

**EI-385**

**GENE MAGI**

**BIRTH DATE: SEPTEMBER 12, 1905**

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**INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.**

**RECORDING ENGINEER: KEVIN DALEY**

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**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 9/1994**

**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY CHARLES MITCHELL, 3/2007**

**ITALY, 1914**

**AGE 8**

**PASSAGE ON "THE ST. ANNE"**

**PORT OF EMBARKATION: NAPLES**

**RESIDENCES: ITALY, CASTILLANO DI LAGO, SICILY**

**US: ST. MARY'S, PA**

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Wednesday, August 25, 1993. I'm at the Ellis Island Recording Studio with Gene Magi. Mr. Magi came from Italy in 1914 when he was seven or eight, somewhere around there. Anyway, welcome, Mr. Magi. It's nice to have you here. Can we begin by you giving me your birth date, please?

MAGI: September the 12th, 1905.

SIGRIST: And where were you born, sir?

MAGI: The name of the town was Castellano de Lago.

SIGRIST: Whereabouts in Italy is that?

MAGI: That's the northern part of Italy there, just exactly the location, I don't.

SIGRIST: Can you say the name of the town slowly for us?

MAGI: Castellano de Lago.

SIGRIST: De Lago.

MAGI: De Lago's a big lake over there, the biggest lake in Italy.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the town itself?

MAGI: Well, we were, we didn't live in the town, only went to town, a small town, once. I remember it very much. But we had, we lived on a farm. It was three brothers and one sister.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the house that you lived in for me?

MAGI: Oh, yeah. It was a brick house, and we had, we had different animals, we raised pigs, sheeps. And we had two oxen to plow the ground. We had a mule to, you know, drive the wagon. And every spring we used to, my father used to go around and buy sheeps, the young

ones, and we'd fatten them up on a farm, and then the fall, we used to sell them. The same thing with the pigs. You had them in, you know, the young ones, raised them up on a farm, and that's how we made a living. Then we planted wheat, and all kind of vegetables, I mean, fruit, figs, apples. Everything but oranges and lemons, I think on account it was too cool to grow those. But anything else, cherries or apples and pears. There was nothing missing, you know, for us.

SIGRIST: And, again, with the intention of selling the fruit?

MAGI: No. It was for our own use.

SIGRIST: Did your father own the land, or did he just rent it?

MAGI: No. No, he rented. The way they work it, there's an owner that owns the land, so you work it. And you, at the end it works half and half. We got half of the profits, whatever was there, and half goes to him. Sometimes we had hard luck with hail storms and different, you know, the climate there. So if things were bad, they loaned us money in the spring to buy whatever we needed. So when we sold the stuff, you know, sold some wheat and corn and stuff like that,

and paid them back. So we had a lot of vineyards. We used to make our own wine. We had a lot of, well, further away from where the farm was, we owned that, we used to raise olives. We had our own olive oil.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me how you made the olive oil?

MAGI: Well, we used to go out and pick the olives, bring them down to the mill. They crush it, and then you, we used to get home, but it wasn't purified like it is if you go in the store now, it's purified, running like water. But we used to have it in big tubs, and you scoop it up with a spoon. It was like soft butter. That's how we used to use that.

SIGRIST: And how did they make the wine in those days?

MAGI: Well, the wine we had to, a lot of grapes. We had white wine, red wine, they were the same way, that the farmers there, instead of, you know, hiring sharecroppers or whatever they do over here, the farmers used to work together. Each one helped each other. When it was time to cut the hay, you know, half a dozen farmers come over, and they work all day. The wives started cooking the pasta, spaghetti or a different thing, you know, to eat, and they done all

the work. So next, that following week they went to the other fellow's farm, and we done the same thing. So it's like the one hand washes the other, you help each other and you gross any money. So then there's a, you know, that's the way it was.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

MAGI: Gasparo, G-A-S-P-A-R-O.

SIGRIST: And can you tell me a little bit about what his personality was like?

MAGI: He was a hard-working man, very hard. He, we had a little hard luck one year there with a, we had two oxen, so taking them out of the barn, the floor was cement, so one of them slipped and broke his spine, so we had to get rid of that, so that was a loss there. Then a sickness came around and killed half of our, the pigs, the hogs, there, we lost there. The same thing with the sheep. I don't know what happened. Everything, it seemed like we lost all around. So my father got kind of fed up. He had a brother in Pennsylvania, so he wrote to him, and he answered he could send him some money for his fare, which we didn't have. So he sent him the money, and he came

over here about a year-and-a-half. He sent us money for the fare. So then my mother and my two brothers and my sister, she was a little small baby then, we all came over.

SIGRIST: What work did your father get in Pennsylvania?

