

EI-186

ANGELA GAROFALO BASSO

BIRTH DATE: JANUARY 19, 1912

INTERVIEW DATE: 6/27/1992

RUNNING TIME: 1:50:24

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME

INTERVIEW LOCATION: SALEM, NEW HAMPSHIRE

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 10/1993

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 12/1993

SICILY, 1920

AGE 8

PORT: NAPLES

RESIDENCES:

- **SICILY: SANTA MARIA DE LICODIA**
- **THE US: LAWRENCE, MA**

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine and I'm here today, it's June 27th, 1992. And I'm here in Salem, New Hampshire. And I'm at the home of Mrs. Angela Garofalo Basso, who came from Italy in the summer of 1920 when she was eight years old. Well, I'm very happy to be here, and I look forward to hearing your story on tape.

BASSO: Well, I'll try to accommodate you to whatever you want to know.

EI-186/BASSO

LEVINE: Well, great. Okay. Let's start by your birth date. Give me your birth date.

BASSO: January 19th, 1912.

LEVINE: And where were you born?

BASSO: I was born in Santa Maria De Licodia in Sicily.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How do you spell De Licodia?

BASSO: L-I-C-O-D-I-A. That's the last name. Santa Maria De Licodia. Santa Maria of Licodia, in other words.

LEVINE: I see. I see. Now, so did you live in Santa Maria de Licodia until you went to the United States?

BASSO: Yes. I was born there.

LEVINE: And you were raised there until you left.

BASSO: Raised there until I was eight. Yes.

LEVINE: Now, apparently you have a very good visual memory.

BASSO: Oh, yes, I do. I do.

LEVINE: So could you, if you need to close your eyes or whatever, but just describe

EI-186/BASSO

the town where you were.

BASSO: Well, let me tell you, first of all, I was there during the First World War and I remember all the people in northern Italy that were all, came down to Sicily because there was fighting going on in the northern part of Italy, in Austria. That's where my father was, for four years.

LEVINE: He was in the army.

BASSO: Yes. And the town is a poor town. We hadn't had enough to eat ourselves. But we had to help those people that came, because they didn't bring anything with them. They just, their lives. They ran away because they were in fear of dying there. And I remember there was a little boy my age that didn't know where his mother was. He was all alone and he came with the rest of them. So we were, like I say, poor people, but we tried to help them. And I remember one woman, she gave birth to a baby. I'll never forget that. And one of the villagers took her in. She had her baby there, you know. She didn't know whether her husband was alive or dead, you know. And what they used to do, we had no gas, nothing. We cooked on burners where you put wood under the parts. And what they would do was go in the woods and collect sticks because over there there's hardly any lumber, any trees. All the trees there are fruit-bearing trees, so they don't cut those down, see, like over here. Over there lumber is like marble is over here. Everything over there is marble because it's cheap, it's there. Lumber is more expensive than lumber. They can't to build with lumber. Anyway, they'd go and collect these sticks and sell them to us so they could buy a loaf of bread, and we'd use the sticks to fire our pots, you know. It was very bad. But the city, the town was clean.

EI-186/BASSO

Everybody had a little garden. We had a lot of pears, the prickly pears. I'll never forget those. My grandmother used to go down to the garden in the morning. And they'd be way up high. And she'd have a pole with a can at the end of the pole, and she'd put the fruit in the can, twist it, and then bring it down. That's how she. And then, you know, these things all had little, great long things that would stick to you, you know. And she'd lift up the back of her blouse and she'd tell me to pick the things off her back. That I remember, too. (she laughs)

LEVINE: You mean, there were stickers that came through her clothing?

BASSO: Yeah! Through her clothes. There were . . .

LEVINE: And they would be in her back.

BASSO: Over here, when you see a prickler, there's no, what would you call him?
The . . .

LEVINE: Thorns?

BASSO: Thorns, thorns. There's no thorns. But over there you couldn't even handle one of those because you'd get them all over your fingers, you know.

LEVINE: And what did they taste like?

BASSO: Ooh, they're delicious. They're mostly all seeds anyway, but you cut the skin off and out comes the fruit and you eat it. It's juicy, but there's a lot of seeds

EI-186/BASSO

in it, but the seeds go with the fruit. They're very, very tasty. And that's the first fruit that I wanted when I went there the first time. (she laughs) They have them here in the market, you know. They come, I don't know, out of California, from somewhere.

LEVINE: Do you remember other foods that you ate as a child?

BASSO: The food was very plain food, mostly spaghetti with broccoli, spaghetti with cauliflower, spaghetti with sauce. Forget it, but mostly it was spaghetti and bread, of course. And during the war I remember the bread, and I suppose the rest of the food was rationed and all. The oil, even the oil that you burn in the lamp, we had oil lamps, and at night, to save the oil, we'd just sit out on the veranda there, wherever, little porch, and the lamp would go off. We'd shut it off to save the oil, you know, because we needed it. And the food, like I say, I remember they used to bake the bread at home. Some people had that, what would you say, the government would let them bake this bread for the people, you know. And then you'd go over there and wait for the bread to come out of the oven. I'll never forget this occasion, when my mother sent me down to get the bread. Because I was little, you know. And everybody, the older people, you know, they'd start pushing. And I remember the woman was on a platform, and we were down below, and in order to reach her I had to climb, uh, there was this great, big stone, uh, container where they used to keep even food or water for the pigs. Because they had pigs running around, you know, over there. You know, they didn't keep them in, uh, of course, they don't do that now, but in those days if you had a pig the pig would walk around all over in the village, and everybody would feed him something, you know. So this trough, like, was for the pig that they had, and I climbed on that

EI-186/BASSO

thing on the edges so I could reach the platform. Well, somebody must have pushed me or whatever, and I fell in that thing. And, oh, I began to cry and I ran home. I didn't care about the bread or anything. (she laughs) I ran home. I'll never forget that as long as I live.

LEVINE: Well, now, do you remember, I mean, in other words, did the people who baked the bread in their homes, did they have regular stoves or did they have great, big . . .

BASSO: Oh, no. In those, in the village everybody had an oven. That's where you baked your own bread.

LEVINE: Now, did these people have just a regular oven like any other family would have? Or they had . . .

BASSO: These ovens are built of stones, bricks.

LEVINE: Could you, yeah, describe them.

BASSO: Yeah. I remember, when I went to see the house where I was born nobody lived in it. But they had it for storage. So my cousin went and had a woman come over. She was good enough to open the door. And each door there was one, two rooms. Each room has a door that led on a little, a little porch, like. But everything there is made of stone, cement. I don't know how the heck they build those houses up against the stones, you know. And she opened the door, and there's this room. I says, "Oh, my God!" I says, "That's where my mother, my mother's bed would be in that corner," I said to her,

EI-186/BASSO

"and my bed was in this corner." I remember that. And then I says, "There's another room where my grandfather and my grandmother slept." He says, "Yeah, come out." And she opened the other door, and there's the other room, where my grandmother and grandfather, the room, you know, where they slept. And I says, "There's a kitchen, too." Well, not actually a kitchen. There's a place where we did the cooking and baked the bread. She says, "Come in. It's still here." I went in there and there it is, the place, stones, you know. And then there's a grate on top, you put your pan on that grate, and you build a fire underneath, you know. And the oven, a great, big oven. And what they would do, we used to bake, my mother used to bake, my mother, my grandmother and my aunt, they get together and bake the bread once a week. And they'd build a fire on the side of the oven. The oven was all cement in there, all rocks, you know, bricks and rocks. They build a fire on the side and when the fire was all smould, uh . . .

LEVINE: Embers?

BASSO: Embers, yes, nice and hot. They'd put the bread in and bake the bread. That's how they'd bake the bread, you know.

LEVINE: And how many loaves would they bake?

BASSO: Oh, quite a bit, quite a few. You can imagine, that had to last the whole week, you know. And my aunt, my grandmother, my, you know. And that's how we did that.

LEVINE: Now, would they, how big was the oven? Could you fit a lot of loaves in at the

same time?

BASSO: Oh, I suppose. Well, maybe as big as this, the top of this table, see.

LEVINE: So about four feet across.

BASSO: Yeah. Just about. Yeah. So.

LEVINE: Well, now, who was living in your family with you?

BASSO: My grandmother and my grandfather, my mother and I. My mother and father married here in the United States. They were young when they came here. They got married in the United States.

LEVINE: Oh. So when did they come?

BASSO: So, when they were young, well, in their, seventeen, eighteen, twenty, whatever. You know.

LEVINE: I see. And they knew each other from Sicily? And they came to the United States?

BASSO: They came to the United States the first time, okay. My mother and father were married here. And they lived here for a few years. In fact, when the First World War broke out, before the war broke out, my father always had intention of going back, so he sent my mother back, and I was born two months after she got there.

LEVINE: Oh. And your father was still here?

BASSO: My father was here with his younger brother. So then the war broke out, and I always remember this. My father used to say that they said that if you didn't go back to fight for your country, which was Italy, you, they wouldn't let you back in the country, see. So they scared these men here so that they went back to fight for their country. And my father said, "They didn't even give us a chance to get off the train." They grabbed them, and into the army they went, both of them, you know.

LEVINE: So he didn't even get a chance to go home?

BASSO: No. Well, I don't know, I don't remember, but he always says that. But I saw my father during the four years maybe three or four times, that's all. They'd let him come home once in a while. I never even knew him, you know. I was, I wouldn't even go near him because I was shy. I didn't know the man. He's my father, but I didn't know him, you know. So that's what happened.

