EI-462
SELMA MONSOUR ABDALLAH GALLO
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INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.
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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 7/1998
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: CHARLES MITCHELL, 7/2006

LEBANON (BORN U.S.), 1923 **RESIDENCE: ST. LOUIS**
AGE 7 **US RESIDENCE: PROVIDENCE, RI**
PASSAGE ON "THE CANADA": U.S. TO LEBANON IN 1921
PASSAGE ON "THE ASIA": LEBANON TO U.S. IN 1923
PORT OF EMBARKATION: BEIRUT/NAPLES

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, April 18, 1994. I'm sorry, April 19, 1994. I'm here at the Ellis Island studio with Selma Gallo. Mrs. Gallo was born in the U.S. in Minnesota, and then was taken to Lebanon by her mother when she was very young, and then returned to the U.S. from Lebanon in 1923. She was seven years old when she came back to this country, and she was detained for two nights here at Ellis Island. I think I got all that correct. Did I? Good. She shakes her head yes. (he laughs) Mrs. Gallo, can we begin with you giving me your birth date, please.

GALLO: March 25, 1916.

SIGRIST: And can you also tell me your, your whole name, your maiden name, all of that.

GALLO: Oh, Salmi Hanna Monsour.

SIGRIST: Can you spell all of that for me, please?

GALLO: Oh. Abdallah Biet al Khabazza. Salmi, which becomes Selma.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Salmi, please?

GALLO: S-A-L-M-I, Salmi. Monsour, M-O-N-S-O-U-R. Hanna, which means John, J-O-H-N, Abdalla, A-B-D-A-L-L-A, from the house of bread. Biet al Khabazza.

SIGRIST: You have to spell that more. (he laughs)

GALLO: Biet al Khabazza, which means B-I-E-T, Biet, A-L means the house of, Khabazza, K-H-A-B-A-Z-Z-A.

SIGRIST: My goodness. Why so many names? What does all of that mean specifically?

GALLO: Well, when I returned in 1963 all I had to do was give my full name, and I had the whole village take me to where I belonged.

SIGRIST: This is when you visited Lebanon later on in 1963.

GALLO: In 1963 was my first time back, and I've been back fourteen years, fourteen times.

SIGRIST: But explain to me, you've got this long string of names. Why so many names do you have?

GALLO: Because being of Arab descent, you had to have not only your name, but the house that you came from, which is very important. See, like Jesus came from the house of Ruth. And, uh, because this is how they can trace you way back.

SIGRIST: I see. Well, let me begin by asking you how your parents ended up in America in the first place.

GALLO: My mother ran away from her village to come to this country to become a nun.

SIGRIST: Can you elaborate on that?

GALLO: She tried to join the convent and her father wouldn't let her because he was a big money land, land-rich person. And she entered her convent in the next village, and he'd come and take her out. So she decided to run away, and she did. She took a boat

first. She ended up in, down in Mexico, and her sister from Minneapolis went after her.

SIGRIST: What year was that?

GALLO: I think it, I don't know, really. I was born 19, when my mother went back, 1916. 18, 1870, 1888.

SIGRIST: 1888. And, um, what was your mother's name?

GALLO: My mother's name was Kalima Tounous Miehan.

SIGRIST: Can you spell all that, please?

GALLO: Which becomes, yes. K-A-L-I-M-A. Tounous is T-O-U-N-O-U-S. Miehan is M-I-E-H-A-N.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about what your mother's personality was like.

GALLO: She was wonderful. My mother could not read or write any language, but she spoke four.

SIGRIST: And what town from Lebanon did she come from?

GALLO: She came from Jadbra, J-A-D-B-R-A.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever talk about her childhood and her background? Tell me some of the things she told you

about her growing up.

GALLO: She told me only because I asked. She came from a house of five girls and one boy. The one boy was favored, the five girls were not, so they had to be, which they are still today in the Arab world, shadows for the men. She worked very, very hard in the fields, although her father was wealthy. And, uh, come back home and take care of the rest, where they cooked and made syrup from carob, you know that, carob?

SIGRIST: Carob?

GALLO: Carob. Okay, carob. And, um, grape, to make the wine, and that's it.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about what a woman's place is like in this society?

GALLO: Uh, now or then?

SIGRIST: Well, then, say.

GALLO: Then it stunk. Just like the Arab women are living today.

SIGRIST: You said the women were basically chatteled.

GALLO: Yes, yup. In Lebanon not so much, because Lebanon is Christian, see? The rest of the Arab world is Muslim. Lebanon is the only really Christian country among an Arab world.

SIGRIST: Interesting. So, so your mother came to this country with the intention of joining a convent, ended up in Mexico. She already had a sister in this country.

GALLO: Minneapolis, yes. She went after her.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me a little bit about what unfolds after that.

GALLO: What unfold after is that her sister married her to her first cousin, whose name was Tonius, which becomes Thomas, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. You marry your first cousins. You still do, by the way.

SIGRIST: This was a common practice.

GALLO: Common, but they arranged the marriage, so she married him, and she had two children, Anthony and Radat, which becomes Rose.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Radat, please?

GALLO: Radat, R-A-D-A-T. And he died when Radat was nine months old. My father lived in St. Louis, but he knew that Kalima was in Minneapolis and she was just widowed. So my father went over from St. Louis to Minneapolis to court my mother.

SIGRIST: So this is a complicated story. Your father is actually your mother's second husband.

GALLO: Yes. She didn't want to marry him, because she still wanted to become a nun. So her people said to her you have to marry Hanna Monsour, John Monsour, and she did.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about what your father's personality was like.

GALLO: My father was a very, very strict man. At times he was cruel. And I took it because I was taught to love my father and my mother. The fourth commandment tells us so. But I fought him from the time I was born, I think. And he always said that nothing could break my spirit.

SIGRIST: Is there a particular experience or a particular story that you would relate to us about your father's

strictness or something that you did wrong?

GALLO: That's bad. Do I have to say that? That's bad.

SIGRIST: Well, if you'd like to, you may.

GALLO: Well, my father's mother came from a house of royalty, the house of bread. And my grandfather was a troubadour, so she broke all rules and regulations by marrying him. So the family, like the Jews, they sat in shiva. She was dead. They live out in the woods, near the cedars of Lebanon. And she had four boys. My father was the only one who stayed. She could never return back to her people. So my grandfather left her and came to St. Louis, Missouri, abandoned her. My father was the only one who stayed and he promised his mother, after he buried her, he would go to St. Louis and make his father pay for everything. He did. He did. He used to get drunk and go around shooting all the lights out. And my father, grandfather, finally sent him to Butte, Montana, where the cousins were, who took the name of Roger, which means Roger. They had a, still do, had a cattle ranch in Butte, Montana, a horse ranch. He punched cattle, and come back to St. Louis. And then he went to

Minneapolis and married my mother.

