

EI-219

BEATRICE BERNARDI MINNITI

BIRTH DATE: NOVEMBER 6, 1901

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 10/1994

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ITALY, 1909

AGE 8

SHIP NOT RECALLED

RESIDENCES: ITALY: SAN GENESIO

PORT: GENOA

US: BRIDGEPORT, CT

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Sunday, September 20, 1992. I'm here at the Ellis Island Recording Studio with Beatrice Minniti, who came from Italy in 1908 or 1909 when she was about seven or eight years old. Mrs. Minniti, welcome. You've come here with quite a few of your family members. Could we start by you giving me your date of birth, please?

MINNITI: November 6, 1901.

SIGRIST: And what town were you born in, please?

MINNITI: San Genesio.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that for me, please?

MINNITI: S, you mean spell?

SIGRIST: Spell the name of the town, if that's possible.

MINNITI: S-A-N G-E-N-E-S-I-O.

SIGRIST: I see. Where in Italy is that?

MINNITI: It's about the middle of the island.

SIGRIST: Somewhere around Naples?

MINNITI: Above from, way above, on the Adriatic side.

SIGRIST: I see.

MINNITI: I looked it up in the map.

SIGRIST: Can tell me, as a little girl, what that town looked like?

MINNITI: It was a nice little town. Everybody has their own little home, and I went to, I went to school because I was old enough to go to school.

SIGRIST: What did the houses look like? Describe your house for me?

MINNITI: The houses were made of stone. They didn't have all the common facility like they have here, but they were coming to it.

SIGRIST: How many rooms did you have?

MINNITI: My mother had five rooms.

SIGRIST: Oh, on one floor, or two floors?

MINNITI: No, up and down.

SIGRIST: Really. Was this a house in town, or was it out of town a little bit?

MINNITI: No, it was in the town, about a short way from the center.

SIGRIST: Can you, um, can you sort of describe the inside of the house for me, like what kind of furniture you had, maybe?

MINNITI: Well, beds and chairs and a dresser, just like . . .

SIGRIST: Where did you get the furniture?

MINNITI: Where did I get it? I really don't know. My mother did that.

SIGRIST: I was wondering if she bought it, or if someone made it for her.

MINNITI: No, no. She, they make it and then they sell it from the place, you know.

SIGRIST: Was there a church in town?

MINNITI: Oh, yes, many churches.

SIGRIST: Really. What was the church that you went to?

MINNITI: One church that I can remember the name was St. Mary's. And the cathedral had a name, it has a nice name, but I don't remember. But it was the biggest church in that town.

SIGRIST: Was the town sort of built around the church?

MINNITI: No. There were many churches in other streets.

SIGRIST: I see. This was kind of a big town.

MINNITI: Well, quite big.

SIGRIST: What was the major industry?

MINNITI: Mostly there were two colleges. I think that, as far as I can remember, even from outsiders came to school there.

SIGRIST: Hmm, that's interesting. What was your dad's name?

MINNITI: Anterno Bernardi.

SIGRIST: Can you spell . . .

MINNITI: A-N-T-E-R-N-O.

SIGRIST: And then your, his last name, your maiden name.

MINNITI: Bernardi.

SIGRIST: Spell it, please.

MINNITI: B-E-R-N-A-R-D-I.

SIGRIST: What did your dad look like?

MINNITI: My dad was a very handsome man.

SIGRIST: What was his temperament like?

MINNITI: Oh, he was a nice man. Very gentle, very nice, mild tempered. Once in a while he probably lost his cool, (she laughs) but he was a nice man.

SIGRIST: What did he do for a living?

MINNITI: He was a, I can't explain what he done, but he was employed by the town

hall in the, in the town hall. There was a town hall and he, like took care of things, and any other things. That's all I can remember.

SIGRIST: What was your mom's name?

MINNITI: Elvira. E-L-V-I-R-A.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

MINNITI: Her maiden name was Gentile.

SIGRIST: Spell that, please.

MINNITI: G-E-N-T-I-L-E.

