

EI-208

LUCY SCIANDRA MELE AND HELEN SCIANDRA MIGLIORESE

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 10/1994

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SICILY, 1913

AGES 3 AND 6

PASSAGE ON "THE CANOPIC"

RESIDENCES: SICILY: VILLA ROSA: US: LAWRENCE, MA

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and it's September 2, 1992. I'm here in Lawrence, Massachusetts at the home of Helen Migliorese, and I'm here with four sisters, the Sciandra sisters, their maiden name. Uh, Mitzi, Rose, who were born here in the United States, and Lucy Mele, who was born in Italy and came here when she was three years old, and Helen Migliorese, who was born in Italy and came here when she was six years old. Well, I'm very happy to be here, and I'll be interested in hearing your story, what you remember about Italy, coming here, and then after you were here in the United States for a while. Why don't we start out by, Helen, by your saying the town you were born in.

MIGLIORESE: Villa Rosa, Sicily. At that time it used to be

Provincia Catanizeta, but now it's Provincia Enna.

LEVINE: Okay. And what is your birth date?

MIGLIORESE: 3/3/07.

LEVINE: Okay. How about you, Lucy, your birth date?

MELE: My birth date is 7/7/09, and I'm three.

LEVINE: You were three.

MIGLIORESE: I'm three years old.

LEVINE: Yeah, when you came. Uh-huh. Okay. What do you remember about Sicily, about your little town, before you came here? When you think about it, what are the things you remember?

MIGLIORESE: Well, I remember the church.

LEVINE: Tell me about the church.

MIGLIORESE: I remember the church that there were certain times when they, certain holidays. I don't know which holiday, but the church used to be closed, and people used to go there and knock on the church, and they opened it up. I don't know what holiday it was.

MELE: (she whispers) Easter.

LEVINE: Easter, maybe?

MIGLIORESE: Maybe, yeah, maybe, yeah. They used to open up. The people used to knock at the door, and they used to open up the church. And then I remember, too, that, which they call a plaza, the plaza, you know. And the stores there had the meat hanging outside. And I remember I used to go out, because I was a fresh one, even when I was young. I don't know why. But I remember I got some kind of, I thought they were butterflies, but they, in Italian they call them scoriae. They were black. I don't know what the heck they were. And I brought them home to my mother. My husband says, "Oh, they disappeared." Oh!

LEVINE: They were flying.

MIGLIORESE: They were some kind of a, I don't know what the heck they were, you know? And what else? I remember, I don't know. I remember when we lived in, it was very narrow. And our beds were bunk beds, they were so high, you know.

LEVINE: Do you remember the house where you lived? Could you describe it?

MIGLIORESE: It was like, I think, at least, right on the first floor, you know, you'd go right into the house.

LEVINE: How many rooms?

MIGLIORESE: Oh, I think one room. (she laughs) One room.

LEVINE: And then do you remember, was there like a cooking area at one end, and . . .

MIGLIORESE: Well, that I don't remember. That's what I remember.

LEVINE: Okay. Lucy, what do you remember? Do you remember anything? You were three years old, I know.

MELE: I don't remember that much, but I know that when I was born Mount Etna erupted. And there were all people running away. And they were telling my father, was there with my mother, that's what I was told. And they said, "Come on, before, you go, let's go." "No," he says, "I got to wait till my child is born. We're going to wait over here, so that . . ." So I was erupted, you might as well

say. (they laugh) I don't really remember too much about Italy, because I was small. I remember one of my, they say he was my godfather, that he came to America. And when he came back, I just, he had gave me a doll, yeah. I vaguely remember that doll. I don't know what happened to it. That's about all.

LEVINE: Do you remember what it looked like?

MELE: The doll? No.

MIGLIORESE: Maybe cabbage patch doll.

MELE: No. I guess just, it was, like dolls, you know, with a shiny face. Those type, like a porcelain doll, like porcelain, shiny face and hand, you know, and a little dress. I don't think I had it too long, because I couldn't remember too much about it. I don't know what happened to it.

LEVINE: Do you remember things your mother and father said about Sicily, when you were older?

MELE: Well, my father, after I was born, he left, he came to America. And there was my mother, and my sister, and I guess the grandparents were there.

But really, it's too much I don't remember what they said.

LEVINE: Helen, do you remember your grandparents in Sicily?

MIGLIORESE: My uncle, one of my uncles. And . . .

MELE: Your aunt.

MIGLIORESE: My aunt, the one that was in (?).

MELE: The one that's living, cousin, Uncle Joe's, uh, sister. Your mother's sister.

LEVINE: Do you remember your grandparents? You remember your uncle?

MIGLIORESE: My uncle, my mother's brother. That's Tony, Tommy Iacci's father. He's my uncle.

