

EI-348

PETER TERZANO

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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ITALY (BORN U.S.), 1928 and 1934

AGE 17 (2nd trip)

**RESIDENCES; CASTELNUOVO BELLO, PIEMONTE
BRONX, NEW YORK**

PORT OF EMBARKATION: GENOA

PASSAGE ON "THE CONTE BIANCAMANO" (2nd trip)

KITCHEN EMPLOYEE AT ELLIS ISLAND

1934-1944

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today at Ellis Island in the studio. And I'm here with Peter Terzano. Mr. Terzano came, he was born in the United States in 1917. When he was fourteen months old he went to Italy, and stayed there until 1928 when his father brought him back to the United States. He stayed in the United States for three months. His father feared for his health and brought him back, he had a rash, and his father brought him back to his grandmother in Italy in 1928. In 1934 he came again to the United States. Within a few weeks he had a job here at Ellis Island. His cousin was a chef and needed a pot washer. So Mr. Terzano worked here at Ellis Island in the kitchen from

1934 to 1944. At that time Mr. Terzano says the kitchen staff was laid off because the Germans who were being detained here wanted their own kind of cooking, rather than the kind of cooking that had been being done. Well, I want to welcome you. I'm very happy that you were able to come here today, and I'm looking forward to all your stories...

TERZANO: Okay.

LEVINE: ...about Ellis Island.

TERZANO: Okay.

LEVINE: So, let's, first why don't you tell me your exact birthdate and where you were born.

TERZANO: I was born in New York City on 45th Street and 3rd Avenue, 1917, December 15. December 15, 1917.

LEVINE: And you, why was it that you went to Italy when you were fourteen months old?

TERZANO: Because my mother died of the Spanish fever when I was nine months old. I understand that it was so many people dead in New York City, it was unbelievable. They had flowers. Every door there was three, four bouquet of flowers. She died on the island under the 59th Street bridge. I

don't know what it's called right now.

LEVINE: Roosevelt Island?

TERZANO: Roosevelt Island. Right.

LEVINE: She was in the hospital there?

TERZANO: Yeah. Yeah, because they had 'em quarantine, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, so you've been told this, because obviously you were too young to...

TERZANO: Yes. Of course. Of course. Yes, yes.

LEVINE: ...to remember it. I see. So your, your mother died. And then you were alone with your father here?

TERZANO: With my father and a aunt and an uncle. My father's brother with his wife. They had no children.

LEVINE: What was your father's name?

TERZANO: Evandro.

LEVINE: How do you spell that?

TERZANO: E-V-A-N-D-R-O.

LEVINE: Evandro.

TERZANO: Evandro.

LEVINE: And your father's brother's name?

TERZANO: Raphaelle.

LEVINE: And his wife's name? Your aunt's name.

TERZANO: Gosh. The memories. I'm sorry.

LEVINE: Okay. That's all right. Whatever you remember is fine, and don't worry if you don't.

TERZANO: Okay.

LEVINE: But Ter, Terzano. Was that always the spelling of your...

TERZANO: Yes.

LEVINE: ...last name?

TERZANO: Yes. Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: Okay. So, and your mother's first name? What was her name?

TERZANO: Rose.

LEVINE: Rose? Do you...

TERZANO: Mussi. M-...

LEVINE: That was...

TERZANO: M-U-S-S-I. Mussi.

LEVINE: That was her maiden name.

TERZANO: Yeah. My father and mother, they were maybe five feet, the two of them. They were very small, and, and then you see what became of me. I'm almost six foot, and two hundred and thirty pounds. (they laugh)

LEVINE: It's all that good cooking, right?

TERZANO: Yeah. Well, yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, okay. So, your father went, took you back to Italy at fourteen months, for any special reason, or was, why did he bring you back then?

TERZANO: At fourteen months he took me to Italy because I, I was, I had this rash.

LEVINE: You had the rash then, or you had the...

TERZANO: At fourteen months. That's...

LEVINE: That's when you had the rash.

TERZANO: Yeah. That's when he took me to Italy. He was afraid I might die over here.

LEVINE: I see.

TERZANO: It was a big mistake, but everything turns out okay.

LEVINE: Okay. So then he brought you back, he brought you back to Italy.

TERZANO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Then, I guess your rash cleared up, and...

TERZANO: Yeah. In Italy I went to school. All my education was in Italy.

LEVINE: Oh, that's right. Because you stayed in Italy then for nine years.

TERZANO: Right. After it, yeah. Well, actually it was almost sixteen because it was from 19...

LEVINE: 1919 to 1928 that you were in...

TERZANO: No, '18. 1918 he took me back to Italy. I was fourteen months old.

LEVINE: Okay.

TERZANO: Well, I guess '19 would be the right way.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, well, where were you living in Italy?

TERZANO: In Piemonte. A little town of about three thousand people called Castelnuovo Bello.

LEVINE: Can you spell it?

TERZANO: Oh, yes. C-A-S-T-E-L-N-U-O-V-O. Castelnuovo. Bello, B-E-L-L-O. Bello. It's a famous part of Piemonte where they make the Asti Spumante. You heard of Martin Rossi, and so on. They got very, very good wine

there. It's all wineries. Except a few fields they grow wheat and corn for family use.

LEVINE: What do you remember about that town, experiences that you had there as a boy?

TERZANO: Oh, there are so many. There are so many. So many memories. I went to the fifth class. I graduated there when I was eleven years old. Then the next year I was supposed to go to, it would be like over here the junior high. This class, it went on for a month and then they fired the teacher, and that was the end of my education.

LEVINE: No more teacher in the town?

TERZANO: No more, no. They had the school but not for me. So what happened, I went to work the farm with my grandfather and two other uncles of mine.

LEVINE: Was the farm grapes?

TERZANO: Grapes, yeah. Mostly grapes. Then you got fields of hay to feed the steers. We had steers to pull the carts, you know. And...

LEVINE: What was your grandfather's name?

TERZANO: Pete.

LEVINE: Pete. And...

TERZANO: Or Peter, whatever.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And your grandmother?

TERZANO: Marguerita.

LEVINE: Marguerita.

TERZANO: Marguerita.

LEVINE: Can you remember any experiences with your grandmother or your grandfather when you were a little boy?

TERZANO: Yes. I have a little experience. My grandmother one time, she made me a cabbage soup. And I didn't like it. So she says, "All right. Leave the soup there. Go upstairs and go to sleep." And she locked the, the cabinet where she kept the bread, because we used to make our own bread. And I went to sleep. I come down for breakfast the next morning, there is that plate of soup again. And I just didn't want to eat it. I left, I went to school, I came home. I took a little package, I went up on the, on the vineyards. I was eating grapes because I was so hungry. I came home that, that night very late. And my father, my grandmother, she says, "You want your soup

now?" And I said, "No." I came down the next morning, there was that plate. I ate that cabbage soup and up to today I love it. (they laugh) It seems funny, you know. You, you say you don't like something that you never had. But by taste and eating it that time it really gave me an incentive, and I, all, my two kids and my grandchildren, and also I always tell them, "Whatever goes on your plate, you gotta clean." And they all do. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Do you remember any other any food that your grandmother made when you were there?

