

EI-452
HELEN MARTINO SABATINO
BIRTH DATE: OCTOBER 16, 1901
INTERVIEW DATE: APRIL 6, 1994
RUNNING TIME: 46:03
INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE
RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME
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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 5/1996
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: IRV SILBERG

ITALY, 1910
AGE 8

SHIP: NAVIGAZIONE GENERALE ITALIANA Line,
PORT: NAPLES
RESIDENCES:
 ITALY: TEARO
 US: NEWARK, WEST NEW YORK, NJ;

HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mrs. Sabatino's son, Victor, is present

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. I'm here today in North Bergen, New Jersey with Helen Martino Sabatino. Helen was eight years old when she came from Italy, and that was in 1910.

SABATINO: '10, right.

LEVINE: And, uh, we're here with, uh, Mrs. Sabatino's son, Albert -- Victor.

VICTOR: Victor.

LEVINE: Victor Sabatino. Okay, uh, why don't we start at the beginning. Tell me your birth date.

SABATINO: October 16, 1901.

LEVINE: And were there any family stories that you heard about your birth? I mean, was there anything that, uh, your mother told you later, or anything about that?

SABATINO: About . . .

LEVINE: When you were born?

SABATINO: Yeah, the address. What do you mean?

LEVINE: No, I just wondered if there were any family stories about when you were born.

SABATINO: Oh, no.

LEVINE: No?

SABATINO: I know my father had, you know, waited till she gave birth to me, and then he was, you know, happy that everything was all right, and he came to America. That's what I . . .

LEVINE: Okay. So he came when you were, you said three months old.

SABATINO: Yeah. (a telephone rings)

LEVINE: Okay. I'm going to pause here.

SABATINO: Go on the other phone. Go on the other phone.

LEVINE: Okay. Um, now, what's your father's name?

SABATINO: Uh, Louis Sabatino. In Italian, you want the name or English?

LEVINE: English is okay.

SABATINO: Louis.

LEVINE: Luigi -- if you, if you want to say Italian, you can.

SABATINO: Yeah, Luigi.

LEVINE: Luigi.

SABATINO: Martino.

LEVINE: And had . . .

SABATINO: Martino.

LEVINE: Martino. Oh, right. Okay. And, so that was your maiden name.

SABATINO: Yeah.

LEVINE: And your mother's name?

SABATINO: Was, uh, Columbia [ph]. We used to call her Colomba, in Italian. And Martino, too, you know.

LEVINE: What, Columbia was her . . .

SABATINO: First name.

LEVINE: Her first name. And what was her maiden name, do you know?

SABATINO: Uh, Rosamilia [ph]. Rosamilia [ph].

LEVINE: Rosamilia [ph].

SABATINO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. And, um, you had brothers and sisters. Can you name them, from the oldest on down?

SABATINO: Yeah. My oldest brother was Joseph.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SABATINO: The second was named Ercole. E-R-C-O-L-E. And the third was Ralph, Angelina, and me, Helen.

LEVINE: So all of the children in your family were born in Italy?

SABATINO: All of them, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And your grandmother and grandfather, did you, were they living with you, or . . .

SABATINO: Yeah. No, just the one. My father's mother. She, all the while, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you remember her name?

SABATINO: Yeah. Afcancha [ph]. Angelina, same.

LEVINE: Angelina.

SABATINO: My sister's named after her.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And do you remember, um, your grandmother when you were still in Italy? Do you remember what she was like, and things she did?

SABATINO: My grandmother, yeah. She lived with us all the while. She used to come to America. You mean the other grandmother?

LEVINE: No, I mean this one, Angelina.

SABATINO: Yeah, yeah. She lived with us.

LEVINE: What do you remember about her? What kind of things did she do? What, how?

SABATINO: Well, she earned a living. She was working in a rich people's house. She used to be the cook.

LEVINE: Oh.

SABATINO: Yeah. And that was, then, you know, she'd come by us weekends.

LEVINE: I see. So was she a great cook? Do you remember things she made?

SABATINO: Oh, yeah. She used to make nice dishes.

LEVINE: Yeah? (they laugh) Can you remember any of the dishes from Italy?

SABATINO: She used to make lamb with, uh, they used to have fagiolini [string beans]. See, I can't . . .

LEVINE: Whatever.

SABATINO: Yeah. She used to make it in the oven, and like a little onion. She used to make very good food. I forgot. Macaroni, all that stuff.

LEVINE: Do you remember any things that you did with her?

SABATINO: Oh, yeah, we used to . . .

LEVINE: What would you do when you were with her?

SABATINO: We played together when she would come on the weekend, you know. And then she -- they had like a vineyard. You know, my mother's father had that, and we used to go on there, too, like, you know. The vaults. He had everything planted, and we used to go there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Grapes and other things?

SABATINO: Grapes, yeah. Grapes, fig trees, plums, and all other stuff on the ground. I can't talk too good.

