

EI-347/CONSTANTINE

EI-347

TERESA CARDINALE CONSTANTINE

BIRTHDATE: MARCH 9, 1908

INTERVIEW DATE: JULY 7, 1993

RUNNING TIME: 54:26

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER: PETER HOM

INTERVIEW LOCATION: ELLIS ISLAND RECORDING STUDIO

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: JOHN MURIELLO, DECEMBER, 1995

TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

ITALY, 1917

AGE 8

PASSAGE ON THE *DANTE ALLEGHIERI*

LEVINE: Okay. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. And today is July 7th, 1993. And I'm here in the Ellis Island recording studio with Teresa Cardinale Constantine. Mrs. Constantine came to the United States from Italy in 1917 when she was eight years old. Well, I'm very happy to meet you, and I'm looking forward to hearing your story about coming to this country.

CONSTANTINE: It was nice meeting you, too. It's a very, privilege for me to be here.

LEVINE: Wonderful. Okay, well, let's proceed by starting at the beginning. Tell me your birth date and the town you were born in.

CONSTANTINE: March 9th, 1908. And I was born in a little town in Italy named Casono del Murge.

LEVINE: How do spell that?

CONSTANTINE: It's C-A-S-O-N-O. Del Murge is D-E-L, M-U-R-G-E.

LEVINE: And where is that located, Casono del Murge?

CONSTANTINE: It's located mostly on the west coast of Italy. And the providence [sic] is Bari. B-A-R-I.

LEVINE: Now did you live in Casono the entire time, your eight years before you came to the United States?

CONSTANTINE: Yeah. Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: Okay. What kind of a place was that? What, was it a big town, a village?

CONSTANTINE: No, it was mostly a village. And not too big. And we had our home there. But, of course, it's not like here in the United States, you own a home and it's yours. Each floor is owned by a different person.

LEVINE: Oh. Tell me about the house, whatever you remember about the house you lived in there.

CONSTANTINE: Well, what I remember, it looked something like in the 1800 of, in this country. It was very plain, different rooms that's just separated by curtains. No doors.

LEVINE: What was it made out of?

CONSTANTINE: Stone. Stone homes. That's what they are all made out of stone. Inside it's mostly tile. Not wooden floors. And it, we had it pretty easy, because we were in the town. The farm people had it much harder.

LEVINE: Did you have, do you remember what your mother cooked on?

CONSTANTINE: Oh, gee, I really can't remember. But what I, what I do remember, to keep warm there was a little fireplace. It's made out of wood round, and in the center of the, of the fire would be like a copper lining. And in there we used to warm up with the, with the almond shells. We used to light almond shells for fire. And this border around, it would be to put your feet on. You kept warm. (she laughs) Really, really, no bathrooms.

LEVINE: How did you get water?

CONSTANTINE: We, we had a well into our own building, and we didn't have it that bad. But there was people, there was a town, you go to the town and they have, well, in many places they had water pipes that people could go in there and fill it up, you know. But we had a well. And my mother also was in business. We had like a country store. A little bit of everything, you know. And we had a nice living. Not expensive living, but nice living. We never went hungry.

LEVINE: What was your mother's name?

CONSTANTINE: My mother's name was Victoria.

LEVINE: Do you remember her maiden name?

CONSTANTINE: Yes.

LEVINE: What was that?

CONSTANTINE: Salvaggi. S-A-L-V-A-G-G-I.

LEVINE: And, so your mother ran a little store.

CONSTANTINE: Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: What do you remember about the store?

CONSTANTINE: Well, it, that was, we ran the store from our own house. And she was a baker. She used to bake bread. And she was known in the town as "Victoria the Baker." But we used to sell a little bit of everything in there. But my father had passed away and, when I was four years old. And my mother really was a man and the mother of the house.

LEVINE: Well, now, so you don't remember your father?

CONSTANTINE: I think I remember him because my mother talked so much about him. But really I have no recognition [sic]. And we have a picture that, you know, that I have now. My brother had it. He's the only one that had a picture of my, of my father. But since he passed away they gave it to me, which I was very happy.

LEVINE: Well, now, you lived in, the house you lived in, there were different people living on each floor?

CONSTANTINE: Each floor, yes.

LEVINE: So that you and your mother and your brother were on the first floor...

CONSTANTINE: Yes.

LEVINE: The ground floor?

CONSTANTINE: Ground floor.

LEVINE: Which is where she sold things out of?

CONSTANTINE: Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: Do you remember any experiences in the store, any things that happened...

CONSTANTINE: Well, this is what happened, you know. My mother used to bake bread. And she'd make my brother and I get up and help her. Maybe we gave her more trouble, because we had to weigh the dough. And one time I forget to put an ounce on it. And after the bread was all made, my mother had to take it all apart and do it all over again. So I don't think we were too much help.
(she laughs)

LEVINE: Well, did you say you forgot to put an ounce on it?