SIGRIST: And tell me a little bit about your mother. Again, what was her temperament like?

MINNITI: She was nice tempered, even. Nice, she raised the children, and once in a while you lose your temper. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: How many children did your parents have?

MINNITI: There were four children, and then later on in years, when we were in this country, my youngest brother.

SIGRIST: So you were the oldest of the children.

MINNITI: I'm the oldest.

SIGRIST: Name your other brothers and sisters.

MINNITI: My other sister was Mary, and my brother, my brother Zef, and then my younger sister Eleanor. And my brother Bert, the youngest.

SIGRIST: Who was born here.

MINNITI: He was born in this country.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about what it was like growing up? For instance, what did you do for fun in Italy? What games did you play?

MINNITI: Well, we played house. (she laughs) Have dolls and play house, make mud pies. Just like . . . (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Would you say that you were comfortable financially?

MINNITI: Yes.

SIGRIST: If you had toys and things to play with.

MINNITI: Oh, yes, we had dolls and, not modern toys, but we had toys and dolls. The girls mostly dolls, and my brother had a wagon and little things. But this younger brother, he had more toys than we did.

SIGRIST: Did you keep animals at all?

MINNITI: My mother had a cat, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember if the cat had a name?

MINNITI: Mishi, Mishi Mishi, she called him. Mishi Mishi.

SIGRIST: Did you have a backyard to the house?

MINNITI: Yes, there was a backyard.

SIGRIST: Did you have a garden?

MINNITI: No. Well, there was a little piece of land where my, they didn't farm, or whatever you call it, a little kind.

SIGRIST: What kind of food did you eat as a child?

MINNITI: Bread, milk. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did your mother make the bread?

MINNITI: No, I don't think so. She used to make pasta, but I don't think she made bread.

SIGRIST: How did she make pasta?

MINNITI: Flour, eggs.

SIGRIST: Did, because you were the oldest did you have to help her with . . .

MINNITI: I helped some, yes.

SIGRIST: What were your chores, specifically? What were you responsible for in the housework?

MINNITI: Well, play with the others.

SIGRIST: Kind of a babysitter. (she laughs) What do you remember about your mother giving birth to your brothers and sisters? Do you remember her ever being pregnant or any of that?

MINNITI: No, I don't remember that, but I do remember the last one.

SIGRIST: When you were here in America. Tell me a little bit about what, you said you went to school.

MINNITI: Yes.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about what going to school was like.

MINNITI: It was nice. I walked to school with the other little girls, and had my pencil and papers and drawing.

SIGRIST: Where was the school? Was it a far way away?

MINNITI: No, it was not far away. It was a very short walk.

SIGRIST: Describe the building for me a little bit, of the school.

MINNITI: It was, it was a building like, it was a very large building, and like everything, all the business, like, was done there. Different offices.

SIGRIST: Kind of like a town building.

MINNITI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of your teachers?

MINNITI: Oh, yeah. I remember the teacher, but I only remember one name. Her name was Emma. Only that one teacher, I remember her name. The other only had two teachers, I think.

SIGRIST: How long did you go to school before you came to this country?

MINNITI: Well, I must have gone a couple of years because I was about eight years old.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what they taught you in school?

MINNITI: Yeah, arithmetic, and additions and writing. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: What was your favorite subject as a young girl?

MINNITI: Ah, I don't know whether I had a favorite subject. I just liked to get everything right on the paper.

SIGRIST: Were your parents educated people?

MINNITI: Well, yeah. They all, they didn't have a college education, but my father was quite educated.

SIGRIST: Do you know how your parents met?

MINNITI: How they met?

SIGRIST: I don't think they talked about it.

MINNITI: They never talked about how they met.

SIGRIST: I see. Were there any other family members in this town? Grandfather or grandmother?

MINNITI: Yes. They came in this country together.

SIGRIST: Which side of the family?

MINNITI: My mother's.

SIGRIST: Your mother's. Can you talk about that a little bit, what they were like?

MINNITI: They were nice, very nice people. My grandfather, it was, well, you would call it a woodworker. He made cabinets and things.

