

EI-192

**NELSON MISTURINI**

**BIRTH DATE: OCTOBER 11, 1917**

**INTERVIEW DATE: 7/19/1992**

**RUNNING TIME: 1:38:06**

**INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.**

**RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME**

**INTERVIEW LOCATION: FRANKLIN SQUARE, NY**

**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 7/1993**

**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 11/1993**

**ITALY (born U.S.), 1929**

**AGE 12**

**PORT: GENOA**

**RESIDENCES: ITALY: CREMONA: US: ASTORIA, NY**

**Oral Historian's Note: This recording is significantly marred by prominent extraneous noise (i.e. birds, cicadas, airplanes, lawn mowers, cars and interior kitchen sounds) during the first two-thirds of the interview. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of the Oral History Project, 11/11/1993.**

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here in Franklin Square today, which is July 19th, 1992.

And I'm here with Nelson Misturini in Franklin Square.

Mr. Misturini came from Italy when he was twelve years old in 1929. Well, I'm very happy to be here, and I look forward to hearing all your stories from before you came to this country and when you first came to this country. Let's start out by you saying your birth date.

MISTURINI: My birthday is October 11, 1917. ( bird noises )

LEVINE: And what town were you born in?

MISTURINI: I was born New York City.

LEVINE: You were born there?

MISTURINI: No, here. In New York City.

LEVINE: You were born in New York. Then . . .

MISTURINI: During the Depression my parents brought us over to Italy, me and my two brothers, three of us. Because he had some property over there, so we lived on his property, we lived.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. So, in other words, how old were you when your father brought you and your brothers from New York to Italy?

MISTURINI: I think we were five. Five years old.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything of your life in New York City up until you were five and you left for Italy?

MISTURINI: I remember being very cold, that for sure, that I remember, but that's much more than that. We're living in a big house in Astoria. I know we had to climb a lot of stairs. I'd play in the Astoria Park there once in a while with Gertrude a little bit. This one girl I grew up with. But, uh . . .

LEVINE: Do you have any remembrances, like experiences that happened to you in New York before you went to Italy?

MISTURINI: Not too much, no. No, no, no. Because it overlapped, the ones over there. I had bigger experiences over there than here, so it overlapped these. It overlapped. But I remember being very cold, by golly. We used to, my father used to go on line to get coal, stand a couple of hours on line. So he figured, he shipped us to Europe thinking it wouldn't be as bad.

LEVINE: Was your father able to work during the Depression over here?

MISTURINI: Yeah. He used to, what do you call it? The hides of the animals. They used to put them in a big tub. They used to put him in there. And he had like an enclosure all around up to his waist. And from, used to, like when you squash grapes. He used to do that to the pelts to soften them, from the sweat of his body. That was his job. But, of course, times were very tough, like everybody else. So he figures, he had his brother and his sister in Europe, a piece of property. He figured he'd ship me over there.

LEVINE: So he stayed, or he went with you?

MISTURINI: He took us over there, yeah.

LEVINE: Now, was he able to, did he have money saved up for the fare and all that?

MISTURINI: Yeah. He did save enough for the fare. Yeah, yeah.  
Not much more than that.

LEVINE: So where did you go? What town did you go to in  
Europe?

MISTURINI: We went to, uh, Cremona is the biggest, it's near  
Milan. Yeah, it's the northern part of Italy there.

LEVINE: And that was where your father was from originally?

MISTURINI: Yeah, yeah, yeah. We went there. And then they  
took one of my brothers, I stood there with two of us. And the  
youngest brother, they put him up in the mountains with my  
mother's folks. They split us up. I didn't even know him  
after. Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, did your father stay, or he went back?

MISTURINI: No. He came back here, and my mother also. They  
came back, uh, make a living. So then we stood there on the  
farm.

LEVINE: Now, who were you staying with?

MISTURINI: I was staying with my father's folks.

LEVINE: And that, both your grandmother and grandfather?

MISTURINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Then do you remember them?

MISTURINI: Yeah, oh, yeah.

LEVINE: How do you remember them?

MISTURINI: Oh, they were, my grandfather looked like C. Aubrey Smith. You remember that English, C. Aubrey Smith, that Englishman? No?

LEVINE: I don't remember him.

MRS. MISTURINI: She's too young.

LEVINE: Why don't you describe him?

MISTURINI: Yeah. He was a tall Englishman, and he always played in like The Charge of the Light Brigade and pictures like that. C. Aubrey. He was a very distinguished man. He had a ( a telephone rings ) big moustache, you know, he had. So my grandmother was a little woman. Carolina, we used to call her, Carolina. Oh, a nice old lady. Wore a black dress all the time. Well, it's all they wore. But my uncle, he was a tough guy. Oh, he was a tough hombre.

LEVINE: He lived with your grandparents too?

MISTURINI: Yes. He lived with my grandparents.

LEVINE: And what was his name?

MISTURINI: Atilio. He was tough. I'll never forget. He got married. His wife owned a bakery in town. She owned. It was a few miles away. You know, a lot of room over there. I had to get up in the morning. If I wasn't going to plow the fields with my other brother, he used to be in front with the oxen, and I was right behind with the plow. Four o'clock in the morning. We'll work. My grandmother used to come out there, Carolina. She used to come out with a bowl of cornmeal. We lived on cornmeal, three times a day, that's the whole. Come out there, put in on there, milk some milk in there, warm and creamy that milk is, right in there. That was our breakfast. So we worked there till about, uh . . .

LEVINE: Did you start doing this when you were, how old were you when you started doing this?

MISTURINI: Oh, I started about six years old.

LEVINE: Oh, my goodness.

MISTURINI: Oh, yeah. Well, I was fairly strong, anyhow. So we worked there till about seven o'clock, come back. I'd get on a bicycle, go to town, go and get bread for my uncle's wife. She

was, I hate to say it, but she was also a petunia.

LEVINE: A petunia?

MISTURINI: A petunia. "Go over there and get them French bread," and so on. You know our uncle wouldn't even let us eat it? "That's for her only." But he was kind of a rough guy. And then the only, on Christmas, the only present we got was milk the cow, go to town to sell the milk. And whatever we made, wasn't much because everybody had cows, that was our Christmas present. During the week, too, come back from school, we go pick the corn. They filled the bushel, throw it up. I empty it, throw it down on top. I was an altar boy also there. I had to go to church every morning.

LEVINE: Every morning, you went?

MISTURINI: Morning, sometimes late at night, too. Later on, you know, in the late afternoon.

LEVINE: Who was the religious one? Was it your grandmother?

MISTURINI: Yes. My grandfolks.

LEVINE: Your grandfolks.

MISTURINI: I'll never forget one day, my brother and I, we're kids. We had a, one section, we had three big sections of land.

One section they were raising watermelons. So, I mean, you're a kid, you want a piece of watermelon. So, without saying nothing, he won't let us have it. "No, those are going to be sold," my uncle. ( he laughs ) I'm making him a monster, but it's true. What's true is true. My brother and I, we stole our own watermelons. So we were behind bushes there, we were eating it. He caught us. Holy Jesus. He took a piece from a weeping willow and whacko. What a beating we got. ( he sighs ) Oh, that guy. And after that my, the first one died, my grandmother. Yeah. That became worse, then.

LEVINE: After she died.

MISTURINI: Yeah, yeah. Because she used to kind of stick up for us a little bit. That was uh, too bad.

LEVINE: Was your grandmother, did your grandmother ever tell you stories or try to teach you certain things? Was she that kind of a person?

MISTURINI: My, uh, well, I know there was a lot of action going on there between Communists and Fascists and so on. Oh, gee. Because then Mussolini came into power. You had to join. You had to be, you had to join. They put you in, whether you were an American or no matter what nationality. Not that I was proud of it, but I had no choice. We became Black Shirts, my brother

and I. ( he laughs ) Like here the boy scouts, but it's a little more serious over there. So after a while that's why our father brought us back because, you know, it was getting a little bit too far. You know, as we're getting older they'll probably send us to Ethiopia or somewheres, you know, to fight.

And you don't want that. I don't want it neither. I'm an American. But when you're there you have to do what you're told.

LEVINE: Did you ever go to school over there?

MISTURINI: Oh, yeah, sure. I got the picture inside there, in school. You know, sitting on the bench.

MRS. MISTURINI: The picture I showed you this morning?

MISTURINI: No, no. It's in the den. Yeah, sure. Yeah.

LEVINE: So you went, you got up about four in the morning . . .

MISTURINI: Yes.

LEVINE: You did the plowing and the . . .