TERZANO: Oh, so many. Raviolis. They used to make, she used to make chickens, rabbits, stewed and fried. We used to make, every day it was polenta, if you know what polenta, it's corn meal. With stew or fish. We used to buy herrings. That's how poor we were. Put a herring in the middle of the table. You, you would cut a piece of polenta and dunk around this fish. Just the taste of it. And everybody did the same thing. Yeah.

LEVINE: How about your grandfather. Do you remember any experiences with him?

TERZANO: Oh, yeah. He was such a nice man. As a matter of fact, when I look in the mirror I see him. And, he was, he was, he had a stroke. And I was the one who used to take him out when he had to make, I used to take out his privates so he could make. What happened, the stroke came when

one of, his last son was one, a carabinieri. Carabinieri is a policeman. He was like a sergeant. And while this sergeant was going back to Pavia, which he had, was his headquarters, it was where they grow rice. On both sides of the road there was trenches of water, or canals, because the rice needs a lot of water. And he gets, somewhere in between there he sees five men. Among these men there was a banker. And my uncle, he said to him, "Gee, what are you doing out there?" So the banker, he said to the guy, he says, "Shoot, because I'm recognized." And they killed the two of them. My uncle and his policeman under him. They were on bikes. And the two of them were thrown into these ditches where if they weren't killed by bullets they were killed by drowning. And what these people were doing, they had a tunnel from somebody's house going into a bank underneath the safe. They were gonna rob this bank in Pavia. And this, this bandito, they called them Bandito Polastro, he killed something like fifteen or twenty policeman. Not that he shoot the person, he was shooting at the, the carabinieri had a flame, this stamp on, on the head. And he would shoot these policemen. He would throw a penny up in the air and shoot it right out of the air, he was that good. But then he was caught and he was sentence I think to forty years in jail. And my mother, my grandmother, she says when they went to the trial, she says, "Why did you kill my son?" And he said, "I didn't kill your son. I killed the policeman." That's, that was his answer.

LEVINE: Do you remember that trial?

TERZANO: Yeah. I wasn't at the trial. I was too small to go, because I was, what nine years old or so.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

TERZANO: But it was a big trial in Milan. It was...

LEVINE: Yeah.

TERZANO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, do you remember times with your uncle before that?

TERZANO: Oh, yes. Yes. I was with my uncle, and I was always with him. Francesco, his name. And he was, stutter?

LEVINE: He stuttered?

TERZANO: He used to stutter something awful. And don't you think I picked it up? I kept stuttering. And my grandmother, she used to say, "Pierino," which is Pete, "Stop it. Stop it." And I just kept it up. So from slapping me in the mouth so many times that I, I got rid of my stuttering.

LEVINE: Your grandmother slapped you in the mouth?

TERZANO: Yeah. Because she wanted to cure me from, and she did. And she did.
Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, it sounds like your grandmother was the disciplinarian.

TERZANO: Oh, she was nice. A small lady. She had so much work, you know, cooking. When we would be working out on the farm she would bring up the breakfast, which consisted of anchovies, peppers, oil, vinegar and nice fresh bread. And we would sit down there on the floor on the, on the country and we would be eating. Then she would go home, cook lunch, and bring lunch.

LEVINE: What would lunch be?

TERZANO: Oh, like I said. Polenta or soup, either one. If you had polenta for lunch, you had, you had soup for supper, and visa versa. (he sighs) What else can I tell you now?

LEVINE: What did, what did people do for enjoyment?

TERZANO: Well, enjoyment. It was, we were very poor people. They had, each town on the summertime they had dances. Had its own dance. And we would go to these dances maybe with two lire, with two lire, what the heck was it, maybe fifteen cents. We would spend the whole day there, dancing and buying an ice cream or piece of candy.

LEVINE: What was the music like? What...

TERZANO: Oh, music, you should hear, it's fantastic. It's fantastic. I mean, it's nothing like this. It was consisting of clarinet, a bass, and mandolin, guitar. The big bass, you know, it's big and that.

LEVINE: Did people sing as well as dance?

TERZANO: Oh, sing. Everybody sang. When you was picking grapes you could hear people all over the colline, hills, you know where they'd been pick, and everybody would be singing. Yeah, it was a very festive affair when we pick the grapes.

LEVINE: Can you, can you remember any of the songs that people sang when they were picking grapes?

TERZANO: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Give a few bars just to, just to give the flavor of it.

TERZANO: Oh, gosh. (he sings) "Fai finta di dormire, per non venire da basso? Sei dura come un sasso, sei dura come un sasso. Fai finta di dormire, per non venmire da basso? Sei dura come un sasso, per far l'amore con me. No, no, non te lo do. No, no, non te lo do, perche mamma non vo."

["Are you pretending to sleep, so as not to come downstairs? You're as dumb as a rock, to make love with me. No, I won't do it because Mama doesn't want it so."]

Translation by John Muriello]

LEVINE: Wonderful. Oh, thank you.

TERZANO: You're welcome.

LEVINE: Okay. So, how about religion? Were you a religious family?

TERZANO: Oh, yes. We were all, I was, what do you call the fattegna [PH], the altar boy. I was the altar boy maybe for five years. And my grandmother's cousin, Bishop del Ponte, he was a bishop, in Aqui.

LEVINE: How do you spell that?

TERZANO: A-Q-U-I. And my father asked him if he could put me in a college for priests. (he laughs) This a funny story because I, one day after a week my friends came to visit me. And they said, "Pierino, you know," he says, "they gonna cut you privates if you want to become a priest." So that scared me. (they laugh) And I run away from, from this college. I went to, I went home. I got a beating from my father for doing so, because he went through a lot of trouble to get me in. But, you know, when you're

young you don't think. And that was the end of me becoming a priest.
(they laugh)

LEVINE: I see. Okay. Well, let's see. So, why was it decided that you, did you come back to the United States the with your father?

TERZANO: No. I came alone in 1934. I tell you why. Because 19, around February, 1934, I joined in the Italian navy. And for the reason, because it was, they give you a lot of food, which at home we didn't have too much of it. And I went to this place, it's called La Spezia. It's a naval base. Submarines. Me and this friend of mine, Eugenio. We were there maybe two weeks. And this friend of mine, Genio, he was rejected because he had a, a hernia? Hernia. He was sent home. And me? I was there all alone, knowing nobody. Then it came to my, the food was very lousy. The food was very lousy. Enough, but lousy. You could hardly eat it. I wasn't used to it. And I made a request to go home, because they gave you sixty days. If you like it you could stay, if you don't like it you went home. So I put in the request, and they took me in the front of the guy who was in charge of this base, which it was like a coliseum with big doors and, how do you say it, oval like with high walls. And he said to me, he says, "How come you want to go home? Don't you like the Italian?" I says, "I like the navy, but I don't like the food," I said. "And what are you going to do? You going to come back when we gonna call you," you'll be, how do you say...