SIGRIST: So your father is kind of a rough and ready sort of person.

GALLO: Yes.

SIGRIST: This is a tough background that he came from.

GALLO: That's why I'm tough. That's why I'm tough. Yes. I was taught to take care of myself. I was taught never to step back for anybody, as long as I was right, to fight for it, and I did. And he didn't like it when I got older, because he told me, he told me to fight for it if I thought I was right, always for the underdog. So, therefore, I am not afraid. There's a lot of things I could tell you, but you don't want to hear that.

SIGRIST: Well, it's up to you if you'd like to tell us, but we like to talk about the family a lot. It's important.

GALLO: Well, he did. And then, of course, when that happened, the reason why we went to Lebanon is my youngest sister was born in St. Louis, and she was sickly. My mother said we take her back because only goat's milk will save her, which it did.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about, about Minnesota? Do you have any memories of those early years in Minnesota?

GALLO: Yes, because I've been back six and seven times.

SIGRIST: Well, forget, forget about being back. What do you actually remember firsthand about those early years when you were just a small child? Anything?

GALLO: Four years old, I don't remember. I remember St. Louis.

SIGRIST: Does your mother, did your mother ever tell you any, a story in association with your birth?

GALLO: Yes. Okay. My mother, my people, my mother's people sell dry goods. They used to, peddlers, on their back. She used to leave Minneapolis, get her goods, and go out into the Indian country. And when it snowed she'd stay with the Swedes and the Indians, in winter. She always had these baubles and bright colored stuff, so they took care of her. That's where my mother picked up the Fairbanks tribe language. She used to tell me all this. Then when she would come back with all the money, all the goods were sold, and all the money, and she would give it to a local

Lebanese man, buy more goods, and wait, and go out again. That's what she told me about that. So when I went back when I was older, I traveled all the steps, the places that my mother went.

SIGRIST: But did she ever tell you anything associated with, with your birth, I mean, anything about when she was carrying you, or if she delivered you under, under unusual circumstances? Nothing like that?

GALLO: No, we didn't talk about births then. We talked about everything else.

SIGRIST: Tell me about, um, you and your sister you've mentioned. Were there any other children?

GALLO: Yes, we were two boys and three girls.

SIGRIST: Can you name everybody please for me.

GALLO: My oldest brother Anthony, my sister Rose, my buddy, my brother, Salim. We called him Sammy.

SIGRIST: Is that S-A-L-I-M, Salim?

GALLO: Yes, Salim. In English it translated to Sammy. Myself, and my sister Vicky. And my brother and I were the only ones who could remember everything

because no matter where I went, from one village to another, I would take my brother. And I told him to pay attention to learn, and this is how, how he remembers everything.

SIGRIST: This is after you had gone over to Lebanon.

GALLO: Yes.

SIGRIST: Now, you said you do remember St. Louis. Did your family move to St. Louis before you went to . . .

GALLO: Yes.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you remember about that.

GALLO: I remember, see this finger?

SIGRIST: Yep.

GALLO: I remember hurting that finger, and I was crying, and my father said he'd give me fifty cents if I stopped crying, and I did. Okay? I remember we went to German Catholic school, so therefore I spoke another, German, Arabic, English, French. And then . . .

SIGRIST: But you didn't speak all this in St. Louis?

GALLO: The only thing I didn't speak in St. Louis was French.

I picked up French in Lebanon, because we had to go to the French convent.

SIGRIST: How long were you in St. Louis before you left for Lebanon?

GALLO: Uh, Vicky, my sister, was nine months. When she was born, I guess three years.

SIGRIST: Oh, so a long time, then. Do you remember the house you lived in in St. Louis?

GALLO: Yes. We lived on East 14th Street. Yep.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the inside of the apartment for me, or the house?

GALLO: It was not an apartment. It was a terrible place. It was, uh, just before you crossed the East St. Louis Bridge to go into East St. Louis, Illinois. And it was, uh, let's say this. We were very poor, but I didn't know we were poor. And when my sister was born we had these great, great big doors that open up, you know how they have in the olden days, and, uh, they closed them, and we had, what do you call them, transom?

SIGRIST: The transoms?

GALLO: And I could hear somebody, and I said, "Sammy, I hear a baby." He said, "Get down from there. Papa will kill you when he finds out." I says, "Get the chair and hold it. I'm going to find out what's going on." And I did. And I heard a baby, and I saw a baby being born. That was my sister Vicky.

SIGRIST: Oh, she'll appreciate hearing that.

GALLO: She's a beautiful girl.

SIGRIST: Your mother wanted to take the kids to Lebanon.

GALLO: To run away from my father.

SIGRIST: I see. Okay. Because that was going to be my next question, how did your father feel about going over there. Well, explain a little bit about that.

GALLO: My mother was a very strong, very powerful woman. She didn't like what my father was doing, so she was going to leave him, because there's no such thing as divorce, and take a boat, and go to Lebanon, and leave him there. Consequently, he found us six months later. He knew where to find us. But we did leave

him. Then we spent our time there, and again we left Lebanon to leave him there.

SIGRIST: Interesting.

GALLO: And he followed he, and we ended up in, in Rhode Island, Providence, instead of back to Minneapolis.

SIGRIST: All right. Well, let me, um, ask you this. What do you remember about leaving St. Louis? Do you remember packing and getting ready to go?

GALLO: Yes.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you remember about . . .

GALLO: I remember we took two ships. It made, no, they were S.S. Asia and the S.S. Canada. Now, I don't know which one we took. It took us thirty-one days to go, twenty-nine days to come back.

SIGRIST: So it takes you thirty-one days to get to Lebanon.

GALLO: Yes.

SIGRIST: What time of year are you traveling in?

GALLO: It wasn't cold. It wasn't cold, because we were always on top deck.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you knew about Lebanon, or what you were thinking before you got there, anything?

GALLO: Nope. I learned everything by asking my mother. No, no. I remember that, uh, we were steerage, and I didn't like the food.

SIGRIST: Did, uh, can you explain to me, uh, if you were going because your mother wanted to get away from your father, can you explain to me exactly how you left? I mean, did you leave in the dark of night, did you leave while Dad was at work?

GALLO: I think we did leave at night, because my mother had it fixed with her cousin to take us in this great, big, I believe it was an open packet, an open packet car, to take us to the train. From the train we came to Ellis Island. That's how.

SIGRIST: And then from, from the train from New York you went to Lebanon.

GALLO: We got on the S.S. Asia or the S.S. Canada. I don't know which one now. Whichever one it was, I know they were French liners.

SIGRIST: And what do you remember about the trip going to Lebanon, going over to Lebanon?

GALLO: Terrible. We went by steerage, and I remember the bunks were like this, and I didn't like it. It was time for us to eat, they'd give us a tin plate, and it used to rust, and the silverware rust, one fork. And you'd go by, and they'd slap the food in there. And I always said, "I don't want to eat this slop," and somebody else behind me would crack me one. Then I got sick. I think, no, I got sick coming back. They put me in the hospital ship. I stayed sick because the food was good.

