

EI-322

JACK (GIACOMO MARIO LORENZO) UBALDI

BIRTH DATE: SEPTEMBER 16, 1910

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: JOHN MURIELLO, 1/1994

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 2/1994

ITALY, 1918

BORN: BEVAGNA, ITALY

AGE AT IMMIGRATION: 7

PORT OF EMBARKATION: GENOA

PASSAGE ON: DANTE ALIGHIERI

RESIDENCE: BETHLEHEM, PA

SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Friday, May 21, 1993. I'm at the Ellis Island Recording Studio with Jack Ubaldi. Mr. Ubaldi came from Italy in 1918 when he was seven and a half years old. Good morning, sir.

UBALDI: Thank you. Good morning.

SIGRIST: Can we begin by you giving me your name as you were born with? What was your Italian name?

UBALDI: I was born with the name Giacomo. And actually I had two middle names which nobody seemed to remember. And so I went with the name of Giacomo none Ubaldi, where I had I really two names which were Mario and Lorenzo Ubaldi, but nobody seemed to be able to say Giacomo, so I (he chuckles), I took Jack. I think it was because Jack Dempsey was a champion and I

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thought that was a great name to take (he laughs).

SIGRIST: So could say your full name with everything in order?

UBALDI: Yeah. I, my name is Giacomo Mario Lorenzo Ubaldi.

SIGRIST: I see. And what is your birth date?

UBALDI: My birthday is September 16, 1910.

SIGRIST: Where were you born?

UBALDI: In Bevagna, Italy. It's a province of, province of Umbria, province, near Perugia.

SIGRIST: Can you spell the name of the town for us?

UBALDI: Bevagna. B-E-V-A-G-N-A.

SIGRIST: And can you described for me when you were a child what the town looked like, what you remember about the town itself?

UBALDI: Well the town, the town, it still looks exactly like it was then. It's a walled little town. It has four openings which at one time they used to be doors, and they used to close them at night. Bandits and what-not, so they used to be protected. They, also it was protected because there was

little wars going on at that time. So we still have the walls all around the town. The town consists of about seven thousand people. Between six and seven thousand people. We have a lot of churches. We have a little theater, a very beautiful little theater. They have these festivals now, the music festivals and they have them in that little theater, which is very nice. And, and we had a little business there. My father had a little business.

SIGRIST: What kind of a business did he have?

UBALDI: Sort of like a delicatessen here. Used to sell cheese and some meat and some wine and things like that.

SIGRIST: Did you produce your own cheese and wine?

UBALDI: No, we didn't produce the cheese, but actually we at that time we didn't do it. We didn't have any property to speak of to grow anything. Only the owners of property did wine. It wasn't wine that, it was good wine, but it was not for export or anything like that. It just for local use. And the cheeses were made by people who had sheep, because only sheep milk we could have. In fact, I never had milk until I came to Ellis Island. So the only milk that I had was from a wet nurse, because my mother was dry. And so the first glass of milk and white bread I tasted when I arrived here in Ellis Island. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Great. Well, we'll talk about that when we get to Ellis Island. Can you

tell me what was the major industry in this town, or what did most of the people do.

UBALDI: There was no industry at all.

SIGRIST: Agricultural?

UBALDI: Yeah. They went out, either you had a tiny, little business, you know small, about the size of this booth (he laughs) practically. And, or you went out and worked on some farm for someone who needed help during planting and during the cultivating and stuff like that and the harvesting. It was a, it's a farm area. There's no industry, really.

SIGRIST: So did the people who worked the fields live inside the city walls, or...

UBALDI: Some did, some did. But, you see, in our area we, there are tenant farmers. The owners never did the work. They had a farmer and his family. They were given a house, and they lived on the property. And they did the work. And the owner got half of everything and so did the farmer. So it was one of those things which benefitted both, I suppose.

SIGRIST: Would you say that the farm community of this town were perhaps the poorer people in the town?

UBALDI: Yes. Yes.

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SIGRIST: Having to be in a situation like that?

UBALDI: That's right.

SIGRIST: Let's talk about your family immediately. What was your dad's name?

UBALDI: Augustino.

SIGRIST: And tell me a little more about this business that he had and how he got involved in it.

UBALDI: Well, it was a sort of a, began, family, my grandfather had a little business. So then my father had started his as a butcher, as a, well, you see, when you sell one thing you sell many other things in the store. So it was really, butchering was his main asset, I mean, what he knew best. And, but then he used to sell other things in the store. And at the time he had about the largest store in the town. And this is the reason why we, our coming to America was because of that, you see.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the inside of the store for me?

UBALDI: I can't. I don't remember it.

SIGRIST: Do you remember perhaps butchering practices at that time?

UBALDI: Well, butchering practice at that time was that you had to go the farms,

and buy livestock. You bought a, sheep or a lamb. Actually they were mutttons that you bought there. Except on Easter time you used to, you used to buy these baby lambs, 'cause that was the Easter item that went. But other times they were mutttons, castrated lambs and very little beef. The only beef that was being sold in the town was if there was an accident. We used to call them a "Sant' Antonio" for Saint Anthony. You broke a leg, they would have called the butcher, they would slaughter it. And that meat had to be sold in the piazza with a red stamp on it, so that it meant it had to be sold at half price (pauses), see. So, but pork we, they used, at that time we used to kill pigs from November to Mardi Gras. Just the winter months, because there was no refrigeration at that time. They made, use to make the salamis, prosciutti, cappicolli, all that dried and seasoned meats that were used during the summer. And so what was used had to be used immediately, because no, without refrigeration you can't keep meat.