MISTURINI: Carts to haul corn, whatever, the wheat.

LEVINE: And then you went to school?

MISTURINI: Yes. After that we went to school. Sure. Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: What do you remember about school over there?

MISTURINI: Well, it was a very old school. We had two teachers. One was, the old teacher was fairly short and very chubby. A good-natured woman, oh. I had that in the first grade. Then when we went up to the second grade we had a tall teacher, slim, always with a dog under her arm. And she was tough. She reminded me of Roosevelt's wife, President Roosevelt's wife. Eleanor, she reminded me of. Tough. Oh, no monkeying around. And sometimes because I have to run errands or come late from the field, oh, she would get mad as a hornet. You know, I was late getting to school. But, uh, I said, "I can't help it. My uncle won't let me go." ( sounds of cicadas outside )

LEVINE: Now, could you speak fluent Italian then?

MISTURINI: Yes. I knew two words of English only, after. "Open the door. Open the door in the house." They used to call me the American because I spoke one word, two words, actually. That's all. And then, no, I spoke mainly Italian. I still do, read and write it. That's why when I went in here they asked me if I wanted to be a conscientious objector. I said, "No, no,

no, no. I'm an American, by golly." But you don't get too much time to play over there.

LEVINE: No? You didn't play?

MISTURINI: Not too much, no. There were two things we made. Ourselves, there was a little piece of stick about that big, pointy at both ends. We put a dot. It would hit the corner. It would come up, and we'd whack it. Otherwise we'd get a piece of, like bamboo, hollow. We'd clean out the inside, about that long.

LEVINE: A foot or so? A foot long?

MISTURINI: Yeah, about a foot long. We'd get cotton balls, first push it in the beginning. Then with another stick go, "Poom." And it would shoot out about ten feet or so. That's all. ( Dr. Levine laughs. ) That's the only toys we had. It's not like here. By golly. Holy Jesus.

LEVINE: Now, what was your brother's name, the one that lived with you in Italy?

MISTURINI: Uh, Alvin. Al. They call him Al, yeah. He lives here in Ozone Park.

LEVINE: Oh. And how many years younger is he?

MISTURINI: Two years. And the other one, Mario, is just up from Florida in Hicksville. He was up in the mountains. He was not even a year old. About a year old, he was.

MRS. MISTURINI: You didn't even know you had a brother.

LEVINE: When you went back to Italy he was about a year.

MISTURINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, did you visit up in the mountains?

MISTURINI: No.

MRS. MISTURINI: They never knew they had a brother.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. I see. Okay. So you were there for, you were religious. Did you have, like festivals or feasts while you were in Italy?

MISTURINI: Oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah. Not as big as they have them there now. But, of course, it was a very, very small town. We had, I remember we used to have that pan where you put candy in and try to break it. And they don't call it Santa Claus over there. They call it Carne . . .

MRS. MISTURINI: Carnevale.

MISTURINI: Yeah. Carnevale, which we have a couple of pieces

of candy and so on. But there's not much action living out in the sticks. ( sound of saw in the background )

LEVINE: What do most people do in town for work?

MISTURINI: The work, well, they had a, there was a restaurant with a bar, I remember. The mayor had a dilapidated car. You could hear that car ten miles away.

LEVINE: So not many people had cars.

MISTURINI: No, that was the only one. I had, my father, when he came back a couple of years later by himself, he bought a bicycle. So we used to share it. And I was the rich kid in the town with a bicycle. Otherwise you walk. But I used to go and run errands with this bike. The trouble is, it was all dirt roads. And when the oxcart, it rains, it makes tracks in the road. And then it dries and the tracks, you know, it's not level. A couple of times with a bike, so I get stuck in the ruts. Oh, I went into, I'll never forget that. I went into a tremendous bunch of thorns. And oh, gee, what a mess I was, all scratched up. Oh! Then we had a big haystack. I rolled down the haystack, and I cut the skull open. There's still a mark here, still. The whole skull, I rolled.

LEVINE: You rolled, you were playing, or . . .

MISTURINI: No. I went up there to, the haystack, more or less, there's a pole in the middle. I came down to go off the pole, I slipped, and I came down. The plow was there. I went head first into the plow. I was in bad shape. They took me to the hospital.

LEVINE: So there wasn't a hospital in your town?

MISTURINI: No. The doctor, and then he took me to the hospital. We went to the local doctor, and he took us to a hospital, probably in Cremona. But my little town that I was in was Derovere. They don't put it on the map.

LEVINE: Can you spell it?

MISTURINI: D-E-R-O-V-E-R-E. Derovere.

LEVINE: And what provence is that?

MISTURINI: It's the provence of Milan.

LEVINE: Milan.

MISTURINI: Yeah. Near the Po river. At another time, my brother, walking ( he laughs ) at a creek, fairly deep. Put a plank across, not a plank, a log. Walking across, he fell in, my brother Al. Oh, what a job getting him out. We almost both drowned. Yeah, that I remember. Then that, and we also had to

do is in the fireplace they have a bench on either side of the fire, the fireplace. Not like here. They have it big, because they cook in it. They have seats you sit on, of stone. He's jumping from one to the other, one to the other. And the pot was boiling. He fell in. Oh, he's still got the marks. And then in the spring we'd take that big chain that goes all the way up to the chimney. We take that off, and we put a rope around us, with the chain, and we keep walking until the chain comes back shiny. You know, by walking into the dirt, it takes a lot of the dirt off. It's the carbon that had formed.

( exterior lawn mower noise )

LEVINE: Forms, yeah.

MISTURINI: "Don't come back until that chain is shiny, uh, the chain is shiny." Oh, boy, what hikes we'd walk. Then you've got to put it in the water so that it cleans it a little bit. We went into this river, the Ramuna, they call it, to get the chain. All of a sudden, boom, the chain around my neck. Then my brother, he got on top of me, and I'm underneath there. ( he makes drowning noises ) with the chain. I'll never forget that.

LEVINE: So what was the house like that your grandmother and grandfather had?

MISTURINI: The house came down a bit, and it had a road on

either side. And it had small streams. It was a big, two-story house with a big attached barn. We had pigeons. At night in winter they'd have almost like an orange crate. They'd warm up the coals in the fireplace, put them in a terra cotta bucket. Put them in that crate. Put them under the sheet, to warm up the sheet because it's cold. No steam up there or anything. So when they warmed up the sheets a little bit we'd take it out, then we'd hurry up in bed. That's the way we would warm up the bed. The night, brrrrrr.

LEVINE: So did you live, I mean, it sounds like you lived in a fairly big house? I mean, how did you, how did your grandmother and grandfather stand in relation to other people in the village? Were they well-off, not well-off?

MISTURINI: Well, uh, we weren't too well-off, but we lived because the land, my father bought the piece of land. And my uncle and my grandparents were living on it.

LEVINE: I see.

MISTURINI: You see? So he let them keep whatever profit he made from the corn, wheat, watermelons. And whatever other profits he made from it.

LEVINE: Did you ever travel out from that town while you were little, while you were living there?

MISTURINI: Uh, we went to this small town, Sangia.

LEVINE: How do you spell that?

MISTURINI: S-, Sangia. S-A-N-G-I-A. Sangia. We went there a couple of times to, they had a merry-go-round. But we were mostly there to buy a different kind of vegetables that we didn't have. We didn't raise much salad, for instance. So we went there to buy it. But then that's as far as we'd go.

LEVINE: Would you have gone by horse and wagon? ( airplane noise )

MISTURINI: Horse and wagon we went by, yeah. Yeah. But another thing, I remember that we used to, those little, looked like chick peas almost, but they're round. We used to pick them, put them in a sack, and put them in the running water. And then you eat them. They're delicious. They sell them now in jars, I've seen.

LEVINE: Huh. Fava? Is it fava beans?

MISTURINI: They look like fava beans, but they're not fava beans.

LEVINE: When you say in the running water you mean like in a stream?

MISTURINI: A stream, yeah, yeah. We used to put a stick in there and tie the sack so that the water keeps running on.

LEVINE: Well, now, how did it get decided that you would come back to America?

MISTURINI: Well, I guess it started here, it was getting a little too rough over there, you know, with the Mussolini, you know. And, well, he was afraid he probably, they start you young there, he was getting to be twelve, you know. He figured he'd ship me somewhere maybe in a couple of years. Well, they brought us back again.

LEVINE: Now, were you writing to your father and mother during the time when they came back to the U.S.?

MISTURINI: I wrote them a few letters. Not much, though.

LEVINE: Did they write to you?

