

EI-183

BENVINDA DANTAS SENNA

BIRTH DATE: JANUARY 21, 1909

INTERVIEW DATE: 6/25/1992

RUNNING TIME: 36:45

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME

INTERVIEW LOCATION: RANDOLPH, MA

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TODD SISLEY, 6/1993

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST JR., 8/1993

PORTUGAL, 1929

AGE 20

PASSAGE ON "THE MEGANTIC"

PORT: LISBON

RESIDENCES: PORTUGAL: CAPE VERDE ISLAND

US: WESTON, MA

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm here today with Benvinda Dantas Senna.

SENNA: Yeah.

LEVINE: And I'm here in Randolph, Massachusetts on June 25, 1992 and Mrs. Senna came from Portugal on December 31, 1929 when she was 20 years old.

SENNA: Yeah, um-hum.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I'm very happy to be here.

SENNA: Yeah.

LEVINE: And I hope you enjoy telling your story. Why don't we start

out by your telling me your birth date.

SENNA: My birth date is January 21, 1909.

LEVINE: Okay. And where were you born?

SENNA: I was born on Cape Verde Island.

LEVINE: Could you spell that?

SENNA: C-A-P-E V-E-R-D-E, Island, I-S-L-A-N-D. .

LEVINE: Now was that on the ocean?

SENNA: Yeah.

LEVINE: A seaport?

SENNA: Yeah, is not, you don't call it a seaport. I guess I don't know. We have a little port. But, I don't think you call it seaport.

LEVINE: It's not a seaport, but was there fishing? Was it a fishing town?

SENNA: Oh yeah, fishing. Yeah. Yeah, the guys fish all the time.
The boats, we have a lot of fishing boats. Yeah.

LEVINE: Now was your father a fisherman?

SENNA: No. My father was a school teacher.

LEVINE: What did he teach?

SENNA: He teach uh, kids all grades of school.

LEVINE: And your mother? Was your mother a housewife?

SENNA: Housewife, housewife. Yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

SENNA: One brother, one sister.

LEVINE: Now what was your father's first name?

SENNA: Auguste.

LEVINE: Auguste?

SENNA: Uh-huh.

LEVINE: And your mother?

SENNA: Wilmena. Wilmena.

LEVINE: Wilmena. And what was her maiden name, do you remember?

SENNA: Leitao. Leitao.

LEVINE: Spell that.

SENNA: L-E-I-T-A-O.

LEVINE: And how about your brother and sister, what were their names?

SENNA: My sister, her name is Candida. But my sister died. I have just one brother.

LEVINE: And his name?

SENNA: John.

LEVINE: And is he here in this country?

SENNA: Yeah. He live in Concord, Mass.

LEVINE: So uh, now do you remember much about the fishing town where you grew up?

SENNA: (?) That's the place where the guys go fishing in that. Joe (?), it's called the Joe (?). You go fishing there.

LEVINE: Now the "Joe," is that a place?

SENNA: Yeah. That's just like a little island just like a little island on top of the sea.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

SENNA: Yeah. One of those things.

LEVINE: Do you remember what kind of fish they caught?

SENNA: All kind, all kind of fish. Good fishing in whole country, though. We have good fish.

LEVINE: Did you eat fish a lot?

SENNA: I don't like it.

LEVINE: Oh, you don't like it! (they laugh)

SENNA: I don't like fish much. No.

LEVINE: And was there any farming done around that town?

SENNA: Eh?

LEVINE: Was there farming done, too? Did people grow crops?

SENNA: Yeah. Oh yeah, all kind, all kind of food. Yeah, we grow all kind of food.

LEVINE: What kind?

SENNA: Corn, beans and squash, cucumber, tomato, all those things, kale.

LEVINE: Do you remember any particular dishes that your mother made?

SENNA: Ah, used to make rice and beans. That's Portugese stuff.

Yeah, yeah. Make those all the time. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember the house you lived in?

SENNA: Oh, my house was to be bigger house. They called it Ponta Baixo.

LEVINE: Ponta--?

SENNA: Baixo.

LEVINE: B-0-S?

SENNA: A. B-A-I-X-O. Baixo.

LEVINE: Oh. Uh-huh. And that was what you called your house?

SENNA: Yeah. That's Ponta Baixo.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And you, yours was a big house compared to the other house in town?

SENNA: Bigger house. Yeah, bigger house because on one side, my father used to have a school. School for some, for big kids.

