

EI-340

MATILDA IZZO DE MICHELE

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ITALY, 1921

AGE 21

PASSAGE ON "THE CANADA"

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, June 29, 1993. I am here with Matilda De Michele, who came from Italy in 1921 when she was twenty-one. Also present is her daughter, Ann Samartino. You may feel free to interject if you feel it necessary. Anyway, I'm happy to be here, and can we begin by you giving me your birth date.

DE MICHELE: July 9, 1899.

SIGRIST: So you're almost going to have a birthday pretty soon. Can you tell me, Mrs. De Michele, where you were born in Italy?

DE MICHELE: Italy, a small town, was named Casi. Teano was the

city, in provincia de Napoli.

SIGRIST: Okay. So it was somewhere near Naples then, in that province. What was the name of the town again?

DE MICHELE: Casi.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that? (Mrs. De Michele laughs) Or Anne, can you spell it?

SAMARTINO: I always think it's C-A-S-I.

SIGRIST: Please speak full voice. C-A-S-I. Casi.

DE MICHELE: Casi.

SIGRIST: The "S" is like a "Z," sort of.

DE MICHELE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Casi. And you said that it was near a larger town?

DE MICHELE: It was a smaller town. It's a city that we belong, Teano.

SIGRIST: Teano.

DE MICHELE: Teano.

SIGRIST: T . . .

SAMARTINO: T-E-A-N-O.

SIGRIST: T-A-N-O, [sic] okay.

DE MICHELE: In provincia de Napoli.

SIGRIST: De Napoli, right. Can you describe for me the town that you were born in, what it looked like when you were a girl?

DE MICHELE: (she laughs) When I was givel. We was in the house all the time. On the land we work all the time when we grow up over there.

SIGRIST: So you were on a farm.

DE MICHELE: Yeah, like, just like. Over there you see somebody that don't got no land, they rent it. Just like yours. You plant everything you need over there.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things do they grow in Italy? What did you grow on your farm?

DE MICHELE: What we grow, we grow grain, we plant the grain on November, and we got to cut them in July. Phew!
(she laughs)

SIGRIST: It's hard work, huh?

DE MICHELE: We plant the corn, we plant the potatoes, we plant the tomatoes, we plant the (?). We plant everything over there, what we need. We put the tomatoes. When they're ripe good we pick it up, we boil in a nice kettle, and we make a tomato paste ourselves. There was the tomatoes.

SIGRIST: Now, did you grow only one kind of tomatoes, or were there several different kinds of tomatoes?

DE MICHELE: A lot, no. There's two kinds. Like the plum tomatoes are the wrong one, you know, the wrong one. But we plant everything.

SIGRIST: Did women work in the fields as well as men?

DE MICHELE: Oh, the women and men and little kids, they work over there.

SIGRIST: Everybody worked.

DE MICHELE: My brother and my father. When I grow up I worked just the same. My brother, my younger brother, when my mother died I was ten, my brother was fourteen.

SIGRIST: What did your mother die of?

DE MICHELE: I don't know. I was young. Over there they no talk

about it, so.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about your mother's death?

DE MICHELE: I remember nice, a nice thing. They used to teach us to do everything over there, to cook. When my mother die, just like my mother was over there, because we knew everything. We used to make the bread. That was . . .

SIGRIST: How did you make bread?

DE MICHELE: With the flour, the grain. Because we'd go to the shop, we'd grind it and make the flour.

SIGRIST: And this is the grain that you grew.

DE MICHELE: Yeah, that we planted. We screen and make the flour nice and make the bread, seven, eight loaf of bread like this. (she gestures) And we got the oven in the house, on the corner. We put all of the branches of the trees, you know, we make it nice, that's all brick inside. After we clean, then we put the bread. You've got to know how to put. One in the back, one over here, one over here and one over here, and they cook nice.

SIGRIST: How often would you make bread?

DE MICHELE: Well, in summertime, on the summer we didn't used to make too much.

SIGRIST: Because it's so hot.

DE MICHELE: It's so hot. We make four, three, four loaf. In the wintertime it was six or seven loaf of bread.

SIGRIST: How long would eight loaves of bread last you?

DE MICHELE: Well, a couple of days. Depends, we eat over there. We don't measure the food. I laugh when I coming over here. Somebody measure the food, how much they got, how many people. Over there you fill it up the pan, that's all.

SIGRIST: Did you eat much meat in Italy?

DE MICHELE: No, we don't buy a lot of meat. We kill the pig over there.

SIGRIST: How did you kill a pig?

DE MICHELE: Three, four men, they (?). They put on the board, a big board like that, the pig. They get a big pan and cut. (she laughs) And we make the blood sausage.

SIGRIST: Make a blood sausage.

DE MICHELE: You cook some rice, you put in there. You put all the flavors and make it cook nice, make blood sausages.

SIGRIST: But in general you didn't eat a lot of meat.

DE MICHELE: The pork, we make, the center of the pork we call proscuitto. Bacon, we got the hole on the top, you know, to fill it. Lots of (?). (?) (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Now, did you raise the animals yourself?

DE MICHELE: Huh?

SIGRIST: Did you have animals on your farm?

DE MICHELE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: You had a pig?

DE MICHELE: Yeah, a few.

SIGRIST: A few pigs.

DE MICHELE: The donkey, he was big. He had to carry all of the food home, the land was so far, with a big sack. We could put it on the saddle. He had to walk.

SIGRIST: Did the donkey have a name?

DE MICHELE: Huh?

SIGRIST: Did your donkey have a name?

SAMARTINO: The donkey, Ma.

DE MICHELE: Cheech. We used to call her Cheech, like Francesca. Say, "Cheech, Cheech." He stopped right away. Soon we got to the place where we've got to carry the stuff home. We look, "Cheech, come on." Come right over there, put on the saddle, and put a big sack on the shoulder, the poor thing.