LEVINE: Drafted?

TERZANO: Drafted. When you gonna be draft. I says, "Not if I can help it." I said, "If I'm draft, if I, if I get a chance I go back to my country." Because if they would draft me then I would lose my citizenship of the United States. So he says to me, "Okay, if you go in America," he says, "Good for you." He says, "I wish I could go." And that's how what happened. I, I left, they didn't even let me go to my bunk where I had my clothes. They had somebody put 'em in a bag, they came by this big door, and the big door had a little on the side for people to walk out. And they threw it right on the sidewalk. I took my train, I went home to Castelnuovo. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Now, was your father there when you got home?

TERZANO: Yeah. I gotta a good shellacking. And when he was finished, I says, "Dad, now what you can do, get me a ticket to go back to the United States." Which he did, and here I am now. Yeah.

LEVINE: So what, where did you leave from?

TERZANO: I, Genova. Yeah.

LEVINE: And did you have an examination and that kind of thing before leaving?

TERZANO: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: What was that about?

TERZANO: Examination. They spray you for lice. They want you to take shower, you know, and everything. And that's how I come in.

LEVINE: Do you remember the name of the ship?

TERZANO: Yeah. Conte Biancamano. Conte Biancamano.

LEVINE: Okay. And, do you...

TERZANO: It took us fourteen days.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about the voyage?

TERZANO: Oh, yeah. I remember very well. It was very rough seas, and out of sixteen hundred people, on the dining room we, it was only me and another girl about my age eating at the table, because all, everybody was sick. Vomiting? They were vomiting all over the corridors and the, and the bedrooms, and whatever they were, you know. Everybody was very sick.

LEVINE: What were you accommodations like on the, on the ship?

TERZANO: Well, I was in a cabin of four. Me and my father.

LEVINE: Oh, your father was with you?

TERZANO: No. No, no, no, no. I was all alone. But we were four anyway on that voyage.

LEVINE: Did you bring anything with you to the United States from Italy?

TERZANO: Well, just a couple of clothes. Not too much. I had maybe four hundred lire in my pocket that my father gave me. And he gave me five cents, which it's, it was like a nickel here. And he says, "When you get there you could put it, when you take a, a trolley you could put on the bus." (he laughs) And then I got caught. So the guy says, "Hey, you put the wrong coin in here." So I, quickly I went for the nickel and I put in the nickel and he let me go.

LEVINE: What kind of a man was your father? What was your father like to you generally?

TERZANO: My father was a shoemaker. And that's all he was ever able, type, he couldn't no farm work because he was so small, like I said. He used to love to drink wine, you know. And from what I understand that was his (he pauses), that's what caused his death. I, I had left, so I couldn't see him do all this drinking. See, because he was so small he used to go in this

place where they make the wine in these big cantinas. And they would give him this vermouth and stuff, and it was very bad for him. That's how he died. Yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: Was he a shoemaker also in the United States?

TERZANO: No. In United State he worked for a candy company on, right on the other side of the 59th Street bridge. What the hell it's called that, Astoria?

LEVINE: Astoria, Queens.

TERZANO: Yeah. There was a candy factory, big factory. And he was a watchman at night. He used to bring me home a chunk of chocolate, maybe two, three pounds. And he got mad because I wouldn't eat chocolate. I would rather eat bread, you know? And, and that was his job there. And it's about the only that I ever know that he did, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

TERZANO: Yeah.

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

TERZANO: Yeah, seeing the Statue of Liberty.

LEVINE: Did you know what that was?

TERZANO: Yeah, yeah. Well the word pass, it goes around, you know. As a matter of fact they announced it on the loud speakers.

LEVINE: And what did people do?

TERZANO: Eh, most of them, they make the sign of the cross being mostly Catholics. Yeah. Roman Catholics. And then we went up the Hudson around Fifty-something street. I don't know if it was 53, 54th Street. And that's where we got off. And my aunt and my cousin came to pick me up with the car. Because I didn't have to come to Ellis Island being an American citizen.

LEVINE: Ah-hah.

TERZANO: See?

LEVINE: I see. Now did you, did you know your aunt and uncle when they picked you up?

TERZANO: No, I didn't.

LEVINE: What was that like?

TERZANO: Well, it was strange. You meet strange person. Like my father when he came in 1928 I didn't know him. You know, it was a big, being a young boy of eleven years old, you see your father. And he was so small, you know, I couldn't figure out how come I'm almost as big him, and I'm eleven years old. You know, and it was really rough. It was really rough. Yeah. What else can I tell you?

LEVINE: Well, how did you happen then to work at Ellis Island?

TERZANO: Well, my cousins, they knew I came. And my cousin, Battista, which he was the chef, he came over my hou, my aunt's house in the Bronx. Around Westchester Square I used to live. And he told me, "After tomorrow," it was Saturday. He says, "After tomorrow," meaning Monday, "you come to work with me in Ellis Island." "How do I get there?" He says, "Somebody's gonna take you." They took me once with the subway, and we, we took the ferry boat at seven o'clock. Every morning it used to leave at seven.

LEVINE: From where?

TERZANO: From South Ferry. It wasn't those type of boats they got now. It was a regular ferry like Staten Island. Much smaller, though. And, and that was enough for me. Then I went home. On the summer time I used to come down with the Third Avenue elevator. They used to have the elevator, Third Avenue, it used to come down from the Bronx. And I used to

change at 149th to take the elevator, because if you took the elevator you used to get nice, fresh air, you know. The subway, it would be hot. They had to air condition at all, you know. And it would come right to where the ferry sat. They had the Second Avenue and Third Avenue elevator that came all the way to South Ferry.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

TERZANO: The Second Avenue used to stop at 125th Street, but the Third Avenue used to go up, uptown. And it used to go up to Gun Hill Road, and then go across up White Plains Road two stops, and that was the end of that, and I used to come back that way.

LEVINE: Did you live in the Bronx around Westchester Square the, the whole time that you worked at Ellis Island?

TERZANO: No. I worked, I lived on, around Westchester Square from '34 to '38. That's when I got marry.

LEVINE: Okay. Why don't we pause here, so Kevin can turn the tape over, and then we'll resume.

TERZANO: Okay.

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO

TERZANO: I gotta tell you about how I met Mary.

LEVINE: Okay. Now it's, we were talking that it's 1938 now.

TERZANO: Yeah.

LEVINE: And that's when you moved from Westchester Square. How did you meet your wife?