LEVINE: So your mother and father knew each other in Sicily.

BASSO: Yes.

LEVINE: But then they . . .

BASSO: They came here.

LEVINE: Did they travel together?

BASSO: No, no, no. In Sicily I don't think they knew each other.

LEVINE: Oh.

BASSO: They knew, it's a small town. They knew who they were, you know, but they didn't come together.

LEVINE: Did your mother come with somebody in her family?

BASSO: Yes, her sister. And my father had his brother.

LEVINE: Now how, why, do you know why they happened to come when they did?

BASSO: Well, everybody wanted to get out. Like today those immigrants that want to come in here to get out of their country, you know? Because it was terrible the way things were, you know. So, and people were coming by the, in droves, from all over, from Ireland, from France, from everywhere, Italy. And they came, too. They decided to come, you know.

LEVINE: I see. So when you were born, do you know how old your mother was, roughly?

BASSO: My mother must have been, uh, about maybe twenty-six.

LEVINE: Twenty-six. And you think she came over to the United States when she was

around seventeen, eighteen?

BASSO: Yeah. About seventeen, eighteen, yeah.

LEVINE: So if you were born in 1912, she probably . . .

BASSO: They were here quite a while.

LEVINE: . . . came like 1902 or 1904. Somewhere in there, maybe.

BASSO: Oh, the first time, you mean.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BASSO: Probably. That I couldn't tell you, because I don't, I don't know.

LEVINE: And do you know where they, then they met over here again.

BASSO: Yes, yes. Because everybody would come to Lawrence because they had the woolen mills here in Lawrence. I don't know if you're familiar with Lawrence's history. And everybody came here because they could get a job in the mills. Even the young people, twelve years old, they'd go to work, you know. Fourteen, for different, you know.

LEVINE: Do you by any chance know if your mother and/or father came through Ellis Island that first time when they came?

EI-186/BASSO

BASSO: No, I don't know. They never spoke about it, so I wouldn't know. And, no, I don't, I don't know if they did or not. Because at one time, because I know friends of mine that came, and they didn't go through Ellis Island, you know.

LEVINE: Right. There were other ports of entry, right. Well, now, did both your mother and your father work in the Lawrence mills when they came that first time?

BASSO: Yes.

LEVINE: Did they ever tell you stories about how they met or their courtship or, you know, getting married here?

BASSO: Not too much, not too much. I don't remember them ever talking about it, you know.

LEVINE: But then after they were married they wanted to go back?

BASSO: After they were married, and I don't know what decided my father to go back. Maybe it was because of the war. I don't know. Because my mother, like I said, she went before my father did, see. And I was, well, I was four years old when my father came back. So it must have been quite a while before the war, before he went into the service. You know what I mean? Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, now, what was your mother's name, and her maiden name?

BASSO: Her maiden name was Giuffrida.

LEVINE: Could you spell it?

BASSO: Antonia, Antonina Giuffrida.

LEVINE: How do you spell Giuffrida?

BASSO: G-I-U-F-F-R-I-D-A.

LEVINE: And Antonina?

BASSO: Antonina.

LEVINE: And your father's name.

BASSO: My father's name was Benny, but in Italian it was Benidetto, because he was Garofalo, you know.

LEVINE: And how about your aunt and uncle who came with you when you came?

BASSO: My uncle had just come out of the service and he got married. So he came with his wife and himself. Because I remember on the boat my mother and I were so sick. Oh, we were so sick, seasick, you know, and my father wasn't. So he used to, and they went, the men and women weren't together at night. You know what I mean? The men were on one, the men and the boys were in one section, the women and the girls were in another section. So in the morning the first thing he'd do would be to come down below, I don't know, where we were, there was, and they had beds, hammocks, like. Not

hammocks, but anyway . . .

LEVINE: Bunk beds.

BASSO: Bunk beds, yeah. And people throwing up all over the place. So the first thing my father would do in the morning, he would come down and take us up on ship where we could, we'd lay out there on blankets half dead. (she laughs) At least we'd have fresh air up there, you know. And my aunt and my uncle, my uncle was sick. Oh, he was so sick. But my aunt didn't get sick. So she used to take care of him, and she'd do the same thing with him. You couldn't even walk. I remember, you'd have to hold on to something, you know, the way the boat would rock, you know. Going up the stairs, I remember that. You'd have to hold onto the railing there or you'd fall, you know. Oh, it was terrible. Then, you know, on the boat, what I remember, too. This was the lowest class, what they call first class, second class. The first class people, all the rich people, and they were way up, way up above, you could see when they come out, you know. And we'd look up at them, they were all dressed, you know, nice, you know, and all that. And we'd look up. And down where we were, we were like a flock of sheep, you know. Oh, it was terrible. Twenty-two days. And sick, so sick. She even has that in the paper, in that article she wrote. The smell of coffee. Ooh, I can't. Today the smell doesn't bother me, but I could never get used to drinking coffee, never. I never drank coffee in my life.

LEVINE: Well, now, what was your uncle? Who was your uncle? Was he related to your . . .

BASSO: My father's brother.

LEVINE: And what was his name?

BASSO: His name was Alfio.

LEVINE: Alfio?

BASSO: Fred, Fred. Alfred.

LEVINE: And his wife's name?

BASSO: Was Consetta, Consetta.

LEVINE: Now, you said you lived with your grandmother and grandfather when you were still in Sicily.

BASSO: Yes. When my father was in the army, yeah.

LEVINE: And was that your mother's father and mother or your father's?

BASSO: No, my father's. My father's mother and father.

LEVINE: And what were their names?

BASSO: Well, Angela. That's my, you know, (she laughs) the Italian, I don't know about the other nationalities, but the first girl, if it's a, is named after the

EI-186/BASSO

father's mother, and if it's a boy it's named after the father's father. So I know her name was Angela, like mine. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: What do you remember about them?

BASSO: Oh, my grandmother? Oh, she was a little woman. She was no taller than this. (she gestures) And my mother always says that she had to have triplets at one time. Can you imagine triplets in a country where there's no, you know, today the hospitals, they live. But those triplets, my mother says, they didn't die right away. They died, one was six months, one was five months. She had, and when she had these triplets she lost all her teeth, and my grandmother had no teeth, you know. And she just, you know how you chew with no teeth, you know. And when we came to this country, I went to school in Italy and I learned how to read and write, you know. And I used to write the letters for my mother. My mother didn't know how to read or write. My father did, but my mother didn't. And I'd write the letters to send back to my grandmother and my grandfather. And my mother would tell me what to write. Tell her to come here. Tell them to come here, because over here there's cakes and they're soft, that she can eat the cake. (she laughs) I remember that so well.

LEVINE: Now, what was your grandfather's name?

BASSO: Salvatore, yeah. Salvatore.

LEVINE: Oh, and what kind of a personality did your grandmother have?

EI-186/BASSO

BASSO: Oh, she was a sweet woman. She was so nice.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything she ever told you, like, you know, sayings she had or . . .

BASSO: No, but you know what I remember? I was spoiled because that was the oldest son, and I was born of the oldest son and they spoiled me rotten in Italy. You know, I had toys, I had dolls, and things like that, you know. And she always catered to me, you know.

LEVINE: Is that a special privilege, to be the oldest son?

BASSO: Oh, yes. I don't know what it is, but the oldest son always is more favored than who comes after that. The oldest, you know. (a refrigerator comes on)

LEVINE: Now, can you remember any stories? Did your grandmother ever tell you stories?

BASSO: No, I don't remember anything like that. But I remember how she worked with everything, you know.

LEVINE: Like what?

BASSO: With say, for instance, the beds. You know, they had this, it was like wool, but it was all in little pieces, and it had to be fluffed out every morning, you know. They'd have holes in the mattresses so you could stick your hands in the mattress and fluff them out.

LEVINE: They were made out of sheep wool, lambs?

BASSO: I don't know. I guess so, because they were like little lumps, like, you know? And then once in a while they'd empty them out and they'd wash them, you know. I remember her doing that. And you know where they'd wash their clothes? Oh, let me tell you about the water. We had no running water, and there was a fountain. We'd have to go down. The streets were all stones, you know.

LEVINE: Cobblestones?

BASSO: Yeah. And we'd have to go down to that, what did I call it?

LEVINE: The well?

BASSO: Not a well. The water was running all the time.

LEVINE: A spring.

BASSO: A spring, yeah. And they had faucets. They had three or four faucets. In fact, that's where they used to take their, everybody had a donkey because that's like an automobile today, and they'd take their animals down there to water them, you know. Before they'd come from the orchard they'd go by there and water their livestock, you know. And there were faucets where you could get, fill your container, your jug. They had these jugs, clay jugs, you know.

LEVINE: Pottery.

BASSO: Pottery, yeah. And we'd have to go down and get our water.

LEVINE: How would they carry the jugs?

BASSO: The jugs, did you ever see on television sometimes they'd have a crown made of material, put it on their head, and they'd put the jug, a great big jug this tall, and they'd carry that on their heads.

LEVINE: So it was like three feet high?

BASSO: Yeah.

LEVINE: And it had a, did it have a lid?