LEVINE: Oh. And you remember him from Sicily?

MIGLIORESE: I remember him from over here. He came here to America, and everything.

LEVINE: Well, maybe, tell me your mother's name and her maiden name?

MIGLIORESE: Gaetana, uh, that was, Iacci was her maiden name,

and then her marriage name was Sciandra.

LEVINE: Okay. And your father's first name?

MIGLIORESE: Angelo.

LEVINE: Okay. And there were just you two.

MIGLIORESE: Yes.

LEVINE: You were the two children, before you came.

MIGLIORESE: Yes.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, had you started school in Sicily?

MIGLIORESE: Yes, I went to school. (she laughs) I remember I used to have the paper, and when the teacher would bring it to me, I'd have a zero there. (she laughs) That I remember really, a zero. I was terrible in arithmetic, even here. (she laughs)

LEVINE: What was school like?

MIGLIORESE: Huh?

LEVINE: Do you remember the school? Do you remember anything about it?

MIGLIORESE: No. Just kids there sitting down. I don't know about that.

LEVINE: What did you play? Do you remember games you played, or (?).

MIGLIORESE: I used to go out and pick up those ants, whatever the heck it was. (she laughs) I remember I used to go out alone.

LEVINE: And the village where you were from, what did people do there for work?

MIGLIORESE: People used to sit outside. You know, outside, they used to drink coffee, whatever the heck they used to drink.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Was it a farming or a fishing village?

MIGLIORESE: No.

LEVINE: A fishing village?

MIGLIORESE: No.

LEVINE: Farming? Did people farm?

MIGLIORESE: They had their own farms there, you know. But, so, if they see here, he's from Italy. He's what you

call carlobanare. It's, now, in English what did you call him?

LEVINE: A policeman?

MIGLIORESE: He's a guard. That's from Italy.

LEVINE: What did your father do for work when he was in Italy?

MIGLIORESE: Oh, I don't know what he did.

MELE: We left. We were young when he left.

LEVINE: Do you know what he did before he left?

MELE: No.

: Didn't you say he worked in, can I interrupt?

LEVINE: Okay. We're resuming now. So there were sulphur mines.

MIGLIORESE: Sulphur mines, yeah.

MELE: In Sicily. The hooks, right? The hooks.

LEVINE: So your father worked in the sulphur mines.

MIGLIORESE: He came here, too, to America. And he had a store.

LEVINE: Oh.

MIGLIORESE: On (?) Street.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, we'll get to that. Is there anything else about Sicily that you think of when you think of Sicily?

MIGLIORESE: Well, we were young. I mean, I was young. She was young, very young, but I was young. I used to go out and play outside, you know.

LEVINE: You just had a good time when you were young. Okay.

MELE: Well, we, like we were told, but we used to have the goat milk, you know. The people would come with the goats, they used to squeeze the milk right out there for you to drink.

LEVINE: Oh.

MELE: That's, my mother used to tell us stories.

LEVINE: Do you remember any stories that your mother told you when you were little?

MELE: Well, I remember she says, when we were on the ship

coming here they had to make the food there, you know. So they brought this thing that looked like soup and everything. And you know what was in there? Fish eyes. (they laugh) She said they were fish eyes. They didn't want to eat. We kids, I looked, we looked, she says we didn't want to eat it. But we had to eat to survive. (she laughs)
Fish eyes. And there's all the things, all the bunks. We used to be on bunks there.

LEVINE: On the ship.

MELE: Just like, like the picture I saw on Ellis Island, you know. When I saw that ship, that pictures, and then also there was what they use for examination.
Like I told the other reporter that was there.

LEVINE: The ranger.

MELE: She says, "What do you think about it?" "Well," I says, "if I went through all that, and I don't really remember," I says, "it was worth it, for me to come to the United States, to be free. So that's about all I could say, you know.

MIGLIORESE: But you remember we used to have the chickens

coming in the house?

MELE: I don't remember chickens coming.

MIGLIORESE: Yes.

LEVINE: Tell me about that.

MIGLIORESE: In the house, chickens, in the house.

MELE: Can I say this? When I went to Italy, you know, I went to Italy. I think I went to Italy because, you know, to my cousins' house. We didn't know the cousins. We hadn't met them before. We stayed with them for a day, two days. And over there they used to have, every morning you could hear some dancing, dancing, you know, the clop, clop, clop of the feet of donkeys. They were going to work. And then you go to one house and there was turkeys and chickens and pigs going inside the house, all over the place. It was a very interesting, you know.

MIGLIORESE: Outside, when we went in '71, there was a turkey walking outside and everything, the chickens, when we went in '71.

LEVINE: Do you remember any things your mother cooked when

you were a little girl?

