

EI-269

JOSEPHINE FALCONIERI CANCELLIERI

BIRTH DATE: SEPTEMBER 25, 1927

INTERVIEW DATE: 3/28/1993

RUNNING TIME: 55:30

INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME

INTERVIEW LOCATION: WETHERSFIELD, CONNECTICUT

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 4/1994

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 6/1994

SICILY, 1947

AGE 20

PORT OF EMBARCATION: ROME (BY AIR)

RESIDENCES: VITTORIA  
HARTFORD, CT

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Sunday, March 28, 1993. I'm in Wethersfield, Connecticut with Josephine Cancellieri, who came from Italy to America in 1947.

CANCELLIERI: Right.

SIGRIST: Present also is Sal Cancellieri, who is Mrs. Cancellieri's husband and who is an important player in this story. Good afternoon. Thank you for letting me come.

SAL: You're welcome, sir.

SIGRIST: Thanks. Let me begin by, Mrs. Cancellieri, can you tell me your birth date, please.

CANCELLIERI: September 25, 1927.

SIGRIST: And what is your maiden name, please?

CANCELLIERI: My maiden name is Falconieri.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that for us?

CANCELLIERI: F-A-L-C-O-N-I-E-R-I.

SIGRIST: And where in Italy were you born?

CANCELLIERI: I was born in Italy, Vittoria, Sicilia.

SIGRIST: Oh, in Sicily.

CANCELLIERI: Sicily.

SIGRIST: Oh, okay. What was the name of the town?

CANCELLIERI: Vittoria.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

CANCELLIERI: V-I-T-T-O-R-A, I-A.

SIGRIST: And where in Sicily is that?

CANCELLIERI: It's near Siracua.

SAL: In the most southern part of Sicily.

CANCELLIERI: It's a big town. It's about fifty thousand people.

SIGRIST: Is it right on the sea coast?

CANCELLIERI: Yeah, it's right on the sea coast, near the ocean, too.  
It's only twenty minutes from the ocean.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you, what did your father do for a living?

CANCELLIERI: Oh, my father was a winemaker. Vittoria is a very good place for wine, where they make the wine, and my father used to make, fix the wine, and sometimes it come sour, and he used to put the stuff in there, you know.

SIGRIST: Did he have his own winery, or did he work for someone?

CANCELLIERI: He worked for somebody else, yeah.

SIGRIST: What was your dad's name?

CANCELLIERI: My daddy's name was Biagio, B-I-A-G-I-O.

SIGRIST: And can you describe what he looked like to me in words?

CANCELLIERI: He's like, go get his picture.

SIGRIST: No, in words, please.

CANCELLIERI: Oh. Well, he was, he was about six feet tall and he was with dark hair. When he die he still have black hair. And

he was a nice looking guy, and, nice educated, too. He liked music, he liked operas. In Sicily used to be with my mother all the time good. They were married about forty-eight years, but then he passed away.

SIGRIST: What was your mom's name?

CANCELLIERI: My mom's name Maria.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

CANCELLIERI: Cancellieri. My husband and I, we are first cousins.

SIGRIST: Oh, I see.

CANCELLIERI: My husband visit us in Italy, and that's where we meet each other. But I never met him before.

SIGRIST: I see. Well, we'll get to that after we get through your childhood. ( they laugh )

SAL: Of course.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit also what your mother looked like.

CANCELLIERI: My mother looked like me, just like. But she's old-fashioned way. She like everything, cooking and sewing. And she lives in Florida right now.

SIGRIST: Did you have brothers and sisters?

CANCELLIERI: I have one sister. She's younger than me. She's eight years younger than me. That's all I have.

SIGRIST: What was her name?

CANCELLIERI: Telizia. T-E-L-I-Z-I-A. And she got married. She married a sailor, too, from Italy, too. They're here.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me about the house that you grew up in?

CANCELLIERI: That house where we grew up was a small place, but it was comfortable. We had bedrooms upstairs. The first floor we had a living room and a kitchen and a dining area. It was a very comfortable place for us.

SIGRIST: Was it right in town?

CANCELLIERI: Right in the town.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the town a little bit for me? You said it was a big city.

CANCELLIERI: It's a big city, but the town was, ( short break in the recording ) we had all kind of schools that was there.

SAL: How many people?

CANCELLIERI: Fifty thousand, that's all. I have to say it again. There was fifty thousand people, and they got all kinds of schools, a nice church, and a lot of activities. There had a soccer game every Sunday, and they had, flat, it was no hills, nothing. It was all flat. It was very nice. Everybody goes for a walk every afternoon, go back and forth. It was very nice. I enjoyed when I was young over there, you know.

SIGRIST: When you were a little girl, what kind of fun did you have in the city?

CANCELLIERI: Oh, we used to play outside with all the kids. Then I went to school. I went to school, I was supposed to be a teacher. But then when my husband came in my home town, I had to drop the school because I want to come in this country. And the activities, that's what we had. You know, we used to go out. They had, like, a park. We used to go walk around. Oh, fun.

SIGRIST: Were there games that you remember that you played? Do you remember any kinds of games?

CANCELLIERI: All kind of games.

SAL: The kids played hopscotch, something like that. And then

you played cards. You used to play cards.

CANCELLIERI: We used to play cards with little nuts, with the little nuts. We didn't have no money then, but with the little nuts. And then we used to eat it when we finished that. ( Mr. Cancellieri laughs ) We used to play outside in the four corners. We used to stay in the other four corners. Sometimes we stay all together. We dance. We used to have a record and we used to dance. And we used to have someone could play accordion and in that way we make like a little party. My mother, she used to make something, and then she offered everybody, and we used to have a lot of fun.

SIGRIST: Was she a good cook when you were a little girl?

CANCELLIERI: Well, I was, never was cook. My mother, she was a good cook.

SIGRIST: What, when you were a little girl what were your favorite foods?

CANCELLIERI: Oh, my mother, my grandmother, she used to make eggplant, stuffed eggplant. And she used, and we used to love that. And then we used to have fish. The fish was not like here. It was very, very fresh. My father used to bring it up every day and we used to fry it and eat it all the time.