BASSO: Oh, yeah, a lid at the top where you fill it, you know. Either that, or they'd put it on their shoulder, but mostly they'd have it on their head, and they'd come up. And it wasn't, you know, the streets weren't. You know what impressed me a lot was when I went there the first time I said, "Gee," I says, "the streets." I even asked my cousin, "Did they build houses so that the street is narrow?" I says, "I remember the streets wider." He says, "No, they've always been like that. Maybe because you were so little you thought they were." I imagined them wider. The streets were no wider than an alley here.

LEVINE: Like for a horse and wagon, that wide.

BASSO: Yeah. And the main streets are still that way, but now they have buses, those great big buses that go through these streets. Can you imagine? And they'd bring their water up. They'd fill these big jugs at home, and they'd use that water to wash up, to drink, to cook, and just about everything, everything.

LEVINE: Now, were the jugs like the color of a natural clay pot?

BASSO: The colors, the color of, you know the pots that you buy to put plants? Now they're made of plastic, so I can't show you.

LEVINE: But I . . .

BASSO: That type, that type, yeah. That type.

LEVINE: Wow. And how about bathroom facilities?

BASSO: Oh, bathrooms. We had no bathroom, but we had the garden down below. We'd have to go down. Like I said, the houses were all built on these mountains. You know, the houses built high, and we'd have to go down into the garden. They'd dig a hole there someplace and use it as a bathroom. That's all, that's all there was. Can you imagine living that way today? Oh, my God!

LEVINE: It wasn't even, was it an outhouse? Was it built up so it was like a seat, or it was just a hole in the ground?

EI-186/BASSO

BASSO: No, no. You just, you just squatted down and that was it. (she laughs)
That's all. That I remember, see. But in the, like, we were in the outskirts,
you know. And we could do that because we had a garden down below, you
know. We had these plants there where we'd get the prickly pears and they
were all big. And down below, you know, nobody would see you. You know
what I mean? But in the town, I remember, because my mother sent me to
learn. Some of these women would take little girls in and teach them how to
crochet, how to knit, how to embroider, you know. And I was going to school
to learn. And I remember they had, on the side of the house, where you
could go to the toilet. It was closed in, you know. So it must have been the
same way as the, you know, just an outhouse. No water, no, you know, to
flush or nothing.

LEVINE: So that's what you learned? You learned to crochet and you learned . . .

BASSO: Oh, yeah. I learned to crochet, I learned to embroider. Yeah, four years old,
they'd send you. I was four years old when my mother sent me. And I
remember if I didn't like the woman, you know, and I didn't, you'd have to
bring your own little chair, you know. I'd pick up my chair and I'd leave. (she
laughs) And I'd go find myself another one, another woman.

LEVINE: So then there were lots of women who did that?

BASSO: Oh, yeah, yeah. They did that, yeah. There was a lot of women, yeah.

LEVINE: And what about little boys do? Did they learn something at that point in life
too, or no?

BASSO: The little boys, the father would take them in the morning with them. Because we had a lot of orange groves, you know. That's where, I remember the piles of oranges and they'd pick them, and the little boys would go with them and learn and do, help, you know, in the garden, whatever. They'd have to water the trees, and they'd do that at night. And we had no, it's awfully dry over there, you know. And you'd have to water these trees. And they'd have this great big tank that they kept filled with water, and every, each one had time to open the water so they could water their trees, you know. They'd give them, like, two hours of water. Then it would shut, you know. So they'd have to go at night sometimes and water. And they'd have these, around the trees they'd have these little, uh, what would you call them, trenches, like, so the water would run in there and water the trees.

END OF SIDE A, TAPE ONE

BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE ONE

BASSO: That's how they watered these trees.

LEVINE: Now, where were the tanks?

BASSO: In the woods, in the woods. I remember that, too. It was big, you know, like these tanks you see. What are they, gas tanks? Something like that.

LEVINE: And they would fill up with water from a stream, or something like that?

BASSO: I don't know how they filled that up. I suppose from the running water. Because that water, that water that I told you, where we'd go get our water, that water ran all the time, all the time.

LEVINE: So, like, say your father or your grandfather would have, say, two hours to water his trees.

BASSO: To water his orchard, yes.

LEVINE: In a week, or two hours . . .

BASSO: Well, I don't remember how often they'd let them use the water, because they had to supply everybody with it. It wasn't only us, you know. Each person that had, and there were a lot of people, like, you'd get a job there in the village to take care of these gardens, and they'd belong to people that were rich and lived in the city, but they had these gardens, and people would work for them to take care of them. In fact, after the war my father, that's how he got a job, and that's what he was doing, tending the garden and watering it and everything. That's the only work there was for them. And then they picked the oranges, you know, and sell them, of course, ship them. And I remember the great big piles of oranges. Well, oranges were plenty there.

You could . . .

LEVINE: Always have oranges.

BASSO: Always, yeah. Always oranges, yeah. And everybody has a garden, too.

LEVINE: What's in the garden?

BASSO: Vegetables and things that they'd grow. They grow their own things.

LEVINE: So all year long you would have things coming from the garden.

BASSO: Oh, yes, yes. Because winter there isn't like over here. So you'd always have fresh. But today, what a difference. I couldn't believe it. They come around selling vegetables, you know. Now you don't have to (she laughs), you have to grow your own, no.

LEVINE: How about the well, or the spring in the center of town? Was that a social gathering place?

BASSO: No, it wasn't in the center of town. It was almost, almost . . .

LEVINE: On the outskirts?

BASSO: This road that led to, this is the road that they would take to go to their orchards, and the well there, the fountain, was down at the end of the road there, down below. And a lot of people would go there to wash their clothes

too, you know. They had these rocks, and they would scrub, instead of a scrub board, they'd use that for a scrub board.

LEVINE: The rocks were right there?

BASSO: Yeah. The rocks were laying. Whether they put them there for that purpose, I don't know. There'd be this, like a little brook running, you know. And the women would just kneel on their knees in front of that rock and they'd wash, they'd have soap, put soap on the clothes and scrub, and then rinse them in the running spring.

LEVINE: Did you, I mean, was it like a place where women would get together and talk?

BASSO: Well, there's be, yeah. There'd be quite a few there, you know, yeah. Yeah, yeah. See, now they have washing machines in the house. I couldn't believe it. We stayed with one of my cousins, and she was about the poorest of all the people that we went, but she had a full bathroom, she had a washing machine in that bathroom, she had a bidet, you know. In Italy that's, everybody has one of those. And when we built this house ten years ago I says, "I want one of those." (they laugh) The builder said, "There's no room in there." I said, "Oh, yes, there is." I says, "I want one of those." (she laughs) So, and she had a full bath, a bathtub with a shower and everything, you know. She had a small television, she had a refrigerator and she had gas, bottled gas, though. And the gas, the little tanks were under the, she had like a little thing there where she cooked, you know, and the gas was underneath there. And running water. I don't understand how they put the

EI-186/BASSO

running water where everything is stone. Everything is solid. How the heck, where did they dig to put the pipes?

LEVINE: In other words, the houses are kind of built into the hills?

BASSO: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Which are out of stone?

BASSO: Yes.

LEVINE: Is there stone, in other words, the houses are stone, but there's stone, like, they're built into rocks on the side of the hills?

BASSO: Yeah, yes, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, now, what do people do now there to make money?

BASSO: I should have, I should have taken some of those pictures, because I took pictures. I took a lot of pictures. I should have taken some of those just to show you how it's been.

LEVINE: When we finish maybe you could show me. But how, what do people do for a living over there now in that town?

BASSO: Like I told you, they work in the orchards.

LEVINE: Still, the same thing.

BASSO: Yeah. There's nothing. Oh, now, you know what they do now? They go to the cities to work. They have buses. They don't need no, they only, I only saw one donkey the first time I went. This man, we were walking, you know, my cousin. Ooh, she says, "There's the," I says, "I want to take a picture, I want to take a picture." And he's on the donkey, you know. And from the, where they come, they bring the vegetables and things, and they have these things that they put on the donkey, and it was filled with greens. I could see it, you know. And he was on it, you know. Before I got my camera ready, you know, he went by. He said, my cousin said to him, "Wait!" In Italian. "Wait! She's taking a picture." "I don't want no picture." He didn't want no picture there, but I took a picture of him as he was going by anyway. That's the only one I saw in my home town, you know, where I was born.

LEVINE: What did they use the donkeys for when you were a little girl?

BASSO: Oh, they used it for everything. If they had to go, in order to go to the orchard they had to have that donkey.

LEVINE: What were the orchards? What kind of fruits?

BASSO: The oranges, oranges, oranges.

LEVINE: All oranges.

BASSO: Oh, yeah. Oranges, oranges, yeah. They used to plant trees there, whatever

they needed, you know. That's what it was, mostly, oranges.

LEVINE: So they would load up the donkeys.

BASSO: And they have olive trees, and they have nut trees, you know. Things like that. They have a lot of olive trees. You know what they do there? They'd even do that now. When I went he had bought, my cousin had bought an olive tree and what they do, they pick their leaves, their olives. You know how they pick them? They put a big, big sheet on the ground, and then they'd shake and the olives would fall, and then they'd take these olives and take them to the, I don't know what you call it, where they make the oil, where they press the olives. They have that in the town. And they have, and they press the olives, the olives, to make their oil for the year.

LEVINE: How do they press them? Do you know how the presser works?

BASSO: Oh, it's a mill, like, it's a mill where they put the oil and they, the thing goes around and they put, the same way with the flour. I remember that. They used to gather the seed, you know, the wheat, and then they'd take it to the mill, and they'd grind it, and make flour.

