach me pretty good before I went for two years. The first, they call first card, second card. It's the family. It was pretty good. Just I make a mistake, one thing. They ask me for the mayor, the don over here. I couldn't make it up. So Eda, my daughter, says, "Ma, you don't got no mayor, you got a selectman." So I put down selectman. I pass it. I had a man and a woman for a witness. Ruggieri Grazio and (?).

LEVINE: Were you proud of yourself?

POLLETTA: Oh, yes. I still got the paper. They're going to frame it when I die. Somebody will take it. (they laugh) I

still got a passport. I got my mother, my father. I don't throw away nothing.

VOICE OFF MIKE: Ask her what happened when her mother died.

LEVINE: What happened when your mother died?

POLLETTA: What happened? What happened? Oh, my father marry. You want to know that?

LEVINE: Yeah.

VOICE OFF MIKE: What went on after your mother died? Where did her father go?

LEVINE: Where did your father go after your mother died?

POLLETTA: Well, we, all the people, they went home, my family, sisters, husband, they all went home. And he couldn't even get out of the car. And we stopped at (?), and I says, "Pa, ain't you going to go home?" He says, "Oh, no." I said, "What are you going to do?" He says, "Your mother telling me when she's going to die you're going to move (?)." I say, "You're crazy! I don't got enough room for my kids." I had no room, honest to God. I had five, used to live upstairs. And you know my husband, what he did, God rest his soul. He says, "I'll make room." Which he did. I had my hands full, a lot of things

slowed down too, but I keep a long. I gave him a chance. He was sick, I take care of him.

LEVINE: How long did your father then stay with you?

POLLETTA: He die, almost twenty-one years. (they laugh) My mother die in 1929, and he die in 1960. Figure it out what I went through for my father, rest his soul. He was good. Still I like him just the same. I'm mad because I was in between my husband and him. My father was fresh. He had a dozen knife and a bucket. And sometimes he come (?). He says, "Watch." Because I got to play, they call (?), it had a bocci field to play. And at night I go play. I was up. He says, "But your father got a knife and a bucket. He says you want to hit your husband." I say, "Is he crazy?" So I tell him that, to my father. It was me and him. My husband went to work. I says, "What you had on your mind?" He says, "What." I says, "You go after me with a knife?" He says, "Who told you that?" "(?) see you. He tell me." I say, "That better stop, (?) get out of here first." He said, "I don't believe it." But I (?) five weeks, he had another man. He says, "I want to get out, go." I says, "Where you go? I want to know where you go to." He says, "To my sister." I says, "Good, go." And I used to pay insurance for him for twenty-five cents, one policy, and thirty-five cents another policy out of my husband's money, and I had

enough to buy milk a lot of times. They keep going. So he took the policy to the book, weekly book, to pay. My husband never know that, never. So he went. Five weeks later, almost five, he bring everything back. He says, "I cannot come back?" "No, not for me." I says, "I ask my husband." He did. Jimmy said, "Sure, why not? I don't chase you out." He was such good to him, and he don't know either. That way my father feel bad. And I gave him a dirty look and I said to him, I says, "You don't know. That's it, you don't know." He come back. When I look in the book where they show rent, I says, "Look, we're five weeks behind." I says, "Who's going to pay for that?" "I don't got no money." I says, "What do you mean you don't got no money." I says, "I know you don't got no money." That book lied because I paid that every week, so I pay for my children. I used to get two dollars a week on welfare, two dollars. We made enough to smoke. I says, "Where I'm going to get money?" He says, "You want me to pay for that all the time?" Right away a (?) come in. I told him it's a better way against them. That's the way you want it. I says, "Now he's an old man, but what I'm going to do?" And I keep paying. He had insurance from Grand Lodge of Italy. That's what it's called. And he sent, he had a policy, two hundred dollars in debt. When he die he got two hundred dollars. It's a big money. And he used to pay a dollar a month. I stretch on that, too, once a month. So

after they raise it to five hundred dollars. Not too long before he come to me, he says, "You got my policy?" I say, "Yeah." "Give it to me." I give the policy. He went to the president of the lodge, he pulled three times. Go to my sister, two of my sisters. The oldest one and the younger one, and me I was the last one. So when he give back the policy then I want. Not because I want the policy. See what I mean? I do good, and I don't do nothing, and I'm the one who do everything. So I says, "What'd you do that for?" I says, "Well, what do you think?" She says, "You going to take everything?" I says, "What I got? I don't got nothing? I give it to you every day." I couldn't stand it. (?) for that. Anyway, he died, rest his soul. The president of the lodge, every day wanted three check. You fill that out yourself, five hundred dollars. They no come you, three check and (?) a number. I was the one to get the less. I say, "See?" I thought I'd get a check for life. I says, "My father, what I did for him." He was bad, but he was good through it all. (she laughs) I keep him here for thirty years because my mother die in 1929, he die in 1960, February 7th.

LEVINE: Is there anything else? The tape is about to run out. Is there anything you'd like to say about coming to this country before we close?

POLLETTA: No. I'm happy to be where I am. I raise a big family, thank God. I had one little start, for the children, but everybody got to die. Everybody got to be sick. I lost three. One in California and two over here.

LEVINE: And do you have grandchildren?

POLLETTA: Oh, yes. I got lots of that. I can't even count.

VOICE OFF MIKE: She has about thirty.

POLLETTA: You run out of paper? You run out?

LEVINE: I'm running out. You have how many grandchildren?

POLLETTA: I think I got sixteen. (he coughs off mike)

LEVINE: And do you have great-grandchildren?

POLLETTA: Yeah. And I think that's three in California and all the rest over here.

VOICE OFF MIKE: Three, seven, eleven. Three, seven, eleven. Thirteen, fourteen. Oh, yeah, Tommy got killed. She had fourteen, uh . . .

LEVINE: Great-grandchildren?

VOICE OFF MIKE: Fourteen grandchildren, and they've got one,

two, three, probably ten great-grandchildren.

LEVINE: Wow.

POLLETTA: I got a lot.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I want to thank you very much.

POLLETTA: That's okay. I thank you.

LEVINE: It's been a pleasure to hear your story. (tape ends
without signoff)