

EI-335

JOSEPH GALLO

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IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE EMPLOYEE AT ELLIS ISLAND
1947-1954

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Friday, June 18, 1993. I'm at the Ellis Island Recording Studio with Joseph Gallo. Mr. Gallo worked for the INS here at Ellis Island between 1947 and when the island closed in 1954. Anyway, welcome to Ellis Island, Mr. Gallo.

GALLO: Thank you. It's a pleasure.

SIGRIST: Can we begin by you giving me your birth date?

GALLO: My birth date is January 24th 1927.

SIGRIST: And your parents both came from Sicily through Ellis Island.

GALLO: Absolutely.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about your parents and why they came to this country?

GALLO: Well, my father, may he rest in peace, is one of thirteen boys, believe it or not. And out of the thirteen boys, he was the only one that migrated here to the United States. Because of my mother coming here and because they were courting in Sicily they were, their intentions were to get married. When my mother came prior beforehand, she came to Ellis Island, went through the procedures, the examinations and so on, and then released to her mother, who was already here. My father, who came in 1913, prior to the second war, came here, came through Ellis Island, did the same procedure, went through the immigration proceedings, and met my mother and eventually married. And we have three brothers and two sisters.

SIGRIST: Good. Let's get everyone's names. What's your dad's name?

GALLO: My dad's name is Louis.

SIGRIST: Your mom's name?

GALLO: Mom is Maria.

SIGRIST: And her maiden name?

GALLO: Torretta. T-O-R-R-E-T-T-A.

SIGRIST: And your dad came in 1913. When did your mom come?

GALLO: My mom came in 1912.

SIGRIST: I see. And how old were they when they came?

GALLO: My dad was, I'm only guessing, but he was around twenty, twenty-one, and my mother was about eighteen. They were about three years apart.

SIGRIST: And, as you say, they'd been courting in Sicily.

GALLO: Oh, they were courting in Sicily, yes. They knew each other from the town. They come from, uh, what they call, Agrigento is the big city, but the town that they come from is what they call Parinta di Naro, which is sub, like Long Island is to New York, a difference of maybe twenty-five, thirty miles to the big city, and that's where they lived on a farm.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that for me, please?

GALLO: Naro is N-A-R-O, is the town that they come from. The

big city where they usually went and did their things was Agrigento. It's A-G-R-I-G-I-E-N-T-O. And that's in Sicily. And eventually they got together and they married, and we had a fine life with them, except that we had a little problem that they couldn't speak English for a while. We spoke fluently Italian. I speak fluent Italian. In fact, on Ellis Island I was used quite often as an Italian interpreter during the, what they call the Board of Special Inquiry where these aliens, Italian aliens used to come in not knowing how to speak. I was often called to interpret for these aliens and for the immigration. And it was interesting.

SIGRIST: Just before we get too far ahead, what were the names of your brothers and sisters.

GALLO: My brother is one Charlie, may he rest in peace, he's gone. I got a younger brother Vinny, and my two sisters was Angelina and Lina.

SIGRIST: I see.

GALLO: Those are, four are still alive, one is gone.

SIGRIST: How old were you when you thought you might like to

work for the INS?

GALLO: Well, I had gotten out of the service in July 20th, 1946. And I had, I had a business to go to. My dad had a business, and he asked me to run the business for him because he felt I had the capability to run his business, but I didn't care for it, because it was a fruit and vegetable business, and you only work on pennies, and you work a hundred hours a week. But my dad, that was his life. And he asked me, he says, "Joe," he says, "you come with me." And, of course, my two brothers were, they weren't just the type. Anyway, to make a long story short, he's the one that pushed me. He says, "Well, if you're not going to work for me, go into the government." I decided to take an examination. I took a Civil Service exam, and I did fairly well. And I was also a disabled veteran, which means I had preference over the GI or anyone else. When we were called, I was called July 1st, 1947. I was called by INS, and I started my work with them.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you a question. Growing up with immigrant parents, were your parents particularly patriotic?

GALLO: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. They, they loved, you know. We had everybody here, and this was their country, you know. It was hard times. We lived in hard times during the Depression. And they would never go back. In fact my mother, may she rest in peace, never went back to Italy to visit, even though her father left them all here when he left. My father, he never went back to Italy either. He just stayed here and done his thing. Got his citizen papers. We worked on the both of them. You know, you know what it is to immigrant parents, it's hard to get them to read and write. My dad was, I got to say, he was not an illiterate, but the man had brains that, unreal. I mean, he could run a business with his hands and this here. (he gestures to his head)

SIGRIST: Why do you think he wanted you to go into government service?

GALLO: Well, he felt that it's security. He felt that going into the government you had a job. And he was, he had that in his mind that if you don't work for yourself, work for the government. And it worked out. I had thirty-four years. I ended up with thirty-four-and-a-half years in the government.

SIGRIST: Now, was Ellis Island your first station that you went to?

GALLO: I started off in the main office at 70 Columbus Avenue. I started off as a clerk, a GS-1. As a salary, if I tell you, it was disgraceful, thirty-eight dollars a week. My biweekly salary was sixty-six dollars every two weeks. But I eventually did fairly well. I ended up transferring over to United States Customs. I ended up as a Custom Agent. I ended up as a GS-12, and I did fairly well, and I got out with a fairly decent pension.

SIGRIST: When did you come to Ellis?

GALLO: I came to Ellis Island in, around October. Let me see, I was hired in July of 1947. I came to Ellis Island around October 1947.

SIGRIST: What did you know about Ellis Island?

GALLO: Nothing at all. You know, this was like a black, you know, when they used to say Ellis Island it was like you were, you were on a black list for the government, or for immigration. You know, when they sent you here, you were like exiled, because nobody wanted to

come to Ellis Island. It was out of the way. It was a place where, it was strictly a family affair here. I mean, it was, and the people worked very well. I've got to say, in my years here the people worked fairly, they were tight-knit, but it was a family. And when I came from the main office to come here, they didn't accept me, because they thought I was with Internal Affairs to come here to see if anything was going on.

You understand? You know what it is when you're coming to an operation when you're not known. But I had been well-recommended by a fellow here that was a beautiful man. His name was Tony Galetta. A beautiful man. And he recommend me for the job. And he went up to see the chief here, and he says, "Look," he says, "I need a man," he says. "And I want Joe Gallo." And I was transferred over, and I worked here for the next seven or something years.

SIGRIST: Tell me about your first day at Ellis Island.

GALLO: Oh, my God. Oh, it was like, it was like being an alien. Just to know the island, just to, just to get familiarized, you know. I mean, you went from the ferry to your office, and occasionally, like, until you got yourself familiarized, then they gave you keys

to the big room, or they gave you keys to, you know, certain areas. But until they got to know you and until they got to like you, then you had the run of the island. When I say run of the island, you weren't kept restricted. So, but I was very popular. Not to say it, I was very popular. I ran the softball team here. We had our own immigration softball team. We did very well here.