SIGRIST: Well, good. Well, let's talk about that when we get you back from Lebanon.

GALLO: Okay.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you, um, uh, did you have to take two boats? Did you go to France and then take another boat to . . .

GALLO: No. Our ship stopped going in Havre. And my mother knew what was going to happen to us, so she was prepared. She has baskets of oranges and lemons,

because she was going to make sure that her kids weren't going to get scurvy or get sick. And we picked up more from Havre, France. And by the time we got there, we had our own fruit and vegetables.

SIGRIST: And then where did the boat dock once it got to . . .

GALLO: In Beirut.

SIGRIST: In Beirut.

GALLO: Yeah, where the Sixth Fleet parks its fleet now.

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollections of arriving in Beirut?

GALLO: Yes.

SIGRIST: And what this all meant to you?

GALLO: Yep.

SIGRIST: You're a little American kid, for all intensive purposes.

GALLO: When I arrived, my mother said, "Don't forget your manners, now. You're American, but you know how American people are." So I said to my brother, "Remember your manners. These people don't know us." And a great big touring car picked us up and took us

to the village, which was thirty-two miles from downtown Beirut north. And we climbed the mountain, and that night everybody was out, and they were cooking eggs. Eggs outside. And nothing smelled so good as cooking eggs, and great big loaves of cinnamon bread, you know? You tear it up, oh, it was so good.

SIGRIST: Of course, this world couldn't look more different than St. Louis.

GALLO: That is why I remember everything, because everything was so different, and, you know, it was hard to believe that it stayed in my mind.

SIGRIST: What year did you go over to Lebanon?

GALLO: 1921.

SIGRIST: '21. Well, good. Well, you say everything's different. Tell me about other things that you had never seen before that you saw in Lebanon.

GALLO: My mother gave us strict orders when the camels come through not to go any closer to them, because they kidnap children. So I says, speak to my brother, and I used to say to him, "Keep away from the camels, Sammy. Keep away from the camels, because they sell

children." And, so my brother and I would step aside. When I wanted, when I didn't want the rest of the family to know what we were talking about, we all spoke English. That way we were safe. And I had some cousins which to this day don't like. They were terrible to us. So Sammy and I would play cowboys and Indians in English. What a job we did on them! (she laughs) I love it! But today owns all my mother's property, by the way. Okay?

SIGRIST: Um, tell me about with whom you lived in Lebanon.

GALLO: My mother had her own home. Her father's home was hers, right on top of the mountain, which is called Jadbra.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

GALLO: J-A-D-B-R-A. It's right on top of the mountain, and it all belong to the house of Minham[ph], like I told you. And that's where we stayed.

SIGRIST: Can you describe that house for me?

GALLO: Yes. It's built out of, like Mexico builds. Cement, not wood. Everything's cement. Marble floors. And, of course, everybody slept on the floor. We didn't

have any beds. Everybody slept on the floor. And there was no windows, just bars, up in the mountain, and you'd look up and you'd see the stars. And if you looked this way, there was the Mediterranean right below us.

SIGRIST: So it's very lovely.

GALLO: Oh, it's beautiful.

SIGRIST: Tell me how you heated the house.

GALLO: They used to, it really didn't need heat, but when they did they had these, uh, you know, those black things you cook outside?

GALLO: Yeah, like a little grill of some sort.

SIGRIST: Yes, yes. And they have some, like, something like sterno, or something like that. That's the only heat you needed.

SIGRIST: And what kind of furniture did you have in the house?

GALLO: Uh, they didn't have furniture like us. All they had was furniture for sitting. That was very important. Because when people came in, you sat them. And those were our chairs, see, that's all. No, uh, nothing

like we have in this country. It was all chairs for the people who come to visit. Then you vacate, because that's a sign of respect. You sit on the floor.

SIGRIST: I see. So the chair is almost like a symbol of hospitality.

GALLO: Exactly.

SIGRIST: This is a special place for people to sit.

GALLO: Absolutely. Yep. That came first. Hospitality was first. It was very important.

SIGRIST: Tell me how food was prepared.

GALLO: My aunt used to stoop. Everything was done crouched, on an open flame. And she could have a seven course dinner in no time.

SIGRIST: What do people eat in Lebanon?

GALLO: Oh, we eat a lot of rice, lamb. We take one piece of lamb, this big, and we cut it in different pieces. This is we grind it up to make kibbe, K-I-B-B-E.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

GALLO: Which is raw lamb, you mix it with whole wheat, which is called bulgarie, B-U-L-G-A-R-I-E. It's whole wheat. And you mix it up, and then you put all the seasoning in it, and you eat it raw. When you get through eating that raw, you'll make it in cakes like hamburgers and fry it, or you put it in a tray and you make layers of the kibbe, and what's snobrae in English, pine nuts on top, and another layer of kibbe.

SIGRIST: What was the word you used for pine nuts? Snobrae?

GALLO: Snobrae. Snobrae. S-N-O-B-R-A-E. Italians use that, too, also. They call it . . .

SIGRIST: Pignole.

GALLO: Pignole nuts, okay.

SIGRIST: Tell me more about food. What did you drink?

GALLO: Uh, tea. I could never tell you what the tea was, because we don't have it in this country. It was dark green, and it was delicious. And, of course, the national drink is hara[ph], which is called uzo in, for the Greeks. Powerful stuff. And Turkish coffee. That was my job to make a Turkish coffee.

SIGRIST: How did you make Turkish coffee in Lebanon?

GALLO: I hated it. You get a small copper pot, open top, let the water boil. When it comes to a boil, you take a teaspoon for each cup, and the coffee looked like powder, awful. Then you put it in, you stir it, you take it off the flame till the film goes down. You put it back on the flame three times until when you poured it it was like chocolate. And, of course, it's served on a small cup like this, about, what, two inches? Which was called achwe[ph].

SIGRIST: Can you spell that? (they laugh)

GALLO: No, I can't. Achwe[ph]. Remember, we use a lot of K's and H's.

SIGRIST: That's why I'm asking you to spell everything. It's . . .

GALLO: Right. And when you do that, that's why the names have been changed, because they could not put down the K's and the H's.

SIGRIST: Right, right.

GALLO: So, like my last name is Khabbaz, K-H-A-B-B-A-Z. In

English it ruins it.

SIGRIST: Tell me about, did you have a garden with the house?

GALLO: Everybody had gardens.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did you grow in the garden?

GALLO: We had sunken gardens. Everything was grown in the sunken gardens. All, everything, including tobacco.

SIGRIST: For your own consumption, or did you sell the tobacco?

