

EI-241

JAMES FRANCIS CATALFIMO

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SICILY (BORN U.S.), 1913

PORT: NAPLES

AGE 7

RESIDENCES: SICILY: FURNARI

SHIP: ADRIATIC

USA: FORT EDWARD, NY

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Monday, January 25th, 1993. I'm in Greenwich, in upstate New York, with James F. Catalfimo, who was born in Middle Falls, New York, accompanied his family when they went back to Sicily in 1912. He was seven years old at that time. And then returned to America with his family in February of 1913. Good afternoon, Mr. Catalfimo. Can we start with you giving me your birth date, please.

CATALFIMO: I was born September 30, 1905.

SIGRIST: And why was your family in Middle Falls, New York?

CATALFIMO: Well, at that time most all the people was coming over to this country for a better living and earning money.

SIGRIST: What was your dad doing for a living at that time?

CATALFIMO: Just a common laborer. He worked on the railroad and whatever they could get to do back in those days.

SIGRIST: When had he come to this country?

CATALFIMO: Well, I don't know the exact date. I was born in 1905, so it must have been early 1900's, because he came alone and then he sent for my mother. And then after she come here, then I was born in 1905, so I don't know just when he did come.

SIGRIST: Were they married before?

CATALFIMO: Oh, yes. They were married in Italy and they had one child, a girl, who died in infancy in Italy before they came over here.

SIGRIST: Do you know what your father did in Sicily before he came?

CATALFIMO: No, I don't. Just common ordinary work, I guess. Working in vineyards and stuff like that.

SIGRIST: What town was he from?

CATALFIMO: He was from Furnari.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

CATALFIMO: F-U-R-N-A-R-I. That's the village. Province of Messina, in Sicily.

SIGRIST: And what part of Sicily is that exactly?

CATALFIMO: I just don't know. It's just a little ways from Palermo because when we were there we could see the bay at Palermo from my grandmother's upstairs window.

SIGRIST: So your grandmother still lived in this town.

CATALFIMO: She lived, at that time, yeah, in Furnari.

SIGRIST: Was your mother from this town also?

CATALFIMO: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you know how your parents met?

CATALFIMO: No.

SIGRIST: What was your dad's name?

CATALFIMO: Uh, Antonio.

SIGRIST: And, yeah, that's fine. And what was your mother's name?

CATALFIMO: Concetta.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

CATALFIMO: Saia, S-A-I-A.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what your father was like? Let's start with what he looked like.

CATALFIMO: Well, he was probably 5'8" tall and had black hair. He had a little moustache, thin. That's about all I can remember.

SIGRIST: What was his temperament like, his personality?

CATALFIMO: Well, eh, he was a good man, a good father. Yeah. He had a good temperament.

SIGRIST: Was he a strict man?

CATALFIMO: Yeah, kind of strict, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember getting into trouble when you were a kid at all?

CATALFIMO: No, no. No, I never was in any trouble. Maybe strict with the family once in a while, that's about all.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you the same about your mother. What did she look like?

CATALFIMO: She wasn't too tall. I really don't know, I can't remember much about it. She was a very brave, a very good mother, and my parents kept boarders. People came over from Italy, from their village they come

from, and they knew my father and they would come there and live with us, and at one time a mother had twenty-two boarders, and she done all the baking for them and washed all their clothes and done all the cooking for them. She had two kitchen ranges in the kitchen. I can remember that.

SIGRIST: What size of a house did all these people live in?

CATALFIMO: It wasn't too big a house. They all double, slept in double beds, and the best they could do.

SIGRIST: Did, when you were growing up in New York state as a kid, did you speak Italian in the house?

CATALFIMO: Did what?

SIGRIST: Did you speak Italian in your house here?

CATALFIMO: Yes, yes. I can speak Italian, not so well now, but at that time I could, and I could read and write it, too.

SIGRIST: You said that you moved a couple of times when you were a kid.

CATALFIMO: Yeah. My father went along with, where there was work, they went from Middle Falls to Gansvoort, New York, down the road a little there. And then from Gansvoort, it wasn't there too long, we moved to Fort Edward. I was just a little baby. My sister was born in Gansvoort. And

he worked on the railroad there, and he worked when they built the barge canal through Fort Edward. He worked on the barge canal there.

SIGRIST: Were you at Fort Edward up to the point where you went to Sicily?

CATALFIMO: Oh, yes, yes. I was at Fort Edward from, well, let's see. Let's see, 1905, 1907. We probably moved up 1908, and I was there until 1926.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about Fort Edward as a little boy?