CONSTANTINE: We had to weigh the, the dough.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CONSTANTINE: And I forgot to put, say, it was a pound, and it needed another ounce. I forgot to the weight on it to weigh the bread. And after it was all finished my mother had to break it all apart and start all over again. That's the only thing I really remember of doing it, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah. What was your brother's name?

CONSTANTINE: Joseph.

LEVINE: Joseph. And how about your father? What was his name?

CONSTANTINE: Thomas.

LEVINE: Thomas. Okay. And so you and your brother and your mother were the only one's living in your home there?

CONSTANTINE: Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: Did you have grandparents?

CONSTANTINE: I had grandparents, but they lived in their own home.

LEVINE: In the same town?

CONSTANTINE: Same town.

LEVINE: Do you remember any experiences with your grandparents?

CONSTANTINE: Well, the only thing I remembered is when we came to America, they came to, they came with us to the boat. And we waved good-bye. They were old at the time. They were eighty-six and eighty-five. And six months later my grandmother passed away, in six months that we were in America. And she passed away. And six months later after that my grandfather passed away, so we never seen them. Oh, I wish I would have taken that picture with me today. I would have showed you.

LEVINE: Oh.

CONSTANTINE: We had a picture with my mother, my brother and I, and my sister and my mother's grandparents. We had taken it to send to America. My father had been here, and he was here for two years. Then he came back to Italy, and my mother wouldn't let him come back, because they used to say, you're lucky he came

home, because a lot of them go away, they never come back home.

So my mother wouldn't let him, he was supposed to come, but she wouldn't let him come, so he passed away there.

LEVINE: I see. Well, now your father, when he left for the United States, was that about 1915?

CONSTANTINE: Oh, no. I don't think...

LEVINE: No, it had to be before that.

CONSTANTINE: I don't think I was born.

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

CONSTANTINE: Yeah. But I was two years old when we took this picture to send to my father.

LEVINE: I see.

CONSTANTINE: Yeah. So, I don't think, you know, he came back. I was the fifth child. They had six children. But three died and three lived. Maybe...

LEVINE: Now, who, what was your sister's name, the one who lived?

CONSTANTINE: Marian.

LEVINE: And how old was she? You were, now wait a minute. She, did she come to America at the same time you did?

CONSTANTINE: No.

LEVINE: No. She came before that?

CONSTANTINE: Yes. She came six months before with some friends in the, hometown people that were leaving also. And my mother, you know, she asked them to watch over here. She was eighteen.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CONSTANTINE: See, she was the first child. I'm the fifth. And that, there was ten years difference between her and I. So she came here six months before.

LEVINE: I see. Now, what, why was the decision made for her to come? Do you remember why she went first?

CONSTANTINE: Well, I think that, I really don't know the reason, you know. My mother never really talked about it. But she had a brother

here. And she wanted her to, to go to the new world and see how it was and how she liked it. And with my uncle everything worked out fine. And she got a job right away. And she worked, she saved money on that ten dollars a week. And before we came, she had her home, she had rented a house, and she had needs. What we needed to, to stay there. Beds, a chair, table and chairs, and where we sleep a little bureau. Only the necessities that was important for us to start our lifetime, you know.

LEVINE: What was she working at when she was here?

CONSTANTINE: When she came here she got a job in the chocolate factory. Candy factory.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Where was that?

CONSTANTINE: In New York. But we lived in Brooklyn.

LEVINE: Okay. So, did you go to school in Italy at all?

CONSTANTINE: Yes, I did. I was promoted to the second grade.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CONSTANTINE: I finished second grade, and I was promoted to the third, but I didn't, I didn't use that at all. And at the time I was doing very well with the speaking and, and writing. Now I don't know too much. I forgot all about it. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Well, now you know English.

CONSTANTINE: Yes, I do. Yes.

LEVINE: So, so, what do you remember about school? What do you remember...

CONSTANTINE: In school?

LEVINE: ...of your experiences there?

CONSTANTINE: In Italy?

LEVINE: Yeah.

CONSTANTINE: I really don't have too much recollection of it. I think we were taught by the nuns. We used to go to the convent and be taught by the nuns. I don't have, I, I can't recall that period of my school days.

LEVINE: How about your brother? Was he in the same school?

CONSTANTINE: He was in the same school. He had finished third grade. And he had promoted to the fourth grade. And in, that is a very good grade in Italy, you know, because they have one year for each class. And really I should know how to speak and write well. But I don't. I forgot all about it. I picked up my new language. I forgot all about the old, you know?

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, who were you closest too in the family?

CONSTANTINE: My, my original family?

LEVINE: Yeah.

CONSTANTINE: I was very close to my brother.

LEVINE: What was he like, Joseph?