LEVINE: You sound fine. You're fine. Uh, so how about, you don't remember your father, then, from Italy?

SABATINO: No. I remember him on the picture my mother always shows. "This is your father," you know. And the way I knew him by the picture when I saw him, he came to hug me or kiss me, I didn't want to go near him. I remember that. (she laughs) And my mother says, "That's your father." Then I got over it. But the other - the rest of them did. They remembered him, but not me.

LEVINE: How about your mother? How do you remember her from Italy? What are the things that stick in your mind about your mother when you were a little girl in Italy?

SABATINO: Oh, she was a tall woman.

LEVINE: Tall?

SABATINO: Yeah, nice looking, and she worked with her mother. The mother had a baker's shop.

LEVINE: Oh, your other grandmother?

SABATINO: Yeah, the other grandmother. She had a baker shop, you know, that made bread, and she used to work with her.

LEVINE: Did you ever help out when you were little?

SABATINO: No. She used to take me with her every place I went, because I remember one time she had to knead the bread, and they we—they used to have fire on the floor, you know, on the ground, with a, not a s -- a brass thing, and the coal would be there, and then this big pot would be hanging with hot water that she had to take to make the bread, and I fell right in and I - look, you could see it here. I was small. (she laughs)

LEVINE: You fell in the fire?

SABATINO: In the pot.

LEVINE: In the pot.

SABATINO: Then they took me into the, no hospitals over there, to the drugstore, and I remember big balloon come up. That's all.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you remember anything else about medical care when you were little, in the town you lived in?

SABATINO: No, I never was sick. I don't remember, outside of cold.

LEVINE: What was the name of the town?

SABATINO: Teora.

LEVINE: And you spell that?

SABATINO: T-E-A-R-O. [sic] I got to take a move. (she writes)
Yeah, that's it. T-E-O-R-A.

LEVINE: Okay. And did you live in Teora the whole time . . .

SABATINO: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Until you came here?

SABATINO: Yeah. See, the ten months we went back, that they had to, you know, take care of our eyes. The doctor there, my uncle took us in because my mother sold everything.

LEVINE: Well, before we . . .

SABATINO: And we were coming here.

LEVINE: Before we talk about your leaving, let's say, did you go to school at all when you were over there?

SABATINO: Yes. They just put me in, then, the first grade, too. I remember the teacher had a long, long stick like a, like those sugar cane things, real long. And she would never get up from the table. Whoever would talk, she'd hit you on the head with it, but not hard. I remember that. She would never move. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Now, how was the school in Italy? When you think about being in school there, and then later when you were in school here, what was the difference?

SABATINO: Well, there were long things long, and each had a compartment, put your books, and that's all.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what did you do in school? You were in, like, first grade

SABATINO: First grade, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember what school was like?

SABATINO: Oh, no. I don't remember.

LEVINE: Was the teacher strict, or did you play, or . . .

SABATINO: Oh, no, no. It wasn't Catholic. You know, we just went to school.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Was your family religious?

SABATINO: Yes.

LEVINE: And did, do you remember any holidays, or any religious observances when you were still in Italy?

SABATINO: Oh, yeah. When -- my mother used to, when it was Easter time she'd make us a cake, you know, with the egg in the middle, one each.

LEVINE: Oh, one each? A little cake? (Mrs. Sabatino laughs) Huh. Yeah. Did you celebrate anything else that you can remember?

SABATINO: Well, they used to have holidays, like, you know, like saints and things, big holiday, and we would go there, you know, have a good time.

LEVINE: Would you . . .

SABATINO: My mother would take us, the children.

LEVINE: So like would you go to church, and then have a big . . .

SABATINO: Yes, oh, yeah. I went to church. I had first communion there, and confirmation. I remember, with the blue ribbon on my neck.
(she laughs)

LEVINE: You remember the name of the church you went to in Italy?

SABATINO: No. The church was on a high street there, and we lived on the other side, on the opposite side. It was like on the hill. And I remember another one was where my uncle lived, was flat. It was like a plaza, you know. I remember those two churches.

LEVINE: Can you remember the house you lived in?

SABATINO: Oh, we had two rooms.

LEVINE: And what was the, what was the kitchen like?

SABATINO: Oh, very poor. We used to have a thing on the side, like a -
- what do you call those, shanties, you know, like Lily's got, in the hall.

LEVINE: A pantry?

SABATINO: Yeah, like that. And in there there was all, uh, oh, my mother used to raise the pigs, little pigs. And then when they, you know, got big, she took them to the butcher, and they would fix them all up for us, like make ham, sausage and (?), and then she, we had the whole thing for a year.

LEVINE: Oh. But you didn't have refrigerators, probably?

SABATINO: No, no.

LEVINE: So how did it keep?