CATALFIMO: Fort Edward was a very busy little village. It had a canal that went through it, and a railroad. It had a lot of railroad traffic. It was the main line on the railroad. And it was a branch line that went to Glens Falls from Fort Edward, and it had the old canal that went from the barge canal to Glens Falls where they took the pulpwood and all that kind of stuff, sulphur for the paper mills up Fort Edward and Glens Falls.

SIGRIST: Were there a lot of immigrants living in Fort Edward?

CATALFIMO: Quite a few, yes. Yes, there was quite a lot of Italians at that time there.

SIGRIST: And were the Italians doing, as you said, the common labor . . .

CATALFIMO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: For these projects?

CATALFIMO: Yeah. All these men, they used to come over, they were our boarders. They all worked in the paper mill there, most of them. And they done all kinds of work in the mill there.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of the boarders specifically? Does someone stand out in your mind who made an impression on you as a child?

CATALFIMO: No. We had so many up there. Some of them only stayed a short time and they would go on or go back to the old country again and settle down there after they earned a few dollars here, and that's all I can remember about it.

SIGRIST: Was this a hard life for your mother?

CATALFIMO: Yes, it was, because she worked, she had to work quite hard. That was two children and, as I say, at one time she had twenty-two boarders, and she done all the cooking and everything. And she really worked real hard. Had two kitchen ranges, and I remember she done all the cooking for them. They'd go to work in the morning, and they'd tell them what they would like for supper, and she would have it ready for them. And she washed all their clothes and baked bread, great big batches of bread. And they used to send, my father and mother used to send New York, to the wholesale place and buy macaroni and cheese and all that kind of stuff in quantities and sell it to the boarders.

SIGRIST: Did, were the boarders part of the family, or . . .

CATALFIMO: They were all friends. They all come from the same neighborhood in Italy there, and they knew my father, so that's how they would come. They would come to Fort Edward, get their start from Fort Edward there.

SIGRIST: In Fort Edward, do you remember there being any kind of prejudice against the immigrants?

CATALFIMO: No, no.

SIGRIST: No instances of that.

CATALFIMO: No, no. Everybody was friendly, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did all the Italians live in one part of Fort Edward?

CATALFIMO: No. They were spread around pretty much.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about church life when you were a kid in Fort Edward?

CATALFIMO: Well, we lived near the church, but nobody ever went to church much. They were too busy working. Some of them worked seven days a week and, as I say, my mother had so many boarders she had to work, and they didn't go to church too much.

SIGRIST: What were your chores when you were a kid? What did you have to do, like housework, or something that was specifically yours?

CATALFIMO: Well, I had to help with everything. Sweep the floor and run errands. And as I grew up a little older I used to, the little men that used to live with us, or some that didn't live with us, they used to apply for citizenship. And we used to have to go from Fort Edward to Hudson Falls to the county clerk to apply for citizenship. And they always used to have me go as an interpreter for them. So . . .

SIGRIST: Was that, was that something that you liked to do?

CATALFIMO: Oh, yeah. I used to like it. Yeah, because, well, I went to high school, I went to finish the second year of high school in Fort Edward, and I got a job during the summer months there, and came time to go back to school in the fall, and my mother said that she couldn't afford to keep me in school any more, so I had to quit school and keep my job. My intentions were being an interpreter. I liked languages. I could read and write Italian. I worked in, when I was twelve years old I worked in a shoeshine parlor there, and a Greek fellow. And I got so I could read some of the Greek newspaper, I took French in high school and I had no problem at all with French. I didn't even have to study it, it was so much near the Italian language. I really enjoyed languages.

SIGRIST: When you were a little kid in the boarding house, everyone's speaking

Italian around you. But you were going to school in Fort Edward.

CATALFIMO: Oh, yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: You were speaking English there?

CATALFIMO: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: So that's why you could do both.

CATALFIMO: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did your parents learn how to speak English at all?

CATALFIMO: Yeah, yeah. My mother especially. She could read and write, so she picked it up a little faster than my father.

SIGRIST: Do you remember . . .

CATALFIMO: They used to get the Italian newspaper, and I used to read the newspaper all along while I learned to read the newspaper. That's how I learned to read pretty well.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the boarders in the house maybe having musical instruments or anything like that?

CATALFIMO: No, no. Didn't any of them have any.

SIGRIST: How did you entertain yourselves? What did you do for fun in those

days?

