

EI-396

SANTO RUA

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

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ITALY, 1921

AGE 16

PASSAGE ON "THE GUGLIELMO PIERCE"

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Saturday, October 9, 1993. I'm at the Ellis Island Recording Studio with Santo Rua. Mr. Rua came from Italy in 1921 when he was sixteen years old. Anyway, good afternoon. Can we begin, Mr. Rua, by you giving me your date of birth, please?

RUA: (he clears his throat) 1905, April 21st.

SIGRIST: April the 21st, 1905. And where were you born, sir?

RUA: Santa Maria Larotta [ph].

SIGRIST: And whereabouts in Italy is that?

RUA: That's in Calabria, provincia de Cosenza.

SIGRIST: Is that like the center of Italy, or . . .

RUA: No, it's way down there. It's almost down to the, it's the third province from Calabria. The second province is Catanzaro, then you reach Calabria, then comes Sicily.

SIGRIST: I see. And can you say the name of the town one more time slowly, please?

RUA: Santa Maria Larotta.

SIGRIST: Saint Mary of something.

RUA: Le, L-E, L-A. Larotta.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the town, or the village, what it looked like?

RUA: Oh, it was a small, about a thousand people or a little bit more, and they were just ordinary people, all working in the agriculture. Everybody was there.

SIGRIST: Everyone was a farmer.

RUA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you describe what the center of town looked like?

RUA: They didn't have much. They only had four rows of houses over there, and it was a little open from the church, and then that's all they had. It was a . . .

SIGRIST: One church in town.

RUA: Yeah, that's all.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the church a little bit for me, what the church looked like?

RUA: Well, it was like, you know, a country church with a small population, and they didn't have too much. Them days, I don't know, them days there was much less a luxury didn't exist, and then there was just, if you had, if you was in some kind of thing where you grew food and stuff, that's what we did. And you have plenty of them, and the rest of them was pretty poor.

SIGRIST: So your father was a farmer.

RUA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

RUA: Luigi, Luigi Rua.

SIGRIST: And can you, can you, um, describe what his personality was like for me.

RUA: He was a real good person. He had a lot of friends. Whenever he, if he took a trip it was walking. (he laughs) There was no transportation, nothing, to another town. If he didn't watch himself, all the friends, they used to get him drunk. (he laughs) He was a real good nature. There was twelve of us.

SIGRIST: Twelve children.

RUA: Twelve children, yeah.

SIGRIST: How do you fall into those twelve children?

RUA: I'm in the middle with seven brothers. I have three on each side. And, uh, I had before, I had five, five sisters.

SIGRIST: And were all the sisters the youngest?

RUA: The sister was the youngest one out of all of us, one of them, and the three of them, before the men come along.

SIGRIST: So that, that's a big household.

RUA: It is a big household. It looked like that boat family (?). (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Can you describe what your house was like?

RUA: Well, there were too many, too many rooms. I mean, there was great big rooms for, one for the boys, one for the girls, and one for father and mother, but that's all, that's all the room you had. Then there was a (?) cellar, the owner, second floor, outside steps. And, uh, the bottom thing was where we kept the thing for the winter, the oil, the wine and a lot of other stuff over there.

SIGRIST: What was the house made out of?

RUA: Stone.

SIGRIST: Were all the houses in that town made out of stone?

RUA: All the houses, all the houses around there. There was no wood.

SIGRIST: Was there a quarry somewhere nearby?

RUA: A what?

SIGRIST: A quarry, a stone quarry.

RUA: Who knows, a lot of stone. Stone was given away for nothing. There was all, take, anybody build a house over there, they had a lot of fences and things all made out of stones to separate farms and stuff. I mean, there was all that kind of stuff. There was plenty of stones.

SIGRIST: What was the roof made out of?

RUA: The roof was made out of, uh, clay, some kind of a dirt that they get them and they make that form over there, then they let them dry, then they stick them in the oven and cook them and it turns a little bit orange color, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did your father build the house?

RUA: No. No, no. We lived, we lived on, (?).

SIGRIST: Who owned the house?

RUA: It was some rich people. The house was (?). (?) sold it, and my father bought it. (he coughs) And it was still, we were still living over there then.

SIGRIST: Was that common, uh, for the people in this town to

rent their property from a wealthy landowner? Did a lot of people do that?

RUA: Well, a few people live in the town, and they had a little piece of grass someplace they work, and then other people, most of the, uh, and this was a few that owned it all around, and the other, a good many of them was living on the rent farms.

SIGRIST: I see. Did the house ever have to be heated at all? Like in the winter, did it get cold?

RUA: No. The only heat we had was we had a little platform where they cooked stuff, and that's all the heat you had. There was no heat, no stoves, nothing, didn't exist, none of that stuff.

SIGRIST: But the winter probably didn't get that cold, did it?

RUA: It didn't get that cold, no, no.

SIGRIST: Tell me, you said your father was a farmer. Tell me some of the things that he did. What kind of farming did he do?

RUA: Well, we grew wheat, corn. We had vineyards. We had, uh, orchard and olives, some we owned, some (?), and

that, and we produced oil, and wheat, corn, and the summer vegetables, a lot of fresh vegetables we grew up. And we never bought nothing. But we, growing everything we sold stuff, but we never bought nothing to eat much.

SIGRIST: Where would you go to sell the vegetables?