SIGRIST: Where was the baseball field?

GALLO: Behind the, behind the quarters. That big lot in the back there. We had aliens there that worked for us. When I mean worked for us, they used to manicure our field. They used to have that field in tip-top shape. And we used to play other government agencies. We played the Post Office, the U.S. Attorney's, we played Internal Revenue. We played against, oh, a number of immigration, a number of other government agencies. And we formed our own league. We had like eight/ten teams, and we used to have a league. And it was very interesting because we got out of it, good ballplayers out of it. And they were very cooperative. The people here that ran the island were very cooperative with us. Whatever we needed, whatever equipment we

needed we always got some sort of funds from somewhere and somehow. They bought our equipment, they bought our uniforms. It was real nice.

SIGRIST: You said that aliens groomed the field.

GALLO: Oh!

SIGRIST: Was this a common practice at that time for people who were detained, to be given jobs around the island to do?

GALLO: Well, a lot did work on the island. A lot were doing jobs here. They were people that, first of all, they had people in their kitchens. They did their own cooking. They handled their own cooking except we had supervision by an immigration officer that supervised. But they handled, they did all the cleaning. They, the job about the ballfield was other, above what they did. They used to love entertainment because, you know, they're very boring for these people to just sit around. For two hours of softball and watching us, they had a ball.

SIGRIST: But they weren't allowed to play, were they?

GALLO: Oh, no. No, no, no. This was strictly government,

government employees. And you had to show an I.D. before anybody played among, against each other, they had to show an I.D. indicating that they did work for such. In other words, they couldn't bring in any ringers, you know. Some, even though we did. We had a beautiful ballplayer.

SIGRIST: Does one game stick out in your mind?

GALLO: Oh, yes. We played against, in fact, we played against U.S. Customs. See, I was with the Immigration, and we played against U.S. Customs, and we were rivals. We were rival teams, and when they used to come over, a quick story is that the aliens, they used to bet money. If I tell you the money they used to bet, and the things they bet on, like, they come over and, like, I used to walk into their room and they say, "Hey, Joe, who's good tonight?" And I'd say, "Well, we got a pretty good competition tonight. It's an iffy game." And they'd say, "Do you think we're going to win?" I said, "Look, don't bet heavy." (he laughs) You know? And they used to bet. And sometimes we used to play against the Post Office. Now, they were a soft touch. They used to come, I'd say, "Pff!" And then, boom, they'd sock you. And

they'd bet against each other. And they used to gamble. You should see the way these people used to gamble. If I tell you stories, we took cards away from them because they got out of hand. They were a lot of trouble, you know, gambling. So we took the cards away from them. So what they used to do is they used to buy a crate of oranges, and this was, as I tell the story. They used to bet, they used to cut the orange in half, and they used to bet to see how many pits were in the half of the orange. They used to also bet, they'd go to the windowsill, the window, and they used to bet on the raindrops to see which one came, what raindrop would come down further than the other. Especially the Chinese. The Chinese were big gamblers.

SIGRIST: And, of course, you were there at the time when there was a lot of Chinese.

GALLO: Oh, yeah. Oh, well, we were in, yeah, sure. I was here at a time when we handled approximately about two thousand aliens. We had as many as two thousand aliens, and it was, let me tell you, it was quite hectic. And, uh . . .

SIGRIST: Tell me more about the gambling. I think this is interesting. You said you had to take the cards away. What games were they playing with the cards that . . .

GALLO: Well, they played poker. They were big gamblers. Chinese were big gamblers. Blackjack, poker. Anything, you see, and we allowed it for a while. We felt that as long as it kept them busy, as long as it kept them occupied we were happy, because there was less trouble for us, you know. But then it got a little out of hand. There was eventually a fight here and this here. So we had to, occasionally we had to lock up, lock up. We had to send certain people out of detention and send them to the jail, the government prison on West Street. Sometimes we couldn't handle them. Some got out of hand so bad that we used to cuff them, take them to West Street, which was the federal jail at that time. It was called the Federal House of Detention. And we used to incarcerate them there.

SIGRIST: Do you remember a specific instance of this, of having to arrest someone and bring them to the jail, that sticks out in your mind?

GALLO: Oh, well, I couldn't, I couldn't give you the name, but I can say on, I'll bet a half a dozen occasions we had sent people to be incarcerated. When I say incarcerated, they're more or less, uh, locked up. I mean, they're in jail. Over here they had the freedom of the place, you know, the freedom of the island. They were, they could walk around, within an area. Within an area, they stayed in that hall. Most of their area for them to move around was in that big hall, you know. And then, when we used to play ball, they used to come out to the yards, and they had benches there. They used to sit there and watch us.

SIGRIST: What kinds of people are being kept at Ellis Island during those years, in the late '40s and into the '50s?

GALLO: It was all different types. I mean, when you say what kind, you had the Italians, the Germans. Well, Germans, preferably we used to hold on to them because, especially they were still, even though the war had ended, the Germans were still being checked, you know. And the Russians, any kind of Russians.

SIGRIST: But why would they be held here? What was wrong with

them that . . .

GALLO: Okay. They come in, you take a case in point. A case comes in where I get, let's say I get the papers. Like when I worked in this particular office I used to get his passport papers and so on, I used to check them. And the BSI, which they used to call the Board of Special Inquiry, which was Immigration Offices. These were immigration inspectors. And they had their own court. There were three men that were their own court. Now, sometimes we used to get letters from people from Europe saying that this guy was a Communist, or this guy was, what was the word I want to use, bad. I don't know what word I want to use, but you got to watch him or, there you get telephone calls from, what's that agency in Europe that keeps track of all things that are going on, and they let us know. And that's how we used to find out. When these letters come in, we used to take them to the Board of Special Inquiry and they'd say, "Joe, when this person comes in I want you to hold him until we have a hearing." And when he got off the boat or the plane or whatever they used to bring him here and we used to just tell him to sit downstairs until he was ready for

his hearing. They used to wait two, three days sometimes. And then he'd be going before this board.

And the board would decide whether they let him in or whether they set bail for him or whether they deport him, and that's the way it worked.

SIGRIST: Now, was there an interpreter at the board always?