SIGRIST: Did they live near you in town?

MINNITI: Yes, not far. And I know I remember his brother being a priest, and it was very nice.

SIGRIST: When you think about your grandparents, what do you remember the most about them? Say if you were going to visit them, what sticks out in your mind about them?

MINNITI: Well, (she laughs) I don't understand what you mean. I visit them because, well, my mother used to say, "You have to visit your grandparents."

SIGRIST: So you went there because you sort of had to? Were you close with them?

MINNITI: Yes, we were very close. And then I had grandparents on my father's side.

SIGRIST: And they also lived near you. What did your grandfather on your father's side do for a living?

MINNITI: Oh, my grandfather, on my father's side, I didn't know him. He had passed away.

SIGRIST: I see. But your grandmother, do you remember?

MINNITI: My grandmother, yes.

SIGRIST: Were there any other family members in the town? Did your parents have brothers or sisters?

MINNITI: My father had a brother.

SIGRIST: Would you say that you were all a big close family, or not really?

MINNITI: Yes, we were close.

SIGRIST: You started talking about your grandparents on your mother's side coming to this country.

MINNITI: Yeah, because they, if they came, my mother had two brothers. They were in this country before, and they wanted. They always tell, "Why don't you, you know, come over?" They, so finally they decided that, to come over. But my mother and my grandfather, they would be left alone, because the other daughter was also in this country. And they came, finally they decided to come, they'd come together.

SIGRIST: What year was that? Do you remember? Was this the same year that you came?

MINNITI: Yeah, oh, sure. I came together with them.

SIGRIST: Oh, you came with them. Oh, I didn't realize that.

MINNITI: I came with them. I was a child.

SIGRIST: I see. I thought maybe they had come before. When you were a kid growing up, what did you know about America? What did America mean to you as a kid in Italy?

MINNITI: Well, not very much because, just that once in a while they receive a letter from here, from her sister. I didn't visualize what it was.

SIGRIST: Was it your grandmother's sister who was here or your mother's sister who was here?

MINNITI: My mother's sister.

SIGRIST: What did she do when she got here? Did she get a job?

MINNITI: Oh, sure.

SIGRIST: What kind of job did she get?

MINNITI: She was a single woman. She got a job in the underwear, they made corsets and girdles and things like that.

SIGRIST: Factory work, she was doing.

MINNITI: Right, yes.

SIGRIST: In New York?

MINNITI: No, in Bridgeport.

SIGRIST: Oh, in Connecticut, also. How long, did she come over a long time before? Had she been here?

MINNITI: She had been here a few years. I really don't know how many years before. But then there was a brother here, too. So then they, when my grandfather came over, they were a family together.

SIGRIST: I see. So your grandfather came first? No, your grandfather came with you all.

MINNITI: Together we came.

SIGRIST: Right. Did your mother and father want to leave Italy? Why did they decide to come?

MINNITI: For the reason that my mother's brother was living here and he said, "Why

don't we all be together?"

SIGRIST: I see. Was your mother anxious about coming, or was she sad about coming?

MINNITI: No, I don't think she was sad, because her mother was coming with her. The whole family, so.

SIGRIST: Do you remember packing at all? Do you remember what you took with you?

MINNITI: Oh, they took a lot of things with. At that time you could bring a big trunk and put all the things, all the belongings in there.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything specifically that you all took?

MINNITI: Do you mean in the, what we took with us?

SIGRIST: Right. Do you remember one object, say, that was yours, that you took that meant a lot to you?

MINNITI: The only, my clothes, my doll. (she laughs) And then there was, my younger sister, she had a doll.

SIGRIST: Did, do you remember what kind of luggage you took with you? Do you remember what kind of trunk it was, or what kind of valise?

MINNITI: It was one trunk for my mother and one trunk for her mother. And the luggage was, like any luggage, but it was big, it was heavy.

SIGRIST: I see. Do you remember, did anyone in town give you like a goodbye party or anything like that when you left?