MAGI: Pennsylvania they used to have a brick yard. He used to, like, take care of the fires over on, where they used to cook the bricks. Then from there we moved to another small town, they used to make sewer pipes, big sewer pipes. He done the same work there. Then we had a cousin who came from Boston to visit us, and he seen how he was working hard, my brother was working hard, the oldest brother. He says, "There's no place here for you. Come, you know, with me back, to Connecticut." Connecticut, you know, they were looking for help and everything. So that's what he done. He come over there, and he wanted, got a job in Remington Arms.

SIGRIST: So you're losing your family one by one to America.

MAGI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: When you think back to Italy, is there a story that

sticks out in your mind about your father in Italy?

MAGI: Yeah. I mean, I remember in Italy he was a good man, and he was a very hard, hard worker. We didn't need anything we could afford to buy, always, he got it for us.

SIGRIST: What did he look like?

MAGI: Oh, he was rather short, something (?), something was kind of, you know, he kept to himself. But he was, I had a brother who took right after him, my second brother, which he passed away, and now my eldest brother passed away, my sister. So, I have two sisters left.

SIGRIST: And what was your mom's name?

MAGI: Uh, Mary.

SIGRIST: And her maiden name?

MAGI: Rossi.

SIGRIST: R-O-S-S-I?

MAGI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And let me ask you the same question about your mom.

What was her personality like?

MAGI: Well, she was very, she wasn't too friendly, I mean, to mix in with a lot of people. She just had, you know, certain people she liked. She was friendly otherwise she kind of kept to herself. She was a hard worker.

SIGRIST: Do you know how your parents met?

MAGI: Well, I know she was a beautiful woman, and they used to tease him because he was, he wasn't like a ladies man but he wasn't what you call, you know, handsome, but he got her. And they always used to, you know, tease him, "How'd you ever get such a pretty, you know, wife?" Like that. "An ugly looking guy, you know, like you?" But, you know, that was all in fun anyway.

SIGRIST: Now, did you have grandparents in this town?

MAGI: No. We left, we left, when we left there lived in Italy a grandfather and a grandmother, a great-grandmother.

SIGRIST: But they didn't live in the town with you in Italy?

MAGI: Yes, they did.

SIGRIST: They did. What do you remember about your grandparents?

MAGI: Not much, because when we left the farm, we gave it up. We lived with them for, till we got, you know, the arrangement to come here. So I remember my great-grandfather, whatever, he was a, he wasn't too educated but he, you know, was very smart. He used to carve things out of briarwood, pipes, you know, the pipes you smoke, and they make a face of an animal or something. It was very good. He used to make stocks for shotguns for different, different people, he used to carve them out. He was very handy with his hands like that.

SIGRIST: And he was your great-grandfather.

MAGI: Yeah. I remember that, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember your great-grandmother?

MAGI: Not too much.

SIGRIST: Was she alive?

MAGI: Yeah, she was alive, but I don't remember her much.

SIGRIST: Is this your father's grandparents or your mother's grandparents?

MAGI: My father.

SIGRIST: Your father's. Tell me a little bit about the kinds of things your mother would have to do around the house.

MAGI: Well, they made their own bread, their own macaroni. And the wool, they spin, you know, sheared the sheep before we sold, and kept the wool, so that they spun the wool, like you see the old-fashioned, the old-fashioned way they had the wheel, and they had a thing hanging, like a spool there, and it spins around. And they kept working, working. They used to get together, the women got together in the fireplace, I remember. And they keep working and doing that. She made all her own clothes, uh, sheets, linen, we used to call that, too. So she used to make the sheets. I remember even the nightgown I used to sleep in, that was made out of it. The only trouble with that was the pure linen, and it was kind of rough. It wasn't, it wasn't, you know, finished stuff. I'll never forget that. But everybody, you know, done their own

work. And as far as, like I said, you practically, you lived on there. You grew your own stuff on the farm, and everybody got along pretty good, as long as the, we had pretty good weather. You know, the hailstorm, they come around and ruin everything.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about the climate in this part of northern Italy. Did you ever see snow up there?

MAGI: No, we, we got a few flakes or ice. The ice was very thin, like a piece of paper. It didn't last. So that's probably, we had all that kind of fruit there, cherries and figs and almonds and plums.

SIGRIST: How would you heat your house when it got cold?

MAGI: With a fireplace. We didn't even have windows. They have wooden shutters, so you close the shutters, (?) draft comes through that And they light, what you call, you light your fireplace.

SIGRIST: Was it just one room, your house, or did you have several rooms?

MAGI: No, rooms from here, separate rooms. The kitchen there, and they had bedrooms, different bedrooms, and we had a dining room. Everybody ate in, you know, it

was done in the kitchen there.

SIGRIST: Tell me some of the foods that you ate when you were a child in Italy. What was your favorite food when you were a kid?