MIGLIORESE: I used to have a zuppa. (she laughs) A zuppa. You know what is that? Coffee and milk and bread, hot bread, to put it in and dissolve it there and eat it. That was our breakfast.

LEVINE: Now, how, your father came to America when?

MIGLIORESE: It was right after, just after I was born. It must have been around that time.

LEVINE: So you were born in 1909. So he came here, well, let's say about four years before you did. He was here for about four years before you came with your mother.

MIGLIORESE: I think so.

MELE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. How was it decided that you would come? How did you get to come?

MIGLIORESE: He sent for us.

LEVINE: Did he send you money for a ticket?

MELE: Yes. He sent tickets and all.

LEVINE: And what did your mother do for those four years when your father was here?

MIGLIORESE: My mother just sewed. My mother was a beautiful sewer.

LEVINE: And tell me, describe your mother. What was your mother like, when you were little, I mean.

MIGLIORESE: My mother was a beautiful woman. That's what she was. That's my mother.

MELE: She made all those clothes that we had on.

LEVINE: What was her personality like?

MIGLIORESE: Wonderful. She used to hit me once in a while.

LEVINE: What would she hit you for? What would . . .

MIGLIORESE: Because I was fresh. (she laughs)

MELE: She never did what she was told to do. That's what it was.

MIGLIORESE: (she laughs) She was a beautiful woman.

LEVINE: And so she sewed, and earned money as a seamstress.

MIGLIORESE: She sewed, even here, when we were into the store.

(a siren is heard in the background) She went back there. She used to sew on the machine and everything. She could make clothes, when she was pregnant, too, right?

LEVINE: Do you remember what you wore when you came to America, when you left?

MIGLIORESE: Oh, I don't know.

MELE: I don't know.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything that your mother packed, or anything you took with you when you came?

MIGLIORESE: That I don't know. I couldn't tell you. I couldn't tell you.

LEVINE: Okay. So when you left the village, and then where did you go from there? Do you remember leaving the village to come?

MIGLIORESE: From, when we left the boat, when we left Ellis Island?

LEVINE: No, when you left your little village in Sicily to get on the boat, do you remember the trip to the

boat?

MIGLIORESE: Well, the boat, on the boat. I remember we were on the boat. I don't know, first class, second class, I don't know.

LEVINE: Were you down in the bottom?

MIGLIORESE: I think we were down, yes.

LEVINE: There were lots of people down there?

MIGLIORESE: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: And did you have an examination, a physical? Do you remember?

MIGLIORESE: They examined afterwards, when we got here at Ellis Island. Okay, you know. My mother was sick.

LEVINE: What do you remember about the voyage, the voyage over?

MIGLIORESE: Nothing. I mean, just people. And there was something wrong with the ship. We had to get off.

LEVINE: Where?

MIGLIORESE: I think we went back! We went back.

LEVINE: This is the Canapici? [Canopic]

MIGLIORESE: That's what she's got down.

LEVINE: The ship. Do you remember the name of it?

MIGLIORESE: I don't remember the ship.

LEVINE: Okay.

MIGLIORESE: My uncle must have told you.

MELE: Well, I had to become an American citizen. I (?) my uncle, my cousin Tom's father, wrote to, and he wrote to me and sent me the name of the ship, the liner, you know. Then she became a citizen in '64, and I gave her the papers. So what she returned me back was that name. That's all I know. I mean, it could be the right, or it could be wrong. What it is, you know.

LEVINE: But something went wrong with your first ship.

MIGLIORESE: Yeah.

LEVINE: And then you . . .

MIGLIORESE: Down in those, what do you call it?

LEVINE: The steerage, down in the bottom.

MIGLIORESE: That's why I never wanted (?).

LEVINE: Oh, they put you in the small boat?

MIGLIORESE: Yeah! (voices garbled) Yes. That's what I've been telling you. They put us in the lifeboats. That's why I was so afraid of going in a ship. By the time we went over there to go there, we had to go over water, I wouldn't go. I didn't want to go.

LEVINE: I see. So you had to actually go onto the lifeboats?

MIGLIORESE: Yeah.

LEVINE: And then what? They took you onto another ship.

MIGLIORESE: They put us on the ship.

LEVINE: And do you have any idea what was wrong?

MIGLIORESE: I don't know. Something must have been wrong with the motor or something. I don't know.

MELE: What that could have been, you know, that was 1913. The war was starting in Europe, then.

LEVINE: Yes.

MELE: So it could have been that. Like my mother said the ship at that time had no lights on. You can't go through without lights. So it could have been that, maybe something, the attack boat, but I don't know. So we had to get off.

MIGLIORESE: Maybe they were sabotaging it.

LEVINE: Okay. So what did you do aboard ship? How long did it take you? Do you know?