CONSTANTINE: He was a wonderful person. Very warm. Very loving. And he, he was the father of our home. When I was young he was my father. And if I wanted to go out and he said no, he was strict. I couldn't go out. (they laugh) But he was easier going with his children. But he was wonderful to me.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, let's see. How about community life? What did people do in Casono for fun?

CONSTANTINE: Oh, I don't know. I don't think I ever seen, you know. Just getting together. That was the main thing. Just getting together. Sometime picnics out to the country. Because we were in the town, so we went to the country. That was a big thing, you know. And what I remember there so well, is that you exchanged, my mother had, say, the bread and the spaghettis and the cheese. And the farmer had the vegetables and the meat had the meat. You exchanged. Most of the times it would even up the money. And there was many times people owed my mother money. And this is what I remember so well, because my mother made me do it. She sent my sister, when she was older, never came back with any money. But she sent me, and I talked them to death. (they laugh) And they paid. And my mother says, "I know who to send now." I could have been no more that five, six years old at the time, you know. But I had, I had a gift of gab. Especially making people laugh, you know.

LEVINE: Wonderful.

CONSTANTINE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, now, what did you, what people do for work in that town, do

you remember?

CONSTANTINE: Most of them were stone makers. Builders. House builders. That I know of, you know. And, of course, there was, there was banks. There was a bank that, we had a dear friend, he baptized my brother. He was more wealthy person. And he worked in the bank. And most of them, men especially, were, were cement workers. Stone workers that they build the houses with, that I could recall.

LEVINE: And how about the agriculture?

CONSTANTINE: Well, there was a lot of farm. There was a lot of farm. And the town was known for almond trees. A lot of almond trees. That's why we were able to burn the almond. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Yeah.

CONSTANTINE: That was our fire, you know. That was the, like we have coal here and things. We had the almond shells.

LEVINE: Let's see. So do you remember any dishes that your mother made that you particularly liked as a little girl?

CONSTANTINE: Oh, mostly spaghetthis. You know, pasta. Mostly pasta. They

were...

LEVINE: What did you put on it? Do you remember?

CONSTANTINE: Oh, we had cheese and gra, sauce just like you use, like we have it here. The only thing once in a while she would make polenta, and we didn't like it no matter what she put on it. It's like wheatina, you know. It's supposed to be a delicacy, but we didn't care for it. But we had meats, and we had pasta, and we had vegetables. As I said, they exchanged. The money exchange with, with the products that they gave, you know, with each other. And then, you know, that was the way of life that I remember.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you remember the religious life. Do you remember any...

CONSTANTINE: (she coughs) Very.

LEVINE: ...religious occasions?

CONSTANTINE: Very. Very, very much the Catholic religion. At that time mostly all Italians were. But not today. They're all mixed. But they were all very strict Catholics.

LEVINE: Do you remember any either religious celebrations or any...

CONSTANTINE: Well, we had, like, once a year we had a feast in our home town.

The patron saint, they would take her out every year. You see how they do in New York, on Mulberry Street, they bring out the statue, and they bring her all around the town, and this is what was mostly that I remember, that it was celebration, a big celebration with the patron saint of the town.

LEVINE: And what would you do? What would people do during that celebration?

CONSTANTINE: Well, they would, they would have music. And they would, you know, dance around, get together, eat, you know. And, nothing too extravagant. (she laughs) The town wasn't that big enough to, it was just simple. Simple.

LEVINE: Do you remember games that you played as a little girl?

CONSTANTINE: You know, this is the funniest thing. I don't remember being little. I don't know why, I don't remember my young youth. I think we had to grow up very early, because of my father dying so young. And we had to help out. I don't even remember my young days in America. And I was quite a big girl, eight years old. I should. And I don't remember my young days. We had to,

there was no playing. No games. The most fun we had was going on picnics and getting together with friends. That was the big thing. The only thing I remember in Italy during the war time, my mother to raise money, we were selling fruit. We had a camp of, near our home town that the soldiers. And they used to come to buy candles and fruit and whatever we were selling. And I would help my mother by weighing the grapes. You had to weigh it, you know, by the pound, not by the pound. (she laughs) And I would, if the scale didn't go this way it went, I would take the one off. (she gestures) Even if, now that was, and the soldiers were laughing, because of such a small girl like me, trying to save everyone of those, of those grapes, you know. (she laughs) But's that's the only thing I really remember when I was there in Italy.

LEVINE: So in other words, your mother would, would get fruits and vegetables from the farmers...

CONSTANTINE: Yes.

LEVINE: ...and sell them in the little store that she had?

CONSTANTINE: Yes. Yeah. And this was to raise money during the war time, because we were saving the money for the trip. We were not the wealthy people. We were on average mostly down instead of up.

(she laughs) We didn't have wealth. No.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about the war?