GALLO: No. The government wanted seventy-five percent of the tobacco that the farmers or people planted. They could keep twenty-five percent. In English it's called alatakia[ph]. And it was imported to this country and Europe as a, uh, very expensive addition to tobacco, because once you grew the leaves they'd be huge leaves, and they'd be just like velvet, and my job was to pick them. And after you picked them, you'd bring them on top of your house, because everybody had flat roofs, like you see now in Jerusalem. Okay, they had flat roofs, and the sun would dry them, they would crackle them. And that was my job to pick them up and crackle them, because they smoked the pipe, you know? Ariglic, it's called

ariglic. Ariglic, A-R-I-G-L-I-C. And you know what a water pipe is? Well, that tobacco was made for that, with the charcoal and the tobacco, and they'd sit back, all the men, and smoke, hours at a time, while the women waited on them to light their.

SIGRIST: And that was sort of a pastime, people would smoke recreationally?

GALLO: Absolutely. I have two pipes at home.

SIGRIST: Um, tell me what people wore for clothing in Lebanon. Obviously you're arriving in completely different clothing than these people.

GALLO: When I, yes, yeah. They wore always long, like you see the people coming in from Italy? Uh, Ireland, and from Russia? They came with skirts. They always had skirts, not dresses, always with the head covered, because you had to cover your head. That was very important. You don't expose your arms or your shoulders. And that was their clothing.

SIGRIST: But, now when your mother was in America, she probably didn't wear this.

GALLO: Uh-uh. We don't wear the veil. We are Christians.

Only Muslim women wear the veil. We are Christians, so we do not wear the veil.

SIGRIST: This is probably a good time to start talking about the religious life in Lebanon and how your family practiced their religion, and that sort of thing, if they did.

GALLO: Let me tell you now. Lebanon was a free country. That is why she became Lebanon. She is actually a part of Syria. Many years ago, centuries ago, she was Phoenecia. So being way up in the mountain, nobody would bother her. How are you going to shoot her? There was no airplanes. So she practiced her religion of the Mornite faith.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Mornite?

GALLO: Mornite. M-O-R-N-I-T-E. There are not too many. There's a big diocese in Detroit, Michigan. The Mornite faith. They said their mass and followed Jesus in his language, because Jesus spoke Aramaic. My people spoke Aramaic.

SIGRIST: And this is a Christian faith, obviously.

GALLO: Mornite Catholic. We're the first ones, next to the

Orthodox, okay? And they were left alone. People who migrated from Shdabra[ph] to Minneapolis to this day support that village because that's where they migrated from, and they took an oath to always support that village by sending the holy Eucharist and things like that to them.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me a little bit about those couple of years you were in Lebanon how the church service, or how you practiced at home, that sort of thing.

GALLO: All right. It was very, very, uh, fancy. I miss it to this day.

SIGRIST: The church was fancy, or . . .

GALLO: Yes, and the clothing was fancy, our priests dressed up, and the women sat on one side, the men sat on the other, and the whole mass was chanted and sung. And the incense, and the bells, and, oh, it was just positively beautiful, and everybody had to be quiet because the mass was going on. And I know my priest always wore, well, I forgot what you call it, a great big crown on his head. And he always had to have a beard down to here. He was not an ordinary Roman priest. So they, he was privileged. The Marnite

people are privileged Catholics.

SIGRIST: Well, and it sounds like, like the whole presentation is very sort of orthodox in a way, with the long beard.

GALLO: Yes. It's just like the Orthodox.

SIGRIST: Very elaborate.

GALLO: It takes two or three hours for a mass.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of the prayers in your native language?

GALLO: Yes.

SIGRIST: Could you say one for us on tape?

GALLO: I may, I know, I remember the Our Father. Sometimes, you know, Arabic words, you cannot translate into English and it becomes the same words.

SIGRIST: Could you say the Our Father for us?

GALLO: Uh, now that you asked me . . .

SIGRIST: Maybe later, maybe while we're still talking. We'll do it at the end of the interview.

GALLO: I say it when I'm in church.

SIGRIST: Okay. (he laughs)

GALLO: Now it won't come to me. (she prays in Arabic) Allah always means God. He's always in there. I can't say it right now. I have to think.

SIGRIST: All right. Well, we'll, we'll catch you later on it. Tell me how you practiced your religion at home. What did you do at home?

GALLO: Up till the time I got married . . .

SIGRIST: Well, just, in Lebanon, for those two years, how, how did you practice your religion at home?

GALLO: Oh, every night, every night we had to have the litany of the Blessed Mother. Everybody kneels, you go to church. The church is right there. Every night for services, and litany. And the candles are lit. And, by the way, I was altar girl there, and my brother was altar boy. So this altar girl business started from way down there. And, uh, we were subject to the priest. He was our boss. Whatever he said, went.

SIGRIST: Was this the only religion in this town? Did everyone

in this village . . .

GALLO: Marnites, right.

SIGRIST: There were no other groups of any sort? They . . .

GALLO: No. Just Marnite people.

SIGRIST: All of this.

GALLO: That's all it was.

SIGRIST: Did the priest ever visit the house?

GALLO: Oh, yes, constant.

SIGRIST: What was an occasion for the priest to visit the house?

GALLO: He'd come to visit every, well, during the day and night, and you always had to have a special place for him. You had to wash his feet. That was my job. And then you had to bring him his little goodies, and he'd bless you, and he always lived, well, next door. He lived next door. There was always a place for him. A priest would walk from village to village, and you'd know he was a priest. And the moment he'd stop by a well, the lady of the house would come out and offer

him food, a place to rest, and to wash his feet.

SIGRIST: Again all part of this ceremonial offering of hospitality.

GALLO: And you know why? And nobody goes by your house. Nobody, stranger or not, we have a lot of strangers, before you ask them, in Arabic, to please sit down and eat and rest. And if the traveler has eaten, he will put his hand like this and say thank you. That's all he had to say, which meant, "I've stopped, I've rested, I've eaten."

SIGRIST: I just want to say for the sake of the tape that Mrs. Gallo put her hand, her right hand on her breast, on her right, or the left side of her chest, and that was the sign that . . .

GALLO: That was it, no conversation, see? Because, the reason for that is because when Jesus said to his disciples, "I was hungry, you didn't feed me, I was thirsty, you didn't give me to drink." And they said, "When, Lord?" He said, "The least of my brethren." So my mother always taught me, and my father, "You never know when he's going to appear or how he's going to walk, so you don't stop anybody." Everybody gets a

place.

SIGRIST: All right, we need to . . .

GALLO: I've been doing that ever since, by the way.

SIGRIST: We need to pause right now so Kevin can flip the tapes over, and then we'll continue with Selma Gallo.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: We're now beginning Side Two with Selma Gallo. Mrs. Gallo, I want to get back to your family situation now. You all left, and you left Dad in St. Louis.

GALLO: And a brother. Oh, no, my father in St. Louis, yes.

SIGRIST: And I just want to tell, to ask you what transpired between your father and mother after you got to Lebanon. How did, how did he come after you, and how, did she have communication with him?

