

EI-202

JOSEPHINE MESSINA CIRELLA

BIRTH DATE: SEPTEMBER 8, 1913

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SICILY, 1923

AGE 10

PASSAGE ON "THE GUISEPPE VERDI"

PORT: PALERMO

RESIDENCES: SICILY: SAN CATALDO: US: PITTSTON, PA

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today with Josephine Cirella, who came from Italy in 1923 when she was ten years old. Today is August 15th, 1992, and we're here at the Ellis Island studio. Well, I'm very happy that you got here today.

CIRELLA: Thank you.

LEVINE: And that we have a chance to do this.

CIRELLA: Thank you.

LEVINE: And why don't we start by my asking you your birth date.

CIRELLA: My birthday is September 8th.

LEVINE: And the year?

CIRELLA: 1913.

LEVINE: Okay. And where were you born?

CIRELLA: I was born in San Cataldo, Sicily, and the providence is Caltanissetta.

LEVINE: And did you live there in San Cataldo . . .

CIRELLA: Cataldo.

LEVINE: Until you left at ten years old?

CIRELLA: Yes.

LEVINE: Okay. So why don't we start, then, by your telling me about San Cataldo. What was it like there?

CIRELLA: Well, as far as I know I still remember, if I went there again, I never went back, but I picture the streets and I picture everything that I was in there. Someday I'd like to go back. I don't know when, but I'd like to go back some day.

LEVINE: When you picture the street, try to help us to see what you see when you picture the streets. What do you picture?

CIRELLA: Well, they were all stones, narrow. There was, the steps were all stones. There was no hills.

Everything was steps. If you had to go from one street to another you had to go up some steps, not a hill. And then you went down steps, and all those, we only had one street that went across, and everything was horse and wagons. Nothing, there was no cars at that time, of course. And I went to school there, and we had quite a walk to go to school. We had to walk.

Luckily that it wasn't too cold. We used to get cold weather very, very seldom, we got cold weather. And until I was nine, a little more than nine, then we left there in August of 1923.

LEVINE: Describe yourself as a nine or ten, nine-year-old little girl who was in Cataldo.

CIRELLA: Oh, I was very, very, very bad. I was very, very, when I left everybody was saying, "Thank God she's leaving." I was a tomboy. (Dr. Levine laughs) I really was, it's true.

LEVINE: Tell me some of the things you did.

CIRELLA: Well, we, my little girlfriend and I would take a walk. We'd go someplace where nobody could see us. We'd change clothes, and we would go to, I would go to her mother's house and she would go, thinking that

they wouldn't recognize us, that we would walk backwards so this way you couldn't see the faces.
(she laughs) And that's the truth.

LEVINE: Do you remember any games you played?

CIRELLA: We played a lot of games over there. We used to play with the filbert nuts. Like over here they play with marbles? We used to make a hole on the ground and we would get the empty filbert nuts. They knew which ones were empty. They would sell them separate, and the ones that were over the fruit they would sell them separate, and we would buy for two cents, for a penny, the ones that were empty and we would play just like, we didn't have marbles over there. We had those filbert nuts. And we would have to make all the nuts go into the hole, like they do here with the marbles. And we would play hopscotch. We would make circles or squares on the middle of the street and we would play there like that. And we would take walks and we would go what they called the piazza, and buy lemonade, homemade lemonade and, for two cents.

LEVINE: Who would sell that?

CIRELLA: They had a place that they would, it's like a square,

and they used to call that the piazza, and there was a couple of stores there. And they had where they sold the coffee, where they sold the gelatis, where they would sell the ice cream, the, uh, the lemonade. I don't remember ice cream, but candy. They had a lot of candy. And then a day like today, August 15th, we had a big, big feast, and we would buy peanuts in the stands, like over here. When you go to a feast out here with the carts, the pushcarts, we had them over there, and we would buy watermelon, sliced watermelon. Or we would buy peanuts. And they used to call them the American nuts.

LEVINE: Peanuts.

CIRELLA: The American peanuts, they would call them. And, of course, over there we only had almonds, and we had filbert nuts and we had walnuts. And I, when I used to go to the country I would ride the little donkey. And this, I would pass a walnut tree, and I would pick walnuts and throw them, play ball with them. And those were the things that we had. We didn't have any toys. We didn't have any things that they have here or, but we passed our time. We had, we thought we had a good time.

LEVINE: What was your mother's name?

CIRELLA: Maria Prizzi.

LEVINE: Could you spell that?

CIRELLA: P-R-I-Z-Z-I.

LEVINE: That was her maiden name.

CIRELLA: Maiden name. That was her maiden name.

LEVINE: And your father's name?

CIRELLA: Salvatore Messina.

LEVINE: So Messina was your maiden name.

CIRELLA: My name, my maiden name. When we left there, we left my grandfather there. I left two grandfathers and a grandmother. The Messina side was my grandmother and grandfather.

LEVINE: What were their names?

CIRELLA: Michael Messina and Maria Messina.

LEVINE: And your mother's?

CIRELLA: And my mother's father's name was Colgere.

LEVINE: How do you spell that?

CIRELLA: C-O-L-G-E-R-E.

LEVINE: And what was his wife's name, your grandmother?

CIRELLA: Angelina. Of course, my mother lost her mother when she was very young. Her mother was very young when she died.

LEVINE: And did you have aunts and uncles and cousins right around nearby that you, that you . . .

CIRELLA: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. We had a lot of relatives. We had, my mother's aunt lived downstairs from us, and my mother's other aunt lived right across the street, right across the place, which is very narrow, not a street like it is here. It's just a, and a cousin lived two houses away and a lot of friends, everybody in the neighborhood was all like relatives, you know. They were friends, but everybody treated each other like relatives.

LEVINE: And what do people do to make a living there?

CIRELLA: Well, they, the farming. Everything was, like my grandfather was, what would they call here, a ranch

foreman, and where they had, you know, animals, and they had a lot of ground, and he would take care of all these men that worked. See, there was a lot of picking olives and picking almonds over there, and then they would have to crack them. And I remember going to a place where they would crack them with a little hammer, the almonds, all by hand, at that time.

And then they got us kids to take them out of the shells and put them in a burlap bag. And we wanted to get into the burlap bag because they said that burlap bag went to America. (she laughs) Yeah. And they used to keep us kids, you know, busy that way. And we had nothing, we never got in trouble. I don't remember anybody, you know, getting in trouble or anything like that. Or, of course, I was young enough that we couldn't get in trouble. But my grandfather did that. And my other grandfather was also living in the country where they were hired. The man, the husband and wife, and they would get a room to live in. And whatever they did I don't remember, but I stayed with them a while. They would cook for the workers. They would clean up around, and that's what they did.

LEVINE: Is this the grandmother . . .

CIRELLA: My Messina grandmother.

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

CIRELLA: My Messina grandmother. They lived together in this big, big, big farm.

LEVINE: And this is where your grandfather is the foreman?