CONSTANTINE: Well, all I remember that there was this camp in the town, and the soldiers used to come to the town. And on the trip, when we came, when we were on the trip to America, like our boat, they said it was practice, but it was being shot at. We all had to wear jack...

LEVINE: Life jackets?

CONSTANTINE: Life jackets. And we were in danger, and everybody prayed, you know. That's the only thing I remember about the war.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, so your sister came, went six months before you and your mother and your brother?

CONSTANTINE: Yes.

LEVINE: And she was received by your mother's...

CONSTANTINE: Brother.

LEVINE: ...brother. And she then, did she send money back?

CONSTANTINE: No, no.

LEVINE: No. She...

CONSTANTINE: She just saved.

LEVINE: ...just made ready for you...

CONSTANTINE: Yes.

LEVINE: ...to come.

CONSTANTINE: Yes.

LEVINE: So then your mother made the money...

CONSTANTINE: Yes.

LEVINE: ...for your passage?

CONSTANTINE: Oh, yes. Yeah.

LEVINE: And, do you remember leaving the town?

CONSTANTINE: Yes, I remember.

LEVINE: What was that like?

CONSTANTINE: It was sad leaving the town. And very, very sad leaving the grandparents. We knew we'd never see them again. They were on in age already. At the time they were already in, in 1917 he was eighty-six and my grandma was eighty-five. And we knew we'd never see them again.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything that either your grandmother or your grandfather told you?

CONSTANTINE: No.

LEVINE: Any kind of...

CONSTANTINE: Story.

LEVINE: ...stories or lessons or their ideas of life or anything?

CONSTANTINE: Well, their ideas of life were very simple. They were already too old, you know, for, for me. And as I said, I don't remember being, we were close to them, but we, you know, we saw them every day, but never sitting down and saying stories or anything

to you about anything, you know.

LEVINE: What would they be doing, like when you would see them? What, what, activities? Did they...

CONSTANTINE: No.

LEVINE: ...do things. They were...

CONSTANTINE: No. Just visit.

LEVINE: ...they were older. So they were sitting...

CONSTANTINE: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...and you would come in and...

CONSTANTINE: Yes. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CONSTANTINE: They were, we were just visiting, you know, to see Grandma and Grandpa. And maybe share some food, you know, bring them something that my mother would make, and bring them something. But no games and no, you know.

LEVINE: Okay. So, do you remember anything your mother packed to take with you when you went?

CONSTANTINE: Oh, just the necessities. The, mostly necessities, clothes. That's about all. We didn't carry too much.

LEVINE: Do you remember your clothes? Do you remember like what you were wearing when you went to the ship?

CONSTANTINE: Well, it was a plain cotton dress, you know. I remember a blue ribbon on, on, for a belt. And the first day that we were on the ship, all the children we so happy. We played ring around the rosy, you know, all together. But that was the last day we saw each other, because after that we were all sick. We all got sick, you know, and we didn't see each other. We were, didn't play too much. (she laughs)

LEVINE: What was the name of the ship?

CONSTANTINE: The name was ship, it was Dante Alleghieri. And, you want to spell, me to spell it?

LEVINE: No, that one I've heard. We get, we get that...

CONSTANTINE: Dante Alleghieri. It, it was nice at the time.

LEVINE: Do you remember your accommodations on the ship?

CONSTANTINE: The accommodations, it was like we were all in one room. The women and girls were in one room, and the men were separated from there, from their wives. They were all in another room with the boys. And the accommodations were like, the beds were like hammocks, because this is third class. Not, no, not way down in the boat. We didn't have beds and we didn't have a lot of any luxury at all. But we made it. That's the main thing. (she laughs) We made it.

LEVINE: Do you remember the food?

CONSTANTINE: The food was terrible. The smell of the coffee was awful. My mother often bought the second class food, because it was, you know, it was done up a little bit better. We, we didn't eat too much because we were very seasick.

LEVINE: So in other words your mother would what, go to the dining room for the second class?

CONSTANTINE: No, she would ask someone, attendants of the third class, and they would bring it down. No, we, we couldn't, no, you didn't

go to the dining room. It was just attendants, you say, could we have, you know, some things from the second class. And that was much better, you know, than they were giving us.

LEVINE: Yeah. Uh-huh. So, is there anything else about the voyage that you remember that we haven't said?

CONSTANTINE: Well, the voyage, it was quite rough. And as I said, the boat was shipped out, was shot at. And we all had to wear these life jackets because we were in danger. But thank God we made it through, which whatever they did we made it through. Everybody prayed. And the only thing I remember on the boat is that the people, they were so close you think everyone was family. They all loved one another. And they all stayed together. As a child I could remember this, you know.

LEVINE: You mean the feeling of the...

CONSTANTINE: The feeling...