SIGRIST: So he was kind of like a pet in a way.

DE MICHELE: Yeah. And we were take care over there. They ate nice, all the food nice.

SIGRIST: Is that what you remember that really sticks out in your mind is the food, in Italy you had great food when you lived there?

DE MICHELE: Yeah. Over there a lot of fruit, a lot of everything.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Well, can you describe the house that you lived in for me?

DE MICHELE: The house? It was a big, over there was two doors downstairs. They build a house with like a sink in the floor over there. Then walk in. The two doors, and one step. After, bigger space. After the step you go upstairs. We had eight or nine steps before we go in the house up the stairs. One room over here. Over there was a big oven in the corner over there the kitchen, over there one room, over there the other room. And the kitchen my father opened the door, to go out the other side. We had another bigger room over there. We used to hang the clothes. My brother, he come to America. I was all alone there in the big house. I don't like that.

SIGRIST: Now, what was your dad's name?

DE MICHELE: Huh?

SIGRIST: What was your dad's name, your father?

DE MICHELE: Raphael.

SIGRIST: Raphael. And then you had your mother. What was her name?

DE MICHELE: My mother was named Alessandria.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

DE MICHELE: Before she married my father?

SIGRIST: Before she got married.

DE MICHELE: Annazo.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

DE MICHELE: I-A, two N's, and Z.

SIGRIST: So A-N, Annazo.

DE MICHELE: Annazo.

SIGRIST: Annazo. A-N-N-A-Z-O.

SAMARTINO: I-Z-N-O.

SIGRIST: I-Z-N-O. And your name, before you were married?

DE MICHELE: Was Izzo. My father's name.

SIGRIST: I-Z-Z-O.

DE MICHELE: I-Z-Z-O.

SIGRIST: So your dad's name was Raphael Izzo. Tell me a little bit about your father. What was his background?

DE MICHELE: Oh, my father, he used to have two jobs. He used to work with the lumber company. He used to work in the shop when they picked up all the leaves. They grind over there, they squeeze it with the machine. The oil coming out. They put a little hot water, a big place like this, the oil run all the way in there. Over there like a little canal, with big tanks under the ground.

They used to go with a stepladder over there to pick it up, the oil. My father said, "You've got to have a steady hand, because a little water is over there."

Because the water, put it on, make the oil coming out nice. You've got to go on the top, nice. And no go deep, you catch the water, too, and you carry the oil home. You got a nice tank on the corner. When you fill it up, you got enough for the whole year. And the rest, we sell it.

SIGRIST: So he made money doing that?

DE MICHELE: With the potatoes it was just the same. So much potatoes, you save so many sack of potatoes, and the rest you sell. With the corn, you do everything.

SIGRIST: So you basically kept what you needed, and then sold off the rest.

DE MICHELE: That's it.

SIGRIST: Was there like a public market in town?

DE MICHELE: Yeah. We go in the city.

SIGRIST: Oh. Describe what that was like for me, going to sell your vegetables.

DE MICHELE: Yeah. Especially on a Saturday they used to have a big sale. Everybody used to go sell. We sell a chicken, you sell eggs, the milk. Over there, before you sell them, the veterinarian coming, and then the (?), with two police officers, and they test the eggs. And over here a couple of months ago I see on the TV that the eggs, the eggs are shaking a little bit, they're not fresh.

SIGRIST: And there was someone who did that then, too.

DE MICHELE: You got to get it nice, everything. They used to check up everything just the same.

SIGRIST: How did you get to town when you wanted to go to town?

DE MICHELE: We got the jackass when we needed. We have a big, like a bushel, like this. Put all of the stuff in there, make so many things over here. You put in there, they

put that thing over here, and walk.

SIGRIST: So Cheech would have to take everything to town.

DE MICHELE: Yeah. It wasn't too much, you know. We sell cheese and nuts, you know. We used to, big sack with three bushels, we get use of that thing.

SIGRIST: Did you make baskets and things? Did you make the baskets that you put things in?

DE MICHELE: No, we buy the basket, yeah. We buy that.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me what your father's personality was like? What was his character like?

DE MICHELE: Well, he was pretty good. Over there, they are very strict. Oh, God! (she laughs)

SIGRIST: How would your father be strict with you when you were a girl?

DE MICHELE: Well, he was nice. He work all the time. I can't say no. He worked all the time. Yeah.

SIGRIST: What did he look like?

DE MICHELE: Well, he looked like my son Ralph a little bit. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Describe in words.

DE MICHELE: He was a husky man, a nice man.

SIGRIST: What color hair?

DE MICHELE: A little dark brown or something like that.

SIGRIST: Did he have a moustache or anything like that?

DE MICHELE: No.

SIGRIST: No?

DE MICHELE: Me, I have the nose like my father. I'm glad my kids, nobody got a nose like him. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Now, tell me a little bit about your mother. She died when you were ten.

DE MICHELE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was her background? Did she come from this town?

DE MICHELE: No. She was from over there, the same town. You know, over there you don't go no place. She marry, that's all.

SIGRIST: Do you know how, do you know how she met your father?

DE MICHELE: Eh, if you go downstairs on the other side, they're all over there, the holiday. You got out to the church on a holiday, they're all over there. They're know all each other, that's why. They get married, nobody part away. All of the same place.

SIGRIST: Do you know what year they got married?

DE MICHELE: No, I no remember that.

SIGRIST: And what was your mom's personality like, as you remember it?

DE MICHELE: I remember that she was a very clean. That's all I remember lots. In summertime I do myself, my bed, you know, when I see I got to go and help and pick up the bed, I got to look at the bedspread, a little wrinkle. I had to crease it nice. She was so clean, I don't mean maybe.