MIGLIORESE: I don't know.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about being on the ship?

MIGLIORESE: Yeah. We were on the ship there. People used to talk to us and everything, that's all.

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

MIGLIORESE: Yeah. We went into here.

LEVINE: Did you see the Statue of Liberty when you first came in?

MIGLIORESE: Oh, yes. I have a picture here, the Statue of Liberty, in 1936. I was there in 1936 with my

sisters and me.

LEVINE: Do you remember what happened aboard ship when the ship was coming into the harbor, when the Statue was in sight?

MIGLIORESE: Uh-uh. No.

LEVINE: Do you remember Ellis Island, when you got there?

MIGLIORESE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Tell me what . . .

MIGLIORESE: We were home in Ellis Island, yeah.

LEVINE: What was it like to you as a six-year-old, when you got in Ellis Island?

MIGLIORESE: I don't know. It was just a bunch of people there, you know. Just a bunch of people going in. All the suitcases.

LEVINE: Then what happened? What happened to you there?

MIGLIORESE: Nothing. They put us in a room, all bunched together.

LEVINE: Yeah? And then did you, and that's where you had

the examination?

MIGLIORESE: Yeah. Then remember my mother was in there.

MELE: The eyes. They examined the eyes.

LEVINE: Go ahead.

MELE: No, I was told they examined, the first thing they examined with your eyes, and if there was something wrong with your eyes, glaucoma or something, you'd be shipped back. So that's why, I think my mother said that my eyes always used to get, like, a little pus in it, you know. So when they saw that they thought there was disease in the eyes, but it wasn't.

LEVINE: Did they hold you at Ellis Island?

MIGLIORESE: No, I just was there with my mother.

LEVINE: No, but you remember how long you stayed there?

MIGLIORESE: Well, like she said, maybe I went there. My mother was sick, they put her in the hospital. So I stayed with her while she ran around.

LEVINE: You ran around, and your mother was put in the

hospital there?

MELE: That's what I said. I used to go around, and eat all the patients' toast. I got a stomach ache, so that's what I said. There were nuns there, they said they were nuns, with those big hats there. She brought me to the infirmary there, and she wanted to give me something, you know, for my stomach ache. And I'd go like this (she gestures) I don't know. So I told her.

LEVINE: Go ahead.

MELE: She had something in her hands, a knife or something. Meaning to say, "Take this, or else."
(they laugh)

LEVINE: So your mother stayed, oh, wow. Your mother stayed overnight, and where did you two sleep?

MIGLIORESE: Well, in there.

LEVINE: In with your mother?

MIGLIORESE: Sure.

LEVINE: And then the next day . . .

MIGLIORESE: My father came, I guess.

LEVINE: Did you remember your father?

MIGLIORESE: He was my father.

LEVINE: When you saw him, what was it like? Because you were only two when he left, right?

MIGLIORESE: She was . . .

LEVINE: She was just born, and he was here four years, right? So you were six when you came, so what was it like to see your father?

MIGLIORESE: Oh, I don't know. I can't describe to you. I don't know. I was a stupid kid.

LEVINE: Were you excited to see him?

MIGLIORESE: Huh?

LEVINE: Were you excited to see him?

MIGLIORESE: I guess so. He's my father.

LEVINE: Where did you meet?

MIGLIORESE: He had a moustache.

LEVINE: And what did he look like when you first saw him?

MIGLIORESE: Good. He looked like a handsome man, too.

LEVINE: Well, you, so did he come to Ellis Island?

MIGLIORESE: Yeah, he come and pick us up.

LEVINE: And where did you go with him when he picked you up?

MIGLIORESE: We went to Boston.

LEVINE: By train?

MIGLIORESE: Well, (?).

LEVINE: So how would you go, by train?

MIGLIORESE: Oh, I don't know. I don't know if it was by train or by bus. I don't know. I don't remember that.

LEVINE: And then what happened next? What do you remember about your first few days in America? Do you remember them?

MIGLIORESE: I don't know.

LEVINE: What was it like to be . . .

MIGLIORESE: . . . with people and everything, you know.
You're with people.

LEVINE: And your father took you to a friend's house?

MIGLIORESE: Yeah. But then she used to get along at the time,
with friends.

LEVINE: So you came to Boston, you stayed at a friend's
house.

MIGLIORESE: Yeah.

LEVINE: And how long did you stay there? Do you remember?

MIGLIORESE: Oh, I remember the Prince Macaroni used to be in
Boston, Prince Macaroni? My father worked there.

LEVINE: When you first came?

MIGLIORESE: Yes, Prince Macaroni. And then we came to
Lawrence..

LEVINE: And then . . .

MIGLIORESE: My mother on Common Street, my father had a store
where he went.