MISTURINI: Yeah, yeah. Oh, yeah, that they were doing all right. Then they got a hold of a woman that was coming back to take us back. By golly, we went to, it was a big, we'd never seen a big boat like that. The Roma, we came back. And we wanted to go, they had movies on there. We'd never seen a movie. No, by golly.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you thought when you saw it?  
Do you remember what the movie was?

MISTURINI: No. She wouldn't let us go. She was afraid we might get lost. She had a kid, and that's three. She had four kids, this woman. They gave her so much to bring us back. We wanted to go up on deck, you know, to look around at the ocean. You know, we're curious. Oh, she was strict.

LEVINE: First tell me, how did you get from your little village to the port that you left from?

MISTURINI: Oh, we left from Genoa.

LEVINE: Genoa. How did you get there?

MISTURINI: Oh, we had, like, a lot of paperwork. Because, you know, we had to go to the American counsel. I'll never forget. He had to, oh, it took a long time. He had to make sure that we were born in America, that we were Americans. Because it wasn't easy to get out of the country, especially when we had those black shirts on. Oh!

LEVINE: You actually had to wear them all the time?

MISTURINI: Not all the time. Not when we worked on the farm. But like when we went to school, lots of times, oh, yes. Oh, yeah. I'm sorry. We went on a trip with the Black Shirts. We

went to Lago de Garda. It's one of the big lakes up there. It has a boat going out on the water where a famous poet, I forgot his name. Dante Alighieri? Well, anyhow, we took that trip. It was beautiful, yeah. But we took it with the, well, the glorified boy scouts, we took it.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about the trip? What you did? Any experiences?

MISTURINI: Yeah. They sang a lot of songs. We sang.

LEVINE: Were they kind of propaganda songs? Or what kind of songs were they?

MISTURINI: No. They were songs like patriotic songs, they were. And I got a medal for saving some guy from drowning.

LEVINE: Tell about that. What happened?

MISTURINI: Yeah. Well, we were by this lake here. We went on a boat. I was fairly pretty good at swimming then. But we went too far out, and kids fooling around, pushed one kid overboard. He couldn't swim good. Oh, I jumped in, you know, and I, oh, I wasn't far from land. Like from here to the fence over there. I kind of pulled him in. He was my size. I got a medal. I still got it, by golly. Yeah.

LEVINE: How would you describe yourself? I mean, if you

were able to look at yourself as a little boy of eleven or twelve, what would you say about you?

MISTURINI: I would say I was very patient. Very easygoing, I was. Trouble is, somehow, I think a lot of kids were jealous because I was pretty strong. I still am with my arms anyhow, and so on to, you know, like even when I came here I could lift up the front wheel of a car. And, you know, like over there, lifting that plow around wasn't easy. So, no. I was easygoing. Oh, yeah. An altar boy and so on.

LEVINE: Did religion mean a lot to you, growing up?

MISTURINI: Yes, quite a bit. Yes. Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. The trouble is, going so many times to church after a while when you're a kid, the kids were outside playing and so on, and you're always in there. ( he laughs ) We used to drink the priest's wine once in a while. It was good wine.

LEVINE: ( she laughs ) Do you remember how the priest treated you?

MISTURINI: Well, he had a big garden. He had the biggest grapes you'd ever seen in your life. Long like that, he had.

LEVINE: Two inches long?

MISTURINI: Oh, yes. And pears, the same thing. I never seen

them that big. I wanted to bring a seed back, but somehow I never, forgot. And once in a while we used to go in through the back of the church, eat some grapes. "You could take some, but don't break anything," he used to yell at us. And he had a big pond in the back, and he had fish in there. Big old catfish, they must have been. I'll never forget one day I started getting one together. I wanted to close off half of the pond, and with my hand I was throwing water on the other side to empty this side to take the fish. But it was a pretty big pond. He comes over to me, he says, "What are you doing?" I says, "I'm emptying this half so I can get the fish, bring it home to eat."

He says, "You know," I'll never forget it, a nice old chap. He says, "It's going to take you ten years to empty that by hand." So he bought me a bucket, but then I got tired with a bucket. I knocked the wall down. I said, "The heck with it all." You know, as you talk about it, things come back to you a little bit more.

LEVINE: Tell me about your brother. Was he an altar boy, too?

MISTURINI: My brother, no. He was too young. Yeah. He was a little more lively, my brother.

LEVINE: How would you describe him as a kid?

MISTURINI: He was more lively. He used to get into a little mischief once in a while. He's the guy that almost drowned me a couple of times. I said, "Carry me across the stream." Because he couldn't touch bottom. "Okay." I'd put him on my shoulders, we'd go across. Oh, down. I stepped in a hole a couple of times. He was on top of me holding me down. "Hey." ( he makes drowning noises ) ( Dr. Levine laughs ) I'll never forget that stream. Yeah. But he, uh, actually, I think about stealing that watermelon, I think it was his idea. ( they laugh ) He was a little more mischievous.

LEVINE: Now, did you mostly pal around with him, or did you have other friends?

MISTURINI: No. We had a couple of other guys, but mostly it was with him, yeah. We were always busy. Even come home from school. "Do this, help milk the cow, feed the chickens." Finally the last year, finally my other uncle from my mother's side . . . One time, no, we went, yeah, yeah. Now that you, now that I think of it, we went once to see my other brother up there. But I don't remember him up there.

LEVINE: Do you remember going to the mountains?

MISTURINI: Yes, yeah. Going over there. That my uncle took us hunting. He couldn't hit the side of a barn. ( he laughs )

LEVINE: Is it your mother's brother?

MISTURINI: My mother's brother, right. He couldn't hit the, when she went back she asked him. She says, "You couldn't hit the birds." Yeah.

LEVINE: What was his name, that uncle?

MISTURINI: Andrea.

LEVINE: Andrea. And what was your mother's name?

MISTURINI: My mother's name, Beatrice.

LEVINE: And her last, her maiden name?

MISTURINI: Paladini. Paladini.

LEVINE: Could you spell it?

MISTURINI: P-A-L-A-D-I-N-I. Yeah, Paladini. You've got to concentrate. When you write it, it's easy.

LEVINE: How about your father? What was his name?

MISTURINI: Louis.

LEVINE: Louis.

MISTURINI: Yeah, yeah. And my grandfather was Giuseppe.

LEVINE: Giuseppe, that's Paladini.

MISTURINI: Giuseppe Paladini, right.

LEVINE: And his wife, your grandmother?

MISTURINI: Carolina.

LEVINE: Carolina. So in other words, you really didn't know those grandparents very well.

MISTURINI: My mother's side.

LEVINE: Right.

MISTURINI: No. But I met them, though.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember anything about them?

MISTURINI: Yeah, oh, yeah. Yeah, sure, I remember them. Yeah. He was a big man also, and both of them. Both . . . ( tape ends )

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

LEVINE: Were they farmers, or what did they do?

MISTURINI: Yeah, they're farmers. A lot of chestnut trees up there they had, and walnut trees, I remember. And chickens. I

used to go hunting with my uncle. And she had a couple of brothers, too. Uh, Andrea and the other, who was . . .

MRS. MISTURINI: Gidio?

MISTURINI: Who?

MRS. MISTURINI: Gidio?

MISTURINI: Gidio. Gidio, the other guy's name is, yeah. Gidio.

LEVINE: Now, what would you hunt?

MISTURINI: Huh? Birds. And then when the grandfather, what we would do is, they'd get a box, a small box, but closed all around. Lift up one corner, put a stick under it. Put some corn under it. Then he'd tie a stick with a cord, and him and I would hide in the bushes waiting for the birds to go under there. And we'd wait and wait. What patience we both had. Well, especially him. He used to enjoy it. Me, I enjoyed him very nicely.

LEVINE: This is Gidio?

MISTURINI: Huh? No. No, that was, uh . . .

LEVINE: Andrea?

MISTURINI: No, not Andrea. My mother's father.

LEVINE: Oh, your mother's father.

MISTURINI: What the heck was his name?

MRS. MISTURINI: Giuseppe? No.

MISTURINI: No, no. I don't think so. Oh, Jesus, oh, crackers.

Anyhow, we would stay behind the bushes there and, "Shhh! Quiet, quiet, quiet. The birds are coming." And then would come one bird. "No, wait a little bit longer. More birds would come, wait." It would be like from here to the garbage pail there. "Shhh! Quiet. They're coming, coming. Quiet, quiet."

Then when we'd get a few, if you pull the string. Boom, the birds. But then catch them underneath. Some would fly out. Oh, Jesus.

LEVINE: So you'd be about ten feet away, but you'd be in the bushes?