RUA: There was no market. We didn't sell it. Half of what you couldn't use yourself, you give it away, put it that way. People who didn't work by the day they make such little money that a pair of shoes in them days, up to World War One, would have cost ten liras, and the men would have to work ten days to earn that much if he worked by the day for somebody else, like the people we used to hire. When we harvested, we'd hire some people, and when we'd cultivate corn and stuff, we had to hire some people again. And they made such a little bit of money, I don't know how they lived. We had plenty to eat, because we grew all our stuff.

SIGRIST: You had plenty of food, but not a lot of cash.

RUA: No. (he laughs) No.

SIGRIST: Can you, you said that you produced your own oil. Can

you tell me how you made olive oil?

RUA: Olives. They let them stay on the trees till they, till they get black. See, olives, they're all green, when you see them in the jars in the store over here, where they sell. They're all small, they come out of the, they got, the olive trees got a small flower. The trees are, they keep them down, you know, they trim, (?) where they pick the olives. And they, they put sheets down when they shake them down, pick them up and take them in a place where they process them. They got a, some kind of a thing built in around. They got a horse with two wheels and he goes around and he shovels stuff under the wheels as it goes around. And then they squeeze them. They got a regular press. If you ever see that on television, they got wine press, once in a while you see it, but they're big. And then they, after it comes out of there, they boil it. They take some of that bitterness off of it, and it separates it, separates what they got inside, and the oil, it's on top, they scoop it up.

SIGRIST: And how would you store the olive oil once it was made?

RUA: In the jugs. We had a, jars, that they was about this high, and they had a neck pot that big over there, and fill that up. And down what they call a basement, down the first floor, say that's where we put all that stuff, over there. And, uh, and we have a, if the year was good, we had some extra to sell some of that once in a while, too fill (?), and there was always a demand when the people up there ask you before if you have any leftovers of anything when you make your wine. And we, then the blight, I don't know what year it was, it was, myself, I was pretty young. They had a blight that killed everybody's vineyards. They had (?) roots the wild grapes, and then they draft them into good grapes, after two, three years, all of that. And they took a lot of stuff (?).

SIGRIST: So the blight caused a great deal of hardship on people?

RUA: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you have any other recollections of when that happened?

RUA: No, I don't. I guess I must have been about six,

seven, eight years old. I was pretty young. I remember (?) good shape, so I must have been about that age, to remember after that. And the only thing that they use for insects to kill it was the sulphur, dried, powder, sulfur, some kind of a pump over there, and that's the only insect stuff, that's the only, anything was a spray for the insects, grapes. All the other vegetables and stuff didn't have no insects.

SIGRIST: It was just the grapes that got hit.

RUA: Just the grapes. Corn, peas, beans, nothing. And figs, we had sold some figs. I used all the best ones, they accept for whatever the (?), they pack them in a package made out of split wood things, like you could always see a chair made out of that, baskets, and they shipped it someplace over there. And all the other, all the (?), we used to raise half a dozen pigs, and they used to feed on that stuff over there.

SIGRIST: Were pigs the only animals that you kept?

RUA: Oh, no. We had sheeps. We had cows. We had a half dozen cows. We used the cows to plow, those big longhorn like you see on television from Texas. (he laughs) That's, they were husky, those kind, that

produce milk. They give milk, but not like it was (?) milk, that stuff. And we made some money selling the calf, if we didn't want to raise one for ourself, that calf, you sold (?) and made some money out of that. (?) think if you're, and made a small amount of cheese, and we sold a little bit of that.

SIGRIST: Who would make the cheese? Would that be something your mother did?

RUA: My mother, yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me what the process was, how she made cheese?

RUA: We, uh, they used to use the, uh, what do you call it, uh, what do they put in the, uh, what do they put when they put (?) milk, those kinds of pills?

SIGRIST: Like a rennet? Not rennet. Is it rennet?

RUA: To make rennet, those pills. Over there they use a few real young lamb and sheeps, they don't eat grass till they get thirty days old, otherwise they nurse on its mother's milk. Up to that time, if you lose one of them, they used to get the stomach, with the tripe, the belly, and it's filled with milk, and they hang

them up, and I think actually the milk gets sour, and it gets dried up, almost like cheese, and you get a little piece of that, and you dissolve it in the milk, warm milk, and you throw it in the pot where the milk is and you stir it, you have a regular stick about so long over there, and they stir it. And you let it stay outside for, I don't know, fifteen, twenty, half an hour, and it jells. And then they get this stick, and they break it up. And the first thing you know all the cheese goes on the bottom, and the water stays over there. And they get their hands in, I seen them make it on television, in a small quantity, but they still make it the same way.

SIGRIST: And you would eat this at home also?

RUA: Oh, yeah. Yeah. We ate cheese. And then they make the ricotta.

SIGRIST: Which is a very soft cheese.

RUA: Yeah. That's very soft. They make that last. After they make the cheese. Then they save about a cup of milk, and they throw it in there, and then let that water that's left from the, where you make the cheese, and it starts to boil, all the ricotta's coming up on

the top, and it's about that thick, and they scoop it up and put it in a dish and you eat it right there. We used to eat it hot. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Now, did your mother do all the cooking in your house?

RUA: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: What else did she cook? What did she cook that was your favorite food?