SABATINO: Uh, we just keep it outside there near the window. It was cold. But then by the summer wow were -- they were finished, and we start all over again. She made, you know, for the winter she used to put things away like that.

LEVINE: What was your father doing when he was in Italy?

SABATINO: In Italy? He was a barber.

LEVINE: A barber.

SABATINO: Yeah.

LEVINE: And, uh, do you remember the grandmother that your mother, uh, worked in the bakery with?

SABATINO: Yes, yes. Zaros [ph], yeah.

LEVINE: What was her name?

SABATINO: Rosa was her name.

LEVINE: And do you remember ever doing anything with her? Do you remember any activities or experiences?

SABATINO: We used to eat by our house, too, you know, we always were together. Yeah. But she was kind up in years. See, my mother had another sister working with her in the bakery, too. They used to bake the bread for her, you know, help her. And that's how she made a living, the two daughters.

LEVINE: So you, you had, um, aunts and uncles around, cousins?

SABATINO: You mean here?

LEVINE: No, there.

SABATINO: Oh, plenty, yeah. They're all gone. They're all dead. (coughs), excuse me.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you did for playing, what kinds of, how you entertained yourself when you were little, in Italy?

SABATINO: Oh, we used to make our own toys. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Oh, really? What would you . . .

SABATINO: We used to take those little marbles in along the river, little stones around, and we'd play jacks with them, you know, here they got jacks? They play like two, three. We used to play with them. And then we used to take an orange, cut it in half, clean everything out, and we used to put three strings, and then put it on a stick, the two of them. And that was the ve-- (she laughs) that was the ve-- the weigh it stuff, to weigh the stuff.

LEVINE: Oh, a scale.

SABATINO: Like, you know, one pound, two pound. We used to do that. We used to weigh it, it would go up and down, or funny things like that.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you remember the main street? Were there stores there?

SABATINO: There was a small plaza, yeah, all the streets, tailors, shoemakers, you know. They were all around. And, like, when somebody would die . . . (she laughs) That's a thing to say. Somebody would be dying, they would ring the bell, the church. And everybody would come out and run with the priest to give the last rites. I remember that, because I used to go a lot of times, and I got hollered at from my brothers. They didn't want me to do it, me and my sister.

LEVINE: Were you closest to anybody in particular in your family?

SABATINO: Oh, yeah. The whole family.

LEVINE: The whole family.

SABATINO: My brothers, sister. They all came here, then they all died here. And I knew a lot of cousins from Italy. They're dead, too. In fact, last year two of them died, right here.

LEVINE: Well, um, let's see. Is there anything else about Italy that you remember about what life was like for you when you were little?

SABATINO: It was nice, very happy. Our ways, you know, we enjoyed ourself. I remember a store that had, uh, those things that the horse eat, those shushel [ph], they call them. And she used to sell everything for the animals, and we used to take them and eat them, and my mother used to holler at us, you know. But they didn't harm you.

LEVINE: They were in a shell?

SABATINO: Yeah. They called them mushel [ph]. They were things long like a stick. They were brown. We'd take them and, you know, and then somebody else would be selling corns, you know, we'd go to school, and for a penny we'd get one, and the other stuff, too, that you eat, you put the sugar on. What do you call it? Pisille [ph]. I don't know if you know what they are.

LEVINE: Pastries?

SABATINO: No, no, pastry. It was bread, dough. And the woman would flatten them up, put a little powder sugar, and she would sell them to the kids, make money, people, you know, different. Yeah, I remember that.

LEVINE: Well, it sounds like you had a happy childhood then.

SABATINO: Yes, I did, very good. See, my mother and my uncle were very close, and his family and our family, we were always together.

LEVINE: I see. Was that your mother's brother?

SABATINO: Yes. He was a cop. Not a cop, he was better than a cop, in Italy. And, uh, you know, he was protected good. And, in fact, my mother sent for his two daughters when we came here. She was guardian, how you say?

LEVINE: A guardian?

SABATINO: Yeah, like that. Then they married, and now the two of them have die. Very close.

LEVINE: Well, tell me about when you were getting ready to leave. You said your father came first.

SABATINO: Oh, he came here eight years.

LEVINE: And did you, did your mother, uh, have, uh, correspondence with him?

SABATINO: Oh, yeah. He used to always send us letters and money. Because, you know, we had to live, too. And he saved money to, for us to come here. I think it was fifty dollars a person. I think I remember that.

LEVINE: So, um, do you remember when your mother was getting ready to leave?

SABATINO: Yeah.

LEVINE: What she packed up.

SABATINO: She packed up a lot of clothes and different things, you know. And she brought, I think it was salami or something. I forgot. She had trunks, you know, and the trunks were, like, we had in West New York there I had. I only left it over there, all these years. That's the trunk my mother, my -- she put stuff in, and that was on the boat. That's why my grandmother had to come here, and another one, too.

LEVINE: Well, when your mother, um . . .

SABATINO: She sold a lot of stuff.