MISTURINI: In the bushes, with my grandfather. Yeah, yeah. Oh, it may have been even more than ten feet away, but, uh . . .

LEVINE: Where would the trap be? Would it be out in the open, or . . .

MISTURINI: In the yard. In the yard, yeah. In the yard, yeah.

( he laughs )

LEVINE: You certainly hunted and fished the hard way.

( they laugh )

MISTURINI: Oh, yeah. Fishing was a stick. With a stick, a piece of cloth, we used to catch. Well, one were easy to get. We used to go for snails also.

LEVINE: How did you do that?

MISTURINI: Uh, all along the banks, we had two streams, one on either side of the property. And the snails. We used to go and catch them and make a good stew. Oh, yeah. Here . . .

LEVINE: How did you catch them?

MISTURINI: Huh? Well, they're stuck onto a . . .

LEVINE: Oh, you just gather them.

MISTURINI: Just gather them.

LEVINE: Pull them off the rocks?

MISTURINI: Yeah, yeah. Big, boy, they were big snails. And then at night we would go for frogs with the flashlight, with the lantern, no flashlight, had no flashlight. With a lantern, a light. Like the frogs would get hypnotized with it, grab

them, and have frog's legs. Oh, they're delicious.

LEVINE: Now, who would cook them?

MISTURINI: My grandmother.

LEVINE: And was she a good cook?

MISTURINI: Oh, yeah. Yeah, sure. Oh, yeah. She took care of us. Oh, yeah. And then we would, when the chickens, they don't do it here, get bigger, they, the roosters, they would cut the things under here, whatever they have, and the top and then they'd like castrate them. They'd cut, they'd open the bag, take the eggs out, you know. And they would have that. There's a stew.

LEVINE: Oh.

MISTURINI: And then you have to sew the bag again, and then the chicken would be all right. The thing is that they become a capon.

LEVINE: Right. Oh, that's, yeah. So that's supposed to be a better . . .

MISTURINI: Better, yeah. They get big and so on. Then the other you make a stew that, you know, was good.

LEVINE: Can you remember any dish that your grandmother

cooked in particular? Any kind of a . . .

MISTURINI: Well, most of them were stews, stews. That's what they specialized, stews.

MRS. MISTURINI: Uh-huh. And cornmeal.

MISTURINI: Well, that's the main food. Then we had a pig. Then in the fall we would kill the pig and make, a guy used to go around purposely. That was his job, going all around and making salamis, he used to make. Salamis and cuppa, you know, and hams. That was the specialty. That's all he did.

LEVINE: So you'd kill your pig, or he'd kill your pig.

MISTURINI: He'd kill. Yeah. Stab it underneath. The thing would run all over the place. Try to catch him. Blood all over. And then with the blood they make, like, a salami of the blood. And when you fry that, oh, it's delicious. It might not sound good here, but it's delicious. Then they make the salami. And we'd get a slice of salami, about that big, one slice. And the cornmeal, on top like that, and eat it. That would be, that's out dinner. That one slice of salami. So, I mean, we weren't that rich. Because that would have to last all winter.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you remember what they called this job of a man who would go around and kill the pigs and make the . . .

MISTURINI: Yeah. Salameiri. The salameiri, the salami-maker.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

MISTURINI: Salameiri, yeah. That was his job. That's all he did. He would do that in the fall. And then during the rest of the year he would be a, what do you call it, a guy that sells, not a barker, a guy that sells things.

LEVINE: Like a salesman?

MISTURINI: No, more or less, like (?). An auctioneer, he would be. He'd do that during the rest of the year.

LEVINE: The pig, uh . . .

MISTURINI: He would sell a pig or a cow. Yeah, whatever you had. That was his two jobs.

LEVINE: And he would auction, what?

MISTURINI: If a guy had a cow for sale or a little calf or a little pig, when they're small. He'd auction them off.

LEVINE: I see. Were you treated any differently in your village because you had been in America?

MISTURINI: Uh, well, they used to call me, "Hey, there's the Americans, there's the Americans." That's what they'd call me.

LEVINE: And did you like that? I mean, was that considered a compliment, or considered an insult?

MISTURINI: Well, to a certain point we used to have, I used to have arguments, too, about that, or fights. You know, they're jealous. I'd have.

LEVINE: Oh, they'd be jealous.

MISTURINI: Yes, sure, sure.

LEVINE: What do you, what did people think of America in your town?

MISTURINI: America, they'd think that gold grows in the streets. They don't know that we work harder here than over there. By golly, now, especially now. They take siestas now, here we don't. Yeah, they thought that everything, "Oh, the rich rich." What do you mean, rich?

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about how you felt? I mean, you started out here in New York, then you went there. Did anything of America kind of stick with you while you were over there?

MISTURINI: I did an awful lot of crying.

LEVINE: Really?

MISTURINI: Yeah. I remember crying so many times, all these days. I wanted to go back, you know, with your parents, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MISTURINI: And, uh, we had friends here we had to leave, of course, you know. We were working so hard over here, no time for anything. No time for anything.

LEVINE: So you were looking forward to coming back.

MISTURINI: Yes, I was, yeah. And then that military business I didn't . . .

LEVINE: You wanted to get away.

MISTURINI: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Before you got drafted. So, okay. So you left the little town for Genoa, and how did you go? By horse and wagon, or did you go by . . .

MISTURINI: Well, we went to the main town by the horse and wagon, and then from there there was a dilapidated car took us to Genoa, which was a long stretch.

LEVINE: Now, this is, now you're reunited with your little

brother.

MISTURINI: Oh, before then, yeah. My uncle brought him down with us, and they say, "This is," I'll never forget. We were in the field, ( he takes a drink ) excuse me. Wheat. We used to, now they got the big things, but we had those . . .

LEVINE: A scythe?

MISTURINI: Yeah. Like the sickle here they have. That's the way we used to cut the wheat. Then when you bundled, tie it up. And going back now, back there. We used to make silkworms.

LEVINE: Tell me about that.

MISTURINI: Silkworms. They're like, on a cart. You know, it's got wood on either side with cloth in the middle, and we put the silkworms on there, little tiny worms. And then we'd have to the mulberry tree. Go on the field with a rope around with a sack, with a circle here, and mulberries, the leaves. That's where they'd live on. Oh, we'd stack him about that high on top of these little worms. And then you'd hear the noise. They're eating. ( he makes a humming noise ) Until you see the mulberry leaves going down. Oh, it's amazing.

LEVINE: You could actually see?

MISTURINI: Oh, yeah. It's amazing. That's all they do, they

eat and eat. And once in a while the ants used to kill them.  
Oh, that was, kill the . . .

LEVINE: Now, where are the silkworms in the beginning?  
Where do you get them from?

MISTURINI: They get them from the cocoon.

LEVINE: Like, where do they live? Do they live in a  
mulberry tree?

MISTURINI: No, no, no, no. Our uncle would get them.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. He . . .

MISTURINI: Yeah, he would get them, yeah.

LEVINE: In other words, they were raised.

MISTURINI: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: And then you'd have them, and you'd put them under  
the mulberry leaves.

MISTURINI: No, no. We'd put them on that, uh, it's like a cot.  
It's a piece of cloth with two, you know, like canvas.

LEVINE: How big?

MISTURINI: About this wide. That's about, I don't know, ten

feet long. And we'd put it up on racks. You see, we'd put it up on racks off the floor, because the ants killed them. And if you got an invasion of ants, oh, Jesus. You'd ruin the whole thing.

LEVINE: I see. So it's two wooden bars on each end. Canvas about ten feet long . . .

MISTURINI: Yeah, with an arm up. And you put them on top like, bars hanging out, like this, you know. Put the, on top of here. And then you feed them. And that's why we have a lot of mulberry trees over there.

LEVINE: And then what happens? You put the mulberry leaves on, they eat the mulberry leaves.

MISTURINI: They eat them, you've got to keep feeding them. Oh, they eat all day long, they eat. And they last, oh, they last about a month, easy, at least. And after that they form the silk, the cocoon. It's like, I don't know, about that big, like a chestnut, but only a little bit longer. And they form, then he dies inside. Then you could hear him shaking in there. It's like a piece of clay after, the silkworm. Then we take all those. We take them to where they spin them, and they make the silk. But if the, if the ants get them, though, oh, gee. ( he laughs ) I'll never forget my uncle fell off the tree once.

Oh, he was mad as a hornet. He was reaching for the branch, and slipped. Badoo! ( he laughs ) He fell down.

LEVINE: He was getting the mulberry leaves?