RUA: Oh, we cooked, we cooked all kind of vegetables. In summertime, we eat a lot of peas, string beans, and all kind of vegetables, peppers and, uh, and in the wintertime for breakfast we ate potatoes and stuff. That's the only time we ate a few potatoes. And where I come from, later it's (?). The, uh, we used to raise it mostly for the pigs and stuff, you know, (?) over there. And we ate, they make their own breads once a week. By the end of the week the bread gets so hard it gets like stone. (he laughs) Like stone. But it was real good bread. I mean, that's hard and it's got white on it, yeah. All the, and once in a while like vegetables, peas. They had peas over there that (?), the peas get, uh, you know, (?) over there. You can't see the leaves. All you see is a pot

hanging there. I plant peas over here, and they don't have near as many.

SIGRIST: Not quite the same thing.

RUA: Not the same thing.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

RUA: Carmella.

SIGRIST: Carmella.

RUA: Carmella.

SIGRIST: And what . . .

RUA: Her maiden name was Radi.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

RUA: It's R-A, I don't know if it was double-D, or one D, D-I. Radi.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about your mother's background, where she came from and what her family, you know, what her family background was?

RUA: Oh, she came from another town next to us, was Rotacreca [ph]. That's the name of the town. And,

uh, her father was Constantino. Her mother was, uh, Katerina.

SIGRIST: And what did her father do for a living?

RUA: Our father?

SIGRIST: Her father.

RUA: I never knew my grandfather, I mean, he was dead before I come up. So everybody works in agriculture or, you know, either big or small, they worked, it was no, no, uh, (?). Nowhere. You couldn't go to the store and buy a loaf of bread. In some of them little towns you had one store, go to a place where you could buy bread, but our town didn't.

SIGRIST: Do you know how your mother met your father?

RUA: No, I don't. He's from one town, and she was from another town. So I, I don't know. I don't know whether they, through the brothers or somebody. She had brothers, so about maybe they met one another, but they used to hire men from different places, work that way, I guess.

SIGRIST: And, um, did your mother ever tell you any stories

about your birth, anything that she ever told you about when you were born or when she was pregnant with you?

RUA: No. Nothing like that. They used to tell us stories, but nothing, no.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the births of any of your brothers and sisters when you were a kid?

RUA: My last sister was born, when I remember, I remember when she was born, but (?). Any kids outside you, they don't belong in the house, (he laughs) that kind of stuff.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's personality like?

RUA: Oh, she was good-natured, and then when you raise up many childrens, uh, I think she had fifteen childrens.

SIGRIST: She lost three of them?

RUA: She lost the first one. They lost them because in the wintertime it gets a little cold. And if you don't have, anybody's born in the winter, and then in the morning have to give them a bath and stuff and clean them out, the first thing you know the kids get

pneumonia and they don't know it, you know, and once it get a hold of you, by the time, the doctor lives in the next town comes over, then the first thing you know the treatment is too far apart. They, uh, well, it was, it was a place where a lot of people was poor, but our family was good. My father was a good provider.

SIGRIST: Do you remember as a child being sick yourself with anything?

RUA: I was the worst one in the family.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me what you remember about being sick as a child in Italy?

RUA: The year after the World War One we all got the typhoid fever, and I got baldheaded worse than, I think it's six of us. Another brother and a sister, there was a young sister over there, and I remember lost her hair. And I was the first one got better. And, uh, I saw the doctors come from the next town on horseback, he used to come over. And he had been in the town, all of that, not (?), before you get to town, where he come from. So he, uh, he making stops in all those places. So when I see him coming on

horseback, I got (?). And so I quick went in the house, and I took my clothes off, and I had to, went up in the attic, and we used to keep the walnuts up there, store them up there for the winter, and I took a whole pocketful. I went outside and I got a stone and I was breaking it. (he laughs) And boy, and eating, I was still half sick, I just got better. And they come over and say, "Open your mouth." I opened my mouth. "What you been eating?" "Nothing." They says, "You've been eating something." And in the night I get fever so bad, they almost gave up. Then I turned a little bit better. Then there was an uncle who had a donkey, and she had a young one, what they call the young donkeys over there, she used to get milk for the donkey, and they used to milk a whole cup of milk. And we had friends that come past the house every morning. We used to live, stay in the town, and had a piece of grass near us over there, and he had the same thing over there. So they milked this donkey, and they give me that milk over there, and that was the only milk I could drink. That was the lightest milk. I usually drink goat's milk. For the cow milk and the sheep milk, they don't drink it. So, uh, when I got better, my brother, you know, they kid

one another, they says, "Boy," they says, "while I was still sick," my brother was telling, "that goat that they get the milk got ears about this big." (he laughs) You know, they told me that that was donkey milk. I never tasted milk since. (he laughs) I still don't like milk.

SIGRIST: The, um, the typhoid that you had, the typhus. Did that wipe out some of the population in town?

RUA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: That was a serious epidemic.

RUA: Yeah, they did, yeah. Lots of them died, yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: You're lucky your mother didn't get sick with . . .

RUA: No, no. Just us, half a dozen of the kids over there, this young sister and five brothers, we all had it over there, but nobody died from it.

SIGRIST: When you were sick were you put into a room all by yourselves, just the kids who were sick, to keep you away from the other kids?

RUA: No, no. But I did sleep on a separate bed, yeah, when I was out there but, I mean, it was all big rooms, I

should take care so many people.

SIGRIST: When you were a little boy in Italy, or even a young man in Italy, what did you know about America? What did America mean to you?