TERZANO: Well, I was coming home from work around three, three thirty, and I was sitting down on the Pelham Bay line, and this girl was standing in the front of me with her books in her arm, and I got up to give her a seat. She took the seat, I got off at Westchester Square, and she gets off at Westchester Square. I'm walking home towards Balcome [PH] Avenue, and this girl is following me. So I said, "Jesus, what the hell did I do giving her my seat," you know. So I walked, I lived at 1424 Balcome Avenue, and she lived at 1426. So I walk into the house, I glance like this, and I see her going into the south bay. So when my cousin Andrew came home, I says, "Andrew, who's that girl?" He says, "Which girl?" I says, "Next door?" He says, "There's four of them." No, three of them, Mary, Sophie and Anna. I says, "She's blonde," you know, I tell it. So he says, "Oh, that's Mary." So, (he

pauses) he made us meet each other, you know. This is my cousin, this is Mary. And my bedroom window would look right into her bedroom, because these two houses were together, and they were like six-cornered. Two windows this way, and two windows this way. (he indicates) It was like a shaft. And then I seen her. So my cousin had a piano, a piano roll. You know, you pump, and, and he had “Parlami d’amore maraiu” [PH]. The song “Parlami d’amore maraiu” [PH]. And I used to play this piano and sing it to Mary.

LEVINE: Well, how did you, then did you meet her again?

TERZANO: Yeah. I met her...

LEVINE: You were introduced, and then...

TERZANO: Yeah. And we couldn’t say, I couldn’t understand a word of English. She couldn’t understand a word of Italian, you know. The only thing I could say to, “piece of gum.” I, I tell you, I gave her so many pieces of gum, it’s unbelievable. (they laugh) I took her one time, and with, on the square there was a nice place where they used to make ice cream sodas and, it was an ice cream parlor. So I took her and her sister Anna, and I says, “Order what you want.” They ordered. So when it came to, time to pay the bill, I had the money, but I wanted to be, I says, “I got no money now.” Then Mary says to her sister, she says, “I told you not to go.” You know. (he laughs) She was afraid she had to pay, you know, and, so after a

while I paid, and so that's how we got together. (he pauses) Then, I was, I, we had Julia in 1942, our first daughter.

LEVINE: Well, before we talk about the later time...

TERZANO: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...what were you doing then at Ellis Island on your job?

TERZANO: Well, I was promoted from pot washer...

LEVINE: Tell, tell me like when you first started, what were your duties, and then what happened.

TERZANO: Oh, okay. I came to work in there in the kitchen with my cousin. There was so many pots, so many pans, unbelievable. And I had to wash them. And over the sink the, the water was very warm, you know, that it steamed. And they had a, a canopy over to drove the fan, the steam out. But my hand, they were all cracked from soaps. Soap powder that we were using to wash these pots and pans. And I had big pots that I used to go inside to wash it. That's how big they were.

LEVINE: Now, you, who were you cooking for at that point?

TERZANO: Well, we were cooking for the imm, immigrants, and the employees of the

island. That's about it. At that time...

LEVINE: So how many...

TERZANO: At that time, you know.

LEVINE: How many people were you usually serving in a day?

TERZANO: Well, we were serving somewhere around six, seven hundred people in a restaurant. And then in the dining room upstairs, the immigrants, they were close to a thousand, maybe a thousand at the time before the war broke out, you know.

LEVINE: So you would get in some of these pots, they were so large. What would, what would you be cooking...

TERZANO: The large pot that I went in, it was a stock pot where we made broth. All the bones that was from the beef and chickens and stuff was throwing into this pot. It was very good broth. And (he pauses), then there was, well anyway. Now that I, I improved a bit, they took me off from pot washing. They put me to clean onions, clean, peel potatoes, peel carrots. The potatoes, well, they were put into a, a machine that would peel it. It was a big drum with water running in, and the bottom was like, what do you call paper, sand paper. And it would take the skin off, and the water would go into the sink and get rid of it. Then, the potatoes, they would be dumped

into the sink with water, and you had to take all the eyes out. And potatoes, they were cooked, boiled potatoes, or made potato salads. They made these potatoes with butter, milk and cheese in the oven. That was very good, too. When it came lunch time, the butcher, he would go to serve the food to the employees in the restaurant. We had a steam table there with all the vegetable, meat or whatever we had for the day. Then it came the coffee, the people would take the tray, go along, take the coffee or milk, whatever they wanted. Then there was a counter with puddings, pies, pastries. And then there was a lady making sandwiches. If somebody didn't want hot stuff they would order the sandwiches.

LEVINE: How many employees roughly do you think were there at that time?

TERZANO: Well, let's see. We were two chefs, one butcher, one pot washer, one, two vegetable men, and one dish washer. Then in the restaurant, at eleven o'clock we all, whatever we were doing, we leave alone and go in the restaurant. Like me, I would be at the end of the line where you punch the price of whatever they got. And then when they go out they pay the cashier that I told you that this girl that, maybe we didn't say that already. Did we?

LEVINE: (indicates "no")

TERZANO: This, well. The office, it was run, the, what do you call that thing that, the gov, he was working for the government?

LEVINE: The concession?

TERZANO: The concession.

LEVINE: The concessionaire.

TERZANO: The concessionaire.

LEVINE: Yeah.

TERZANO: It was Mr. Magown [PH]. He had a man working for him and two ladies. One lady, she would stay in the office the whole times. The other lady, at eleven o'clock, she would go into restaurant and be the cashier. And the restaurant was open from eleven till two o'clock for all the employees.

LEVINE: How many employees were there working at Ellis Island approximately at that time, do you have any idea?

TERZANO: Oh, I would say maybe two hundred, two fifty, tops. Because we had carpenters, we had painter, we, we had the guy in the incinerator. His name was Mike. Irish fellow. There was I think four on the power house, because the power house had to run twenty-four hours a day, so they used to switch. The, the incinerator had two burners. In other words you kept burning on one side until it was filled, and you cleaned the other one.

And then when this one is filled you switched over to the other side. I don't know if they got oil through barges, or if there was a pipe coming from Jersey. Which I don't think so, because the current in there, it's very strong. Nobody ever got away from Ellis Island, how do you say, escaped from Ellis Island. Nobody. There always was a police launch, boat, parked where the boat used to dock. So in case of the emergency they, and they had three shifts a day. Two policemen on each, on each shift.

LEVINE: When did you serve the immigrant people in the dining room?

TERZANO: On the dining room they would start to come down at eleven thirty to pick up all the food. They used to have soups, meats with potatoes and vegetable. They used to have dessert, coffee and tea, all they wanted.

LEVINE: How was the food?

TERZANO: Food was very good. Of course, it, it wasn't prepared like home, you know, because it was such a big bulk. At night many times they gave cold cuts. And everything had to be sliced. And we had one slicer, a hand slicer. It was not electric. Used to stay there maybe three hour cutting cold cuts.

LEVINE: Do you remember any immigrants in particular who came through while you were working here?

TERZANO: Well, one that was, stands out in my mind, it was the son of Haile Selessi [PH]. He was the emperor of Abyssinia. They call him the emperor...