LEVINE: How was it ground? Do you remember how it used to be ground?

BASSO: With this, I remember going there once, and everything was white from the, from the dust from the flour. And it had like a big, big stone wheel, and this wheel would go around.

EI-186/BASSO

LEVINE: It would be like a horizontal, it would be like a table top going around.

BASSO: Yeah, yeah. Yes, yes. That's what I remember. That's how they ground . . .

LEVINE: And a horse, was a horse pulling it around?

BASSO: I don't remember that, whether it was a horse or whether it was people.

LEVINE: Or a donkey?

BASSO: Or people, I don't know. I don't remember. But I remember seeing the place. What I remember was it was all white from the dust from the flour, you know. And every, everybody did that. They'd make enough flour to last until the next flour, the next grain that you'd pick, yeah. The oil, the same way. They'd, and like I said, even now they did that. He would grind enough oil to last them until the next crop, you know. And they had, oh, you know what they had a lot there where I come from? Grapes. They make wine. They did the same thing with the grapes. He'd get enough grapes to make enough wine for himself and the rest he'd sell it, you know. And when I came, we were coming back, they were going to pick the grapes the next day. And everybody goes and picks the grapes, got to pick it by hand, you know. Even now you have to pick it by hand. He was going to pick the grapes and make the wine.

LEVINE: Do you remember what kind of wine they made there?

BASSO: Well, it was mostly red wine, you know, that they made. Even my father,

EI-186/BASSO

when we came here, he was making his own wine. At the time they used to send the grapes from California, you know, in Lawrence, and they could buy it in the stores by the case, and they'd buy enough grapes to make a barrel of wine. I used to hate that, wintertime came, to make wine. I used to hate it.

LEVINE: Why?

BASSO: Because I'd have to help my mother, my father and I. I'd have to take the leaves off, some grapes still have leaves, clean it, sort of clean it. I'd have to take the leaves off the grapes, you know, and help like my father. I didn't like it. (she laughs) The time came, I didn't like it. And then they'd have it in the cellar, and it would have to ferment, you know. And you could smell that all through the house. We lived in a four-story house and you could smell that all through the four tenants that lived in the place, you know. Everybody made it then, anyway.

LEVINE: Were you a religious family when you were in Italy?

BASSO: Yes. Oh, yes, very religious. Yes. I remember, you know what I remember about that, every Sunday we'd go to church and my father and my mother. And then coming home, before we'd get to the house there was an aunt of my father. My grandmother's sister that lived a house, before we'd get to her house, my grandmother's house. And he'd always go by and say, we'd have a saying that's like, "Bless me." You know? And he'd say, "Bless me." And he'd kiss her hand, you know, and then go home, and do the same thing to his mother, you know. Yeah. And when we came here, too, in Lawrence, we lived not too far from the church, and we used to go to church every Sunday,

my father, my mother and I, you know.

LEVINE: Now, what, do you remember like saints days or any kind of celebrations that were religious?

BASSO: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: What were they like?

BASSO: St. Joseph was their, what would you call it, their . . .

LEVINE: Patron saint?

BASSO: Patron saint, yes. And they'd have, oh, all kinds of, it was a feast. They'd have, even, fireworks. Because I remember, we had a dog. We had a dog, and it kept tied. And he was so afraid of those fireworks. He used to hear them and he used to go hide wherever he could. Oh, yeah. That was very, they had a lot of religious, you know, things that they'd hold.

LEVINE: Processions? Did they have processions during these religious ceremonies?

BASSO: When I was young, yes. Now I don't know if they do, but when I was young I belonged, what they call the virgins. And I had a veil, a white dress, and we'd march in the procession. And that was, I hadn't even had my first communion or anything, you know. Usually when you have your first communion you have your veil, you know. But this was like a society, a little, you know, where you get. In fact, my aunt was so religious she'd have these little virgins, they

EI-186/BASSO

were called. She'd have them at the house. You'd have to fast on that day. I forget what day it was. And she'd have them, then at noon she'd fix lunch for them, you know, for us. I was one of them, too.

LEVINE: You mean you'd fast in the morning?

BASSO: Fast, yeah, fast. I only have a little something at noon, that's all. Fast all day. Yeah.

LEVINE: And what would the feasts be like on such occasions?

BASSO: I don't remember. They have it a certain day where they did that, but I don't remember what it was. In fact, you know, where my aunt lived, this was my father's sister, it was like a little, I remember it as big. When I got there it was little. Like, a round square, a square, you know, where there's houses here. And I says, and I saw, there was a wooden cross right in the middle. They had like a little something made of stones, and then this big cross was in the middle. So when I got there I went all through the village looking at everything, I remember. When I got there, yeah, I feel a cold breeze. Do you? So when I got there I says, "There used to be a cross here, I remember." My cousin, "You remember that?" I says, "Yes, I do." I says, "But now they had a statue of the Blessed Virgin." I says, well, he says, "The cross, in time, it got, it was wooden, and it got rotted." And my aunt had made a collection and had put this statue in place of that cross, you know. And he couldn't believe it when I told him, "Where's the cross that was here? I remember there was a cross here." (she laughs)

EI-186/BASSO

LEVINE: Well, now, you had a lot of family members, extended family members, right in that town.

BASSO: Yes, yeah, yeah. Yes, my father's sisters. He only had one brother, but he had about three, three or four sisters. My mother had sisters, brothers, too. When we came here my aunt, my father's sister was here. They lived in Beverly. And she was here already, you know. And that's where we went until we found a place in Lawrence, you know. And my mother had a brother, her brother, her two brothers, I think, here, when we came, when I was, you know, eight years old.

LEVINE: Well, now, do you remember when your father came back from the army?

BASSO: Yes.

LEVINE: Were you still there?

BASSO: Yes.

LEVINE: What did you feel like when you saw your father?

BASSO: Oh, like I said, I didn't know my father, and I was shy. I didn't even want to, you know, go near him. You know what I mean? Because I didn't, I didn't know him.

LEVINE: And how old were you then, when he came out of the army?

BASSO: Well, I was about seven, because we weren't there too long and then we came, you know. He worked for a while. You know, I was talking to one of my cousins, and I was telling her about what happened, you know, that this woman is going to come tomorrow. She says, "Oh," she says, "I have a story, too." She came, her father and mother were here, and her brother, no, they got married in Italy. I don't know, the way she told me. Anyway, they went back when she was two years old. She was born here. And the government, the Italian government, paid for their passage to go back. This was during the World War I. Because I said to her, "Gee, I wonder if my father, if they paid for my father and his brother's way to go back." But I never heard my father say anything about that, so I don't know. So after the war, and they decided they want to come back here. In the meantime she had had another baby there, a little boy. So when it was time for them to come back, the government was going to pay their passage again, to go back to where. Because they went back. He went back to fight for his country, you know. But in the mean time this little boy had been born in Italy. So he says, "We'll pay for the four of you, she and her sister, father and mother, but we're not going to pay for him. You have to leave him here." Because he was born in Italy. He says, "You have to leave him here." And she says, my mother says, "I'm not going to leave him here. I'll pay for his passage." (she laughs) She remembers that, you know.

LEVINE: Okay, so how was it decided that you would come? Do you remember?

BASSO: Oh, my father always wanted to come back. After what he went through in the army.

LEVINE: Did he talk about the army? What did he tell you about the army.

BASSO: Oh, yes, he did.

LEVINE: What did he tell you about the army?

BASSO: He did talk about the army. We'd sit there with our mouth open every time he started talking. He was injured, his foot, there. He got a pellet there. I don't know what it was. He got injured. And they had to fight. He says, "I remember there was one." They were young. You know how these kids that go in the army, nineteen years old, for goodness, seventeen, you know, seventeen. And he says, "This young fellow, he was so scared. He was so scared he didn't want to." You know what they did? They shot him, his commander shot him. Can you imagine? And that, you know, and oh, so many things, so many things. They were out in Austria there, way up in the Alps, all over the place there. It was a hardship for them, you know.

LEVINE: So did he see a lot of combat?

BASSO: Well, yes. He was there right where they were fighting. He was right there, yeah.

LEVINE: So what was his attitude, then? It was that he had had it with . . .

BASSO: He had had it, yes. And he wanted to get back here as quick as he could. And where there was his sister here too, you know. And so that's what we did. As soon, I don't know, as soon as he got enough money we made

EI-186/BASSO

passage. And we went, from Sicily you have to cross by boat to go into Italy. You know, that was an overnight thing we did. Then we went to Naples, because that's where we were going to leave with the boat. And the boat, I don't know what happened, but we were there, oh, it seemed like a long time to me. Maybe we were there a week, maybe two weeks, I don't know. And we slept, there was like a great, big hall, and they had all these carts there.

LEVINE: Oh, from the steamship company.

BASSO: Yeah, for these people that were waiting to go to the United States.

LEVINE: And did they examine you there?

BASSO: They examine you there. And we had, my father had a friend of his wife that they were coming, they were together. We were all together. I don't know if she had a little boy, and I don't know, something there they had to go back, and that's heartbreaking, after doing all that, after making a trip, you know, to Naples. And oh, they were crying, and they had to go back. They wouldn't let them on the boat.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about that examination?