GALLO: Oh, yes. We always had, we always had either a Spanish interpreter, Italian, German, any kind of an interpreter we needed. We always had people here. And I'm saying employees, not specifically outside interpreters. Even though we had, on the island we had what they used to call the Italian Welfare. Now, they used to handle all the Italian people. Then we had Czechoslovakian agencies. And they used to handle all the Czechs and all the Yugoslavians and so on. So anybody who was being held for a particular reason, these agencies used to interpret for these people. And they used to try to find, they were like mini-lawyers. And they used to come in, and they'd say, "Well, I'm representing, and no fee. This was all gratis. They used to come into the Board of Special Inquiry and say, "Look, I'm representing Joe, uh, John Doe, and let's find out what the story is." And then

they'd say, "Well, the hearing is scheduled such-and-such." And this person would come. And he would act as the man's interpreter or the woman's interpreter. Now, there's no way that this person would have, fenagling the interpretation, or whatever this person is saying, because there were people there that understood languages, you understand? But they're never let it know. They just say, "Mr. So-and-so, ask this person a question and so on," even though they knew exactly what this fellow was going to say to him. And that's the way it worked.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any specific cases that stick out in your mind?

GALLO: One case I'll never forget. There was a young boy, a young boy, a seventeen-year-old. I'll never forget this story as long as I live. He was a seventeen-year-old German, a young lad. He stowawayed on a Pan Am flight. We picked him up at Kennedy Airport and they brought him to Ellis Island. This kid was a snake. When I say a snake, this kid could maneuver you out of, we had him for about four years and we couldn't deport him. We couldn't deport him for a reason that Germany wouldn't accept him. They

wouldn't say that he was a German citizen or a German, uh, subject. They wouldn't tell us that he was born in such a place and so-and-so. We were stuck with him. But the only good thing about that is that Pan Am paid the tab. We used to bill Pan Am every month, bing, so much a month. And they used to send a check, and they'd pay his tab. Before Ellis Island closed they, they did everything to try and get rid of this man. Are you ready? This man was adopted by a family in Texas. They heard about his story, and they went through legal formality. They ended up adopting this, and at that time he was twenty-one, because he was here four years with us.

GALLO: He was detained here four years.

GALLO: Four years he was with us, yes. And I can't remember his name, I don't remember his name, but that story stuck with me, and he got out. He got out and they, the family, adopted him, per se. And he went to live in Texas somewhere. Now, that's one story that I'll never forget because this kid, he was a, this kid had, I'll never forget it. He had every girl, every, this kid was a snake. (he laughs) If you know what I, this kid was, but he was a good, never gave us any

trouble. He was a worker. We would say, "Here, here's a pail of paint and a brush, go paint this." And he'd be, he'd work like a dog for you, you know, because he was happy to be here knowing that he wasn't going to go back to Germany. He knew he wasn't going to go back. And eventually, like I said, he ended up staying in the United States.

SIGRIST: And interesting that Pan Am paid . . .

GALLO: Well, they had to. They were responsible for him. They had two choices. They either pay his toll or room and board, or they had to deport him. If we could get the documents to deport him, because they're responsible for him. Same thing with any ship. Any ship that brings in stowaways or brings in anybody that jumps ships, the steamship company is responsible. See, that was another phase of my job. I was a process server. I used to serve all these summonses to the airlines and to the, uh, and to the steamship companies.

SIGRIST: That's an unpleasant job.

GALLO: Yes, it was. Well, I wasn't that popular. But they knew me, they got to know me so that, see, and I had

to get a signature by anybody. I had to go to the VP and all these agencies. I used to go up and say, "Mr. So-and-So, here." I'd say, "I got a summons here." And he'd sign it, and I'd explain to him, "This is what it is. It's a form of a summons that you're being liable for such-and-such." And then they'd get their lawyers on it, you know. And they only paid, excuse me, they didn't pay a hundred percent. They paid like twenty-five percent. If it was a thousand dollars they paid two-fifty, you know. And that's the way it worked.

SIGRIST: So people would have been brought out to Ellis Island for legal reasons, right, if their papers were together.

GALLO: Or sicknesses.

SIGRIST: Or illness.

GALLO: Illness.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about what kinds of illnesses you saw out here?

GALLO: Oh, sure. We had quite a few cases here of TB, quite a few cases, where we used to isolate them ourselves.

And eventually we used to send them to the U.S. Public Health Hospital, which was on the other side of the island. And they had rooms where they were kept isolated until we got papers enough to get rid of them, because they would never allow them in the United States. Then there were cases where they had glaucoma, which you weren't allowed in the United States. Or if you came in with VD. If you came in with VD, I mean, even though it's a curable disease, they wouldn't allow you in the United States.

SIGRIST: And I've interviewed other people who remember there being a lot of Cuban prostitutes at that time.

GALLO: Oh, yes, yeah. Cubans, even Italians.

SIGRIST: Here. Does that stick out in your mind?

GALLO: There was one case that stuck with me. There was an Italian girl that was picked up in New York as a prostitute, illegally here in the United States. And we brought her onto the island, and we couldn't get rid of her. She was another one case in point where we couldn't get documents for her. But you just can't put a person on a plane or on a ship and say, "Here, Italy or Germany, this is your body." They won't

accept them, unless you got documents saying that this person was born here, and you got proof of, birth certificate and so on. Now, this girl, she made a business coming here because, you know, she was a prostitute. Eventually we had to get rid of her. We paroled her, or she was let out on bond and we let her go because she was more damaging to the people here than, you know what I'm talking about. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: She made more money at Ellis Island.

GALLO: Yeah! You know, there was a close-knit population here, you know. And these men were, you know, nothing. Go ahead, and you have a ball.

SIGRIST: Tell me about what kinds of interaction you had with the Public Service Hospital, if any.

GALLO: Not much. I really, the only thing that I had to do with them is when a person was sick I would call up and say, "Dr. So-and-So, this is Joe Gallo. We're sending John Doe over. He's got this and this." And he'd say, "Okay, send her over. We have a bed for her," and so on. And we used to wheelchair them over, you know, unless they were bedridden. Then we used to

send a gurney. And we, see, this used to be connected. That bridge, when we got off Ellis Island, when we got off the ferry there was that bridge there, and we used to, we used to go to the right, and the people that worked in Public Service, uh, U.S. Public Service, they went to the left. But we didn't have that much to do with them. I mean, per se, you know.

We sent our people that were sick, people that needed medical attention right away, we sent them there.

SIGRIST: What about your own medical needs? For instance, if you needed to be checked out by a doctor because you worked for the INS, did you go to the Public Health Service?

GALLO: Well, if I needed, if I needed like a blood check I would call somebody and say, "Is it possible I could have it?" "Oh, yeah, come on over, and if there's time available to us we'll take care of you." But we really didn't. I mean, we didn't want to, we were more isolated. We were Immigration and they were Public Service. We really didn't have too much to do with them, you know.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the Coast Guard being here at that

time?