CATALFIMO: Well, the men played cards on Sundays when they didn't have anything to do. But that was most generally Sunday afternoons, because Sunday mornings they were all busy. They didn't have to work at their jobs. The Italian people used to go get railroad ties. The ones that worked on the railroad, they would change the railroad ties, and they would bring them all to a crossing. And on Sundays the neighbors would get together and they would hire a team of horses and a wagon and go get the railroad ties and bring them home, one load to my house, one load to the other house. And on Sundays they'd have sawing bee. They'd have cross-cut saws and they'd cut the ties, Sunday mornings. And usually the lady of the house would get dinner ready for them if they got through sawing ties. And our job as kids was to split that wood and stack it up in the woodsheds for winter. And they all had great big gardens. We raised a lot of stuff in the garden, and we used to can a lot of stuff and store stuff in the cellar for winter.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did you grow in your garden?

CATALFIMO: Everything. Tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, celery. All kinds of vegetables. They'd get chickens so they would have eggs, and have chicken to eat once in a while.

SIGRIST: It sounds like even your fun time was hard work.

CATALFIMO: Yeah. When we didn't have anything to do we sat on the ground in the shade in the summer time. In the winter time they had these big potbelly stoves that were cherry red they'd get so hot it would be so cold out, and we'd sit around the stove. (he laughs) Lay down on the floor and go to sleep.

SIGRIST: Was that how the house was heated, with these big stoves?

CATALFIMO: Yeah. They had, yeah. They had a parlor stove and the kitchen ranges, and that would heat the house.

SIGRIST: Any heat in the bedroom at night?

CATALFIMO: No. No, there'd be frost on the windows an inch thick.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about going to school. How old were you when you started school at Fort Edward?

CATALFIMO: I was five when I started school, and I went from kindergarten straight through the second year of high. Never had no problem in school. Lessons were very easy for me. School went very easy for me.

SIGRIST: What were you like as a little kid? Describe yourself as a little kid. What were some of the things you really liked to do, for fun or just . . .

CATALFIMO: Nothing special. (he laughs) It was just routine. You got up in the morning, went to school, come back in the afternoon and helped around

the house until I was about twelve years old, and then I started to work in a milk station. I used to go to work at the milk station in the morning before I went to school, help unload milk cans and get ice out of the ice house. And I got two quarts of milk for that. That's all the pay I got. Then as I grew a little older I got to working a little more there, Saturday mornings and like that. And I used to earn a little money that way. And then, as I say, when I was twelve years old I used to go to the milk station in the morning. I'd go to the milk station probably six o'clock in the morning and help with the work there, and then eight o'clock I'd go to school and get out of school for lunch at a quarter to twelve. We'd walk home to lunch, be back at school at one o'clock. Got out of school at three-thirty, and at three-thirty after I was twelve years old I went to work in a shoeshine parlor after school, worked there until eight o'clock or so at night, and then went home. And that was seven days a week. The milk station was seven days a week, and the shoeshine parlor was seven days a week.

SIGRIST: So you worked hard.

CATALFIMO: I worked very hard, yeah.

SIGRIST: Let's talk about the trip to Sicily. Tell me first why your parents wanted to return to Sicily.

CATALFIMO: They wanted to visit my grandparents. They hadn't seen them in

seven, eight, nine years probably, and they wanted us to see our grandparents, too, my sister and I.

SIGRIST: What was your sister's name?

CATALFIMO: Frances.

SIGRIST: And are these your maternal grandparents or paternal? Mother or father's side?

CATALFIMO: Both. Well, yeah, my mother's, my mother's mother was living. My mother's father was dead, but my father's father and mother were both living, yeah.

SIGRIST: When you were seven years old, what did Sicily mean to you? Before you got there what were you thinking?

CATALFIMO: Nothing. I didn't know nothing about it. All I can remember is going from Fort Edward to New York. I remember that.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you remember about the trip to New York.

CATALFIMO: Well, we got on the train, and I remember New York. I don't remember just exactly what happened, only getting on the boat. I remember getting on the boat. The name of the boat was the Berlin, and we started over and when we got to the Rock of Gibraltar the boat docked there for a while, so then we could see the scenery, the rock and

everything. And I remember down on the water there was people with little boats down there, and people up in the big boat used to drop coins down, and when the coins hit the water they'd dive off those little boats and pick up the coins in the water. Another thing I remember was that there was people down there on the boats that had fruit for sale, and I guess they had a rope with a basket. They would send it down with money in it, and they would put fruit in it and then we'd pull it up. And that's the first time I ever ate fresh figs, and I really enjoyed them. They really tasted good. And then we went, from there the boats started up again, and we went to Naples. I remember getting off the big boat at Naples and getting on a smaller boat and going down to Sicily.