We never had much money then, but whatever we had was good, you know. We made some sauce, we'd put a little bit of meat, but was tasty, you know.

SIGRIST: Was there some kind of a farmer's market or something in town where you could buy vegetables?

CANCELLIERI: No. We had to go all the way to the town, and they had one street or sometimes they pass by the street, the people they selling broccoli, you know, anything. All kind of vegetables, you know.

SIGRIST: You mentioned a grandmother. Whose mother was this?

CANCELLIERI: My mother, my mother's father, we used to live together. My mother's father . . .

SAL: You mean your father's mother.

CANCELLIERI: My father's mother, my father's mother. We used to live in the same house, you know.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about your grandmother?

CANCELLIERI: Oh, my grandmother, my grandfather especially. He was, I used to be with him all the time. He used to take me to school, come back. And he used to cook my breakfast in the morning, take me to school every morning.

SAL: She was very close to her grandfather.

CANCELLIERI: I was very, very close with him. I don't even want to go to my mother, I want to stay with him all the time. My grandmother, too.

SIGRIST: What did he look like?

CANCELLIERI: My grandfather was a tall guy, but he was blind. Something happened in one eye. They took it out, and he was blind. But he knew where to go. He was a very smart guy. And he's telling everything what happened, because he was in America, too. And he was telling this story about it.

SAL: Maybe you want to mention the time when you'd have to do bills, how much money he spent, and he . . .

CANCELLIERI: Oh, yeah. My mother, my mother used to make the same cooking in the same house. And they say, "Oh, you spent this money." He says, "No, wait a minute." He was figuring it out without writing, by his mind. And he said, "Oh, I think we made a mistake. Five cents extra. You got to owe me, you owe me five cents." My mother say, "Okay, I give you the five cents. As long as you quiet down, you know." ( Mr. Cancellieri laughs )

SIGRIST: Do you remember a present that your grandfather gave you that was very dear to you?

CANCELLIERI: A present? Not. Really, they don't give that much presents over there, but they use, they show so much affection, you know. They show, you don't even care. It's not like here at all. He gave me this, he gave me that. He always give me everything that I wanted, you know. Sometimes we used to go to the store for a haircut. He used to take me, because my father was working all the time. He used to take me, he used to buy me a grinder on the way, mortadella in a small bread. And, oh, I used to love that, you know. That's was a pretty good thing over there.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you about religious life in Sicily. What religion were you?

CANCELLIERI: Oh, we were Catholic.

SIGRIST: Tell me about how you practiced your religion when you were a little girl?

CANCELLIERI: Well, my grandmother, she was going to like in Lent time. She was going to church all the time, especially the last week, the last week she was, she just taking me all the

time. She say, "You got to come with me." When I was hungry, she had a bread inside there, ( gesturing inside her blouse ) and she'd say, "You hungry?" She used to put it underneath her blouse all wrapped up. She say, "You hungry? Here a piece of bread." "Oh, that's all?" ( she gestures taking cheese from her blouse ) "Okay, a piece of cheese." "Oh, I'm thirsty." And she used to take out the bottle, and she gave me, you know, like a little bottle of water. Everything that I wanted. I was over there, we listened to the priest say all kind of stuff, and I said, "Take me home." But I didn't suffer at all, because any time I wanted something she was ready. I don't know how she could do it.

SIGRIST: She had it all in her clothes. ( they laugh )

CANCELLIERI: I myself said. I don't know how she did it, you know. I really remember that.

SIGRIST: The noise that we hear on the tape is the refrigerator kicking on. Let me ask you, how did you practice your religion at home? Did you say prayers at home, or . . .

CANCELLIERI: At home? Yeah, we usually say prayers, and we usually say stories. My grandfather used to tell me a lot of stories.

SAL: Religious stories.

CANCELLIERI: And then he says, "Okay, now you sit over here, and I want you to read this book." So I started reading, and then all of a sudden I got tired. I figure my grandfather can't see. So I skip a couple of paragraphs. And he said, "Doesn't sound right. Go back where you come from." So I had to do it all over again. Oh, my God, I couldn't fool him at all, you know. Because he was blind and I thought he, you know. But he was a very smart guy, you know. And he realized that the things didn't match.

SIGRIST: That's interesting. Tell me about, you have a sister who's seven years younger, you said?

SAL: Yes.

CANCELLIERI: My sister?

SIGRIST: Seven years younger?

CANCELLIERI: Six years younger.

SIGRIST: Six years younger. Tell me what you remember about your mother being pregnant and having your sister.

CANCELLIERI: Oh, I don't remember my mother being pregnant, but I remember when my sister was born.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about it?

CANCELLIERI: I remember that they sent me away across the street. They had the kids in the house, then. They didn't have to go to the hospital. So, and they says, "You got to go across the street, because pretty soon we're going to give you, I don't know if it's a boy or girl." All of a sudden somebody came up to me and say, "Oh, you got a sister." So I went to see her, and she was so pretty laying on the crib over there, my mother, she was in bed. That's all I remember. But then, when we started to get older, we used to fight with my sister. She used to be jealous because I was older and they give me more stuff. She say, "Ah, how come she gets more than me. How come this? How come that?" You know. She say, but now we live far away, we love each other. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: When you were a young girl and your sister was a baby, did you have to take care of her?

CANCELLIERI: I take care of a little bit, and so one day we had bedrooms upstairs and my mother said, "Go get the baby. She's crying." And I fell from the stairs. She must have died. She must have got all bumped. I remember that, you know, six years old. But she was okay then, after a little

while, but I'm still thinking about how could she live, because she bumped all here, in the head, you know.

SAL: She fell down the stairs.

CANCELLIERI: I don't know how she lived. That was bad, you know. So, but that's the only thing that I remember. Then I don't remember feeding her. I don't remember much.

SIGRIST: You had your own life.

CANCELLIERI: Right, then I had my own life, you know.

SIGRIST: Did you have any pets when you were a kid, pets?