MINNITI: Well, they probably did, but I don't remember.

SIGRIST: So where did you, where did you go to get the boat?

MINNITI: Oh, I had to go, we had to travel to Genoa.

SIGRIST: To Genoa. Do you remember anything about that trip?

MINNITI: I remember riding the train.

SIGRIST: Was that the first time you'd ever been on a train?

MINNITI: Yes, I think so. But I think that once my mother took me with her to visit somebody, and that we had to go on a train. But that was the ride that I remember mostly.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about it? What do you remember about that train ride? What sticks out in your mind?

MINNITI: It was a long ride, and I fell asleep. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: How long of a ride is that?

MINNITI: Well, it was quite a few hours, I imagine. Quite a few hours.

SIGRIST: How much younger are your brothers and sisters than you are?

MINNITI: Oh, we're close.

SIGRIST: So your mother had her hands full.

MINNITI: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: With the kids. Were you well-behaved children?

MINNITI: (she laughs) Children are children. I don't know how behaved we were. My mother could tell you that. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Now, so who's traveling? It's you, your mother and father, your, what, three other siblings, and then Grandpa and Grandma?

MINNITI: Yes.

SIGRIST: And that's it.

MINNITI: That's it.

SIGRIST: That's it. And how long did you have to stay in Genoa before you got on the boat?

MINNITI: Oh, I think the next day. We left in time to be, when the boat was ready.

SIGRIST: How long, did you have to undergo any kind of examinations in Genoa? What did you have to . . .

MINNITI: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did they do before you got on the boat?

MINNITI: They examined, especially your eyes. That was something they, if, you had to have good eyes, and good health. Well, they, you know, they checked your eyes.

SIGRIST: Was it, did they do the examinations . . .

MINNITI: Not thoroughly. Not till we got to Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: I see. Just enough to get you on the boat. What was the name of the boat?

MINNITI: I don't remember that.

SIGRIST: Was it a big boat?

MINNITI: Oh, yes, it was a big boat. It had to cross the Atlantic. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: What month is this in the year?

MINNITI: November.

SIGRIST: In November. Can you describe a little bit about what your impressions were as a little girl when you saw this big boat? What did you think?

MINNITI: I thought it was a big boat. Well, you know, my mother kept everybody together.

SIGRIST: Had your parents ever been on a boat before?

MINNITI: I don't think so. I never heard them talk about it.

SIGRIST: I see. Well, good. Well, let's talk a little bit about what that boat ride was

like. Did you have a cabin, or were you all in one big room?

MINNITI: One big room.

SIGRIST: And were the men with the women?

MINNITI: No. During the day, the dinner and supper and all that, but then at night men were in a different compartment and the women in another.

SIGRIST: Can you describe what your compartment looked like?

MINNITI: One great big room was . . . (she gestures)

SIGRIST: Bunk beds?

MINNITI: Yes.

SIGRIST: Was it crowded?

MINNITI: Oh, yes. There was a lot of people on it.

SIGRIST: Was it, was the area that you slept it, was that a clean area, or was it . . .

MINNITI: It was clean. I remember them mopping up all the time.

SIGRIST: Were a lot of people sick?

MINNITI: Uh, they might have been. I don't really remember. My sister was the youngest, and she couldn't, they used to take her to a different room for play because she was very young. And then the older ones had another room which, mostly we stayed together with my mother.

SIGRIST: How old were your grandparents at this time?

MINNITI: Well, they were old, but their exact age I can't tell.

SIGRIST: Older than seventy, say?

MINNITI: Yeah, about.

SIGRIST: About seventy. I'm just curious, how did they weather the boat trip?

MINNITI: They were very good. Us kids used to get a little sick once in a while, but the others were all right.

SIGRIST: What did you do for fun on the boat?

MINNITI: Well, there was one room where the little kids where they had some books you could look at, you know.

SIGRIST: Was it mostly Italian people on the boat?

MINNITI: I think so. I think they were all Italians. At least I didn't pay that much attention to what they were.

SIGRIST: Did they ever let you up on deck?