MAGI: Well, I don't quite remember that. Generally, I mean, whatever that was grown there, we ate over there. The only thing, for us, or to me, anyway, if you went to the store and bought some, I mean, a store macaroni, I thought it was a big treat. Hers was better, because, you know, you put eggs (?) when you're young. Another thing was, let me think now. I just had a couple of, I totally forgot. But, oh, the bread. Now, we used to raise our own wheat, and when it came time for, not to make the wheat, we used to cut it down, bring it under, then have it in a machine there, a baler, like. But, at the same time, like now the machine comes along and bales and everything. Over there, shook it up, like. Then you had to feed it and they used to, one side was the wheat, you know, would fall on one side and the hay, or whatever, was left on the other side. I don't remember too much of that.

SIGRIST: When you were a little kid in Italy, what did you do

for fun? What was entertainment at that time?

MAGI: There was no entertainment, because I always take care of the sheep, take them out on, you know, to feed. The dangers there were was take them out, and we had a lot of oak trees. We had oak, you know, the acorns, so they used to love that. So we used to have a long stick sometimes, and you put a nut on the other end, so you could throw it up against the branches and shake the branches so they'd fall down and the pigs used to eat them, fatten them up.

SIGRIST: Did you, the animals that you raised, did you consider them pets, or did you just simply consider them livestock?

MAGI: No, no. We learned that, you know, they keep them, only kept them to fatten them up, that's all it was.

SIGRIST: Did you ever name any of your animals?

MAGI: No.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me, did you do the slaughtering at the farm?

MAGI: For our use, yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me how a pig was slaughtered?

MAGI: Well, they take a pig, like over here, the farmers shoot them in the head first, cut their throat and get the water, get the blood out. But the farmers there saved the blood, so they get the pig, three or four of them, take him and put him on a table, like. Then he got a long knife, and stick it in his, you know, in his throat there. And they put a pan under and save all the blood. Then you go out and you pour hot water, very hot water on top of the pig after he's dead, and you scrub it, and it takes all the, practically all the hair and skin, cleans him all up. Then you take it and hang him up and take all the outside out and you cut it, and the part of the neck, they call it capricole. So you cut that out, and you cut the sides and make prosciuttos, and different things. So we always made enough to put aside for the following year.

SIGRIST: How would you do that? How would you store the meat for that long?

MAGI: It was funny. We used to have a cellar. You keep it in there. What they have there and what you, save the

meat from going bad, you put so much salt on, the salt and pepper on the prosciutto or the capricole, that's what preserves it. Or we had a well, a pretty deep well. If you wanted to keep it longer, you put it down in the well in a basket and it kept. But we always tried to, you know, not to have so much stuff ahead.

SIGRIST: Tried to keep it as fresh as possible.

MAGI: That's right.

SIGRIST: Let's talk a little bit about religious life. What religion were you?

MAGI: Catholic.

SIGRIST: And was there a church nearby in town?

MAGI: Yes. There was a couple of, evidently they call it padron, the padron, the land that they worked, there was two of them there. They had a half dozen farms apiece. What they lived on was on that. You know, you raised the stuff, and whatever they got their half of whatever you did, you raised, so that's how they got along and we got along. And, like I said, if something went bad and you needed money, you know,

they paid you out till it come the spring, but they didn't show anything on the (?).

SIGRIST: Were they responsible for supplying religious services?

MAGI: Well, they had a church that they built themselves. I remember, I kind of remember my father used to go up in the steeple, ring the bells with a hammer, you know, instead of pulling it with a rope. He was pretty good at it, the chimes, like.

SIGRIST: How did you practice your religion at home?

MAGI: Well, there wasn't much. I remember once a week we went to church there, and in the night time you say your prayers before you go to bed, and that's it.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any prayers in Italian?

MAGI: No.

SIGRIST: No?

MAGI: No.

SIGRIST: Because if you did, I'd have you do one on the tape.

MAGI: No, I don't remember.

SIGRIST: No. Okay. Did you go to school while you were in Italy?

MAGI: No, I have very little. They weren't forced to go to school, and most of the people, they didn't, they didn't go. My father learned through you in the service, and he learned through somebody else, taught him how to read and write. He was the only one that wanted to do that, read and write.

SIGRIST: So your mother couldn't read and write.

MAGI: No. At that time, especially women, women never went to school at all.

SIGRIST: I see. So you didn't really learn in Italy. It wasn't till you got here.

MAGI: No. The only thing enforced there in Italy was when Mussolini got in power. He made us, so everybody went to school, like they do over here. You have to go to school.

SIGRIST: Can you explain to me how you celebrated Christmas in Italy when you were a kid?

MAGI: Well, it was something like this here. I remember

they had oranges or something, things, we never, or something we used to have around. You know, my father had some oranges or had some nuts or something hidden around the fireplace, and that's the only thing we had.

SIGRIST: Was there a special food that your mother cooked for Christmas that you remember?