LEVINE: ...of the people...

CONSTANTINE: ...of the people...

LEVINE: ...as they were crossing?

CONSTANTINE: Yes. Yes. Very, very close. Everyone was your sister.
Everyone was a member of your family.

LEVINE: So the, the adults were looking out for the children and...

CONSTANTINE: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did they have any music or dancing on the ship?

CONSTANTINE: No. Not when I came. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Yeah. Okay. So then, do you remember the ship coming into the
New York Harbor?

CONSTANTINE: Yes I do. When it came in the first thing we saw was the Statue
of Liberty. And when we say that beautiful lady we knew we had
come to America. (she laughs) Yes. That I remember so well.

LEVINE: Do you remember what people were doing when, when...

CONSTANTINE: Cheering, and, and screaming, and everybody was so happy that
they have made it. Now we don't know if we would have landed
here. (she laughs) When we got to Ellis Island, now that was
another thing.

LEVINE: Well, how about the New York skyline. Do you remember seeing that for the first time?

CONSTANTINE: Well, there wasn't these tall buildings. There was none of these tall buildings when I, when we came. Now, you know, these, it came after we got here. It was just simple. No high buildings.

LEVINE: What do you remember that you had heard about Ellis Island before you actually got off the boat and came here? Do you remember what people thought about it?

CONSTANTINE: At Ellis Island, there wasn't...

LEVINE: No. Before, before, you actually, like what did you hear on the boat, or what did people expect?

CONSTANTINE: Nobody mentioned it. Nobody mentioned it about Ellis Island. Everybody looked forward for the Statue of Liberty.

LEVINE: Oh.

CONSTANTINE: Yeah. There was no talk about it, you know. About when we got here and what it would be like. I don't think anyone knew.

LEVINE: I see. Okay. Why don't we pause here, and we'll turn the tape over, and then we'll continue with what you remember about Ellis Island.

CONSTANTINE: Okay.

LEVINE: Great.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Okay. This is Side B now, and we're just about, I'm talking with Teresa Cardinale Constantine. And we're about to hear what Ellis Island was like to an eight year old when you first arrived in this country.

CONSTANTINE: When we first arrived, we had to go through an inspection. And my, there was my cousin that came to America with us. It was my mother's sister's daughter. And she was asked a question. It, it was, my, my cousin that was asked a question by the, the inspector, says, "How many feathers has a chicken?" And so she says, "Well, you count them and let me know." So she

passed. Now it's my brother's turn. And there was a man in front of him, and they asked him, half Italian, half in English, "Sei e sette, sei e sette." The man said, "Twelve."

He thought he said six and six. He didn't pass. My brother answered thirteen. He passed. Now it came to me. And I had these fever sores on my mouth and my head from an infection of my vaccination. And I got a chalk mark on my arm. And my mother didn't pass because she had to stay here with me.

LEVINE: Now how, when did you have the vaccination?

CONSTANTINE: When I first went on the boat.

LEVINE: So they vaccinated everybody...

CONSTANTINE: Yes.

LEVINE: ...on the boat...

CONSTANTINE: Yes.

LEVINE: ...shortly after leaving Naples?

CONSTANTINE: Before.

LEVINE: Before.

CONSTANTINE: Before you, when you got on the boat, you were vaccinated. Everybody was vaccinated. Mine got infected. And from the infection of the vaccination I developed these fever sores. And I used to go to the hospital in boat to take care. But by the time I got here they were not any better. And so I had to stay here in Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Do you remember what the vaccination was for?

CONSTANTINE: No. I don't know.

LEVINE: So, so your mother was in good health, but she stayed because you had to be detained?

CONSTANTINE: I, yes.

LEVINE: So, so what happened? You were in the line, and they see that you have these fever sores, and then what happened next?

CONSTANTINE: Then I was taken away with my mother to somewhere else which I didn't know what it was, but it was a doctor's office. They examined me, and they saw that it was nothing that was danger or disease. It was just...

LEVINE: Infectious or anything?

CONSTANTINE: Yes. So they separated my mother and I. My mother waited in the waiting room, and they took me in another room. And they examined me, and they kept me there. Then the next thing I know, I was in the hospital. They were bathed and washed and they cleaned me up, and I had to stay there.

LEVINE: And what was the hospital like?

CONSTANTINE: It was nice. It was clean. And it was very nice. The doctor's were so wonderful to me, and, and the nurses. I cried every night not knowing where my mother was.

LEVINE: Nobody told you?

CONSTANTINE: No. We were just separated. The last time I saw her was in the office room in the doctor's office. And then they took me to the hospital and they left my mother to go back maybe where she had to stay and wait for me. And there was a room where they kept these people. Now my brother couldn't go out because he was under age. And my cousin had to stay there and wait with my mother and my brother, because my sister worked and she could only come on the weekend to get her out.