RUA: We don't know nothing much. It was, people was immigrating once in a while, some people coming back. Uh, in fact, one had been in the United States, my father had a piece of property, and then they moved back in this town where her mother come from, they sold (?) this guy, he had brought money from this country over there, and he bought it, and it's always, we used to know it was better. And then we, we didn't want for food and stuff, we didn't want for nothing. But my father knew that because of people that used to come over here, then they come back with money, and they says, "Well, for that guy that goes over there and makes money, it must be pretty good." Because, you know, he wasn't too really hardworking guy. (he laughs) He was looking for it easy. And he come back, and (?). I, when I first come back for my nephew, and my brothers got me a job in the hotel where they worked.

SIGRIST: So you had family here before you came. Your brothers had come first?

RUA: Well, it was two brothers. One came 1913, and one came 1915, and my uncle was here before then. My mother's brother. And, uh, then we were supposed to come here, and my sister, one sister, and another brother was two years older than I am. Then (?) through the physical stuff they, uh, in the office, the girls says, "You can't travel." I says, "Well, why not?" "Because you're not sixteen yet." And they turned me back, and I had to wait till I was sixteen, in April, and I came here the end of May sometime.

SIGRIST: When your brothers were here first in 1913, 1915, what were they doing? What kind of jobs did they get?

RUA: One was working in the, uh, he had been working in the (?) yard, one of them, but just right then he was working in the hotel, the hotel as an elevator operator. They used to have a man to run the elevator, and the other one worked for the city in the, take care of the, uh, them days there was never trucks, the horse and the wagon. Nobody had a train. We just came from farm in Italy. That's all they

know. I mean, you might be a good worker, a good guy but, you know, as far as masonry or carpentry or something like that, I mean, they didn't know.

SIGRIST: Right. They were all unskilled.

RUA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Why did they go to Philadelphia?

RUA: His uncle was over there.

SIGRIST: Now, who's brother is this? Your mother's brother?

RUA: My mother's brother, yeah.

SIGRIST: And he was already established before?

RUA: He had been here.

SIGRIST: What was he doing here?

RUA: Well, he worked as, he worked in construction as a laborer, whatever, they built houses there. They have men that grade and level off the, the ground and all that stuff, and that's what he used to do then. Afterwards we all got work in a hotel, a little easier.

SIGRIST: So your brothers went to Philadelphia because your uncle was there.

RUA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Now, are they sending money back to your parents?

RUA: No, they didn't.

SIGRIST: No. But were they in communication? Did they write letters?

RUA: Oh, yeah. When they first come over, I'm the only one that keep writing (?). The rest of them, then they (?).

SIGRIST: Did you want to go to America, or was it just sort of decided for you that you were going to go to America?

RUA: Almost decided for me, yeah. Because I didn't, I didn't (?), and I didn't know any different of it, any better than it had been, (?). I mean, the food and stuff, I mean, we, raise food and we sold, we sold wheat, we sold everything we grow. We sold figs, and they made the, uh, my sisters and my mother, they made the, uh, the silkworm, the silk out of it? They buy by the ounces, the little eggs, and I don't know how

many ounces they used to get, but they used to get pretty good over there. And in so many days they hatch, they get the worms, and they turn to butterflies, and the first thing you know they have the cocoons, and they used to make a little bit on that.

SIGRIST: So that was extra money for the family then.

RUA: That's right. That kind of income. That's what I meant with the difference between the guys that live in the town and works by the day. In the first place, it was only if you work, if you're in agriculture area, you don't work in the summer. But if you, if you, you know, work for yourself, you used to raise half a dozen pigs, two of them were killed, and you would sell for it, you got some money to buy clothes, buy shoes, buy, a lot of money you need. Somebody else (?), but, uh . . .

SIGRIST: But in Italy that was the only future that you really had as a young man, to do the same kind of work as your father.

RUA: We was raised, born, raised, that was the only thing that you could do was, there was a few stone masons,

not too many. I remember there was one carpenter. He used to, if you build a house he'd make the doors and make anything you need. He was that good. I mean, that's all he made. I mean, it was kind of, not much work. The guy turned around, he changed his job. You have to be a, if you like to do that kind of work, but then the seven days is over, if you have livestock, all kinds, well, Sunday, that's just another day.
(he laughs)

SIGRIST: It's work no matter what day.

RUA: It's a work day, no matter what day. You ain't gonna work that day, but they got to eat, they got to be fed, they got to take care and all that stuff. So, oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: So did you, did you look at America as an opportunity to, to be able to do something different before you got there? I mean, did you understand that you wouldn't have to be a farmer in America?

RUA: Well, we knew that was better. If you have a, we used to hire some people that they had been to here and they come back, and they told you about what they did, the kind of work they did, and they made money. In

them days over there, a man had to work for one lira a day, and one lira was twenty cents, and the money was even in the United States, and all over the world, I don't know about all over the world, but countries like Italy and maybe France and England and Germany and stuff like that, a penny there was a penny here.

SIGRIST: Right. It was a low wage no matter where you were.

RUA: But the, if he come here, if they made a dollar a day, well, you got five liras.

SIGRIST: So you knew it would be more money.

RUA: Yeah, that's right.

SIGRIST: We need to pause so that Peter can flip over the tapes and then we'll get you to America in a moment.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: All right. Let's get you to America. You said you went to Naples and then were turned back because you weren't . . .

RUA: Yeah, because over there physical, they sent us back. We had to go back anyhow, because there was just a

new regulation they had made, for afterwards then it was the same thing. When you got ready, the agent that used to prepare your stuff, take you when the time was ready and send you, but then just that time they changed, they thought it was better because the people, if they turned back, well, they were awful disappointed. This way if they went over there physical and they turned them back, you didn't, didn't feel so much. And then they came with the same physical, after getting more physical, nothing, they came right over.