MAGI: No, when she made these Italian cookies like, that's all. As far as the macaroni, you know, you make macaroni for soup, and you make the lighter ones with the gravy, and stuff like that there.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when you were a kid a toy that you had that you particularly liked?

MAGI: No, we never had any toys. The only thing I remember, my father bought me a knife. I always wanted a knife, you know. So I could cut the watermelons, and I always liked to carry, have it in your pocket. That's the only thing I ever had.

SIGRIST: What were you like as a little boy? How would you describe yourself as a little boy?

MAGI: Well, I don't remember too much about it, because it wasn't, like I said, there wasn't much time to do anything. There was always something to do, you know, around the house, take care of the animals.

SIGRIST: And the kids were expected to help out.

MAGI: Oh, yeah. With the sheep, you have to watch the sheep, that no dogs or anything bother them, and the same thing with the pigs, because sometimes you meet another farmer, he had pigs. One thing we used to do, I know we had one one year that was a big pig, so he always got in a fight with the other ones, see. You're beginning to see how they (?) sometimes, your pig was bigger, tougher than the other one. But that's about the only thing, otherwise you never had much time to do anything.

SIGRIST: Do you remember a time where the animals got away from you maybe, or . . .

MAGI: No, they never got too far because, you know, you always was there. There was no place to go. You're close to them. If they do go further out, you've got to watch them, because they'll go on somebody else's property or the gardens, you know. (?), they get in

the garden, dig everything up.

SIGRIST: They can be very destructive.

MAGI: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Your father, you said your father went to America about a year before you came, or a year-and-a-half.

MAGI: About a year-and-a-half.

SIGRIST: A year-and-a-half. Is he sending you money, sending your family money?

MAGI: No. He saved money till he got enough for tickets, and he sent money. So that's how we have, you know, we came across.

SIGRIST: When you were a little boy in Italy, what did you know about America?

MAGI: Oh, I remember my uncle, my father's relative, he come back up one time. He used to talk to us, but we didn't pay much attention to him. And we just used to go away. What, that is what, over here they went to Germany, a different place to work. So it was a habit, you know, he knew about it, so we didn't think too much of it.

SIGRIST: Did, was life different when your father was away than it had been before?

MAGI: Oh, yeah. You know, it was a little harder for her. But my father never, he was a man that, probably too much worrying about the family, lost everything to my mother. She ran the family.

SIGRIST: So things weren't that much different after he left.

MAGI: No, no.

SIGRIST: Do you remember your mother telling you, "We've got our tickets in the mail. We're going to go now."?

MAGI: It went from day to day, you know. We got the tickets, then.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you packed?

MAGI: No, I don't remember. There wasn't too much to pack anyway.

SIGRIST: Do you remember saying goodbye to maybe your great-grandparents?

MAGI: Oh, yeah, we did, yeah. (?) people that, you know, lived around there. Like they say, you know, you

don't know if they'll ever see you again, which was true.

SIGRIST: How do you think your mother felt about coming to America?

MAGI: Well, she found, you know, the old standard following a husband. The old timers, whatever you want to call, she knew that things were rough, you know, rough for her, for him. If things on the farm didn't turn out right, it was bad for everyone, the whole family. So it was, one good thing that happened, if we didn't come here, than my oldest brother wouldn't have been here, because he was seventeen years old, he would have been in the Army. Nine out of ten he would have got killed.

SIGRIST: Sure, because World War One was just about to break out.

MAGI: We got in war, three days after we were in the ship, the war broke out. So then all of a sudden we saw a ship come, following us up, caught up to us, and a boat stopped. They wanted to know if there was anything on board, ammunition or stuff like that. They said, "No, just passengers." They let us go,

which (?) .

SIGRIST: Where did you have to go to get the boat?

MAGI: Uh, Naples.

SIGRIST: And how did you get from your town to Naples?

MAGI: By train.

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollection of that?

MAGI: No. I know somebody drove us to the station in a horse and wagon. That's all there was then. Nobody had cars. As far as that, with the dock, you know, they didn't have a car, they had motorcycles, and stuff like that.

SIGRIST: Was that the first time you'd ever been on a train, or had you been on a train before?

MAGI: No, the first time.

SIGRIST: Is that a long train ride to Naples?

MAGI: Well, to me, yeah. It was, you know, a (?). Because when you're young you don't realize the time it takes. To you it was something different.

SIGRIST: And who's traveling? It's you, your mom . . .

MAGI: Two brothers and a young baby there. She was only about a year-and-a-half old.

SIGRIST: And your two brothers, their names are . . .

MAGI: The oldest one was Boldisero, and the other one was Anello.

SIGRIST: Boldisero?

MAGI: Boldisero, and Anello.

SIGRIST: Anello. And then your sister is?

MAGI: Angie, Angelina.

SIGRIST: Angelina.

MAGI: She passed away now.

SIGRIST: And did you have to stay in Naples for a while before you got on the boat?

MAGI: No, overnight, that's all.