LEVINE: So your father was considered a professional. And you....

SENNA: Yeah. Government, he worked for government. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you were slightly better off than a lot of other people in town?

SENNA: Nice. No, I can't say that because there were a lot of poor, poor, poor, poor, medium class and the first class. You have three classes essentially.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what class were you in?

SENNA: Well, I guess the first one.

LEVINE: The first one. (they laugh) And uh, what do you remember about living there? When you think of that place, what comes to your mind?

SENNA: Well, I guess my mother and my friends. I have a lot of friends and a lot of neighbors. It used to be nice when you

was a kid. Yeah.

LEVINE: Did you play, do you remember?

SENNA: I play a lot of, I play with my neighbors and my cousins 'cause I have a lot of cousins. All my first cousins. Yeah.

LEVINE: About how many family members were right around in that area?

SENNA: Oh, a few.

LEVINE: Few?

SENNA: Few.

LEVINE: And how about your grandparents, were they around?

SENNA: Yeah. My grandparents all died while I was a kid. When I was seven years old my grandfather died.

LEVINE: Do you remember that grandfather?

SENNA: I remember my grandfather and then my grandmother. Then my other side, which is my father's side, because my father's

side, his family died when my father was young.

LEVINE: I see. What do you remember about your grandparents on your mother's side?

SENNA: Oh, she was a beautiful lady. And she take care of us kids and my grandfather was nice. He worked for government, too. My grandfather, he was nice looking guy.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did you ever go out with them?

SENNA: Oh yeah. We go out to visit friends, visit cousins. We have a nice time. Yeah.

LEVINE: Now were you the oldest child?

SENNA: Yeah, me.

LEVINE: You were the oldest? Do you remember your grandfather and mother's house?

SENNA: My mother's house, oh yeah. We used to go all the time. We stayed with my grandfather and grandmother all the time.

LEVINE: Where were they, where did they live?

SENNA: Oh, is not too far from our house.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what was their house like? Can you describe it?

SENNA: Yeah, white house, small white house, not that big a house but a nice house.

LEVINE: And your grandfather was a government worker?

SENNA: Yeah, he worked for government, too. Yeah, um-hum.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And, do you remember games that you played when you were a little girl?

SENNA: Oh, we played house sometimes. Everybody would pretend food for the dolls. Make believe that they are people. And a, we somersaulted. Lot of games. Just like kids play in this country, too.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And did you go to school?

SENNA: I go to school. I graduated in the right, the, just like you

say high school in this country, that's where you go and I graduated school maybe when I was twelve or thirteen years old but I went right through the school. Yeah.

LEVINE: And did you like school?

SENNA: I like school, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah?

SENNA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Did you have a favorite subject, did you have a favorite interest in school?

SENNA: Uh, I like to read and I like to write, too. Yeah. My teacher is a wonderful lady, yeah.

LEVINE: What do you remember about your teacher? What was she like?

SENNA: Oh, she was nice. She was nice and smart. Oh, very smart. Oh, very smart teacher. She teach us good in the school. Yeah.

LEVINE: Were there certain things that she taught you that had to do with, you know, how you should live in the world, the kind of, you know, teachings of values? Do you remember anything like that?

SENNA: No. I don't remember those .

LEVINE: Yeah.

SENNA: But she was very nice lady.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SENNA: I know.

LEVINE: And how 'bout your mother, did she teach you kinds of things like sayings. Do you remember any sayings that she had, that she used a lot?

SENNA: Ah, she say to respect people. And to love everybody and to love each other; brother and sister especial. And be nice to everybody 'cause my mother was a wonderful lady, too.

LEVINE: Your mother, I'm sorry?

SENNA: My mother was a wonderful lady.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SENNA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Were you a religious family?

SENNA: Yeah, very. We go to church all the time.

LEVINE: Every day or every week?

SENNA: Almost. Oh yeah, every week we go to church. My family is very religious.

LEVINE: Were you Catholic?

SENNA: Yeah.

LEVINE: And did you, observe like Saint's days and...

SENNA: Yeah. Patron saint was Saint John, Saint John Batista. He was the saint in our country. We have a nice, nice feast in

our country.

LEVINE: And when it was a Saint's Day, what did you do to celebrate it?

SENNA: Ah, we have a nice, nice mass. Eveybody go to mass. Then they would call everyone outside after mass and put all the different kind of food and (?), all different kind of food, then call mass. (?) Everybody went to have a good time. Yeah, we have a dance. We have a nice time. Yeah. I don't forget this. We have a lot of things in our country.