LEVINE: What did she do? Did she have a sale? How did she sell everything?

SABATINO: Oh, to the people around. I don't know how much, a little amount. And the rest, we didn't have much. We had two bedrooms.

LEVINE: What about the house?

SABATINO: Hmm?

LEVINE: What about the house?

SABATINO: That wasn't our house. I don't know. I remember the bathroom was outside near the shed. I know that. Where the pigs was. (she laughs) Away from it.

LEVINE: And what about water?

SABATINO: Water?

LEVINE: Did you ever do . . .

SABATINO: Oh, we had to go get the water on our head with those things, you know. Clay, big clay things.

LEVINE: Like a jug.

SABATINO: Yeah. The woman used to go and get it near the river there. Yeah, I remember that.

LEVINE: Do you remember . . .

SABATINO: When we had to wash clothes, my mother would, by the river, and she would put the washin' board there and wash clothes with the water running. I remember that. And then she dried it on the grass, you know, and we got our clothes dried. Like, we had a nice, a nice living. Poor, but (?).

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So then, um, let's see. Uh, after your father came over, he sent for your oldest brother.

SABATINO: Yeah, him. And he sent him to a man that was a tailor, too. That's what he was taking up in Italy. He used to go, like, to another man to learn the trade. And he went to another man, he had to learn. And the brother that came with us, too, the second one, he put him in - in this thing, too. He used to be with my other brother. So he went and worked to be a tailor, too. The two of them were tailors.

LEVINE: Was your father being a barber when he was in Italy?

SABATINO: No. He went to work in a hat factory. They, you know, for ladies, those beaver hats, long ago, with the trim? They used to have ribbon in the back. He used to work on them. I remember when we came from Italy he got us one each, me and my sister. (she laughs) And my aunt bought us a coat, like black, but it was like pearls, you know, the goods, and brass buttons. And she took us to school, enlisted us in school. But she came with the wrong number. My name wasn't Helen. My name was Helena. But she gave me that name, so I went on with it. So, she made a mistake. (Dr. Levine laughs) That's all.

LEVINE: Yeah. Okay. So, so, um, how much . . .

SABATINO: Oh, I forgot about this.

LEVINE: How much after, how much after your brother came did the rest of the family come?

SABATINO: Eight years after, eight years after. My father was here eight years alone, you know. And then my brother came a couple of years after, he sent for him. And we came here, all together it was eight years that he was here by himself, my father.

LEVINE: I see. So your brother, your oldest brother, let's see, Joseph, he came how many years before you and your sister and your mother?

SABATINO: About two, three years. I don't remember. Because he used to go to this place and learn the trade in Italy.

LEVINE: I see.

SABATINO: He had to be in his teens, you know. He couldn't be too young. Sixteen, seventeen, I don't know.

LEVINE: So, uh, so tell me the story about what happened when you, it was your grandmother, your mother, your sister and your two brothers.

SABATINO: Yes.

LEVINE: And you were going to go to Naples.

SABATINO: Yeah.

LEVINE: To leave.

SABATINO: Yeah.

LEVINE: And what happened?

SABATINO: We had to go in a big motel. We slept there overnight. And we never had that in the little town there. We were playing around with my sister, and my mother say, "Stay by me, or you's gonna get hurt." You know, everything, marble on the floor. I remember all that, nice and clean. And then the boat, you know, we got on the boat, and this is the boat. And it was about eleven years old. That was an old boat. It was young, uh, new. And, uh, we had a nice, just a couple of times, like, the water was rough.

LEVINE: But tell first about your eye problem.

SABATINO: Oh. About, yeah, well, when we went back to Italy, we went to the drugstore and the doctor gave us some drops, and we had to put them for three months in. So . . .

LEVINE: Well, tell me what happened. Did, were you examined? When you first went to get aboard the ship.

SABATINO: Yes, we were.

LEVINE: Where were you examined? On the ship, or before you got on?

SABATINO: Before we got on. That's when they put us aside, and my other one passed, my other brother and sister.

LEVINE: So you went and somebody looked at your eyes.

SABATINO: Yes.

LEVINE: And then they, what did they say?

SABATINO: That we needed drops, or something was wrong with them. Till today one eye to me is, you know, I can't see good. But, uh, we, whatever we had was cured with the drops.

LEVINE: So you were turned back.

SABATINO: Yes.

LEVINE: And then what happened when . . .

SABATINO: We stood there three months with my uncle, because my mother had nothing no more in the house, we sold our stuff. And then we had, the second time we came, after three months, I, we were all right, me and my brother, so she came with all of us.

LEVINE: I see. And the first time, when you were supposed to go, your grandmother went?

SABATINO: Yeah. She came alone here. And it was around Thanksgiving time. That's how I remember. She's, everybody says, "Oh, we ain't gonna get off, because it's Thanksgiving." And she says, "What's Thanksgiving?" Then she used to tell us. And she said, they said it's the holiday for the chicken. (they laugh) She was weird.