SIGRIST: Did you have to undergo any kind of examinations?

MAGI: Oh, yeah. They were strict. My sister, she had an

operation, she had a little pimple or something in her eye. Now, over here they got TB and AIDS and everything else, when we got over there, over here, they wanted to send her back on account of, my sister wasn't (?). We had a hell of a job. My mother had to keep her here.

SIGRIST: Was this when you were in Naples that they discovered this.

MAGI: No, over here.

SIGRIST: It was once you got to Ellis Island.

MAGI: Over there they done the operation in Italy and they didn't know too much about, you know, like it is now. But over here is, we had trouble. Like I said, now, now they come from all over, just got to say they're going to kill you or something, so they keep you here. They go too far, as far as I'm concerned anyway.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the ship?

MAGI: St. Anne.

SIGRIST: And how long was the crossing? Do you know?

MAGI: Eleven days, eleven sick days.

SIGRIST: Eleven sick days.

MAGI: I was sick every day.

SIGRIST: Well, we're going to pause for a moment. Kevin's going to flip the tape over, and when we start it up again, we'll talk about the voyage.

MAGI: All right.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: Okay. We're resuming with Mr. Magi. You got on the St. Anne in Naples, and you traveled for eleven days, and you were sick the whole time. Tell me what you remember about the voyage. What was it like for a little kid from the north of Italy to be on this ship?

MAGI: Well, different people from all different parts of Italy, they were all on the ship there. But the food was, like, we always liked macaroni. Where we come from, we never use fish, (Italian), with the macaroni, instead of using sauce, you put, you know, those there. They had that there, the small fish, being on the water. So we practically lived on lettuce, salad,

made a salad. We used to buy that, that had to buy it. Like the food you got, the other stuff, you got it for nothing. But the lettuce, you had to buy that.

Then they even they don't allow you so much. Then when we got close to over here they put it out. You could have all you want, see.

SIGRIST: As the journey was ending.

MAGI: Yeah, so they wanted to get rid of it. So, whatever it was at the time, and all of a sudden you feel it coming up, you run for the side of the ship, and down it goes.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me where you slept on the boat?

MAGI: We slept on what they call steerage, you know, way down in the bottom, and it's a double, double-thick beds. So they're, it's not too far from each other there, so you sleep on that. The worst part of it, you get sick, you throw up, there's people under you, sleeping under you, and so the sailor guy comes around with a mop and a pail and clean up.

SIGRIST: Did they separate people by sex down there, or were you with your mother and . . .

MAGI: We were together, all the family was all together in the same, the same spot, the same place.

SIGRIST: Were there indoor toilets downstairs?

MAGI: I forgot. There was, I forget just what, how they were there. It must have been there, yeah. But, you know, to get seasick and, the smell of the people throwing up and everything, the third floor, (?). It was bucking like a third floor, beneath the water. It was pretty bad.

SIGRIST: What time of the year is this? Do you remember?

MAGI: No, I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Did you ever go up on deck?

MAGI: Oh, yeah. We used to be, always be up on deck except, you know, for rain. Up there at least you got the fresh air. And so we spent very little time down, only to sleep, downstairs.

SIGRIST: And you weren't eating much except for some lettuce.

MAGI: No. The people second, up, first class, second class, they're all right, but third class, that's bad. That's for the birds.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing people from first and second class?

MAGI: Oh, yeah, sure. You know, they're up there up against the railing, you know. We weren't allowed to go up there. You know, you can't have the higher class with a bunch of rubes. ( Mr. Sigrist laughs )

SIGRIST: What, did anyone play any musical instruments on the boat?

MAGI: Oh, yeah. These, a lot of people had accordions and stuff like, always they're singing, try to, families on the floor, you know, on the ship there. They had chairs, too, but, oh, yeah, they all tried to pass time. We had a good time. It was the best of it anyway.

SIGRIST: Yeah. I'm sure a lot of people were probably sick.

MAGI: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: You weren't the only one. ( he laughs )

MAGI: Oh, yeah. Everybody got sick. Mostly it was women and kids. As far as the men, there wasn't too many, I guess they were all sending for their families or

something.

SIGRIST: Oh, that's interesting. You're saying that most of the people who were traveling were women and children.

MAGI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when you came into New York?

MAGI: Well, I remember something, not too much about it. You know, somebody said, "Finally, it's the Statue of Liberty." But the hard time was on account of my sister. I mean, you know, the time we had. Another thing I never forgot, I used to tell my wife, when we got off the boat I seen a bunch of bananas, I'd never seen in my life. So I asked my father what they were, so he went down, he bought a big bunch. The first time I ever had a banana in my life. So I never forgot that.

SIGRIST: So tell me what happened at Ellis Island when the boat docked and, tell me what happened.

MAGI: Oh, the ship was all one side, one room. We had to wait there for to get examined. It took quite a while there.