LEVINE: Now, uh let's see, when you went to school did you learn English at all?

SENNA: No. No. Not at that time. Now the kids learn some but not before in my time.

LEVINE: No. Could you describe the town a little bit?

SENNA: Yeah.

LEVINE: What did the town look like?

SENNA: Oh a small town with a lot a people. Nice people. A nice park, like a garden. We would go when we were young. If you had a boyfriend, you ask him to go. A lot of flowers, a place to sit on. It's beautiful. I had some nice times in my town in the old country.

LEVINE: And how about your father, were there certain things that he taught you, like values, things that he told?

SENNA: Yeah, my father didn't teach me too much. (?)

LEVINE: What was he like? What was his personality?

SENNA: Oh he was nice guy, (she laughs) very nice guy.

LEVINE: Was he a strict father?

SENNA: No, he's not that bad. But he's nice, yeah and a friend of everybody.

LEVINE: And, let's see. Is there anything else about the town when you think back to, up to the time you were twenty, what are the things you remember most about there?

SENNA: Oh, I remember just with my friends, would go to dance, would do, celebrate into the evening, you have a nice time. That's what we did in my town.

LEVINE: And how did you meet your husband?

SENNA: I meet my husband in, they say in our country called just like a novena. I went to that day and meet my husband. I meet my husband in November, we get married in December.

LEVINE: Oh, was it love at first site?

SENNA: Yeah, I guess so. (she laughs)

LEVINE: What was your husband's name?

SENNA: Manuel.

LEVINE: Manuel. And how did you meet him?

SENNA: I met him in November. We talk with ech other. Then this guy used to be a friend of my father. They introduced me, because I didn't know him before and he say, "That's it, that's it." Then instead of Manuel, we call "Larry." And

then we see each other all the time, then we get married next month. We meet in November then we married in December.

LEVINE: And did your family have to approve?

SENNA: Oh yeah, because I was not eighteen yet. Then my mother and then my a, even my uncle because of my father used to be in this country, though. My father come in this country.

LEVINE: When did your father come?

SENNA: Oh, he come in 19, maybe 19, maybe 19, 1914 or 15 he come in this country. Then he was going to (?). He did die. He died in this country though in (?) Hospital.

LEVINE: Did he die before you came?

SENNA: No.

LEVINE: No, after you came.

SENNA: Uh-huh.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you were sixteen when you met your husband? How

old were you?

SENNA: Eighteen.

LEVINE: Eighteen. And how old was your husband?

SENNA: He was thirty-five. He was seventeen years older than me.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And but your family approved of the match.

SENNA: Yeah. Uh-huh.

LEVINE: And then did you have a big wedding?

SENNA: Yeah, uh-huh.

LEVINE: What was the wedding?

SENNA: We danced, we catered it, we did everything just like this country.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh, uh-huh.

SENNA: All the family. My side of the family and my husband's side

of the family. My friends, we have a nice time.

LEVINE: Did your husband have a big family?

SENNA: Not that big. Like about two brothers and three or four sisters. Yeah.

LEVINE: So you had church wedding and then you had a big party.

SENNA: Yeah, uh-huh. It was nice.

LEVINE: And did you go on a honeymoon?

SENNA: No, we didn't go no place. No.

LEVINE: Was that usual at that time?

SENNA: Yeah, yeah. In the old country, no. .

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh, yeah. So then where did you and your husband live?

SENNA: My husband had to come back in this country, then I stayed with his mother, my husband's mother.

LEVINE: Oh, so after you got married, how long after that did he come then here?

SENNA: We get married in December then he come in about in April. He come in back in this country. Then he come, he sent for me right away, though. I come in a few months afterwards.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. Had he been in this country before?

SENNA: Oh yeah, two or three times he went to the old country back and forth.

LEVINE: So did he go back to Portugal to get a wife? Was he interested in going back in order to get married?

SENNA: No, he wanted twice, then he come back and he didn't plan to get married but when he saw me then he say, "Now I got to get married."

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Yeah. So, he had been back and forth and what did he do for work?

SENNA: He work on a ship as a cook. Chef.

LEVINE: And so was he a chef here in this country? And also ...

SENNA: Yeah, in a boat, in a restaurant, in a hotel and a college,
he worked all over the place.