SAL: Like cats or dogs, or birds or rabbits.

CANCELLIERI: What do you mean "pets?" We never had it. I never liked it myself, even in here I didn't like it.

SIGRIST: You were city people anyway.

CANCELLIERI: Right, right. And I didn't care so much for any cat. I'm scared of dogs.

SAL: I think the economics had something to do with that.

CANCELLIERI: Yeah. I didn't, no, we never had it.

SIGRIST: You said your father was in the wine industry. Tell me a

little bit about the wine industry in that part of the world. Were a lot of people involved in the wine industry?

CANCELLIERI: The wine, they used to make the wine, and then they import and export here and there. And they . . .

SAL: Maybe you want to mention how Vittoria was known for wine making.

CANCELLIERI: The wine, they had those places where they make it. You know, they used to step in with the feet in there. They used to step there. And then I remember they used to come out, all the juice from one container, you know. And then they used to ferment it. They'd put on some kind of chemical, make sure the wine was good. And I remember they had quite a few places in my home town. And then I remember that was Mussolini came up to my town.

SIGRIST: Yes, what do you remember about that?

CANCELLIERI: He came to my town. But when I was young, that was Fascist, the Mussolini was there. And he came to my town, and he saw a big fountain of wine, you know.

SAL: And which, they made it purple.

CANCELLIERI: All the wine was coming down, all the wine. And then he

went to another town the next, the name is Gela. It was all grain.

SAL: Wheat and grain.

CANCELLIERI: Grain. And it says, "The wine is good, but I think the grain is better, because people couldn't eat. With this here, they could drink, but they could avoid this, so we want the grain." He was saying all kind of stuff. I remember that he say that, you know.

SIGRIST: Was that a scary time to be there?

CANCELLIERI: Uh, no, no.

SIGRIST: Did you know what was going on?

CANCELLIERI: No, it was not scary. Everybody was free, everybody open the doors. They slept with the door open. Nobody's scared. Nobody do anything. We used to go to the beach. People sleeping on the floor with all the doors open. Nobody was afraid. I never was afraid myself.

SIGRIST: What kind of clothes did you wear? Did you make them at home?

CANCELLIERI: I had, I was too fanatic about clothes, because I had somebody making the clothes for me. When I went to school,

all the girls, they wanted the same kind of clothes that I had. They used to go to the same tailor and say, "I want the same dress." But I don't know. The personality. They didn't have the kind of shape. They don't, shaped the same. "But how come she looks better than us?" "I don't know. Must be different, you know, shape." The way I had, I was long hair, you know. Maybe I was good looking.  
( they laugh ) Now I'm old.

SAL: The clothes just didn't look the same on them as they did on you, right?

SIGRIST: Well, tell me a little bit about school. You started talking a little bit about school.

CANCELLIERI: Then I got out the school. I went to magistrale, they call it magistrale. All the people, they get at it to be a teacher.

SAL: It's like a teacher's college.

CANCELLIERI: And we had all kind of friends. Every day we used to go for walk in the afternoon, and a lot of guys, they're looking, you know. Magistrale is like a college, because they come out from there. And we used to go for walk or coming back, or go to school. But we had a lot of

activities at this school, too. Like they had a gym, soccer. They had basketball. They had a lot, all kinds of activities at school.

SIGRIST: Could your parents read and write? Could your parents read and write?

CANCELLIERI: Oh, yes, both of them, yeah.

SIGRIST: Were they supportive of education?

CANCELLIERI: Uh, no, no. They didn't know that much.

SAL: The question was did they believe in education?

CANCELLIERI: Oh, yeah. My mother, she wanted me to go, you know, she wanted to go to school, and that's how I could have a good education, and some day I could be good, you know. Except my mother, she was, my father, too. But . . .

SIGRIST: How old were you when you graduated from school.

CANCELLIERI: Uh, well, I didn't graduate from the college because I got married. My husband came, and he wants me in here. But I was going to finish my school. But that happened that, that was the year, 1947, that if he could call me I could come in here, you know. So that's what happened. So what am I going to do? Got to drop out school, because there

were fifty girls, fifty girls that they had to go, coming here, all on the same plane. Nobody else was in the plane.

Just us fifty girls. We were supposed to meet all the soldiers, see, that was in the navy.

SAL: Servicemen.

CANCELLIERI: And so we had to go, so I had to drop out school to come in here.

SIGRIST: How did you meet your husband?

CANCELLIERI: He came to see his parents, his aunt, my mother, came to see there. And I invite all my friends from school to have a good time at my house. So somebody came with an accordion, another came with the drum, another came with the violin. They started playing. So that night we had a good time, you know, we had to dance, and I guess we fall in love. That's what happened. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: ( to Sal ) Let me ask your side of the story. Can you tell us a little bit about, first of all, why you were in Sicily, and second of all why you wanted to come over and see your aunt.

SAL: Well, I was part of the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean right after World War II.

SIGRIST: You need to speak up.

SAL: After World War II I was in the Sixth Fleet, and I was aboard the light cruiser Huntington, which the home base happened to be in Naples. And so it came to the point where I was, I was able to get about a two-week leave to go visit my aunts down in Vittoria, Sicily. And it was approved, and I went down there. And when I went down there I met my, she was my cousin then, but I had no intentions of getting serious with her. But, of course, as I was there I found out that she was really a very nice girl, probably something of the type of girl that I would be interested in, and then just took it from there.

SIGRIST: So how did the courtship begin?

SAL: Well, the courtship actually began after I left.

CANCELLIERI: Yeah, he wrote a letter.

SAL: I wrote a letter to my father, I says, "Pa," I says, "You know them well because it happens to be your sister, the mother." And I says, "Do you think that maybe they might be interested in my getting serious with your niece?" Because it's not an everyday thing that cousins marry. But, at any rate, they were very delighted about the whole

situation and therefore we went into serious business, and finally she came here in America, and as the story, later on here.

SIGRIST: Tell me how you felt when you got your letter in the mail, when he wrote you a letter.