SIGRIST: What did they, what kind of examinations did they do?  
Do you remember?

MAGI: Well, if you were sick there, you know, if you had any  
TB or stuff like that there. But I can't see like,  
all my sister, I never forgot it, to pick on a little  
thing like that. Now they're taking with AIDS, with  
TB, with everything else, they let them come in. Why?  
Why they do that, I can't figure it out.

SIGRIST: And this was some kind of a scar that was left on her  
eye from the operation?

MAGI: Yeah. It was inside, a little growth, like, just  
little pimples. They cut it out. But whoever done  
it, I guess they didn't have the experience they have,  
you know, nowadays, and botched the job, and she lost  
the eye. She went blind in that eye.

SIGRIST: But that happened later on.

MAGI: Later on, yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what it all looked like here  
at Ellis Island?

MAGI: No, I don't remember too much, because we didn't have

a chance to move around. They just kept you in a room where you had to move, from one room to the other, just like a bunch of cattle.

SIGRIST: A lot of people.

MAGI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How long were you here?

MAGI: ( he sighs ) Just figure out, not too long.

SIGRIST: You didn't stay overnight.

MAGI: No, I don't think so, because my father was here to meet us.

SIGRIST: What was it like seeing your father? You hadn't seen him for a while?

MAGI: It was, you know, when you're young you miss your parents. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how your father greeted your mother?

MAGI: No, I don't. I imagine, naturally, like the rest of that, like they done over there, I don't know.

SIGRIST: Did he look different to you somehow?

MAGI: No. No, he didn't change that much. He wasn't, you know, (?) that much anyway.

SIGRIST: Well, where did he take you when you left Ellis Island?

MAGI: Back home they had, he bought stuff from Sears Roebuck, furniture, you know. Because he didn't have much money. They make, they're getting ten or fifteen cents an hour, so they were paying, to work in the brickyard, making bricks. And so he had four chairs, a table. He bought a stove and, you know, beds. There was a company houses over there, the company's to build the workers.

SIGRIST: This is in Pennsylvania he's taking.

MAGI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember actually going to Pennsylvania?

MAGI: On a train.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Did you see anything that you had never seen before on your way to Pennsylvania?

MAGI: No, no.

SIGRIST: In New York, except for the bananas.

MAGI: Banana, I'll never forgot. Some things hanging up. Evidently, I never had them, but I never, like the in Rome or Naples they might have. We weren't there long enough to see it, anyway. So (?).

SIGRIST: Now, what was the name of the town in Pennsylvania?

MAGI: We were, we had left off it was Dubois first. We weren't there too long. Then we went to St. Mary's, where he made the sewer pipes and he got, you know, better pay.

SIGRIST: Is it still a company house that he's living in?

MAGI: He had, yeah. Both times he had, the company made the homes there. It was the help there.

SIGRIST: So the company is sort of like a little town itself that way.

MAGI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me a little bit what life was like, maybe for your first year in this country.

MAGI: I remember my father, we went to St. Mary's, and there

was rows of houses. There was a creek, there was a bridge in the center, like. So we moved a little further down. So we figure why I got to keep going way up there and come back to come home. So we were in the woods. He cut a tree down and we dragged it back home. We made a bridge right near our house, hoisted across, didn't have to go around. So some stinker, I don't know, he called the sheriff, so he got arrested for cutting a tree without permission. It wasn't his. So they gave him a fine, and he took, made him take that bridge down. Because it was only a, you know, a log they put boards across, and he had a railing to hold on. I think it was wide, it was only about ten feet wide, the bridge. But it saved us time to cross back and forth. I never forgot it. But then, like I said, a stinker was jealous or something, called the sheriff. (?) a sheriff, I never seen one before.

SIGRIST: Now, your father's making a little more money now, right, at St. Mary's.

MAGI: Oh, yeah. He used to try for overtime, everything there.

SIGRIST: Did your mother go out and get a job, too?

MAGI: No. No, she stayed home. Then my uncle, he lived in Boston, and he got construction work, so he didn't want to tell us, you know, told us about coming over here.

SIGRIST: Over here to . . .

MAGI: He said Bridgeport.

SIGRIST: To Bridgeport.

MAGI: Bridgeport, needed help. He said, "They're looking for help." That's how he, you know, he landed over here.

SIGRIST: Now, how long were you in Pennsylvania before you went to Bridgeport?

MAGI: Three years, that's all.

SIGRIST: So you went to school in Pennsylvania then.

MAGI: We started going to school out here.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me what that was like for you, going to school?

MAGI: Boy, it was different than it is now, a lot different.

SIGRIST: Because you hadn't been to school before.

MAGI: No, yeah.

SIGRIST: This was, tell me, was it difficult for you?

MAGI: Well, it was, because, you know, I couldn't speak the language, and I didn't understand nothing. The kids would be funny, and pick on you, call you guinny, call you dago. It was kind of rough.