SIGRIST: How did she clean the house? How did she . . .

DE MICHELE: With her hands! You got the hands and the broom over there, that's all. (she laughs) No vacuum cleaner, no this or that. She used to wash her clothes.

SIGRIST: How did she do the laundry?

DE MICHELE: We got a lot of (Italian), we called, with the water, you know, that would run. You take the clothes, you go over there with the soap. The stones lying there, a little rub, scrub with the hands like we scrubbed over here years ago in the tub. (she laughs) And washing board.

SIGRIST: It's hard work.

DE MICHELE: I did it.

SIGRIST: What kind of clothes did you wear in Italy?

DE MICHELE: Used the same over here. I used all my clothes when I come in America. The skirt, it was the same. The suit with the jacket, the blouse. I say, "Why I got to go buy some clothes here? What I got to do with this? I got to throw it away?" (she laughs) No, I use it right over here, bring that over here. The skirt is the same. I said, "No, I use." After, I buy.

SIGRIST: Did you make your clothes in Italy?

DE MICHELE: No. The dressmaker make it. We don't buy all made over there. All the clothes and all the shoes.

SIGRIST: Who made the shoes?

DE MICHELE: The shoemaker. He got a big store, all of the leather, any kind you want. We got four, five shoemaker over there. They measure your foot and they make the shoes.

When you go put it on it's nice on your feet. Not tight over there and loose over here. The clothes, it's just the same. You go in the store, you buy so many yards. The dressmaker, she ask you the way you want the clothes, that's how much yards you've got to buy.

SIGRIST: Did the dressmaker come to your house?

DE MICHELE: A long knife. No, you go to the city.

SIGRIST: You go to her.

DE MICHELE: It's the city, yeah. If you want the full skirt, if you want the one that used to dress, or two piece, everything.

SIGRIST: Was it expensive? Was it expensive to have your clothes made?

DE MICHELE: No, not too much. They used to like it, the people in the small town. They used to bring a lot of things to the woman. Was named Christina. She used to make the clothes for my mother, after she make for me. I

was the only girl in the family.

SIGRIST: How many brothers did you have?

DE MICHELE: Four.

SIGRIST: Can you name your brothers?

DE MICHELE: Yeah. Angelo, Patsy, and Inocenzo. And another one died when he was small. I don't know. I was young myself.

SIGRIST: Were you the youngest in the family?

DE MICHELE: I was the last one, yeah.

SIGRIST: The baby in the family.

DE MICHELE: Yeah. (she laughs) You're no baby over there!

SIGRIST: You had to work hard.

DE MICHELE: You just had to work, even if you got to take care of the chickens you had to work.

SIGRIST: The chickens? Did you have a lot of chickens?

DE MICHELE: Well, about six or seven. Just for the family.

SIGRIST: I see. You spoke before about holiday celebrations.

What kinds of holidays did you celebrate?

DE MICHELE: Oh, we've got a lot of holidays over there.

SIGRIST: What one sticks out in your mind?

DE MICHELE: St. Michael.

SIGRIST: The Feast of St. Michael.

DE MICHELE: May 8th, oh the people, coming from the other town to see the celebration. After we got, uh, the Virgin Mary, the Rosary. After we got (?) to see the Virgin Mary. We got a Saint Anthony de Padua. It's about a (?), part. The big command, they got at the school. They got everything over there. And after it start, June 1st till June 14th.

SIGRIST: Two weeks.

DE MICHELE: The people, they come from far away, over there.

SIGRIST: And how do you celebrate? What would happen when all the people came?

DE MICHELE: Everybody go in the church. Everybody do so many things. Everybody sell something to make money for the church. They got a nice school over there, the

college. They used to go in the school, be anything you want. You didn't have to be priest or monk. You want to be teacher, you want to be anything, you go to school over there.

SIGRIST: During the Feast of St. Michael for instance, did you have a parade in town?

DE MICHELE: Yeah, yeah. (Italian), we called. (Italian), see it on the television, too.

SIGRIST: Did you have statues that you carried?

DE MICHELE: Yeah, the statue, four people carry, go up on the platform. Two on the back with the thing over here, and stood over there. Every street you go they fix a big table, and they put the statue over there. Oh, just like you see on this, the priest. You know what they do? They get a big bushel. They get all of the rose, carnation, any kind, and they fill up the bushel all these flowers, and they throw every street that the parade got to go.

SIGRIST: Was this a fun time? Was this something you looked forward to?

DE MICHELE: No, yeah. It was very nice.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about, I assume you were Catholic at that time. Tell me a little bit about the church and what you had to do, you know. Like tell me about your First Communion or something like that.

DE MICHELE: Yeah. We, no. We had a nice church. No too, too big. There were about a couple of thousand people in that town. We used to go every time.

SIGRIST: Did you just go once a week to church?

DE MICHELE: Oh, no. You go, they go every morning, the old people especially, or in the night. We used to go in Sunday school, when I was a little bigger girl, we used to go in the Sunday school with the kids. I used to sing in the choir, too.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything that you sang?

DE MICHELE: Well, all the girls, the street, all together, we had to go to eleven o'clock mass, the high mass, you know. I sing in the choir. They say all our mass, with the one who played the organ with the priest and everything.

SAMARTINO: La canzone, Ma.

DE MICHELE: It was nice.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of the, anything that you sang at that time?

SAMARTINO: Do ricordi canzone, Ma?

DE MICHELE: Huh?

SAMARTINO: Do the ricorda na canzone?

DE MICHELE: The Messe!

SIGRIST: But could you sing something for us?

DE MICHELE: They wanted the priest to sing, that's all. The padre put (?) together. We sing (Italian). It was in Latin, see, the book.

SAMARTINO: In Latin.

SIGRIST: I see.

SAMARTINO: Actually it was the mass.