BASSO: No, I don't. I don't remember it. The only thing I remember is when we got to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Well, before you tell that part, could you describe yourself as you were when you were eight years old. (Mrs. Basso laughs), like, just before you left for

the United States? What kind of a little girl were you, when you think about it?

BASSO: I don't know. I was a happy little girl. At that age what, I went to school and I had, like I said, I had everything. My aunt used to send us a lot of packages with clothes and everything. My aunt, my father's sister, was here. She used to send us a package, packages all the time. And my mother would make, she know how to sew, she'd make all of the, and I always had nice dresses on and everything.

LEVINE: Can you remember any of your clothes, the kind of clothes you wore when you were that age?

BASSO: The only one I remember was, you know, we were playing, and I don't know what happened. And one of the girls had a pocket in one of that, on my dress. She must have grabbed my pocket and it ripped. So I went home crying. My mother said, "Ooh," she says, "what did you do? Did you go out and play like that and you," you know. She was very upset with me, you know. And I was crying because my dress was torn, and that's all I can remember.

LEVINE: Do you remember the styles at all, the kind of stuff you wore?

BASSO: No. But I have pictures, I have a couple of pictures of me and my mother with the cinched and the long skirt. My mother with her hair around, you know. And I had a dress that come down to here (she gestures), and it had a sash right down below my belly. You know? My mother used to make my clothes.

EI-186/BASSO

That's the picture, I still have that picture. (exterior voices can be heard)
And . . .

LEVINE: What do you remember about school in Sicily?

BASSO: The school, I loved to go to school. The school was right behind the church, you know. And I remember one day it was pouring, and my mother says, "You can't go to school." The water was coming down there. It was, you know, the street was steep and all rocks. She says, "You can't go to school. It's raining, you know." "No, I've got to go to school." You know. So she took, got an umbrella, and she took me to school. When I got there there was no school because it was so stormy. That I remember. I'll never forget that. (she laughs) My mother says, "I told you not to go." (she laughs) It was pouring. I loved to go to school. I was in the first grade, first, second and almost the third grade when I came here, and I still write in Italian. I write letters. I still write to my cousins. I have a pile of letters there to answer, ooh, so many.

LEVINE: So, let's see. Did you know any English at all when you came here?

BASSO: No, nothing at all. But it's funny how you learn so fast. I remember going to the first grade and, of course, (a cuckoo clock chimes) a lot of those kids that come from the old country, and we moved in the section where it was all Syrian, Lebanese people, you know. And they talked their language, we talked our language. In school the poor teacher, I don't know how she could make out. And I used to, you know how they, I don't know if you ever heard them speak their language. "Halla, halla, halla, halla." And I said, "All they

EI-186/BASSO

say is, 'Halla, halla, halla,' and you can't understand what they're saying."

LEVINE: So those were the two immigrant groups that were mostly around Lawrence when you came?

BASSO: Oh, yeah. Oh, sure, because, like I say, in those days they were coming in droves, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, you mentioned before you were shy. Were you shy when you were eight years old, when you came?

BASSO: No, no. No, no.

LEVINE: Okay, let's see. So then you got to Naples, and finally you got on the boat. And is there anything else about the voyage that you remember that you haven't already mentioned?

BASSO: That we were all sick, like I said. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: And the name of the ship?

BASSO: Well, as far as I can remember it was the Dante Alighieri, but I'm not sure about it. But that's the name that stayed in my mind, and I couldn't make sure. I couldn't say, I couldn't swear. I can't swear that it was the name of the ship. But that's the name that stayed in my mind, and that's what I put down on the thing there.

EI-186/BASSO

LEVINE: Do you keep contact with anybody else who came over on that ship?

BASSO: No, no. My aunt, my uncle, they're all dead. My mother, my father, my uncle, my aunt died not too long ago.

LEVINE: And was it mostly all Italian people on the ship?

BASSO: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: And so then do you remember coming into New York Harbor?

BASSO: I remember coming in, and when the ship docked I imagine it must have been in Ellis Island, because we must have gone there. We went there first. And, yeah. (break in tape)

LEVINE: We're starting again after a little break. We were talking about when you arrived at Ellis Island.

BASSO: Yes.

LEVINE: Can you remember Ellis Island, your first impression of it?

BASSO: I remember where the boat docked and, you know, these small boats come along the ship, you know, selling things, you know. And my father, they'd have a basket, lower the basket down with a rope. And they bought some bananas. I never forgot that. I never saw a banana in all my life. Of course, he knew what it was. And he brought the bananas up, and he peeled it, and

EI-186/BASSO

gave me one. I tasted it. Oh, I didn't like it at all. And that's the best thing I like now. (she laughs) I never forgot that.

LEVINE: What did he do? He put money in the basket and lowered it down.

BASSO: Yeah, he used to lower it down, and whatever. They'd take whatever it was, you know. That I remember. I don't know what else he bought, but I remember the bananas particularly.

END OF SIDE B, TAPE ONE

BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE TWO

LEVINE: . . . taken advantage of, that you remember, when you first came, by people at Ellis Island, or coming into New York?

BASSO: No, no, no. We, uh, we, I don't remember how we came down off the boat. I remember going into the island. I remember going into this great big hall in there, and they took our clothes. We had to strip. We had to take all our clothes off.

EI-186/BASSO

LEVINE: They took the women and girl children on one part, and men . . .

BASSO: The men and the boys in another, yeah. And they took our clothes, our shoes. They took everything. Gave us a blanket, and I always said, "This is the first time, this is the first time I ever saw a naked woman."

LEVINE: Really?

BASSO: (she laughs) It was quite an experience, my mother, her holding me. We go into this hall, this other place where they have showers, and at the end, as you go in, there's this woman, she must have been a nurse because she was all dressed in white. That I remember. And she had this thing that she'd squirt. I guess it was soap. And then she'd tell you to go in the showers and we had to do that. And then wrap ourselves up again in the blanket and come out and wait for our clothes.

LEVINE: And where were your clothes?

BASSO: They took our clothes to fumigate them, you know. Germs, you know, and all that. And when we got our clothes back, I remember going into this big room where they had not bunks but hammocks. Because I said, "Gee, I wonder if Ellis Island ever was a place where soldiers . . ."

LEVINE: Yes, it was.

BASSO: Yeah. Well, that's, when I thought of those things, you know. I forgot to ask the man about that. I always wanted to, and I forgot. Even the second time I

went I forgot to ask him.

LEVINE: Because that was after. That was after you went.

BASSO: Yeah, yeah. Oh, after the war. Yeah. And so they brought our clothes. I remember they were all wrinkled. I put them on, what else? But my father said, "When we get back on the ship we'll change." Because evidently it must have had, we must have had luggage that you carried by hand, because we had a great big trunk that we put all our belongings there. And, in fact, it was flat on the top and my father had the top made over and made it round so that you could put more clothes in there, you know what I mean? (she laughs) And, in fact, that thing, when I moved here, I lived in Andover, and I had a big house there. I had to get rid of a lot of stuff. And I called these people that came to buy a lot of the things I had. And he looked around, and he saw that . . .

LEVINE: Trunk?

BASSO: That luggage there, and you know what he called it? "Immigrant luggage." That's the first time I heard that, you know. So I says, "Oh, sure," I says, "you can have it." I says, "Because it's no good. I can't." He gave me thirty dollars for it, so God knows how much he sold it for.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BASSO: Because it had iron things on top to hold it, you know. Well, anyway, it was, well, it was one of those things where people today are going crazy for

antiques or things like that.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything that you or your family packed, your mother and father packed and took with you to this country?

BASSO: No, but I remember, well, they took, like, sheets and things that they'd need, you know, things like that, besides some clothes. But I remember in particular I had a doll that I loved, and my mother says, "No, you can't." Because we had no room for it. And I had to leave my doll. And that broke my heart. (she laughs) That I remember.

LEVINE: Did the doll have a name?

BASSO: No, no. But it was my favorite doll. I had to leave it, because there was no room for my doll in the big luggage there. So, anyway, when we got back on the boat my father said, "Well, we'll change before we," because we had to go to Boston then, from there. And, but we didn't even, I don't know what happened, we didn't even have time, we didn't have time or whatever it was, to change or nothing. So we got off the boat, my aunt was waiting for us there in Beverly, and I remember going off there, going in this big door, it looked like the railroad station but I don't know whether we had, I don't remember whether we had to go back with the train or whether they had a car. I don't remember that.

LEVINE: But you went from New York by boat to Beverly?

BASSO: Yes, yes.

EI-186/BASSO

LEVINE: So you never really got off in New York? You just got right on another ship.

BASSO: No, no. We just got off to Ellis Island. That's all. And back on a boat. We went back on the same boat.

LEVINE: Oh.

BASSO: On the same boat that we were. The same ship.

LEVINE: And that boat went to Beverly?

BASSO: Went to Boston. To Boston, not Beverly, Boston. Yeah, that's right, too. It must have been the railroad station because they must have come by train to pick us up. I remember going into the doors, all these doors, you know, one after the other, you know, how you go in. Yeah. And . . .

LEVINE: So if it was the Dante Alighieri then that would have been what went on to Boston after.

BASSO: Yeah. And the first thing my aunt did when we got there, she took me to the store, she bought me a pair of sneakers and a dress. (she laughs) I remember that.

LEVINE: What did the dress look like?

BASSO: I don't remember how it was, but it was a new dress, because all our clothes

were, oh.