GALLO: No. No, I don't remember the Coast Guard. I remember they used to tie up, uh, Coast Guard boats used to tie up with the ferries, because they used to eat in our cafeteria. I think we paid like fifty cents for a meal. And we used to get a fairly decent meal. I mean, you got a meal that was worth, at that time, say, two, three dollars outside. But it only cost us fifty cents.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the cafeteria for me?

GALLO: The cafeteria was clean. It was, the food was good because it was cooked by immigration people. It was about, maybe seating for forty, and you were allowed a half hour, forty minutes, you know, for lunch or whatever. And it was well-kept. It was very clean, I've got to say that. And they aliens used to clean it. They used to have aliens.

SIGRIST: But the aliens didn't eat there, did they?

GALLO: Oh, no. No, no. No, they had their own cafeteria. The only aliens that used to eat there were the people that served. Like, we had aliens that served us.

They were behind the counter and, you know, you went with your tray or dish and they, whatever you wanted.

And then you ate, and then you paid. There was a man that used to be at the door, and they give you, at the end of the meal they used to give you a stub, a chit, and you used to go to him and you paid him. That's the way you got out, you know. But we all ate, nobody ever went ashore to eat, nobody. because the food was good here, you know. You had to. And the price was right. Well, it was subsidized by the government. I mean, aside that, aside that eating here, you were here. So in case an emergency like for us, that we were in detention, they wanted you were, you know. It's like a prison guard. They don't expect the prison guard to go outside the prison to eat because in an emergency they want you . . .

SIGRIST: You were on call, you needed to be here.

GALLO: That's right. Absolutely.

SIGRIST: What kinds of situations might arise that you would be called? What kinds of emergencies might happen?

GALLO: Well, fights, you know. You know, you got, don't forget you got a lot of people here that they resent

being held. You know, there are people here, they want to know what they're doing, and they don't understand, because they don't understand why they're here, why are they being held, uh, "Why ain't I getting examined?" Or, "Why ain't I going before the Board of Special Inquiry?" "What am I doing here?" You know. And then you had two people, you know. They get together and the next thing you know they're throwing punches. And you're in the middle, and you're trying to be the good guy and you end up getting a shot. You know, you end up getting belted, but we had enough help here during the day time. It was at night that we didn't have the help because, you know, we only ran this place with, uh, I'm only guessing, but I guess there were about thirty, thirty-five, forty detention officers.

SIGRIST: What was the evening procedure for the aliens? When did they have to eat? When did they have to go to bed, and what were your responsibilities?

GALLO: They ate between the hours, like between four thirty, six thirty. They had like two, and don't forget we had a ton of people here. And they ate within those certain two hours. And then they were allowed to stay

up till about nine thirty, ten o'clock and lights out.

But they never went to bed. They used to just congregate, you know. The only people that went to bed were the families, because they had their own separate rooms. They had places to go and be comfortable, because we tried to keep the families together. You couldn't, you couldn't expect a family of three or four with kids to live in dormitories, you know. So that's why we used to keep them in their separate rooms.

SIGRIST: So single people stayed in the dormitory rooms?

GALLO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Split by sex?

GALLO: No, no, no. They mingled. No, we didn't, we didn't care that much, like I said, the big problem here was not to create a problem. You were here to detain them, you were here to see that they get service and that there's no problems. That's the big thing, you know. And most of them, basically eighty-five, ninety percent, you had problems with them. They were good, you know.

SIGRIST: Where were the families put up?

GALLO: They were put up on our second floor, those private rooms?

SIGRIST: The third floor balcony around the . . .

GALLO: The third floor balcony, yeah. That was theirs.

SIGRIST: So there were children here at that time.

GALLO: Oh, absolutely.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about there being children in this atmosphere?

GALLO: Well, you know, European children, they stay so close-knit to the families, to the mother and father that you really never had, really get in contact with them because they're always hanging onto the mother or they're always, because they kept them isolated. They always tried to keep the families together, and that was a big thing because, you know, kids were, sometimes they run around or whatever, they can get hurt and so on, but the families were good. The mother and father, and they were strict. They kept the, you know, kept themselves, made sure that there

was no problems.

SIGRIST: Do you remember an instance where a child was hurt or got lost, something like that here?

GALLO: Not really. I couldn't, I mean, I couldn't venture to say whether, you know . . .

SIGRIST: The kids were the least of your worries.

GALLO: The kids were, yeah. (Mr. Sigrist laughs) The kids were, they were. There was no problem because they could go to the cafeteria and get, you know, little goodies for them, you know. There was always a place where they could get candy or something for them, you know. We had a, we had like a little shop, a shop, knick-knack, and they used to go to get their candies. And I kept them, you know. But that was run by, privately. That wasn't ours.

SIGRIST: Was there also like a room or a classroom or something that was set aside for children?

GALLO: No, not really.

SIGRIST: Nothing like that.

GALLO: No, nothing like that. But they did have, the main

thing that we depended on was the people that were on the island, like the Italian Welfare or the, these agencies that kept these people known or knowledgeable of what's going on. In other words, they wanted to know. So these, we relied on these people outside of the immigration people to contact these people. In other words they tell them, "Look, I spoke to so-and-so, and this is what's happening. There's no problems." Bla, bla. So they were satisfied to hear from somebody of their own language, you know. But if I went into the big room and I'd say this and this and this, they didn't understand me from Adam, you know. But coming from their own people, they were happy and kept, you know, kept without any problems.

SIGRIST: So the immigrant aid societies were very important there.

SIGRIST: Oh, absolutely.

GALLO: Did they have their own offices right here in the main building?

GALLO: Yes, yes. Yes, they had their own offices, the Italian, the Yugoslavian, all of them. They all had their own offices.

SIGRIST: The HIAS must have been . . .

GALLO: Oh, they were very popular, Jewish. I didn't even mention them, Jewish, yes. Because we had quite a few Jewish people here, quite a few. And HIAS, they were very helpful to us. Any time you need, any kind of problem with one of their own, they used to come up to our main office and say, "Joe, what's the problem?" And I'd say, "bing-bing-bing" and you never had no problem. They were good.

SIGRIST: We're going to pause for a second and Kevin's going to flip the tapes over and then we'll talk some more.

GALLO: Here's luck.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: We're now resuming with Joe Gallo. Mr. Gallo, can you describe your office, where it was, and what it looked like?

GALLO: Well, the office was on the second floor, and it was, it was little cubicles.

SIGRIST: Off of the main . . .

GALLO: Off of the main . . .

SIGRIST: The main hall?