DE MICHELE: It was nice.

SIGRIST: How did you practice your religion at home?

DE MICHELE: Home?

SIGRIST: Yes. How would you, would you say prayers at home?

DE MICHELE: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: What would you do at home?

DE MICHELE: We all got everything home. I got some more over here, too.

SIGRIST: Who was more religious, your mother or your father?

DE MICHELE: To me my mother was nice. I was too young. Too bad, because if I was with her I don't think I'd come to America. (she laughs) Not if she was alive, she never would send me America.

SIGRIST: Do you remember a grandmother or a grandfather at all?

DE MICHELE: No, no.

SIGRIST: No. When you were a little girl, what did you know about America?

DE MICHELE: Nothing. My first brother come in America, my brother Angelo.

SIGRIST: Angelo came to America. What year was that? Do you remember?

DE MICHELE: I don't know. He have two sons, one five and one three.

I'm sorry to say, he not stay too long. When he got his own house, his own property, land that you plant everything, you get lost when you come over here. Go to work. Because the money, that's all.

SIGRIST: When Angelo came to America, what did he do when he got here? What did he get for work?

DE MICHELE: He work in a shop over here at that time.

SIGRIST: Where did he come to? Did he stay in New York, or did he . . .

DE MICHELE: Yeah, he was in Lawrence, Massachusetts.

SIGRIST: Oh, he went up to Massachusetts.

DE MICHELE: Me, too. I was over there, my other brother.

SIGRIST: Well, did Angelo come a long time before you did?

DE MICHELE: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: You were a young girl.

DE MICHELE: I was a little girl. My mother was alive at that time.

SIGRIST: She was still alive.

DE MICHELE: He was married. After my brother Patsy come. He was married, too.

SIGRIST: So did Angelo get married in America?

DE MICHELE: No.

SIGRIST: Oh, he was married in Italy before he came over.

DE MICHELE: My brother Patsy too, married in Italy, and he come to America. He had one daughter.

SIGRIST: So they're actually quite a bit older than you are, then.

DE MICHELE: Yes.

SIGRIST: Quite a bit older. When Angelo went to America, do you remember him writing back and forth? Do you remember him telling you or your father anything about America?

SAMARTINO: (Italian)

DE MICHELE: Yeah.

SAMARTINO: What did he tell you, Ma?

SIGRIST: Did he ever say anything to you about what it was like?

DE MICHELE: He says only thing, when I had to come to America, to me. He said, "You feel right, you stay. If you no feel good, whatever you like, your place is over here. Come back like I did." He come back. Stay a little longer, you know. He like (?). I say, "What do we do over here? We got to get all the money that we work." He had woman to take care of the two kids." He say, "We got to pay that, we got to pay the rent." I say, "We got to pay all of the money just for sleeping there. That's such a big house over there." (she laughs)

SAMARTINO: They missed the farm, you know, and all that.

SIGRIST: Well, why did you want to come to America?

DE MICHELE: My younger brother call me.

SIGRIST: And he was here.

DE MICHELE: Yeah, he was here, Lawrence, Mass.

SIGRIST: Now, because you're a young woman. Are you still living with your dad at this point.

DE MICHELE: Huh?

SIGRIST: Were you still living with your father?

DE MICHELE: Yeah. My father, that's a long story. I don't want to remember. (they laugh) My father, I was big, he want to get marry again. I say, "Why you no marry when my mother die after a little while?" I was ten, my brother was fourteen and we used to do everything just the same. After my brother call my younger brother, I come, and I say, "I can't keep going to work." Over there the father, he not do some keeping house, help you. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: The kids have to do it all.

DE MICHELE: That's the way it was. And he say, "Well," he say, "one day you start to be bigger girl and now pretty soon you get marry, I'll be all alone." He say, "I want to get marry." I no care if he get marry another woman of that place, from the city. No. I say, "If you get marry again, I no call the woman 'mom.' She's not my mother." I say, "My mother died." My father was surprised because you no talk over there. (she laughs) I say, "If she come over here, she thinks she boss me around," I say, "she better think about it." (she laughs) My father have a surprise. I have a surprise, too, because he no slap like this.

SIGRIST: He was probably so surprised.

DE MICHELE: He think I was right as he start to think. Telling me she have two sisters-in-law I think. Why nobody wanted it there? Because over here, just like a family. I no care. (?) No, here somebody was a (?), but they no want. I don't know how he find it out. When he want to get married, he was talking like that, see. People, he write to my brother. He's calling me to come in America, my younger brother, sure. He say, "Yes." He send me the money, too. I think my father give the money? He no give the money to my brother either to come to America. He no want to make us come. He has nobody. It look like one family in the place over there, and I come.

SIGRIST: How did you feel about leaving Italy? I mean, obviously you didn't like the situation that was going to happen.

DE MICHELE: Well, you no feel nice. (she laughs) You no feel to, I know where I am, but I know where I go. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you packed to take with you?

DE MICHELE: Yeah, the suitcase, that's all, the suitcase.

SIGRIST: What was in it?

DE MICHELE: My clothes. Just my clothes, that's all. Nothing else.
You cannot put nothing in the suitcase. You've got to check up over there. They open them. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Now, do you remember saying goodbye to your father?

DE MICHELE: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Had he already remarried by then?

DE MICHELE: No, no.

SIGRIST: No, he hadn't yet.

DE MICHELE: No married. After they talk, the sister-in-law to my brother in Italy, she calling me, and she talked to me, she says, "You no go America, your father said. When he find it out, the woman was. Tell him if you no go America I go to the lawyer, I fix everything, give everything to her." I say, "I don't need anything." I say, "He start, I finish." He no asking me if I want to go America or no. Why he no ask me, huh? Sometimes they said the kids are that bad, you never know. Why? He don't have the place to say, asking

me. She telling me no go America, she make tell the woman to me. I told them everything they wanted. I say, "Well, she tell my father. My father . . ."