MELE: When we first come from Boston, from Boston he took

us to Lawrence, and he took us to these friends of his house, it was on Lowell Street. They lived way on the top floor. Then from there come down. That's how we knew, we lived on Oak Street. We lived in a lot of different streets in Lawrence. And we even lived in those little houses that the girls from the mills used to live in, on Canal Street. We lived in one of those houses, too. They were just babies.

LEVINE: Did you go to school?

MIGLIORESE: Yeah, we went to school in Lawrence. And the (?) School.

LEVINE: And what was it like being, you know, now having the language and going to school . . .

MIGLIORESE: Well, it was kind of hard with the teachers, you know. And they, they teach you nothing, like this is your home. We go home to our parents, they couldn't teach us nothing, because they didn't speak good English themselves. So we had to make sure we learned the language, and fast, too.

LEVINE: And so you had to more or less pick it up by

yourselves.

MIGLIORESE: Yeah. We had to pick it up by ourselves in school, from the teachers.

LEVINE: Were there a lot of other children from Italy in your, in your classes?

MIGLIORESE: Just a few of them, not too much, a few of them. Most of them were, oh, most of them were all American-born in America, yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

MIGLIORESE: But they, some children were nice, you know. They used to talk to you. Others, they used to make fun of you because you didn't speak the language, you know. But after a while we got along.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, now, were you, how did you get along, because you were from, coming from Sicily? Were the kids nice to you? Did they make fun of you? Were you called a greenhorn?

MIGLIORESE: (she laughs) I don't remember. I don't remember. Okay. I don't remember.

LEVINE: Okay. So how long did you stay in school?

MIGLIORESE: About the fifth grade here. I think the fifth grade.

LEVINE: And then what?

MIGLIORESE: I went to work at fourteen years old. Was I fourteen, or what? Fourteen years old, I wanted to be a (?), or whatever. And I got married at sixteen, sixteen, sixteen-and-a-half.

LEVINE: Tell me about your first job? What was it like?

MIGLIORESE: It was, that's the doffer job I told you about.

LEVINE: Yeah. Tell it now for the tape.

MIGLIORESE: Well, it was, they called it a doffer.

LEVINE: What's a doffer?

MIGLIORESE: A doffer is, they had a spinning thing there, you know, when they wind the bobbin up, so I used to take the bobbin, and try to put the string around the bobbin so they, it would wind up, you know, on the thing. Evidently I could never get that string around the bobbin. When the spinners used to come over to stop the frame, the strings would break and

they, oh, yeah! They didn't want to see me coming.

LEVINE: So how did you meet your husband?

MIGLIORESE: Oh, we lived on, he was working with, he worked with an undertaker across the street, on (?) Street. We lived across the street. He had an old sweater. It was ripped. And I says, "Oh, I'm going to knit you a sweater one of these days."
(she laughs)

LEVINE: And did would you see him for a long time before you got married, or no?

MIGLIORESE: No, I eloped with him. I ran away with him.

LEVINE: Okay. And how about you, Lucy? Did you go to work also?

MELE: Oh, yeah.

MIGLIORESE: She worked.

MELE: I went to work. They falsified my papers. I was thirteen years old, and they said I was fourteen. And that was in 1922, in 1922, in July 1922, after I had completed the sixth grade, and they put me to

work.

LEVINE: Where did you work?

MELE: And I worked in the Washton Mills, in the spinning room. I started as a doffer, you know. I worked there for a while. Then my mother died in November, the same year. And she was rushed to the hospital. She was pregnant, eight months pregnant, and they rushed her to the hospital. They said it was the appendix. They said by the time they got her there, it ruptured. So then the next day she went into labor, and everything broke, so she died of peritonitis. The baby died, too. So I had to stay home and take care of my three sisters, and then my two brothers, you know.

LEVINE: So Helen . . .

MELE: Helen had Leroy. She used to, she was home, too, with me, for that, because she died after we got married after my mother died. She said just when she turned sixteen she got married, so I was taking care of the children for my father.

LEVINE: And what was your father doing? Was he having the

store?

MIGLIORESE: He had a store across the street.

LEVINE: What kind of store?

MIGLIORESE: A grocery store. He sat there and make a living.

LEVINE: So did the two of you take care of the younger children then?

MIGLIORESE: No, she did.

MELE: I did.

LEVINE: Just you.

MELE: I did, because she got married. Then eight years, after eight years later my father died. So I had all the, the state stepped in. They wanted to take them. I says, "No." I says, "We're going to stay together." So we stayed together, wonderful. The one that just left as soon as she got, she was older. She took over the household while I was working.

LEVINE: I see. So then you went back to the mill.

MELE: Yeah, after that I went back to work after, because

I had to. You know, this is not like now you get on welfare, they give you everything. They didn't give nothing. All they gave was seven dollars a week for just the five, just supporting, you know.