GALLO: Off in the main, in the back of the, in back of the island. And they had, well, the chief had his own office, then his secretary. Then there was one, two, three. There was three cubicles which, these were, these were people that handled all the different problems that were on the island. Then I worked with a fellow by the name of Frank Haste who was, at that time we were called Statistical Clerk, at that time. And when I, that's when I first came to the island. And I was his assistant, and we used to keep records. We had folders and binders as big as your arm. And every day we used to get all the immigration papers of all the immigration aliens coming to the island and we had to record them. Name, date of birth, whatever and such. And then we used to take these papers. If they were ready for a Board of Special Inquiry, I used to take them back to the Board of Special Inquiry office and say, "Here, this is what we got." They didn't know until they got the documents. I used to take them back there, and I say, in fact the fellow that

was in charge was Ed Clark, a beautiful man. He was in charge of all the inspectors, and he, well, we got very friendly. You know, you get to be friends. I mean, they were beautiful men. And I'd say, "Eddie, this is a six, seven, ten." Whatever. He'd say, "Okay, Joe." And they would at that point schedule these people for hearings. After the hearings I would get the documents back, and they would say, "Okay, you can release her." And they'd give me a release on him. And I'd go downstairs and I'd call out "Mr. So-and-So," and release him. Or I would release him to the, to the agencies. I'd say, "Look, this guy is being released," or, "This girl is being released. Would you see that somebody meets her on the other side, the New York side?" You don't let these people out blind, you know. So they used to make the arrangements. They used to call people that they knew in New York, and they'd say, "Your friend or your cousin or your aunt or somebody's being released. He's going to make the two o'clock ferry." And they'd be waiting on the other side, so these people wouldn't be, you know, lost in New York.

SIGRIST: Would you say that the Board of Special Inquiry, going

before the Board was an extremely emotional experience for a lot of these people.

GALLO: Oh, absolutely, absolutely, sure. Because they didn't know, they didn't know what to expect. I mean, these people were, these people were judge, jury and whatever, you know. They decided whether these people entered the United States or whether they faced being deported again. And very rare have I seen it in my time here that they made errors in that respect. I mean, most of, most were released, you know. Either on bond, bail or whatever. Because, see, some of them used to be held on bond because the reason we held bond for them, of course, we didn't want them to become a public, uh, charge to the United States. So what we used to do was we used to ask their cousins, aunts or uncles to put up a five hundred dollar bond. So if anything happened, like these people would become a public charge, they would take it right out of the bond. You understand? So basically most of them were released on what we call ROK, released on his own recognizance, ROR, released on own recognizance.

SIGRIST: Do you remember an instance where a mistake was made?

GALLO: Not really. No, like I said, these people were excellent workers. I mean, these Board of Special Inquiry, they were all inspectors. They were immigration inspectors.

SIGRIST: Who would, who would actually sit on the board?

GALLO: Well, Ed Clark was the number one man. Then you had a fellow by the name of Russ Danielson, who I remember very well. And let me see, who else was back there . . .

SIGRIST: Would there be a stenographer there?

GALLO: Oh, yeah, sure, taking notes. Absolutely.

SIGRIST: So you've got one, how many people sitting in justice? Three?

GALLO: Well, you'd have maybe three. You'd have three people, you'd have a stenographer, you'd have the alien sitting like this, and then you'd have the interpreter, and then you'd have the person from the welfare, you know. And they would ask questions and they would go through a routine of questions. Because I've sat in through many of them being used as an

Italian interpreter that, and the findings were up to the three people. And then they used to coincide, there was a chief. And he used to say okay, and they okayed it. You got released, you know.

SIGRIST: Tell me about being an interpreter and what that experience was like for you.

GALLO: Oh, it's strange because, see, I'm, there's so many different dialects in Italian.

SIGRIST: Right.

GALLO: I mean, you know, there are cases sometimes where I couldn't talk to the person. And I says, "Capice Italiano?" "Do you understand Italian?" And I'd say, "Well, talk to me in Italian." And if I didn't understand him then I didn't want to be involved because I didn't want to steer this guy wrong. So what I used to do is call this gentleman that used to work at the Italian Welfare, this fellow by the name of Frank Triversa, who was a beautiful man. He spoke everything to everyone. And I used to pick up the phone and say, "Frankie, I'm in a little problem." He'd say, "What is it, Joe?" And I'd say, "I need an interpreter for this dialect. I don't understand it."

You got the Roman, what they call Alta Italia, which is the high Italian. You could talk to me and I couldn't understand beans. But this fellow, this guy was beautiful. He knew all in all dialects. And when I was in trouble I used to call him.

SIGRIST: And, of course, this is a great responsibility for anyone.

GALLO: Oh, absolutely. Because you . . .

SIGRIST: Were you paid extra to be an interpreter?

GALLO: No, no, no, no. I did it because I was an employee of Immigration and they didn't have to go out, see, they didn't rely too much on the welfare people because they wanted to keep it among the Immigration people, you know. But they accepted, they accepted these people because there was nothing else they could do. You know, they had to rely on some people to talk to.

Or else occasionally you had to bring in an outside interpreter and they cost money at that time. You had to pay them. You had to pay them for their time from their offices, the ferry ride, and you had to feed them, and so on, so it entailed money. And the government didn't buy that. The government felt that,

do it within reason, you know, here, and work on it.

SIGRIST: Do you remember a specific case that you had to be the interpreter for? Does one stick out in your mind somehow?

GALLO: No, not really, not really.

SIGRIST: They were all pretty . . .

GALLO: What I sat dozens. And I've got to say dozens, in all my years here, that I was called, you know. Because I spoke, I speak Italian fluently, you know. I don't write it, and I can read my own dialect, but I cannot, you know, interpret. Like you say, there's fifty to a hundred different dialects in Italian and it's not easy, you know. The ones I understand are my people. A Sicilian comes in, I could talk to him like I'm talking to you.

SIGRIST: Did you have to wear a uniform?

GALLO: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the uniform for us?

GALLO: Ah! It was a green, it was olive green, olive green, black tie. In the summer time we wore short sleeve

shirts. Wintertime we had long coats, because it got cold out there when you're out in the field, because sometimes you had to be out in the field, and you wore long overcoats. It was cold. You know, out here in the winter time that wind is howling out there on the water, and you, the uniforms were obsolete, what's the word I want to use? Really old-fashioned, old type. You're going back, I'm going back forty, forty-five years.

SIGRIST: Did you wear a hat with your uniform?

GALLO: Yeah, we wore a hat. Well, that's where the badge, I used to, that badge comes from my hat. And, you know, like I said, we were all examined by the chief. Before you went on duty he looked, you know, and he briefed us. Every morning or whatever shift you worked there was always a captain or someone on. He'd say, "Well, this is, look for this problem," or "check this" or "watch this guy." You know. And he used to brief us what went on during the eight to four shift. And if you worked four to twelve he used to say, "Well, this is what went on eight to four, and we might have a problem with John Doe. Watch him. Just keep an eye on him." And then when we used to leave

here at midnight, the midnight to eight used to be briefed by their people. And that's the way it worked, you know.