LEVINE: And was he a chef also in Portugal?

SENNA: He don't do nothing in Portugal either because he don't need
to do.

LEVINE: Because he could make enough money here so when he was there
he didn't have to.

SENNA: Yeah. No, he don't do nothing. He just go to visit.

LEVINE: So then you moved in with his mother.

SENNA: Yeah. I stayed with his mother 'til I come back into this
country.

LEVINE: Was that usual if you were married to a man you would be
living.....

SENNA: Oh yeah, oh yeah oh yeah. I know, is not strange. No.

LEVINE: Now what was his mother's name.

SENNA: Maria.

LEVINE: And what was, so his name was Senna?

SENNA: Yeah, Senna.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what was his mother like?

SENNA: She was a nice lady, beautiful lady, too. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Yeah?

SENNA: And we get along very well. I get in very good with his family. I still do good with his family. My husband died but we still each love each other. They all like me and I like them, too. We have no fight, no nothing.

LEVINE: That's great. Now who else was living in the house with you?

SENNA: My, we have a daughter. Two dogs, two dogs. One die already before when I get married, before I get married her husband die, my husband's father die. He just had his mother.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh. Um, so was your husband close to his mother?

SENNA: Yeah, very close. That's why he went to the old country two times before he get married, to see his mother. Yeah. He'd say he'd come in this country then he'd save his money, then he'd go to the old country twice to see his mother.

LEVINE: And then after you got married and you came to this country, did you go back again?

SENNA: No, I never go back.

LEVINE: Did he go back?

SENNA: No, he didn't go back either. He sent for his mother. My mother didn't want to come in this country. She didn't come in. But his mother come and stay with us for a little while, then go back again. Then she died in old country, though.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And how did his mother like this country?

SENNA: Oh she loved this country. My husband, everytime he'd bring his mother every place to visit all his family all over the

place. He liked it. But then she want go back, then she go back and then she died in old country. She worked 'til sixty-five.

LEVINE: This is your husband?

SENNA: No.

LEVINE: No, his mother.

SENNA: My husband died about seven years ago. He was ninety-four.

LEVINE: Oh.

SENNA: We then, get married, fifty-seven years married before he died.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SENNA: He died seven years ago.

LEVINE: Well now, tell me about like your father was here for about five years.

SENNA: Right, my father stayed for a few years in this country.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And, and your mother and your brother and sister were still in Portugal.

SENNA: Uh-huh.

LEVINE: And but then you came first?

SENNA: Yeah. Yeah. I come in, no, my dad come first in this country. My father sent for, my dad come in this country a few years. He didn't see me get married, of course. My dad come in this country. And my sister stayed in old country with my mother and my sister get married, too, and then her husband die. But before he die, he come in this country too, but he didn't stay long. He wanted to go back to old country because he has a house in old country, that's why he didn't stay. And...

LEVINE: And did your sister come? (telephone rings faintly in background)

SENNA: My sister come but she don't want to stay. She want to go back again because you have a nice house in old country. She

go back again. But they didn't have no kids. She died about three years ago.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Yeah. So, when you came, your brother was here and your father was here.

SENNA: Uh-huh. Yeah.

LEVINE: And that's it?

SENNA: Yeah.

LEVINE: And your husband.

SENNA: Oh, I have an uncle, and an aunt in this country, I have a lot of family in this country. All come here.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

SENNA: All come in. Yeah.

LEVINE: Well when you, when you, how did you, how was it arranged for you to come? Did your husband arrange it?

SENNA: Oh yeah, he do everything. Yeah.

LEVINE: The papers and everything?

SENNA: Um-hum. (?) It was no trouble, my, his father was citizen a long time ago. My husband is a citizen and if my father was a citizen, I'm a citizen because I come in this country before I twenty-one.

LEVINE: Oh.

SENNA: When I come in, I didn't need papers of my husband because I'm a citizen already. And my daughter is citizen because she's born citizen because her father's citizen a long time. We don't have no trouble.

LEVINE: Now did your husband send you the fare?

SENNA: Oh yeah, he send me the money to pay everything. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember how much it cost?

SENNA: At that time it used to be two hundred fifty dollars, but now costs a lot of money. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Yeah. And how did you feel about coming when you were about to leave?

SENNA: Oh yeah, I don't like to leave my mother, too and my family but I get married and my husband come in this country and then I got to come in, too.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well were you sad when you left?