CANCELLIERI: Well, I really, I say, "I don't think I want to go to America." I says, "I got everything over here. I got to finish my school." I says, "I don't know what I should do about it," you know. So I think it over, my mother said, "Oh, if you go to America probably you'll be better off because over there, you know, it's better things, a lot of stuff, you know." And so I make up my mind, and I say, "I think I should go." You know. So I wrote him back and I said, "Well, before I want to see you again." I say, "Okay, I want to see you again." And he came, he came here again. And we went out.

SIGRIST: You went back to Sicily? ( addressing Mr. Cancellieri )

SAL: Yeah.

CANCELLIERI: Yeah, he went, he came.

SIGRIST: How long ago, I mean, how much time?

CANCELLIERI: Maybe we had two weeks together?

SAL: No, no. In between the first time I saw her and the second, after about nine months, probably nine months . . .

CANCELLIERI: Yeah, yeah.

SAL: Because we were stationed, our home port was Naples, and from Philadelphia to Naples we would always go back and forth. Because that was a time when we had, there was a problem with Yugoslavia and Trieste, because going to Yugoslavia at that particular time, that was our main reason for being there, in that area.

SIGRIST: I see. Was this exciting for you when she said that she wanted to see you again?

SAL: Well, I'll tell you the truth. I really . . .

CANCELLIERI: We were too young, you know.

SAL: We were still little kids, really, basically speaking. I wasn't even twenty-one at that time, because I was in the navy until my twenty-first birthday I was discharged because I got in at seventeen, and at twenty-one you're out. So as far as emotions go I really wasn't that serious about it. But thank goodness, everything turned out to my

luck. I had really, very lucky.

SIGRIST: So how long, how long was he in Sicily the second time?

CANCELLIERI: Oh, I think about two weeks?

SAL: About two weeks.

CANCELLIERI: About two weeks. But we didn't go out by ourselves. We go with my mother, you know. ( Mr. Cancellieri laughs ) That's the way they used, old fashioned way.

SAL: We had Grandma, too.

CANCELLIERI: Then after I got this, that he came back here, then it's, he sent me a letter. He says, "If you want to come in this country, you've got to come at this time, December." This and that. Oh, my God. I says, "Okay." So I decided, "Okay." I wanted to go. I left everything.

SIGRIST: What did you know about America before you made the decision to come?

CANCELLIERI: I really don't know nothing too much about it. All I know that my mother-in-law, she wrote me a letter. And she say, "You want to come in this country, you've got to work here every day. You cannot stay home. You've got to work every day." But I figured I was going to be a teacher. I was

going to work every day anyway. So, "And over here you've got to work for your money," that's all. And I said, "My God, my mother-in-law, she's so strict." Maybe she don't want me, I figured. I figured the way this place was, you know.

SAL: She was totally . . .

CANCELLIERI: I said, "Okay, that's what she say, okay." I decided to stay.

SIGRIST: How did you get the money to come over?

CANCELLIERI: How did I get the what? Money?

SIGRIST: The money. Who gave you . . .

CANCELLIERI: My father pay from Rome, from, uh . . .

SAL: Vittoria.

CANCELLIERI: Vittoria to Rome. But then Rome, they sent me a ticket, Rome and New York. Besides that, they had to deposit, five hundred dollars deposit. If he didn't marry me, with that five hundred dollars they'd ship me back in Italy. Because that was, that's the way the law was.

SAL: The law was that.

SIGRIST: What did you take with you when you left?

CANCELLIERI: I didn't have no money at all when I come back. I just took a suitcase with a few nightgowns and underwears, you know, just clothes. And my mother, she gave me a couple of sheets.

SAL: Bed sheets.

CANCELLIERI: And that's all I had.

SAL: Very little.

CANCELLIERI: Just, I think.

SIGRIST: Did your mother or a friend or someone give a little party for you before you left?

CANCELLIERI: Oh, we had a big, big party before I came in here.

SIGRIST: Describe that.

CANCELLIERI: All my friends from school, they all came, they all cry. We all cry, because they don't want to leave me. But I had no other choice. I made up my mind, that's it. And my mother, she was so happy that I came in here, but she didn't like because, but she still had my sister with her, so she wasn't really that bad, you know.

SIGRIST: What about your father? How did he feel about it?

CANCELLIERI: My father, too. He feel the same way. They both came to left me in New York, in, uh, Rome, and they, boy, they cry, they cry. And believe it or not the plane took three days before we came in this country.

SIGRIST: How did you get from Sicily to Rome?

CANCELLIERI: From Sicily to Rome, by train.

SAL: That's twenty-four hours.

SIGRIST: That was a train that goes on the boat, sort of across?

CANCELLIERI: Oh, yeah. That goes to Messina.

SAL: The Straits to Messina.

CANCELLIERI: That go through the Straits over there, and then they got the train to Rome. By that time we had to travel all night to go there.

SIGRIST: Was that the first time you'd ever been in Rome?

CANCELLIERI: Yeah. That was the first time I'd been to Rome. I never was in Rome before.

SIGRIST: Did you have any impressions of Rome seeing it for the

first time?

CANCELLIERI: It was nice, but I didn't see nothing. We just went to the airport. That's all we did. So I didn't see nothing. My husband had to take me on vacation over there to see it.  
( they laugh )

SIGRIST: Years later. So you went right to the airport.

CANCELLIERI: To the airport, and we took a plane. We took a plane, Pan America.

SAL: No jets in them days.

CANCELLIERI: The Pan America, this one, we stopped in Lisbon. Lisbon we slept there all night because we couldn't go forward, I don't know what happened to the plane. Me, I was sick like a dog on the plane. Oh, my God. I thought I could never make it in here. The first time I'd been in a plane. I never was in a plane.

SIGRIST: Was that scary? What was that like, the first time?

CANCELLIERI: No. I was not scared. I just, my stomach doesn't feel right, you know, maybe because it was first time. But now it don't bother me any more.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what the inside of a plane looked

like to you?