SIGRIST: Now, you did not live on the island, correct?

GALLO: Oh, no. I lived home.

SIGRIST: But did any of the staff live on the island?

GALLO: No, no, no, no. No. Not even Mr. Foreman, who was the chief, who was the Chief of Detention. No, nobody.

SIGRIST: You came every morning on the Ellis Island ferry.

GALLO: Yeah, five. You know, you worked the, I think eight to four. When I was in the office, when I started in the office I think my hours were like eight to four thirty, or so. But it was inconvenient because that damn ferry. If you missed it, sometimes you'd get stuck. You miss that ferry you're stuck an hour, you know. And they didn't pay you. You never got paid any overtime or anything like that. They just, you were just stuck and you waited till the ferry went to New York and they did their thing there, and then they come back. And by the time you lose an hour, an hour-

and-a-half, you know.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the ferry for me?

GALLO: Oh, the ferry. God almighty, I wish I had a nickel for every ride. It was an old-type ferry, but it was excellent service, the service was excellent. We had, there were no cars, no cars allowed on that ferry, and it carried all the employees of not only Immigration but all of Public Health. So in the mornings, like on the eight to four shift, that ferry was really mobbed because you had, well, maybe a hundred, maybe a hundred people that worked on the island at that time.

I'm only guessing but, excuse me, but there had to be at least a hundred that worked on the island. And then they used to run ferries back and forth because we had to take people like, sometimes you had to take an alien to do some work in New York. So we used to have two men, and two men, we used to escort him to New York, and he used to do his thing, whatever he had to do or whatever, you know. But you always had, you always waited for that ferry no matter what, you know.

And then at night it didn't run from the hours like, what was it, one o'clock to five. If I remember, I think from one to five the ferry didn't run at all, or

midnight. I think midnight was the last, I think once the midnight shift came on board the ferry stopped. And then it started like five, five thirty in the morning, but it didn't run at night. But it was inconvenient.

SIGRIST: And you said when it docked you all went to the right.

GALLO: We went to the right, and the U.S. Public Health Service went to the left, right. We used to . . .

SIGRIST: Tell me, what kinds of jobs did women have here?

GALLO: Well, most of them were secretaries. Let me see, there was one woman that stuck in my mind. Her name was Evelyn Franco. She was, oh, she was a beautiful woman, a black woman, but a beautiful woman. She had a responsible job. She was in charge of, she was like a Board of Special Inquiry officer, but she didn't work as a Board of Special Inquiry. She used to do a lot of the interpreting of what was wrong with these people, what was wrong with their documents. And she used to determine, at that point, when I used to get the papers, she used to say, "Well, let's see, Joe." And then she'd say, "Send them back to the Board of Special Inquiry." And she was the middleman between

my office and the Board of Special Inquiry. And she had a responsible job. She was a beautiful woman, a beautiful worker. Evelyn Franco, her name was, beautiful.

SIGRIST: But for the most part women had secretarial jobs.

GALLO: Secretarial jobs, yeah. Clerks, secretarial jobs. We had a lot of what they call searchers. There were a lot of people here that, we used like three or four clerks. They were clerical positions, but they were searchers. And the searchers, what they used to do is go into files and look for misplaced files. Sometimes you take a file that's put under G instead of F or whatever, and it's misplaced. And these people, that was their job, to look for files that were misplaced or lost and so on. And they were good people. Of course, you needed them, because you're looking for a file, a jacket or whatever, you don't know what the Hell to do. And we used to call and say, "Look, we need a, and they used to go through all the files and scan through the files and find it, you know.

SIGRIST: One question that comes to my mind is did you supply any kind of entertainment for the immigrants?

GALLO: No. They supplied their own.

SIGRIST: What about . . .

GALLO: The only, wait. There was one time, there was one time we had Jimmy Durante here. Jimmy Durante came here one time and gave a show. He was the only man that I ever remembered that came to Ellis Island and gave a show for the aliens, the only man that I, in the entertainment field. But they supplied their own. They had radios. They all had little radios. They all had some sort of entertainment.

SIGRIST: Were there televisions anywhere?

GALLO: Did we have televisions? I don't know, in 1947, yeah, I guess there was, but I don't remember television here. I don't honestly remember tele, I think eventually they must have, if my memory serves me right, from 1947 to '55, '54, they must have had television somewhere, I would think so, but I wouldn't bet on it.

SIGRIST: But you don't remember there being one in the Great Hall that people would watch or anything like that.

GALLO: Oh, no, no, no. There wasn't, there was no

entertainment at all in that big, they entertained themselves.

SIGRIST: What about for Christmas or something? Did they do anything for the . . .

GALLO: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: What did they do for the people?

GALLO: We put up trees, we put up Christmas trees.

SIGRIST: Where would you put the tree up?

GALLO: Down in the big hall. Yeah, we had trees. We had, in fact we had a Christmas tree like up in the office part of us, for us. And then we put a Christmas tree. And then we had, for the Jewish people they had the, what do you call, the meno, what do you call that?

SIGRIST: The menorah.

GALLO: The menorah.

SIGRIST: For Hanukkah.

GALLO: Yeah, the Hanukkah menorah. And we used to try to make it as pleasant, you know, for the holidays. It's not easy to be locked up during the holiday, you know.

But we did, that we did. And that was, stuff like that was donated. Most of the trees, like, were donated by people on the other side. They'd send one, two trees, and we used to put the trees up. Especially for children, you know. And then you'd have little gifts, somebody would buy little gifts and so on. People were very generous here. They were really good. I mean, because it was a family thing, you know. You don't, when you work, when you work in a prison, these people are incarcerated, they're locked up. These people really weren't locked up to speak of, they were just being held, detained. That's the word you used, they're being detained, you know. And you don't like to say you're being locked up because even though they don't, they can't go anywhere, it's a fact that they're not locked up. They're not in jail, you understand? But we used to try and make it as pleasant as possible for these people, you know, their kids.

SIGRIST: Even though they perceived it, really, as being incarcerated.

GALLO: Well, of course, you know, because they can't go anywhere. You go to the big hall there and you sit

there, you can't go to the, you know, you're locked up, per se. But they're not locked up, they're detained. That's the word we used to use, "You're being detained here temporarily by the government, by the Immigration, and as soon as the papers are straightened out, or bah, bah, bah." You know, you try to pacify them in some way, you know, so at least you feel that you won't have any kind of problems. And most people got out within a reasonable time. They're, you know.

SIGRIST: Would you say four years, the German gentleman, was probably the longest you remember?

GALLO: Oh, that was the longest. Oh, absolutely. He was the longest gentleman that we had. A young kid, he was seventeen. I'll never forget it, seventeen. And he was, he was our longest resident. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Now, was there any general processing going on here, people who were just here to be processed and then move on?