SIGRIST: Tell me how you learned English.

MAGI: Well, between that and, you know, when you mingle there with the kids and all, you pick it up.

SIGRIST: Do you ever, do you remember a story about you speaking English and making a mistake?

MAGI: No. It was never, I never got up to make a speech in front of the people. I was almost never asked, and I'm glad I was never asked anyway. My youngest brother, he didn't go to school. My second brother, he didn't go to school. He just, you know, went to work.

SIGRIST: Were there a lot of Italians in St. Mary's in Pennsylvania?

MAGI: Yeah, there was quite a few over there, a lot. But it Italians seemed to be, at the most there were, you know, growing up on farms and stuff like that, hard work.

SIGRIST: You were used to that kind of labor.

MAGI: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me about your mother's adjustment to America. Was this easy for her, or difficult?

MAGI: No because, like I said, she kept to herself a lot, except a few friends that she had, you know, she kept like that. She didn't mingle and go party here or party there. She didn't do any of that.

SIGRIST: Did she ever attempt to learn English?

MAGI: No, she just spoke whatever, always in Italian. We tried to speak to her back in English. She could go out and buy something, but she couldn't answer you, but she knew everything you said to her. She didn't go to school, but you couldn't fool her on counting

money in her head there.

SIGRIST: She was a smart woman.

MAGI: Yeah, she was.

SIGRIST: What about, of course, this is a big change in terms of her household chores, you know, how she made food and that sort of thing. Did she still hold onto any of her Italian ways, or did she try to Americanize?

MAGI: No. She still made macaroni, made bread. My father made a, he made an oven on the outside, you know, it was like a half a, half a shell. You know how they made, right through them. Even with that, they made the other one. But this other one was next to a mason, they used to work for the factory. So the guy used to watch him, because he was there a couple of hours a week, and he kind of made fun of him, you know, because he didn't know how to do it. So my father, he done in his spare time. When he got through making it, he climbed up on top of the, on top of the, he warned him, you know, that's going to cave in. The bricks were put on the side, you know, slanty a little, keeps going. You put the weight on top. The ones on the bottom were already set, because you

didn't do it all at once. Every night he done something. So, and the ones on the top, they weren't going to go through, because they were slanty, they locked into each other. So the guy was left with his mouth open, so he just looked at him. He don't know how, because he built them in Italy too. Everybody had their own oven.

SIGRIST: So he was trying to make your mother feel a little more at home.

MAGI: Well, yeah. Because afterwards you can make bread. You have to have an oven. So he used to make his own, but that was a pip.

SIGRIST: Did your mother or father ever want to go back to Italy?

MAGI: No. My mother said she would never go back. She liked it here. Things were a little rough, but it was a lot better than over there.

SIGRIST: So even with the difficulties it was better than Italy.

MAGI: Oh, yeah. So much over there to do, to take care of the family and make clothes and linen, the washing and

all that stuff. You wash on the outside, and a lot of them wash in the river there. We had a good-sized river not too far away from the house there. It was a very rough life, farming. Farming, the guys who are farming now, they have all the convenience, it's a different story. But you take way back them days, like you see in the movies, it's really rough.

SIGRIST: Tell me, when you moved to Bridgeport, did you move into an Italian neighborhood?

MAGI: We moved to, Bridgeport, and there were one, two, three, four different houses in about three years.

SIGRIST: Why did you move so frequently?

MAGI: Well, we moved in one place, we moved more than one house. Years ago when I used to collect garbage, they had garbage trucks like a half a shell, made out of steel, and they used cobblestones on the road. So when we moved, we moved back of a store. There was a flat in back of the store that was connected, there was a door. We come to find out there was a man got killed, and the store got (?) for three days. It was a wine store, he sold wine, and he was there for three days. We find that out after a month. Ooh! At that

time, early in the morning a truck come around, making the noise, pick up the garbage, my mother said, "I think there is a ghost in this place." First we moved out of there, moved another place, just after the war, then from there we moved another one on George Street.

From there we moved to another place on West End because my father and my brothers, they worked on the Columbia Records making records, but we didn't realize it was a 24-hours a day job it was. They never stopped working. And they had the flat, these square plates where you make records, you put the plate on there, the thing is thick. They pick it up and put it on a steam table, and clank-clank, clank-clank, rolls it, and rolls it on things. We couldn't sleep there.

We were there six months. Moved back to North Tenth.

And still my sister still lives there. Five different houses in about, say, five years.

SIGRIST: Would you say that life was easier for your family once you went to Bridgeport?

MAGI: Well, it was, yes. Better than, well, for them, for my part, I mean, we didn't do too much over there anyway. Like I said, take care of the animals. But for my mother and father it was easier, like the farm.

You work on the farm, sun up, sun down, you never finish.

SIGRIST: Well, and by the time you got to Bridgeport, you know, you'd been in America for a while.