MISTURINI: Yeah, yeah, yeah. He used to use a wooden ladder, you know, and it wasn't steady. Oh.

LEVINE: So, okay. So then they brought Mario down from the mountains. Much before you left?

MISTURINI: No, yeah. He was there with us for about a month.

LEVINE: You were in the fields when . . .

MISTURINI: Yeah, he come.

LEVINE: Tell about the reunion.

MISTURINI: Yeah. We were picking, like I said, it was wheat. We were working on the wheat field. We were cutting and tying it up. So my uncle came. He said, "Here's your brother." I looked at him. I didn't know him from Adam. He said, "Oh, hi. How do you do? How do you do?"

LEVINE: How old was Mario then?

MISTURINI: Well, it's two years, almost, difference. About eight, he was about seven, anyhow. Seven, eight, eight.

LEVINE: Yeah. ( exterior sound of cicadas )

MISTURINI: We didn't know him. So he was quiet. He never said a word.

MRS. MISTURINI: He was scared.

MISTURINI: Oh, scared. Strange place, you know. "These are your brothers." He didn't even answer us. I went over. "Hi." "Hello." "Hi." "Hi." So we went back to work, that's all. But then at night he stood there. After a while he fell, plop. The polenta, he fell asleep lying in the polenta. Boy, he was tired. But we used to go work in the field. And him, he stood home with the grandma. He used to climb the fig tree to get the figs. I remember that. Wow, what figs we had. Tremendous tree. They don't grow that big here. Big, beautiful. We never associated much with him, because it was just us. We didn't, ah.

LEVINE: So then your father hired somebody from the town that was coming to America to accompany you and kind of watch out for you on the boat?

MISTURINI: Yes. Toma, her name was. Her name was Toma.

LEVINE: T-O-M-A?

MISTURINI: T-O-M-A. ( background sounds intensify ) ( break in tape )

LEVINE: We're continuing now after, uh . . .

MISTURINI: An interruption. ( he laughs )

LEVINE: After an interruption of a lawnmower. Lawn equipment. ( they laugh ) Okay. Let's say now, let's see. Where were we?

MISTURINI: When (?) came.

LEVINE: Mrs., Miss or Mrs. Toma.

MISTURINI: Toma, yeah. A woman, yeah. She also had a kid about our age. I forget, a girl. So we had a cabin. No, we went to Genoa. We had a lot of trouble trying to get the passport because there was trouble there and they didn't want to let people get out of the country. They didn't want to. So finally they got a hold of the American counsel. With my father, he had to send papers from here. You know, it took a long time. But finally we got the, got on the boat, on The Roma, like I said. Very rough water. In fact, that was the time that the waves kind of dented the smokestacks. I went up to eat, I was the only guy up there.

LEVINE: Were you sick?

MISTURINI: No, it didn't bother me. My brothers did. That woman, oh, crackers! ( he laughs ) I thought she was going to die. Yeah, I went up to eat at our table. Our table, everybody's table. It's not like here. Everybody went up whenever, oh, there was nobody up there, just a couple of people. Very rough.

LEVINE: You were in a cabin?

MISTURINI: We were in a cabin.

LEVINE: You weren't in the hold of the ship. You had a cabin.

MISTURINI: We were down. I remember down pretty deep. But, no, there was a cabin.

LEVINE: And how many were in there?

MISTURINI: Oh, I think about a dozen people in there, there was.

LEVINE: So it was your brothers and this . . .

MISTURINI: This woman here, and . . .

LEVINE: And her daughter. And some other people.

MISTURINI: Yeah, right. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. It was a big

cabin, I should put it that way.

LEVINE: And then everybody went to a dining room.

MISTURINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: But it turns out most people didn't go because they were sick.

MISTURINI: That's right. In fact, it's like they even had something on those tables here where you pull the glass in and you go around in a circle and hold the glass. Otherwise it won't, uh, tumble over. ( clock chimes ) But I wanted to go and see things, you know. We didn't see nothing, by golly. Because our uncle kept us kind of clamped down. I know I wanted to go up on deck. I could hear some music up there. Because us, getting back to the other. The nice part, when we picked the corn, we put it in a yard. And all the families around there come and help us husk, peel the corn, shuck the corn. And there's always one guy with an accordion, and we have some bottles of wine. So everybody sings, you know. Because all that's the same nationality, and we sing songs. That is, that was beautiful. Oh, I still remember. In fact, I still got some of those songs. Oh, that brings back memories. That was the good part. And stay there, you know. Used to have a, go around here with a point coming up, fast. ( he coughs )

LEVINE: Now, what. You would shuck all this corn, and then what would be done with it?

MISTURINI: They'd send it some place where they'd take it off the husk.

LEVINE: Like can it, or bottle it?

MISTURINI: No, no. They'd take the kernel off. It takes a machine they used to put them in. That machine I, uh . . .

MRS. MISTURINI: It was for the animals.

MISTURINI: Well, some, some, yeah.

LEVINE: So you heard this music up on deck on the ship.

MISTURINI: Yeah. They're playing music up there. We wanted to go up. No, she was afraid we'd get lost. She was a very scary woman, by golly, too. All the responsibility, in a way, you know, I couldn't blame her. But, uh . . .

LEVINE: So, what? You had to stay in the cabin?

MISTURINI: Not far from it. Only when you go up and eat. And that wasn't in deck. It was still, not way on top.

LEVINE: Do you remember coming into the New York Harbor?

MISTURINI: Oh, yeah. That was exciting, the horn blowing there. You know, the Roma was blowing the horns. The Statue of Liberty, oh, was that amazing. We never seen nothing like that, wow.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you thought or what you felt when you saw . . .

MISTURINI: Oh, Jesus. Uh, a big statue like that. Free, oh. You don't have to plow the fields no more, I was thinking. Free in America. It is a feeling that is very hard to explain unless you actually went through it. By golly. A lot of confusion, though, there was. Oh. Beautiful. Then when it docked, waiting to get off. Gee. I could just picture it. But then when you get inside, get off the boat, there's more confusion. Everybody running around like a chicken without a head on.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you brought with you? Did you have luggage, baggage, rather?

MISTURINI: No. I had a sack and a dilapidated bag. I remember we had two of them, I remember. We came down. The woman says, "You go in that big room over there and you sit on that bench and you wait there." So we followed. Oh, a good thing the guy spoke Italian a bit. Because I didn't speak any. And most of them were speaking English. So what the heck, we don't know

what the hell they're doing. Scared stiff because, you know, I'd never seen that many people, that much, especially guys in uniform, and so on. You know? The cops was there. I was on that bench. Louie didn't move at all. He didn't move. ( he laughs ) We didn't want to get lost with all that confusion. And even her, she stood there waiting, waiting, waiting. Finally the guy came over, waiting for all that. Another guy came over. You got to wait, wait. "( Aspette, Aspette )" Wait. The, finally my folks came in. Because he had American, he had the pass, "My kids are coming, they're Americans." You know. That helped a little bit. But we had to wait quite a long time.

LEVINE: Did you have an examination?

MISTURINI: Yes. Oh, yeah. Ooh, everybody got the examination.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about that? What it was like?

MISTURINI: I know he checked, take it over there, check the ears and all the eyes, and so on, asking if we had any kind of sickness, you know. No, no. We were all healthy. Temperature and so on. Checked us if we had any lice or anything. But, uh . . .

LEVINE: Were you treated nicely? Were you treated

brusquely? Do you remember? ( exterior cicada noise )

MISTURINI: No. It wasn't, uh, rough, actually. You know, but we just stayed there and wait, wait until the right guy comes around. That's all. Just to wait, and a lot of confusion. That was, I remember a lot. People running here, running there, the baggage, luggage. And they wanted to look inside if we had any, I don't know what the heck they were looking for.

LEVINE: So you had to open your bags?

MISTURINI: Yeah, sure. Yeah, yeah. We had a sack with a rope tied around it. ( he laughs ) But we had some clothes in there, that's all.

LEVINE: That's all you brought were clothes.

MISTURINI: Yeah. We didn't bring anything else. I don't remember, no. Eat. I don't think we had anything to eat. I don't remember eating anything, no, no.

LEVINE: Do you remember, like, how long you were there before your mother and father came?

MISTURINI: Oh, I would say it was a couple of hours. A couple of hours it was. I think somebody gave us a couple of crackers or something. Oh, crackers, wow! We never had crackers. In Europe French bread was considered cake, so my uncle's wife ate

it. We got this, it's a bread. It's like a, it's hard like a rock. Mainly polenta, we eat, that's all. All polenta. We never had cake. By golly. And, uh, I didn't even recognize my folks, no. It was a long time we hadn't seen them. Years, faintly.