GALLO: Oh, yes. Now, she, we went right to our village, which was run by her family, who are powerful. He stayed in Bratroun, which is on the way to Tripoli. Bratroun is B-R-A-T-R-O-U-N. And that's where his

people were, and at the time his uncle was the Chief of Police, whatever we call Chief of Police here, and he warned his nephew, "Do not go near Kalima, because you've been a bad man." So he had to live down in the village, and we lived up in the mountain top.

SIGRIST: Was there any interaction that you know of between your mother and father once he got there.

GALLO: Oh, yes, oh, yes. We spoke constantly, and we'd be with him all the time, and there were certain things he would ask me, and if I thought I should tell him, I would. And if I didn't I'd say in English I'm not going to tell you anything.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how you as a child spent time with your father in Lebanon?

GALLO: In the village, my father was about, I mean, a shoemaker. My uncle next door was a barber. He always wore the Turkish clothes, never took them off until the day he died, and when I last visited him in 1977, tarboush is, you know the Turkish hats that they were and the trousers with the great, big balloons, and the shoes that came up like this, and I'd say to him, "How do you take those pants off?" Because, as I

said, he was a barber, and he had a moustache, it was just like this. He reminded me of Adolph Manchu, you know, it was so thin. And he always said to me that I was a very, very inquisitive child, and I said, "That's the only way I can learn." Now, one day my brother and I were playing cowboys and Indians, and I said, "Sammy, I'm sick and tired of being the bad guy. I'm going to be the good guy, and you be the Indian and you lay down there." He says, "No, you lay down." And my father had guns, because we had wolves. And my father would go chase the wolves at night because they would eat their chickens. And my father built chicken houses in the trees, but the wolves got up there anyway. So I said okay, I laid down, and he didn't know the gun was loaded, and he shot me. I had my eyes closed. That's what saved me. And they were, what do you call them, pellets? BB guns, or something? And I'll never forget, the doctor next door came, and they were taking these pellets out of my face, and they had made holes in my face. I remember that one. Because we were playing cowboys and Indians. My father punished my brother for that, because he said he should have known better, because he was older.

SIGRIST: Yeah, you could have gotten hurt. Do you remember how your father punished your brother?

GALLO: Oh, yes, oh, yes. Turned him right over and just beat him, like they're doing to that kid in China. Oh, it was awful. Terrible. This is where they, this is where they were.

SIGRIST: Tell me some of the other things that you and maybe your brother Sammy did for fun when you were kids in Lebanon. What was there to do that you really looked forward to doing?

GALLO: Uh, we ran up and down the mountains, and the best thing was every day we had to go for salt. So my mother would pack us the big Syrian bread. You'd open it up and you'd throw olives in it. That was our lunch. We'd run down, and wait for the tide. We'd swim in the Mediterranean, wait for the tide. When the tide left, it always deposited salt in cracks, okay? And then we'd wait until it was sort of dry, pick it up, and take it home for cooking. Their salt, to this day, is very, very coarse, it's not refined. Right from the ocean. Then another thing was we had to go out and get, pick, uh, sugar cane. That was our

job, pick a lot of sugar cane. I'd eat half by the time I got through to the house. And then to take care of the leaves, the tobacco leaves.

SIGRIST: So that was your . . .

GALLO: That was enough.

SIGRIST: The small children would do that sort of thing.

GALLO: That was enough. Then if we were good, they'd let us down in the village, and we'd run all the way down, you know? We never wore any shoes until we went on a boat to come to this country. That's why I don't like shoes today.

SIGRIST: Tell me about your older, you have older brothers and sisters, correct?

GALLO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And, of course, they would be just that much more American. They had spent more time in America. How did they adjust to all of this?

GALLO: Very nice. I have an older sister right now who's out in Illinois. She's five years older than I am. And when we first went she told my mother, "I am not

living in no village." Okay? So she said, "I'll be a domestic to my rich people in Beirut." So she became a domestic, because she always loved the night life. To this day she loves the night life. On my way coming back, should I tell you that?

SIGRIST: On your way coming back . . .

GALLO: When we had to leave Lebanon?

SIGRIST: In 1923, yeah, go ahead, tell me.

GALLO: Well, we had to stop in Naples. Everybody got off the ship. The men and women, women and children on one side, and the men on the other side. They all had to be deloused because there was somebody had bugs in their head. And we stayed there three days. And my sister did not want to go get deloused, so for three days she roamed Naples. She did a beautiful job. I don't know where she got the money, or whatever. But she remembered she didn't like it because she didn't like the way they put females down, and she never forgot it. So every time I wanted to go back, she wouldn't come back with me.

SIGRIST: Forgive my growling stomach. (he laughs)

GALLO: I am.

SIGRIST: Um, well, why don't we get you out of Lebanon then.

GALLO: Okay.

SIGRIST: Why did your mother decide to leave Lebanon when she did?

GALLO: When?

SIGRIST: Why did your mother decide that she needed to get out of Lebanon now?

GALLO: You mean after we were there?

SIGRIST: After you were there, you'd been there for a couple of years.

GALLO: All right. Because we were Americans, and she did not want us to lose our American citizenship and to grow up American, because my mother always believed everybody should be free. She was a one-minded person. Nobody tells you what to do.

SIGRIST: Well, then, am I to believe that she was beginning to see in her children, you were adopting sort of Lebanese ways?

GALLO: Yes. She liked that part of it, because that taught us respect, hospitality, and feeling for other people. People walk in your house, you immediately stopped whatever you were doing, gave them a seat and went out to make Turkish coffee and present them with a bowl of fruit.

SIGRIST: But she didn't want it to go too far. She wanted to retain . . .

GALLO: No, I think it was time for her to go back to Minneapolis to, uh, just to go back to America so her kids could get an American education.

SIGRIST: And that was her intention, to go to Minneapolis when she came back to this country.

GALLO: Yes.

SIGRIST: Well, now, what about your father in all of this? You know, here's your mother scooping up the kids again, and off you're going. Did she let him know that that's what was happening?

GALLO: When we left, we left my oldest brother there and him, get on the ship.

SIGRIST: You left your oldest brother with your father.

GALLO: Yep.

SIGRIST: Were they living together at that time, or . . .

GALLO: No. My father was in the village, and my brother was up in Batrous[ph], Shdabra[ph].

SIGRIST: I see.

GALLO: And that's it. So my father found her six months later.

SIGRIST: Did he know you were leaving, or did he . . .

GALLO: No, but he knew. Once we left he knew we were going. How he ever found out we were in Providence, Rhode Island, I don't know. But he found out. We had an aunt there, which I'm named after.

SIGRIST: Well, so, did the ship leave from Beirut?

GALLO: Yes. Beirut Harbor.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the trip back to America? This is 1923. What time of the year is it?