CANCELLIERI: Oh, inside the plane was, it was different than here. It was a lot of space in the back, all this, what's the name?  
( Italian )

SAL: Uh, the flight officers?

CANCELLIERI: The flight officers. They all were sitting in the back. They were sitting in the back. The seats they were like this, ( she gestures ) three this side, three the other side, you know. That was like a round circle in the back.  
You know the way they have the kitchen now? It's not like that. They have like a round circle. And they were sitting all in there, they're talking to us. We couldn't, I understand a little bit of English because I went to school and I studied English. And I tried to write it down. I knew how to write, but I couldn't talk. So they tell me, "What time we're going to get there?" You know, we tried to explain what time we're going to get there. But they still didn't know, because the plane had trouble.  
The plane, one motor, I think, was out of control, because there was a big, big storm. So we stopped in Lisbon one night. The next day they took us and we stopped to Canada. And from Canada went, supposed to be to the International

Airport, but they may get to International Airport. We had to stop at La Guardia here. But my husband, he was, I think, at International Airport. So we were at La Guardia. We don't find nobody over there.

SAL: We just missed each other, because we . . .

CANCELLIERI: Somebody find the boyfriend over there, somebody not. I says, "Oh, my God. What are we going to?" All those people didn't have the boyfriends. They stay all on one side, they stay all in one side. The people, they had the boyfriends. I don't know what happened. Maybe they knew it, but they didn't know anything about it. Maybe they was in New York, he was in New York, but went to another airport. So what they did, after everybody left this lady, she came out. The boyfriend came, take the coat, put it in a pail, and gave a mink coat. "Oh, my God," I says, "they're giving mink coats. I wonder what our boyfriend is going to give us." (?) ( she laughs ) But anyway, we were so excited looking this, you know. This girl, she has so many dollars.

SAL: We didn't know what they were.

CANCELLIERI: So, anyway, all those girls, with no one here, they got to come with us. So we got to go to Ellis Island, but we

didn't know. And it will be on the boat, and we're going to take you somewhere. Oh! We started crying. We didn't know where we was going to end up, you know. So, okay. We got in the boat. Suitcase, all ripped up, three days being up and down. We carry everything, and we got to this place. We got to this place, and there was a big, big, big room with all the beds in there, this Ellis Island. And they say, "This your bed, this your bed." Everybody gave it to us. You show us, "Tonight you're going to sleep in there." Oh, my God, we started to cry. But they were so nice. They were very nice. It was the first thing in the morning, they tell us, "Leave everything in here." We got to go have breakfast.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

CANCELLIERI: The breakfast I never saw in my life. The dining room was full of all kinds of foods, all kinds of foods. Pancakes, French toast, sausage and bacons and all kind of Danish. Oh, unbelievable! But me, I didn't want to eat.

SAL: Why?

CANCELLIERI: You know why? It's funny. Because the black men, they serve, and I was scared. And I said, "Ah, those black

people!" ( she whispers ) "Forget it!" And I says, "I don't know." I says, "I never saw any black people." And I don't want to have nothing.

SAL: She was afraid.

CANCELLIERI: I don't want to have it. But the lady, she was so nice, and she said, "You know, you'll be here for a couple of days, you should eat." I said, "I don't care. I just want my boyfriend. That's it. I want to get out of here." So she said, "If you don't want to eat, it's up to you." Some people, they ate. Oh, my God. I wish it was now. I would eat anything. ( she laughs ) (?)

SIGRIST: Could you describe, I never did ask you, were you traveling with a group of other . . .

CANCELLIERI: With the other girls, the other little girls. We went on together.

SIGRIST: I mean, all the way from Rome you were traveling with a group of people.

CANCELLIERI: With all those girls, all those, the same age mine, probably one year younger.

SIGRIST: All going to marry . . . ( voices garbled )

CANCELLIERI: So when we got there, they says, "We got to try to get you boyfriend." I says, "What are we going to do?" He says, "We'll send a telegram to the address where they are." You know, we didn't have no money. So this lady, she said, "Oh." I says, "Can you borrow me fifty cents?" Somebody say, "Borrow me." She borrow everybody money. We didn't know who the lady was. So she borrowed the money every girl, I sent the telegram to my mother-in-law. So that happened, he called over there, he called over here in Hartford, and he says, "Ma, I don't think the plane got here. We're still here." "Oh, she's at the place, to Ellis Island. You'd better go over there." So . . .

SAL: I got to go to the Battery.

CANCELLIERI: That was, my father-in-law and him and another guy that was with them, telling them where to go. Right away they tried to get there, but they didn't get to Ellis Island. They couldn't go over there. They stayed right to the airport, I don't know where . . .

SAL: To the Battery, the Battery.

CANCELLIERI: I don't know where it was. To the Battery. So when they got there that way, they get the message. I think they call up, or anything. So I was sitting in there having,

then it was time for lunch. And the lady says, "You got to have lunch." Soup and all. I said, "I don't want nothing." I was sitting reading a book. I didn't want nothing. So what happened, this lady, she say, she came fast, she say, "Josephine Falconieri." I says, "Yeah!" I'm screaming. She says, "Oh," she says, "we got good news for you." I said, "What?" "Your boyfriend is coming to that place. About three o'clock we're supposed to leave this place, and we're supposed to go over there." That was still one o'clock. Those two hours, they looked like all day. So, and about three o'clock they put us in this boat, again. Oh, the people that they call, might not everybody. Some people, they were still there. I don't know what happened to them there. But I wish I had seen that lady again. I would have given the fifty cents she lent me back. ( she laughs ) I never gave it. So, but says, "When you get there, don't you move. Just got to be over there, we've got to write down all those kind of papers, and then you're going to see your boyfriend." I says, "Oh, sure. No problem." They put all kind of things, that they had to go this way or the other. But I remember the place when I went to see Ellis Island. I remember exactly where it was. That was forty years ago, forty-two years ago.

SIGRIST: So did you finally meet Mr. Cancellieri?