SIGRIST: So you turned sixteen in April?

RUA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: When did you go to Naples initially before you were turned back? How long before you turned sixteen?

RUA: Mostly in the fall. Uh . . .

SIGRIST: The fall of 1920.

RUA: 1920. Because we bought a watermelon over there, like (?), but it was big, it was like a watermelon. I think it was a long, it was about, they had piles over there, in Naples, all over there. So it must have

been some time, some time in October, I believe, because those kind of watermelons, they don't ripe early, and we took one home. That's the only thing I remember.

SIGRIST: It's an interesting way of remembering what time of year it is.

RUA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Um, when you finally left, you said, in April of '21, do you remember saying goodbye to your parents?

RUA: Yeah, that's not much, I mean, when you, when you get separated, when you feel pretty down in the dump over there, so you really don't remember too much.

SIGRIST: How did they feel about your leaving?

RUA: Oh, especially my mother, she felt terrible. But I, I took, I went over there to see them twice while they was living, and I went to Italy four times altogether, four trips, so I didn't do too bad. Yeah. But all the other brothers, I never did see them. They left. They went back.

SIGRIST: Was your mother afraid that when you went that you

would be like your other brothers in that you wouldn't keep in communication with them?

RUA: Well, at that time my other brothers were like that. I mean, they . . .

SIGRIST: They were writing back and forth.

RUA: That's right. They write. Because they had been at the paper for us to get here. So she, I don't think she'd think anything like that, because only when you, when we came to the United States, our family, I mean, we was living good. We came here to make some money to go back. Already we had eyes that you're going to buy some property and stuff like that.

SIGRIST: So that was always your intention, then. You would come to this country, make money and go back.

RUA: After you get here, when they see what's here, well, then you change your mind. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you packed, what you took with you when you left?

RUA: Well, some, uh, suitcase (?). (he laughs) I got them piled up over here. No much, not much stuff.

You don't have so much clothes and stuff. We was over there, I was over there 1990, 1991, just (?), wonderful old relatives over there, they got all the convenience you have here. Hot water, cold water, electric and gas and stuff, everybody had an automobile here, everybody's got a television.

SIGRIST: I'm sure it's different now.

RUA: It is. Yeah. They, all my relatives. I mean, I was over there, and we stayed, uh, three or four days, I think, because we had a trip made up. My was over here, they all had other things to do, the trip you make, your time fixed up. We didn't stay over there. They all got, almost got hurt, since you come all the way from over there, they just get a (?), so I went over there by myself for three weeks there, the year before last.

SIGRIST: When you left Italy in 1921, did you take something with you as a reminder of Italy? Did you take something that was yours?

RUA: No, because I told you, when you come here, you think you're going back. You really don't, don't stay so long. You don't do that.

SIGRIST: It was not a permanent kind of thing.

RUA: No.

SIGRIST: You were going to go . . .

RUA: That's right.

SIGRIST: You went to Naples, and that's where you got the boat.

RUA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the boat?

RUA: The Guglielmo Pierce. It was out of business, when I went back, 1936, I went back on the Conte Savoie, and they built them, all them smaller boats that they had they didn't have no more. They had four big, yeah, luxury liners over in Italy.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me, in 1921, what the accommodations were like on that boat?

RUA: On the board?

SIGRIST: On the boat. Where you slept on the boat.

RUA: No accommodations.

SIGRIST: What was it like?

RUA: (he laughs) The shelves. You, they had shelves about as high as, almost five foot high, they had four or five things over there. And you don't have no chairs, no accommodations, nothing. They give you a, they give you a pot with a handle like a bucket, and they told you to get together six people, and they give you food for six and they give you a dish, and you wash your own dishes and stuff, and when you get done with it you can sit on the, go sit on the floor over there. (he laughs) On that place over there. But then it was a little changed, when I went in 1936, even before that. My father came for a trip a year-and-a-half here, and they built a boat line, Roma, they had everything that they serve everybody on a table there, rooms for each two people there sleeping in one room, and you had, you had (?), your toilet, right around your room.

SIGRIST: When you came in 1921 and you had all those bunk beds.

RUA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: You were talking about all the shelves. Were you in one big room with lots of people?

RUA: Yeah, that's right.

SIGRIST: And were you separated by sex?

RUA: All the men was on one side, and all the ladies was on the other side. Yeah. That's how we were separated, we were separated there.

SIGRIST: So what did you do during the day on the boat? What was there to do?

RUA: Nothing, nothing. And then, now before the airplane had come out they had shuffleboard, they had tables that you could play cards and stuff like that. When I came over we had nothing.

SIGRIST: Nothing to do.

RUA: Nothing.

SIGRIST: Did you go up on deck?

RUA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you, how did you feel being on an open ocean like that? What was that . . .

RUA: Pretty scary. (he laughs) You get up, boy,

something happened. We had to, in 1936 when I went, they called the Savoie, the ship, they had a little room over there that they hold mass. And the priest over there give a little ceremony. He says mass over there. He says, "I bet some of yous, you don't know the inside of a church. But if something happens, if this ship goes, if something happens," he says, "God help me." That's the only time you go. (he laughs) Boy, I wasn't too much of a churchgoer, but I said, "Oh-oh!"

SIGRIST: In 1921 was there a storm, or did you get seasick or anything like that while you were on the boat?

RUA: No. I got seasick, but there was no storms. I mean, just the boat was just, make me sick. I couldn't, uh, I can't go fishing. I mean, I went deep sea fishing over there just about four, five years ago, and I had to go lay down.