SIGRIST: He was very upset.

DE MICHELE: I say, "He started that, I going to finish." He make me go out, just like he threw me out of the house. I say, "I go America." That's all.

SIGRIST: So that was how you said goodbye.

DE MICHELE: That's all. He come in Napoli. Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: He went with you to Naples.

DE MICHELE: He see me when I go on the ship over there.

SIGRIST: How did you get from your town to Naples?

DE MICHELE: The train.

SIGRIST: Oh. I thought maybe poor Cheech the donkey was going to . . . (he laughs)

DE MICHELE: We had to take the train, and after we had to take the subway, what you call, you know, the trolley car, to go port, you know.

SIGRIST: How long did you have to stay in Naples before you got on the boat?

DE MICHELE: No, just one night, that's all.

SIGRIST: Did they have examinations in Naples?

DE MICHELE: Oh!

SIGRIST: What did they do to you in Naples before you got on the boat?

DE MICHELE: All the paper to the city of Naples. Your family, who you are, how long my brother was in America, if he was single or married, he was married, the name of my sister-in-law, the last name. I remember the name, the last name, they want to know. I used to know everything. The street, the number of the house, they make me say two times. No, novantun. You know, ninety-one. She say, "What?" I say, "Ninety-one."
(she laughs) The man look at me. They make everything. If you make a mistake, they put you on the side.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: When you, do you remember the name of the boat that you took, that you got on?

DE MICHELE: The name?

SIGRIST: The name of the boat.

DE MICHELE: When I go on Napoli, I look at that. I told the man, "You got to have somebody, you got to present, you're working for the state." I said, "Where I go?" Canada was the name. I said, "Where I go, Canada or America, my brother?" "Oh, no, no, you go America." They go every port, every nationality. I say, "Canada? I no go Canada." (they laugh)

SIGRIST: That's very funny. What did you think? Was this the first time you had ever seen a big boat?

DE MICHELE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What did you think when you saw this boat?

DE MICHELE: I stay in there. I no was sick, nothing.

SIGRIST: Where did you sleep on the boat?

DE MICHELE: Like a bunk bed. My brother say, "Look at the name when you go in the ship with the bed. Take the number

for the top, and put it on the bottom. And take the . . ."

(they laugh) See if it was nice, all the (?) on the bottom. Very nice, it was, all the (?) .

SIGRIST: Were you traveling by yourself, or were there other people from the town that were with you?

DE MICHELE: No. Nobody was, nobody from the town when I go. One girl, she had to come in, too. She had two sisters, one brother. In a few months they passed the law, because the people didn't know how to read and write, they cannot go to America. Because a lot of people, there's three step over there. If you make me sick, you get the wrong step, you go to Cuba. A lot of people, they used to go to Cuba, they have a hard time if they find it out. But when you know what it is, I think that number, the street, where you got to go, that street, over there. That's where you go.

SIGRIST: That's interesting.

DE MICHELE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: One thing I forgot to ask you while we were still in Italy, and it just occurs to me now, can you tell me a little bit about how Italy was affected by World

War One and how your life was affected by World War One.

DE MICHELE: No.

SIGRIST: Not much?

DE MICHELE: No. It was bad because I see a lot of my cousins go, you know. My brother. My brother, he was there three years when he was single. You got to go over there. You reach twenty-one, you got to go in the service. After, he was forty-four years old, he had to go again, the second war, with two kids. Yeah.

SIGRIST: But your family was not affected by World War One at all.

DE MICHELE: No.

SIGRIST: All right. So you're on the Canada, and you're on your way to America. (they laugh) Tell me what you remember about being on the boat. What was there to do?

DE MICHELE: I remember. They bring you the food. They used to cook good, yeah. To me was a friend of my brother in Massachusetts. His brother, he was the best man when my brother, when he marry, and my brother, he wasn't

home yet, at the shop. And we go to the mother and father house over there, his name Emilio. And the fellow's wife was sick, was sick a lot in the boat, because they had to put in the hospital. And we got to go in the hospital when we come, checkup, everything, and she no pass. She still was sick, and she was, we leave her in the hospital in New York.

SIGRIST: That was at Ellis Island.

DE MICHELE: Yeah, we leave her there.

SIGRIST: Do you . . .

DE MICHELE: Me, I used to eat, go on the top, on the porch, and look over the water, watch all the water come.

SIGRIST: Was it boring on the boat?

DE MICHELE: No.

SIGRIST: Was it a boring trip?

DE MICHELE: No, it was a lot of people, you know. You eat nice. They no bother me. I no was sick.

SIGRIST: Were they all Italians on the boat?

DE MICHELE: No, they're mixed. A lot of people, they're mixed.

SIGRIST: How long did the boat ride take?

DE MICHELE: I think fifteen days before we reach, we stay another three or four days.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when you got to New York?

DE MICHELE: Yeah. We passed it coming over here. (she laughs)
I said, "The woman, what's she doing in the middle of the ocean, got lavanderio." (they laugh)

SIGRIST: After you go to New York, tell me how, what happened at Ellis Island. How did you get to Ellis Island?

DE MICHELE: Well, the boat, we reach over there. After we start coming out, and you know who come out first? All the American citizens of the ship. They go on the bigger steamboat over there. After the first class, second class, after that everybody. When we reach over there, we had to go in the hospital.

SIGRIST: What did they do to you in the hospital at Ellis Island?

DE MICHELE: We had to walk up and down the Battery, in the cold, up and down. When we reach the hospital, we go in the hospital. But the watchman is by the door. Just the

people, they come from the other country to go in the hospital, nobody else. Checkup, you've got to show the passport, the name. And they give you, the man, they give you the ticket. I say, "What I got to go to the movie?" (she laughs) I go in there, the nurse, the doctor, to make it just like every small place, you know, with the curtains. I think over there they got to check up all the people. Then we got to . . .