SIGRIST: And it's a mild climate, I would imagine.

UBALDI: Well, it is. We never, I, no, the snow, I saw it once in my youth, and it just barely covered the ground and then dissipated right away.

SIGRIST: That must have been quite an event actually (he laughs), to see this..

UBALDI: Well, yes, it was. (chuckles) But you did see sometimes that the temperature may, that came down to about thirty-two degrees or something like that, and then there was little puddles, and it would, it formed a

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little ice covering. But that was the most that we had.

SIGRIST: What was your dad's personality like?

UBALDI: Well, he was a large man. He weighed about, at that time he weighed about two-twenty. He was six foot.

SIGRIST: And his temperament?

UBALDI: At that time, well, he was like a god to me. (he laughs) Later though, after four years of absence, because he went, he left in 1914, came to America, he was angry. He was angry in the sense that his business, he was conned into going into a, like a, a (pauses), a business together with other people. First there was a group of other people, they wanted to start a, like a supermarket or some kind, and they wanted to take his stores because they were the only ones that in the, in, were worth to do a business, a larger business. And, but after a year's work and everything they absconded. The money was all disappeared, and he lost his stores. And he was so angry that he, he had a passport already, and he, the first trip, ship that came, just before the war started in 1914 he came to America.

SIGRIST: So this all happened in Italy?

UBALDI: Everything in Italy.

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SIGRIST: What did...

UBALDI: Everything in Italy.

SIGRIST: Why America? Why did he choose to go to America in that disappointment?

UBALDI: Well, he had been to France. He had travelled to Luxembourg and Germany, and he didn't seem to like it. I don't know. There was some, some of our countrymen, you know, townspeople who had come to America. And so there was a ship coming to New York, and he just went on it.

SIGRIST: Now, of course, you were quite young when he left.

UBALDI: I was four and a half.

SIGRIST: Do you remember him leaving?

UBALDI: No. No. But I did miss because he used to take me, whenever he, every time he used to go to a farm to look for animals, for an animal to buy, to, he used, he used to have a little cart, well, two-wheeled carriage, like, with a horse. He used to have it always a little Arabian horse. And he used to take me along. So it was very pleasant at that time. Well I, you know, then I missed him after, later on, but I don't remember him going away or anything like that.

SIGRIST: Tell me what he did when he got to America.

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UBALDI: Well, he found a job in Manhattan on Thompson Street as a butcher. And he didn't like it. He was a man already about thirty-eight years old when he first came here. And they used poke fun of him because he couldn't speak English. They paid him very little, five dollars a week. He couldn't live on it, even in those days. And what helped a little was that he could have free lunch, he'd go to a bar to have a mug of beer. And those was the kind of days that in New York was. And unless you had a business or something like that you just barely lived, and then, you know, worse than today. I mean (he chuckles) there's no comparison. So, but there were bars that they gave, had a smorgasbord of food, and you ate. All you had to do was buy a nickel's worth of beer.

SIGRIST: So at least he didn't starve.

UBALDI: He didn't starve. No.

SIGRIST: But America turned out to be a disappointing experience for him.

UBALDI: This was very disappointing to him. And then (he coughs) someone mentioned to go to Pennsylvania. And he went to Scranton. At first he started, worked in the mines. That wasn't his work. He'd last about three months and he couldn't do it. And while he was there someone mentioned that there was a job available as a butcher. And he went, applied for it, and it was a husband and wife. But they had two stores, and one they made a meat market, and the other one it was sort of a

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general store. And they liked him and they said, "Well, look, if you can't speak we'll help you. My wife will help you." And he built a nice business for them.

SIGRIST: So he found his niche there.

UBALDI: He did find his niche there. And so for, he was with them for about over three and a half years, and that's what the time when we came here. And we stayed about a year. Oh, well, no, let's see, February we arrived. And so from March until September we stayed in Scranton. Then people, he was making, you know, well at least about twenty-five dollars a week at that time. And when (he pauses) it was around September people would, you know friends and other would tell, he says, "Why don't you come to Bethlehem," because there's the steel works, you know, they were armaments. It's, the war was still going on strong. So they talked him into leaving the market and going to Bethlehem.

SIGRIST: Before we get to far along in the story, let me get back to Italy, and then we'll work our way through Pennsylvania when we...

UBALDI: Fine. You can cut it all, you can cut it all up. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: ...get over here. Let me ask you what your mom's name was.

UBALDI: Sabbatina.

SIGRIST: And her maiden name?

UBALDI: Angeli.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

UBALDI: A-N-G-E-L-I.

SIGRIST: And let me some of the same sorts of questions about your mom. What was her temperament like?

UBALDI: Oh, an angel. But a hard-working woman.

SIGRIST: When you think back to when you were a small child in Italy, what sticks out in you mind about your mother? Is there a story or an anecdote of some sort about your mom?

UBALDI: Well,...

SIGRIST: Something she did for you maybe once?

UBALDI: Well she, she always took care of me just, you know, as if I was the only one. And (he pauses) she ran a little store at that time. And she made sure that my two older sisters were able to go to, to school, and they went to, one was ready to go to, to college, my oldest one. See, there's a difference in age between myself and my two older sisters.