SENNA: Oh yeah, I was sad to leave them but then, I'd be alright when they come in this country. And I got my kids, I got twelve kids. I got twenty-seven grandchildren and six great grandchildren.

LEVINE: Wow! That's wonderful. Well now, when you were coming, what had you heard about America? When you were first leaving to come here, what did you know about America?

SENNA: Yeah, they say America's a good country. They say it's a country to make a living. Everybody come in just for that purpose because a lot of people have a house in old country but cannot get the money to make big house in old country.

LEVINE: Um-hum. Was it your husband's plan to go back again?

SENNA: No.

LEVINE: He wanted to stay.

SENNA: He never planned to go back and once he say that's enough,
and three times, that's enough.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

SENNA: He have his kids, he say you have me. That's all.

LEVINE: So, did your husband ever write to you about, you know,
before you came...

SENNA: Oh yeah.

LEVINE: ...what to expect?

SENNA: Oh yeah, I told him that.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SENNA: Yeah.

LEVINE: And do you remember anything that he wrote to you?

SENNA: Oh yeah. He did. He was waiting for me to come then, and bring my daughter, too. And we're going to have a nice life to be sure.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, do you remember what you packed when you were leaving?

SENNA: Oh, I packed a lot, a few clothes, a few clothes, a lot of clothes, then we come in to Lisbon. We stayed in Lisbon for maybe for a week with my cousin. Then we come in there to England and (?) and then we stayed maybe for a few days then we come back (?).

LEVINE: Now who did you travel with when you uh, your daughter.

SENNA: My daughter.

LEVINE: And it was just you and your daughter who were traveling.

SENNA: Yeah. Then my husband have this good friend. He was coming

too, then he take care of us, too.

LEVINE: Ah, I see.

SENNA: Good friend.

LEVINE: When you left your town, was there a send off? Did people come and say good-bye?

SENNA: Oh yeah, oh yeah. They used to come in and say hello and goodbye, and when I come, and stop in, some they send to cousins, I stayed with my cousins for a couple of days then I had cousin come in and board the ship with me and my daughter. Then we have a nice trip with a big ship.

LEVINE: What was the name of the ship?

SENNA: Megantic, White Star Line.

LEVINE: And did you get any examinations by the steamship company before you set sail?

SENNA: No, see my daughter, had some boil inside in the back under her arm and then you have to have the doctors examine my

daughter. That's why you come into the island, stay for a few days. Then after that everything is all right again, my husband come and pick us up in New York again. Come in to Boston.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. Wait, let me see if I understand. When you first went to Lisbon, were you examined there?

SENNA: In Lisbon?

LEVINE: Yeah.

SENNA: I was already in my country already.

LEVINE: So then, when you were on the ship...

SENNA: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...after you got to New York you were examined.

SENNA: Yeah. Um-hum.

LEVINE: Well, first let's talk about the voyage. What was the, how long did it take you?

SENNA: About five or six days. Don't take too long because those ship is good ship. And each one send good food. We didn't even have a (?) , see, to take care of the money, my daughter and we had a nice, nice trip.

LEVINE: What were the accommodations like? Where did you sleep?

SENNA: We slept in those bunk bed in a room to sleep. The ship have a big room, a nice place to sleep.

LEVINE: Was it just you and your daughter in the room?

SENNA: Me and my daughter.

LEVINE: Nobody else in the room?

SENNA: No. No. Me and my daughter.

LEVINE: And how about the food?

SENNA: Oh, the food was good.

LEVINE: Did you go to a dining room?

SENNA: Yeah, I went to the dining room to eat. Then, my daughter was young at that time. She don't eat too much. Just milk, that's all.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So, it was a pleasant trip?

SENNA: Pleasant trip. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember coming in to the New York Harbor?

SENNA: Yeah. Um-hum.

LEVINE: Do you remember seeing The Statue of Liberty?

SENNA: Yeah. Um-hum.

LEVINE: Did you know what that was?

SENNA: Yeah, I know. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Yeah?

SENNA: I know the Statue of Liberty. Yeah, I know. See, in the old

country, we know a lot about this country before we come in.

LEVINE: And how did you feel when you saw the Statue?

SENNA: Oh yeah, I feel happy because now I'm in this country. (she chuckles) Then afterward I saw my husband again. (?)

LEVINE: Well now after, do remember seeing New York for the first time?

SENNA: Yeah. I know, I saw it for the first time.

LEVINE: Do you know how it struck...