SIGRIST: Did you have to take a shower, or anything like that?

DE MICHELE: No. I take a shower on the ship, yeah. But when the doctor tell me unbutton your blouse. Oh, I say, "My God!" (she laughs) I say, "I come to America, this man going!" I never remember be sick, I never remember go to the doctor. Who go to the doctor? You eat, work, everything, you eat.

SIGRIST: So that was very shocking, actually, to have to take your clothes off.

DE MICHELE: Yeah. The nurse, she look to me. I, she laugh.
(she laughs)

SIGRIST: She was used to it.

DE MICHELE: Yeah. You got to see the eyes. Bup, upside down, they turn up there. And then you hear, your lungs. The boat, after, they give you the syringe. I say that's all.

SIGRIST: So they were very thorough.

DE MICHELE: Oh, yeah. After you go out and you go in New York station.

SIGRIST: When you, you stayed at Ellis Island for three days, you said.

DE MICHELE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Where did you sleep at Ellis Island?

DE MICHELE: Over there on the ship. They leave us started to come out on the ship, just the same. Yeah.

SIGRIST: I see. And you said somebody with you who was sent back? Someone, a woman was sent back? She didn't pass?

DE MICHELE: No. She no pass. The husband write her, but she no pass. And she's stuck in the hospital, you know. If you go to the hospital, mother and father's house, the brother. The brother, he was a best man of my brother. They not say too far, he reach us. You know, we take

the train twelve o'clock in the night in New York, to go to Boston. We take the train to Boston. We stop at Boston, we had to take another train. We go to South Lawrence. After South, we have to get off and take another train to go Lawrence. I'll never forget. The man say, "Lawrence, Lawrence." I say, "(?)." We come out, then we walk. Second Street to the center of Lawrence, Massachusetts. He was about over two miles the street, beautiful. Two lines with the car, you know, over there. Over there, in the middle, that piece was all nice grass, all small trees. It was so beautiful.

SIGRIST: When you were, did someone meet you at Ellis Island?
Did your brother come and meet you at Ellis Island?

DE MICHELE: No, not over there. We go over there, with the train.
We change, after that we walk to go to my brother.

SIGRIST: How did you know what train to get on? How did you know?

DE MICHELE: They tell you, they say the stop. Stop in Boston, and stop in South Lawrence until we reach Lawrence. At twelve o'clock in the day time, you believe?

SIGRIST: That's a long trip.

DE MICHELE: All the whistle blow the shop, they blow. That fellow say, "Now everybody stop their work." Somebody go eat out, and somebody eat in the shop, you know.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing your brother for the first time?

DE MICHELE: Oh, yeah. It was a pretty long time. He was seventeen years old. After he was married, he have two kids, one died, the first one.

SAMARTINO: (Italian)

DE MICHELE: (Italian)

SIGRIST: When you saw your brother, when you first came to America . . .

DE MICHELE: Oh, it's nice, so nice. He cried, and I cried.
(she laughs)

SIGRIST: This was Patsy?

SAMARTINO: No, that was Inocenzo.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you were wearing when you got off the boat? What outfit were you in when you first set foot in America?

SAMARTINO: (Italian)

DE MICHELE: The clothes!

SIGRIST: Yes, what were you wearing? Do you remember?

DE MICHELE: The blouse. The blouse of mine that I put with the suit, with the jacket and the skirt. It was blue, nice, nice blue suit. Yeah, I wear it to work over here when I got a job. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: That was the blouse you were asked to remove.

DE MICHELE: Yeah. And the blouse, it had a ruffle over here.
(she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did you have a hat on?

DE MICHELE: Huh?

SIGRIST: Do you remember a hat? Did you wear a hat?

SAMARTINO: No, no hat.

SIGRIST: All right. So you got to Lawrence, and then what happened? How did you spend your first night with your brother in Lawrence?

DE MICHELE: My brother's house.

SIGRIST: He had a house.

DE MICHELE: My brother's house. One week, I no say nothing. It was two weeks, I say, "What I do? I come in America? I stay in a house? When I got to work? When I got to go work?" You look all inside, you n see nothing. I see house and street. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: What's the first job that you got?

DE MICHELE: I go work in Washington Mill, a wind. I used to take care of twenty-five spools of wool. Walk up and down and tie, you know, it had to be all the same size, and take it off and put on the top, the shelf, with the machine. I used to have to take it off four times a day. I had to put on my number. I'll never forget. I had to make a hundred spools of that wool every day. I had like my number was fifty-five. I told there the woman, I say, "You know when I forget this number? When I die." (she laughs) Fifty-five, and fifty-five and fifty-five, and fifty-five.

SIGRIST: So this is hard work, but a very different kind of work than what you were used to.

DE MICHELE: I don't know, I work, any kind of work never bother

me, just like I work before, the job.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much you got paid for that first job?

DE MICHELE: (she laughs) We used to work ten hours a day, seven to six, five a day. I used to make fifteen dollars and forty cents a week. (she laughs)

SAMARTINO: Not bad.

DE MICHELE: (she laughs) I worked for ten hours up and down. I tied the thing, I push the heads, I get one.

SIGRIST: Fifty-five, fifty-five, fifty-five.

DE MICHELE: (they laugh) Walk up and down. It was long like the wall over there, the machine. Every once in a while the big boss used to pass by. He was Armenian. He stop and look, see if everything was all right. One of the machines, stop and look. I feel like saying, "Get out of here!" (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Were there lots of other immigrants working in this factory?

DE MICHELE: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Were the Italians, or were they different?

DE MICHELE: Yeah, a lot of Italiani was over there.