LEVINE: Do you remember if the dress was like the dresses you had, or was it a different kind of clothing?

BASSO: No, no. It wasn't different, no.

LEVINE: So, and what about your hair on Ellis Island? Did they go through your hair, too?

BASSO: Oh, I imagine so. I don't remember that. I had long hair, always had long hair, never had my hair cut or anything. My mother used to braid it, you know. But I imagine there must have been all kinds of bugs and things, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BASSO: So that's why they put you through the island there, to de, uh, what's that word?

LEVINE: De-louse, and de-everything.

BASSO: De-louse, or whatever. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Well, so, do you remember anything about the exam that they gave you?

BASSO: No, I don't remember.

EI-186/BASSO

LEVINE: The physical, or mental exams, or papers, or . . .

BASSO: No, no, no. I don't remember that at all.

LEVINE: Do you remember how long you were there?

BASSO: At Ellis Island? Oh, not too long.

LEVINE: A matter of hours, you think, or did you sleep there?

BASSO: I don't remember sleeping there, and I don't remember exactly how long we were there. I couldn't tell you for sure whether we stayed. But I remember that room that had the hammocks, you know. We were waiting there with the blankets for our clothes.

LEVINE: And when you got off in Boston do you remember going to your aunt's place?

BASSO: Yes, I remember my aunt waiting there, they were waiting for us. My aunt, I don't know who else was there in Boston, and they took us to Beverly.

LEVINE: And do you remember anything that struck you about America in the beginning, in the first few days?

BASSO: No, no. I guess I was too young to be impressed by anything. They asked me if I remember seeing the Statue of Liberty. I don't remember.

EI-186/BASSO

LEVINE: Do you remember what your attitude was about coming here? Did you have any ideas about what you thought it was going to be, or . . .

BASSO: No, I didn't.

LEVINE: You were too young to be thinking that. Let's see. So then what? You went into school here.

BASSO: Then we were there for a while, and we moved to Lawrence and my mother's brothers were in Lawrence, and we couldn't find a place to live, you know. The houses were all, there wasn't a vacant place. So we moved in with my uncle, my father's, my mother's brother for a while, until we could find a place. And my mother got a job in the mills, and my father worked with the railroad. My uncle was in it too, so he got him a job with the railroad.

LEVINE: So then did he go away, or he was home every night.

BASSO: Yeah. He was home, he was home, yeah.

LEVINE: What kind, did he, like, do building tracks, or did he work on the trains, or . . .

BASSO: Well, he worked, like, good. He replaced the, you know, those things on the tracks, things like that, you know. With the whatchamacallit, what do you call it, that thing that's on the tracks there that you work, by manual. I got a picture of that with my father in it. So he worked in Andover, not too far from here. So then we finally found a place in Lawrence, but in order to get the place we had to buy all those things that were in there. Because these

EI-186/BASSO

people were going back to Italy and they weren't going to take those things with them, so they, in order to get the place, we had to buy, of course, we had nothing. The beds there, a couple of beds, and chairs and tables. So my father bought all the things that were in there and we moved there it was way up on the fourth floor. Oh. You know, after we moved, we were there about four years. When we moved from there, I used to dream about that place all the time, you know. Because I was afraid of fires, and there was only one way to get out of that place, you know. And that must have been, in my mind, and I always, I dreamed about that place for a long, long time.

LEVINE: Did you dream about fires in it, or did you . . .

BASSO: No, I just, I just, it was just a frightening thing that I remember, you know. I used to wake up, you know. Probably a nightmare, or whatever. (she laughs)

LEVINE: So, let's see. So you started school there, back into school.

BASSO: Yeah.

LEVINE: And you started out with a class, what?

BASSO: First grade.

LEVINE: First grade. And then what happened?

BASSO: I started there because I knew, I knew my letters, and the letters are the same

EI-186/BASSO

in Italian and numbers, and how to write and everything. And my teacher said that I would probably get a double promotion when I. But then we moved from there and we moved to the other end of Lawrence and I had to change schools, so that fizzed out, the double promotion. (she laughs) But that was all right. And I went to school, second, third and fourth grade, to this other. They were just wooden buildings. Third and fourth grade were just wooden, four wooden buildings. And they were heated by a stove where they had to put coal in it, just like the pioneers. And they'd have, and it was, you'd come in, it was an opening there, then you'd go into your classroom. And that opening, the stove was there, and there was a big hole up on top where the heat would come in from there, you know, into a room. The floors were wood, you know. Oh, I never forgot that. It was cold in the winter, too.

LEVINE: Did you like school?

BASSO: Yeah, I loved school. Oh, yes, I did.

LEVINE: You liked school here as well as in Italy.

BASSO: I did, yeah, I did. I did.

LEVINE: Do you remember, like, games you played as a child here?

BASSO: Oh, yeah. Oh, marbles, I used to love to play marbles. In those days even the girls played marbles and hopscotch.

LEVINE: Did you play marbles in Italy?

BASSO: No.

LEVINE: Hopscotch?

BASSO: Hopscotch, and the rope, you know.

LEVINE: Jump rope.

BASSO: I loved to play. Whenever we'd go visiting, you know, my father would say, "When we get there, now, you sit in that chair and don't you move." You know how, you can't keep the kids sitting in a chair for two hours. Then over there there was another girl and her brother and we'd get together and we'd play. I forgot my father said, "Don't move from that chair." (she laughs)

LEVINE: Was your father strict?

BASSO: Very. (she gasps) My father was the, I don't think there was another person that could compare with my father.

LEVINE: Really!

BASSO: He was terrible.

LEVINE: What, in what ways, would you say?

BASSO: I couldn't go out to play with the kids. You know, I'd go to school and he'd

EI-186/BASSO

time me how long it took me from school to get home. If I was two minutes, "Where have you been?" "I don't know." "You stopped to play?" "No, I didn't." You know, things like that. You know what I mean? I'll never forget, you know, for Valentine, when you exchange valentines, you know. And I got some valentines from boys, you know, the boys, the girls, put them on my bureau. (she laughs) He sees the valentine with the boy's name. "Who is this?" "Just a boy I go to school with. You think I'm going to marry him?"

LEVINE: You were, what, third, fourth, fifth grade?

BASSO: Ten, ten years old, twelve years old I was going to the Oliver School after. Over there they had the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth, you know. And, oh, my God, he was terrible. That's all I can say. My father, my father, oh. (she laughs) So then, and I, like I say, I loved school, you know. And when I was in the eighth grade my mother was very sick, and I had to stay home and take care of my mother. It was almost at the end of the year, you know. And I was, oh, I was crying. Every time my father, you know, we had the stove with the coal and when he ordered the coal I'd have to stay home to let the man, tell him where to put the coal. And I'd be crying all day. You know? So I was crying and crying. I says, "Oh, I probably won't graduate because I'm missing a lot of school." I was really, I was eight years old when I started school, and when I ended up I was almost sixteen, you know. And the teacher, I went to school one day to tell the teacher that I couldn't go, she says, "Don't worry about graduating." She says, "You're going to graduate." She says, "Don't worry about it." Well, that kind of made me a little happy, you know. But I remember I'd cry and cry and cry all day.

EI-186/BASSO

LEVINE: And what would your father do if you did something wrong? How would he punish you?

BASSO: Never. He never whipped me, never did anything. But he always said, "One of these days you're going to get the worst licking. One of these days." He always said that. "One of these days." (she laughs)

LEVINE: And how about your mother? Was she strict too, or no?

BASSO: My mother, my mother was, whatever my father said was it. She never stood up for me no matter what it was. (she laughs) I'll tell you one incident. At night, you know, we have supper. We all sit at the table and have supper. So this particular night we had this fava, you know fava beans? Okay. Well, I didn't like those too much, you know. And I says, "I'm not going to eat them. I don't want them." "You don't want them?" He says, "Go to bed." He says, "And no supper." Then he'd have a story. He'd say to me, when I'd say, "I don't like the fava, I'm not going to eat them." He'd say to me, "Do you know the story of the monk, the monk and the fava?" I says, "Pa, don't tell me that story. I've heard that before so many times." And this was a story, the monks, you know, how they dressed with sandals. Well, this monk, I forget the way it was, he didn't, they put him, they punished him for something and they put him in a room there and they had this basket full of fava, you know. And they hung it up on the ceiling, and they weren't going to feed him, see. So what he did was he took his sandals, because he couldn't reach the basket, he took the sandal and he hit the basket so the sandal would tip over and some of those things would drop and he'd eat them. He was so starved, as much as he didn't like them like I didn't like them, he was eating them

because he was starved. Every time I said to him that I didn't want to eat the fava he'd tell me the story of the monk. So that night I went to bed without any supper. So my mother used to go, in those days there was no radios, no television. They used to get together with the neighbor. Downstairs we were friends with the woman that lived on the floor below. She used to go down with her and she used to bring her crochet, and crochet. And she was always working with her fingers, you know. They'd get together and talk. And I guess she must have told that lady that I had gone to bed without any supper, and that woman, she loved me. So she came up, she made a sandwich and she brought it into bed and gave it to me. (she laughs) Now, my mother wouldn't, because she wouldn't dare do anything against my father.

LEVINE: So let's see. So were there any, did your mother and father want to keep up the sort of Sicilian traditions, or did they want the family to become Americanized? Did they have some of each, or . . .