CIRELLA: No, no. In a different, in a different place. And he would bring my mother stuff, food, and drink, you know, when he came. He used to come home once a month. My grandfather, my mother's father came home once a month and brought home a lot of the stuff from the farm, see. We never lived in a farm. We always lived in the town. But I would go to my grandmother's and stay there with them. And sometimes the people there, they were very rich. They would take us in, and me that I was a little girl, you know. And I would stay with them and eat with them.

LEVINE: Can you think of any experiences that you had with them?

CIRELLA: With them I have an experience that they used to put

me on the table with them and they loved me very, very much. And they treated me very, very, very well, and I, that's how I knew how the other side lived. By being with them, I knew how the other side lived. But we weren't that bad off, because my father used to send money from here. And we had a dollar, we had a few dollars there.

LEVINE: When did your father leave?

CIRELLA: My father left when I was about four years old.

LEVINE: So you remembered him?

CIRELLA: I really didn't, but through pictures I did. But I really didn't remember my father that good. I never was face-to-face, close to him, from when I was four years old.

LEVINE: I see. So when you came here, he was really pretty much unknown to you.

CIRELLA: And when we came here on the boat we stayed on the boat and he couldn't come into the boat. They used to come with the tugboats.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. Let's hold that till we finish with the

talk about Sicily. Did you go to school then when you were still in Sicily?

CIRELLA: Yes. Yes, I went to the third grade.

LEVINE: And what did you . . .

CIRELLA: I was promoted to the third grade.

LEVINE: Can you remember any differences in the school there compared with when you came here and went to school?

CIRELLA: Well, it was altogether different. I remember I was in school when Mussolini came in, and they took us out of school and they made us march all around the town with the flags and everything. And our school was upstairs from a prison. And during the day it was like an open yard, like. And there was, like, an iron walk all around. And the schools were in like that, (she gestures) upstairs from the prison. And the prisoners would be in the yard there, and from way up on the railing we would talk to the prisoners, all us kids. And they, I guess that was the best thing that they could have done, that they used to see us kids talk to them, and that's when I went to school. And it was in the main street of whatever they used to

call us, (Italian). You know, a main highway. Which now I hear it's a big, big, big highway. They made it a big highway, and cars and everything go through. But which at that time was small, and that's where the school.

LEVINE: Excuse me. How about the teachers? Was there a big difference between the teachers you had there and the teachers you had here?

CIRELLA: Well, the only thing, what I remember is that I'm lefty, and they wouldn't let me write with my left hand, and they would hit me on my hand and put the pencil in my right hand until I got used to writing with the right hand. But I'm lefty. Everything else I do, I do lefty. Whatever I'd been learning myself with the both hands. But, and I remember that it was very, very tough for me to learn to write with the right hand. And I used to cry a lot because I didn't want to do it. I would always put the pencil in my left, in my left hand. And they would come over and do it again, and put the pencil in my right hand. And I learned how to write in the right hand, but I have a very terrible handwriting. And that's what I remember about school. And I remember walking to school. It

was quite a long way we had to walk, but there were no cars (she laughs) and nobody to drive you to school at that time.

LEVINE: So the only place you had animals was when you went to your grandparents?

CIRELLA: Right, right.

LEVINE: And there you had a donkey?

CIRELLA: Yeah, there was a donkey there and I used to ride the donkey. Uh-huh. And I used to go pick figs in the morning, early in the morning I would go pick figs and big, big fruits, all kinds of fruits, pears. And I would watch them when they were picking olives, and I watched them, as I said before, I watched them when they would crack the almonds, and then we would, they would put us kids to take them out of the shell. When they crack them, you have to take them out of the shell and put it in, fill up the burlap bags. And that's what we used to do. That was our good time.

LEVINE: You considered that fun.

CIRELLA: Oh, yeah. That was fun. That was a lot of fun. I don't know if the mothers or the people got paid extra

for what we did. I don't know about that, but it was fun for us kids.

LEVINE: What was your, what were your grandparents like? How do you remember them?

CIRELLA: My grandmother and grandfather were very, very, very good to me. Because my father was out here, and they were very good. We went there, every holiday we spent with them, and it was very good because they lived a little further away than my mother's people. My mother's people all lived downstairs across the way. And, which she had no mother, but she had all the aunts that used to take care of her. Her mother died when she was thirty-three years old, and left four children. My mother was the oldest, and she took care of the three children and herself when she was thirteen years old. And . . .

CIRELLA: What about your grandmother and grandfather, your father's mother and father? What, how would you describe their temperament or their personalities?

CIRELLA: My grandfather was, well, the thing I remember about my grandfather, that he would do anything I wanted him to do for me. And I couldn't get over why he had blue

eyes and he was very, very light, and my grandmother was a little different, a little olive-skinned. Compared to him she was darker. But I remember my grandfather being a very good-looking man and very blue eyes. That's why until today I remember him with those blue eyes.

LEVINE: And what was he like with you?

CIRELLA: He was very good to me. No matter, when I went there to stay with them he would take me every place he went. If he went to feed the animals he would take me. If he went to pick up the stuff to cook for the men that were working there, he would take me with them. No matter what he did he'd take me with them. And he was very, very good to me. I never, never got scolded. I was the baby of the three sisters. We were three sisters. I was the baby, and I never got scolded from my grandfather, I could say. I loved him.

LEVINE: And how about your grandmother? How was she in relation to you?

CIRELLA: The same way. She was, as far as I remember she was, no matter when I went there, she was always good to

us. She always hugged us and kissed us, and we were brought up with a lot of love.

LEVINE: You had, what, two sisters, right?

CIRELLA: Two sisters.

LEVINE: And where did you fit in in the order of . . .

CIRELLA: I was the youngest.

LEVINE: You were the youngest.

CIRELLA: Yeah. One was fifteen, one was thirteen and I was ten.

LEVINE: And, the older sister, what was her name?

CIRELLA: Maria.

LEVINE: Maria. And then the next one?

CIRELLA: Angelina.

LEVINE: Angelina.

CIRELLA: Yes. And we were three sisters when we came here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh, let's see. How about your mother's father? What was, did you think of any experiences

with him?

CIRELLA: (she laughs) Oh, I could tell you stories. With him? No. It takes too long. (she laughs)
My . . .

LEVINE: Maybe one incident or something, just to give a flavor.

CIRELLA: All right. Just one incident. My grandfather had a big, big, big fig tree outside of his house. And I would climb that fig tree all the way up to the top. And, I told you I was a tomboy. And there was an old lady living across the way, and she would always yell at me because I was climbing the tree. Maybe she was afraid that I'd fall or what, but to me she was very, I thought she was very nasty, very bad. So I used to make fun of her, of the old lady. And one time she came and she told my grandfather, and I could not come down from the tree and go into the house by my grandfather. So I stayed there until they all went in and they all, they couldn't see me. And I ran. I came down from the tree, and I started running. My grandfather ran after me all the way home to my house, to where I lived. And it was at least, I would say,

about two miles away. And the poor man had to run after me all the way. And there was another, one incident which I should mention. That, it was August 15th, like today. They used to make a fire in the middle of the street, and it was like a feast. And the fellows would, from the hill they would run down the hill and jump over the fire, and see who could jump the highest, the fellows. And I was standing on line there watching them, and one of the fellows stretched his arms out and hit me right in the eye, and I got a black eye. And my mother was scared that we were going to leave for America and they wouldn't let me pass with my eye, with the black eye I had. Luckily, until August 26th or 27th that we left from Palermo, my eye got better. But she cried for a week because my eye was black and blue. That I'll never forget.