SIGRIST: There were a lot of Italians.

DE MICHELE: Every nationality, but a lot of Italiani, they work.

SIGRIST: How did you learn English when you came to America?

DE MICHELE: You listen. (she laughs) After I get my citizen papers, the (?), they send me, the (?) north.

"Mrs. De Michele," he say, "Go. Go to evening school.

Your daughter knows Italiano, the ABC's the same.

The numbers are the same, everything. You'll learn."

I said, "Gee, I should go." When I go evening school, who was over there? Mr. Highland. The school, there was a park. I was sent to school with the kids.

(she laughs) "Hello, Miss De Michele!" Everybody look. (she laughs) "Ooh, Miss De Michele," this and that.

SIGRIST: Did you like America when you got here?

DE MICHELE: I liked it nice.

SIGRIST: Did you miss Italy?

DE MICHELE: I missed what I had. But (she laughs), you know when you start, like even now, something wrong, you know. You live at somebody's house, you've got to watch nice. But when you're home, you relax. We fix, or we call somebody, they fix. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did your father go ahead and get remarried?

DE MICHELE: No.

SIGRIST: He didn't?

DE MICHELE: You know what he did?

SIGRIST: What did he do?

DE MICHELE: At that time I'd like to go back. After the one year I was in America he die. He feel himself all alone. He start to think, see, what he did. He don't get marry, see. And my brother was in Italy, he write to us, me and my brother over there. My brother have a house, but his house was small, not like us. He say, "What I got to do? Go over there, sell the house and the land over there?" My brother say, "What do you say? You want to go back?" I said, "No." I come, they ask me in New York, "Are you coming to America?" They say, "Or you want to go back?" I said, "I'll

stay here." Ha! The (?) everything you say. It was a tough coming upon New York. But what are you going to do? We go to the lawyer. We make the paper. We send it to my brother. "Do anything you want, you want to rent it, you want to sell it. You want you go live over there. You've got kids, got your house a little small. Do anything you want. We don't want to know nothing."

SIGRIST: As far as you were concerned, that part of your life was over.

DE MICHELE: He was nice. My older brother, he was very nice. He tell me, when I come in America. He said, "This and this and this is over there. If you no like, you got the house over here. Come back."

SIGRIST: And which brother was that that stayed in that house?
Which brother was that? Which brother was that who stayed in the house?

DE MICHELE: My brother.

SIGRIST: Which one?

DE MICHELE: Older brother.

SAMARTINO: (Italian)

DE MICHELE: Huh?

SAMARTINO: (Italian)

DE MICHELE: Angelo.

SIGRIST: Oh, it was Angelo.

DE MICHELE: Angelo. The one named Angelo, and the one he died in America over here, name of Pasquale. And the one named Inocenzo, what they call him Jimmy, Inocenzo. Over there, over here, too. So, everybody put the name. Grambare and gramare. Everybody like it.

SIGRIST: They changed everything.

DE MICHELE: And my brother, the younger boy, he named Alessandrio. I thought a big girl, my mother name, you know, he's Alessandrio, just the same.

SIGRIST: Tell me how you met your husband.

DE MICHELE: Met my husband in the shop. I worked with my husband, my husband assist in the shop.

SIGRIST: In the shop with the spools?

DE MICHELE: Lawrence, Mass. Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

DE MICHELE: Huh?

SIGRIST: What was his name?

DE MICHELE: Anna. My sister-in-law was named Anna.

SIGRIST: No, your husband.

DE MICHELE: My husband's name was Vito.

SIGRIST: Vito. And you met him in this shop, you said.

DE MICHELE: Yeah. They fix everything, her husband, the brothers.

They make him come up to the shop. I see him. He was nice. Nice suit, light brown, like beige, and a hat. The hair nice, dress up nice. He was clean. You see that. He was clean, not sloppy. But he liked, my brother said, "He's nice." But it was so funny.

(Italian) When I looked at him like this, you know, I cannot stop looking. I said, "My God, what is he, a gypsy?" I do like this to stop looking. (she gestures and laughs)

SAMARTINO: He was just so gorgeous.

DE MICHELE: He got eyes like it's a (?).

SIGRIST: Oh, so he had great eyes, your husband. What year did you get married?

DE MICHELE: 1923.

SIGRIST: So you were in America how long before you . . .

DE MICHELE: Two years.

SIGRIST: Two years. And was he from Italy also?

DE MICHELE: Yeah. He was from Italy. After the First World War the government say everybody who was in the service in the war want to come to America, the government would pay the fare. He come, he come to a sister, to one sister, after she come over here, the younger one.

SIGRIST: Where in Italy was he from? A different part than you?

DE MICHELE: He was Turi, in the provincia de Bari. Far away from us. they are closer to south Africa. It's hot over there all the time.

SIGRIST: And how many children did you have?

DE MICHELE: I had six.

SIGRIST: Can you name them?

DE MICHELE: He's over there, my husband, you see? (she gestures to a photograph)

SIGRIST: Yes. Can you name your children?

DE MICHELE: Huh?

SIGRIST: Can you name your children?

DE MICHELE: Well, one named Giuseppe like my father-in-law.
(gesturing to her daughter) She's the mother-in-law named Anna. Sent to Italy you read and write, you've got to do just the name. My son Raphael is my father named.

SIGRIST: That's three.

DE MICHELE: The other one was named Jimmy, all right.

SIGRIST: Two more.

DE MICHELE: And the other two, they die when they was born.

SIGRIST: They died as children.

SAMARTINO: They were stillborn.

SIGRIST: They were stillborn. I see. Was there something about

America that you didn't like? When you got to America was there something here that you just didn't like?

DE MICHELE: I like everything now.

SAMARTINO: (Italian), Ma.