CANCELLIERI: So then what happened, ( raising her voice ) then what happened, this boat opened up the door, and right there, and I spotted him from far away. The girl said not to move. I left all the suitcase and I run away, I run to see him. She says, "Ahhh!" I says, "I don't care. I don't want to know nothing." I says, "Now you go over there." So, but then they took me over there, you know. They were very, very nice, those people. They treat us so good. They try not to get away with anything, you know, to go there, and they says, they want to make sure that you in the right place, you know, in the right position.

SIGRIST: Going to the right person . . .

CANCELLIERI: Yeah. They were very nice. I never forget. So when I saw him I says, "I don't care where I am now. I just want to go home." ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Mr. Cancellieri, let's go back, and let me hear your whole version of the same story starting when you go to the airport to meet her.

SAL: Actually, it was at La Guardia Field. At that time La Guardia Field was a pretty big airfield. And, in reality,

we were waiting for her at a different place than where we were supposed to, because we had the wrong information. And we waited and waited and we didn't see anything happening. It became the early part of the morning and everything else. And so we called up and we had to spend the whole night at the airport.

SIGRIST: You're saying "we."

SAL: My father was there.

CANCELLIERI: And this other guy.

SAL: And a fellow that was a friend of the family. There were three of us, we were waiting. And so finally they told us to just stay there and call back later on, you know, because they didn't hear anything either. So about, let's say about nine o'clock in the morning I called back again, and finally we found out that they were being held on Ellis Island, and that we were instructed to go down to the Battery, which is where the ferryboats from Ellis Island bring the people to the Battery, which is, of course, the southern part of Manhattan there. And so we, right away we went there and we waited, and then the rest of the story curtails how she explained it. She just ran away from the group. And then we got together and, of course, eventually

straightened out the paperwork, and that brings us up to this point.

SIGRIST: What did you think when you were told that she was at Ellis Island? I mean, what . . .

SAL: Me, I remember stories, because my father, you know, he was at Ellis Island a long time ago. And I says, "My gosh, she's at Ellis Island. I hope it's not going to be bad." Because in the old days the people really didn't understand, I mean, the reason why everybody had to be checked out for eyes and things like that, and had to be more or less taken care of in a special way. And my only thought, my only thought was that she would be the same way, and I was kind of worried about the thing.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Cancellieri, let me ask you just a couple of specific things about Ellis Island. Do you remember what kinds of people were there other than yourself? Were there other people?

CANCELLIERI: They were like me. They were all people that they're all waiting for somebody to pick them up. We tried to talk to that one, to the other one, and say, some people they were there for two days and nobody show up. And that's the way I seen it, but I was lucky because he came so fast. You

know, from nine to three o'clock wasn't bad, but some people, they say, "Oh, we slept in here." They gave us the sheets and beds, make sure, you know, we sleep in there." I was so scared, I say, "Oh, my God. I'm going to sleep in here? I never got out of the house, it was the first time I get out, and I end up in here." You know, something come up to my mind. But I find out that they treat the people good. They, everybody was happy. But the only thing, people want to go to the family, you know. They want to go see the family. They like to stay there, but they want to go. Even if they give food or anything, they still were not too happy about it, because they wanted the family, you know.

SIGRIST: When you were brought to Ellis, I'm just sort of curious about this, did they look at your papers at all?

CANCELLIERI: Oh, yes. They look at all kind of papers. They want to make sure, you know.

SIGRIST: But when you left in Rome, didn't they do all your processing in Rome? Didn't they actually check all that stuff out before you left in Rome?

CANCELLIERI: Before you came in this country, believe me, you got to go to the consulate. In Palermo they had a consulate. And

from there they got to give you all kind of papers, a bunch of papers, before you could come in here. Besides, I got to get vaccinations, and you got to have all kind of needles before you come. It's not easy. Now it's easy. Now everybody just gets the plane and come. And before was, I mean, they have to have a passport, but it's not like a long time ago, they need more, more strictly stuff.

SIGRIST: So when you got to Ellis Island they went through all the papers again, right?

CANCELLIERI: Oh, yeah. Everywhere you stop they want to see all the papers, everywhere. So before you go to the other airport, you know, they want to make sure. But we stuck, the kids, all together. They want to see all those people, because we all were single. Nobody was with any family. But they tried to be careful with us.

SIGRIST: Oh, I sort of have this mental image of this little herd of young Italian women just kind of scared out of their minds.

CANCELLIERI: Yeah, yeah, that was it, that was it.

SIGRIST: Just sort of being herded around.

SAL: We really didn't know what to expect.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Well, of course, you've never been to New York before.

CANCELLIERI: From New York to Rome. I never been, I never was out of the house. The most we went, eight miles away from my house. ( they laugh ) That's it.

SIGRIST: All right. So you have the happy reunion on the Battery.

CANCELLIERI: Right.

SIGRIST: Then where did you go?

CANCELLIERI: So we left there. They couldn't even bring the car in New York. There was a big, big storm.

SAL: A snowstorm that day.

CANCELLIERI: We had to go by train.

SAL: Oh, by the way, excuse me. Let me interrupt you. When you came to this country you had these nice, very new, fine shoes with high heels.

CANCELLIERI: Oh, yeah.

SAL: And the snow was about twelve inches high.

CANCELLIERI: They had to carry us in Canada. We couldn't even get off

the plane. They carried us to the airport.

SIGRIST: What time of the year is this?

CANCELLIERI: It was 19, December.

SAL: It was the end of December.

CANCELLIERI: The end of December.

SIGRIST: 1947.

CANCELLIERI: 1947.

SIGRIST: So you have these dainty little shoes.

CANCELLIERI: We had to go in these shoes. Over there it doesn't snow in my home town.

SAL: She never saw snow in her life.

CANCELLIERI: And I was freezing, and the coat was like a spring coat. Over here we need the fur coat. But I didn't find no boyfriend to bring me a mink coat. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: This is just one discovery after another.

CANCELLIERI: But anyway, we got, we got the train to come in Hartford. It took, how long it took?

SAL: It took about four hours at the time.

CANCELLIERI: Four hours before we arrive in here.

SAL: Back home, it was four hours.