GALLO: It had to be warm, because it was all on top deck. I

remember . . .

SIGRIST: You said you were sick going back.

GALLO: Yes, and I wanted to stay sick. I remember the third class people, the first class people up there dancing, eating beautiful food, and I'm looking through the hatch. I know that. And we were playing on the top deck because my mother got permission to allow us to play on the top deck. Why? I don't know. I think my sister bribed the captain of the ship.

SIGRIST: Can you elaborate on that, please?

GALLO: Hmmm. Well, when I say first class, you have to know what a first class ship is, okay? You had to have money then. And she, she was always smart, so she saw him fooling around with somebody else's wife. So she threatened him. She said, "You let my mother come up on deck to wash clothes and my sisters and brothers play, and I'll keep my mouth shut." It was a deal. And he's also the same captain, I don't know what he was, he gave us our first vaccination. So everybody's got this who came with me on that boat.

SIGRIST: Now, when you're going back to America, you didn't

have many memories of what it had been like in America. What did, what were you thinking of going back to America?

GALLO: I didn't care. All I remembered was St. Louis.

SIGRIST: Did you want to come back to America, or were you sad about leaving Lebanon?

GALLO: Oh, no, no. We had no choice. We didn't even think like that. Your mother went, you went.

SIGRIST: I see.

GALLO: That's it. When you were told to go, you go. There was no such thing as, "Well, I . . ." You know, like today's kids. No, no. You did as your parents asked you to do. In this case, my mother was the boss.

SIGRIST: And you said that the trip back took twenty-nine days. Is that what you said?

GALLO: Yes, I'll never forget that, on the S.S. Asia.

SIGRIST: You came back on the Asia.

GALLO: Yep.

SIGRIST: And, um, tell me about arriving in New York Harbor,

and what you remember.

GALLO: We arrived in New York Harbor, and I kept saying to my brother Sammy. I said, "Sammy, we're in America now. We can do as we please. You don't have to speak another language. We can speak English." So I wanted everybody to know there that I was an American, because they were treating the people terribly!

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when the ship came in?

GALLO: Yes. And I told Sammy, I said, "Do you know what that thing's up there for?" I said, "France gave that to us to be free." And, uh, I had to explain a little more things to him. And coming in, as I said, the Irish ruled.

SIGRIST: Well, wait. You're talking about Ellis Island now?

GALLO: Yes.

SIGRIST: All right. Well, what, how did you get to Ellis Island?

GALLO: On a big boat. We got, from the big boat we got to a small, uh, on the smaller boats, to go into the

harbor.

SIGRIST: I see. Tell me what you remember about Ellis Island.

GALLO: They brought us in here. I remember the stairs of tears. I remarked about it, because it was so wide, people were being pushed like cattle. They didn't care for you. After all this was over, they let us through, because we had American passports. They didn't look in my eyes, but they looked in everybody else's eyes, and sent so many back. But where are they going to send us? And, of course, as I said, I was a fresh American kid, and I kept telling them, "I'm an American, I belong here, you don't." And we went upstairs, up to those rooms. We had to wait there, everybody, three or four families, until somebody came after us from there. We could have gone any place we wanted, being that we were Americans. I doubt very much if there were many Americans. Outside of my family I don't think there were Americans coming back with American passport. So they couldn't treat us too badly. But I watched how they treated the other people, and I went, Sammy and I went to help them. You know, because then I knew, I said, they were misspelling all the names of these people.

However they heard it, that's what they wrote, and I knew better, even at that time, that they were doing it wrong, but they couldn't misspell mine, because it was in my book.

SIGRIST: Now, you said the Irish . . .

GALLO: They were boss.

SIGRIST: Are you talking about the Irish guards, or . . .

GALLO: The Irish doctors.

SIGRIST: Doctors.

GALLO: Or the bosses who let you in. Everything was Irish. They were getting even with the English. Don't you remember that?

SIGRIST: And were they, they were tough on the immigrants?

GALLO: The way English treated them, that's the way the Irish treated the immigrants, the same way. Exactly the same way. And I'll never forget that to my dying day, the time Tammany Hall was boss, too.

SIGRIST: Do you remember where you, you stayed here for a couple of days, correct? Do you remember where you

slept at Ellis Island?

GALLO: Upstairs on the third, all those big rooms?

SIGRIST: Can you describe it for me?

GALLO: Well, it was a, now it's a little bit cleaner. It was a huge room, I would say maybe about thirty by forty, and everybody had a corner, and we had the luggage. And Sammy and I were used to sleeping anyplace, so it didn't bother us where we slept, as long as we were free, and this is where we stayed until a couple of days.

SIGRIST: Did they feed you when you were here?

GALLO: Yes.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about that?

GALLO: I don't remember. I remember something in a pot that gave, that gave us in a tin bowl, you know those blue and white tins? That's what it looked like. I don't remember that at all.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing anything here at Ellis Island that you had never seen before, anything that struck you as being new and different?

GALLO: I remember looking up. I said to my brother, "God, the ceilings are awfully high. What did they do to them?" To me as a kid, they never quit, the ceilings, and this is what I thought, and it was dirty. It was, I remember it was dirty.

SIGRIST: And crowded.

GALLO: And crowded. And how the, those people came with their children, and how they kept pushing them and pushing them, in corners, and kicking them. Oh, yeah, I remember that.

SIGRIST: So that's probably the single strongest impression you have is the bad treatment of the people being processed.

GALLO: Yes, of people. To think that you could treat another human being that way, yes.

SIGRIST: Now, did someone come to Ellis Island to meet you?

GALLO: Yes. My Aunt Selma came from Providence, Rhode Island.

SIGRIST: And, she's the once from Providence. Do you remember anything about the trip to Providence?

GALLO: No. I remember I was in the car, and I thought the car would never stop. I don't remember that at all. I guess we were too tired.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me a little bit about what life was like in Providence. And, because your mother wanted to go to Minneapolis.

GALLO: Yes, it was terrible.

SIGRIST: Why did she, why did she go with your aunt?

GALLO: Because my Aunt Selma was there, and she wanted to see her sister, and I kept saying, "I have an aunt here. Why can't we stop and see her?" And we did. And we stayed. We kept going back and forth to Minneapolis, but actually we stayed. And life there was terrible. My mother used to bake bread to make ends meet. My sister did plier work, jewelry work. She used to make holy rosaries, homework. Then she would go to school to make sure that three, three kids had enough to eat. For a short period of time we had a St. Vincent de Paul home, a Catholic home. You don't give them up your kids. You put your kids there until you get on your feet, and then you take your kids out. And we

were there six months.

SIGRIST: Oh, well, talk about that. That's interesting. And I bet probably it wasn't such an unusual situation, actually.

GALLO: Not then, because they didn't take your children away.

SIGRIST: Right. It was just a place for children to stay while the mother got established.

GALLO: Established.

SIGRIST: Tell me what it was like to live in that home.