DE MICHELE: Yeah. (Italian) When we go to the house the fellow come the wife was sick. If we walked, you know, from the station, and they go to the mother's house. I saw her house, you know, the paint all fall off. I was surprised because the house, they got lumber over here, not stone. (she laughs). When we passed it was cool, it was pretty cool. It was April, and it was cool over here. Especially in Massachusetts. Very cool over here.

SIGRIST: And you came in April, you said.

DE MICHELE: Yeah, April.

SIGRIST: April of 1921.

DE MICHELE: I say, "Emilio?" He say, "Yes?" "This is America?"
(she laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, you were used to everything being so clean and neat and . . .

DE MICHELE: Every time we used to see, "Emilio, this is America?"
I say. (she laughs) Some of the people, they have
the window open, you know. The curtains was in all
the time. I said, "What's the matter with people?"
(she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did your father ever want to come to America in his
lifetime?

DE MICHELE: No.

SIGRIST: He was never interested.

DE MICHELE: I remember once my brother make a nice package with
a lot of little things, and she send, he send the pipe
that they use over here. Oh, he was something with
that pipe, because we had that pipe in a crate, and
the other thing, like the (?). That kind of a pipe.
No.

SIGRIST: Are you glad that you came to this country?

DE MICHELE: In one way, yes.

SIGRIST: What ways are you not glad that you came to this country?
What could have been different for you if you'd stayed
in Italy?

DE MICHELE: I got to buy everything. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Here.

DE MICHELE: And it was fresh.

SIGRIST: So food, the food was a disappointment.

DE MICHELE: Buy it here and buy it there and buy it there. I don't know what I'd do if I don't have her, my sister, my daughter-in-law. She ask me a lot of times, too.

SIGRIST: So in America you have to buy things.

SAMARTINO: She was used to getting everything from the farm.

SIGRIST: That's right. You had everything you needed, didn't you, in Italy.

DE MICHELE: You know, I was surprised when I coming over here. You see where they got the plaque there on the old sides. There was a nice cherry tree over there. They cut down the cherry tree and they planted the wild tree. And now they had a tree, because the flag bent on the trees. It was torn. They put a new one, and painted the post, too. I said, "What, they are coo-coo over here. You cut down the cherry tree and plant the wild

tree?" I don't know. To me it don't make sense.

SAMARTINO: You don't cut fruit trees down in Italy. You plant more fruit trees.

DE MICHELE: The one that wanted the property, Mrs. Santinelli, when the cherry was ripe she used to call a few fellows, pick it up. They put in a basket. They put on the ground in the backyard where we used to live. "Come on, everybody." Everybody have a cherry, kids and everybody. All the people that was over there. Huh? They be able to do over here, all (?) the cherry. They plant the wild tree, the wild over there. I no can see. I don't see the cherry tree over there. It was right on the corner. I used to live over there. Tony Moses used to go on the porch, make the, get a branch or make it like a little hoop, and used to grab the branch and pick up the cherries.

SIGRIST: We have just a couple of minutes left, and I want you do to something for us in Italian on tape, and I'm wondering, can you say maybe The Lord's Prayer in Italian, slowly, on the recording.

DE MICHELE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: All right. Go ahead.

DE MICHELE: Uh, what I got to say?

SIGRIST: Can you say The Lord's Prayer in Italian for us.

SAMARTINO: (Italian), Ma.

SIGRIST: Go ahead.

SAMARTINO: Say a prayer in Italian.

DE MICHELE: We used to say the prayer when we go in the bed. They say, "(Italian)" See what we used to say?

SIGRIST: What does that mean?

DE MICHELE: That mean you lay down in the bed with the Virgin Mary. If something happen, she got to wake me up, see. She dress up so nice, you know, with that thing and everything. We make the Cross so that God bless us.

SIGRIST: Thank you for saying that. We need to end now, and I want to thank you very much for having me come out here and asking you a few questions. I really appreciate it.

DE MICHELE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Matilda De Michele.

DE MICHELE: I teach my kids, too. My daughter, my granddaughter. They used to say, "(Italian)" Which is (?) for God, you see. And (Italian). See? (Italian)

SIGRIST: So you taught your children prayers in Italian, too.

DE MICHELE: They used to say, I don't know if they still say. I don't know.

SAMARTINO: I do.

SIGRIST: You still do.

SAMARTINO: Yeah.

DE MICHELE: And you know who teach me that? When I was a little mother's sister was a widow. Their husband die, and every Saturday night she wanted me to go sleep to her house. She had a little girl too, like me. And she said, "Come on, we got to say the prayer now." And she used to say every night a few times. After I learn, when I used to go home I used to say, I keep saying till I was big, till now.

SIGRIST: Well, it was a way that you could pass on the old world

to the new world to your own children here in America.

DE MICHELE: Yeah. I say, I got to say. On the ship, nothing. (?) had enough. The fellow said, "If you no got enough, tell me. I'll go to the cucina. They'll give you what you want." So one day the nurse pass by. They used to give the soup to all of the kids, you know. I said like this. I said, "You, please," I say. "You give me cup of soup, too. See, I'm no bambina but I'm pretty young. He say, "Sure?" He say, "(Italian) no?" And she used to bring me a cup of soup every day with the noodles.

SIGRIST: Well, you didn't get sick, so you could eat.

DE MICHELE: I eat.

SIGRIST: Again, I want to thank you.

DE MICHELE: I never was sick. I don't know.

SAMARTINO: (Italian)

DE MICHELE: I said, "My mother pray for me."

SAMARTINO: (she laughs) What did I tell you, Paul?

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off.

DE MICHELE: They don't find nothing wrong.

SAMARTINO: Ma, (Italian)

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Matilda De Michele here in Bristol, Connecticut on June 29, 1993 and her daughter, Anne, is in the room. Thank you.

DE MICHELE: Okay.