LEVINE: Tell me about . . .

CIRELLA: (she laughs) She cried.

LEVINE: What about your mother? How was she? How were you with your mother?

CIRELLA: My mother, I was the baby until I was eleven years

old, after we came here. I came here at ten. Once we got here she started having babies.

LEVINE: So did she baby you?

CIRELLA: And she babied me a lot. My two sisters babied me also, and I was spoiled. Let's put it that way, I was a spoiled brat until I was eleven years old, until I was eleven years old. And, well, then, they were home.

CIRELLA: What was your mother like? What was your mother like? Was she strict? Was she, uh . . .

CIRELLA: Well, there was nothing to be strict about because we went to church and we, I went to school here, came home, and she was just like any other mother that we were, as I said, we were a loving family. We always went home. We never said, "I'm going to run away from home," or be nasty to one another, or anything like that. We were always in the house.

LEVINE: Well, how was your mother after your father left for the United States? How did she, did she have enough money from what he sent her? Did she have to work?

CIRELLA: No. My mother never worked in her life, in Italy. My

mother always had enough money from here. He was a very, very good provider from, in fact, everything he made here he used to send it to her. Then, when we got here, she exchanged some of the money she had left over that he had sent her. She had turned into Italian money, and then she changed it to American money when we got here, and she had some money left. But she was afraid to spend some of the money because people over there didn't have much. And she didn't want to show that she was doing, you know, better than them because her husband was in America. And she had a lot of compassion for the people there, and sometimes if we did something we did it, she bought something extra for us, she did it because, in a way that we wouldn't go out and say anything to anybody. "Don't tell anybody that I bought this or bought that," not to make them feel bad, you know. And she lived very well out there. In fact, she lived better there, while my father was here, than when we got here.

LEVINE: What did your mother wear? Can you remember the way she dressed when you were a little girl in Italy, in, uh, Sicily?

CIRELLA: Well, this was something that, my sister was thirteen years old. She went to a dressmaker to learn how to make dresses. And, before we came here, she made all our dresses. And, I'll tell you, when we came here we looked like, I would say, Jacqueline Kennedy, all dressed up with georgette dresses, and that my sister had made herself because she, two years already she was working in the dressmaker. And we, my mother bought straw hats with cherries on them, big straw hats with cherries on them. My sister came here with high heels, and we really were dressed very, very well.

LEVINE: Now, what's a georgette dress?

CIRELLA: That thin material, that very thin material, georgette.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. I see.

CIRELLA: That thin material that you have to wear a slip with it.

LEVINE: Do you remember the styles?

CIRELLA: Well, the style was a full skirt, a little full skirt I had, I remember.

LEVINE: Long?

CIRELLA: No, short. I never had long hair in my life.

LEVINE: Oh, how about the, the dresses?

CIRELLA: The dresses were underneath my knee, or on my knee, when I came here. We all wore them like that. In fact, the styles were better over there than when we came here. We had to get rid of all our clothes when we came here because they were too dressy. And my sister had to get rid of her high heels, and she cried for six months because she couldn't wear her high heels at fifteen years old.

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

CIRELLA: Well, that was with my father. He was here in America before the war, the First World War. And there was something that, as I understood, that if he came to Italy and served in the Italian war, we would come here free with a passage to America. He could come back, and we would come here. And I remember that we didn't pay anything to come to America.

LEVINE: Because he did go?

CIRELLA: Because he did come to Italy. He went to war there. And he, after the war he came right back, yeah. And that was around, uh, '18, you know, 1918, 1919.

LEVINE: I see. So he came to Italy.

CIRELLA: He was here in America.

LEVINE: Right.

CIRELLA: Alone.

LEVINE: Right.

CIRELLA: Came back to Italy, and served in the Italian war, and they promised him, or they had documents or something that we would, the whole family could come back to America free. I don't know what they called it then, and we did. But they had a, they put my mother's name in a basket, like, and they had to pick out the name. And that's how we got here.

LEVINE: So he came back before you.

CIRELLA: He came way before us.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about his serving in the army

during World War I?

CIRELLA: I don't remember. I remember one slight thing that, I don't know if he was a prisoner of war, but we went to see him someplace. But I remember that. That's very faintly I remember.

LEVINE: Do you remember, like was he behind a fence, or did you . . .

CIRELLA: He was behind bars. He was behind bars. But it didn't last long, because then he came home and he went, and he came back to America right away after, I don't know, he was discharged or whatever. And evidently his record was good because we all came. He came first and then my mother had to wait to make all her papers, her documents. And they put her name in a barrel or a basket or whatever and all the men that did that, they would put their names down like that. And whosever name was picked, if it was every month, every, I don't know. But . . .

CIRELLA: That's when you would go.

LEVINE: That's when, yes. And that's when her, my mother had her name under, in Italy they use their maiden name.

She hardly used her marriage name.

LEVINE: Was that usual?

CIRELLA: Yes, yes. All her letters used to come under Mary Prizzi.

LEVINE: So she didn't use, uh . . .

CIRELLA: Maria Prizzi.

LEVINE: She didn't use your father's name?

CIRELLA: No, not in Italy, no. Not in Italy. And when the "P" came out, the letter "P," then they called her, and we got ready to come here.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you or your mother or your sisters packed to take with you when you were going to leave?

CIRELLA: We didn't pack too much because we had an aunt here, my mother's, my father's brother, and his wife was living in Pennsylvania. And she told us not to pack too much, and I remember we left a lot of stuff there, but we brought all our good clothes. That's about all. We bought a trunk, I think two trunks. That's all, nothing else.

LEVINE: Was your, I forgot to ask you, was your family a very religious family?

CIRELLA: Very, very religious, very religious. We had the church not far from us, maybe about six, eight blocks from us. And she would go to church every day. Yes, she was religious. And they prayed a lot for their husbands that they were, and they were very, very, very strict with themselves, that they made sure they didn't go any place. That their husbands were away, so people wouldn't talk about them. And the, they were afraid of the, her father and the aunt that they're watching her, you know.

LEVINE: Now, were there a lot of people in the same boat? Were there a lot of women there whose husbands were in the United States?

CIRELLA: Oh, yes. In fact, we were supposed to get the boat in Naples, and there were three men in the same travel agent that my mother was going to, to make the trip. And these men felt sorry for my mother because she had three daughters, and she was going to travel alone without her husband. Adn they decided, they were going to leave from Palermo, we were going to leave

from Naples. And they decided, they gave her a break.

They says to her, they changed the names. And we came from Palermo. They, they changed the dates, because they says, "We could travel, but you have girls, you know, and woman alone," and that's why we came, our boat left from Palermo to come here.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

LEVINE: Do you remember any stories that you were told as a child? You know, like fairy tales or stories? Anything stick in your mind that you, was a, poem, story, or anything like that?