Because she was receiving us with my uncle. And we, they all had to wait. But there was a big where they all stayed together. And...

LEVINE: Your brother stayed with your cousin and your mother?

CONSTANTINE: Yes. And, and there were the people that had, did not pass for some, what would you call, a test, or whatever they were giving them. The question they were asking them. There was a girl staying there with my mother in the same room where she had to count twenty backwards. And she was always mixing her, her numbers. And she didn't pass. And my mother left her there. She still was detained on account of these numbers. But, you know, it was a, a silly, there's a word for it that I want to say.

LEVINE: You mean a silly exercise?

CONSTANTINE: No. A silly, it's, these questions were not, that you needed, it was a catchy little thing. And it was an intelligent [sic] test. That's what it was. Trying to see how intelligent would ask, answer. This girl count, counting nine, twenty backwards. She would get mixed up, and my mother would hear her practice at night. And she would hear her practice and she would get all mixed up. She would go the next day for the

test and she wouldn't pass. She's back there again. And like my cousin. How many feathers has a chicken. Now, if she started to hesitate, well, this one is a dummy. You know. (she laughs) So she gave them the right answer. And she said, "You count them, let me know." And she passed. So, it was a little intelligent test, that's what it was.

LEVINE: How, were you able to speak to any of the nurses or doctor's in the hospital?

CONSTANTINE: Well, I spoke Italian.

LEVINE: Did, did any of them speak Italian? Do you remember?

CONSTANTINE: They, they understood a little of it. They understood a little of it, but this is a dialect. It's not Italian. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Oh.

CONSTANTINE: You know, it's like the southerners have a dialect, the northern, Brooklyn, everybody knows who comes from Brooklyn. They have a way speaking. And it's, so, but they knew a little bit that, you know, that they understood. There wasn't too much to say. Just take care of me. And then they were so nice to me, you know, I cried when I come out. I, I didn't

want, I didn't want to come out. (they laugh) Then when I saw my mother I was very happy, you know. And to today, when I pass a bridge, any bridge with lights at night, it reminds me of the time I was at Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Oh.

CONSTANTINE: Because I used to look out of the window and I could see the bridge.

LEVINE: That's from the hospital room.

CONSTANTINE: Yeah. And I could see that, all the lights lit and wonder where my mother was, and wonder. I thought she went out. But they were all there waiting for me. Then we all come out together.

LEVINE: Well, let's see. So it was your sister who came and picked you up?

CONSTANTINE: Yes. My uncle also.

LEVINE: And your uncle.

CONSTANTINE: Oh, yes. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So where did you go when you left Ellis Island?

CONSTANTINE: Well, we lived in, in Brooklyn in a street called Utica Avenue.

And my sister had already rented this little house before we got here, and everything was set before we come.

LEVINE: Now, how did the house compare with the house you had lived in in Italy?

CONSTANTINE: Oh, much better. Much better.

LEVINE: In what way?

CONSTANTINE: In atmosphere. In privacy, because we didn't have too much privacy, as a curtain, you know, it separated the rooms. And it was made, in Italy it was made like one big room separated with curtains, and these was your bedroom and your kitchen and, you know, whatever you, you know. But it was much nicer. In every way, you know, we found it much nicer. We, we loved this country the first minute we came.

LEVINE: Do you remember any things about this country that struck you in the beginning as being different?

CONSTANTINE: Snow. Snow. It, when we first came out, because it was in January, there was a lot of snow. And Italy doesn't have much snow. Very seldom. That was different to us.

LEVINE: Yeah.

CONSTANTINE: To, my first impression, when we come out of the, you know, out of Ellis Island, and my sister was waiting. And we had a nice reunion, and we took the train and went home and we saw all this snow, different buildings. Completely different than our own home town. That was all it impressed, you know.

LEVINE: And how did your mother feel about being here?

CONSTANTINE: She loved it. She liked it. She was a woman that, I would say she was a pioneer. To leave, not knowing where we were going, and the only thing she had to look forward to that she had a brother here. And she knew that, you know, he would certainly see that we were taken care of.

LEVINE: What was your uncle's name?

CONSTANTINE: Thomas. He was my mother's brother.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So, let's see. So, did you start school right away?

CONSTANTINE: Yes. They, I went into second grade. And...

LEVINE: What was that like?

CONSTANTINE: Well, it was so, it was so different. You don't know the language. And when you had, this comes to my mind, when I spell. You had to have a name sheet. S-H-E-E-T. And I said "shit." (they laugh) My daughters are laughing. And it was, it was hard at the beginning. But then you, you know, when you're young I think you get into it right away. And it wasn't too bad.

LEVINE: Do you remember any incidents that happened while you were learning English, where maybe something clicked for you that you understood, or how you learned it, or anything like that?