SENNA: Yeah, big street. I say, "Oh that's big city with a big building."

LEVINE: And then did you go? You went by a smaller boat to Ellis Island.

SENNA: Yeah, uh-huh.

LEVINE: Do you remember your impression of that?

SENNA: No, I don't like to use the boat too much, but it was alright. I say, "Now, we have to go back to Boston."

LEVINE: Well when you went into the Great Hall, do you remember that part at Ellis Island?

SENNA: Yeah, I remember but not too clear, though. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you know why you went to Ellis Island? Why did you have to go to Ellis Island? Do you know?

SENNA: Yeah, because I tell you that the ship would come in then and my daughter had this thing inside her arm and they needed the doctor to look her over. That's why we went to Ellis Island. Is not because (?)

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And so she had, what, she had some kind of a growth?

SENNA: Yeah. Just like a cyst here. Cyst.

LEVINE: Cyst.

SENNA: Yeah.

LEVINE: I see, so that's why you had to go there.

SENNA: Yeah. Um-hum. Yeah.

LEVINE: And then what happened once you got there?

SENNA: Yeah. Oh yeah, the doctor looked her over, then he said she'll be alright.

LEVINE: And were there lot's of people there?

SENNA: Yeah. Lot's of people. Then my husband come in to New York again. Come and pick us again and we come in to Boston.

LEVINE: Did your husband come right to Ellis Island?

SENNA: Yeah. Um-hum.

LEVINE: Is that where you met him?

SENNA: Yeah. Um-hum.

LEVINE: Do you remember meeting him? What was that like when you saw him?

SENNA: Oh, I was happy to see him, my husband because I was in a strange country, strange people.

LEVINE: Yeah. And had he'd seen your baby? Had he seen your daughter?

SENNA: For first time.

LEVINE: That was the first time he saw her?

SENNA: Yeah, uh-huh. And is already his daughter because he was, all the other kids were born here.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh. And what was your daughter's name?

SENNA: Maria.

LEVINE: Maria.

SENNA: Maria (?)

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And um, okay so then you met him and then what happened after you met your husband at Ellis Island, what did

you do next?

SENNA: Then we come and take a train, then we come in to Boston.

LEVINE: So you took the little boat back to Manhattan, then you took a train...

TOGETHER:...then you (we) come in to Boston.

SENNA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about the train ride?

SENNA: It was a nice ride and the (imitates sound of train ride) which is okay because that's my first time on the train too, because I never went in a train either.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SENNA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Did you remember, do you remember anything about your first few days in the United States?

SENNA: Yeah. When I come in that day in Boston see, my brothers were living in South Boston. And I have a lot of cousins who live in Boston, too, in South Boston. You come in the night to New York, then my husband say, "You stay with your brother and your friends, your cousin and I go to Boston because he used to work in Weston College and I come in tomorrow, come and pick you up." Then he come the next day, come and pick me up. I stay overnight to see my brother and my cousins.

LEVINE: And then your husband took you to Weston?

SENNA: Weston. Yeah, I live in Weston for twelve years.

LEVINE: And where, what was the house like where he took you to?

SENNA: Oh, nice house, house in the country because they all belong to Weston College. But everybody to work for the Weston College have a house like me. We live in our house for twelve years.

LEVINE: And he cooked for Weston College? Is that what he did?

SENNA: Oh yeah. He was a cook for the Weston College. He worked for sixteen years but I stay twelve years and then we move

near Roxbury then I move to Roxbury but my husband come back and forth for them every day. But he still work for the Weston College another four years.

LEVINE: I see.

SENNA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And do you remember anything that seemed very different or odd to you when you first came?

SENNA: No, people all over the place are all the same. You just talk different language. That's all.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And were there a number of Portugese people around where you lived.

SENNA: In Weston, in Weston area, nobody. We used to come in Boston to see people. If you wanted to see Portugese people again, you had to come in Boston, though. I have a lot of friends in South Boston. My brothers in South Boston also, my cousins then come we come in sometimes once a week, once my husband have a day off, then we come in to visit people. But the people used to go all the time come and visit us in

Weston because it used to be nice regular country, we have a lot fruit, a lot of things in Weston and we have a lot of visits. From all over our family, they would come and visit us all the time.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SENNA: We have a nice, nice life.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SENNA: Thank to God.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And then you started having more children.

SENNA: Yeah. I have a lot. A few kids in Weston, then I come and stay with the others in Boston.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you had twelve, you say?