GALLO: And I remember I was so fresh that the nuns used to take me with them on Chalkstone Avenue, put great, big, white bows in my hair. I've still got picture of it. And shoes up to here that I buckled with a buckle for buttons, and a white dress. And we'd go in different stores, and we would beg, whatever they gave us. Food, money, drinks. And I was a very good beggar, because the more I begged, the better food I got. And at one time I met my mother selling dry goods, because my people sell dry goods then. And she said, "Selmi, what are you doing here?" I said, "I'm with the nuns, Mom, helping them beg." She didn't

like that. She said, "You're the daughter of so-and-so, and you don't beg." I said, "Well, they asked me to come, and here I am." And, uh, one week later she came in and took us all out.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about what it was like to stay in the home. I mean, was it like a big dormitory, or . . .

GALLO: Yes. They separated my brother and I, and I didn't like that, so I fought with the Mother Superior, and she cracked me a couple of times. I said, "My brother is not used to being without me, and I don't want my brother by himself." He cried all the time, poor thing. All the time, he kept telling me in Arabic, "Please, take me away, I want to be with you." I finally told my mother, "Ma, I'm going after Sammy," and this is what she did.

SIGRIST: Did your mother have her own apartment, or was she living with the aunt?

GALLO: No. No, no, no. We didn't have apartments. They were tenements. And my mother's tenement was three rooms.

SIGRIST: Can you describe those three rooms for me?

GALLO: Yes. We all slept on the floor until she got beds for us, and we'd go to the Salvation Army and get whatever we needed. That's why I'm a strong supporter of the Salvation Army. No matter what we wanted, I'd go to the Salvation Army, and they would give me whatever I needed. I never asked for more than what we needed.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me, was there a Lebanese community in Providence?

GALLO: Yes, that's why we were there. You always go to where your other people are. So we went to Providence because the people from there were from my mother's village, and that's why we went. And there was a community there of Lebanese people. We were Syrians then, because we followed Syria, which we were part of. And only after the Israeli war did we become Lebanese, because Lebanon is still by itself. It became a country by itself.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little more about, um, life in Providence. Tell me about school, when you started going to school in Providence, I assume is where you started, and was it difficult for you because you'd been away from

America so long, and . . .

GALLO: No, no. It was very, very easy for me. In fact, I skipped the first grade, and I skipped the fourth grade because I was so smart, and I have to tell you that. The teachers wanted to know how come I was. That's because I liked geography. I just liked it. I wanted everybody to know how much I knew, I guess. And I did. I was ready to graduate at sixteen years old. And I was thrown out of Classical High School.

SIGRIST: Why?

GALLO: Because the dean did not want to give me my I.Q. test. She said it's people like me that don't belong in this country. That's what she did to me. Because I had hair down to here, black, and I always wore dungarees. And, uh, I had just come from Uniontown, Pennsylvania, ready to graduate, and it was Classical High. And she was a dean, tall woman, long nails, painted. And I said to her, she said, "You have to go back as a junior." I said, "Well, just give me my I.Q. test. I know I don't have to go back." And she said, "All you Catholic Italians are the same." She took her fingers and she stuck it right up in here.

She drew blood. And I said to her, "If you're supposed to be the dean of a school, in the first place, look at my name. You'd know it's not Italian. And my religion is my business, none of yours." So she dug her fingers more. Three times I asked her to let me go, and she didn't. Well, let me tell you, the third one, I started from the bottom here, and I connected. I hit her right in the chin and knocked her right out. I thought I killed her. I kicked her a couple of times.

SIGRIST: Did your mother speak English?

GALLO: Yes.

SIGRIST: Did she speak English from way back when she had been in America, or . . .

GALLO: Yes.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about your mother's adjustment to this second time being in this country. It sounds like it was difficult.

GALLO: Let me tell you about the Lebanese people. They're survivors. If you notice now what they're doing, the don over here, what does he say? Thank you God, then

he moved one foot here. They're survivors.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me about your mother specifically.

GALLO: My mother was a very strong woman. She was smart up here. She wanted to make sure all of the kids get educated, know many, many languages. And she always taught us, "You take a job, you'll contract for eight hours, you'll give eight hours. You don't want to work, you'll leave. You don't shortchange anybody, you don't cheat. You see somebody hungry, bring them home. You see somebody that had no place to sleep, bring him home." I've been doing that ever since.

SIGRIST: So these, these virtues were important to your mother that she bestow these on her children?

GALLO: Yes, absolutely, yeah. The Lebanese people are very, very strong surviving people, and they speak many languages.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about, you said your mother was doing dry cleaning again once she got to Providence.

GALLO: No, no, selling goods.

SIGRIST: Selling, selling. Well, tell me specifically what she

was selling.

GALLO: Well, my people would go, carry about two or three hundred pounds on their heads, and they would have cloth, dresses, all kind of material. They'd go from house to house, to sell.

SIGRIST: It's liked peddling.

GALLO: Peddling, okay. They're the beginners of the peddlers. And this was how she would do it. And when she brought in Providence different places, and I'd say to her, "Ma, how did you know where to do?" She said, "Put in the book Mrs. So-and-so. Okay, third house on the left." "What was the name of the street?" "Never mind the name of the street. Just put third house on the left." And this is how my mother survived. And a couple of times I'd go with her, I'd say to her, "How do you know which streetcar to get on?" She'd watch the words, and she'd remember how they were, that's the street car she'd get on.

SIGRIST: Now, what about, um, any of your siblings. Did they get jobs to contribute to the household?

GALLO: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Because your mother can't make that much money doing this.

GALLO: We all worked in jewelry shops. My brother worked there for the CCC camps. And, uh, my sister and I, older sister, worked in the jewelry shop, making jewelry.

SIGRIST: And then you would contribute what you made . . .

GALLO: No, you don't contribute. You give.

SIGRIST: You gave everything.

GALLO: Yes, that's right.

SIGRIST: I mean, it was just, and then from that money your mother would feed you and . . .

GALLO: We did all right. Baked bread, went to church every night. We had to go to church every night, you know.

SIGRIST: Every night?

GALLO: Every night, because my priest was boss.

SIGRIST: So in, so in America, in Providence, the church was just as strong an influence on its people as . . .

GALLO: It is the boss.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

GALLO: So when my priest used to whack me more than I deserved and I'd complain to my mother, and my father, after he joined us, she'd say to me, "He is boss. He is head of the church, and of the house."

SIGRIST: Well, let's finish up this father saga. Now, Dad was left in Lebanon. You said six months later he . . .

GALLO: He arrived.

SIGRIST: He arrived. Tell me, tell me all about that, everything you know about your father coming back . . .

GALLO: He arrived and came in the house.

SIGRIST: How did he find you, first of all?

GALLO: Don't ask me something . . .

SIGRIST: Because he probably thought you were going to Minneapolis.