MINNITI: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about being up on the deck of the boat?

MINNITI: Very cold. (she laughs) That's why most of the time we stayed below, because it was wintertime.

SIGRIST: And did you bring appropriate clothing?

MINNITI: Yes, oh, yes.

SIGRIST: I see. So you knew it was going to be cold?

MINNITI: Well, my mother knew it was going to be cold.

SIGRIST: Where did they feed you on the boat?

MINNITI: How can I say? The ordinary food.

SIGRIST: Where? Was there a dining room on the boat someplace?

MINNITI: Oh, yes, oh, yes. When they rang the bell, then you go in the dining room.

SIGRIST: Do you know how long the trip took?

MINNITI: Oh, that trip was long. Thirty, I would say maybe less than thirty days, a little less than thirty days. The sea was very rough.

SIGRIST: Do you remember a storm or anything like that happening?

MINNITI: I remember it snowing.

SIGRIST: Snowing! Was that the first time you'd even seen snow ever?

MINNITI: No, no.

SIGRIST: You had seen it.

MINNITI: There was snow where I come from.

SIGRIST: In Italy. So it's a long boat ride, and would you say that you had fun on the boat, or that it was just something that you needed to get through?

MINNITI: (she laughs) I guess so.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

MINNITI: And then the cold weather, I guess, was.

SIGRIST: Do you remember coming into New York Harbor at all, or seeing the Statue of Liberty?

MINNITI: Yes. I remember, what I don't remember the boat coming in, like I see Ellis Island now, but I know that we came that way because that was the only way. Then one great, big room with all the benches and all the people, that's what I can remember. Now, my, I don't know whether this goes with it, but my grandmother and grandfather were too old to come on their own, and their oldest son was in this country. He had to vouch for them before they could come in, so that's why they had to wait for. But somehow my mother didn't realize that, and when they examined everybody, my grandfather and grandmother, they took them in another room. And my mother got excited, and she followed them because my uncle had gotten here one day ahead, and she, and he wasn't here when we, when we came to Ellis Island. So they had to, they had a place for them, but they had to stay overnight.

SIGRIST: So they had to stay, but you didn't.

MINNITI: No, we didn't.

SIGRIST: Do you think that was scary for them?

MINNITI: Yeah, for my mother it was.

SIGRIST: Did they have interpreters here that helped work out these problems?

MINNITI: Oh, yes. Those, there was always somebody who spoke Italian. And I think that, you know, the examination, that if you're, if something's wrong with your eyes you couldn't come in to the night.

SIGRIST: Do you remember just, I'll ask you this question, do you remember what you were wearing when you were at Ellis Island?

MINNITI: I remember a warm coat. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did you eat while you were at Ellis Island?

MINNITI: Oh, then my father and mother, they kind of got excited over my grandfather had to stay, that he forgot all about, then we looked around and everybody had a little lunch box. So my, they were always someone to talk to, to speak Italian. And he looked, he asked around, and we got a lunch box. You know, it was getting late, because they had to find out

what would happen to my grandmother, but then they explained in the other room.

SIGRIST: That must have been not only scary for your grandparents, but I bet it was very upsetting to your parents, too.

MINNITI: Yeah, because it was, you know. And I really don't know why they didn't, they didn't know about that. My uncle had to be there.

SIGRIST: Why was your uncle here a day early?

MINNITI: They mistaken, the boat was late.

SIGRIST: The boat was late. I see. Did you have to stay overnight at Ellis?

MINNITI: They did, not us.

SIGRIST: They did, but you didn't.

MINNITI: No.

SIGRIST: Do you remember at all about your grandmother talking about the experience of having to stay overnight here?

MINNITI: Yes.

SIGRIST: What did she say?

MINNITI: She said it was, she had a nice clean bed, and they fed them for the next day until my uncle come down and they came home. And we stayed at his house for, until we got established.

SIGRIST: So how long were you here on the island? A few hours, maybe?

MINNITI: Well, it was night time. I think that's the reason why I can't remember the building, because it was at night.