LEVINE: Of Ethiopia.

TERZANO: I think they call him the emperor. He was a very, very large man. He was maybe six foot six, six foot seven. And every time he came to the dining room he used to order three to four steaks, every meal. He, of course, he had to pay extra for that. (he pauses) And then he went out into the city. I don't know who took him out. And somehow the, this man, he was a very, he was like a horse. (he pauses) Everytime he walked his privates would swing in his pants, and somehow the word got around about this man, and I understand that quite a few very rich lady from Park Avenue and Fifth Avenue, they wanted him as a sex partner. But I understand that after a while a couple of ladies died from it, having sex. And then they deported him. They send him back to Abyssinia.

LEVINE: For that reason?

TERZANO: Yes, for that reason. Because as long as no, nobody ever died from it, you know, once somebody died they said this is no good. Because people had money, they gave all kinds of money, whatever he wanted, you know, to satisfy their ego. And that's what happened.

LEVINE: Oh. How about any of the employees who were here when you were

working here. Do any of them stand out in your mind, or that you remember when you think about working here?

TERZANO: Well, practically everybody. The only thing it, another one that stands out, it was a Mr. Jim Roe, R-O-E. He was the man that, it was an exchange. In other words, people came with foreign money, he would change into American money. But then when the war broke out, his son was drafted into, and they put him into the Coast Guards. This man took it so hard that his son had to go to war, afraid they he might get kill, he start gambling. He gambled so much that it was unbelievable, that he robbed money from the government. He robbed so much that then, that he was so much in debt that one time he wanted to commit suicide. His wife called a John Hershack [PH], which he ran the store room. And he says to me, "Pete, we gotta go and see if we find Jim." We was told that he usually went to Pennsylvania Hotel for bets, and we went there. We found him on a chair all stretched out. And he had a bottle of pills empty on the floor. He was un...

LEVINE: Unconscious.

TERZANO: Uncon, unconscious. So right away we called for hot coffee and tried to make him vomit, which we did. We got him all dressed and we took him home to his wife, which they live in East New York on the Jersey side. On the other side, on the north side of the George Washington, it's a beautiful home. But then the trial came up. The man was sent up to Sing Sing, I

don't remember for how many years. But he had diabetes. First thing, he lost a leg, and I think eighteen months after lost the other leg, and eventually died.

LEVINE: So he had taken the money that people had used to exchange...

TERZANO: And gambled...

LEVINE: ...and gambled it.

TERZANO: And gambled it. And gambled it. Yeah, he got, it's a sickness, you know.

LEVINE: Tell me about Mr. Corsi, who, who was here when you were here.

TERZANO: Mr. Corsi was a gentleman. He said hello to every employees that was on the island. And he had a private dining room where we worked. He had his private waiter. And for, because he always had some dignitary, how do you say?

LEVINE: Hm-hmm. Yeah.

TERZANO: Dignitary. Yeah. And he would be served steaks and lamb chops. You know, real good food, yeah. Which they didn't cook for others, you know, except for us. We...

LEVINE: Oh, you got the good food?

TERZANO: Oh, yeah. I didn't think of nothing of having five, six lamb chops for breakfast, and maybe sometimes five, six eggs. I came from Italy. I was a skinny malinky [PH], you know. And first thing you know, I weighed two hundred some odd pound. (they laughs)

LEVINE: So in other words, those who worked in the kitchen were well fed.

TERZANO: Oh, yeah. Well, we fed ourselves, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

TERZANO: And you're a fool if you don't, because there was so much food, you know. It was unbelievable. It was unbelievable.

LEVINE: Do you remember any of the inspectors, or any of the other people who were here when you were here?

TERZANO: Well, I remember guards and inspectors, guards for the, they would watch these aliens, you know, that nothing would happen. They had a guard, that he was so fat, you have no idea. Twice a year he used to go have his fat remove. He used to come, pass in the kitchen when we make meatballs. We used to make up to seventy-five hundred meatballs. And

he would grab a handful and just eat it like that. (he gestures) Anything. A loaf of bread. He just kept eating, kept eating. But, two men come break his stomach, you know, it was very, very fat.

LEVINE: What...

TERZANO: And we used to tell him, "How can you watch anybody, if they wanna run?" He says, "If they wanna run, let them run. Where are they gonna run, on the water?" (he laughs)

LEVINE: Well, how did Ellis Island change once the war was underway?

TERZANO: Well, I think when they, it changed because within the very next day, you have no idea, how many Japanese people and many German people they had. They went out, I guess they had all these people's name. You know. And they went to take them right out of their houses. Brought them in. On the ferry boat there was a big, it was long, you know. And there was iron gates. And every time they would bring them in, (he gestures) put then in there. And then when the boat came in, they had guards standing in a line, open the gate and let them on to the boat, and brought them in like that. It came to a point that we had about thirty-five hundred people to feed. Imm, immigrants, or prisoner of wars, yeah.

LEVINE: A lot of Japanese and Germans.

TERZANO: A lot of, and Germans and Italians.

LEVINE: And Italians.

TERZANO: Yeah. Yeah. You know, you couldn't have a short wave in the house or anything that was against. When the war broke out, all the employees, they, they were supposed to have an identification card with your picture on. (he searches for papers) Excuse me. Yeah.

LEVINE: How did you feel with them bringing in Italians as prisoners of war?

TERZANO: Well, they were, they were aliens, you know. And most of them, you know, they all came on, on boats on a coal, you know. Illegal. (he is searching for papers) Is this the one? No, this is...

LEVINE: You mean they came to this country as like stowaways...

TERZANO: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...in the coal, where they kept the coal on the ship.

TERZANO: A lot of them. A lot of them, let's put it that way. And others, they came if, if they had relatives, they would call for him. Like my father came in 1911. At that time they used to take about twenty-five days coming. They had very slow boats. (he continues to search for papers) I got notes.

LEVINE: Are you going to read something?

TERZANO: Yeah. You know that this island, they're actually three islands. One was the immigration, the very next one is the merchant marine hospital, and the third one was a, a hospital for crazy people.

LEVINE: Mental hospital.

TERZANO: Yeah, mental hospital. Ferry would leave at seven a.m., every hour. The laundry I showed you. They had their own laundry. The Jewish people got Jewish food. There was a special lady cooking Jewish, there was a rabbi to inspect all our food. The food, we used to buy it from Zion. Z-I-O-N. I used to go and get like corned beef and beef and franks, and stuff like that. Everything kosher. I used to get off on Longwood Avenue on the Pelham Bay line to go and get it and bring it in. (he pauses) When, for breakfast there was french toast. The two chefs and three helpers, we used to come in and sleep over here on the island. Because you had to cook over seven, seven thousand slices of toast. You know, you pass them through the egg, through the milk, and then we had pans on the fire to cook them. And instead, when the other food for breakfast like soft boiled eggs, or, and cereal. I guess that's about it. Eggs and cereal. We had no pancakes or anything like that. There was a man, they used to call him Zarembo. He had a son working here, too. The Zarembo slept here every night. He used to come in in the morning, put the steam on the

stock pot, put the eggs in baskets, put them in a, on the steam, we had a steam cooker. And he would turn the steam on maybe for two minutes or three minutes, and then pull the basket out. And when we had the cereal like oatmeal or farina, he would have all this cooked by the time we came in.