CONSTANTINE: No. It, it, you know, you just paid attention, and you learned, and naturally you didn't pronounce the word right at first, but it, no, I don't remember, no, anything of that that it would stay in my mind, you know.

LEVINE: Do you remember how the school compared with the school you had gone to in Italy, in Casono?

CONSTANTINE: It was different.

LEVINE: In what way?

CONSTANTINE: Well, different buildings, different, in Italy we were taught by the nuns, and here we were taught by the teachers. It was different. It was an adjustment. We had to make a lot of adjustment. But we made, we made it good. (she laughs)

LEVINE: So, were there any new things for you here as far as playing with, with other kids, or...

CONSTANTINE: Well, at first we didn't know anyone, you know. And you meet people, you meet friends in school. And you become friends with everybody in the neighborhood where you lived. And we had lots of friends.

LEVINE: And was the neighborhood a largely Italian neighborhood?

CONSTANTINE: No. It was mixed. It was all mixed. We had Irish people, Italian, we had the blacks. It was a mixed of, I had a very good friend who was a black girl. We used to go to school together. She had to pass my house, and, and we would al, always go together.

LEVINE: So there was a real sense of community...

CONSTANTINE: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: ...in, in where you were living?

CONSTANTINE: Oh, yes. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what kinds of customs did you or your mother retain, that you had done in Italy and that you just carried into, into the new country?

CONSTANTINE: Well, it's almost your lifestyle. You, you continued with the same, you know. My mother never learned English. She only remem, she only knew money.

LEVINE: Oh.

CONSTANTINE: (she laughs) She knew to count money, and she'd do that. But she never learned how to speak English.

LEVINE: Did she work here?

CONSTANTINE: Yes, she did.

LEVINE: What did she do?

CONSTANTINE: Well, when we came my sister got her a job also in the candy factory, but a different section. And she worked there a few months. Not knowing, not knowing how to read the English words, she had a poster, that she knew that poster where she had to get off, off the train. And it came the time that they changed the poster. She got lost. And it was one night, eleven o'clock at night. My mother wasn't home, and there was no way we knew where to, eleven o'clock, about eleven thirty. Of course, we're crying, and we were look, and where are we going to look for her. About eleven thirty at night some kind man, understood Italian, took her home. So from then on she didn't go to work anymore. But in Italy my mother taught my sister, she sent her to school for embroidery. And my sister got a job as a forelady in an embroidery shop where they made blouses. Years ago they used to use a lot of embroidery on blouses. And being that she knew so much about it, this man gave her a job. Now she's making eighteen dollars a week. (she laughs) It was a big promotion. So my mother didn't go back to the job because we were afraid she would get lost again, and we didn't want to go through what we went through. So she did some homework, you know, at home. And my sister...

LEVINE: Would that be sewing?

CONSTANTINE: It was embroidery. On embroidery. No, not...

LEVINE: Not sewing.

CONSTANTINE: Not sewing. No. It was blouses that you embroidered and then it went back to the factory and get sewed up, you know. And her place was right across the way from where we lived. So it was very convenient, and my mother never went back to her, to her job.

LEVINE: What was your first job?

CONSTANTINE: My first job, my sister now, she worked for this man for few years. And then there was someone else that come in. It was a little jealous of my sister, and she's telling the boss that my sister is stealing his patterns. Now patterns have no need to steal because they change everyday. But they were ignorant at the time, and he fired her. And my mother went there and says, "My daughter never took anything from you. And now that you did this, I'm putting her into business." So my mother put my sister into business.

LEVINE: What did that mean?

CONSTANTINE: She, she opened up her own place on embroidery. And my first job was working on embroidery. (she laughs) Then the beating came in, and then the sequence came in. And my sister from the, from the store where she was doing her business for blouses, then they promoted themselves to dresses. And she put up a big shop on women's wear. And there was, at one time there was a lot of beating to do on women's wear. Dresses. And that was the first job. And, and I stayed with her all, you know, all my lifetime.

LEVINE: How old were you when you started?

CONSTANTINE: Nineteen.

LEVINE: Well, now, what did your sister do? She...

CONSTANTINE: They were the manuf, they were the contractors.

LEVINE: So they would make...

CONSTANTINE: You get the work from the manufacturers. And they would, you would, they would send you all the bundles ready for you to do the embroidery on it. And after this was all, all the work that they send maybe two hundred blouses. Then you send it

back. And then, but after that, she went into dress line. She went, they made them there. They come just cut, and then you make them there. Then she promoted herself, they did their own cutting. And then you grow. You, you know, you're doing well, you grow.

LEVINE: So how many people worked for your sister at the height of, of...

CONSTANTINE: At the height of, I would say about sixty people.

LEVINE: Wow.

CONSTANTINE: Yeah. They had a big place. Then they went into, at that time then I had children and I stopped working.