SENNA: Twelve kids, yeah.

LEVINE: Wow.

SENNA: I eleven kids left. Just one died when he was small.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SENNA: But eleven living. That's why I've got twenty-seven grandchildren.

LEVINE: Do you have any great-grandchildren?

SENNA: Six.

LEVINE: Wow. Well, let's see, so you were busy taking care of children. You never worked.

SENNA: No, I have no time to work. No. (they laugh)

END OF SIDE A

BEGINNING OF SIDE B

LEVINE: Were there some things that you kept and maintained that were ways that you had in the old country after you came here?

SENNA: Oh yeah, you have to keep some.

LEVINE: Do you remember what things you wanted to hold on to from Portugal?

SENNA: I tell you, I didn't because my mother and my father say, "Stay with your friends and with each other, and never forget each other." That's why I like to remember that. I never forget my family and especially my brothers and sisters. We're very close with each other.

LEVINE: And did you stay religious? Did you keep up the religion?

SENNA: Oh yeah, we were religious. I still religious. Oh yeah. I light my candle all the time. I go to church. My kids are all the same way, too. My children are all religious.

LEVINE: Now what do you light the candles for?

SENNA: For everybody.

LEVINE: In church, you mean.

SENNA: Yeah, in church. I light my house candles, too. Because they used to do that in the old country and I want to keep it up.

LEVINE: Is that in memory of people who have died? Is that...

SENNA: Yeah, they die and the living, too.

LEVINE: Oh, and the living, too. And how about English? Was it difficult for you to learn English? How did you learn it?

SENNA: Oh yeah. I didn't go to school, I tell you because I didn't have the time to go to school. When you're raising kids you have so many places to go back and forth, you just talk! Then my kids go to school, taught me English. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Did your kids teach you English?

SENNA: Oh yeah, I talk with the kids and my kids don't talk Portugese much, you know.

LEVINE: They don't?

SENNA: No, they should. (?) The young ones, it doesn't matter.

LEVINE: Did you speak Portugese with your husband at home?

SENNA: Yeah. We speak Portugese with the kids, but they pay no attention. Very, very little.

LEVINE: How did you feel, were you happy being here in America or did you want to go back?

SENNA: No. I didn't want to go back. I have a mother. Then after my mother died, then I stay. Is my country. I never forget because I was born in that country. Is my country. But I knew more American because I lived more years in this country than in my country. Then I have all my kids, my grandchildren. That's my country.

LEVINE: And did you want your children to become American or did you want them to hold on to the fact that they had a Portugese heritage?

SENNA: Oh yeah. The kids never forget about the experience of Portugese but they never want to go back in old country, either.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything else that you can think of that you might want to say about, you know, being born in Portugal and coming here, and what your life's been like?

SENNA: No, no, my life has been pretty good, I guess. I have a husband and then I have my kids, that's all-- my family. That's my life.

LEVINE: Well, sounds like you've had a very good and rich life.

SENNA: Yeah. That's it. You're right. Yeah. You don't need to be rich sometime to be happy.

LEVINE: No. No, I don't mean rich in terms of money.

SENNA: I know, but sometimes, a lot of people say, oh to be rich, but sometimes we be rich and we're not happy either. Is no good either.

LEVINE: That's right. Well, you're riches are in your children, I think.

SENNA: I know, I know. My life is my kids and my grandchildren and my family.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

SENNA: I like people. I like everybody. I have a lot of friends, young kids and all kids. All kinds.

LEVINE: Really?

SENNA: Yeah. My grandchildren's, all of his friends all call me "Ma." All call, some call me "Grandma." I say I have a lot of them.

LEVINE: And are you enjoying your old age?

SENNA: My age, yeah, yeah, alright.

LEVINE: You're not ill and you feel okay.

SENNA: No. Thanks to God. I do pretty well with my age. I'm now eighty-three.

LEVINE: Okay, maybe we can stop here and I want to thank you. It was very interesting talking to you.

SENNA: Thank you very much. Do you want a cup of tea?

LEVINE: Yeah, I would like one. Okay, this is Janet Levine signing

off for the National Park Service and it's June 25, 1992 and I've been here with Benvinda Senna.

SENNA: Benvinda Senna, yeah.

LEVINE: And your maiden name was?

SENNA: Dantas. In Randolph.

LEVINE: Dantas. Okay. In Randolph, okay.

END OF INTERVIEW