CIRELLA: Not really. We used to talk to each other. All the kids, we had, we used to tell each other stories for the king and the queen and the Italian king and the Italian queen, or something like that. But I don't remember, I remember sitting down and telling each other stories. I remember that, (she laughs) she's making me remember everything, you know. I remember that I had two girlfriends that, one of them was saving, taking oil from her mother's house in a little bottle, and I would take sugar, and the other one

would take flour, and the other one would take something else. And we'd go to one little girl's house, and we would bake when nobody was around. And we got caught. And we, we didn't get, I don't think we got a beating but we got scolded, and where did we get all this stuff. Because when we did take it out of the house, in Italy they had a lot of walls, stone walls, and they had holes. And we would put all that stuff inside of that hole, without knowing if there was any bugs, not anything. And we would go get that stuff out of the hole and then we wanted to make cakes, we wanted to make cookies, and we got caught when we, and we all got scolded, of course. But that's one thing we did that wasn't the right thing to do.

LEVINE: Do you remember any dishes that your mother or your grandmother cooked that you particularly liked?

CIRELLA: Should I tell the casa teda? (she laughs) Well, we had what they call here the zeppolis, svingi? You know, the zeppoli feast they have? We made them. And it was my mother's aunt, that she made, she used to make all kinds of pastries, and she was very, very, very good at it, and one year I made, I went around

collecting money. This is too long. And she, uh, I wanted to make a table for St. Joseph, St. Joseph's table. Any Italian people will know what a St. Joseph's table is on March 19th. They make, well, we get, we got the poorest man in town and the poorest lady in town and the poorest child in town and dressed them up as Joseph and Mary, you know, and, Jesus, Joseph and Mary, we dressed them up in. And then we made, it was an open house, let's put it that way. It was an open house. And my great-aunt made all these pastries and all these cookies for everybody that came to the table, was free. And I know that some places they still have it. They make it out here in United States. A lot of people still do that. But I remember only once when I was nine years old I did that, and my mother wanted to kill me, but I did it, because I went around begging, for flour, for sugar, for eggs, for money, to buy all this stuff that you had to cook. But my great-aunt was very good, and she did all that for me. And maybe that's why I've been very lucky. St. Joseph has been very good to me all my life, and I'm here today. Tell her about the casa teda? How could I? It's like an apple turnover. It's a pie crust, this pastry. It's a pie crust, and

you make it a little harder than a pie crust, and you roll it flat. Then you fill it up with ricotta and sugar. You put ricotta in a dish and put some sugar, beat it up nice and creamy, and you put it in between this here pie crust. And you seal it with a little water and then either with a fork or with a pastry cutter, and then you deep fry it. And you got to be careful that they open up. They open up, you lose it, in deep frying. They open up, you lose the whole half a gallon of oil or whatever you put into it. But if you're very careful they come, and they are very, very, very delicious pastry that no matter who you bring it to, no matter how you make it, everybody is crazy about them. But every town makes them different. Some towns they put chocolate chips in them and cinnamon and stuff like that. But my mother always wanted it clean, white. The ricotta had to be, it's white, and she made it white. Just with sugar.

LEVINE: What do you call it?

CIRELLA: And then put a, put honey on top after they were, got cold, you put honey all over them, and it was like a Danish pastry, like a, it was a very, very good pastry.

LEVINE: And what's the name?

CIRELLA: Casa teda.

LEVINE: Casa.

CIRELLA: Teda.

LEVINE: How do you spell the last part?

CIRELLA: T-E-D-A. Casa teda. Yeah. And, you know, Italian people, they'll understand what it is. They'll know what they are. (referring to someone else present)
And she's dying for them. (she laughs) I got to make them when I get home, I guess. You know, I always, I still make them. But she's on a diet.
So . . .

LEVINE: So, okay. So when you were about to leave, was there a sendoff for you, or?

CIRELLA: There was a big sendoff at the train station.

LEVINE: How did you get to the train station?

CIRELLA: We walked. (she laughs) We got a nice long walk, but we walked to the train station. Like I understand today it's a big highway and they go by car to the

train station, but we walked, and it was like through farms and a little narrow road. When we got to the station the night, that night we had a lot of people at the house before we left. And that morning my grandfather came, my two grandfathers and my grandmother, and they came and I was telling my mother the night before, "Oh, tomorrow everybody's going to cry, and everybody's going to do this." And when the train came I think I was the one that cried the most, that I didn't want to leave my grandmothers and my grandfathers, and my grandmother. I didn't want to leave them. And, of course, I knew them all my life and they were, as I said, very good to me, and I really cried when we left, and we got on the train and we drove. At that time it took us about seven hours to get to Palermo. It was a very long ride, which now I hear it's about an hour-and-a-half by car. And it's so easy to get there. But when we got to Palermo we went into a hotel and we stayed there about six days because, as I said, we left the 23rd. No, about three days, because we left there the 26th. It took thirteen days to get to the United States in your town.

LEVINE: Was this the first time you'd ever been to Palermo?

CIRELLA: Yes.

LEVINE: Do you remember what struck you about it?

CIRELLA: The station, a very, very large station, and the hotel, which it was only one story high, but it was something that we were never in, in a hotel. And we went to a theater, we went to the opera while we were there.

LEVINE: Had you ever been to it?

CIRELLA: I'd never been there. But we were in the movies in Italy. When the first movies came out we were, we went to the movies and I saw the picture of that, what was that picture, a little boy that was running the moving picture camera and, uh, oh, gosh, and the picture broke and the people had to run out. It was in Italy. Ooh, I seen it in California. Ooh.

LEVINE: Yeah. I can't think of it either. I was thinking of it.

CIRELLA: It was so good, that that was just the way we did it.
The first movie . . .

LEVINE: Was the little boy's name Tito?

CIRELLA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah, I know what you mean.

CIRELLA: You know what I mean. And the film broke, and they sent us home, and we had to go back the following day, the first movie in Italy, before we came to America.

LEVINE: This movie that you saw, was that in your town?

CIRELLA: In my town? Yeah. But, I mean, it wasn't this movie that . . .

LEVINE: No, but, I mean, your town had a movie theater like that one.

CIRELLA: Oh, yes, yes. Just before we left they started the movies. They were starting the movies, but they didn't know how to work the cameras then, and they didn't know how to set everything up, and it broke that night, so we all had to come home. So the next time we went to the opera in Palermo that we, that was on stage. That I remember very, very clearly.

LEVINE: And how did you . . .

CIRELLA: It was beautiful.

LEVINE: You liked the opera?

CIRELLA: It was very, very beautiful, yes. I remember everybody screaming and clapping and everybody was happy. And we went by the water. We, I remember riding along the water, which we never saw. My town was not close to any kind of ocean. We were in the center of Sicily and we never saw an ocean. And when we got to Palermo we rode along the ocean with the carriage, horse and carriage. And we went sightseeing. We went to a park. The three days we were there, and this friends that my mother had took us around in Palermo, and we went around like that. And it was something different because we never seen an ocean before, never mind boats. (she laughs) So when we saw the big boat, we really were amazed to see such a big boat that we were going to be on.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you knew about America before you left Italy? Do you remember what you knew or thought or felt, or . . .