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SIGRIST: What are your sister's names?

UBALDI: One was Lydia, the old one, and the second one is Josephine.

SIGRIST: And how much of a difference is there?

UBALDI: Ten years with the first one, and eight years with the second.

SIGRIST: Wow, that is a span of...

UBALDI: But, there were five other children in between which died almost at birth.

SIGRIST: Do you know what they died of?

UBALDI: Nobody seemed to know at that time, you see.

SIGRIST: Was that a commonplace occurrence in those days for young children to die?

UBALDI: Hm-hmm.

SIGRIST: Yeah. So she's running a store. Is this after your father leaves for America?

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UBALDI: Yeah. That's right.

SIGRIST: Tell me how she got involved in running a store.

UBALDI: Well, she, he was, he left her with this little store.

SIGRIST: So it was his store that she was running.

UBALDI: Yeah, but it was, it was small, you know. So she kept going, you know. And at, in those days there was the war, then the war broke out, and there was very little food around. And the farmers, there was no money. So there, there was a lot of bartering going on. And so with what little money she, she, she made she was able to send my sisters to school. I started the first grade and just about two months for the second grade. And then I had a younger sister who is three years younger than I am.

SIGRIST: So you're the only boy in the family?

UBALDI: I was the only boy. I was the eighth.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you were like as a child.

UBALDI: Wild.

SIGRIST: What sticks out in your mind when a little kid?

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UBALDI: I used to...

SIGRIST: Do you remember getting into trouble?

UBALDI: Oh, I used to get, I was (he pauses), I used to get into trouble that I got hurt. I was just prone to, to hurt myself.

SIGRIST: Do remember a specific instance of getting hurt?

UBALDI: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Could you tell me one?

UBALDI: Well, one, was I, my, I was with my mother. And a bicycle came and it was just turning around the corner and it hit me right across the head, and I got a great big gash, you know, up here. That was one. Another time I was running away from my sister. My older sister was very, she, I was afraid of her. And my mother never touched me, but my sister would. And, and I went, and I hit my head again against one of these rakes that they, you know, these metal, so I got a big hole (he laughs) on my forehead. (he pauses) The last, and that saved our lives I suppose, was the day, the day before we had to go for our physical. And we were a bunch of kids, you know about four or five. And we were looking for pieces of wood, because we don't, you know in those days we had no stoves. We had either a fireplace, and little what we call fornelli. They were little burners that you made with bricks, and, and you put a

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pot over it, you know. So you needed little sticks, and there was no charcoal or anything like that in those days. So you need, and I was, went around, I didn't need them but I went with the rest of the kids. And we were picking up things that, wood that the farmer needed. And we didn't know the difference, I mean, wood is wood to us. You know, a twig is a twig. (he laughs) And he came chasing us, and as I, we started running away I tripped over a stump. And right across was a wheel barrel with a shovel right across it. And I split my eye right up here and down here. (he gestures) So, and I was, you know I start bleeding. And I was afraid to go home because I would get a beating besides. And so I was packing it practically with dirt to stop the blood from flowing. Well, I finally got home, and when I did get home, they saw my face like that, and they took me to their pharmacist. In those days the pharmacist did just as much work as the doctor did. And he cleaned it, and he patched it up, and, but the following morning my face was like a balloon. (he pauses) And we went to the doctor, there was that took our physical, and he says, "The boy cannot go." So my mother says, "My son doesn't go then we, none of us go." And (he pauses) two weeks later we find out that ship was torpedoed and sunk. Then I became a hero. (he laughs) And then again, well, those were the main things that happened to me, you know.

SIGRIST: Can I ask you a question?

UBALDI: Sure.

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SIGRIST: What do you remember about medical practices at that time? I mean, you said the pharmacists sort of functioned as the town doctor.

UBALDI: That's right.

SIGRIST: How did they treat a bad gash like that?

UBALDI: Just cleaned it and put a piece of tape on it. Nothing else.

SIGRIST: Did you ever get stitches of any sort, or did they...

UBALDI: No.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any, maybe home remedies, or something, that your mother might have used for the kids when they were ill?

UBALDI: Well, you see, as I said, we didn't get milk. We didn't have any. There was no cows at that time then. Just sheep, but we didn't get the milk. They used to make (he pauses) remedies of, you know, these home made remedies. For instance if you had a stomachache they boiled bay leaves in water, and put a little bit of sugar, and you drank that. So it either came up (he laughs), you know, it was just one of those things like that. Things like that. Nothing that, medications were not known. There was no antibiotics. There was nothing in those days. And so if you lived, you lived. (he laughs)

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SIGRIST: You were probably lucky, always banging your head somehow.

UBALDI: Well, yeah, I, I was fortunate. I, as I have always said, I says, "I have St. Francis on my shoulders." He's been watching me. Because St. Francis of Assisi is only about four miles away from the town. And I says, "He must have been watching over me," because, and then when we came to America we finally got on board the Dante Alighieri in Genoa, and we went as far as Gibraltar. We were there for five days, four or five days. They refueled us and then we went out on a convoy. Now the convoy went straight, one behind the other. Our captain decided he wouldn't do that because he had no, no cargo. The boat was very light in the water, and he went in a different direction where he figured the submarines wouldn't be hiding underneath. So at midnight of that night after we left Gibraltar they called everybody to the lifeboats. And we huddled there by the lifeboat during the night. At dawn we had no lights on, no nothing. All you could here was screaming, crying, people, mothers calling for children 'cause they got lost. It was only women and children, that's all that was on boat. And when we, at dawn we look overboard and we see lifeboats one after another coming back towards the, towards shore. The ship, the convoy had been attacked by submarines. You know, at that time the submarine war was going to, all they wanted to do was sink tonnage, and that's it. Whether they had anything on it, they just ship, sink the ships. And so we, we came here, but very gently, very slowly. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: When you were a kid growing up in Italy what did you know about America?