SIGRIST: So when you left Ellis it was just you and your brothers and sisters and your mom and dad, where did you go?

MINNITI: To my, my father asked the direction, and they, there was always some help, somebody to help you. We went to Grand Central on the train, and, you know, they took us across on the ferry, and we went to Grand Central and came on the train.

SIGRIST: And you went to Bridgeport?

MINNITI: To Bridgeport.

SIGRIST: Did you have your luggage with you?

MINNITI: Not the big trunks, just the luggages.

SIGRIST: So then the next day your uncle came down and got your parents, your grandparents. Did you stay in Bridgeport, or did your mother and father go back down with your uncle to get your . . .

MINNITI: No, we stayed at his home.

SIGRIST: Yes, yes. I was just wondering if maybe your father went back down to New York with him to get your grandparents.

MINNITI: No, I don't think so. We went along. But we stayed at his home, at my uncle's home.

SIGRIST: Let's talk a little bit about your uncle's home and what Bridgeport was like at that time. Can you describe where your uncle lived?

MINNITI: Sure. My uncle lived on Charles Street in Bridgeport.

SIGRIST: Yeah, and what did his house look like?

MINNITI: Oh, it was a nice little house, small. And sometimes I wonder how he put

us all up for a little while.

SIGRIST: Did you all have to share a bedroom, or . . .

MINNITI: Yes, the children shared the bedrooms.

SIGRIST: Did, when you arrived at your uncle's house, did they have dinner waiting for you, or something like that?

MINNITI: We arrived the day after Thanksgiving. Well, I didn't know at that time, but they, that was the day after Thanksgiving.

SIGRIST: Did your uncle have a wife and children?

MINNITI: Oh, yes. My uncle had a beautiful family.

SIGRIST: And what did he do for a living?

MINNITI: He was a mason, bricklayer. He was, you know, building. He put up buildings.

SIGRIST: I see. We're going to pause just for a second, and Brian's going to flip the tape over so that we can continue.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: How long did you live with your uncle in Bridgeport?

MINNITI: Oh, I don't know the exact time, but just enough time that my father got established with, for the family.

SIGRIST: What kind of a job did he get?

MINNITI: The very first job I don't remember what he did. I don't remember the very first job. As I grew older, they were Singer machine.

SIGRIST: Singer sewing machine.

MINNITI: Singer sewing machine, in Bridgeport. There was a great big factory there.

SIGRIST: Did your mother get a job?

MINNITI: Not right away. But my mother, after, when we got established, the grandmother and grandfather came to live with us, and then my mother got a job in the same place that made girdles and corsets.

SIGRIST: That her sister had a job.

MINNITI: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you talk to me a little bit about how your grandparents adjusted to this country because, of course, they're much older, so.

MINNITI: Yeah, they were much older.

SIGRIST: Yeah, so what was it like for them, having to come here?

MINNITI: They seemed happy enough. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did they ever learn English?

MINNITI: Oh, yes, they learned. My grandfather didn't learn too much because he was a little older, but my grandmother spoke. Of course, she spoke Italian most of the time, but she understood a lot of things.

SIGRIST: Did, um, was your grandfather, did he want to get a job when he got here? Of course, he was a woodworker, right? Did he do that when he came here, too?

MINNITI: No, he didn't do anything while he was here.

SIGRIST: How did you learn English?

MINNITI: I went to school.

SIGRIST: Was it hard?

MINNITI: No.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about that first year in school, getting adjusted?

MINNITI: Well, see, my uncle's children went to the same school, so we, it was nice going to school.

SIGRIST: Did you find that, were other children kind of prejudice towards you because you were Italians and foreign, or was there a big Italian population in Bridgeport at that time?

MINNITI: Oh, yes. But I don't remember anybody doing that.

SIGRIST: So everyone was friendly.

MINNITI: The teachers were very nice.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any funny things happening in school, or something that sticks out in your mind, something that happened, that you remember?

MINNITI: Well, I remember that it was closed, the school was closed, and we went home for lunch. And then at recess time, that was nice.