SIGRIST: Can you describe your accommodations on the boat going over to Sicily, where you slept on the boat?

CATALFIMO: Well, there was, of course, back in those days the boats had, maybe they do now, too, but they had three different classes, class one, two and three. And our people didn't have much money, so they mostly went in class three. And we slept in bunks, one over the other, in little rooms with bunks in them.

SIGRIST: Who was in your room? Who was with you?

CATALFIMO: Father and Mother and my sister and I.

SIGRIST: Did other people from Fort Edward go on this trip?

CATALFIMO: No.

SIGRIST: Just your parents.

CATALFIMO: Just us, yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about, let's see. This is November of 1912.

CATALFIMO: Yeah. The latter part of November, the first part of December. I don't remember just. All I remember we were there for Christmas.

SIGRIST: You were in Sicily for Christmas.

CATALFIMO: I was in Sicily for Christmas. I remember they had, Christmas Eve they had a procession down through the streets. And I remember they had sheep in the procession, and that's about all I remember. It wasn't, it was warm down there. It wasn't cold.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit, was the boat ride rocky or was it smooth?

CATALFIMO: No. Going over it was nice and smooth. It took us ten days going over. Coming back it was rough. It took us twelve days coming back.

SIGRIST: Do you remember where they fed you on the boat going over?

CATALFIMO: Where they fed us?

SIGRIST: Where they fed you.

CATALFIMO: It seems as though they brought the food to our rooms. Seems as though we ate in our little rooms there. I'm quite sure we did.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much luggage you took with you to Sicily?

CATALFIMO: No. No, I don't remember that.

SIGRIST: All right. So the boat goes to Naples, and then you took a smaller boat to Palermo.

CATALFIMO: Yes.

SIGRIST: Tell me about what it was like seeing your grandparents for the first time.

CATALFIMO: Well, it was just, you know, just like any child seeing their grandfather and grandmother for the first time, happy. We lived, we stayed with my maternal grandmother while we was there. And I remember my grandfather, my paternal grandfather. He had vineyards. I remember that. And it was time that they pruned the vineyards, and he had a donkey and he took me on the donkey with him one day and he had a little small pair of pruning shears, and he showed me how to prune vineyards. Another thing, I remember one time they took me where they pressed olives for olive oil, and my grandmother had fresh homemade bread, and they had this great big place in this room here,

and they dumped these black, ripe olives on the, well, like a platform, but it had holes in it. And there was a horse that went around that had a big stone on it, and the stone would roll around and mash the olives, and the oil would get down into the vat in the bottom. And we had, my grandmother had fresh homemade bread that she dipped in olive oil and put a little salt on it and we had it for lunch.

SIGRIST: What was your grandmother's name?

CATALFIMO: Carmella.

SIGRIST: And her last name? This is your mother's . . .

CATALFIMO: My mother's. Saia was her marriage name.

SIGRIST: And what was her husband's name?

CATALFIMO: Uh, Sam, Samuel. He was dead at the time when we went there, but that's where we stayed.

SIGRIST: Can you describe her house or apartment or whatever?

CATALFIMO: Well, it was a two-story house, and the first story wasn't finished. It was a dirt floor, and we lived upstairs. And I remember in one corner, I assume it was downstairs, there was, it was like a brick oven, like. I don't know what it was made out of. And that's where they done the baking, baked the bread in. They would have wood or branches from

trees, and they'd start a fire in this oven and let the oven get hot, and then they'd pull out the ashes and bake their bread in there. They'd have a big pallet, like, and they'd put the bread on there and shove it into the oven and bake it in this oven.

SIGRIST: As a little kid having come from a very different kind of world, what did you think about Sicily? It all must be very strange to you.

CATALFIMO: Yeah, it was strange, but we was gone quite a bit from one house to another while we were there, visiting all our parents, their friends and all like that. My parents had friends and relatives, cousins, like that, and we used to go around visiting them quite a bit. And I remember one time we went to a cousin's wedding, and I can remember that. And they had sort of a reception at the house where they were going to live, and instead of paper confetti they, for when they throwed, they throwed money and hard candies for confetti. Jordan almonds was what they used for confetti, and money. And I remember the big bed in the bedroom there where the bride and groom was going to be, and then people put money on the bed there. That's about all I can remember about that.

SIGRIST: So your parents had lots of family then.

CATALFIMO: Oh, yeah, yeah. They was all big families. They had brothers and sisters and cousins. They had big families.