GALLO: No. They knew exactly, they knew from the old country exactly where we were. He had people there. They

came right to the house, and all the Lebanese people came out, "Hanna, Hanna's back here!" And it was a big party, and I don't know.

SIGRIST: There was a party?

GALLO: Oh, yes. Every time somebody comes from there, it's a big party.

SIGRIST: Was your mother happy to see your father, or not?

GALLO: I never really knew, because my mother always kept a straight face. Oh, I do know that . . . (she laughs) He became violent again, and we didn't like it, and my mother asked the Chief of Police at the time. He knew how the Lebanese people were, very clannish, no divorce, very Catholic, and he told my father, "Hanna, you have to leave the State of Rhode Island." And my father left the State of Rhode Island, and he ended up in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, with his other cousins, the Rogers. That's what happened.

SIGRIST: So the parents simply lived separated at that point, finally. Now, was that, was that the final . . .

GALLO: No, no.

SIGRIST: . . . chapter in that story, or did Dad keep trying to come back into your lives?

GALLO: No, from St., from Uniontown, Pennsylvania, I asked my mother if we could go live with my father for a while. She said yes. I was fourteen, Sammy was fifteen. I went to Uniontown, Pennsylvania. We lived there two years. I was ready to graduate from there. We came back to Rhode Island, he went to St. Louis, where his father was.

SIGRIST: Why did you want to go and live with your father?

GALLO: It was adventure. It was something different.

SIGRIST: Just something different. Were you, were you dissatisfied at home in Rhode Island?

GALLO: No. No, no. It was, it was embedded in us. We're like bedouins. You can't keep us quiet.

SIGRIST: You just want to wander.

GALLO: Just go, wandering. And, besides, at the time, we could, because the fear of, was instilled in us not to be afraid of anybody or anything. So, therefore, I was not afraid of anything, or anybody.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about what it was like to live with your father, because you really . . .

GALLO: Very strict. And . . .

SIGRIST: What were some of his rules, some of the things you couldn't do.

GALLO: If I told you what I couldn't do, you wouldn't believe it. You would not believe it.

SIGRIST: Well, tell us, in our last few minutes, tell us some of the . . .

GALLO: I was a, really tomboy. I wanted to, any boy could climb a tree, I had to climb higher than him. If I was going to play baseball, I had to be better. If there was a fight, and I'm a dirty fighter. I was taught to be a dirty fighter. I want to fight more than you. And I did things, like my father said, "You don't sit in the window and dangle your legs. You're a young lady." I sat in the window and dangled my legs. Up comes my hair. He'd whack the hell out of me. And I'd do it again. And then he'd say to me again, "I told you not to." I said, "Well, I'm going to do it. There's nothing wrong with it. You want to

beat me? Fine. Beat me." So as much as he was, today you'd call him cruel, really. Uh . . .

SIGRIST: But at that time this is probably not so unusual in, in men from the "old country," quote/unquote.

GALLO: Yep. That's right, yeah, yeah. But as long as I had my brother Sammy, my brother Sammy and I were always, we never, we were, from the time we were born, we were always together.

SIGRIST: But was Sammy, was his personality as defiant as yours was?

GALLO: No, no, no. I'm, I'm the one that did it.

SIGRIST: You were the trouble. (he laughs)

GALLO: When my father would beat him up, because he was older, and I'd say, "Biet, I'm the one that instigated it. You're going to do anything, you beat me up, not Sammy." And I would always come to his rescue.

SIGRIST: How do you think your mother felt about you wanting to go live with your dad?

GALLO: Okay. He was my father. There was none of that like it is today, no.

SIGRIST: Well, and she probably wouldn't have expressed her true emotions to you, anyway, yes?

GALLO: No, because that's your father. Your father is your father. That's all there is to it. Except that for, uh, everyone's sake, years later, I learned it was for influence sake, when my mother returned, my mother returned back again, third time.

SIGRIST: She did? What year was that?

GALLO: 1939. She left on The Normandy. I'll never forget it.

SIGRIST: And she stayed that time?

GALLO: Because war broke out, she could not come back. I worked with Washington. I had money for her. I worked through the Swiss Red Cross, through Chase National Bank, and when Washington notified me, six months later they said, "Your mother cannot make the trip, she is very sick with cancer." Then the next telegram I got from Washington telling me that my mother died and she was buried in her village.

SIGRIST: You know, your mother is interesting because she's

really a person who has one foot in one world and another foot in another. And it's like her whole life she was, couldn't quite get both feet in one place at one time.

GALLO: And yet she could live in any world. She had this bearing about her, everybody notices it. She had this bearing about her, and, uh, she never backed down to anybody. She always taught us, not me, whatever you believed in, you stick to.

SIGRIST: So she had a very strong moral fiber in her.

GALLO: Yes. And everybody tells me, when I go back and forth to the old country, they say, "Salmi, you're just like your mother." I said, "Thank God." Because I survived. I've survived a lot of things by being like my mother.

SIGRIST: We have just a couple of minutes left, and I was wondering if maybe I could get you to speak a little of something on tape before we close up.

GALLO: Okay. First of all . . .

SIGRIST: Or a little poem, or a nursery rhyme or something?

GALLO: Oh, do you want me to, do you want me to, uh, quote Khalil Gibran?

SIGRIST: Any, I'd just love to hear you speak . . .

GALLO: He was a great poet. He lived in the next village.

SIGRIST: Good.

GALLO: No. I have to tell you, first of all, Paul, your name is Butros, in Arabic.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

GALLO: Butros is B-U-T-R-O-S. See, when it's translated, they lose everything, okay? And P, it is the same. Um . . .

SIGRIST: Could you say just a short poem or something for us in Arabic?

GALLO: No, no.

SIGRIST: No?

GALLO: Not the poems, because I can't remember them offhand. I just want to tell you, (she speaks in Arabic). Which means, you want me to translate that?

SIGRIST: Please.

GALLO: It means that I am happy to be with you because Allah, God, has given me the power and the privilege to be here with you to share this.

SIGRIST: Oh, well, thank you. That's . . .

GALLO: You always must put Allah, because without him we don't exist. Like when you say, "Tomorrow." (Arabic) There is no tomorrow. That's what I learned from them, from the priests and from the prophets who sit down and, they all talk like prophets, you know, then you have to figure out what the hell they're talking about.

SIGRIST: (he laughs) Well, Mrs. Gallo, thank you very much, and I appreciate getting that little bit in Arabic at the end.

GALLO: I hope this wasn't boring.

SIGRIST: No, it's not. It was a wonderful interview, and I thank you. It's been nice. We've been sort of back and forth for a while. Anyway, this is Paul Sigrist signing off with Selma Gallo on April 19, 1994, Tuesday afternoon, here at Ellis Island, and it's

about 3:10 or so.

GALLO: Right on the button.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Gallo, thank you very much.

GALLO: Thank you for having me.