SIGRIST: Were you violently sick, throwing up, when you were on the large boat in 1921?

RUA: No. I don't remember throwing up. I never remember throwing up any time. I don't throw up.

SIGRIST: Just feel queasy.

RUA: Yeah, just feel bad.

SIGRIST: How long did the trip take in 1921?

RUA: Eleven days.

SIGRIST: Eleven days. And this is April into May, or in May of 1921 at this point?

RUA: No. But I went, I was born in April, and in May was, they had the ninth of June, but I think we got here June the seventh, something like that.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when you arrived in New York Harbor, maybe seeing the Statue of Liberty?

RUA: I remember that they quarantined us for a week. We could see the Statue of Liberty, and we was one week over there, but that's all. They told us there was somebody sick with something, that they had to hold us, you know, nothing else.

SIGRIST: So the boat is in the harbor. It's not docked, it's . . .

RUA: Yeah, it's in the . . .

SIGRIST: It's in the harbor.

RUA: Yeah, it's in the harbor, yeah.

SIGRIST: And, um, tell me a little bit about what that week was like, because surely you want to get off the boat.

RUA: Oh, yeah. There was nothing you could do about it. I mean, they just wait (?). I mean, that's all. I told you, they didn't have no tables that you could pass a little time like that. So (?) didn't do anything. You just get together with the people that you know, do a little talking, and the time you eat in the morning and night, suppertime, lunchtime and suppertime passes.

SIGRIST: What did they feed you on the boat?

RUA: Not so good. (he laughs) Even when I went back in 1936, then it was still travel the ships and they give us some wine, and there was another fellow over there, and he says, "Boy, this wine is made with the sticks."
(he laughs)

SIGRIST: And it was bad in 1921, too?

RUA: 1921 they didn't give you no wine and stuff like that.

SIGRIST: What did they feed you? Do you remember?

RUA: It was like stews and soups and stuff like that.
There wasn't much, you know, no steaks or kind of meat
by itself, something like that, nothing.

SIGRIST: Did the food change once you had to be kept in the
boat for a week? Do you remember the food getting
better or worse when you were held?

RUA: I don't remember it, I don't remember changing, I
don't think it changed. No, because they didn't land
and get no food. It was the same thing that they had
in there. I guess they figured they got supply a
little bit more than what they really used, and that
was still the same stuff.

SIGRIST: Tell me what happened after the quarantine was lifted
and you were processed.

RUA: Well, they just take us out of the boat. They took us
in the, someplace over here, they process you.

SIGRIST: Here at Ellis Island.

RUA: Yeah. And, uh, when we went to Philadelphia, there
was one man, he was a chaperon, because I wasn't

eighteen yet, and he got a fellow too, and there was the three of us, one of the fellows that left you out of that bunch. That's all I remember. A fellow (?) around two o'clock in the morning.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of the processing here at all?

RUA: No, no, no.

SIGRIST: Nothing. It's you and the chaperon, and is it your sister? Who's the third person with you?

RUA: No, we were supposed to get here, three of us.

SIGRIST: Right.

RUA: But then they turned me back because I wasn't sixteen yet.

SIGRIST: Right.

RUA: And so I come by myself.

SIGRIST: I see.

RUA: And then those other two, they were just friends that came to this country, too, same as I did myself.

SIGRIST: I see. Um, so you arrived at Philadelphia quite late

at night.

RUA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about what, like, your first day in America? What did you do that very first day?

RUA: I guess for six months I didn't work. I was just living off of my brothers and sisters over there. They used to work, and I used to do the cooking and stuff. But, uh, that's, uh, you live a different, different altogether. But then we, as I say, our own family, we didn't want for food and stuff. I mean, we had plenty of that, so it was a, just a little bit worse than, you know, on a boat, to get that kind of food.

SIGRIST: Tell me what, what was the hardest thing to get adjusted to in this country?

RUA: At that age, when you're that young, it don't take long. You, you really, I never seen a colored person when I was, I was sixteen I never seen a colored person. The first time I seen one was when the ship was quarantined they had this guy, after we come in

the, come in the land, and then (?) the steps over there, and a few hours before the people started getting off over there, and they had a soldier over there, and he was black. That was, I never seen a colored people.

SIGRIST: What did you think?

RUA: (he laughs) We used to hear about it. My brothers-in-law, they were in the army over there in Africa and places like that, they used to tell us. But when you're young you really don't pay much attention to the kind of stuff like that.

SIGRIST: What about learning English? Tell me how you went about learning English?

RUA: Well, that's another thing. I don't think that you, if you was a certain age, I don't think that you really, you'd have a tougher time than somebody young. It wasn't too hard. In a couple of years, why, you know pretty good.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what your first English word was?

RUA: No, I don't.

SIGRIST: Did you go to night classes to learn English, or did you just learn on the job?

RUA: They did have, uh, one summer over there trying to stimulate the jobs and stuff like that, you know, there was a room over there, in the building over there, and they give little lectures, the guys over there, and tell you different kind of things. But it was just short, a short while. But I got work in the hotel once, it was uptown. It was all the, all different kind of, there was some Italian people, but there were people that had been over there, but they really (?). But the first thing you know I (?). It don't take too long to catch up with it.

SIGRIST: Where were you living for that, for those six months when you were first here?