SIGRIST: And did they teach you English? Did you have to take a class at school to learn English, or did you just pick it up through the regular classes?

MINNITI: Yes, through the regular classes. I imagine they have it, today they might have, but then they didn't have. And then my little cousins, they spoke English to me because they wanted us to learn, and it didn't take too long.

SIGRIST: Well, of course, you kids were all young, so.

MINNITI: We were all young, so we learned fast.

SIGRIST: How long were you here before your brother was born?

MINNITI: Oh, many years.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about how your parents adjusted to this country. Your mother, especially. Was it hard for her to adjust to America?

MINNITI: Not really bad, because they were, you know, a lot of woman that spoke her language, and then she learned English, too.

SIGRIST: How did she learn English?

MINNITI: Well, my father went to school to learn English, but my mother learned through us children and through friends. She got along.

SIGRIST: You said your father went to school. What kind of a school was it?

MINNITI: He went to night school.

SIGRIST: It was a night school.

MINNITI: Because, well, at that time my uncle, said, you have to be an American citizen, and in order to do that he had to go to school. But he wanted to go to school anyway.

SIGRIST: Your father sounds to me like a person who liked to learn and who was, you know, he seems to have had, you know, a job with a certain amount of responsibility to it in Italy. He sounds like he was very anxious to learn things. What about your uncle and aunt? Did they speak English in the house, or did they speak Italian in the house?

MINNITI: Well, mostly, the children always spoke English, and the father and mother, they spoke Italian once in a while, yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you remember something that your mother and father retained with them from the old country, some, either a custom or a tradition that they clung to when they came to America? Like a, oh, like, um, I don't know, maybe like a certain holiday, something to do during one of the holidays that was very Italian.

MINNITI: Oh, yes, oh, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: What?

MINNITI: The holidays, we always made a lot of food and things like that. They retained the holidays all the time.

SIGRIST: Did, was there a church in Bridgeport that had a big Italian congregation?

MINNITI: One, yes, one church.

SIGRIST: And is that the church that you went to?

MINNITI: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the name?

MINNITI: Holy Rosary.

SIGRIST: And would you say you were a religious family?

MINNITI: Not over-religious, but we received a lot of Sacraments. Are you Catholic?

SIGRIST: No, my father is. (they laugh)

MINNITI: But, anyway, we received all the Sacraments.

SIGRIST: Did they conduct services in Italian?

MINNITI: Yes.

SIGRIST: Oh, that's interesting.

MINNITI: Well, the priest was also Italian. Well, that was a very small church. There was only that one church in the city of Bridgeport. And Bridgeport is a nice big city, but there was only one Italian church.

SIGRIST: Did you live in that neighborhood where the church was?

MINNITI: No, not in the neighborhood. We lived mostly, later on in years my father got his own place, his own house. We lived near, in America, what would you call it, an English church, not an Italian priest, and we still went to that

church on Sunday. But then my youngest brother went to that school.

SIGRIST: I see. Can you tell me what your first job was? What was the first, did you get a job as a young woman?

MINNITI: Yes.

SIGRIST: And do you remember what that job was?

MINNITI: The same thing as what my mother did.

SIGRIST: Working on the corsets. Do you remember how much you made?

MINNITI: Uh, I can't remember how much an hour, but it was not bad. Like ten dollars.

SIGRIST: Ten dollars a week?

MINNITI: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Did you get to keep all your money, or did you have to contribute that to the household?

MINNITI: No, we had to contribute.

SIGRIST: Were you allowed to keep any of it?

MINNITI: Some of it, yes.

SIGRIST: As a young woman, what were the things that you liked to spend money on?

MINNITI: I personally liked to buy shampoo for my hair. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did you have nice hair, blonde hair?

MINNITI: Well, yeah, I had long hair. Thin, thin hair.

SIGRIST: Did you buy your clothes, or did someone make them at home?

MINNITI: Yeah. No, my mother made them. We bought some. Once in a while we bought some clothes, ready-made.