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UBALDI: Nothing. Nothing at all.

SIGRIST: Was your father writing back and forth?

UBALDI: Well, I didn't ever see, read the letters.

SIGRIST: Could your mother read and write?

UBALDI: Oh, yes. They both could.

SIGRIST: I assume he's not sending money, because he's not really making a lot until he gets to Pennsylvania?

UBALDI: Well, yeah, very little. If she got any I don't even remember that.

SIGRIST: Because you were probably doing better than he was.

UBALDI: I, I was happy there. I was really happy. I mean I didn't miss anything. The only thing we missed was having pie, having cake or things like that. Sugar. We couldn't get sugar. So I tried when I was about six, six and a half to be, to act as an altar boy, because it was, there was a chapel right near our house that had, was a monastery right behind. And the sisters had everything. So we could, they would break-, coffee with milk, cakes, little cookies and things like that. And I, ever, whenever I used to hear that I says, "Oh my God, maybe I can get,"

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so I called one morning only, though. (he laughs) And that was, it was a, I botched it up. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Was your mother a religious woman?

UBALDI: In a way, in a sense, yes.

SIGRIST: And was this customary for young men to serve as altar boys in...

UBALDI: Young boys? Oh yeah. Oh yeah. It's just like over here. We have them here, too.

SIGRIST: How did you look at your religion at that time? Was is just something to do, or...

UBALDI: Well, it was part of life. I suppose you did it, and, but you didn't think about it, you know, in the serious way. (he pauses) You didn't think Hell or Heaven or anything like that. I mean it's, it was, it was something that was there, just like it was your home or your, you know, and whatever or school. It was part of life.

SIGRIST: Part of the routine?

UBALDI: The routine of life. I mean nothing, you weren't like, like St. Francis that became you know, maybe later on you'd think about it, and you'd start studying it, things like that. But not in those days, you

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couldn't.

SIGRIST: Did your mother...

UBALDI: And the war was on, you know.

SIGRIST: And that was a difficult time?

UBALDI: That was, we, we, you see, news didn't come. We had no radios. We had no, not no way to find out what was going on. And when there was a disaster or something like Capporeto in, you know where the Italians lost to the Austrians, we thought they were going to be next door, in the following or something like that. That was the only thing that, you know, you thought about. You thought about living.

SIGRIST: And there was a sort of undermining threat of constant fear not knowing...

UBALDI: Oh definitely, you not knowing. And just like we were on the ship, the fear was that, of the unknown. You didn't know if you were going to get hit, if what, if you're going into the water, and you know, things like that. You just waited and waited and everybody's crying, the screaming and, and that's frightened you more than the actual scene, because nothing was happening. But the surroundings were just...

SIGRIST: It's the not happening that's the scary part.

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UBALDI: Yeah. Yeah because you didn't, it was always in the dark. And so you didn't see anybody. You just, you heard, you heard the moans and the cryings and stuff like that, you know. People would come, so, that scared the...

SIGRIST: Did your mother want to come to America?

UBALDI: Well, she wanted to stay, come back and join my father. Not that, you know, a wife wants to stay with her husband.

SIGRIST: How did she feel about leaving Italy, though?

UBALDI: Oh, she didn't mind that. She didn't mind that. As long as she, she came here and stay with my husb-, my father.

SIGRIST: Do you remember her saying to you, "We're going to America now?" Do you remember any...

UBALDI: Yeah, but, you see, going to America meant nothing to me. It could have been going to Foligno, which was the next town station, railroad station. And they, some of the people in town, they, "Giacomino." You know they used to call me Giacomino. He says, "How you gonna go to America to your father?" "Oh," I says, "I'm going with Dominick's cart." I, I had no idea what the notion was or what a ship was. You see, you're in the middle of the country. You're far away from the Adriatic, from the

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Mediterranean, from any body of water. I had never been anywhere, any of these parts. So I was totally ignorant of all this.

SIGRIST: Your world was very small.

UBALDI: We're just a little town. That's all. So, you know, when I moved out and things began to see, nobody spoke about America to over there. Nobody spoke about the Statue of Liberty. Nobody spoke about, we could, first of all we never had any oppression or anything like in the town. The town was free-going, you know. And so when I came here, it was a different story. First of all, the lack of knowledge of language.

SIGRIST: We're going to pause just for a moment so that Peter can flip the tapes over, and then we'll get you to America.

UBALDI: Sure.

**END OF SIDE A**

**BEGINNING OF SIDE B**

SIGRIST: We're now resuming the interview with Jack Ubaldi. What were just going to say, Mr. Ubaldi? I was asking you about something.

UBALDI: I don't know. (he laughs) Sorry.

SIGRIST: OK. Well, maybe it'll come back to you.

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UBALDI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you took with you when packed?