LEVINE: She must have been quite a courageous woman to take off on her own.

SABATINO: She had to, otherwise we would lose everything. She didn't want to come. Oh, my mother had a hard time. She says, "Well, then you come back with us. We ain't got nothing no more. They're going to take everything." They were going to take her off the ship. She said, "I don't know why they put them on before we went." You know, it was their fault. But that's the way it went.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So, uh, so then your father met her when she came here?

SABATINO: Oh, yeah. Then she lived with us. I was there alone with my father. And my brother was living with this other man, but he had come weekends. In fact, this man lived on East 33rd Street, I remember that, in New York. East 33rd Street. In the house he had a room, and he used to cut out man's suits, you know, pants, everything. That's where he learned the trade, then.

LEVINE: So, uh, when you went to go back, your eyes were cured.

SABATINO: Yeah.

LEVINE: And then the name of the ship you came on?

SABATINO: Yeah. You got the name. I put it. See, I got to, oh, gee, I can't see good with this. Navigazione, Navigazione Generale Italiana. It was a nice ship. In fact, there's a big picture there in the Ellis Island. I saw it. First we're looking at all postal cards, a lot of them, and I rec-- we recognized the name. So then we went in the next room and there was, there's this big name of the ship, and it was a nice ship, it was new, kind of new. And it took us eleven days to get here. Other people, it would take longer.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What do you remember about the voyage?

SABATINO: About the what?

LEVINE: The voyage, the trip over?

SABATINO: Oh, well, I got seasick, because I remember a lady coming around, she gave me soup with a big pot, with the ladle there, whatever you call it. I go with the dishes, she put it in for me, but the rest couldn't get any. My sister put one, the kerchief around her head but she didn't feel good. She wouldn't give it to her, only to the kids of a certain age. And the others, they eat what they can.

LEVINE: Do you remember about, did you eat in the dining room, or did people bring their own food, or how was it . . .

SABATINO: No, we on long tables like one after the other, when the ship would go, you know, back down, rough thing. All those things, they go to one end, then they go to the other end. And then, I remember, too, I picked up a crucifix in front of me. It rolled, you know, and I picked it up. But, you know, everybody was losing things because the ship was very rough, the ocean. Twice was very bad. But then we got here to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: So were you sick the whole time?

SABATINO: No, no, no. Just, you know, the beginning. Seasick. Everybody got, you know, like that. Big people, everybody. Yeah.

LEVINE: Was there any entertainment? I mean, was there, was there something there?

SABATINO: Well, there was first, second class. We never went. We couldn't go up there. I come on the third class. You can imagine. Was -- the - the -the thing bef-- the top of the boilers, you know, that floor.

LEVINE: Right.

SABATINO: And then there was second and third, they had the money. But we - we came.

LEVINE: Yeah. So do you remember coming into the New York Harbor?

SABATINO: Oh, yeah. I remember that. We saw the Statue of Liberty, we said, oh, my mother and my brother said, "Oh, we're rich, we're rich!" (they laugh) Oh, it was nice.

LEVINE: And how about, um . . .

SABATINO: I'd never seen anything like that over there.

LEVINE: Yeah. How about Ellis Island? Do you remember that?

SABATINO: Yes, I remember. Some things, like, they had long, uh, how you call them, island? And you had to go one, and in another, and another.

VICTOR: Aisle.

SABATINO: All around, yeah. And, uh, you know, but we passed. Yeah. Everything was okay. They pin somethin' on us, that it was okay, and then we had to go in the big room. And then, I don't know-- I forget where my father was now. I don't know where I met him. First, I think outside, or in, inside, I think, the waiting room. Yeah.

LEVINE: And do you remember when you first saw him, what you thought?

SABATINO: Uh, well, I remember him saying to us - you see, we went in a subway, he took us. Now it's a subway. Under, he says, you see, under the ground. He says, "We're traveling under the ground. On top of us is all water," my father said. And I says, "How can it be?" You know. And he says, "There is." You know, and then we got out to Newark, you know, with the subway. And then they were there waiting for us, somebody, with the cars. We went home. That's all.

LEVINE: Well . . .

SABATINO: We had a big holiday with the rest of the family. You know, I had relatives here. They all came.

LEVINE: Well, uh, had you ever seen a car before?

SABATINO: A car? Uh, an automobile?

LEVINE: Yeah.

SABATINO: In Naples. Not in my place. In Naples, yeah. Oh, they had everything there. I remember while we were waiting, like my mother wanted to buy us food or something, and the wagons would pass, and they would, they had a - a basket with rope. She would lower it down with money, and they would put the stuff. We'd pull it up, and we would get our, you know, before we got on the ship. I remember that.

LEVINE: Where was your mother?

