

EI-469/SIGRIST

EI-469

PAUL EUGENE SIGRIST, JR.

BIRTH DATE: AUGUST 8, 1960

INTERVIEW DATE: TAPE ONE: APRIL 26, 1994

TAPE TWO: APRIL 26, 1994

TAPE THREE: DECEMBER 13, 1994

RUNNING TIME: TAPE ONE: 58:30

TAPE TWO: 58:30

TAPE THREE: 58:30

INTERVIEWER: N/A

RECORDING ENGINEER: KEVIN DALEY

INTERVIEW LOCATION: ELLIS ISLAND RECORDING STUDIO

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED AND REVIEWED BY: PAUL SIGRIST, 1998

DIRECTOR OF THE ELLIS ISLAND ORAL HISTORY PROJECT:
1989-PRESENT

SIGRIST: Good afternoon, this Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, April 26th, 1994, approximately 1:15 in the afternoon. I am the director of the Ellis Island Oral History Project, based here at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. We're in the recording studio in the museum. I am about to relay information concerning interviews that have been conducted for the, the Oral History Project, about what I remember about conducting the interviews,

information about the person or the situations that surrounded when we did the interviews. Information that wouldn't necessarily be gleaned from just reading or listening to the interview of the interviewee's immigration experience. Let me just give a little background first, why I'm doing this. I think this is significant to the Oral History Collection because it will help people in the future to understand who these people were and put them in some kind of context. You know, we interview mostly about people's early lives, childhood, eighty years ago, seventy years ago, whatever, and I think that it will be important for people in the future to understand a little bit about what the person was like when they were in their eighties, in their nineties, and the circumstances that surrounded doing the actual interviews. Let me begin by giving a little background, how I became director of the Project. I came to Ellis Island, my first day of work was July 10th, 1989. I was brought down here from Saratoga Springs [NY] to be part of the Accountability Project, which entailed cataloguing and identifying furniture that was part of the museum collection. Ellis Island wouldn't open as a museum

for another year and a couple months and, at that point, we were still scrambling to catalogue furniture and stray artifacts, that sort of thing. In October of 1989 , I took over the Oral History Project from Marcy Cohen. Marcy is now married. Her last name is Davidson. Marcy had been in charge of the Oral History Project for the last couple years, years prior to 1989. The Project existed on a somewhat reduced scale than what it would become later and Marcy, while she conducted a few interviews, really functioned in the capacity of caretaker for a series of transcripts and interviews that had been conducted by contracted interviewers across the country. Anyway, in 1989 in October I became the head of the Oral History Project, as well as having duties in other parts of the museum, staff, for instance the exhibit staff. My first job, big major project once taking over the Oral History Project was to correct all the transcripts that had been done under contract by Nancy Dallett and Andrew Phillips, what is now known as the DP Series of interviews. And there are about sixty of them that had been contracted back in 19-- , maybe late 1988 and into 1989, I'm not sure about that. But anyway, the

transcripts had never been corrected and they were riddled with mistakes, punctuation and spelling and that sort of thing. Anyway, my first big project was to correct all of those and to send the transcripts back to have the corrections typed in.

Anyway, all that said, let's begin with talking about the interviewees, starting from the very first interview that I conducted for the Project on June 21st, 1990. And the interviewee was Charles Crimi, C-R-I-M-I. Mr. Crimi lived in Queens, I'm sorry, in the Bronx and was quite a character. He had called the museum office a number of times saying that he had made a model of Ellis Island and wouldn't we like come out and, and accept it for the museum collection. At that time, I was beginning to think about conducting interviews myself and, and so I finally contacted him. As I said, he had called several times and we arranged

that Brian Feeney, who at that time was the photographer and AV [Audio-Visual] person here at the island, that Brian and I would drive up to Queens and interview Mr. Crimi about coming to America. He would be the first interview that I conducted for the Ellis

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Island Oral History Project. Brian and I did indeed do that. We drove up to Mr. Crimi's house. He lived with his wife, Mrs. Crimi, who had wonderful hair, I remember, thick beautiful hair done up in a bun. They lived in a, in a free standing house in the Bronx, where they had obviously lived for a long time. Mr. Crimi took us into the cellar to show us his model of Ellis Island, which was made out of household objects like aerosol cans and cotton balls and toy boats and toothpicks and things of that nature. It was quite large and I can't really give you specifics as to the dimensions, but it was big. It was very big. He also had models that he had made of St. Mark's in Venice and, I think, Independence Hall in Philadelphia if I'm not mistaken. And these were all quite big. He was anxious for us to even take the model back with us that very day. We, of course, couldn't do that and upon later consulting with the Curator of Collections at that time, Felice Ciccione, who didn't want it at all because of the instability of the objects used in the creation, we simply had to tell Mr. Crimi we didn't want it. And he was very disappointed about that. Anyway, the interview with Mr. Crimi was conducted in his living room. Mrs. Crimi, who was a