SIGRIST: What was your father's parents' names?

CATALFIMO: My grandfather was Vincenzo, and my grandmother was Francesca.

SIGRIST: And this is the gentleman who has the vineyards, correct?

CATALFIMO: Yes.

SIGRIST: Talk to me a little bit about what your father's parents were like. What do you remember of them as people? What were their personalities like?

CATALFIMO: Well, I was just seven years old. I don't remember too much. I remember my grandfather and grandmothers all making a big fuss over us. I remember that.

SIGRIST: Did they give you any presents? Do you remember getting a present that they might have given you?

CATALFIMO: No, no. I don't remember any.

SIGRIST: You talked about, you remembered Christmas and there being a procession in the town. Do you remember anything else about celebrating Christmas in Sicily? Did you go to church?

CATALFIMO: No, no, no, no. We did go to church one day. It was a feast day of a saint. There was quite a ways from my parents' house there. We had

to walk a long time to get there. It seems though that there was a miracle performed with the saints there. It was way up on a cliff, like. It seems that a baby fell off this cliff in the water. That's the way the story goes. And the mother prayed to the saint for the baby not to drown. There was water there. And all of a sudden they say the water dried up and they saved the baby. So they had a feast day every year there, and I remember going to the church on that day there, at this feast.

SIGRIST: How did your father get the time off to go to Sicily from his job in America?

CATALFIMO: Well, I really don't know, unless he was between jobs.

SIGRIST: A lot of the jobs he had only lasted for a certain . . .

CATALFIMO: Yeah, yeah. They was always looking for work. They didn't have steady work in one job all the time.

SIGRIST: Who took care of all your mother's boarders while you were gone?

CATALFIMO: My aunt.

SIGRIST: And whose relation is she?

CATALFIMO: I don't know. I really don't remember. Whether they took care of themselves, or whether my aunt was there or not. My mother's, my brother, my mother's brother's wife. But they were there at one time. I

can't remember if that was that time or not, whether the boarders took care of themselves while we was gone those two, three months or whether they had somebody there, I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything else about the trip to Sicily that really stuck out in your mind as being so different than what you were used to in America?

CATALFIMO: No, not really, just the boat ride and changing boats. I remember that.

SIGRIST: Now, okay. So you were there until February. You left . . .

CATALFIMO: February first we left there.

SIGRIST: You left February first. Now, tell me how you got back.

CATALFIMO: Back?

SIGRIST: Back to America.

CATALFIMO: Well, we went from Palermo to Naples again on a little boat and got on the big boat, the Adriatic, and we started from there and came right down straight through. Took, as I say, the ocean was kind of rough on the trip back, so it took us a little longer. My wife's mother, she was with us, she was seasick, and my mother was kind of seasick. My sister was seasick. But it didn't bother me any. I was going around the boat with my father and looking over the edge of the boat with the

waves and stuff like that.

SIGRIST: Was there anything, any kind of entertainment for you to do on the boat?

CATALFIMO: No.

SIGRIST: But you're coming back on a different boat. This was the Adriatic.

CATALFIMO: We went over on the Berlin, came back on the Adriatic.

SIGRIST: Can you explain for us on tape about your wife, your present wife, her family, and then coming back with you. Can you explain about that?

CATALFIMO: Well, as I said before, my wife's father and mother came over here about the same time that my parents came. And my wife's older sister was born here in Middle Falls, and her brother was born in Middle Falls, and then they went back I imagine probably, see, my sister-in-law, my wife's older sister, was born in 1906 or '07, and my, her brother was born about 1908, and that's when they went back, right after that. Because my wife was born 1910 over there. (break in tape) That he wasn't coming back for her and the three children. (break in tape) When my wife's family went back, they intended . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: I see. So their family is doing something similar to your family.

CATALFIMO: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: They're going back and forth.

CATALFIMO: Yeah. Only when my wife's family went back they intended to stay there. They didn't go just for a visit. But they built a house, and they ran short of money, so he came back over here to earn some more money, and he got sick. So while we were there he wrote to his wife and told her to, that he wasn't coming back for her and the three children, to come with us so she would have company coming back from Italy to Fort Edward.

SIGRIST: What is your wife's name, please?

CATALFIMO: Anna they call her now, but she was named Antoinette.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

CATALFIMO: Her name was Munafo, M-U-N-A-F-O.

SIGRIST: So when you came back on the Adriatic, you had some playmates.

CATALFIMO: Yeah. Yeah, it was my sister and I and, who is my wife now, and her brother and her sister.