SABATINO: In Nap-- she was near us, but we didn't want to go down. My mother wouldn't let us go downstairs.

LEVINE: I see.

SABATINO: She did it all that way.

LEVINE: I see. (they laugh)

SABATINO: She was afraid we'd get lost.

LEVINE: So, um, were you at Ellis Island for just the afternoon, or do you remember how long?

SABATINO: I think, I didn't sleep there, I remember. Just the day, the day. Because my father was there good and early. I don't know. No, I never slept there.

LEVINE: Do you remember other things that struck you as different once you got to this country, things that you hadn't seen?

SABATINO: Oh, everything was so nice, different. And Ellis Island ain't like today. It ain't like today. Today it's fixed nice.

LEVINE: It wasn't that nice.

SABATINO: No. Everything old. That's what I say. I hope I would have took that trunk I left home. When I moved here, I left it in the cellar. I says, "What am I going to do with it?" And that came from Italy.

LEVINE: Yeah. You could have given it to Ellis Island.

SABATINO: Yeah, that's what I . . .

LEVINE: Yeah.

SABATINO: You never know.

LEVINE: Yeah, right. So, um, so when you first got to Newark, how was the house compared to what, the one you had come from?

SABATINO: Oh, much better. (a telephone rings) Much better than here. The houses here, nice, everything, bathroom inside. Over there we had to go on the porch, but outside, you know. It was different living. We weren't used to that. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Did you, did you like it here?

SABATINO: Yes, we all did. Yeah. It was better living. We dressed better. We had more to eat, cheap, you know. We used to -- my mother buy the beans, I think, five cents a pound. She used to send me to the store. Anything she wanted, you know, very cheap, them days, 190-- 08.

LEVINE: Yeah. Uh-huh. So, uh, when you were in Newark were there a lot of other families that came from Italy?

SABATINO: Oh, the whole place there was all Italian people, yeah. But I didn't know them, you know. Then you make friends. Different parts they came from. They're friendly, yeah. We stood in our own house.

LEVINE: And did, when you went to school, what was that like for you?

SABATINO: Oh, when we went to school, my brother went to third, my third brother went to school. My sister and me, three of us. The other two, you know, worked. And, so one time, I -- we didn't know, they put

us in each one in the seat, you know how they have it here, and they teach you all kind of blackboards in the back and all that. So my, uh, we didn't know that. We were just, you know, trying to write. And what the teach-- and the bell, the fire bell rang, the thing, and we didn't know what that was about. You know, everybody, the teacher, everybody got up nice. All of a sudden we saw my brother open the door, he was in a different class. He opened the doors, you know, that they open, and he rushed in and he got a hold of me and my sister. "Run out."

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGIN SIDE TWO

It was fire, he thought. [both laugh] Want to save us. Oh, gee, he was something. And the teacher says to him, "Don't do that." You know. And then they told him, and then he was so red in the face. And then, you know, we went in the line and all that. But the first time . . .

LEVINE: Which brother was that?

SABATINO: This is Ralph, the third brother. He went to school, in a different place they put him in. Because he was older than me. My sister was two years older than me, and he was four. So . . . (she laughs)

LEVINE: How was learning English for you?

SABATINO: Very nice. I enjoyed it. I graduate grammar school. You know, and I got the big paper there, oh, how big they give them - diplomas? Not like today. It was a big sheet of paper, square. And then I remember the principal, named Dr. -- Dr. Green, Green. G-R-E-E-N. He was a tall man and, uh, I remember all the teachers, yeah. It was nice.

LEVINE: Was the teacher . . .

SABATINO: And on the hot -- hot days they would make us go in the hall, you know, the teachers over here, and put water on the, on the wrists, so we got, you know, keep cool. Was hot -- hot days. I remember that, too.

LEVINE: Do you remember how, did somebody take special, pay special attention to you to learn English?

SABATINO: Yeah. From the teach-- from the class. She teached, you know, I took it up, and then she taught us.

LEVINE: There were other children in your class who were also learning English?

SABATINO: Oh, yeah. They used to call us greenhorn. (she laughs) But we didn't, they says, "Don't mind them." So we didn't.

LEVINE: It didn't bother you?

SABATINO: Nah. If we know they are Jew, we call them Jew. But, uh, I know they used to say the greenhorns. Yeah. And if the teacher ever heard them they got punished. She would put them in the corner. In school, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: The teacher? The teacher spoke? (Victor speaks off mike)
The teacher was speaking English. Did she know Italian at all?

SABATINO: Oh, the one in the class? The one that was teaching us here? No. All English. All, you know, American. No Italian.

LEVINE: So, um . . .

SABATINO: Right.

LEVINE: Do you remember games that you played when you were here in this country?

SABATINO: When I what?

LEVINE: When you were here in this country? Do you remember what you played, games, how you, what enjoyment you had when you were little, when you were in school?