But we got a lot of good, and we always had good health, thank God. And we all chipped in.

Everybody used to do their own thing.

MIGLIORESE: You lived across . . .

MELE: I was right here across the street.

MIGLIORESE: Right across the street here.

MELE: Cotillion Street.

LEVINE: When you were . . .

MELE: But I was taking my brothers and sisters there.

MIGLIORESE: Before those buildings were built there, we lived in a brick house there, and she took care of them.

My mother, when my father died they were there, see. I lived in New York. I was married.

LEVINE: When you eloped, then you left here?

MIGLIORESE: I left after. You know, I told you that my husband

didn't have a job. My daughter was eight months old, and I left for New York. My daughter was born where they're building the garage here, on Common Street. They're building a garage now. They named it after Buckley. And I remember that place was 271-1/2 Common Street, the place where I lived when my daughter was born. I went to the City Hall. She was sixty-eight years old July 27th, my daughter.

LEVINE: What's your daughter's name?

MIGLIORESE: Josephine.

LEVINE: And then did you have other children?

MIGLIORESE: Yes, three boys. One, my son who was in Vegas for fifty years. My son died, he died in '77. He had a massive heart attack. He was fifty years old. And just recently I lost another son, forty-nine years old, February. Because I was in the hospital for twenty-one days, and the day where I should be discharged, my son died in New York, and I couldn't go and see him. And then his son just died, he overdosed himself, some twenty-eight years old. That's what I had, this year, since February.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

MIGLIORESE: To the hospital, to the doctor. They said I'd had a heart failure. I don't know.

LEVINE: Well, tell me the names of your other three children.

MIGLIORESE: The other one is Joseph Migliorese.

LEVINE: Your second son?

MIGLIORESE: These are my three sons, and my one daughter.

LEVINE: Tell me their names.

MIGLIORESE: This is Joseph Migliorese, Jimmy Migliorese, and Theodore. These two are the ones that died.

LEVINE: Now do you have grandchildren too?

MIGLIORESE: Oh, yes. I have three, four, five grandchildren. I have two great-grandchildren. One is twenty years old, and one is sixteen. And the others are younger. I have three great-grandchildren.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, okay. And how about you, Lucy? Did you,

well, tell me how you met your husband?

MELE: Well, I met my husband, see, his sister was going out with this man, this young man there. And they were going out to a place to eat, you know. So they asked me if I want to go, and she asked her brother. So that's how we met there. Then after that, that was the first time. Then the second time we met friends of ours, friends of ours we had down there. We were going to Boston, and he came with his sister. So we were on the ferry, crossing from Boston to go into South Boston, is it? We had to take a ferry to go there. We were on the ferry and he was, we'd get together and start talking and everything. And he was telling me a lot of stuff.

I says, "Oh, you're full of baloney." I said, "I don't believe a thing you say." They were waiting in the car when the other one's walking around. So from then on we started talking. He called up, made a date. We made the date and I says, "Yes." Now, he lived in North Andover, I lived in Lawrence. So I says, "Okay." I said, "I'll meet you by the air mill." That's where that clock is.

So for a while, I went up as far as the bridge,

and I was going to turn back. I says, "What the heck am I going to do this for?" You know. But then after I saw him walking up and down, I said, "I'd better go." So I went there, and from there we went to Canada Lake, and we had a nice time. That's how we got together. So then he says, "Well, how about getting married?" I says, "I've got brothers and sisters." I says, "You know, after all, you're going to take a whole family." "So what?" he says. "We'll all live together." So I go and get married, and we were living together. My oldest brother went to New York, so I had my three sisters and one of my brothers, they lived with me. So then, after I started getting my children, they started taking care of my children. So then after a while they grew up, they started getting married, took off, you know.

LEVINE: What are your children's names?

MELE: I've got two girls, one named Joanna Corrieri. My son is Joseph Mele, and the other one is Janice Holt. And I've got ten grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

LEVINE: What are you proudest of that you've done?

MELE: Huh?

LEVINE: What are you most proud of?

MELE: My family.

LEVINE: Your family?

MELE: My families. My brothers, my sisters, my children, grandchildren. So we're all still together. Now they're taking care of me.

LEVINE: So that's nice, isn't it?

MELE: Yeah. Because my daughter can't get too much down here, you know. So anytime, take over.

LEVINE: Were there any ways that your father kept that had to do with ways of Sicily once he came here to this country?

MELE: No. My father, he destroyed all the passports. That's why we don't know too much. Because he was going back to Italy to remarry. So I don't know what happened. He didn't go, and he got all the passports, he tore them all up. That's why we had

no information at all. I rescued a couple of old pictures of my mother, but . . .