CIRELLA: Nothing, nothing. All we knew was America, that we wanted to go to America. That's all. I guess because

most of us, our fathers were here, a lot of my girlfriends.

LEVINE: Yeah. In your mind, though, did you have an imaginary idea of what it would be like for you when you got here?

CIRELLA: No, nothing whatsoever, nothing whatsoever. They used to say there was big buildings in New York. And to us a big building was maybe three stories high over there, that's about all. But my father would say, you know. But in his letters, my father wasn't such a good writer because he never went to school. And he learned how to write here through someone, through someone else. All the men used to live together. They used to board in a house. And the ones that didn't know how to write in Italian to their wives would learn through another man. My father learned through my sister's godfather, because he lived in his brother's house. My aunt had three boarders, three men. And my father was the only one that didn't know how to write English, in Italian. So he learned how to write, and he used to write nice letters to my mother. And that's how he learned, you know, out here. But my mother went to school in Italy, and she

read and wrote. Because a lot of, even my mother-in-law couldn't write Italian, or English. She used to make a cross whenever she had to sign her name.

LEVINE: Do you remember your mother, whether your mother was excited when she was coming to the United States?

CIRELLA: She was very excited. She didn't care who she left behind. And it wasn't like today that you have a plane, you go back and see your father. She knew that once she left she'd never see him again. And it was very hard on her, but meantime it was very exciting that we were all coming here in America. And, as they say, the opportunity of all the people out there. And everybody that came here worked very hard and got someplace.

LEVINE: How about your two sisters? What were they like at this point in time?

CIRELLA: My sisters were very excited. The only mistake my father made was that he took us to Pennsylvania. And my sister was a dressmaker. And in Pennsylvania there was no work. And by that time she was sixteen, almost sixteen, and she wanted to go to work. And that was a very small town in Pennsylvania.

LEVINE: What was the town?

CIRELLA: It's eleven miles from Scranton, Pennsylvania. It's Pittston, P-I-T-T-S-T-O-N, Pittston, Pennsylvania. And it was a very, very small town. Nobody worked. No woman worked. No woman could go to work out there, whether they would work or not. Only men were allowed to work. And she was very, very disappointed. She wanted to go back to Italy. She was doing much better in Italy. When she got to Pennsylvania, they made her take all her clothes off, change her clothes, put things that she didn't like because she was always all dressed up, always the newest styles because she was a dressmaker. She would cut and sew without a pattern, without anything. Just look at a dress and make it up and do something. So she was very, very hurt. She wanted to remain in New York. But my father had one brother out there, and we went out there, and that was the biggest mistake in his life that he made. We should have stayed in New York.

LEVINE: Well, let's talk about the voyage, when you, when you got on, after you spent the three days in, um . . .

CIRELLA: Palermo.

LEVINE: Palermo. And then you, what was the name of the ship that you were on?

CIRELLA: Guiseppe Verdi.

LEVINE: And it took you thirteen days?

CIRELLA: Thirteen days to get to, well, I don't remember exactly the day we left from Palermo, but I know that we got here on my birthday, because my mother started, you know, kissing me and hugging me because it was my birthday. And somebody yelled, "The Statue of Liberty, the Statue of Liberty!" And we all ran to the railing to see the Statue of Liberty. And everybody was praying and kissing and happy that we were coming up the Hudson. But then when we docked we had to stay there. I don't remember how many days, but it was quite a few days we stayed there, because my father used to come with the tugboat. And that's how I saw my father for the first time, from all the way up on the railing down to, he was on the tugboat. And I remember that it was wonderful that he bring big bananas. We didn't know what bananas were, and made sure we take the skin off the banana, (she laughs) otherwise, "Don't eat it like that," he

would go. "Take the skin off." You know, he would say. They would bring a pail down and they would, each man had a turn to put, bring a pail down, and fill it up and bring it up on the ship.

LEVINE: Now, you stayed on the ship in the harbor.

CIRELLA: In the harbor.

LEVINE: Because it was so crowded?

CIRELLA: In Ellis Island. Ellis Island was too crowded, and we couldn't come in. So they waited until the, they waited their turn. Each boat had to wait their turn. We were not the only boat. There was quite a few boats from other places.

LEVINE: What was the boat like, the Guiseppe Verdi?

CIRELLA: Well, it was, I tell you the truth, I can't remember too much of the boat because as soon as I got on the boat, a couple of days later, I started complaining to my mother that I had swollen glands. And maybe I had a fever, I don't remember. And she brought me to the hospital on the boat, and they left me there. They took me in the hospital, and they wouldn't let me go back with my mother and my two sisters. So after a

couple of days I was on the boat in the hospital, I ran away from the hospital looking for my mother in my nightgown. And when I got a hold of my mother, I found her, they were in the back of the boat, a lot of people there. I remember sitting on the floor, sitting on boxes, sitting on, they didn't have chairs and stuff like they have today. And I grabbed a hold of my mother. My mother had about a thirty-two waistline at that time. And I put my little arms around her and I wouldn't let her go any more. So they locked us up. They brought us in the bottom of the boat and they locked us up. And they used to bring our food, open the door, give us the food, just like prisoners, and close the door. All we had was a porthole.

LEVINE: You were locked in with your mother?

CIRELLA: My mother, my mother with me, because they couldn't break us apart. And the only time they let us out, when they got to the harbor, because my father used to come. But then they used to bring us down again right away, after my father would go away they brought us down. So the only time, then, they let us out was when everybody from the boat got into the ferry. And

I remember getting on the ferry with my mother. I remember sitting with my mother on the ferry. Whatever happened they disappeared. And, when we got to Ellis Island, I went one way and I don't know what happened to them. And they brought me in through the door, like I told you, the front door, and brought me in the hospital. And my mom and dad had to go to Pennsylvania, and he had to leave a bond, a two hundred and fifty dollar bond for me. He had to get a bond in New York. And they left the bond that, I don't know if it was in case they forgot me they would send me back, or whatever, but that bond was until he came to get me. And I was here for twenty-three days, in Ellis Island.

LEVINE: So then your sisters went with your mother.

CIRELLA: My sisters, with my father, went to Pennsylvania.

LEVINE: And then you were in the hospital here.

CIRELLA: And I was here in Ellis Island in the hospital.

LEVINE: And what was that like?

CIRELLA: Oh, my God. I cried a lot, and I had a girl in with me for a while. She must have been, she was much, she

was older than I was. She must have been about thirteen, fourteen. What I figured today, that I picture her today. And I know she was a Jewish girl, because she used to say, in Italy we had a few stores that they were, you know, Jewish stores. And I remember the name Jew. So that's all she said, you know. "Me Jew." That's the only way we could talk to each other. And we got a kick out of the sliced bread in the morning when they brought us breakfast, and we would both, you know, talk with our hands, and try to make each other understand. But she only stayed about a week with me, I guess maybe a short time, because then I was left alone in there.