SIGRIST: Tell me, you said it took how many days coming back, a little bit longer?

CATALFIMO: Yeah. It was twelve days. We docked on the twelfth day but we couldn't get off the boat because it was a holiday, and longshoremen or whatever they were didn't work on the holiday, so we had to stay till the next day, the thirteenth, we got off the boat.

SIGRIST: Now were you, were you . . .

CATALFIMO: It was awful cold weather. I remember that. It was very cold. It was February, and it was very cold.

SIGRIST: Well, of course, you had just been in a warm climate, too. When you came back from Sicily, is there anything that you can remember that you took as a souvenir from Sicily?

CATALFIMO: No, nothing.

SIGRIST: Would you say that the trip to Sicily made your parents very happy?

CATALFIMO: Yeah, yeah. They were happy to see their parents again and . . .

SIGRIST: Now, you said you had to stay on the boat. Were you held in your cabin?

CATALFIMO: Yeah. Well, we could walk around and everything. We just couldn't get unloaded. They wouldn't unload the boat. Nobody was working that day, so we had to stay till the next day.

SIGRIST: Now, what happened when they finally let you go off the boat?

CATALFIMO: Well, we came though what I suppose was Ellis Island. I remember going through this building there, and there was, I imagine there were doctors there, and they was examining us, and they were vaccinating us. Look at your hair to see if you had any bugs, and look at your throat and eyes and vaccinated us and sent us on through.

SIGRIST: How long do you think you were there?

CATALFIMO: Oh, not too long. It was, they were all lined up and they were pushing right on up through, just as fast as they could go. I remember when we went over my mother had us vaccinated up in Fort Edward there, and the doctor that was vaccinating us up at Fort Edward had a different method I guess. He kept scraping, scraping, scraping on our arm and then he put some medication there. Coming back all they done was they had something like a pin, and they just jabbed your arm a couple of times and that was it and sent you right on through.

SIGRIST: Was this, was this something scary for a little boy?

CATALFIMO: No, no. We didn't know what was coming off. We were just standing up in line, keep right on going.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what it looked like?

CATALFIMO: Just a lot of people. That's all I can remember.

SIGRIST: Now, was there someone waiting for you at Ellis Island, or did you just . . .

CATALFIMO: No, no. My father had been through it, and my mother had been through it before, and they just kept right on coming. They got out of Ellis Island. It seems as though we got on a ferry from Ellis Island to the mainland, and I don't remember then, I remember getting off the train up to Fort Edward, but how we got on the train in New York I don't remember.

SIGRIST: And still your wife's family, your wife-to-be's family, is still with you.

CATALFIMO: They was with us because her father was in Fort Edward waiting.

SIGRIST: Did you have to stay overnight in New York, or did you just go right up to Fort Edward?

CATALFIMO: No, right on up to Fort Edward.

SIGRIST: When you got back from Sicily, and this is in February of 1913, did you miss it? Did you like the lifestyle in Sicily, or were you anxious to get back?

CATALFIMO: I was anxious to get back, yeah. I was anxious to get back to school.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about what happened to your wife's family when they got back. They met the father, who was here. And then what happened?

CATALFIMO: Well, they settled down in Fort Edward, and he worked on, he worked on the railroad for a good many years. He retired from the railroad. Where he worked before that, I don't know. But we lived neighbors across the street from each other, and everybody was neighborly. And Sunday afternoons in the summertime they'd sit out under the trees and visit or play cards or something like that.

SIGRIST: Did your parents even think about returning to Sicily to live?

CATALFIMO: No, not that I know of.

SIGRIST: Was it difficult for them saying goodbye to their parents?

CATALFIMO: I couldn't tell you that.

SIGRIST: Did any other family members from either your mother's family or your father's family come to the United States to live?

CATALFIMO: Oh, yeah. They all, my father had five or six brothers that all came over here and lived here, different parts of New York state, Buffalo and Dunkirik, Cohoes, Fort Edward. He had two sisters. They never come over here. They got married and stayed in Italy. One of my uncles, my

aunt's husband came over for a while and then he went back too and stayed there.

SIGRIST: Stayed in Sicily.

CATALFIMO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Was that common for people to come to America, stay here for a while, make some money and then go back?

CATALFIMO: Quite a lot of them did, yeah. Young men come over here and earn money and went back over there and got married and stayed there. They had money enough so they could buy a little property or something like that that they could earn a living on, and a lot of them stayed here, scattered around the country. They didn't stay in New York state. Some stayed here.