SABATINO: Oh, we used to play like ropes and jumping like that, yeah. I got in with the kids, played London Bridge Is Falling Down. (she laughs) All those things, I played.

LEVINE: Were the games different here than they were over there?

SABATINO: Uh, no. Over there, I told you how we played. We'd make our own toys. And I forgot a lot of other things. Then we would take a thread and we'd put it, we'd make the cradle, we'd make all different things. With the thread we'd make the picture, and that was to be the doll's cra-- cradle. Yeah, all those things like that, but we didn't have much to play with. We made our own. But over here we got the toys. I did, not my sister.

LEVINE: Why not your sister? Because she was older?

SABATINO: She was older than me. She didn't want them. Yeah. And then a lot of times people from here came to visit their relatives where I came from, and then they would, we would get all around these two kids, you know, come on, tell us something about how they doing in American, and they would tell us a lot of things, you know, and play games and all.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

SABATINO: Yeah. They used to talk a little bit English, you know. But they were born - they were born here. I forgot now. Their parents would take them with them. Otherwise, we didn't, everything was Italian there. They teach you, and over here everything was English.

LEVINE: Were you, uh, religious, your family, when you came over here? Did you stay religious, or . . .

SABATINO: Did I stay . . .

LEVINE: Did you go to church over here?

SABATINO: Oh, yeah. Oh yeah. We went to church every -- St. Lucy's church in Newark, yeah. Boy, in fact, we got married from there, in Newark.

LEVINE: So after you graduated from high school, what did you . . .

SABATINO: Not high school, grammar school.

LEVINE: I mean, from grammar school. Then what did you do after that?

SABATINO: Uh, I went to work.

LEVINE: Where did you go?

SABATINO: I want-- I remember I wanted to go to high school, then my father won't let me go. We needed money. So they were all working then, but they weren't making much. They use-- so I had to go to work. See, I was near, I was going to be fourteen. It just fell in - in June, like, I was going to be fourteen in October. I graduated before that, in June, like.

LEVINE: So what was your first job?

SABATINO: Well, the first job, I went to work in a handkerchief factory, and it was big machines, and you had to put them, like this is the - the handkerchief, put it in straight, and it would come nice and smooth. But if you didn't do it, you put it in crooked or something, it would get all wrinkled. And then they holler at you, you know, you get fired. So I used to do that. Take my time. A certain corner you had to put it in. They show me, a little girl, and I did, and I always got it nice and straight, piled them up. That was the first job. Then my sister went to work in a corset factory. WB, they used to call 'em. I reto-- remember I told you once, you know, the whole block. And she took me to work with her. I went with her to work. And they made corsets. So I used to make the garters for the corsets. And my sister made the other parts of the corset. And I worked there til I got married, and her, too.

LEVINE: And how did you meet your husband?

SABATINO: Oh, I met him, I went, I came, I was -- this lady with her son came to see another lady across the street where we lived in Newark. They were very friendly. I don't know whether they were a relative, or what. And I met my husband there, and that's how I met him.

LEVINE: Did you like him right away?

SABATINO: No, not too much. (they laugh) Not too much.

LEVINE: So then did you start to . . .

SABATINO: I was always afraid of my parents. I was young. I wasn't too old, you know. But, uh, then we got to know each other good, families. It was all right.

LEVINE: So was your husband also from Italy?

SABATINO: No, he was born in Jersey City. That's why, too, I - I - want -- want to marry, because he was born here. He was a citizen, but I was a citizen, too, from my father. So there's no trouble.

LEVINE: So was that considered a good thing, to marry somebody who was born here?

SABATINO: Oh, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: And, um, so when your, did, your mother and father became citizens?

SABATINO: Yeah, everybody. We were all citizen. And that's how I came. Otherwise he couldn't call us here.

LEVINE: Oh, I see.

SABATINO: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: So he went to night classes and all that, to become a . . .

SABATINO: My father? No. What do you mean, night class?

LEVINE: In order to become a citizen?

SABATINO: Oh, I don't know, he must have. Somebody helped him out. That's the same man that give him the job like in Newark. After he got out of the hat, he gave him a job in the City of Newark. But all in the parks, around the trees, like just fix the flowers and very, you know, put up the flag, take them down in the night. That's the job he had till he died. So he had to, you know, do something, to get that job, too. He had to be a citizen.

LEVINE: So how about your grandmother? Was she happy she had come here?

SABATINO: Yeah. She, because she was with us, yeah. Ooh, she didn't want to be left alone, no.

LEVINE: And how about your mother? Was she glad she could come?

SABATINO: Well, my mother, you know, she left a brother there, and another sister. And quite a few, you know, you be a few, you don't like to leave. But we got used to it.

LEVINE: Um, did you ever go back?

SABATINO: No.

LEVINE: To visit?

SABATINO: Everybody said to me, "What, you never went back to visit?" Ah, I never did. My husband don't know nobody there. And then I couldn't afford it. I'm happy I'm here.