BASSO: Well, you can't, you can't get rid of your tradition, and especially when you're living among the same people you keep on, my mother couldn't even speak English when she died. So you see how it is? We spoke Italian at home. My father spoke a little English, you know. But, you see, they didn't get away from their customs because they were all here, they were all together with the same people and, what else. They spoke the same language. Just like these Puerto Ricans. I don't know if you have any of those up your way where you come from but Lawrence, oh, what a mess Lawrence is in. They've burned just about half of the city. There's a fire going on every day. They're burning these houses. The things they do, they destroy. They're destroying the city, you know.

LEVINE: Tell me, in other words, what ways did your mother and father hold on to, would you say, were customs that were strictly Italian?

BASSO: (she pauses) Well, I don't know. Everything, I guess.

LEVINE: Did your father become a citizen?

BASSO: Oh, yes. He became a citizen, and I became a citizen because at the time if there were any children under twelve they would automatically become citizens. I even had a citizenship paper. Still have, yeah. And my mother couldn't become a citizen with him, so she was working in the mills, and they had this school. She went to school there. They had a school that they go for an hour, you know. In fact, she got a diploma. She couldn't even speak English and she got a diploma from school, you know, and all that. And through the school she became a citizen, too, later on. Yeah.

LEVINE: Did your father go, also, to school?

BASSO: No, he didn't go to school, no.

LEVINE: To become a citizen? No.

BASSO: No, but he had to learn a lot of things, you know, things from the book. Of course, he could read and write in Italian because it was much easier for him, you know, to learn, you know what I mean.

EI-186/BASSO

LEVINE: So was he proud of that? Were your mother and father proud of becoming citizens?

BASSO: Oh, of course they were, because they had no intention of going back to Italy any more. My father always wanted to go back just to see his mother and father. And I always said to him, "Pa, when you go back, I want to go back with you." Because I wanted to see it again, you know, as young as I was then, but he never did go back, so that was it.

LEVINE: So you, little by little you got close to your father even though when you first, when he first came out of the army he was . . .

BASSO: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Now, did you ever have brothers and sisters?

BASSO: No. No brothers or sisters. I had nobody.

LEVINE: So then how did, what did you do? You finished school . . .

BASSO: Because, you know, I always said, I wished my father would have had a dozen children, and maybe he wouldn't have been so strict with me. You know what I mean? (they laugh)

LEVINE: So you went to eighth grade and you graduated.

BASSO: I graduated, and that's it.

LEVINE: And then what?

BASSO: Then, after that, my father said, "If you want to still go to school," he says, "you can go to high school." "No," I says, "I'm not going to high school and have to go through this with you the way I have to come home, hurry, I have to actually run home from school. No." I says, "I don't want to go to school any more." And that was it. But after that, see, he said to me, "If you want to go to school, high school, you can." And I said, "No, I'm not going. I don't want to go." I says, "Because I don't want to go through this every day, 'Where have you been? What did you do?'" Uh, forget it. And I quit, I quit.

LEVINE: And then did you work?

BASSO: He wouldn't even send me to work, no. Because he was afraid I'd learn the ways of the world. Can you imagine? And he wouldn't even send me to work. Well, we lived in this house where there were these two girls that was friends, friendly with. And they worked in the sewing place where they'd sew, make jackets, and stuff. And I says, "Ooh, I'd like to try it." You know. So he says, "Okay." So I went. The first week I brought home four dollars, in those days. He says, "Stay home. I don't want you to go." And then, over there, my father, my mother would come and see that I got home okay. Oh, terrible. So I stayed home. I didn't go to work. He never let me go to work."

LEVINE: Were you allowed to go out and socialize with, uh?

BASSO: I would, but I couldn't. No. I would love to do that, but I couldn't. I couldn't do

EI-186/BASSO

that. I couldn't go out with my friends, go to the movie, or no. I couldn't.

LEVINE: So what did you do? You just stayed in the house?

BASSO: Nothing, at home.

END OF SIDE A, TAPE TWO

BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE TWO

LEVINE: For how long?

BASSO: Well, then, you know, I learned how to embroider on the machine, you know. Cut work. I don't know if you're familiar with that.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BASSO: Cut work, on the machine. And I used to do that, even for other people, you know, in those days if you had a daughter you'd start, when she was little, to accumulate her trousseau, sheets, and they'd embroider the sheets all around, and pillowcases. And I used to do that for people, you know. Keep busy.

LEVINE: So then how did you meet your husband?

BASSO: Oh, my husband. We, they, his father and mother, my father and mother, they knew each other when they were little kids in the old country. And we

EI-186/BASSO

became friends, you know, here, and we used to, you know, socialize and I met him. But I couldn't go out. He used to come up and see me. Oh, one time, one time, you know, we were sitting on the porch. I was sitting on the railing and he was sitting on a bench. My father was there all the time, you know. So, and he was kind of fiddling with my skirt, you know. Nothing, you know, what's that. So after he left he says, "And don't you dare ever do that again." I says, "What did I do?" (she laughs) Things like that, I'm telling you, unbelievable.

LEVINE: So your mother and father knew your husband from the old country, too.

BASSO: Yeah, yeah, sure.

LEVINE: So that's why . . .

BASSO: Not the old country, he was born here.

LEVINE: Oh.

BASSO: No, his father and mother, his father and mother.

LEVINE: I see. So did your mother and father and his mother and father want to make this match?

BASSO: Yeah, oh, sure, sure, yeah. And, of course, with me, I always like him, and I really fell hard, you know. And finally we got married, we had a big wedding. He was an only child, I was an only child. And, of course, being an only child,

EI-186/BASSO

well, you don't have to have your own apartment. You can come and live either with me or them. That's the first mistake I made, the very first mistake.

Because I always told my friends, "When you get married, don't you go living with." I was living with my mother and father, but I wasn't. "Get your own place." You know.

LEVINE: So you and your husband lived with your mother and father for a while?

BASSO: For a while, yeah.

LEVINE: So was your father strict with you when you were married?

BASSO: Well, my father was kind of peeved because sometimes he'd go out. He had friends of his age, you know. He says, and he talked to him one day, and he says, "You go out at night and you leave your wife and you go with your friends." He says, "What do you mean?" He says, "You're telling me what to do?" You know? So he was so angry he said to me, "I am leaving. If you want to come with me, okay. If you don't want to come, you can stay." So what was I going to do? So I packed a bag and left. And where did we go? To his mother and father. (they laugh)

LEVINE: And what was that like?

BASSO: Where could we go? We didn't have, I didn't, I wasn't working.

LEVINE: What was he doing?

BASSO: His father was a builder, a contractor, plastering. In fact, my son is a, and his father was a plasterer, and my son is a plasterer. That's what he does. And he used to get big jobs. He used to have it nice. And his son worked for him, you know. And they had a nice house and all that, and they were good, they were good.

LEVINE: Was living with them different than living with your mother and father?

BASSO: Well, naturally it was different, but with my mother and father I felt at home. Over there I felt like I was in a strange house, you know. But it wasn't, they were good to me, you know what I mean. But we didn't stay there long. We moved, from there we moved to Detroit. There were friends. Then things started to get bad, you know, during the Depression, Depression. And the jobs he was getting, instead of making money he was losing money, you know. So they moved to Detroit where it was . . .

LEVINE: His mother and father moved, so you moved.

BASSO: There was some work. We had friends of ours that were friends from here that had moved there too, you know. So after they moved we moved out there, too. And he was working there a bit, you know. And when I got pregnant, I didn't get pregnant till after three years. And, of course, I was such a greenhorn, you know, I didn't know what it was all about. I wanted to come back to my mother. (she laughs)

LEVINE: When you were pregnant you were in Detroit.

BASSO: Yeah. We came back. My baby was born, that was him that was born, my first one.

LEVINE: What's his name?

BASSO: Uh, Sonny, named after my husband's father, you know how it goes. But his name is Santo, but I never liked that name, and I never called him Santo. Ever since he was a baby I called him Sonny. And now he's known as Sonny, that's all.

LEVINE: And then what other children did you have?

BASSO: Well, I, Sonny was born here in Lawrence, and when he was about two we went back to Detroit, you know. We lived with this woman, German. She was a very nice person. And, because there was work over there, you know. Over here there was nothing. So we went back and after I got pregnant again I came home again.

LEVINE: When you say you lived with this German woman, was it a person who rented out?

BASSO: Yeah. She had a smaller apartment up above, just about the kitchen and a room, you know. Yeah. And my second son was born I think four, five years after Sonny. And then I found out that my husband was going around, you know. He was working out of town, jobs out of town, he met somebody, and I found evidence and all this and that. Oh. Then my little boy was almost three and he came down with leukemia. Oh, I'm telling you. I've had a lot of

heartaches, a lot of, oh. I can't begin to tell you. I always say, "If I could write, I'd write the story of my life, and I think that book would be a bestseller."

So, anyway, when we found out what it was, our doctor told us to bring him to Children's Hospital in Boston. That's where I found out, we found out that's what it was. To make a long story short, he died there. We were supposed to take him home. I says, I just said to the doctor, "What am I going to do?" He says, "There's no cure for that." I says, "I'm going to bring my baby home and watch him die a step at a time?" I says, "How can I do that?" He says, "There's nothing else you can do." But we didn't even have a chance to bring him home. He died.

LEVINE: What was his name?

BASSO: Benny, like my father. Benidetto. But I called him Benjamin to make it different. But we called him Benny. So after we lost that one we decided we'd have another child, and I had another boy.