LEVINE: Well, how did you meet your husband?

CONSTANTINE: I met my husband in the, in the shop where we were working.

LEVINE: How, how, how did that happen?

CONSTANTINE: How it came about?

LEVINE: Yeah.

CONSTANTINE: He, I was, I was the floor girl, they call it. I was on the department, when the dresses were all finished, we would clean them, and we would put all the ornaments on them. They would be ready for shipping when we got through with it, my department. My husband, the, my husband that I met, he was a presser on the, on the dresses. And, well, not ever thinking that I was going to go out with him, because he used to go telling me when he went out with other girls. So I, you know, we were just good friends. And then we took, we went on vacation with his sister and his niece. And a friend...

LEVINE: Who, you and your sister did?

CONSTANTINE: No, his sister. And her daughter and myself and my husband and a friend of his went on vacation up in the Catskills. And it was up there where he asked me that he wanted to go steady with me. I...

LEVINE: But you had never dated him?

CONSTANTINE: No. No, we were just good friends. Family friends. That his sister had come over, and asked my mother if I could go over. Mother would never let me go. But she depended on these people. She says, well, I was safe to go with her, you know.

And it was there to my shocking surprise he asked me to go steady with him. And I said, "Oh, you're lonesome for all those girls you go out," I told. (they laugh) He said, "No."

And he had a ring. He says, "I never make anyone wear this ring. This is for you to wear." So I knew that he was kind of serious. I used to like him, but never thought that I, you know, would go out with him.

LEVINE: So you, so you...

CONSTANTINE: But that's how we met. Yeah.

LEVINE: So did you say yes?

CONSTANTINE: Yeah. Not, yeah, I, I took his ring. But I didn't know that I was going to stay, I was married fifty-two years before he passed away.

LEVINE: So what, what was your husband's name?

CONSTANTINE: Patrick.

LEVINE: And the names of your children?

CONSTANTINE: My children's name, my older girl is Emily, and my second

daughter is Teresa, and my son is Vito. And they were named after relatives. My father-in-law, my husband, it was the only son that had children, a boy, so we named it after my father-in-law. My Teresa, well, we call her Teresa, but her name is Victoria Teresa. And that was my mother's name. And my Emily was his mother's name.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, when you look back on the fact that you started out your life in Italy for eight years and then came here, what influence do you think that early time had on you in your lifetime? The fact that you started out there and then came here, and really lived out most of your life here.

CONSTANTINE: Well, it was to, to better yourself. To see that you would improve yourself, which we did. We, we went from nothing, and we raised up to a very nice standard of living. In 1956 my husband and I went into business, also in the dress business. The dress line, the women's wear. And we were until 1970. Then my husband then retired and we sold the shop.

LEVINE: Now, had your husband always worked in the clothing line?

CONSTANTINE: In the, in the clothing line, yes. But during the war time he was doing work on, what did they call that, when you worked for the...

LEVINE: Defense?

CONSTANTINE: Defense. Yes. He was working on ships, and he was an electrician. He became a foreman. But he gave this up when the war came in. He went into it. And my sister went into doing all army things.

LEVINE: Oh. Do you remember anything else about the second world war, how it effected you and your family?

CONSTANTINE: Well, not really. It was a hard time. We made the best of everything. Worked hard. We made a nice living. We never went hungry. And I raised my children I think wonderful. They're three wonderful children. Loving. And they, very caring. Never got into any trouble. And that was a good part of my life.

LEVINE: Now, did your, was your husband, was your husband born here, or did he also come...

CONSTANTINE: Yes. No, he was born here. I was the only foreigner. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Well, what, what could you say about, what brings you happiness

at this time in your life?

CONSTANTINE: I, I have no regrets. I have a lot to look forward to. I love this country. And I don't think I have an enemy because I have been kind, I think. Never try to hurt anybody unless it was, not notice it. And I'm, I'm a very happy person. I don't let nothing get me down. I make the best of the situation and I take one day at a time. I make people laugh with my stories. With my jokes. I'm a good joke teller.
(they laugh)

LEVINE: Okay. Well, is there anything else that you would like to say before we close, either about any advise you'd like to give to your grandchildren and great grandchildren, or anything else you'd like to mention before we end?

CONSTANTINE: I would like to say to my grandchildren, to love this country, be a good citizen, respect yourself and the law, because if you are a good person it will come back to you always. That's what I...

LEVINE: I think that's...

CONSTANTINE: That's what I feel in my heart.

LEVINE: Well, I think that's a beautiful place to end. I want to thank you very much. It's been very enjoyable talking with you. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. I've been speaking with Teresa, Teresa Cardinale Constantine, and it's July 7th, 1993. We're here at the Ellis Island studio, and I want to thank you again, and I'm signing off.