CANCELLIERI: And I got it in here. From there, you think you find the car over there, or we have to take a bus?

SAL: We had to take a bus.

CANCELLIERI: We had to take a bus, imagine that. From the . . .

SAL: From the railroad.

CANCELLIERI: From the railroad we're going to a house by bus. Then we had to walk, too, to go to my mother-in-law, to find her. All tables, the fancy tables. Those soup. I was so tired, I'd been four days awake, I didn't care for nothing. But they were asking me a lot of questions, you know. But then we started eating, and it was, for me it was everything strange, everything was strange.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about, how soon after did you marry?

CANCELLIERI: Oh, then after twelve days, he had to get married. He had to do . . .

SAL: I was home on leave at the time, from military leave. I

was still in the navy.

CANCELLIERI: So, and in twelve days, we got married January 12, we got married.

SIGRIST: Of 1948.

CANCELLIERI: 1948, we got married. And we had to get married. The minute we got married we went to honeymoon. When we came back, he had to go back to the service because they only stayed, and then I had to stay with my mother-in-law for a little while.

SIGRIST: Did your mother-in-law speak Italian to you?

CANCELLIERI: Oh, yeah. She was, yeah. She would speak Italian. Otherwise, I couldn't understand nobody. He got three sisters there talking English, but they tried to talk Italian with me, you know.

SIGRIST: What was the hardest thing for you to get adjusted?

CANCELLIERI: To get adjusted was very hard when I came into this country because I don't know anybody, I don't know how to talk. I didn't know anything, no friends. I had such big nails like this. ( she gestures ) And my sister-in-law says, "Oh, in Italy she never washed dishes in my life." I never

did. My mother and my grandmother did everything.

SAL: And what did your sister-in-law say to you?

CANCELLIERI: And my sister-in-law say, "Oh, those nails, they got to go pretty soon, because the moment she wash dishes . . ."  
( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Sort of "welcome to America." ( they laugh )

CANCELLIERI: She (?). I had long, long hair. Oh, my God. She say, "Oh, she's too fanatic." You know. So (?) for that time, because all people they go to school, they dress up nice, you know. And over here it was different. It was still old-fashioned way in here then.

SAL: Depression.

CANCELLIERI: Not like over there. Over there was more popular.

SIGRIST: This may be an unfair question, but did your mother-in-law like you? Was she happy with the way you were?

CANCELLIERI: Yeah, she was happy. She was very happy that I was here, you know. I can't complain. She was very happy. In fact, she's ninety-two years old now. She still respect me.

SAL: She taught you a lot while you were . . .

CANCELLIERI: Yeah, she teach me how to cook, she teach me how to wash dishes, she teach me everything, because I didn't have no mother, nobody here. But then she says, "You got to go to school, you go to go to work. And in the meantime you've got to go to school." And I used to go to school at night, learn how to talk English, and I used to go to work. And he was in the service. So I didn't see him.

SIGRIST: You were kind of by yourself a lot of the time.

CANCELLIERI: Yeah, because my mother-in-law, they don't let me pay nothing. And they send me, I remember, fifty dollars a month, when he was there. And I used to save some money, you know, just for rainy days.

SAL: The best you can.

CANCELLIERI: ( she laughs ) It was never much.

SIGRIST: Let me ask Mr. Cancellieri. Your first, say your first year of marriage or so, or first couple of years. What was the most difficult thing about being married to someone who was not American and being in America?

SAL: Well, I think the most difficult thing was to get adjusted to how we were supposed to eat, because she really didn't know anything about cooking. But she was very fortunate

that I was in the service, because the food in the service was really not that great to begin with, so I was more or less the type of a person that could eat anything. But still, little by little, I just had to bear with her, and it came to the point where she really became a very good cook. But I think that was the most difficult thing, because as far as I was, I was able to speak her language, so the language was not a problem. It was just a matter of trying to get adjusted to each others' customs, because I was raised in the United States and she was raised in Sicily, and we had different ways of being . . .

CANCELLIERI: It was very hard in the beginning, but we adjusted.

SAL: We adjusted.

SIGRIST: What did he do that was the hardest thing for you to get adjusted to?

CANCELLIERI: Uh, he really didn't do too bad. He agreed with whatever I say, you know. But the only thing, I could see that he couldn't do whatever he wants to do, you know, in the beginning. But then when I started to make friends myself, I went to work, I started (?), I tried to encourage him, "Oh, we got to do this, we got to do that, we got to have some parties." You know. And little by little we tried to

adjust.

SAL: Social life.

CANCELLIERI: You know. But in the beginning it was very bad because he just get out of the house at seventeen years old, so he didn't have too many things going on, too. It was not that we're old people. And I was twenty years old too, the same age.

SIGRIST: And it's interesting that you came to this country without knowing any kind of domestic skills . . .

CANCELLIERI: Nothing, nothing.

SIGRIST: At all. Did, who were your friends? Who were the people that you made friends with?

CANCELLIERI: Oh, the friends that I made friends with, the people next to where we were working.

SIGRIST: Were they Italians?

CANCELLIERI: Italians. Oh, got to be Italian, otherwise I didn't understand. In the beginning they were all Italian.

SIGRIST: Was there a big Italian neighborhood?

CANCELLIERI: People that were here maybe six months, a year, those

people. And they tell me, "Oh, we're going to buy a dress.

Come on, let's go to this store. I know this place.

You're going to go to the hairdresser? Oh, let's go to this place," you know.

SIGRIST: We did live in an Italian neighborhood, and that was to her advantage because she was able to meet other people and show her.

CANCELLIERI: See, I'm the kind of person that I like to introduce to a lot of people fast, you know. It's not that I was shy. I say, "Oh, where do you come from?" You know. That's the way I make friends.

SIGRIST: What kind of, what kind of, what did you do for fun in your early years of marriage? What would you, if you wanted to have fun, what would you do?

CANCELLIERI: We used to go to the movies.

SAL: We used to go to the State Theater where they had . . .

CANCELLIERI: We used to go in person. They had a lot of shows before, better than now.