RUA: I lived, uh, 1520 Tenth Street in South Philadelphia, and I lived there for maybe three or four months. And then my brother, the older brother, he bought a house, and all the other brothers and sisters, we all moved with him, on another street right nearby there. And a little bit later was (?).

SIGRIST: The house on Tenth Street, 15 Tenth . . .

RUA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Was that a boarding house?

RUA: No. It was my uncle's house.

SIGRIST: It was your uncle's house.

RUA: My uncle's house, who was over here before us.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about your uncle and what his personality was like, and how you got along with him or maybe didn't get along with him.

RUA: He was good-natured. He was a big guy. (he laughs)
Like those big guys you see, about two hundred fifty pound guys, and about six foot, six. On my mother's side, they was all pretty good sized people, all of them. And he was good natured. I mean, he was a home guy, that he goes to work and comes home every night and he likes home cooking and stuff like that. He was a good, he was a good family guy.

SIGRIST: His last name would be Radi, like your mother.

RUA: Yeah, Radi.

SIGRIST: What was his first name?

RUA: Benny, Bernardo.

SIGRIST: Bernardo.

RUA: Bernardo.

SIGRIST: Was he married at that time?

RUA: Yeah. He had four girls. The youngest one was my age, and he had three that were older.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about what it was like living with this family whom you really didn't know until you got here.

RUA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me how you felt when you were living with them.

RUA: Well, his family, uh, they lived too far away from us. They lived another town from us, but they used to visit quite often, and we were doing pretty good. I mean, it was, you know, cousins, those girls and stuff. It wasn't too bad for me. I mean, I imagine a lot of people had been up there going so bored in their house that they made real strangers, but the whole family, everybody in the house over there was an

uncle or aunt and the cousins and stuff. And the only one we didn't know was the uncle. His wife and stuff, she had came, I think in 1913 she came, I remember her and the daughters over there used to come over all the time over their house. So it wasn't too bad because we knew then, you know, from the other side.

SIGRIST: So your uncle made you feel very comfortable.

RUA: Yeah, that's right, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did your uncle ever give you any advice about being in America and maybe not doing something, or . . .

RUA: No, I didn't need that for myself. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Did you ever get into any kind of trouble when you first got here, maybe made a mistake on your job, or something like that?

RUA: I got a couple of scrapes when you're young. When you're a foreigner, in them days, there was a lot of foreigner. I mean, they were called all kind of names, and the first thing you know when you're young and you start using the fists and the . . . (he laughs) Stuff like that. Not nothing that the law would, uh, (?) the law. In the jobs, in the, I work

in a hotel over there, and I done what I was supposed to do, and I guess the boss recognized that you do your duty, and he says, "Well, Sam," he says, "you will come in, instead of coming in twelve o'clock, come in at eleven. And go in the kitchen and look underneath where they keep all the pots and pans, the cooks, over there. If you find any of them they haven't been using much, and it's got this kind of mark," that he showed me, he says, "take it back in the pantry, and when the men come in, tell them to polish it." So I did that. And a couple older guys, one older guy, he picks up one of these pans over there, he says, "This is dirty." I says, "Yeah, that's what the boss," I forgot what his name was. "Yes. When it gets like that, take it back and clean it." He turns around, he gets up his hand, he's gonna hit me in the head with it. And, boy, I got mad. (he laughs) I mean, I choked the guy. (he laughs) That kind of stuff. But it wasn't too long, and pretty soon we started to grow up, you know, that you're supposed to keep your hands to yourself.

SIGRIST: Was that common in Philadelphia at that time, that different ethnic groups would fight?

RUA: No. I don't remember fighting, but different ethnic groups, I mean, they used to live almost in the certain sections in South Philadelphia. Most of the time it was when the blacks come in, and they keep pushing and pushing and pretty soon all the blacks are over there. (he laughs) Yeah.

SIGRIST: Um, did you miss Italy when you were first here?

RUA: No, I don't, no. But I realized that this country was better than over there. I never thought to go back any more, I had to go back for a visit. I mean, I always did, like, go back and see my relatives, and all my father and mother was living, but, uh, as far as living over there and coming over here, I mean, it's no comparison when you start, when you start criticizing Clinton or anybody else. (he laughs) Don't start to compare, put them on the same level as the other side, because they talk about these, uh, insurance stuff, tax, one quart of gasoline would cost you more than a gallon over here. 1968 I was over there, gasoline in this country was seventeen, eighteen cents a gallon, and over there was thirty-seven and thirty-eight cents a quart.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much you were paid for the job in the hotel, how much you got paid a week?

RUA: Fifty-five dollars a month. They pay me less. They used to pay the regular guys fifty-five, but because I was underage, I only got forty dollars a month, and the meals.

SIGRIST: Was there, oh, so you were fed at the hotel then, too.

RUA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Oh. So that's great for your uncle. He doesn't really have to feed you. (they laugh) Do you remember when you first got to America, going out and maybe buying new clothes?

RUA: Well, one, in the fall here, 1921, I went to the, uh, pick cranberries for a month, I think. Then we wanted to husk corn, take the husk off, and I remember I made coats, you know, a suit, and what I need, first what I need. That's the only time I remember.

SIGRIST: Was there something about America that you really didn't like? Something that was just, you just couldn't really adjust to. Now, obviously the language is a problem at first, anyway, but is there

anything else about America that's really hard for you?