LEVINE: Now, when you did the french toast, you came in early for that?

TERZANO: No, we, we slept here.

LEVINE: Oh, you slept over.

TERZANO: We slept over. So they, because we used to start at five o'clock to make them. You know, for thirty-five hundred people, my goodness, that's a lot of work.

LEVINE: So how often would you sleep here?

TERZANO: Maybe once every two weeks they had the french toast.

LEVINE: And where would you sleep?

TERZANO: (he indicates) Right up here. You see...

LEVINE: On the balcony.

TERZANO: On the balcony. All those rooms. (he coughs) Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Is there anything else that you can think of that happened here when you worked here, that was a striking occurrence?

TERZANO: Well, one time I was coming from the ferry boat through the hallway that I show you when we came in. I seen this fellow with this bathrobe on. He was taken from the immigration, they were taking him to the hospital for a checkup. And who was it but a friend of mine that I went to school in Italy. His name was Luigi. And when we seen each other we embraced. You know, we played together all the time. And I says, "What are you doing here, Luigi." He says, "Don't tell me." He says, "I was for two weeks on the coal bin. They just brought me some water and some bread for two weeks, and now I got caught when I," he tried to jump ship. And they was bringing him for the checkup in the hospital, and then they were gonna deport him. And that was some experience. What else? What else can I tell you? There's so much. Let's see. (he pauses) One, as I told you, they, we had the W.P.A.

LEVINE: Oh, yeah.

TERZANO: And they had up to three hundred fifty people on the W.P.A. All office worker.

LEVINE: And what years was that?

TERZANO: And that was around 1935, '36, something like that. Maybe '37. And then the war broke out. Of course, they didn't need the W.P.A. because you had all the defense jobs. You know, everybody got jobs. They brought in the Coast Guards. And they were also maybe four, five hundred. But they had their own cooks. They had nothing to do with us, eating.

LEVINE: So when the Coast Guard was here, there were two kitchens operating, one for the Coast Guard and one for the alien?

TERZANO: Yeah. The Coast Guard, it was under the Coast Guard. It had nothing to do with this part, you know.

LEVINE: And where were they physically located, the Coast Guard, on, on the islands?

TERZANO: Well, right where the W.P.A. was. On that, it's a big, tremendous room, you know. And they were in there. I tell you two cases on these Coast Guards. Something that stuck in my mind. This fellow, this Coast Guard, he found one of these big, they're not flies. They got colored wings, and they got long legs.

LEVINE: Grasshoppers?

TERZANO: They're like grasshopper, but not...

LEVINE: Butterfly?

TERZANO: No. They're much bigger than...

LEVINE: Oh.

TERZANO: Well, anyway...

LEVINE: Cricket.

TERZANO: No, not even. And this animal, this insect got on the top of this Coast Guard hat, and never left him. He used to leave the island, he used to go to the bars in Manhattan and come in at, at night stewed to the gills, and this thing would stick with him. He used to stay right by his bed, and then I don't know whatever happened to him. Another one about the Coast Guard, we had champs here, boxing champs. Famous musician on the Coast Guard. Oh, you name it, we had him. Between island, the hospital and the immigration, the Coast Guard used to stand alongside the water, the parapet. And they used to give him, each other signals with flags and stuff. They could read them, you know? And somehow one day these two guys start sending dirty words. And a nurse from the hospital we'd see could read this, she reported them. (they laugh) And they got in trouble because of it, you know. And then, that was something. That's

about it. What else can I tell you?

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So, did you mingle with the Coast Guards much?

TERZANO: No. We just say hello, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

TERZANO: Because you used to know most of them, you know. Because right there by the slip of the ferry boat, where it used to pull in in that building there, there was like a cafeteria, which it served sandwiches, it served drinks, soda, nothing alcoholic. And the ferry boat had a, a counter that served sandwiches, pastry and cigarettes and sodas. At nine o'clock they used to come in like they, they called, what do you call it, they start running.

LEVINE: Oh, a stampede.

TERZANO: A stampede. To, who gets there first, you know, to get served. It was really something to, and I did that for quite a while, also.

LEVINE: What? Worked on the ferry boat?

TERZANO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Oh.

TERZANO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, I think we'll pause here...

TERZANO: All right.

LEVINE: ...in order to change the tape.

TERZANO: All right.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

LEVINE: This is tape two. I'm talking with Mr. Peter Terzano, who was both, a person who came, no, you didn't come through Ellis Island...

TERZANO: No.

LEVINE: ...but you did live in Italy as a child, and came here.

TERZANO: Yes. Yeah.

LEVINE: And then you worked here from 1934 to 1944.

TERZANO: Right.

LEVINE: And we were talking about that period of time here at Ellis Island. It's, let me just say that's it's July 13th, and we're here in the Ellis Island studio. You were mentioning about somebody who tried to escape the, from Ellis Island.

TERZANO: Yes. Well, this guard was taking this alien on a boat back to New York. I don't know where, where was he bringing him. Either to a prison or whatever. And this guy wanted to escape. So what he did, he asked the guard, they had to take the handcuffs off when they got on the boat, because in case of an accident so he could be able to swim. So he says, "I would like to go to the bathroom." And on this ferry boat there was one bathroom. So he went in there. And the guard without thinking he let him go in by himself. He opened a window and jumped in the water. Somebody from the outside of the ferry seen this guy jump. He started yelling, "Man over board." And within minutes we had Coast Guards, we had police boats and what have you, tried to get this man out of the boat. We finally got him out. (he laughs) Yeah.

LEVINE: So nobody ever escaped for, that you know.

TERZANO: Nobody, nobody ever escaped because the current between Ellis Island and New Jersey, it's tremendously strong. They could never make it across. Once a year the cops, or what, guards, they, whoever had anything like a gun or handcuffs that wasn't good, they would throw them in the water. They would go in the back there and throw them in the water. This time they threw them in the water, but one set of handcuffs got stuck on one of the piles. So me, I made a big, long stick, and I pulled it out. I took it home as a souvenir. I took it home, and I put it on the table. While I was washing in the bathroom a friend of mine came in. He says, "Pierino," he says, "What is this?" I says, "Well, they're handcuffs they threw away, and I brought them home." Don't you think he put the good part of the handcuff on his wrist. I says, "Now, how are you gonna get it off?" We had no key. So on Westfarms Road there was a locksmith. So I says, the only way is to go there and see if this guy can, we go there. I should have never did it because this guy thought I was, we were a fugitive from, you know. (Levine laughs) And he called the police. Within two minutes there must have been fifteen police cars and detectives. They put us against the wall, searched us and everything, you know. And, you know, me, my English is not as good yet, but at that time I could hardly say any, you know, really make myself un, so finally I made myself understand. There was a Jewish detective, I still remember. Red they used to call him. And I explain it to him. So they called Ellis Island, and is it so they threw these handcuffs away. They threw guns and everything in the water. And they told them yes. So then they took me and this friend of mine down to 138th, near Third Avenue, there was a

locksmith which he let us go free. It was, that was some experience.