LEVINE: Did he ever become a citizen?

MIGLIORESE: That's the story. I was told that he was a citizen, you know. He had become a citizen. That's why I never bothered becoming. So the war broke out, I come to find out he wasn't a citizen and I wasn't a citizen. I had to go sign, alien, like you know, every year. Meanwhile my husband became a citizen, because he was born in Italy, too. But I didn't know anything about it, how to go about it, so I went to the City Hall to get information. So this man was there. I says, "Well, how do I go about becoming a citizen?" You know, I need information and everything. He says, "I'll get the information for you." I said, "Okay, thank you." He said, "Yeah, but you've got to pay me twenty-five dollars." So I looked at him, I says, "Instead of paying you twenty-five dollars, I'll buy a war bond." So I walked off. But then I went to the immigration. They gave me a book to read and everything. After I did all this studying, became a citizen. They said, "You could

have become a citizen under your husband's papers."

I said, "I wish you had told me that before." So that's how it happened. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How about you, Helen?

MIGLIORESE: What?

LEVINE: How about, what are you most proud of that you've done?

MIGLIORESE: Who?

LEVINE: What are you most proud of that you've done, you've accomplished, in your life?

MIGLIORESE: I don't know. Accomplished?

LEVINE: What do you feel good about that you did in your life?

MIGLIORESE: Everything. What the heck, everything. I told you that I went to New York when my daughter was eight months old. I was in New York for thirty-two years.

LEVINE: And what did you do there?

MIGLIORESE: I worked in, I worked as a hand-baster. Army, air

force, during the war, army air force coats. I used to thread three hundred needles and wax them to go to work, pieceworker, and baste the collars, baste the collars. Remember? 900 Broadway, in New York, I used to work. A man named Farber. The boss' name was Farber. A Jewish, you know, a Jewish guy. I worked in pockets. I worked in the candy place. And then I worked in the, when they made batteries. Batteries, they used to make batteries in New York.

LEVINE: Now, did your husband go off to the war? Was . . .

MIGLIORESE: My husband was, yeah, yeah. My husband was in the navy before I got married.

LEVINE: Oh.

MIGLIORESE: He was in the navy before I got married. But . . .

LEVINE: In the first World War he was in the navy.

MIGLIORESE: My son, the one that died, that was in Las Vegas, he was in the Navy, too, yeah. And so I came back here in 1959, back to Lawrence, when my daughter was eight months. And I came back here, and I went working Raytheon, yeah.

LEVINE: And did you work there for a long time?

MIGLIORESE: I was, three years. I was sort of, I used to, we used to make things for the (?) there, whatever. And then I wanted a leave of absence to go to Las Vegas by myself. They were hesitating. You know, finally, I never took off. I worked steady three years. Then finally they gave me a leave of absence from that day to, they put a question mark.

So I took off to go to Las Vegas. When I was in Las Vegas after a while they started writing me, and I never answered them, so they terminated me. So they terminated me. My son, I said, "What am I going to do here?" So my son put up a concession for me. I used to make meatballs and sausage sandwiches. In 1953, seventy-five cents. (Mrs. Mele coughs) I used to sell them near the racetrack there, and the strip in Las Vegas.

LEVINE: Now, had your husband died by then?

MIGLIORESE: My husband was still living. He was in California. My husband died in '66. See, I went to my son. I come back, I says, "I'm coming back here." And after a while I was here, I was getting sick, you

know. And people, I used to have the hot dogs. They used to be fifty cents. So the man come in, he says, "I want a hot dog." So I put one on the rotisserie. So then he says, "I asked for a hot dog." I says, "I did put it, you know?" So I says, "What you want? A song and dance for fifty cents?" See how wild I was? So then the bartender there says, "Are you giving her a hard time?" He says, "You know whose mother that is?" And everybody knew my son there, fifteen years, you know. "No," he says. So then I came back, I says, "I'm going to come back."

LEVINE: Were you homesick?

MIGLIORESE: Huh?

LEVINE: Were you homesick? Is that why you wanted to come back here?

MIGLIORESE: I was getting, I was taking tranquilizers. So my son said to me, my son, he said, "Give the money there." He used to pay the rent there and give me the money. He never took the money, you know, and everything, see. So he says, "Ma." He says, she says, "Ma, give it up." He said to me, you know.

That's when I was in Las Vegas, see? All the slot machines outside of the thing there and everything.

And so, I gave it up. So I called them here. I says, "I am coming back." I came back here, and I went to court. I got twenty-two checks. This was no fault of mine. I just wanted a leave of absence, so they terminated me.

LEVINE: So did you stay at Raytheon until you retired?

MIGLIORESE: No, I, in Raytheon, when I came back here, in '59, I (?). Then when I came back here I went to work to De Moor's Meat Market. I was a meat wrapper when I came here. That's what I retired from. I worked, well, in New York I worked in Macy's.