UBALDI: My mother packed a number of things. She even packed a mattress. And just the things that you can carry. But pillows and a mattress. That's one of the things that I, I remember. But they were rolled up and, but then we, she wasn't even able to use because we had these bunks one, one on top of the other, you know, for like the militaries.

SIGRIST: You're talking about on the boat?

UBALDI: On the boat.

SIGRIST: Why would she take her mattress? What was the thinking?

UBALDI: Well, because, you know, I suppose all the ancient people thought that a mattress was very important. I don't know why.

SIGRIST: And maybe they don't have mattresses in America?

UBALDI: I, who knows? You know, it's just one of those crazy things. I mean, of all, I mean it's hard to carry, but that's what, I never could figure out. I mean, well, I, I, when I was in the navy we carried our mattress with us, you know. In the sea bag, we had rolled in the hammock, and

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wrapped it around the sea bag, and we used to carry it. No longer, that's not done anymore, but I did it for almost three years while I was in the navy in '41, '45, '46.

SIGRIST: But of course that's a whole different reason for carrying your mattress (he laughs).

UBALDI: That's right, because...

SIGRIST: Do you remember when you left your town? Do you remember was there any kind of a send off? Did friends give a little dinner perhaps, or anything like that?

UBALDI: No, it, it...

SIGRIST: Snuck out into the night?

UBALDI: No, because you see the war was very, very hard at that time, too. And if you could get away they just got away. I mean, things weren't, weren't very good at all.

SIGRIST: It's a scary time for everybody.

UBALDI: Yeah. Well here, you see, they didn't feel it so much because there was, there was no, no fighting here. But there the fighting was, we weren't that far away. I mean...

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SIGRIST: Did you see any fighting as a child...

UBALDI: No, no, no...

SIGRIST: ...or hear any artillery?

UBALDI: No, because here, no, no, no, no, no, no.

SIGRIST: No. It was far enough away?

UBALDI: Oh, yeah. We are at, Perugia is (he pauses) about a thousand miles south of where the Alps, you know, between the, Austria and Italy. So.

SIGRIST: So really only the northern Italians would have been exposed to...

UBALDI: The northern Italians, around Piedmonte and places like that. Yes.

SIGRIST: How did you get to Genoa?

UBALDI: Train.

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

UBALDI: That's right.

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SIGRIST: Do you remember what that felt like to you as a little boy?

UBALDI: Not right now. No.

SIGRIST: Is that a long trip to Genoa?

UBALDI: Yes. It takes about (he pauses), it could take eight hours, or it could take overnight.

SIGRIST: Do you remember if you...

UBALDI: Depends, depends how the trains, you know, travel.

SIGRIST: ...had to travel overnight?

UBALDI: Well, it, every, you know it becomes, things become clouded at that time, you know, because you're, you're half sleepy and things like that.  
And...

SIGRIST: Well, and you're just a little boy...

UBALDI: Yeah. I just don't...

SIGRIST: ...you know, you're not conscious...

UBALDI: ...you know, it's not that you're doing something that you're enjoying or

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anything like that. So those things I don't remember. I remember going and getting on, on ship.

SIGRIST: Did you have to stay overnight in Genoa before...

UBALDI: Yeah. Overnight.

SIGRIST: ...you got...

UBALDI: Just overnight.

SIGRIST: Do you remember having to undergo any kind of examinations in Genoa before you got on the ship?

UBALDI: No. No.

SIGRIST: So tell me what...

UBALDI: No, we just, we just went on board, and my mother was given a sack that contained a dish pan, five dishes, five, five dishes, metal dishes, five metal cups, five forks and five spoons. And that...

SIGRIST: It's you, three sisters and your mom.

UBALDI: That's right.

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SIGRIST: Right. And what else do you remember about the boat? Can you describe for me where you slept perhaps?

UBALDI: We slept, we, it was just below deck. And they had a big, well two, two big salons, which were, there were no, no cabins. There were just these beds...

SIGRIST: Bunk beds.

UBALDI: Bunks beds, you know, one after another, three high, which the soldiers, when they come in, they were bring, they were bringing soldiers from America over to Italy at that time.

SIGRIST: So they would bring immigrants and soldiers back to Italy.

UBALDI: But no men. There were no men coming, coming to America. There were just, most, if there were they were handicapped or something. But mostly women, mothers who have, whose husbands were in America. And that's about all.

SIGRIST: And what was the name of the ship?

UBALDI: Dante Alighieri.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what your first impressions were when you first saw the ship? Because actually, you know, you're seeing ocean, and everything

for the first time.

UBALDI: Yeah. It was huge, it was huge to me. It was huge. But after a while you noticed, there were, well, I didn't know the accommodations that you could have on a ship. And so (he pauses) the toilets were in the open. They had washing where we ran out of sweet, fresh water half way through. So what fresh water there was was only for drinking. So if you washed you had to wash with salt water from the ocean. You, we never, I never took a bath for the whole twenty-three days on board ship, because it was too cold. There was no place, it was in the open, there was a shower in the open. (he laughs) You know, it was just a cubicle like that. And (he laughs) here suddenly in February, you're not going to take a shower in the middle of the Atlantic. So we, we looked like Negroes when we got over here. Just black because the, the ship was running on coal, it was coal fired, no oil. I mean at those days it there, there was coal fire, and we took, we took coal from in Gibraltar from the British. Food, well, we had potatoes, we had rice, we had turnips. And all different methods. They switched them around. We had them for breakfast, for lunch, for supper.