SAL: The big name bands used to come. Frank Sinatra came here.

CANCELLIERI: Yeah, we used to go there.

SAL: And it was a theater called the State Theater in Hartford, and we saw all of these people, these artists in these bands that came to entertain. Of course, these things don't exist any more in the big cities.

CANCELLIERI: And then we used to get together in the house, my mother-in-law and my sister-in-law. We used to tell the stories, and we used to play cards there, you know. We started to get social life like that.

SAL: Television wasn't here then.

SIGRIST: Soon, though.

SAL: Right around the corner.

SIGRIST: Right around the corner. Let me ask you, did you ever wish that you hand't come to America?

CANCELLIERI: What do you mean?

SIGRIST: Did you ever wish that you had stayed in Sicily?

CANCELLIERI: In the beginning, no. In the beginning, no. But I figured I was very disappointed when I came in here, you know, in the beginning.

SAL: Because of the trip . . .

CANCELLIERI: Everything was strange for me. I didn't know anything.

SIGRIST: How did you learn English so well?

CANCELLIERI: I went to school, and then practiced with this, with that.  
You know, we started a little better. Then after working,  
after talking English.

SAL: That's what I wanted to say.

CANCELLIERI: You can't talk Italian with the boss.

SIGRIST: What was the first job you got?

CANCELLIERI: The first job I had was a dressmaker where they make the  
clothes. That's where my mother-in-law sent me.

SAL: Sewing machines.

SIGRIST: How did you get that job?

CANCELLIERI: I got that job, somebody knows. Says, "Let her come with  
me." So when I got there, the boss was Italian. And he  
showed me how to work. I never worked on a sewing machine,  
never in my life. But I started looking all the factory,  
and he says, "Oh," he says, "you come in here to work, not  
to look all over." Oh, my God, can't even open my eyes in  
there. So he got me angry. I told my mother-in-law, "I

don't think I like the place. I don't want to go over there." She says, "Why? What happened?" I says, "Well, the guy is very funny. Besides that, I never was working in the clothes." I says, "I don't think I like it." So my father-in-law, he was working at the Royal Typewriter.

SIGRIST: Royal Typewriter.

CANCELLIERI: Royal Typewriter. And he gave me a job over there. I got a job at the Royal Typewriter.

SAL: Assembly, right?

CANCELLIERI: Assembly. We used to put the stuff in. And I used to like it over there, you know. And we get along with the people. There were a lot of Italian people, too, a lot of fun, too.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much you got paid?

CANCELLIERI: Oh, before we used to get paid sixty-five cents an hour. The most maybe a dollar, didn't even.

SAL: No, seventy-five cents.

CANCELLIERI: Without money you didn't know what you're going to do, you got to dress. We didn't have no kids then, you know. For four years we didn't have no kids. Good thing. We was

making up some money, you know.

SIGRIST: Did you have your own apartment, or were you still living with your parents?

CANCELLIERI: Then we rented a place.

SAL: We rented our first apartment on Asylum Avenue, which was right behind St. Joseph's Cathedral here in Hartford. And we stood there maybe about a year. Then we moved into a, my father has a three-family house in the South End, and we took the top floor, one of the apartments in the top floor. And from there, of course, we started more or less getting on our own.

SIGRIST: Yeah, but it takes time, doesn't it?

BOTH: Yeah, oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Tell me about the first time you went back to Sicily?

CANCELLIERI: The first time I went back after twenty-two years.

SIGRIST: And what was different about Sicily when you went back?

CANCELLIERI: Oh, my God, I never like it any more. When I got back and I said, "This is my house that I used to live? Oh, my God, the door is so small, everything's so small. Oh, my God!

I don't think I like it." I didn't like that much. In fact, we went back again, and I didn't have no desire to go back any more. I have a lot of relatives. They're nice people. But I'll be glad to stay in my own house over here in America. There's a lot of things to see better.

SIGRIST: How do you think your life would have been different if you'd stayed in Sicily? Say you didn't marry Mr. Cancellieri.

CANCELLIERI: Oh, if I would have stayed there probably I would have liked it, because that's the only place that I've seen, you know. I never saw anything else. Maybe I had to get used. I don't know. I don't have no feeling. I don't even know what to say about that. Probably if I was there, because when I came in here I liked it over there. Everything was normal, you know. When I went back I said, "Oh, my God. I could never live here no more." And I said, "The people . . ."

SAL: I'd like to, let me . . .

SIGRIST: Yeah, sure, by all means.

SAL: I think this probably, my idea of that thing is just, I look at Italy, Germany and France today, after the war was

over and everything else, and they've progressed. And I'm pretty sure that Italy, in Italy they have also progressed quite a bit. I think that her life probably would have been, I would say the way things are in Italy today, they have progressed also. I can't say that she'd be exactly the same position she is now, because this is she is now, but I think she, I mean, I think that they probably would have been happy, but of course living in the United States, there's no place like it.

CANCELLIERI: No, no.

SIGRIST: Did you ever consider, when you guys were talking about getting married, did you ever consider going to Sicily?

SAL: To visit?

SIGRIST: No, to live, to marry. ( Mrs. Cancellieri laughs )

SAL: Not even a thought of it, no way, no.

SIGRIST: And are your parents Sicilian or Italian?

SAL: My parents are Sicilian. One comes from Vittoria, and my mother came from Siracusa. And I, I always heard the stories that my father told me about Italy, how the food grows and how everything was so nice, but there was poverty

there because it was the day before a lot of progress was made. And, but when they thought about us leaving the United States it never came to my mind, because I was in an apprenticeship program here anyway, and my future, of course, was in my, right here where I was born, and the country who I served in the military for.

SIGRIST: Well, that kind of brings us full circle, I think. I want to thank you both for letting me come out and . . .

CANCELLIERI: You're welcome.

SAL: It was a pleasure.

SIGRIST: And getting your marriage story on tape for posterity. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. I'm signing off with Josephine and Sal Cancellieri in Wethersfield, Connecticut on Sunday, March 28, 1993.