LEVINE: Was it your father's idea that you would become Americanized fast, or did he want you to keep up with the Sicilian ways, do you think?

MIGLIORESE: No, he didn't say nothing.

LEVINE: He wanted you to become American.

MIGLIORESE: He took out his first papers for citizenship, but he didn't go through with it. Because I inquired, I had to go all the way to Lynn, Mass or something

first. They told me, they said, "No, he didn't become an American citizen. He just took his first papers out, that's all."

LEVINE: What do you remember of your father, Lucy? How would you describe him?

MELE: My husband, my father was a little stern man. He obviously had to be just so. Like when we used to sit down, we'd get up in the morning, he'd make sure that our hair was all combed out, we were all nice and cleaned out, and our clothes were just so. And then when we used to sit down and eat at the table, we had to sit up straight. We couldn't slouch. Then he used to go around and around inspecting us. Of course, they weren't born then, inspecting us. When he used to go in back of her, she used to go like this. (she gestures) He says, "What are you doing that for?" "(?) for do that, you must have done something."

MIGLIORESE: We used to live in one room.

MELE: That's something, another room.

MIGLIORESE: That's, on top of the store.

MELE: We were, how many children we were?

MIGLIORESE: At that time.

MELE: We used to sleep in one room. But it wasn't too bad. We used to get along, huh?

MIGLIORESE: I got a headache.

LEVINE: Is there anything else you can think of that has to do with starting out in Sicily, coming to this country, having your whole lives here?

MELE: We've had a good upbringing. We had a good upbringing. And then we got married, and we're on our own.

MIGLIORESE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Could you imagine what your life would have been like had you stayed in Sicily?

MIGLIORESE: Who knows? (she laughs) You were young. How old are you?

LEVINE: Fifty.

MIGLIORESE: Fifty? Oh, not bad.

MELE: My son would have been fifty now, the twenty, the fourteenth of this month. I'm having a Mass said the thirteen for Timmy and his son.

LEVINE: Were you always a religious family?

MIGLIORESE: No.

MELE: No.

MIGLIORESE: My father and mother never went to church. But we had a church we lived one on Common Street across the Common, the first Baptist Cavalry Church was on the corner there. And we would jump there. We used to run in and out of the church. Another time I'd remember on Elm Street there was Protestant Church. They used to take us there, you know, classes and all that.

MELE: We used to go to the Salvation Army. I used to go to the Salvation Army.

LEVINE: What did you do there?

MELE: They used to give us stuff and we'd sit there and play. Yeah. I always said, "There's only one God." Now, I go to, it's (?). It's called St.

Joseph Melkite Church. What it is, it's a Greek Catholic church. I go every Sunday. I enjoy it.

MIGLIORESE: Well, our parents all go to church. All the children are baptized. They are born in the Catholic Church, in the Holy Rosary Church we have down there, all baptized. And I made sure they get their First Communion, Confirmation. But . . .

MELE: So you were like a little mother when you were young, taking care of everybody.

MIGLIORESE: You want to know something? When I was going with my husband now, they started, went and tell his mother and father, he just married a woman with five children. (she laughs) And they were so dead-set against it. "What do you mean, five children?"

MIGLIORESE: Well, my husband and I, we looked at ourselves. So young, I got five children. Wonderful. We got along good, didn't we? Very good. He used to think the world of them, especially the twins. It wasn't when I went to Italy he'd take you down the street. When we went down Essex Street one night, he said (?). He had a temper, but he was okay.

LEVINE: Was there anything else, Lucy, that you would like to say before we close? About coming to this country, about really having all of your life here, you might as well say.

MIGLIORESE: As I said, I'm glad I went through it and came here. So, it's a free country. Getting married, have children. And I have my brothers and sisters, everything. And everything grew up nice, you know. Everything's been happy. We had little setbacks, but thank God we're all here.

MELE: In New York I used to belong to the Catholic Sea Cadets of America. I used to march down Fifth Avenue in our uniforms and everything. I never seen (?).

LEVINE: Okay, so that's another thing you're proud of.

MELE: Then there's Perry Como. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Okay. Is there anything else you want to say? Okay.

MELE: This is our mayor.

LEVINE: Okay. Let me just say this is Janet Levine for the

EI-208/MELE and MIGLIORESE

National Park Service on September 2, 1992, and I'm here in Lawrence, Massachusetts with Lucy Mele. Is that how you, Mele?

MELE: Mele.

LEVINE: Mele, and Helen Migliorese.

MIGLIORESE: Migliorese.

LEVINE: Migliorese, sorry. Okay, and we've been talking about your coming here from Sicily. I'm signing off.