GALLO: Well, they did. If they felt, you know, people here brought, like, for an hour or so, just to have their papers processed. They would bring them to Ellis

Island, they'd put them in a big room. Papers would be processed by somebody or by the Board of Special Inquiry, and they'd say, "Okay, release him." And they put him on the next ferry and they'd go.

SIGRIST: So there was some general processing going on here.

GALLO: Oh, sure, sure. If they felt, if they felt that they couldn't be released either on a ship or on, at the airport, they brought them over here to protect yourself. Because, see, they had the jurisdiction at the airport, the Immigration inspector had the authority to release him. But if he felt that there was a little bit of a black mark or something, send him to Ellis Island and let, let the people here decide. And it's, that was the job of the Board of Special Inquiry. That was their, they were very busy. They were kept pretty busy.

SIGRIST: What about with displaced persons?

GALLO: Oh, my God.

SIGRIST: Talk to me about the fate of displaced persons here on Ellis Island.

GALLO: Oh, the poor people. Oh, those, well, they were

brought in after the war, after the second war, they were brought in by the boatloads because they didn't know where they, where they came from or how to, because they were displaced.

SIGRIST: And that process went on for a number of years after the war.

GALLO: Oh, absolutely.

SIGRIST: Do you remember dealing with cases like that?

GALLO: Oh, absolutely, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about that?

GALLO: Oh, they were detained, like, until their papers were cleared, you know. Until, there were many of them that got in. There were many, and I say this with no hesitation, there were many Communists. And I say that, Communist people or people that were in jail over in Europe, let's say. And they were, they got in through the Displaced Persons Act, because that was a big thing, in 1947 I think it started.

SIGRIST: Tell me about the Act.

GALLO: The Act was, the Act was that as long as these people

didn't have a country to live in, they were being sent out of their country. So they came to the United States. And that's how they got the word "displaced."

They didn't know where to put these people, so they all came here. And they became, you know, they all, basically, ninety-nine out of a hundred people were released because of that fact that they couldn't send them back to their country. Most of them came from behind the Iron Curtain. Not so much the Italians, French, British, you know, which these people came in on quotas. See, all those countries, they allot a quota every year, so they weren't even mentioned in this Displaced Persons Act. It was people behind the Iron Curtain, because the country where they were, they didn't want them. So they sent them here, and that's how they got these people, the incorrigibles, into the United States. Like, for sake of argument, Castro. How many people did he get in through Cuba when he wanted to get rid of those people in Cuba, right? He took them all out of his jails and sent them to us. So that was the same principle. The principle is the same, that these people didn't, most of them, most of them were good. I mean, basically most of them were good, honest people, but they had

people that you, that they wanted to get in, Communists and so on. And that's how they got them in. But some of them were caught. Some of them were caught, they were stopped here. When they went before the Board of Special Inquiry they said, "Well, this is it." Boom, put them on a plane or ship, send them back. They couldn't let them land in the United States.

SIGRIST: A terrible position to be in.

GALLO: Oh, absolutely. Same thing holds true with the war brides. We had a big influx of war brides after 1947 to maybe '50.

SIGRIST: Oh, great. Talk about that. That's an interesting side to Ellis Island.

GALLO: Oh, this is, this war bride deal was something. Well, the GI's were all in Europe, and they married everything and everyone. The British, French, Italian, everyone. Now, excuse me, these girls used that as a way to get into the country, because that was the fastest way to get into the country, because you didn't have a quota. You were a bride of a GI. And when I, in fact, I started on that project. I was

in charge of that project, and I used to handle all their papers. And they used to come in, we used to hold them here until the GI. Now, the GI would call and say, "Joe, Mr. Gallo, you got Mrs. So-and-so." And I'd look my file, and I'd say, "Yeah, she's here. She's waiting to be picked up." They come out to Ellis Island, they'd have to identify themselves as a GI, the husband, on the marriage certificate or something. They'd take them home. But the things that you saw, a different type of, I mean, these beautiful girls. I mean, they were girls that were outrageous, beautiful girls. And they married some bum. (he laughs) You don't have to say anything about it. But it was a passport. And I used to talk to these girls and say, "Look." But I'd say, "You know, by law you're supposed to live with this GI." I think at that time it was mandatory that they had to live with the GI for at least a year. If I remember, I'm only guessing, but there was a time that they had to live with this GI. And then they scat, you know. They leave. But that was the fastest way to get here. That was a big project. That was a big thing after the second war, because all these GI's were bringing their brides home. And we couldn't stop them, because

they were bride of a GI, you know.

SIGRIST: But oftentimes they would end up over here.

GALLO: Oh, absolutely! Nine out of ten brides ended up on Ellis Island, just to be processed and to be picked up by the groom, or whatever, yeah.

SIGRIST: Is there any other category of person that we haven't talked about that would have been brought to Ellis Island. We've talked about people who are ill, displaced people, people whose papers were not legit.

GALLO: Kosher.

SIGRIST: War brides. Is there any other category that you can think of of people that would have been brought out here?

GALLO: Well, you had the people that were sick. You had the people that were very sick.

SIGRIST: Right.

GALLO: They were, you know, they were held . . .

SIGRIST: Tuberculosis.

GALLO: Tuberculosis or, glaucoma and tuberculosis were the

two items. They really, I think I covered as much as I could have, yes. In a general information, or general talking I think I've hit almost every category of person that was on Ellis Island, you know.

SIGRIST: Tell me about how you found out that the island was going to be closing up.

GALLO: We didn't. We didn't. That was a strange thing. I was just mentioning to my brother-in-law about, I'll never forget it. Around two months before, prior to closing, we had spent, when I say "we," the government had spent like two or three hundred thousand dollars. They put in a whole new sewer system.

SIGRIST: For Ellis Island.

GALLO: For Ellis Island. I mean, it was a big, it was a big operation. And tons of money went into this island. They were doing a lot of fixing and this and that. And no one had an inkling about this closing the island until this General, who was General Swing at that time, I'll never forget his name, General Swing, he was the Commissioner of Immigration. And he came, and he didn't even come to the island. Stood on the other side of the island, where the ferry was, and he

pointed. I'll never forget the words. This was the story that they told us. I was on the island. Pointed, he says, "Close it." And I would say, without no hesitation, at least two hundred, two hundred and fifty people lost their jobs just like that. What the government did was they tried to give these people an opportunity to transfer to other positions or to other jobs, but they had no job here on Ellis Island. The job was closed. The only thing that we kept here was detention until we moved them to our new detention area at 641 Washington Street.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about that process, because that must have been a bit of an ordeal, moving everybody.