LEVINE: What did, did your mother tell you that they were going to go on and that you had to stay?

CIRELLA: Nobody told me anything. All I know is that, she didn't have a chance. She didn't even know herself. That, the way they took me away. She didn't even know, because after, when I went home I asked her what happened, how did I get, you know, away from her. And she said she didn't know anything, and all of a sudden she didn't see me any more. She said, too, on the ship, on the ferry.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you thought, or felt, when you realized that you . . .

CIRELLA: Well, I still wanted my mother. I wanted, I was crying when they got me, and there were two men that brought me into the hospital. I wanted my mother. I was kicking and screaming and after a while I got tired, and they put me in there and that's it. I had, thank God I had this girl, that when I went in she was there already. I don't know how long she had been there.

LEVINE: Did somebody explain the situation to you?

CIRELLA: Nobody explained, nobody ever said a word to me for twenty-three days. Just the nurse that came in and took my temperature, and they give me, if they gave me medicine, whatever, and that's all I saw was the nurses. And not too many anyway, because, like I said, at night I used to pick up the gate. There was a gate that came down, and you pick it up. I would pick up the gate and walk to the end and go look in the water and see boats go through and the Statue of Liberty and the ferries, the Staten Island ferries going along, a long way, I guess, before I came. I

was watching the Staten Island ferry, and that's how I used to, and during the day I guess I fell asleep, and I did my time all sleeping. I felt like a, or I used to look at the birds on the side of our window. From the hospital window, there was a big yard, like, concrete. The rooms went around like that, (she gestures) and there was a platform, like. And all the birds and the seagulls and everything. And they used to feed them. They used to throw food to feed them. And they would be by the thousands there, and I would watch them and spend my time like that. And at night it was the only time I would run in, I would run away from my room, because during the day I was afraid that they would holler, whoever was there, the male and the female nurses or male nurse or whoever they were, they would holler if I'd try to get out, but I never stayed in bed. I wasn't that, I just had two walnuts right here (she gestures) that's all. And they said it was contagious, and they, but I think they forgot me for a while. Then my mother got a telegram to come and get me, and that's why I remember that room so much, but not the way it is now, you know. And it was thousands and thousands of people in there. And I went in front of the judge. I

remember him sitting up high, and as a little girl I went. And he says to me, "All right, you sit there."

I sat there. My father had to find me amongst all those people. And I knew him, after that I seen him from the ship. That's the only time. I had seen him in pictures, and I know he had gray hair. He was only thirty-three years old. Thirty-three years old he had gray hair, so there was nobody there with gray hair at that time that young. So I knew that it was him.

LEVINE: And what was it like to be, then, with your father after you didn't know what happened and you really didn't know your father.

CIRELLA: I didn't know my father, and I didn't know where he was taking me. But I remember that we took the ferry to La Lackawanna Station in New Jersey, and we took the train to Scranton. And he bought me a chocolate bar, a Hershey chocolate bar. That's the first time I ate a Hershey chocolate bar he bought me on the train. And he was telling me about my mother, where they were, and my sisters. And, of course, I was crying that I wanted to be with my mother, and, well, when I got home it was really, really a big feast. It was a big party of all the people that knew that my mother

had the youngest one coming in. I was always the main attraction of the house. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Because you were the baby?

CIRELLA: I was the baby, at that time, when we got to, uh. And my mother had a four-room apartment, and three, two bedrooms and a living room and kitchen. And we three girls slept in the same room.

LEVINE: And how is it different where you lived there as compared with what you had left?

CIRELLA: Well, I had quite an experience when they brought me to school. The next day they made sure that I enrolled in school, and they had a funny thing that they made me go in the first grade. And, of course, I knew a lot of the alphabetical order, I knew the whole thing. And I was too smart for the first grade, you know. And, but the only thing, we pronounce our words different, like the "A" over here. Over there it was "ah," you know, "C", "chi." So it was different. So, but I knew. They wrote "cat," I knew what it was. And the kids used to make fun of me, so I wouldn't go to school no more. I went home, and I wouldn't go to school no more.

LEVINE: Weren't there other children that had come?

CIRELLA: No, no. It just so happened there was no one else in that school. And for quite a while I wouldn't go to school because they used to make fun of me, call me "dego" and call me all different kinds of names, you know. And I went through that through the whole time I went to school.

LEVINE: So you went home, but then you were sent back to school.

CIRELLA: But then I was sent back, but I didn't go much. After, I only had, in America I only had three years of schooling. But what I learned I learned all by myself. I had a business, and I kept, you know, contact with books. And I made sure that I learned everything that I had to learn out here.

LEVINE: How did you mostly learn English?

CIRELLA: I picked it up fast, because I was always the one that I, I promised myself I would never have an Italian accent, because I was afraid of what I went through when I was a kid. And I always made sure that my words were always perfect. If I didn't, I studied

how. And I read a lot of books, a lot of books when I was younger. There was nothing else to do in Pennsylvania but read. So we were kept very strict, we weren't allowed out at the time, and we read a lot.

LEVINE: Your father was strict?

CIRELLA: My father and mother both were very strict, very strict.

LEVINE: In what ways were they . . .

CIRELLA: Well, like my sister, my older sister came to New York right after we, six months after we went to Pennsylvania. Six months after we came from Italy she went to, she came back to New York.

LEVINE: The dressmaker.

CIRELLA: The dressmaker. And she got married right away, and she went to work. My other sister stayed there with us, and she was very, very, very, kept very strict, and she also got married at sixteen.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

LEVINE: When you say "kept strict," does that mean you

couldn't go out or you couldn't, in what ways
were . . .

CIRELLA: Well, there was, there was a few movies. You couldn't go to a movie unless your mother or father took you. And my mother started to have babies, one every year, and she could never take us. My father, if he went to work, then he didn't have time to take us to the movies. So he would take us maybe once every six months in Pennsylvania to the movies. And you weren't allowed to go anyplace else. Or three or four girls got together from the neighborhood and put records on, and that's their only enjoyment that they had.

LEVINE: You couldn't see boys.

CIRELLA: Never. Never, never be near a boy. But that's it, she met the fellow next door and she got married, my sister. And that's the only way that she met this boy, that he lived next door. And one got married in New York and one got married in Pennsylvania, and at thirteen I was left with my mother. And then they had, they made me quit school, because I had to help her with the babies.

LEVINE: Now, how many babies did she have?

CIRELLA: She had five, six. One died, but she had five living.

LEVINE: What were their names?

CIRELLA: Oh, the oldest one was, here in America, Rosina. The second one was Sarah. The third one was Charles, Cologero. And the fourth one was Michael, and the fifth one was Jamie, Jimmy, Vincent. She called him Jimmy. And she was getting them one after the other. Until she was forty-two she had a baby.

LEVINE: So you were like a little mother.

CIRELLA: I was a little mother. Wherever she wanted to go, she was allowed to go and we weren't allowed to go. So we would sit out on the porch. But when I was sixteen, I came to New York.

LEVINE: Now, how did your sister, first, and how did you, your sister couldn't just come by herself and not, I mean, who did she stay with?