LEVINE: Oh, my.

TERZANO: Yeah.

LEVINE: What was the feeling around this place when, when, during the war, when the Germans and Italians and Japanese were being housed here?

TERZANO: Well, of course, whoever was brought in, you know, they all had jobs. Business men. They had bakeries. You name it, they were here. And then after they were processed they were sent out, I don't know, some camps out in Iowa, whatever. And, and there was three families that I knew. Germans. One was Otto, he was a bakery, the, a baker. The other one, it was Mary and Karl. They were house, house workers for big, rich people, you know. What do you call...

LEVINE: Housekeeper and the...

TERZANO: Housekeeper, and the husband would be like the chauffeur.

LEVINE: Chauffeur. Uh-huh.

TERZANO: And then there was another family, too. He was, he was very smart. He was (he pauses) in charge for a big company to handle trucks and, you

know, ships, stuff. And they were brought in here, so...

LEVINE: They were brought in here and they were processed here?

TERZANO: And they were pro, I knew they were here. I used to come up and see them, you know.

LEVINE: And how long were they here for?

TERZANO: They were here for about three months...

LEVINE: Three months.

TERZANO: ...before they were processed and send away.

LEVINE: And then they were sent away.

TERZANO: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Did you ever hear from them after?

TERZANO: Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: What did you do?

TERZANO: Then Otto came back. He opened a, a bakery in Astoria, I think, Broadway. Broadway, yeah. A german bakery. What pastries. They were unbelievable. All good workers, but what are you gonna do. They were Germans, and...

LEVINE: So, in other words, was that typical? In other words, were people kept here for a period of about three months...

TERZANO: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...when they were processed?

TERZANO: To hold the process, you know. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

TERZANO: But it was really amazing how they picked up all these people out of, out of nowhere. Nobody knew. They knew they were Germans, but they, they weren't American citi, American citizen, you know, United States citizen. So, I guess, they just went along, that's all. What else can you do? So.

LEVINE: And, let's see. You mentioned that you were married in 1938.

TERZANO: Right.

LEVINE: And then you moved from where you had been living.

TERZANO: Yes. Around Westchester Square. And I went to 1175 Westfarms Road.

LEVINE: Also the Bronx?

TERZANO: Yeah. Four room apartment with a foyer. Nice. Really nice. On the fifth floor.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

TERZANO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, your wife mentioned that sometimes she would come here? How...

TERZANO: Yeah. She would come with me, you know, as my wife. And she would have lunch and then wait for me until I went home at, I quit at three thirty.

LEVINE: Was there much socializing among the people who worked here?

TERZANO: Yeah. Well...

LEVINE: Did you get together after work, or...

TERZANO: Yeah. No, no, no. The only ones, it was the drinkers. Me, I was never an alcoholic drinker. Never. Food, yes. (he laughs)

LEVINE: But not drink. (she laughs)

TERZANO: But drinking alcohol, no.

LEVINE: How about people who worked here living in New Jersey. Were there any people who worked here who lived in New Jersey and came here to work?

TERZANO: Yes. Yes. There was, the one I know, it was John Hershack [PH] they used to call, I don't know how to spell it for you. And he used to be in charge of the store room. All the food, meat, ice cream, all that stuff there. And when all, when the war broke out, he brought in his brother, Joey. And they used to take care of that. And the food used to come to the island on carts. I don't know if you ever seen them. They got two wheels, and they shape like, like this. (he indicates) So did you put the stuff on it and it balances. And then you pull it, and you got somebody behind you pushing you. And all the food, it was unloaded in South Ferry. And it would stay in that part where they, they had, the people stood. All these trucks until they tide came up and brought up the, oh, the dock, you know. It brought up to the level of the boat, so it would be level. Because if you would go on when the water's tide is low you would run away. And if it was too high you had to push a lot. But it's how it all came. The name of the guy that used to take care, they used to call him "Big John." I only

know him as Big John. And he weighed close to three hundred pounds. A Polish fellow. He, he would grab you by the wrist and stop the blood from going through the, that's how strong he was. He was like a mule. A mule. Yeah.

LEVINE: Wow. How about the man, the man who ran the store house. Where in New Jersey did he live, do you...

TERZANO: In Bayonne.

LEVINE: Bayonne.

TERZANO: Bayonne. He used to take a ferry into New York, and then walk down to South Ferry and take this boat.

LEVINE: I see. Was it, were there many people who lived in New Jersey that you know of?

TERZANO: I really don't know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

TERZANO: That's the only two that I know. Of course, there must have be a lot, you know, because there was so many workers, you know, working in the offices, and...

LEVINE: Yeah.

TERZANO: And especially the hospital. There are a lot of nurses, doctors, a lot of them.

LEVINE: Now, the hospital was there for the Coast Guard?

TERZANO: No.

LEVINE: Or the hospital was there for the immigrants and for the people being detained?

TERZANO: Imm, immigrants, and the merchant marines. It was a merchant marine on, when it was in war time, they used to go there. In other words if somebody was sick they used to bring him there, you know, the merchant marine. But then when the Coast Guard came, of course, if something happened to them they used to bring them there also, you know. Even us. Like me, I, I, one time I was cleaning the meat grinder. I was making mash potatoes. I went like this, like a dope. (he gestures) And the knife cut my finger. (he indicates) As you can see, it's still the scar. You see it cut a piece off.

LEVINE: Well, (she pauses) you and your wife, after you were married, you had your first child, Julia.

TERZANO: 1942.

LEVINE: 1942. Did you have any other children?

TERZANO: Yes. My son, Ronny.

LEVINE: And...

TERZANO: He, he was born in 1950. Right now he's in charge of La Guardia Airport runways and constructions there. Very good kid. Hard working boy. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you think as a father, you, you kept some of the ways of, that you learned in Italy? I mean, do you think there...

TERZANO: Yes. A lot of them. A lot of, I, I learned to be strict with your kids. Now they have different way of raising. Because they're just like a tiger. If you don't train them right, they, they don't know. They let themselves pull away from other people. You know what I'm saying? Like, we would sit at the table. They had to eat what was put on the table, whether you like it or not. And after you get used to it, it's just as good as any other food.

LEVINE: Were there any other things that you were strict about?