LEVINE: Can you remember the reunion? How, where you saw them, or what happened?

MISTURINI: Oh, crackers. I know my mother. She went bananas. Well, she was an affectionate woman anyhow. Oh, boy. Everybody crying. Oh, Christ! I even get tears thinking about it, for God's sake.

LEVINE: So you didn't recognize them when they first showed up?

MISTURINI: It seemed as though I had seen them before, but I wouldn't be able to pick them out of a crowd, you know, or anything. No. Yeah. Strange. It was very strange. Then going in a subway coming home. Holy, geez, scared stiff. Ho, ho.

LEVINE: You were scared of the subway?

MISTURINI: Especially going in the tunnel. Oh, gee, whiskers. Boy, oh, boy. Scary. We didn't move.

LEVINE: Well, now, you were the responsible one, right, for your brothers? Because you were the oldest.

MISTURINI: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Can you say anything about that, how you felt bringing them? I mean, I know the woman was in charge of you, but still.

MISTURINI: Yeah. But still I, what do you call it? I felt a little more responsible because they were my brothers, they weren't her kids. That's why I was holding on to them, you know, and talking to them. I said, "Hey, stay here. Don't go away now." You know. Oh, yeah. Especially Bino. He tended to be a little bit lively. "Come over here!" You know, I was grabbing him. Mario was easygoing. No matter where you put him, he stood there. But the other one, he wandered once in a while. "Just stay here, I'll go and get him." I chased him all over the place. It was the same thing, after, here, in school. Oh, Jesus. Fights, by golly.

LEVINE: What, he would get you started in a fight?

MISTURINI: Well, we went to school. After we came here, you know, it was, then they put us in school, P.S. 122 in Astoria. I'll never forget. That's where they had the house. Uh, we

started going to school. But for my age they put me with the twelve-year-old kids. I was bigger. Even though there were some my height, they weren't too bright. ( he laughs ) So, but I had gone to school. Arithmetic, I knew it. But English, I still have trouble with the English language.

LEVINE:        Sounds good to me.

MISTURINI:    I'll never forget the word "right." No matter which one I put down, it was always the wrong one. ( they laugh ) Why don't they, the way it's pronounced, why don't they write it? And that's the way it is in Italy. The way it's pronounced, you write it. Here it doesn't. Oh, I used to go crazy. I always put down the wrong one. I never forget that word. And the other word, "because". I used to say, "BEE-CAW-SEE." You know, the way it's spelled, I used to say it.

LEVINE:        Uh-huh.

MISTURINI:    "It's not pronounced that way!" It's the only way I know it.

LEVINE:        So was it difficult learning English?

MISTURINI:    Oh, yeah. Sure. English, arithmetic was easy, like I said. But English, English was, I think the highest mark I ever got was a C. ( he laughs )

LEVINE: Did you get any special help?

MISTURINI: Uh, not, no, no. I was old enough to, good enough for me to get along with, you know.

LEVINE: Do you remember when you began to really pick it up, or when you were able to read it, or . . .

MISTURINI: Yeah. Well, after about a year or so, then I started to get the hang of it a little bit, anyhow.

LEVINE: By then were your mother and father speaking English?

MISTURINI: Yeah, yeah. Not too good, but they spoke it. Oh, yeah. Well, they were here quite a few years, you know. No, I, they spoke it fairly well. But naturally after we always spoke Italian at home. I says to her, "Speak English, you'll learn it." So, uh . . .

LEVINE: Now, were you in an Italian neighborhood?

MISTURINI: We were in Astoria. Well, we had a lot of Italian friends there, yeah.

LEVINE: So you could really speak Italian and get along?

MISTURINI: Yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, but, you

know, it was all mixed. I'll never forget, my mother used to work at night cleaning offices and so on. You know, during the night she used to go to New York. We'd get up early in the morning, and we'd go up by the school. It was two blocks away. We'd hide. When she'd come over, we'd surprise her. ( he laughs ) Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, was life easier or harder when you got back?

MISTURINI: Oh, over here. Well, actually it was easier. We didn't have to get up at four o'clock in the morning to go and plow the fields. And we didn't get whacked once in a while like over there. Even though we did the work, but they wanted more, from my uncle.

LEVINE: What was it like being around your mother and father and getting used to having them around again?

MISTURINI: Well, it felt strange, though, in the beginning because you hadn't seen them for such a long time. I used to say, I had a picture, you know. I says, "Sure, they are my folks." You know, I used to talk it to myself. "Are you sure they're your folks?" You know? And you didn't have that confidence, you didn't have. I was ashamed to ask for things, you know. Like, for instance, for an ice cream, let's say, and so on, I was ashamed to ask them, or anything like that.

LEVINE: How about your brother Bino?

MISTURINI: Him? ( he laughs ) He was a little bit more. She used to call him the black sheep ( he laughs ), she used to call him. Nah, to him, never said a word. He's still very quiet now. But, you know, it was the black sheep. He was a little more lively. ( Mrs. Misturini speaks off mike. ) Yeah, well, he used to start confusion. Then I'd have to step in, and that was the problem. Like I said, I was fairly strong. I could work in the fields, the plow, when I was young, you know. Go to school, they'd start an argument. With Bino, or even guys. You know, they'd push you like hell. You'd go down the stairs from school, pow. Somebody would give you a shot in the head for no reason. I'd grab a hold of them. I had this guy, a friend of mine. Caesar Buda. He was my interpreter.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

MISTURINI: He's living in Florida now. And I went to grab him, you know, like wrestling. He said, "No, no, you've got to fight." I'm not going to fight? I don't know how to fight. They had to separate us. I don't know about boxing. That's why, after, you know, the distance. I used to live in Astoria down by the Hellgate Bridge. I used to run all the way to

Queens Plaza, over the bridge, to 72nd Street to learn how to box. Because I got tired of getting beatings. ( a telephone rings ) Because they won't let me wrestle. Wrestle, I used to throw them all over the place. Box. So I used to box with the Golden Gloves.

LEVINE: Really?

MISTURINI: Practice with them, you know, and so on. Then when I was ready I got the toughest guy in the school. I says, "All right." I get started. I took care of him. I wasn't a fighting man, but they constantly, I come home with a black eye. My mother, "Who did it? I'll kill him!" ( they laugh ) Oh, many black eyes. Oh, yeah. I even got marks here, I got stabbed with pencils and so on. By golly.

LEVINE: Now, were the other kids, did they treat you bad or pick on you in any way because you had come over from Italy?

MISTURINI: Because I was a foreigner.

LEVINE: They did?

MISTURINI: Not so much because I was from Italy, but because I was a foreigner.

LEVINE: A greenhorn.

MISTURINI: A greenhorn. That's what it is.

LEVINE: Yeah. So a lot of the kids were not kids who immigrated to this country.

MISTURINI: No, no, no.

LEVINE: They were born here.

MISTURINI: When I went to school, I was the only one.

LEVINE: Oh, really?

MISTURINI: My and my brothers, we were the only ones.

LEVINE: Oh.

MISTURINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: But I thought there was a large Italian population in Astoria, no?

MISTURINI: No, not too much. They were born here, though.

LEVINE: Oh, I see.

MISTURINI: They were.

LEVINE: I see.

MISTURINI: No.

LEVINE: So did you feel like, did you feel discriminated against? Did you feel bad because you had come from Europe, or . . .

MISTURINI: Well, I, yeah, I felt bad. I didn't think of discrimination so much. In those days you probably didn't think so much about it, you know. But I was getting tired of it. I says, "By golly, I never did nothing to you guys." They were picking fights with me. You know, there's always a couple of bullies. There was a lot of, I had a lot of good friends. Oh, yeah. They would stick up for me. "Oh, leave him alone." But there were a couple of bullies there, always. Oh. I remember in the school that I opened, we used to get mats and do wrestling also. No, I wanted to defend myself. I got tired of it. After that I wrestled for New York State after, yeah, you know, amateur. Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: So did your brother fight, too?

MISTURINI: He had some, too, but not as much. Big brother used to come over and help. ( he laughs ) Mario, not too much. Well, he didn't go to school right away because he was too young, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So was your father still working in the same job with the, uh . . .

MISTURINI: No. He became a cook, after, he became. He was a cook after he worked in all the big hotels in New York. He worked as a chef, a cook.

LEVINE: So did your family, was your family kind of getting ahead during this period?

MISTURINI: Yeah. We were living, you know. Nothing to, we didn't have money to throw away, but we were living then. Because he was a cook and my mother made cigars, after. She used to come home, make them at home, you know. Roll them up, cut the tips off. Havana cigars, she used to make. Yeah.