RUA: No. Because coming from someplace where convenience don't exist, and over here the first stop, the, the, uh, (?) is different than that, you make more money and stuff like that, so you, I don't think anybody that they're, I used to, I wasn't, I had a store of my own over on Riverside for eighteen years, and I used get a lot of German people, used to brag about the German and stuff. Well, if it was so damn good, why, (he laughs) why didn't you stay over there. That's foolish to. But it was just a, a different kind of conditions. So everybody didn't appreciate it, why, they didn't, they didn't think right, or didn't have a sense of them.

SIGRIST: So even as a young man, you recognized that things were better for you here than they had been in Italy.

RUA: Certainly.

SIGRIST: How long do you think it took you before you decided that you really didn't want to go back to live in Italy?

RUA: Not too long, I don't think. I just don't remember, but I don't think very long.

SIGRIST: What was the year that you first went back to Italy?

RUA: About 1936. Fifteen years to the day, just fifteen years, when I left Naples, I remember, I don't remember what day of the month it was, but it was, it was in the May, I left Italy, and it was just that same day in fifteen years.

SIGRIST: Tell me what it felt like to go back to Italy for the first time and see your mother and father?

RUA: Oh, that's, uh, that's really a, a nice thing. Anybody that has any feelings for their father and mother, I mean, that's a wonderful, except that there was nothing else, nothing else to get, there was just that train, and they used to get the train in Naples, and we used to take twelve hours to go, (?). A little bit before the capital of the state, the provence over there. Nothing changed in 1936 when I went. It hadn't changed anything. They had no electric lights yet, nothing. So, uh, anybody that came from, uh, those kind of (?), get used to it pretty damn quick over here.

SIGRIST: Had your parents changed in your mind? Did they seem different to you?

RUA: Oh, yeah. They were (?) fifteen years, a little bit longer.

SIGRIST: Did they treat you like you were a kid?

RUA: Huh? No, they, boy, they knocked themselves out when I go over there for that, they were so glad that they're, one of us would go over there and see them. Yeah, it's a, but they, now they did a lot better. I think when they sent out money right after the war over there, everybody got wise up and they got the Americans to go over there and show them, and they remodeled everything they got. They got highways from, uh, the, the capital of the province over there, all the way to Rome.

SIGRIST: Did your parents ever want to come to America?

RUA: Yeah, they wanted to come. My father came here. He stayed a year-and-a-half, and my sister was young, and she was too young to get married, and they didn't want to live with the other married sisters, and that's why my own mother didn't come with my father at that time,

then they get old, and they went back to stay with them.

SIGRIST: What year was that when your father went over?

RUA: When they came over?

SIGRIST: When he came over?

RUA: 19, 1927. And he was here the day when I got married, 1928 in June, the last day in June, and he left, that same summer he left.

SIGRIST: Well, I'm glad you brought up your marriage. In our last five minutes can you, um, just kind of fill me in on your own family. You said you got married June of, June . . .

RUA: Last day of June.

SIGRIST: Last day of June, 1928.

RUA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And what was your wife's name?

RUA: Lina [ph].

SIGRIST: And her maiden name?

RUA: Marino.

SIGRIST: M-A-R-I-N-O?

RUA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Marino. And, um, how many children did you have?

RUA: Three of them, two girls and one boy.

SIGRIST: Can you name them for me, please?

RUA: Yes, Virginia, Paulina's here, and Sammy, Samuel, the boy.

SIGRIST: And were you living in Philadelphia at that time?

RUA: No, living in, Riverside, the wife was in Riverside. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Was she Italian?

RUA: Yeah. She was Italian. Her mother and her father came from another town near us, wherever he came, from the same place.

SIGRIST: But she had been born here?

RUA: She was born here.

SIGRIST: Was she younger than you, or your age, or . . .

RUA: She was five years younger.

SIGRIST: And, um, can you just quickly tell us how you met your wife?

RUA: Oh, it was through my old brother. They baptized their children over there, almost a brother-in-law off of, married the old sister's wife, sister, the oldest one, six girls, and one boy there, one brother. They got, and they used to visit pretty often one another, and they used to get along with one another real good. And, uh, the only thing I was getting the age where I started looking for the ladies, and they made the, uh, business there, asking me if I think I want to get married, if I would like her, and stuff like that. And the family was a nice family.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you did for your first date with her?

RUA: Huh?

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you did on your first date with her?

RUA: Date? (he laughs) They don't let us go nowhere by ourselves. Any time you went, the whole family went, like the (?).

SIGRIST: This whole herd of people traveling.

RUA: Yeah. You had to go. You didn't take (?).

SIGRIST: In our final two minutes, I just want to ask you a question. Are you glad that you came to this country?

RUA: Oh, sure, I am.

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

RUA: Well, you'd miss all the advice (?), and a lot of the luxury stuff that you have that you never, they still don't have it over there, I mean, like over here, just different, different countries. I tell you, when they start talking the tax now, watching television, you'd be nice talking tax, you don't know.

SIGRIST: You still might be raising watermelons and pigs if you had stayed in Italy.

RUA: Yeah, that's right. Well, that's the only thing, that's the only thing that was good over there that

you could get enough food and stuff. There was nothing else over there. And that was a good thing for anybody that had a, that has that kind of idea, because that was the only thing good about it, that you raise your own food. There was no place you could go out and buy any kind of food over there.

SIGRIST: Well, Mr. Rua, I want to thank you very much for coming up to Ellis Island today with many members of your family.

RUA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And for sharing with us your history. I appreciate it.

RUA: I want to thank you for having me here.

SIGRIST: Sure. It's our pleasure. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Santo Rua on Saturday, October 9, 1993, at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum Recording Studio.