SIGRIST: Was there something about America that your mother and father couldn't adjust to? Some aspect of living in this country that was very difficult for them to adjust to, that you can think of?

MINNITI: I can't think.

SIGRIST: You'd say they were happy to be here?

MINNITI: Yeah, they were. They were quite happy.

SIGRIST: Do you remember . . .

MINNITI: They, they, once in a while they would talk about the trip over. It was kind of hard, especially in the winter.

SIGRIST: Well, and your mother had, you know, little kids to take care of. Do you remember in those early years of America when you were here, do you remember any kind of family tragedy that happened, something that sticks out in your mind that was a very sad time when you first were here?

MINNITI: Not that I can think of. Well, once in a while one of the kids would be sick, but not bad tragedy until, you know, later in years when my mother lost her mother. Her father first.

SIGRIST: How old were you when your grandfather died?

MINNITI: Oh, I was grown up.

SIGRIST: So he lived to be quite elderly, then.

MINNITI: Yes.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about what you remember about World War One and how, if at all, your family was affected by the war.

MINNITI: No, my father was too old, and we were too young.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any kind of . . .

MINNITI: My mother had a cousin, and he, us kids would call him "uncle." He was in the war. But, and, like, you know, my, the church had something that they, we knit sweaters, and we learned how to knit and we knit some sweater for the war.

SIGRIST: So that was a way of participating.

MINNITI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Let's kind of, let me ask you about when you married, and the gentleman that you married. What was his name?

MINNITI: His name was Joseph.

SIGRIST: And do you remember what year you were married?

MINNITI: 1921.

SIGRIST: And tell me a little bit about what your husband was like, what he looked like and what his temperament was like.

MINNITI: He was even-tempered, not bad.

SIGRIST: And he had come from Sicily, yes?

MINNITI: He had come from Sicily for the earthquake. He was one of the survivors.

SIGRIST: Oh, right. Did he ever tell stories about that?

MINNITI: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: What kind of stories did he tell about the Italy, the Sicilian earthquake? Do you remember anything specific?

MINNITI: Well, his mother and father lost their parents in the earthquake, so it was a kind of sad.

SIGRIST: Do you know what year that was? He was older when he came than you were when you came, I believe.

MINNITI: Yeah. He was fourteen.

SIGRIST: I see. And, so you're married in '21, and how many children did you have?

MINNITI: Two.

SIGRIST: And their names are?

MINNITI: Charlotte and Peter.

SIGRIST: And were you living in Bridgeport at this time?

MINNITI: Yes.

SIGRIST: What did your husband do for a living?

MINNITI: He was plumber.

SIGRIST: And were you . . .

MINNITI: His trade was a plumber.

SIGRIST: Was he a plumber before you married him?

MINNITI: Yes.

SIGRIST: I see. And did you work while you were married?

MINNITI: Yes. I worked after the, you know, the children.

SIGRIST: What job did you get?

MINNITI: The same as my mother.

SIGRIST: (he laughs) That factory was busy.

MINNITI: It was one of the best, Warner.

SIGRIST: Oh, sure, Warner Corsets. Absolutely. Well, let me ask you a couple of final questions here. One is, and I think I sort of know the answer to this. Your parents really, you know, made a big change in their lives by coming here. In their later years, did they feel that they had made the right choice?

MINNITI: Uh, yes. They bought a home, a home of his own. And I guess, and they never, I never heard them complain.

SIGRIST: Did either of them ever wish they had gone back to Italy?

MINNITI: Uh, no.

SIGRIST: Never. And then I guess my final question to you is are you glad they

came? Are you glad that you grew up here instead of over there?

MINNITI: I guess I'm glad I'm here, because I really didn't know too much about how they lived there, you know.

SIGRIST: This is really your home, I suppose.

MINNITI: Yes.

SIGRIST: Well, Mrs. Minniti, I want to thank you for coming down from Stratford with twenty-plus family members, and it was a pleasure talking to you. Thank you very much. This is Paul Sigrist signing off for the National Park Service with Beatrice Minniti.