LEVINE: So then how long did you stay in school?

MISTURINI: Well, I finally graduated public school, yeah. I got the, downstairs yet. I forgot the year, '34? I think 1934. I went to Bryant High School for six months, and then my mother started to clean offices at night. I didn't like that. ( exterior cicada noises ) She'd come home very early in the morning. All night she would clean them. Then she got mugged. You know, some guy knocked her down. She had a big, swollen. So I says, me, a healthy, strong kid, so I quit and I went to work.

LEVINE: And what was your first job?

MISTURINI: My first job I, I worked with tile. This guy, that kid that was my interpreter, Buda, his father had a tile business. The son didn't like it, so I became a tile helper. Oh, boy, oh, boy. I worked like a horse. Gee, whiskers. Those tubs that they used to have butter in, that wooden tub, that big. Fill it up with cement. Carry it five, six flights up. Holy crackers. Till late at night. I got tired of that. The hands, from the lime, used to eat away at the skin there. Couldn't hardly pick anything up from those (?), you know. I said, "I'm not getting nowhere." So I became a waiter. I became a waiter. My first job was in Flushing. I worked there a while, then I worked at the Hotel Pierre. Then I worked at the Plaza in banquets. Then I used to go to Florida. During the day I'd be a lifeguard, and at night I'd work as a waiter.

LEVINE: Now, what year is this, roughly?

MISTURINI: 1936. I'll never forget the first year. That, I did pretty good.

LEVINE: So in other words you were actually working and making a living during the Depression.

MISTURINI: Oh, well, this, no, that was after the Depression.

LEVINE: Oh, after.

MISTURINI: Yeah. '36 was after the Depression. Yeah, yeah. Well, the Depression I was in Europe most of it.

LEVINE: Wait, you came, what, you came in '29, right?

MISTURINI: Right.

LEVINE: And you were in school for about . . .

MISTURINI: I moved up pretty quick.

LEVINE: Yeah. So when you left school was roughly what year?

MISTURINI: I think it was in 1934. Was it 19 . . . I got the thing down there.

LEVINE: The diploma, uh-huh.

MISTURINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. So you were working, then, right from the time you stopped school.

MISTURINI: Oh, yeah, yeah, sure. I didn't like being a waiter. I didn't.

LEVINE: What didn't you like?

MISTURINI: The hours, to begin with. You only had Monday off.

Everybody's working on Monday, you're home alone. I didn't like it. Then I didn't like this tie, ( he gestures ) like this. It annoyed me.

LEVINE: You had to wear a tie?

MISTURINI: Oh, sure. Tight. Then in Florida, in Florida, I didn't mind the part during the day. The lifeguard, once in a while, you know, and so on, that was all right. But the night, yeah. Walking in the sand. Your shoes would get full of sand and so on, walking in those cabanas. Because I was used to the open, I was used to. You know, I went, so I went six months school. Then I quit, went to work. I didn't like my mother doing that.

LEVINE: So then did your mother quit work when you started?

MISTURINI: Yeah. Not long after that she quit, yeah. It was a tough job, you know. Never home, you know, during the night.

LEVINE: So then when did you meet your wife?

MISTURINI: In 1941.

MRS. MISTURINI: We were married in '41. We're married over fifty years.

MISTURINI: Same woman.

LEVINE: Wow. ( they laugh )

MRS. MISTURINI: It must have been about 1938, '39. Right around there.

MISTURINI: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember where you met?

MISTURINI: A blind date, a blind date. I was working at the Pierre, then.

MRS. MISTURINI: That's right.

MISTURINI: There was this fellow, a friend of mine. He was going out that night. And he says, "You want to go? I'll call up my girl, if she's got a girlfriend." "Yeah, all right." I had a 1935 Oldsmobile. Yeah. Before that I had a Whippet. A 1935 Oldsmobile. So he called up his girlfriend and she says, she called, ask her, a double date. All right, so I went to the Bronx to pick her up. No, up in Manhattan. All the way up, near the Bronx, I guess it was. We got, just as I was ready to leave The Pierre, a party of six people come in. We're ready to close the place. What are you going to do, throw them out? The Hotel Pierre? That's a high class joint. Holy crackers. So we hurried up. We kind of pushed them through, quick, quick. The guy giving me dirty looks. Expensive. We kind of rushed them.

As soon as the last guy, we told the guy, "Finish up, will you?" To another waiter. So he finished up. We got up there, we were late. She was ready to leave. She got tired of waiting. But, you see, destiny. So finally we got to the, "How do you do?" "Fine." So we came back to Astoria and went to a place in Astoria there. Venest? No, not Venest. What the heck was the name of it? Underneath the bridge. So we had a couple of dances, we had a drink. So that night I told her, "You and I are going to get married whether you like it or not." ( Mrs. Misturini laughs. ) That's it. I told her.

LEVINE: How did you know? What made you so sure?

MISTURINI: I don't know. I felt comfortable with her, and we got along. You know, I felt just, it felt comfortable with her. That was it. Ah, it was a good deal. ( they laugh )

LEVINE: Well, you were right, right? You made a good decision.

MISTURINI: Over fifty years, so I must have made a right decision.

LEVINE: So how long did you see each other before you were married?

MISTURINI: Uh, well, then I went to Florida. Then she went to

Florida, working somewhere on Jupiter Island somewhere. You know, we seen it for two years, about two years we, on and off, you know. Because I'd go one place, she'd go another place. And then we got married, '41. And then the service came. We, I was working in a foundry after. I got sick. And I'd drink a quart of milk a day, I had to drink. It was coming out of my ears. Oh, boy, golly. From the sulphur, you know, it gets in your system. So we went for a job. I'll never forget. We went for a job at, uh . . .

MRS. MISTURINI: Colesman.

MISTURINI: Colesman, in Woodside. Excuse me. I was in 1-A with no job, because I was sick. She wasn't working. So they were strictly, well, you've got to say it as it is, a German place. If you weren't German, it was rough. So they rejected both of us. I got annoyed. I told them. I said, "Look." I says, "I'm in 1-A going into the services. Okay. I don't blame you for not taking me. But at least take her, for God's sakes. Somebody's got to, somebody's got to work." So he took her, finally. You know, I talked him into it. So that's what happened. So I went in. I'll never forget, I went to Texas. First at Camp Swift, Camp Upton. Oh, was it cold, January. Then I was, pick up everything, don't go. I was a, what do you call it, like a one-day general. They show films of all

different diseases. Guys pass out. You'd be surprised. So I was one of the guys that go around with smelling salt, because it didn't bother me as much. Wake them up, pick them up, and so on. Me and another guy. I'll never forget. So I did that for a while. Then we were shipped to Texas, Camp Swift. So, in a short period of time, different bivouac and maneuvers, I became sergeant. I had a little military experience.

LEVINE: You mean, from the . . .

MISTURINI: From Europe, yeah, yeah. So, but they asked me if I wanted to be a conscientious objector. I said, "No. I'm an American, by golly." I said, "No, no, no, no." All right. So that's why they put me in a combat M.P.'s, to bring back prisoners, you know. But then when we got there it changed. There I became a spy. Because when we landed in Africa I was talking with the prisoners, there's a lingo. So the provost marshal figures you could go in with an Italian labor gang, because Germans had the Italian labor gang, bring back information. Yeah, but sneaking back and forth was no picnic. A lot of trigger-happy guys. So not going into too many details, I went into Sicily, jumped with the paratroopers, and then went in at Salerno, the invasion. I was in Naples before the allies came in, hiding in the cellar. And, uh, ( he is moved ). Yeah, it's a rough feeling. Wait a second.

LEVINE: So when the war was over, then what?

MISTURINI: Uh, I was up in the hospital because I was wounded, also and, uh, I got shock treatments also. ( he pauses ) Then, finally, after a while, well, I was locked up for a while. ( he coughs ) Excuse me. ( he coughs ) ( break in tape )

LEVINE: When you say you were locked up, you were in a hospital, or . . .

MISTURINI: I was blown up, see.

LEVINE: Oh.

MISTURINI: ( he sighs ) All . . . ( he pauses ) Uh, oh, sugar. I could still . . . ( he is moved ) ( break in tape )

LEVINE: Okay. We're resuming now, and you were talking about being in the service.