SIGRIST: Trying to fool you.

UBALDI: So they, my mother used to go with the, this dish pan, and they used to put this slop right into it. After a while you couldn't eat it no more. But if you had some money you could buy rolls with a sandwich, little oval rolls that they used to sell. But they used to cost a lira. A lira

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at that time was twenty cents American money. So you couldn't afford too many, you know, five, five people, to buy, one little, little roll is about as big as a cup.

SIGRIST: How did your sisters and your mother weather this trip? Were they good sailors...

UBALDI: Yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...or did they get sick?

UBALDI: No. Nobody got sick. Nobody got sick.

SIGRIST: So the boat goes from Genoa...

UBALDI: Genoa to Gibraltar...

SIGRIST: ...to Gibraltar...

UBALDI: ...from Gibraltar to New York.

SIGRIST: And it refueled in Gibraltar?

UBALDI: That's right.

SIGRIST: And then from there to New York.

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UBALDI: Because at that time, you know, Italy was one of the Allies.

SIGRIST: You already told us one wonderful story about the lifeboats and all on the boat. Tell me what was there to do for a little boy on the boat?

UBALDI: Oh, you just ran around. They, they allowed you, as long as you, you ran around up and down and all over the place. (pauses) They had two cannons, and we used to love watching, they had two little five inch cannons, one at the bow and one at the stern. And we used to, you know, that was interesting to us. We used to ask the soldiers, you know, the sailors, you know. But they never shot them, never opened fire, or anything like that. But, we, you know, that was interesting.

SIGRIST: Do you remember being up on deck?

UBALDI: Oh, sure.

SIGRIST: Do you remember...

UBALDI: You couldn't (?) stand up...

SIGRIST: ...seeing anything in the ocean that you had never seen before? Did you pass an iceberg perhaps or another boat?

UBALDI: No. No. All you saw was a lot of sea. (he laughs) A lot of sea.

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SIGRIST: As a young boy...

UBALDI: And the weather was, wasn't bad, it wasn't that, you know. It was cold, yes, but it didn't rain, it didn't, you know, we didn't have squalls, or...

SIGRIST: It was in February, it can be quite stormy.

UBALDI: Yeah. That's right.

SIGRIST: As a little boy was this a fun experience being on the boat?

UBALDI: In a sense, yes. It was, it was an experience which I never had. And as long as we had the freedom of running anywhere, going up and down, you know, kids, you don't stand still. Especially me. At that time I was running all over the place.

SIGRIST: Was one of your sisters sort of responsible for you while you were on the boat, or did you hang out with other kids?

UBALDI: My older, my older sister.

SIGRIST: Did she ever get mad at you while you were on the boat?

UBALDI: Oh, she used to beat me up. (he laughs)

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SIGRIST: What would you do that she would get angry with you?

UBALDI: Well, she, she acted like my, as a mother, you know. She tried to keep me in line. So whenever, and the easiest way was to give me a couple of really good whacks. And so I took them. (he laughs) I was, when I, when I broke my eye, I (he pauses), I was afraid of her. She would, she would...

SIGRIST: And your mother wouldn't intervene in that?

UBALDI: No. My mother was too kind, too so-, you know.

SIGRIST: Did you wish that older sister had stayed in Italy when you came to America?

UBALDI: No. No. I loved her. I loved her. I really did. In fact, I lived with her after my father and my mother and my younger sister went back to Italy in 1930.

SIGRIST: And she stayed?

UBALDI: Yeah, well...

SIGRIST: The older sister stayed?

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UBALDI: My older sister was married here, and so I went to live with them for a while.

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

UBALDI: But I, I didn't, I saw it, but I didn't know what it was. We had a lot of ice flows in the bay. They had a ice breaker that was breaking ice when we came in. That was how cold it was that time. And so, if they don't explained it to you, you don't know what's, what, what you're seeing. I travelled a lot since I've been here, and, and unless I have a book or something that explains what I'm seeing, looking at, you just look at it, and you say, "Well, that's a nice statue." (he laughs) You know. But we (he pauses), we didn't come with, you know, because we knew America. America to me was nothing. This is, you know, I have to say this, you know, this is the truth. When I went to school I had to take all kinds of abuse. In fact, you know, now I teach cooking. And I never would wear a white toque, you know, one of those (he gestures), why? Because I was in the first grade, and the teacher called me, on me. And she had a picture of a tree and a number. So she says, "What's this?" Well, I knew what a tree was. And, "What's this?" "Tree." "No, three." But I didn't know that then you put the 'h' with the 't.' I couldn't pronounce it. So I kept saying, "Tree, tree." And she got so mad that she took me out of my seat, put me in a corner and put a dunce hat. So every time I see a chef's hat I think, now this is seventy-five years ago, and I still think and I wouldn't wear it.

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SIGRIST: That's an interesting story.

UBALDI: See? So I had to put up with a lot of, and I had to work here.

SIGRIST: Let's...

UBALDI: From the first day.

SIGRIST: Let's get you to America first. We're still on the boat at this point. Tell me what happened after the boat docked.