GALLO: Oh, my God, that was a hectic thing. Because you could only hold so many people up there. That place was, oh, I'd say maybe a hundred people. And the rest of the people that were here, they just had to let go. They had to let go, and what they did was they gave them a date, a hearing date or a tentative date to come and report. But the ones that were bad, the ones that we really had to keep, we brought them up to this new detention area which we had to set up. Oh, it was hectic. And then there was no kitchen there. All the

food had to be purchased from a restaurant in the area, and they used to deliver the food, morning, afternoon and night. And they used to bring like a hundred trays of food. And they used to just send them in, and they used to eat. That's the way we fed them.

SIGRIST: And that was for the worst people.

GALLO: For the worst people.

SIGRIST: What was the address of that detention house?

GALLO: 641 Washington Street.

SIGRIST: Oh, on Washington Street.

GALLO: It was right off the West Side Drive. It was a government building, it was a government building. And, uh . . .

SIGRIST: How long were you given to vacate the island, to do all of these things?

GALLO: Well, the island closed in October. No, November, I'm sorry. We closed in November. And if I remember I think we got off before the holidays. If I remember, you know, I'm only guessing, but I'm sure we were off

before the holidays, because I think I spent Christmas in that detention area. I'm pretty sure I spent my first Christmas with Immigration in that area. It was in 1954.

SIGRIST: What was your initial reaction when you find out the island was going to be closed?

GALLO: I was shocked. I was shocked because I thought they had such a good operation here. I mean, a place where you can hold these people and take care of the problems that existed in Immigration, you know. I mean, today it's, forget about today, poor Immigration. I wouldn't want to work in Immigration today. Those poor guys up there, they have a . . .

SIGRIST: It's a whole different ballgame.

GALLO: Oh, it's a whole different game.

SIGRIST: Did they have some kind of a, I hate to use the word celebration, but some kind of a party or something for the staff because of the closing?

GALLO: We had our own party, we did. We had our own Christmas, well, we had more or less a pre-Christmas party because it was before Christmas. We used to

have our parties here, you know, Christmas parties. Because, like I said, it was a family here. You got to be like, you got to be like a close-knit family. The people were all beautiful people.

SIGRIST: Can you make a generalization about how the staff in general felt about the closing of the island?

GALLO: They were really in shock. I mean, you know, you had people here fifteen, twenty years, twenty, twenty years. You know, when they found out that Ellis Island was closing they just couldn't believe, they couldn't believe their, what they were hearing. But this general said, "Close it," and that's it. And there was no way that you could dispute or even say, "Wait, give us an argument, you know." Just like that. "Close it." And that was it.

SIGRIST: Do you remember cleaning out your desk or vacating your office?

GALLO: Oh, yes. Oh, my God, what a sad feeling. When you're talking about Tony Galetta, (referring to Interview AKRF 41) you said you had an interview with him, and I worked for that man. I worked for him, too. I worked for him, oh, about two, three years I worked

for him. A beautiful man. He was in charge, Tony was the agent cashier on Ellis Island, and he handled all the personal properties of the aliens. In other words, if aliens come in with gold and wristwatches and monies, which they're only allowed to keep so much, he used to take it off from them, give them a receipt, a government receipt and so on. And then we used to keep it, I was his assistant for about two, three years. And from his office, that's where I got the job serving, being a process server. Because from his office we used to give all the process servers the summonses and I used to take them from there and then I used to go to New York and do my thing, yeah. But he was a beautiful man, Tony. What a gentleman, what a, and he did, quite a few years. I guess he was thirty-five years with Immigration. In fact, he just died. I was at his wake, about two years ago. A beautiful man.

SIGRIST: Who was the superintendent at that time? Who was in charge of the island?

GALLO: George Foreman.

SIGRIST: Foreman.

GALLO: Foreman was in charge.

SIGRIST: And can you just quickly give a little personality sketch of Mr. Foreman?

GALLO: Oh, he was an oddball. He was an oddball. I mean, the guy, the guy knew his job. I mean, there's no way in the world I can dispute that. The man knew his job, he knew what he was doing, but he was a little bit of an oddball. Well, you know, he had a big responsibility. You know, this was a big job. And I think at that time he must have been, grade-wise I don't think he was more than a thirteen, a fourteen at that, which was, at that time it was a big job. And he had his own office. He was king of the hill. I mean . . .

SIGRIST: What was odd about him? You say he's odd. What sticks out in your mind?

GALLO: Well, he never, he never smiled. He never smiled. The man would walk through your office and look at you like, you know. But he appreciated the work you did because he knew everything was up to par and there was no problems. But he never come in and say, "Joe, Jesus." This, never. But my boss, who I worked for,

Frank Haste, he used to come in and say, "Joe, George says everything is going along great. He's happy." But this frown on his face was, oh!

SIGRIST: Would you say he was sort of a remote character?

GALLO: Oh, yes. Oh, absolutely. But I should say this story, but it's a funny story. (he laughs) He had his own car. I don't know if he's alive, and I don't know if he's going to hear this, but he had his own car, that was a government car, an issued car. And I'll never forget this story. His car was stolen. It used to be on the other side of the ferry. You know, his own private, a nice car. It was a Buick of some sort, a black Buick, kept up well, you know. It was stolen. He tried to blame one of our detention officers. "I want it back. You stole it." Bah, bah, bah. "You stole it." Are you ready for the bottom line? His son stole it. He was so embarrassed. He didn't know whether to crawl under his desk. But his son, well, actually he didn't steal it. His son borrowed it. In the meantime he was blaming everybody and everyone. And when he found out that his son stole it, he didn't know what to say or who to say it to, or, but he was, you know, that's the type of man

he was. He really was one, two, three, boom, you're wrong. You know, until I'm proven that you're right, you're wrong. And that's the way he was.

SIGRIST: When you look back on your years at Ellis Island, do you look back on them fondly or was that not a great time in your life?

GALLO: Oh, no. I loved it. I loved it here. I always looked forward to coming to work here. Because, like I said, you had people you loved to work with. It was always something different. Every day was something different, you know. Every day was a different job, you know, a different something.

SIGRIST: Wearing a lot of hats.

GALLO: Yeah, you're right. Well, in my time I did, let's see. I was a detention officer. I was a statistical clerk. I was a process server. I was the armed guard. I mean, and I was just new in the game, because I come in in 1947 and I only stayed with Immigration till '55. When I got married, I left, when I got married at '55 I left Immigration, and I ended up as a Customs agent, and I did about thirty-something years in Customs.

SIGRIST: Oh. Mr. Gallo, we need to end now. We're just about out of tape. But I want to thank you very much. This has been a real pleasure. You've filled us in on a period of Ellis Island history we don't know a whole lot about. I appreciate it. Thank you, thanks. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Joseph Gallo on June 18, 1993.