SIGRIST: I suppose they went where the work was.

CATALFIMO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So did your mother come back to her boarding house? Is that . . .

CATALFIMO: Yeah. Oh, yeah. They was all there waiting. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: And hungry, too.

CATALFIMO: Probably. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: I wanted to talk a little bit about World War One and your memories of the war and how it might have affected your family. For instance, did your father have to fight, or anything like that?

CATALFIMO: No, no. Let's see. I remember Woodrow Wilson was the President, and I remember the boys leaving Fort Edward to go to fight. At that time we had a band in Fort Edward and I played in the band. I was only eleven or twelve years old, and I played in the band. And one bunch of boys, they all left from Greenwich here. The draft board was in Greenwich. And so they had to come down from Fort Edward to Greenwich. I remember we came down in what they called an open air trolley. It was in the summertime, they had trolley cars that was all open. And we came down on the trolley, and the band came down with them, and we stayed overnight here in Greenwich. And the next morning we had, we were paraded during the night, and the next morning we went down to the railroad station with the boys and seen them off, and then we went back to Fort Edward. And, let's see . . .

SIGRIST: Do you remember any kind of hardship here because of the war, perhaps rationing of some sort?

CATALFIMO: No. Things, Fort Edward was a railroad center, and it had a big yard there where they made up trains to go to different locations. And it was a very, very busy place up there. They had a lot of extra help on the

railroad and had extra trains and it was very, very busy. Very busy in the paper mill. There was a lot of work for everybody.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, of course your parents are European. Do you remember how they felt about World War One?

CATALFIMO: No.

SIGRIST: Your father never talked about it either.

CATALFIMO: No.

SIGRIST: Did they have friends who might have been lost in the war?

CATALFIMO: Not that I know of.

SIGRIST: And what about during the war if they were, excuse me, worried about their own families in Sicily?

CATALFIMO: I imagine they probably were. I don't remember. I don't know much about it.

SIGRIST: Can you remember growing up in Fort Edward, if there was some drawback to coming from an immigrant family? Was there something difficult for you because you were from an immigrant family, something made hard because of that?

CATALFIMO: No, no. Everybody was friendly. We got along nice in school with

everybody. We even had some colored kids in school with us, and they was all friendly. No problem, no racism or anything like that.

SIGRIST: Why don't you tell me just quickly what you did as an adult, what career you chose.

CATALFIMO: Well, as I say, I was working in the milk station, and, when I was sixteen, seventeen years old I had finished my second year of high school and I got jobs in the milk station firing the boilers. They had two boilers there, and I was firing the two boilers. And then September time I go back to school, my mother said that I, she couldn't afford to keep me in school any more, so I had said I should keep my job. I wanted to go back to school the worst way. And the truant officer went and talked to her, but she went and seen the principal of the school and he said that I didn't have to go. I was sixteen years old, passed, and I didn't have to go back to school. So I had to keep my job, and I worked there until I was twenty-one years, twenty years old. And I got pneumonia. It was a very damp place to work in. It was cold, and we used to ship milk to New York, and we used to have to, I used to run the bottling machine afterwards, and used to run these cases of milk into the milk car, what they call the milk car, freight car, refrigerated cars. And we used to have to stand beside this door, and the capping machine would sometimes break some of the bottles and milk would spill all over, and we had boots on and rubber aprons, and the milk would freeze on us if

you'd stand by that door there, and I got pneumonia. And the doctor told me that I'd better get out of that place, because I was only a young lad and it wasn't good for me to be there like that. So my mother thought I should be a barber, so I started to learn to be a barber up at Fort Edward. And when the doctor told me to get out of the milk station I went to Albany and went to barber school there.

SIGRIST: Why? Did you have an inclination to do that before? It seems like such a dramatic career shift.

CATALFIMO: Well, I had a cousin that was a barber, and my mother thought it was nice if I'd be a barber. So I went to Albany and I went to barber school, and I worked down there. After I went to barber school I got a job down there, an apprentice, worked there six months. And business kind of dropped off, and the owner of the barber shop said that he didn't need me any more. So I thought I had enough of the city. I wanted to come back up here in the sticks again. And so I came back home looking for a job in Fort Edward, and went to Glens Falls looking for a job. And a fellow up there told me that there was an opening down here in Greenwich looking for a man, so I came down to Greenwich and he hired me. His name was Woodbury, Warren Woodbury. And I came down here December 1, 1926 and went to work for him. And I didn't intend to stay only just for the winter. What I wanted to do was go up to Lake George and see if I could get a job up Lake George and then work