LEVINE: So how is, um, how is this time of your life?

SABATINO: This time?

LEVINE: This time in your older age? How . . .

SABATINO: Oh, fine, fine.

LEVINE: Yeah?

SABATINO: I get along pretty good. I got my big boss here home. (Dr. Levine laughs) He never got married. So I ain't alone. Then I have another son in Florida, and another son, he -- just lost him two years ago. I had three boys.

LEVINE: You had three boys, uh-huh.

SABATINO: My husband died in '46, so they all went to work. We all got along very nice.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did you go back to work after your husband died, or you didn't?

SABATINO: I never went. They wouldn't let me go. My sons wouldn't let me go to work. So they went. He's the only one that went to school, got an education. The other two, they went to work.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So what are you proud of in your life? What makes you feel proud?

SABATINO: Uh, everypl-I'm -- I don't -- they took me all over with them, wherever they went. I saw a lot of places here, which I lived in there I wouldn't never seen nothing. Yeah, I went all over with them. They took me all over, the other two. Vacation in Wildwood, and in Florida, I went two or three times. And now that my son's there I went, too. Yeah. In fact, he calls me every Sunday, and he wants me to go, stay there with him for a while. I (?) here. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Well, tell me, do you think you, do you think you have some ways that are Italian? In other words, ways that you, that you kept up

that were, that you were used to when you were in Italy, and now you're here, but, that are a carry-over? In other words, some parts of you maybe are Italian, some parts American. Do you have a little of both, would you say?

SABATINO: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. I associate with a lot of people born here. I belong to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and that's where I met all these nice people born here, you know. And we had a club of eight woman. We call ourselves The Friendly Eight. I had a lot of good times.
(she laughs)

LEVINE: Is that club still going?

SABATINO: No. They're all gone except one, now she's sick, and me. They're all gone.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, what, do you think having been born in Italy and living there for eight years, do you think that affected the whole rest of your life?

SABATINO: You mean here?

LEVINE: Yeah.

SABATINO: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: How do you think it made a difference to you, being born in Italy and then coming here?

SABATINO: Well, I was poorer there. We were, you know, we couldn't afford a lot of things. Because, see, I told you, my father came here to make money, send for us, because it was a better place for the family, you know, for his family to live. And he sacrificed, he lived with one of his relatives. He boarded there, you know. And she used to save the money. And, oh, he put it in the bank. I don't remember now. When he got enough, he sent for us. Oh, it was better living here.

LEVINE: The whole family felt that they were glad they had come.

SABATINO: Oh, yeah. All of them. They all married nice wives, my brothers, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah. Is there anything else you can think of that you might, that you remember about Italy or coming here, anything?

SABATINO: I don't think so. I don't know.

LEVINE: How did you feel when you visited Ellis Island?

SABATINO: Uh, now, you mean?

LEVINE: Yeah.

SABATINO: Oh, I liked it very much. I enjoyed that day, yeah. Oh, then he says, "Let- " my son says, "Let's go see the movies." They have movies. And I went over, he put me in the wheelchair because I couldn't walk, and we went and I sat on the side. I didn't sit, I stood in the wheelchair near the wall. And everybody, the audience was there, you know. Then, uh, this man with the thing went up and he come there, and he -- first he made a speech. I don't know what he said, a lot of things. He says, "If anybody was born in Italy." And he went and say, "My mother here is born in Italy." And that's -- then he started to ask me a lot of questions. That's how I got to it. Yeah. Then I met him a couple of times after when we come out. He said, "Are you still having a good time?" Oh, and the clapping they gave me!

LEVINE: When you said you had come through . . .

SABATINO: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, that's nice.

SABATINO: Clap. Oh, I was so embarrassed. I says, ah. Because of where I was, they were all looking at me. If I was sitting down, it wouldn't have been bad, and with them. Everybody was looking, clapping. I was the only one that day, that I was born in Italy.

LEVINE: Wow. Well, that's what Ellis Island's all about.

SABATINO: And this man says to me, then we met him on the first floor, and he hit me, "Hey, Mama, are you enjoying yourself?" I says, "Yes, I am." (she laughs) He remembered me in the wheelchair.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, this sounds like a good place to stop. I want to thank you very much. Very interesting, a very interesting story.

SABATINO: It's too bad I can't speak too good.

LEVINE: Oh, don't apologize. You did great. Okay. Well, this is Janet Levine. It's April 6, 1994. I'm here in North Bergen, New Jersey, with Helen Sabatino, and, uh, let's see, how old are you now, at this time?

VICTOR: Ninety-two.

LEVINE: Ninety-two.

SABATINO: Yes.

LEVINE: Ninety-two. Okay. Well, thank you very much.

SABATINO: Oh, you're welcome. I was born in 19, uh, I got to wait till October, I mean, to be ninety-three.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, thank you.