CIRELLA: Oh, she stayed with my mother's aunt on Stanton Street in New York, near Eldridge Street. She stayed with my mother's aunt for a while. And, but we, I came when I was sixteen also, after I was old enough to, my aunt

had moved here, the one that lived in Pennsylvania, had moved here. So I told my father I was going to see his brother, and I never went back.

LEVINE: You meant to stay.

CIRELLA: I meant to stay. I never wanted to stay there.

LEVINE: Did anybody like it? Did your mother like it there?

CIRELLA: My mother liked it better in Italy than she liked it in Pennsylvania. She had more freedom in Italy. She had more, uh, it was more, for her it was more of a good time. She knew more people. She had relatives. She had a lot of people. Here she only had one sister-in-law until she met a few people, whoever she would meet. The landlord who rented us the house was a very wonderful woman, and she was very close to her, but that's about all, and her sister-in-law. She didn't have too much to do outside of having babies.

LEVINE: Did your father become a citizen?

CIRELLA: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Was that after you arrived?

CIRELLA: After, yes. We all did, after we came we all, my

mother, my father, all my sisters, we all did.

LEVINE: Did your mother and father, were they glad they had come? Was your mother then glad she had come?

CIRELLA: She was glad when she came to New York.

LEVINE: When did that happen?

CIRELLA: Uh, well, I was sixteen. In September, she came in December.

LEVINE: And she came to stay?

CIRELLA: She came to stay. She moved here. Because she knew I wouldn't go back. And my father knew his brother, and the coal mines weren't working. It was very bad. Out there, there was no other work. Once the coal mines closed up, there was nothing to do. So he came here and he started to work with the Edison Company, digging the streets to put the new wires. And I remember he worked on 34th Street putting the wires under the ground.

LEVINE: And where did you live in New York?

CIRELLA: We moved into Brooklyn. We moved into Brooklyn. I lived in Brooklyn two years, and I met my husband, and

at nineteen I got married.

LEVINE: How did you meet your husband?

CIRELLA: I was working in a factory. I went on dresses also. I started to work on dresses. And I went to work in this place, and my husband was, used to come in with a brother-in-law of his to pick up work, and once in a while. Then he got a job in my place, where I worked. We both worked in the same place. And we were working together, and one thing led to another. He was nineteen, and I was just seventeen at the time, and exactly two years later we got married. So, we'll be married sixty years this November, thank God.
(she laughs)

LEVINE: And did you have to have your, did you have, did he have to ask your father about marrying you, or?

CIRELLA: Well, that was another thing. That he used to come to see me, and he would stay outside. And back, across the street. And after I got, you know, tired of watching him across the street I told my mother, I says, "See that boy over there?" I says, "He works with me, and I like him, and I want him to come in." And she was afraid of my father, so she says, "No, not

until his mother comes." So my husband went home and told his mother, and I went over his house as his sister's girlfriend. In the meantime his mother went to my house (she laughs), says, "My boy is going with your daughter." My mother didn't know nothing about it. So then he started to come in the house, but it was very strict. The first time I went out with him I, he met me on Columbus Day, and I was seventeen in September, and on Columbus Day I met him and we went out. I met him before that in the shop, but we went out the first time, it was Columbus Day. At two o'clock in the afternoon, by seven o'clock I had to be home. And two weeks later he wanted to take me to a dance, that he was running a dance in Jamaica. He was very wild. And he, my father made me go, came over eight o'clock. At ten o'clock I left Jamaica to go home. He won't let me stay. I had to be home by ten-thirty. So by the time I took the subway, and I was home at that time. In fact, I was home a little later, and I got a good balling out that I wasn't allowed to go out any more. And then he went back to the dance, my husband.

LEVINE: What do you mean he was wild?

CIRELLA: Well, he was allowed to do whatever he wanted to do. He was always going out and he was always going out with girls. That his mother said, when he met me, she says, "Thank God I see him home once in a while." After he met me. And he calmed down all at once. I can't understand that myself. But his mother and everybody was saying that he was nineteen and he was wild. He was never home. He was always going out with different girls and always doing, he wasn't bad. Nothing bad that he did, but he was never home. Dances, and he wanted to be a fighter and wanted to play baseball and wanted to do, he was very good at sports. He was very good in sports. But once he met me he quit sports, he quit everything. If I stayed home he stayed home with me, because my father wouldn't let us out. And we kept company two years, exactly two years, then we got married. On his birthday we went for his, for our marriage license, when he was twenty-one. Yeah. So everything is, you know, time that you can't forget, see, whatever went through our lives.

LEVINE: So then did he keep working on at the factory? Did you? Or . . .

CIRELLA: Well, that's the Depression. That was 1932, the worst Depression we ever had. He got laid off two weeks before we were going to get married from the job that we both had. I had left that place. I had gone to someplace else because our mothers, my mother didn't want me to work in the same place with him. When they found out that we worked together, I had to leave the place. So it was better that I left the place than him, so I went to work someplace else.

LEVINE: You mean they wanted you to leave the place because it wasn't good for you to be . . .

CIRELLA: Together with him. That's right. They didn't believe in that. So I went to work someplace else, and he got laid off two weeks before we got married. So after we got married his brother-in-law had a cab, and he had the medallion, and he drove his brother-in-law's cab for a while. And he drove a cab until he went into the, what they should have today. The C, what is that?

LEVINE: Oh, the WPA.

CIRELLA: The WPA, they, he helped build the Northern State Parkway. They built the Northern State Parkway, all

those men. And he worked there until he was twenty-two, twenty-three.

LEVINE: Did he ever, what did he tell you about work on the WPA? Do you remember?

CIRELLA: Well, they had a lot of fun working there, but they had a lot of cold weather and they did a lot of suffering, because they had one car, if one, somebody picked somebody up with one car, nobody had cars, and they had to take buses, and it was bad. And they were wondering who was going to use two lanes going north and two lanes coming south on that parkway. Who was going to use that? But it was like building the Empire State Building to them. It was, they always used to come home and say, "I don't know. We're working, and we're building a road. It's so big, so wide, who's going to go?" There was one car every three hours maybe, before. Nobody lived in Long Island. And that's what they said. The more they went out building the more they said it was all wooded area, all. And one night we had a snowstorm that was so bad they never got home until, oh, about eleven o'clock, and we were all scared and worried because there was no way of getting home when they were all

the way out there, unless a truck picked them up or a car, and it was pretty bad. But then this brother-in-law that had the cab started to work with the bus company in Queens, in Ozone Park. And he got my husband a job driving a bus. And he worked for the bus company forty-five years, and that's where he retired, from the Green Bus Line in Ozone Park.

LEVINE: So what are the names of your children?

CIRELLA: I have three children. One is Edward, one is Salvatore, and one is Joanne, a girl. I have two boys and a girl.

LEVINE: And do you have grandchildren?

CIRELLA: I have eleven grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. And we're living a very happy life, thank God. And pretty good, healthy. We have our ups and downs, but thank God what we have today. We're all, we made our stay here very, very, very comfortable. Thank God for that. We worked very hard for what we have. What we went out to get we worked hard for it, but we are in a good standard position now that we enjoy our life. And that's it.