UBALDI: Well, they expected my father to be here, to claim us. And he wasn't. Nobody came to claim us. So we were all brought here on this island. And my mother was frightened because he wasn't here. My sisters it was the same way. I couldn't figure it out, anything anyway. So the communication between friends here in New York and my father seemed, or from here, I don't know how it worked, it didn't work out until almost six days later that he was able to come here. He was waiting for us in Scranton, we were waiting here. So the communication was, you know, really snafu-ed there.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about those six days that you spent at Ellis Island.

UBALDI: Well, we, here they went through, we went through physicals. Doctor checked us all over. Here was when the first day that I came here when

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they fed us that I got big glasses of milk and white bread, which to me, I never felt bread, that soft bread. It was, you know, like manna from Heaven. And, and I was treated very nicely here. And, (he pauses) but, you live on rumors. People are being sent back. People for one reason or for another. And you never know what is happening, what is going on. And so my mother was crying her heart out, and my sisters were worried also, and they cried. Because the trip coming over wasn't a cruise. And to go back and go through the same thing, or being blown up, you know, it was a horrible thought for that. So, those are the six days that came by, they went by like that.

SIGRIST: Do you remember where you slept on the island?

UBALDI: No. Isn't it funny?

SIGRIST: Do you...

UBALDI: I could have slept on a bench, I mean, and I wouldn't have known.

SIGRIST: Do you remember where they fed you? You talked about getting milk and bread.

UBALDI: Yeah, well that, there was like a, seemed like, what to you call, a, with long benches, and you sit down and they, they brought you food.

SIGRIST: Where there other Italians here at that time?

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UBALDI: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. In fact there were, we had two young kids that my mother had taken charge. They were orphans and they were coming here to join some relatives in this country. And there was, well, a lot of people from the ship were stuck here, too. (he pauses) But we, my mother and my sisters tried to stay on their own. I don't know. They didn't join in on the...

SIGRIST: And you think that's what's running through your mother's mind is, you know, "Oh, my God, I might be sent back?"

UBALDI: That's right. That was the main thing. That was the, because there were so many rumors going around, you know. People don't know. You don't know what's happening. And we don't hear anything from one side from my father. And, you know, day after day, and that's worry.

SIGRIST: What did you mother think when your father didn't show up? Did she ever tell you that later, what was going through her mind, why he didn't come?

UBALDI: Well, she couldn't figure it out at first. Then they said that, the messages, he says, "Family here. Everything's fine." Didn't say you must come over and pick them up. So he's waiting there and we're waiting here. So, you know, there's just a confusion of messages.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of the physical exams that you had to go through here?

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UBALDI: We just, they made us, the first thing they made us do is wash up. Shower. Because we were, I'm telling you 'cause we were black from the dust, the coal dust, especially. And we couldn't, we couldn't wash. It was, the salt water, it stick, you know, you just can't, wash your face a little bit, but the rest of the body is all filthy. So they gave us all, everybody had to take a bath. My sisters were gone, went in one room, I went into another room. And they had to undress and wash up. And, you know, that was the first time that had to do it in an open, and it was a little - so, to me it didn't make any difference. (he laughs) So they washed, and, you know, everything was all right. My face had healed up. So there was a scar, the scar was, it's still, you know, the scar is still there. There's a separation here (he indicates), and there just a little bit over here, because it just came like that.

SIGRIST: But they didn't seem concerned about that?

UBALDI: They weren't, no, it wasn't anything. You see, when my face was swollen, that was a different thing, because, I'm lucky that I didn't get tetanus.

SIGRIST: What about lice? Did they check you for anything like that when you were here?

UBALDI: Yeah, sure. Oh yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: So, tell me how you finally got off the island.

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UBALDI: Well, then my father came.

SIGRIST: So he came right to Ellis Island.

UBALDI: He came to Ellis Island, and we came off, off the ferry. And we started to, we walked into, you know, Battery Park there. And first...

SIGRIST: What did you think when you saw your father? You hadn't seen him for some time?

UBALDI: Four years.

SIGRIST: Yeah. How did you greet your father?

UBALDI: Well, you would wonder (he laughs), because you forget, you know. At that age you forget what, what they look like.

SIGRIST: So he was kind of a stranger to you in a way?

UBALDI: Yeah. That's right. Because it happened to me late, you know, later when I went into the navy. My daughter was one year old, and when I came back she didn't want me in the house.

SIGRIST: Isn't that interesting? You saw both sides of fence.

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UBALDI: That's right. So you see?

SIGRIST: Where did your father take you?

UBALDI: We went directly to, to Pennsylvania, to Scranton.

SIGRIST: You went right on the train into Pennsylvania?

UBALDI: Right on the train.

SIGRIST: And tell me about setting a life up there with the whole family.

UBALDI: Well, they found a house. We, it was a private house. And we set, you know, got, had furniture and stuff like that. And we stayed there until September. So he was working on, in this meat market. And it was, it was pleasant there. It was pleasant. I, I started the school for just a short period of time in Scranton because by the time I was enrolled in it was already April. And April, May and a couple of months and then there was summer. And then we went, in September we went to Bethlehem.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, you told us one school story already. Do you remember what it was like as a young boy to go into a strange school for those two months or month and a half when you were in...

UBALDI: Well, I didn't know that I was gonna go in for just a month or two months. I mean, that, it just so happened that, you know, the grownups

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decided on that. I didn't decide that. And I found it difficult because of language. And, you know, even then there wasn't that, they poked at you because you couldn't speak. And that hurt. That hurt.

SIGRIST: Was there a large Italian population in Scranton at that time?

UBALDI: A little. Some. Some.

SIGRIST: How dramatic was the poking fun? I mean, were you ever beaten up, or was it just verbal insults?

UBALDI: Oh, I got beaten up once. I got beaten once. And then I beat another guy up.

SIGRIST: Beaten up because you were Italian?

UBALDI: Well, because, "Guinea," "Wap," you know. Things like that. They hurt. See. In those days they used to call you those names. And...

SIGRIST: Would you say that was the hardest thing about getting adjusted to this country?

UBALDI: I think so. I think so. I think so...

SIGRIST: Was it the same way in Bethlehem?

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UBALDI: Once, once I, you know, I got over that, then things began to get a little bit better. But it was always work. Work was the main thing in my family, in my, with my father. Because he did, he was not happy here. And he came here against his will. And he didn't find happiness in any possible way, whether in his work or anything. And he always wanted to go back. He wanted to go back, and sort of (he pauses) show that those people that had hurt him, went, made him really come here, sort of prove to them that they couldn't have hurt him. You know, something like that. And it wasn't good for us because we would have been in a much better position if he hadn't gone back. And whatever money he had he spent it, or he bought property over there and stuff like that, which eventually was sold for a song, because my, you know, my mother was left there. And she was old and she (he pauses), she was there, all the children were over here.

SIGRIST: When did they go back?

UBALDI: 1930.

SIGRIST: And do you remember how you felt about them returning to Italy?

UBALDI: Well...

SIGRIST: It's just you and your older sister who stay here, right?

UBALDI: And my, and another sister.

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SIGRIST: And one other sister.

UBALDI: There's the second, another sister. My younger sister went back with them.

SIGRIST: Did you want them to go?

UBALDI: No.

SIGRIST: How did you feel about that?

UBALDI: Well, he left me in charge of a business. I had a little restaurant.

SIGRIST: Of course you're an adult at that time.

UBALDI: Well, I was twenty already, you know. And so he left me a little restaurant. And I kept, I kept it going for, well, for almost four years. The last year and a half things got so bad because of the Depression of the thirties, and finally I had to give it up.

SIGRIST: Were your parents happy that they had made that decision, or were they unhappy when they got to Italy, too?

UBALDI: Well, they liked it because it was their life. They came here when they were old already. You see, it's different, when I came at the age of

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seven and a half, you get, all right, you have to go through the rituals (he laughs), I would say, of coming into a new country just like going to a school. You know, freshman, you go through all kinds of, to become part of the school or part of the team or something like that. And so once I got, I got over that, then I began to enjoy this, because then, you, you are able to think what you have in this country and what you had there. And no matter where. And I travelled a lot. I was always looking for a Shangri-La someplace. And I travelled all over Europe, South America, Central America, and I didn't find no Shangri-La. I was happy when I saw the Empire State Building on Thirty-fourth Street. I says, "I'm home." See...

SIGRIST: And, of course, your parents never...

UBALDI: Never had that.

SIGRIST: They never it...

UBALDI: They never had that, you see? So I created my own family here. And I have two sons, a daughter.

SIGRIST: What year did you get married? What year did you get married?

UBALDI: 1941.

SIGRIST: And whom did marry?

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UBALDI: Mary. My wife.

SIGRIST: And what's her maiden name?

UBALDI: Maiden name was Mary Proto.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

UBALDI: P-R-O-T-O.

SIGRIST: And you said you had how many children?

UBALDI: I have three.

SIGRIST: Can you name them for us?

UBALDI: Sure. Joan is my daughter. She's a teacher with two degrees.

SIGRIST: And is she the child who didn't quite recognize you came back from the military?

UBALDI: Exactly. That's the one. That's the one. And then there's Richard. He's a (he pauses) in marketing. He a vice-president of Ogden Project. And I have a, the third one is Augustine. "Augus" we call him.

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SIGRIST: Named after your dad?

UBALDI: Yeah. And, and he's in charge of the division in Ohio for the company that does (he pauses) airports, runways, lighting, you know, all that stuff. And I have eight grandchildren.

SIGRIST: Quite a brood.

UBALDI: Yeah. And they're all very nice because, well there all grown up now. The oldest one is getting his Master's at Harvard. The second graduated from the University of (he laughs) Chicago. The third is a, is a senior now at Cornell. And the girl, one, and the younger sister is at James Madison University. So I carry a button because it has my, my initial JMU (he laughs). And then I have Richard. Richard has two children, Lisa and Kristin. And then I have, Gus has two children. One is going into college now. In fact, we're going to visit them for graduation in June sixth. And he's in Ohio. And Michael is the youngest.

SIGRIST: You must be very...

UBALDI: That's my family.

SIGRIST: You must be very proud of all...

UBALDI: I am.

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SIGRIST: ...all that education and...

UBALDI: I am. I am. Yeah. Because especially today with children and teen, teenagers, the way things are shaping up is awful. And, and having a family like that is, that's a gift.

SIGRIST: Well, we need to end the interview right now. We're out of time. Mr. Ubaldi, I want to thank you very much for coming out here...

UBALDI: You're welcome.

SIGRIST: ...and you've given us some wonderful information about growing up in Italy and coming at Ellis Island at a very interesting time in history, and I want to thank you.

UBALDI: Thank you.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Jack Ubaldi on Friday, May 21, 1993 at Ellis Island.