MAGI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So things are, tell me what your very first job was, the first job you got paid for. What was it?

MAGI: I worked in a drugstore, a soda jerk.

SIGRIST: How old were you?

MAGI: Oh, not even fourteen. No, I was about twelve years old. I worked on Lexington Avenue. There was a drugstore right under, you know, his brother was a doctor, and, yeah. I worked there for a couple of years there. So then . . .

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much you got paid?

MAGI: Oh, I got paid very little. As soon as I got the job there I ate so much candy and ice cream that I couldn't see no more, I didn't want to see it. I used to make ice cream cones or stuff like that, or sundaes, and help out around the, sometimes in the

back, all the medicine already packed in bottles and everything. Then they bring a prescription. You had to look, take out a box, and take some of this, some of that, some of that. Mix it up, then you, I used to help in the back, you know, mix up the, grind up the medicine to stick in a package or a bottle there. But now they got it easy. Now they work out a number, they take it out and hand it to you.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how you got that job?

MAGI: Well, do I remember? I didn't live, we lived across from the doctor's, the druggist's brother, you know, that had the office right there. So it wasn't bad. Like I said, I used to eat all the, all the ice cream or candy that I needed. But as far as, I didn't get too much pay. But then the druggist, the worker, the owner's, the doctor's brother's, you know, this fellow that used to work for him, he went out on his own. So he asked me if I wanted to, you know, go to work for him. He said, "We'll send you to school in New Haven." New Haven College or something, it was. To be a druggist, you know, also. I was honest, and I done my work, but I never did. So I went to work with my father in the foundry, so I used to shovel brass

chips and different things. So I said, "Oh, I'm making twenty-four dollars a week," and he was only paying me very, I don't know, about thirteen dollars or so. He said, "Well, in the long run, you know, you'll be ahead of the game, but when you're young you don't realize." Which I did after, but too late. So that's, that's what happened. So, so I worked in different shops and everything. And then I went to trade school for a while and took up house painting. That's how I landed painting the house for sixteen years.

SIGRIST: Ah. Were your parents writing back to their relatives in Italy?

MAGI: My father used to write, yes.

SIGRIST: And did he, was he instrumental in bringing any more relatives over to this country?

MAGI: No. There was one that come over here, that was, my daughter went last year, we met, and their grandson of the fellow there. And he wanted to come in the Depression, the worst Depression we had. So my father, he didn't want to bring him over. It was rough for us, you know, to just have enough to eat, so

he discouraged him. Now this is, I think, his son. His son or his grandson that she met. Evidently she, especially she went over there and met him, the kid. He's thirteen years old, he was so happy to be there.

She sent him a baseball. She asked what he wanted, and a baseball hat, so she got him, you know, a baseball, a Yankee cap and another cap, you know.

SIGRIST: Did you ever want to go back to Italy?

MAGI: No, I never did. I didn't care for it.

SIGRIST: You never had any interest in that.

MAGI: No. I figure here I'm here, I'm going to die here.

SIGRIST: And so your parents felt, too.

MAGI: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes. They really didn't want to go back.

MAGI: No. My mother said, "Never." So she lived till eighty-four years old, so she lived a pretty good life.

SIGRIST: How do you think your life would have been different if you had stayed in Italy?

MAGI: Oh, I didn't know. Working on the farm, I suppose, and Lord knows. Maybe I would have been, you have to serve eighteen months. When you got to be eighteen years old you had to serve the Army, so I don't know what the, whatever happened. But I know the farmers nowadays, you take it in this country, different world, I guess. You got all kind of machinery doing all the work, but in them days it used to be back-breaking jobs.

SIGRIST: Do you think you would have ended up being a farmer like your dad was?

MAGI: It could be. If you stayed there, it was three boys he had, you could, you know, make a farm work very good, but it was too tough. He figured the hell with it.

SIGRIST: Are you glad your parents brought you to America?

MAGI: Oh, yeah. Sure.

SIGRIST: Well, Mr. Magi, I want to thank you very much for coming over to Ellis Island and for letting us ask you some questions about your experience growing up and everything.

MAGI: Another thing I left out was we had a little land, lots, near this lake, Lake Strasirano, they called it, a big lake, where you used to get fish sometimes as big as that. So we had a lot there, and we used to grow a lot of melons, honeydew melons, watermelons, on sandy soil. And it seems like it grew better in sandy soil near the water. So every summer we had a shed, and stay there or work there. My father would go out and, against the law whether you sneak in, get a basket and put it in the water and get all the small fish, you pull it out fast before the fish get out of their shells, and bring it in, and they we'd fry them.

( Mr. Sigrist laughs ) So we had a good time.

SIGRIST: Well, this is Paul Sigrist signing off with Gene Magi on Wednesday, August 25, 1993 at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. Thank you very much.

MAGI: You're welcome.