LEVINE: What's his name?

BASSO: And of course my father would be hurt if I didn't call him Benny, so I called him Benny again, Benjamin. (she sighs) So, see, his picture's over there. This boy went to school, then we moved, then I got married, then I got a divorce. I got married a second time, but the second marriage was more, because I felt so bad for this man, he had two boys, and they lived in a farm in West Andover. Oh, what a place, when I first saw it. And I felt more, I felt sorry more than, you know.

LEVINE: Love.

BASSO: And to get out of my father's house, because my father, I had two children and I still couldn't go, even go out to get an ice cream with a friend of mine, you know. And I wanted to get out of my father's house. And I wasn't working. At least if I was working, you know, I'd have money. You know? I was doing sewing. I was sewing the skirts and things for people. They used to come, you know. I had quite a thing going, you know. So anyway when my son, the second Benny, was born, and that's when my husband left. I was in the hospital when my second son, my second Benny was born, and nobody knew that I was, you know, in a four room, a four-bed room there, and the husbands go and visit their wives. I had to tell them that my husband was working out of town, but he had left. He sent me a great big bouquet of flowers there and it said, I'll never forget the note, "The least I can do for the mother of my son." And he sent me these flowers in the hospital. And me, my tears were coming down, you know. Well, anyway, after I come out of the hospital I went, we had a place of our own, but it was my, his mother and father's house, you know. They rented it out. And we had a place where we weren't even paying rent. So I lived there for a while. Oh, and the baby, he wanted to see the baby. And my mother-in-law, she used to come up, she says, "He wants to see the baby." I said, "No, he can't see the baby. The baby isn't his. He's my baby. I had him all by myself." I said, "I don't want him to see him. He's not his baby." She says, "You should let him see, you know." But he was good to the kids, though. He provided for them. He gave me money every week for my son, you know, that I had, and the baby, you know. Finally she convinced me to let him see the baby. Okay. So she took the baby and he saw the baby, and that was it, that's all. Then finally I had to

move out because I was living alone there. I moved back to my father and mother, you know, with the two kids that I had. And my father, like I say, he was just as strict as when I was. Here I had two children. My God, and he still, you know. So then we met this man. Somebody told my father and mother about this man that lived alone, his wife had died or something. I don't know. And he's so nice. He says he was working with him. And he's got a big house, and this and that. So my father, before he told me about him, he went to see where he lived. He thought he was in a farm or out in the woods or something. But it wasn't. It was near the town, you know. To make a long story short I finally, we finally got together and got married. He didn't even want me to go out with him. I told my father, "Before I let this man in this house, I want you to understand that I'm going out with him. He wants to go out, I'm going out with him." My father said, "Okay." So, you know, I'd go out with him, and when I come home my father would have a long face. He wouldn't talk to me or anything. One day he just couldn't hold it any more. When I come home, the fellow was Italian, but he couldn't understand or speak Italian, see. So my father started in, "Well, this, I can't, I don't, this has to stop, you can't do this." "Pa," I says, "before he came in I told you that I was going to go out with him and you said it was okay." Oh, forget it. Well, anyway, I ended up marrying him, and he had two boys, and I had two boys. He had, he didn't even have a pot, you know what I mean. I was getting thirty dollars from my ex-husband, and I was feeding the whole family for thirty dollars, that money that belonged to my children, you know. And this man, he was a good, he worked hard on the farm, but no money. He never gave me a cent, never, you know.

LEVINE: So he was a farmer? That's what he was?

BASSO: A farmer, yes, yes. And the farmers, in those days, are nothing. They work outside in the mud, in the rain. A bushel of whatever it was, a dollar, you know, nothing. So anyway I ended up, decided to go to work. I was forty-seven years old when I decided to go to work. Because I started thinking, I says, "When my turn comes to retire, I won't be getting anything because I haven't worked." So I decided to go to work. And I said thank God for, it was Western Electric at the time, AT&T. They have a big plant here in North Andover, AT&T. So I went to work for AT&T. And every time I go by there, "God bless AT&T," I says. Because the benefits are beautiful. I get my pension, I get social security now, and I'm all set, you know. Well, my son, Benny, the third son, he went to school in Andover. I had Andy too, his son. He was about his age. They got along, the boys got along marvelously. The two of them, Andy and Benny, God rest their souls, they're both gone. They were beautiful, the two of them. They went to school together in Andover. Finally Benny went to Springfield College. I don't know if you are familiar with that. He was in gymnastics in high school. He was in gymnastics in Springfield College. He graduated from Springfield College. He went to California to work there in a school for a couple of years. And when he was out there we went out there to see him, my son and his wife and I.

LEVINE: Did you stay married to your second husband?

BASSO: Yes, yes, yes. And we went to, we went out there to see him. I wanted to, while he was there I said, "We have a chance to see California." And we did. We saw a lot of California. He took us all over the place. So after he was working for this company that sells gymnastics equipment to colleges and

schools and everything, and he would say, "I had a chance to get a job around here or out there." I says, "I hope you get it around here." Well, finally he did get the job, and it was around here. So he moved back. He bought a house in North Andover, beautiful home, swimming pool and everything. He had a good job and everything. Andy was still living. Andy went to Vietnam, too. He was injured. He came home, and then he decided to go live with Benny, in Benny's house, because Benny had an apartment. I says, "You're going to leave me." He says, "No." He was more like my son than my own. He says, "I'll always be here. I'll always be around." Okay. So there he went. My son Benjamin had friends in California, and during his vacation, which was in August, it would be August the 12th, it will be thirteen years that he died. He went to California and, like I say, he was in all kinds of sport. And one day they were in Sacramento, and you know there's the Sacramento River. They were on a boat waterskiing. They were pulling a skier and they were in the boat, him and this other friend of his, another boat, they collided and he must have been hit on the head, because he was a good swimmer. He would have, he went down, and that was it. They didn't find his body till five months after. It was after Christmas. And every night there'd be an article in the paper. I saved all these things. Oh, I'm telling you, it was heartbreaking. (she is moved) I always had, I says, "Maybe he got knocked." Because they said the one side of the river was like a jungle. Maybe he's just walking around, you know, he lost his memory. You know how you always have hopes, but they had divers there, nothing, and they couldn't find. Finally the body came up after five months.

LEVINE: Oh, my goodness. Well, the tape is nearly, we've got like a couple of minutes left. Is there anything else, you really have had a life full of good and bad

things, haven't you?

BASSO: Heartaches. Yeah.

LEVINE: Is there anything you'd like to say before we close about your starting out in Italy and coming to this country and making another life for yourself here? I guess the fact, did you ever have a sense that, you know, you were, as an immigrant you were what this country is all about? That, you know, you were really an integral part of what America is?

BASSO: Well, when I came, I mean, you can see the difference between where I come from and what America was, the difference, you know, in a lot of things. There's a lot of everything here that we didn't have back there in those days when I was young. And naturally it's a better country, you know. And that's it.

LEVINE: Were you glad that you had come earlier on, I mean, when you . . .

BASSO: Oh, my God, (she is moved) I always say thank God my father decided to come back. Because during the Second World War that town, as small as it was, was bombed. My father, one of my cousins and three children were in the house that was bombed. And when he went in there he found them in pieces. Horrible. My father owned a couple of houses. One of the houses was bombed. There was a lot of tragedy. And I always say, "What if I was still there? I would have gone through that, and gone through all these things." I always say, "Thank God that my father decided to come to America when he did." And thank God that I decided to go to work when I did. (she laughs) And thank God for a beautiful son that I have. That takes all,

EI-186/BASSO

because Andy died too, and do you know what he died of? AIDS, about three years ago. They both died, almost together. They were always together, and they died. See?

LEVINE: Well, I think, do you have grandchildren?

BASSO: I have, my grandchildren are all grown up. I have six great-grandchildren. I'll show you a picture of my great-grandchildren.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, maybe that's a good place to end.

BASSO: Yes. And now I say thank God. Sometimes his sister will say to me, my second husband, because we're divorced, she says, "Would you go back to him? He misses you." "Theresa," I says, I'll say to her, "I'm living like a queen. Do I want to go back and live with him?" I says, "Please, Theresa, don't wish that on me."

LEVINE: Let me just ask you one final question at the last minute. Do you look back on your life very often at this stage in your life?

BASSO: Of course I do. Yes, I do. Yes, I do.

LEVINE: And it's a good time for you?

BASSO: Now it's a good time, because after all I went through, you know, now I can. But I always say, "Dear, God, my life is not over yet. Please, dear God, I have suffered enough heartaches, and that's it. I don't want any more." I

EI-186/BASSO

have six great-grandchildren, three boys and three girls, and I'm surprised that they're not here today because they're always, they live, one lives in New Hampshire, one lives in Tuxbury. But they come often. In the water, when it's warm, they're always in the water, you know. And my son is wonderful. He is wonderful. I call him, I says, "You know you're my father now." For Father's Day I gave him a card. He says, "I'm not your father." Yes, he is. He's my father. He does all this for me. I says who else would do.

LEVINE: And he isn't as strict as your own, right? (they laugh) Okay. Well, why don't we stop here. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I've been talking to Angela Garofalo Basso, who came from Italy, from Sicily, in 1920 when she was eight. I thank you very much for a very interesting . . .

BASSO: You're very welcome. You're a very nice person, yes.

LEVINE: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW