

EI-333

ANNA D'ADAMO FIORAVANTI

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ITALY, 1920

AGE 17

PASSAGE ON "THE AMERICA"

MATSEN: This is Elysa Matsen. Good morning, for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday, the third of June, 1993, and I'm here at Ellis Island with Anna Fioravanti, who came to this country from Italy in, what year did you come here, Anna?

FIORAVANTI: What year?

MATSEN: Yes.

FIORAVANTI: 1920. I left Naples, I'm going to talk like that.

MATSEN: Sure.

FIORAVANTI: I left Naples from come to America 1920, 28th October.

MATSEN: In October.

FIORAVANTI: Yes, October. I arrive in (?) 13th November.

MATSEN: And how old were you when you came here, when you left Italy?

FIORAVANTI: I was a young girl.

MATSEN: How old were you?

FIORAVANTI: Seventeen.

MATSEN: You were seventeen.

FIORAVANTI: I was seventeen years old. And I went to Baltimore. Baltimore was where my sister was living, and we stayed over there three years, then we come back to New York.

MATSEN: Okay. Well, we're getting a little bit ahead of ourselves. Why don't we just start by you telling me your full . . .

FIORAVANTI: What?

MATSEN: If you could just tell me your full first name and your date of birth?

FIORAVANTI: What?

MATSEN: Your full first name . . .

FIORAVANTI: Yeah.

MATSEN: And then your date of birth.

FIORAVANTI: I went to Baltimore, then come back to New York. Now,
is that right?

MATSEN: Well, what is your date of birth? When were you born?

FIORAVANTI: When was I born?

MATSEN: Yeah.

FIORAVANTI: Oh, yeah. I was born in 1903. (she laughs) 12th
of April 19, wait. I was born April 12th, 1903.

MATSEN: Great. And where were you born?

FIORAVANTI: Blasta, Italy, Abruzzi.

MATSEN: Can you spell that for me, the name of your town?

FIORAVANTI: Huh?

MATSEN: You were born in, what was the name of your town again?

FIORAVANTI: I was born in Italy.

MATSEN: Right. And the name of your town?

FIORAVANTI: No, no, no. Abruzzi, the city.

MATSEN: Abruzzi.

FIORAVANTI: Blasta, Abruzzi.

MATSEN: Okay. Do you know how to spell that?

FIORAVANTI: No.

MATSEN: No? Okay.

FIORAVANTI: Wait, I show it to you.

MATSEN: Can you tell me, what did it look like?

FIORAVANTI: Where?

MATSEN: The town where you were born? Do you remember what it looked like?

FIORAVANTI: It was a nice, it was a city. It was a town. It was a big one, now it's more big, you know.

MATSEN: Okay. It's bigger now than it was.

FIORAVANTI: Yeah. And what do you call it, it was a nice city, you know. No was a little town, it was nice, you know. But now they got more big, and it has more things,

you know. Because I didn't have no parents. That's why I come. My mother and father died, and I come over here, you know. My sister called for me. She was living in Baltimore, you know. And when I went over there, when I come back, when I come over here, like they separate me. I said, "Let's get out over here." That's what they told me, I get off in New York, you know. Anyway, I reach over here, they change the things.

MATSEN: Right.

FIORAVANTI: And they push me a different way, you know.

MATSEN: Can we just backtrack for a minute. Do you remember your house in Italy?

FIORAVANTI: The house in Italy? I remember?

MATSEN: Do you remember?

FIORAVANTI: Yeah. I remember.

MATSEN: What did it look like?

FIORAVANTI: I went back. I went back after fifty-two years.

MATSEN: Well, when, do you remember it when you were younger? What did it look like?

FIORAVANTI: When I went back?

MATSEN: No, when you were there to begin with, when you were living in Italy, before you came to the U.S.

FIORAVANTI: When I come over here?

MATSEN: Before, yeah.

FIORAVANTI: Oh, before. When I come over from Italy, what I look like. (she laughs)

MATSEN: No, what did the house look like?

FIORAVANTI: Oh, it looked like, oh, the house!

MATSEN: Yeah, the house.

FIORAVANTI: It was a two-room house. I was living with my father, my mother and my father. And my brother was in the war that time, you know. But then, when my parents died, I was living with my uncle. The uncle, he had three rooms, three nice rooms, and I stayed with them until my sister called me, you know.

MATSEN: Right, from Baltimore. When you were living in Italy, I just want to talk a little bit about Italy before you came to America. How did your parents die?

FIORAVANTI: My parents die?

MATSEN: How?

FIORAVANTI: My mother was in mourning her son, the son that was in the war, the first war, 1918, you know. Now, it was war with that, and then it was out, you know. Then my father died eight months after my mother, see? And he was in war, too. It was me, then my brother come back from the war and he got married and everything. And I was living with my aunt and my uncle, you know.

MATSEN: How old were you when . . .

FIORAVANTI: I was seventeen.

MATSEN: When you were living . . .

FIORAVANTI: My mother died, I was fourteen.

MATSEN: When you were fourteen.

FIORAVANTI: Fourteen, fifteen.

MATSEN: And then you moved in with your uncle?

FIORAVANTI: Huh?

MATSEN: You moved in with your uncle when you were fourteen,

then.

FIORAVANTI: I was living with them, see. Because he says to me, you don't want to go, stay over here, then in Italy you get married, you know. Because that's what happened. My sister called for me, he says, "No, she want to come, your sister will call for you." And I came, you know. That's how come I came, you know.

MATSEN: Now, when you were taking your trip to get to the boat, do you remember?

FIORAVANTI: They sent me the paper with, the paper, we already paid for the boat.

MATSEN: Oh, okay. So it was already paid for.

FIORAVANTI: My sister did that, you know.

MATSEN: Now, when you were on the boat, who did you stay with on the boat? You weren't by yourself.

FIORAVANTI: With a lady. I stayed with a lady, because that lady, see, about that lady, I can come. That lady was like guard for me.

MATSEN: What was her name?

FIORAVANTI: Her name was over here. Adeloretta D'Angelo.

MATSEN: Okay.

FIORAVANTI: My, uh . . .

MATSEN: How did you know her? How did you know her?

FIORAVANTI: I met her?

MATSEN: How did you know this woman that you stayed with?

FIORAVANTI: Oh, no. Well, it was the same time, it was the godmother to my sister, we knew the people.

MATSEN: Oh, it was your sister's god . . .

FIORAVANTI: We knew the people.

MATSEN: Right.

FIORAVANTI: We knew the people, you know. See, you mean say the one bring me, you know. Now, when he, she find out I can come, the paper was May. The time was October, I can't come yet, because I can't find nobody yet to bring me, you know. Then the real estate, the agency, he went to this woman and this mother, and he went over here and he says, "I got a young girl," he says, "that wants to go to America. Want to take the responsibility

to bring her over her to America." You know. She says, "Yes." But she didn't know it was me. We knew her, you know. I didn't know she was coming to America, you know. Then he says, "All right, tomorrow come the girl, come and meet her." He sent a call for me. And this woman recommend me. She says, "You?" She says to me. I says, "Yeah." "Oh," she says, "didn't you know?" I says, "I didn't know you were going to America." Well, anyway, she says, "Yeah." Right away she says, "Yes." Already she says yes before she sees me, you know. But when we come over here we were the things over here, it was a big step. When we come together, you know. She was in the boat. But when we come over here, it was the things over here. It was a big step. When we come together, you know, like (?) in the boat. She was really up, and I was really down. She says she couldn't breathe downstairs, you know. Now, on the boat they have the second floor, I mean the third floor, down, you know.

MATSEN: Steerage, right?

FIORAVANTI: Yeah.

MATSEN: What class were you? Do you remember, on the boat,

what class? Second class was it, or, when you came on the boat do you remember what class you traveled?

Were you steerage, in the lower part of the boat?

FIORAVANTI: Yeah, lower the boat. The third class.

MATSEN: Oh, okay, the third class.

FIORAVANTI: The third class. The first class, they go the people, you know. The second class, then happened somebody give me the rope, with a rope on it. You know, the water, and people got scared, we thought that the boat was going down. Then she asked can she go upstairs, to the captain. So he said, "No, your papers are for downstairs." You know, because, you know, she didn't know, you know, she think she can get upstairs, but she didn't know what was the boat. Like years ago you don't know everything, you know. Everything that they're doing, you know, never is, you know.

MATSEN: Was it a rough ride on the boat?

FIORAVANTI: A what?

MATSEN: Do you remember, do you remember the boat ride?

FIORAVANTI: No, like, we sleep downstairs, but in the day we go

up.

MATSEN: Up on the deck.

FIORAVANTI: The deck, yeah. We go upstairs, we eat upstairs, you know. Then at night we go down.

MATSEN: You remember, do you remember the dining room where you ate? What did it look like?

FIORAVANTI: The name of the boat?

MATSEN: No, the dining room where you ate dinner, on the boat?

FIORAVANTI: In my country?

MATSEN: On the boat.

FIORAVANTI: The boat? Yeah, it was a big room.

MATSEN: What did it look like?

FIORAVANTI: Yeah. Well, it was a big room, and all the children run, you know. Because everybody, like it wasn't too luxury, you know what I mean? There wasn't too much, we belong downstairs. Then the second floor they have different parts where they eat, you know. They cook, like, they bring the dish.

MATSEN: What did you eat? Do you remember what you eat?

FIORAVANTI: Every day one thing, one thing. One day another thing, you know.

MATSEN: What was it? Do you remember?

FIORAVANTI: Vegetables, macaroni. You know, like everything different, you know. Twice a day they gave it to you. In the morning we have the coffee, you know. We have the coffee, we have the milk, you know, what you want, you know. They had all this, you know. And it was nice, you know. Well, you know, we stood the fifteen days over there. (she laughs)

MATSEN: Fifteen days?

FIORAVANTI: Yeah. 28 October, and I reach over here 13. Then, when I reach over here, they see my ticket, they separate me from that woman. That woman was going to Union City.

MATSEN: Union City, New Jersey.

FIORAVANTI: Yeah. And the ticket she give to me, my paper, by then they change it, they change the rule when I reach over here. I can't go nowhere, you know. But then me, I

got scared. You know?

MATSEN: When you got here you were scared.

FIORAVANTI: I come back again, and then the man come and told me, "You have the tickets. We have the tickets in Europe, you know. And he told me where we're going to go, you know. And then I went to the boat. I remember I went to the boat, and then from the boat to the train. Now, when we went to the train there was two young girls with me, two young women. They were going to Pittsburgh. I never forget that day, you know, that night. Now, the boat is (?), me and (?), I think. Because, I don't know, you know, I was alone. Then they was together, you know. And he says to me, he says, "Go sit down." Then the next train, next wagon, I hear singing, my dialect, like where we come from, you know. I said to the man, "I want to go over there." "No," he says, "you have to stay over here." You know, it was two men, these two girls, and me, in this car, this car of the train. Now, I hear singing, singing, you know. I says, "Ooh," I says, "they're singing my dialect." You know. I get up again, and I says, "I want to go over there." "Yeah, yeah, yeah." I make the motion, because there was singing there. "No,"

he says, "you have to stay over there." You know. Then, when I come out from the train, and I see there's a lot of people come out. Oh, when I see them, it was the same town where I come from, you know. I says, I stood with this girl. They gave me a piece of bread, one fruit, because I brought a basket. Me, I don't know the way, you know. Like when he come out from over here then he go to the train, I don't know nothing, you know. And he says to me, he says, "She give me a piece of bread and one fruit." You know. I says, "It's all right." He says, "No, no." I say, "The American bread was soft, you know." I says, "Ooh, how soft it is." (she laughs) And they started to laugh. He says, "This is not Italian bread." You know. And then I come out, it was in the morning. It was in the morning. I didn't see nothing by seven o'clock. All night we travel, you know. Every once in a while the train stop and everything. No, when I come out it was another big stop, Baltimore. And I come over there, and I went to the room, and this colored man come at me. When this man come at me, I went, "No!" Over there I never seen the colored people, where we come from. Now they seen now, you know. And I said, "No!" You know, I have two little, one valise and one small one,

you know. And I went back to the, outside to the, where they, everybody comes in, you know. And then all at once this man call me. "Paisa!" You know, it means, the same town, you know. I see on the boat and then I don't see no more, you know. Then I turn around, I says, "Where were you?" He says, "Here. Why didn't you come over there?" I says, "The man didn't make me come over there." You know. "Why?" he says. "Nobody over there?" I says, "I don't know. I didn't see nobody." You know. But he was already over here. He knew the way, you know. And he says to me, "Come with me. We'll make the run," and we don't see nobody. Not my sister. My sister, he got the telegram, my sister-in-law did it. He went to the, another people, the same name was them, Baltimore, you know. Now, what happened there, they got this telegram. They didn't know it was my sister, you know. He says, "Somebody make a mistake." You know, because we don't know nobody from Italy, you know. But this man, he says to me, "You come with me." He brought me to another house. This house was all women, and the same town where we come from, you know. And he sit down, he says, "(?)." He says, "Maybe you eat." You know. She went outside. She have a nanny goat. She took the milk. She said

to me, "Drink, it's nice and warm." You know, years ago, you know. And I says, "Ooh," I says, "thank you, no." And she give me some biscuit, you know. In the meantime this man went, call my sister, see. And when my sister come he says, "Boy, my," he says, "I don't know. I don't see nobody over there in New York." You know. Well, she went and she says, "All right, let's go now." I remember it was her birthday that day. I don't know it was her birthday, you know. My brother-in-law says, "Today's a feast." Because it was her birthday, it was 14th November when I reach Baltimore. We stayed a little while over there.

MATSEN: What was her name?

FIORAVANTI: Huh?

MATSEN: What's her first name, your sister?

FIORAVANTI: My sister's name was Theresa Ramondi.

MATSEN: Okay.

FIORAVANTI: The husband was Mike Ramondi. And he have a few children, three children.

MATSEN: And your brother's name?

FIORAVANTI: My brother's name, my brother was named Camillo, Camillo Antonio, you know. But the other one, the youngest one, the three that died really in Italy, my brothers, you know. And when I went over there, then the men, the teacher, a few days after, the lady came. I'm supposed to go to school. My brother-in-law says, "No, no school. We go back to New York." You know, because we were supposed to come to New York. Because he says over there was no more work for them, it was (?), you know. When we come over here, I come over there in November, and I was, July we come over here in New York. When I stayed at the sister-in-law's house, then I come to Brooklyn. To Brooklyn we went to, I got married over there in Brooklyn. It's, you know. I met my husband, and we live on 12th Street. Because he belonged in New York, you know.

MATSEN: So in Brooklyn you met your husband.

FIORAVANTI: Yeah, yeah. And then from over there, now I'm living, I went to the Bronx from over there, by 112th Street, you know. And then from over there we went to live in the Bronx. From the Bronx I live in a neighborhood for fifty years, in (?). Now I'm (?) because I didn't have nobody no more, and my daughter, she make believe,

my son, there was a (?) a little bit, too. And I got another son, on Poconos.

MATSEN: Oh, in the Poconos.

FIORAVANTI: I got four great-grandchildren, four grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

MATSEN: Are you glad you came to America?

FIORAVANTI: Huh?

MATSEN: Are you glad you came to America?

FIORAVANTI: Am I happy?

MATSEN: Are you happy you came here instead of staying in Italy?

FIORAVANTI: Sure. Yeah, well, listen, you get used to. When you got nobody else, see, you have, like, you have mother and father. Like my mother, every time say, "When I'm not living," she used to say, "you go to America." Because already two daughters was over here. See, my mother wanted me to stay over there. But that happened a thing different, you know what I mean? And when I went back, my daughter, with a cousin over here, she says, "You want to go back? You're going to go back. Every time we go back we never go back." You know.

Then my daughter went to agency, and then agency says, "No, bring your mother over here." This happened twenty-two years ago, and now as I come I went. I went to my cousin's house. The son, the mother and father came here, they want, you know. And I stayed with them, two months. Very nice, all different. More house, more things, you know. They do like over here, you know. The girl, they do like over here, years ago they don't do like that.

MATSEN: Right.

FIORAVANTI: They do the things.

MATSEN: Ms. D'Adamo, (incorrectly addressing her) do you remember when you came to Ellis Island? When you came to Ellis Island, do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

FIORAVANTI: No. It was dark.

MATSEN: Oh, you were in the dark.

FIORAVANTI: Yeah, it was dark because it was in the night. Because when I come out from this building, I didn't see nothing. See, when we come in, it was dark. And then when I told you they separate to check you the eyes,

they see the paper, you know. They see the paper and they check my eyes, then they take off my clothes, because they have the paper for the doctor over here, I have no sickness, you know. And they check over here, in the back and the front. They see my eyes, my ears, my throat. I remember. Then he push me, you know.

Like he meant to say, "You're all right." You know?

And I went like this. (she gestures) I seen the other people taking off the clothes, you know. And that's it, you know. And then when I went downstairs, it was dark. When I took the other boat downstairs, we go to the train. I don't know which one it was, you know. I says, now, when I went to the other way, I mean, to Hoboken, I remember. I says, "Maybe this is the one I took, the train, I know." There's another train over here, I seen now, with the bus, you know, and one street over there. When I reach over there, it was everything in the night. Traveling in the night, because I was trying to look outside the window, but it was so cold, you know. All I have, the shawl, the jacket. (displaying the papers) See, this picture took before I left Italy, see? Now, it was, the attorney paper, he ask, the immigration, two years ago. Two years ago, three years ago. They ask for immigration,

you know, like come over here. I called them and this fellow, on the telephone I told her, you know. Just a few words like this. For them, the same thing, you know. Then when I reach over there I start to cry in (?). When I see, uh, I seen this colored fellow. See, I don't want to put on the paper, this colored fellow, because they say that I'm against them, you know. You know what I mean?

MATSEN: Right.

FIORAVANTI: I said, "No." I started to cry.

MATSEN: So you were afraid.

FIORAVANTI: Yeah. He looked at me like a kid. I started crying like a kid because, you know, I don't see nobody of mine. But I find myself, I started to cry like anything. Then I come out over here, there was a little floor and then the step. That's how come that fellow call me. He says, "What are you doing? What are you crying for?" You know. I said, "I don't see nobody." You know. And, you know, that's how come, this is the story, you know.

MATSEN: The people were really nice to you.

FIORAVANTI: Huh?

MATSEN: When you came here, people that you didn't know, strangers, were very nice to you.

FIORAVANTI: What?

MATSEN: When you came here, strangers were very nice to you, good to you.

FIORAVANTI: Wait, when I come over here?

MATSEN: Right. You didn't know anyone at first.

FIORAVANTI: No, no. I started learning, then, you know. I started learning because the Italian paper, they have the American. When I got married, you know, the kids are going to school. And then when I got, they were small, like I talk Italian, you know. Then when the kids started to go to school, then the Italian paper, they bring one page American, the Progressive from that time, and now they got a different paper, they got Oggi now. One side was Italian, and one side American. I come because I did the school already over there, and I come. I know how to speak a little bit. I don't know to write. I write Italian, though. I write Italian, you know. That's it. This is the life, a

ninety years old woman. (the sound of papers rustling
is heard)

MATSEN: Is there anything else that, is there anything else
that you'd like to tell me about your immigration
experience?

FIORAVANTI: The what?

MATSEN: Anything else that you'd like to tell me about your
experience.

FIORAVANTI: No. What else I can tell you? I got four
great-grandchildren that love me. This is the one that
put the name outside. They give the thing, they put
a, they take out together.

MATSEN: That's wonderful.

FIORAVANTI: A couple of years ago it was, when the, they all, it
was seen outside, check outside. It all shows them,
you know. They're all from my grandchildren. They
get together, they put my husband's name and my name.
You know? On, over here, outside.

MATSEN: On the wall.

FIORAVANTI: What part it is, the name is?

MATSEN: On the wall?

FIORAVANTI: With the name they write down on the outside, over here on the island?

MATSEN: Right.

FIORAVANTI: What part it is? What part it is?

MATSEN: Oh, I can show you. We'll show you later.

FIORAVANTI: I want to see, too.

MATSEN: Definitely.

FIORAVANTI: Maybe we'll see, I don't know. My sister, my daughter, I says, "All right." I says, "Wait a little bit." Then I started bringing, want to send the money. Because when I seen it over here, I ask the people. They can send the money with the address and everything. All right.

MATSEN: (incorrectly addressing her) Ms. D'Adamo, I want to thank you very much for doing this interview with me today.

FIORAVANTI: I don't know. Some words maybe I don't understand.

MATSEN: It's very interesting, though, to hear your stories.
Thank you very much for letting us do this interview.

FIORAVANTI: I got, you know, like, because that time I ask, then the kids, one of my granddaughters, she says, "Grandma," she says, "why don't you put your name over there?" I says, "Wait. Later on I do. Now it's closed." Because it was during the winter. It was Christmas night when they give it to me for a gift, you know. All my give grandchildren, on my son's side.

MATSEN: That's very nice.

FIORAVANTI: My other son doesn't have no children. All I got the four over there, four great-grandchildren.

MATSEN: That's wonderful.

FIORAVANTI: The first one is in the college already.

MATSEN: Wow!

FIORAVANTI: Three years of college, my first great-granddaughter, you know. And when they see you, you know, we love them, you know.

MATSEN: Right. Well, this is Elysa Matsen signing off with (incorrectly stating her name) Mrs. D'Adamo, Anna

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D'Adamo. July, oh, my gosh, what am I talking about?

This is June 3, 1993 for the Ellis Island Oral History Project.