TERZANO: Well, yes. I didn't like my daughter to stay out later than ten o'clock. And my wife agree with it. One time she stayed out a little bit too late, my wife just lay it on her hard, you know. (he laughs) Now she's probably gonna laugh when she hears this. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Did you treat your son different than your daughter, do you think? You have different...

TERZANO: No. The same.

LEVINE: ...standards for your son?

TERZANO: The same. The same. The same. My son, he must have spilled hundreds of glasses of milk. You would put a glass of table on the milk, he would be eating, first thing you know he let, and it came to the point that I say, "Well, you don't eat with us." And I had him eating in the kitchen instead of, you know. (he laughs) But then, of course, like anything else, it's corrected, and so on. My son at, what was he, about fifteen. He used get up at four o'clock and come down to Fourteenth Street to work in a butcher shop, to bone, take all the meat off the bones for a butcher. He was really a hard worker. When he, when he was about seven, sixteen, seventeen, oh I didn't tell you. I, oh, there's so much to be told. I was drafted in 1945. I was sent into the Philippines, and I, they put me in on a major officers mess. I had Filipinos working as waiters and helpers in the kitchen. When I had something to clean like stove and stuff,

I used to have three, four Japanese prisoner with guards, you know. They would do the cleaning. This major officers mess, they ate everything. Everything. I used to have four, five course dinners, breakfast, eggs five styles, pancakes, you know. Because I didn't get my supply from like the regular G.I.'s, because they were, I had majors, colonels and generals.

LEVINE: And you were in charge of the kitchen?

TERZANO: That's right.

LEVINE: Wow.

TERZANO: In charge of the kitchen. And the dining room. Well, actually the dining room, it was the second lieutenant. His name was, oh, Jesus (he pauses), well I can't think of it. I know he was in charge of that. One time I lioness potatoes on the menu. There was three generals coming from the Philippine, Japan. And I told the lieutenant I couldn't make the lioness potatoes because I had no fresh potatoes. So we called up a colonel, the colonel sent a plane to Leyte to pick up three bags of potatoes. (he laughs) Yeah, it was really nice. It was really nice.

LEVINE: How did you feel about being drafted?

TERZANO: Well, I, I was lucky. I stood away so long, you know. I really didn't see no war. I went into the war zone in the Philippines. Leyte and Luzon. But I

didn't see no war because of my experience in the kitchen. And...

LEVINE: Tell me how it was you left working at Ellis Island.

TERZANO: It was hard. I went to get a job in Long Island. Someplace where they had, there were making sheet metals. And then I, I was there maybe four months, and then I was drafted.

LEVINE: I see. Why did you leave Ellis Island?

TERZANO: Because we were fire. All of us, we were fire. All of the kitchen help, all the waiters and so on.

LEVINE: And, and say why you were fired.

TERZANO: Oh. Because the German prisoners, they didn't like the way we cooked. And they gave them permission to cook there own food the way they want it. And so we were all out of work. My cousins, they had thirty-five years in here. And they were fired like anybody else.

LEVINE: Wow.

TERZANO: Yeah.

LEVINE: So, let's see. So then when you got out of the service, then what?

TERZANO: I came out of service. I was out of work for something like, let's see, from July till almost December. Then I went into construction. My first job, it was in a project on 135th and Fifth Avenue. We had eight buildings there.

LEVINE: And is that what you continued to do, work in construction?

TERZANO: Yeah. Every construction. Regular construct, bridges, you name it. Verrazzano Bridge, the Triboro Bridge, the entrance to the Triboro Bridge, the Long Island Expressway. We did a lot. I'd work in Newark Airport, I work in Kennedy Airport, I work in La Guardia Airport. Quite a few power houses for Con Edison. And one for the Jersey City light and electric, electric and lightning, whatever they call it. It, it, all heavy construction. A lot of concrete.

LEVINE: What, how do you feel about this period of your life?

TERZANO: Well, my period, when I reach sixty-two I says, "I did so much work, I'm gonna quit." And I went on social security.

LEVINE: And how...

TERZANO: And I got a pension from the union.

LEVINE: And how, how, how do you enjoy your life at this time?

TERZANO: Well, I tell you. I, when I came out, I was always strong as a bull. I bought a house in 1980, no '78 or '79, up in upstate, in Unionville, New York. I had a big garden, took care of the garden, and you got grass to cut. But now I came to the point I don't want to do this type of work. Not that I don't want, I could do it, but I feel myself getting tired. My bones are aching, the legs, the hip. (he laughs) That's about it. I take, I take five pills in the morning, six pills at night. I go to the Veteran Administration Hospital up in where we are.

LEVINE: I see.

TERZANO: Yeah. Castlepoint, it's called, the hospital.

LEVINE: Do you, do you feel, how do you feel, your early childhood being, living in Italy some of the time and then coming here, and back and forth. How do you feel that's effected your life?

TERZANO: I don't think it, no, I'm, I got adjusted to everything, you know. Like I told you, no matter what I did, I always was the top. I was the foreman in construction for Slattery Construction for seven, eight years. I was a foreman for Cayuga Construction, I was foreman for Civetta Construction.

LEVINE: What are you most proud of, or what do you feel most grateful for in your life?

TERZANO: For having two kids the way they are. Honest to God. (he cries) They're so good.

LEVINE: Well, I'm sure you've been good to them, too.

TERZANO: I hope so.

LEVINE: Let's see. Is there anything else that you can think of that you'd like to say about being here today before we close.

TERZANO: Well, I tell you. I came in here maybe eight, nine months ago with a senior citizen group. What I seen what you people did, it's a great improvement. You, you did the work on this hall here. It's, it's unbelievable, how you brought it back. But then again I think to myself, how come they let a place like this go down? There was dropping from pigeon on every room. How did they do that? It's, it's really incredible. Thanks to Iacoca, is that his name? (he laughs)

LEVINE: Lee Iacoca. Uh-huh.

TERZANO: Yeah. You really did a great job. And that wall with all the names that you have on, that's really nice.

LEVINE: Is your name on there?

TERZANO: No. I don't deserve it, because I'm not an alien.

LEVINE: Oh, because you did, right, you were a citizen to begin with.

TERZANO: Yeah, I was a, yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

TERZANO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, well I want to say, I really thank you so much. You brought such a wonderful amount of information, and...

TERZANO: I, I really look forward to this.

LEVINE: Well, your, your, this tape will now be in the Ellis Island collection, and be available to anyone who wants to research the history of Ellis Island. It will be a wonderful help...

TERZANO: Good. Good, good. Good.

LEVINE: ...for posterity.

TERZANO: Very good.

LEVINE: For the future.

TERZANO: Good.

LEVINE: So this is Janet Levine. I want to thank Pete Terzano very, very much. We will be also going with a video tape, walking around so you can point out things that you remember from Ellis Island.

TERZANO: Okay.

LEVINE: Today is July 13th, 1993. We're here at Ellis Island in the Oral History studio. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service signing off.