LEVINE: Good. Let me ask you, are there certain things that your mother and father particularly, but maybe you, too, retained about the old country? Any ways that you, and particularly your mother and father and maybe your sisters, kept on, or did they want to more or less forget those things and become Americanized?

CIRELLA: Well, being that we were here. When we came here was the time that everybody was, how should I say, we were discriminated, the Italians especially. We really wanted to be Americans. We didn't want to, we wanted to forget all about Italy. But as time went on and like, as you say today, we were afraid of saying that we were Italians at one time, we were, when we first came. And it took quite a while the only place we could work was with Italian people. The only place we could go was the, the Jewish people owned the factories, the Italian people worked. And we had to work together with them. That's the only thing. But outside of that we were afraid. And we tried to make ourselves Americanized as much as we could at the time. Now anything goes. Now, thank God, we're all one. I hope so.

LEVINE: Now it's like, you know, it's an honor . . .

CIRELLA: Yeah.

LEVINE: I mean, you having come as an immigrant . . .

CIRELLA: Right.

LEVINE: . . . is something to be proud of.

CIRELLA: I think so. That's why I'm here today.

LEVINE: But you went into business for yourself at some point?

CIRELLA: I went into the dressmaking business. I had a factory. I had a dress factory. (they laugh)

LEVINE: And how long did you do that?

CIRELLA: First I worked in a dress factory for a long time, and in 1959 I bought a factory.

LEVINE: How did that come about? How did it happen that you . . .

CIRELLA: Well, I became a very, very good seamstress, and I was making all samples. I was making all, and I started to work as a floor lady in a dress factory, showing people what to do, a floor lady. And from that I bought this place that I was floor lady.

LEVINE: Are you saying F-L-O-O-R, floor lady?

CIRELLA: Floor lady, yeah. And I became, I bought it. I bought this factory. And I kept it for, until 1968 I kept the factory. In 1969 I sold it. It was too much for me to be alone in the factory because I had about, well, about twenty-eight people working for me. And I was alone because my husband was driving a bus. And he would come in to help me once in a while, and the people that you hired, most of them, by the time you taught them the money wasn't there too good, so you had to be careful who you hired and how you hired, so you did a lot of work yourself. So it was too much for me to go to New York. I had to make my own sample, go to New York and bring in the sample. When they okayed the sample, then I would go to the shop and show the girls what to do, and they would work. And I would have to show the pressers what to do, and the finishers what to do. Everything was a lot of hand work at the time, we did a lot of sewing by hand. Now everything is done by (?). And we worked very hard, and I, after a while I just couldn't take it any more. I was too tired, and I wanted to stay home for a while. So, I was alone, my kids were all married.

They got married very young, my three children, and I wanted to stay home. I stayed home for three months and I couldn't take it any more. So I went back to Seventh Avenue and I got a job with Anne Fogarty, which was a very, very exclusive house, making samples. I worked there for two years and I was called to be a quality controller for H. Schraeder. That's a big, big firm on Seventh Avenue. And I was quality controller for ten years for H. Schraeder. And then I retired. And that's, and I did very good.

I traveled a lot, going from factory to factory. I had my own company car, and I loved it. And I did that until 1976, and I retired in 1976.

LEVINE: Well, what do you have to say now about your life. I mean, starting out in Italy, coming here at age ten, the whole thing? How do you view it, at this point?

CIRELLA: I review it with, a beautiful life. I had a lot of sicknesses after I was married, but from my childhood to when I got married, and a lot of hard work. I had children, I had to go back to work. And at home when I came home from work I had nothing else to do but stay home, wash clothes, iron and take care of the kids, dress them in the morning, send them to, walk

them to school, and go to work. Run for a bus or run for a train and go to work, and it was very, very hard work. My best time of my life was after they were married. I had three boys in the house, my husband and two boys. And at that time the kids had to go to school with white shirts and ties and handkerchiefs and dressed perfect. Their clothes had to be cleaned, their clothes had to be pressed, and their clothes had to be, it was nothing like today, wash and wear, or whatever. And after I came home from work at seven o'clock, six thirty, I would put up supper. After supper I would wash clothes. After washing clothes I would iron the ones that I washed the day before. And I would iron until two o'clock in the morning sometimes, get up at six and keep going again doing the same thing day in and day out. And the only thing we had to, we never went out to restaurants. We never went out to eat. We never went to, maybe to a movie.

Twice a week we went to a movie. How I see it that I've lived my life like my mother taught me. Many things that she, all the holidays that we had with my mother I still keep going, and all the little things that she taught me, like our holidays, we light a candle for All Saints Day, which it's the same thing

as the Jewish people light for the Hanukkah, for the, or on Fridays when somebody dies, we light a candle also on their birthday, or their anniversary. We light a candle if you're religious. And my mother kept it up, and I keep it up also. And those things, you don't forget what your mother taught you. And that's it.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, how about your husband? What is his first name?

CIRELLA: My husband's name is Dominic.

LEVINE: Dominic.

CIRELLA: Dominic, yes.

LEVINE: And is he enjoying his old age?

CIRELLA: Boy, is he enjoying his old age! And how!
(she laughs) He's very, very good. He does whatever, we both, almost the same type. If I say to him, "Let's do this," he's game to do it. And we go away on vacation a lot, and we stay home a lot together. We're always together. We're like two peas in the pod. We're always the same, we're in different rooms, but we're always in the same house.

(she laughs) He's a very good man.

LEVINE: He came from, he didn't not come from . . .

CIRELLA: No. He was born in Ozone Park, in Queens.

LEVINE: I see.

CIRELLA: Ozone Park, New York.

LEVINE: But his mother or father, did they come from Italy?

CIRELLA: They came from Italy, but they married in the United States. They came young, and they married in the United States. And he, all, he has a few, a brother and a sister that was born in Italy because his mother and father went back to Italy, and then they came back again. But my husband was born here in the United States. And he's been, he never went abroad. He doesn't feel like going either. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Okay. Well . . .

CIRELLA: He's a very good man. Thank God we got each other, see, until now. Amen.

LEVINE: Unless there's something else you'd like to add, I think this is a good place to close.

CIRELLA: This is, we'll close this.

LEVINE: Okay. And I want to thank you very much for a very interesting recounting of your life.

CIRELLA: You're welcome. You brought me back, all the way back, and a lot of memories, and they were good memories. As I've been talking to you, I've been picturing everything that I told you in front of my eyes. And even my grandfather, when he left us on the train, how much I cried. You brought me back there, so I'm happy for that. At least I remember.

LEVINE: Yeah, I'm happy because you have very vivid, you recounted in a very vivid way . . .

CIRELLA: Well, that's what I mean, because at my age now, I have all these good memories yet, and I remember everything, and I'm happy for that, and I thank God.

LEVINE: Well, thank you very much.

CIRELLA: You're welcome, for sure.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine, and I've been here with Josephine Cirella. And it's August 15th, 1992, and we're here at the Ellis Island Studio, and I am

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signing off.