MISTURINI: Well, when I went for the service, they asked me if I wanted to be a conscientious objector. I said, "No. I'm an American. I was born here. I'm an American." So they said, "All right." They put me in. I went to boot camp in Camp Swift, Texas to train me for the combat M.P.'s to bring back prisoners. I said I was proud to be an American. I did my part

for my country, I says. But then when we got to Africa they, I was talking with prisoners, and I figured it would be a good idea if I would, through the Secret Service, O.S.S. and all those, intelligence, and bring back information. So I volunteered for it. I figured I'm an American, I wanted to do, I wanted to prove that I was one. So I volunteered, and I've gone behind enemy lines quite a few times. I've gone, I've brought back information at times where they had the headquarters or got gun placements. I've, I've, uh, not bragging, but I've killed a few people while I was in civilian clothing behind the lines. Sorry I can't talk too much about different incidents, but, uh, I've been in five major battles with them. I even carried ammunition for the Germans so I could get Mount Casino before the Allies took it. I didn't enjoy it, but I had to do it. And then at Enzior I went too far in. I got blown up, and captured. I was wounded. I was in the hospital up there. It was a little kind of confusing because I couldn't remember everything. I, uh, tell me to do things that I couldn't. I, then they exchanged wounded. That's how I got back. They exchanged. I found myself on a truck coming back. I wound up in a hospital in Naples. I got shock treatment and so on. They tried to revive me. Then after a while I wound up in Utica in the hospital. And then I got tired of being locked up. I fought like hell with myself. Even though I still have

nightmares, I said to myself, "That's enough. It's up to you."

That's why I keep busy doing things and so on. You have to. And thank God I'm still around.

LEVINE: So you've been decorated with medals from the war?

MISTURINI: Uh, well, you help somebody, says, "we'll put you up for medal, promotion." Then another guy put a medal, a silver star and so on, like that. But somehow I'd come back, I'd be to another outfit. You know, I would lose this one. I was with the 36th Division, the 45th, 82nd Airborne, all those. But then when I'd come back I'd be with another outfit, whoever I'd meet. So naturally, you know, things would get forgotten down the line, so I didn't want to bother. I got one from the Italian, for saving some sailors. Yeah, they gave me an Italian medal. But, uh, yeah. They'd promise a few things, but (?), you know.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

MISTURINI: I'd probably be an officer. I've been a sergeant. That's enough.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So since that time, since you got out of the service, then where did you go from there?

MISTURINI: I still go back to the V.A., though.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MISTURINI: In fact, I'm going tomorrow morning again.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MISTURINI: They've got to do a few things on me, yeah. But, uh, well, when I got out, I got a job. I tried a couple of jobs, I couldn't. Too noisy. I can't stand noise, or enclosure. I've got claustrophobia from it. But all in all nothing is perfect.

LEVINE: Did you ever have children?

MISTURINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: You have children? What are your childrens' names?

MISTURINI: I've got a boy and a girl. The boy, his name is Bobby.

MRS. MISTURINI: Robert.

MISTURINI: Robert. And the girl's name is June. Five grandchildren. My daughter's got two boys, and my son has got two boys and a girl. The last one is a girl, finally.  
( Dr. Levine laughs ) We call her "The Little Tomato." She's nine years old. I've got one grandchild, he's twenty-four. No?

Bobby? Twenty-four.

LEVINE: You'll probably have great-grandchildren before you . . .

MISTURINI: Yeah. I hope to be around that long, I hope.

LEVINE: Well, what would you say, is there anything that you would say about having started out, well, your parents certainly started out in Italy, and then you went back there and all, are there any things that you retained from being in Italy and being Italian, or did you try to get rid of that and be strictly Americanized?

MISTURINI: I'm an American first, but deep down there's always a little feeling there for the times when we used to husk the corn. That I never forgot. With that accordion and a glass of wine, you know, singing there, no problems, you know. Nice. That was terrific. That I, uh, in fact, when I play some of those songs now it brings back some of those memories.

LEVINE: Now, who would be there at those times?

MISTURINI: Oh, dear. I probably got some cousins. I made a trip to Italy. When I was on the tour I could never go to that town. I could never. I'd like to go back one day just to see where I was an altar boy, where I went to school. But somehow

we've travelled seven countries. We've gone on a tour.

LEVINE: So maybe you could go.

MISTURINI: But you've got to leave the tour.

LEVINE: Yes, yeah. You'd have to have a tour you could leave and come back.

MISTURINI: Now my eyes are going and I can't drive too much, so that's limited. But, uh . . .

LEVINE: You're an American first, but deep down you have some of the . . .

MISTURINI: Some you kept, sure, you have it. You can't help that. You know, you take, the good parts you take. Yeah. By golly.

LEVINE: And what would you say you're proudest of in your life?

MISTURINI: What I'm proudest of?

LEVINE: Yeah.

MISTURINI: Well, my family, my wife here, the way we've, the things that I've accomplished. I feel proud that I have done my part for this country in the service. But like now they say

even though lately, when they see the, I've got a Prisoner of War plates. You know, they gave it to me. They give me a beep-beep on the horn and so on. It makes you feel good that people appreciated it. Yeah. I didn't do that in the beginning, but, too busy working I guess, and so on. Now that I'm retired, you know, they kind of talked me into it. "Why not? You should be proud?" I am proud, but I don't like to . . .

LEVINE: Toot your own horn.

MISTURINI: Right, right. Yeah, yeah, yeah. They said, "Why don't you go after the medals and so on?" I says, "Ah, medals." You know. I said I got some, but I didn't bother too much with that, because then too much remind me of the incidents that bothered me, that bothers me. You know, once in a while I come out with one. And then, really, you know, when it keeps happening. You know, it keeps happening right in front of you, you're with it, and sometimes you can't do nothing about it. Like at Salerno, for instance. This young kid was next to me. We were behind rocks. A lot of fire. I was dressed as an American soldier then. We were hiding in little rocks. Machine guns come. He was scared stiff, his first thing. What do you call it? "Hey Sarge," he says, "ain't you scared?" "Sure I'm scared," I said. "But there's bigger coverage over there." There was an open space near the beach. Stay here till the

guns, quiet them a little more. You've got to have patience, you can't . . ." "Yeah, but there's more coverage over there." ( he sighs ) "I'm going to try." "Stay here, you jerk, stay here. Listen to me, I've been through this before. Stay there." "No, I'm going to see." He lifted his head up. Right in the face he got a big .45, a couple of shots. His whole face blew off. Holy Jesus. ( he sighs ) He was trying to talk, and blood. Oh.

LEVINE: Yeah. Oh, boy.

MISTURINI: Anyhow. ( break in tape )

LEVINE: We're resuming now, and we're going to be closing with whatever you'd like to say about your life, coming here, whatever.

MISTURINI: Well, first I would say that I am, my number is not up. The man up there is still keeping an eye on me. With so many guys going that were in front of me, and I was behind it and I didn't get it, you get to believe in destiny, and I am very thankful to be here. But, and I am very proud to be an American, that I did my part to the best of my ability. ( tape ends )

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE TWO

MISTURINI: Also, one thing that annoys me immensely is these characters that burn the American flag. That bothers me because it's not a piece of clothe. It's what it represents. So many guys getting killed so that you can speak and say what you want. But don't burn the flag. That annoys me. Because they have no reason to do it. Yell against the government. Protest. You don't like this. You don't like that. But leave that symbol alone for what it represents. I don't know, maybe I'm wrong. But I don't think so.

LEVINE: I don't either. Okay. I want to thank you so much for talking with me. This has been a very, very wonderful interview and I want to say that you'll have a tape and this tape will be part of our collection in our library at Ellis Island. And I just want to say that it's July 19th and I've been here with Nelson Misturini. And we're here at his home in Franklin Square, New York. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service signing off . . . We're starting another piece of vital information that we want to make sure is included on this tape.

MISTURINI: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Mr. Misturini, why don't you say your wife's name and maiden name.

MISTURINI: Well, my wife's name, of fifty-one years, is Elsie Misturini, of course. Her maiden name is, oh, wait a minute, Pancini.

MRS. MISTURINI: ( correcting his pronunciation ) Pancini.

MISTURINI: Pancini, her maiden name is. I got it.

LEVINE: Spell that.

MISTURINI: P-A-N-C-I-N-I. Yeah. I've talked so much about the war that I forgot . . .

LEVINE: Do you want to say anything about your wife in closing?

MISTURINI: Oh, definitely. I'll tell you, I don't think a guy can get a better wife. We get along very well. WE've never had a tough argument, a word here or there once in a blue moon. But never an argument. And we still love each other. And let's hope we go on a few more years. ( he laughs )

LEVINE: I hope so. And it looks as though you love each other. Okay, this is Janet Levine signing off.