there in the summer time and then go to Florida in the winter time and get a job down there. But in the meantime we got married and my wife said, "No. If we have children they'd be on the road all the time, and wouldn't have no home." So I stayed here and worked for him for four years, and he used to do a lot of ladies' haircutting, and we had a lot of lady customers. And the beauty parlors commenced to open up, and the ladies started going to the beauty parlors, and his business dropped off. And he was kind of elderly, and at that time the young men was looking for a haircut like Rudolph Valentino with the sideburns and like that. Of course, I had learned that down in Albany, so I had quite a lot of customers. So it came winter time, and Mr. Woodbury asked me if I could take a five dollar cut in pay. I was getting twenty-five dollars a week, and it was winter time, I couldn't do nothing else, my wife was working down the shirt shop. So I said, "Yeah, I'll take a five dollar cut." So I worked all winter for twenty dollars a week, and then come Easter week we was pretty busy and I was keeping track of how much work I was doing and how much he was doing, and I was taking in more money than he was, because I had all the young customers, and he didn't give me anything extra. So I didn't say anything. So then come April a friend of mine belonged to the masons. And a fellow had a little lunch room in all the buildings down on Main Street, and there was a barber shop down in the lunch room in this building. And he told my friend, he says, "Why don't you have your friend come down and buy out Walt Weelock?" He owned the barber shop up there. He says, he

says, "He's six months behind in rent." He says, "And I'm going to kick him out come spring." So my friend's name was Bob Thomas. Bob come down and told me about it, and I went down and seen Walt Weelock. And I says, "I heard you want to sell." And he says, "Yeah." He says, "I'll sell," he says. So I asked him what he'd take. He says he'd take five hundred dollars. He didn't have anything in the shop. "Well," I said, "that's more than I was figuring on." I said, "I was figuring on four hundred." I said, "But we'll split the difference. I'll give you four fifty." He says, "Okay." So I went in business for myself in April 1931, and I had a, I was in business here for forty-one or -two years.

SIGRIST: You weren't even going to stay in Greenwich.

CATALFIMO: No, but I've been here ever since, since 1926.

SIGRIST: What year did you marry your wife?

CATALFIMO: 1928. June 24, 1928.

SIGRIST: And can you give me the names of your children.

CATALFIMO: Yeah. My oldest son is James, and the other son was Donald. James is an attorney, who is Michael's father, and Donald is a science teacher down in Burnt Hills Ballston Lake School.

SIGRIST: And Michael, because we're on tape, I'll simply say Michael is your

grandson.

CATALFIMO: Yeah. I have two grandsons, Michael and . . .

SIGRIST: David.

CATALFIMO: David.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you a couple of final questions. One is, I want to know how do you think your father influenced you in your life? What was the biggest influence that your father had on you in your life?

CATALFIMO: Well, he didn't have too much influence on me because, oh, I was, I don't remember just how old I was, but my father and mother split up, and he went to Cohoes, and my sister went with him, lived with him, and I stayed in Fort Edward with my mother. So really I didn't live with my father too many years.

SIGRIST: Was there communication, though, between you and your father?

CATALFIMO: Yeah. My mother always told me, she says, "That's your father," she says, "and you go down and see him." I used to go down and see him, see my sister, yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, then let me turn the question around and say what kind of, what's the most important influence your mother may have had on you in your life?

CATALFIMO: She was always guiding me to do the right thing. She always told me I should learn how to cook, which I can do, and work, and I used to mow lawns, get five or ten cents for mowing a lawn, and all that kind of stuff. And she was always very good to me, and when I started to work as a little boy in the milk station and the shoeshine parlor, she started a bank account for me and saved all the money for me which, one reason why I wanted to finish school and go to college. I had about eight hundred dollars when I finished the second year of high school, saved up, which would run a long ways towards college back in those days.

SIGRIST: She knew what hard work was.

CATALFIMO: She was very, very good to me. Always wanting me to be saving, be good and go straight.

SIGRIST: My final question to you is this. In what way do you think, you're Sicilian. What aspect of you is Old World? Is there some part of you, or some way that you think, or perhaps some expression that you use that comes from your Old World background?

CATALFIMO: No, no. Nothing of that.

SIGRIST: Okay. Well, Mr. Catalfimo, I want to thank you . . .

CATALFIMO: You're welcome.

SIGRIST: . . . very much for taking you down memory lane this afternoon.

CATALFIMO: Okay.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off for James Catalfimo, and I'm in Greenwich in upstate New York on January 25, 1993.