very sweet and patient woman, was banished to the kitchen. And Mr. Crimi and Brian and I sort of sat in a triangle. At that time we did not have the digital recording equipment and we did the interview on a small reel-to-reel recorder that was quite cumbersome to carry. Mr. Crimi sat in an armchair. The telephone was next to him, I remember. I remember that specifically because Mrs. Crimi was in the kitchen, as I said, and there was a telephone in the kitchen. And in the middle of the interview, Mrs. Crimi, who really must have been bored stuck in the kitchen, called one of her girlfriends on the phone and started talking. And she was talking loudly enough where we were picking it up in the living room.

So Mr. Crimi, rather indelicately, picked up the phone that was next to him and yelled, "Hang the goddamn phone up!," and slammed it down on Mrs. Crimi, which she, of course, did and that was that. Anyway, Mr. Crimi was quite a character, as I said. He had his own agenda. I began the interview by asking him what his name was and his birthday and he simply ignored me and, beginning with a line, and I'm paraphrasing, this may not be exactly right, "Let's brush away the cobwebs of history" and on he went.

Mr. Crimi himself had been a muralist for the WPA and actually had a rather interesting career as, as an adult as an artist and a designer. Of course, that would account for the huge models of major world buildings in the cellar. We conducted, after we did the interview with Mr. Crimi, and as it turned out he was only three years old when he came. He had never given us specific dates, so we really didn't know. It was my very first interview, so I didn't know what to expect. Afterward, we did a short interview with Mrs. Crimi, who had been born here but of Italian parents. Actually, Mr. Crimi came from Sicily. I think Mrs. Crimi's parents had come from Italy, if I'm not mistaken. I don't have that in front of me. But anyway, she owned a lot of table linens and clothing and furniture that her parents had made. Her father had made some, some furniture pieces and her mother was very talented with handiwork, and there were gowns and all kinds of things. She had, I believe she had her mother's parasol, if I'm not mistaken, and she talks a little bit about this in, in the interview. Mr. Crimi also, while we were there, showed us upstairs he had a coffee grinder and, I believe, a small oil lamp that his parents had brought over when

they came from Sicily in 1911, not to mention all of his rather lovely renderings of his designs for various murals that he had done for public buildings during the WPA.

After we completed the interview with Mr. Crimi, Brian and I got back in the car. It was in the late afternoon, and I believe that President Bush was visiting New York City that day, and traffic was a nightmare. And we ended up being re-routed way off course and, and instead of just coming through Manhattan and back to Ellis Island the way we would have normally come, over the, over the construction bridge back onto Ellis Island, we ended up having to go into Long Island and Brooklyn and, and it was a very long ride home. And I remember it was very hot that day, also. Anyway, Mr. Crimi died in August of that year and I know that Mrs. Crimi came out and visited the museum once soon after we opened. Anyway, that was the first interview that we did, that I conducted. [for further information about this interview, see EI-469, the beginning of Tape Two, just after the discussion about Mary Hovhanesian, EI-32]

The next interview was done here in this very studio.

It was a couple weeks before the museum actually opened. It was on August 30th, 1990. And ironically enough, the woman that we interviewed, her name, her last name was Ellis, E-L-L-I-S. Her first name was Ida. I'm not quite sure how we found her, actually. Maybe her daughter had called us to say that her mother was going to turn, I believe she was turning ninety four soon and would we like to interview her. Anyway, we arranged for Mrs. Ellis to spend her ninety fourth birthday with us on Ellis Island on August 30th. Mrs. Ellis arrived and she arrived with her daughter Ruth Landau [ph] and three or four other women of her daughter's age who were relatives, I think, of various sorts. And what I remember most about that day was they were dredging the ferry slip in front of, in front of the museum because we were getting ready to open soon and the ferry slip, of course, had to be dredged so that the Circle Line boats could pull in, in front of the museum. The, the smell was terrible. The, the gunk that was being dredged from the ferry slip gave off a horrendous odor and the whole atmosphere of the island just reeked of this smell. It was also extremely noisy because they had a huge dredger on a barge out there which ran full

steam the entire day. And it really was kind of unpleasant. Again, it was a hot day, I remember. Mrs. Ellis was vivacious, although she was in a wheelchair just so that we could move her around easily without her getting tired. And I learned a valuable lesson that day, this the second interview that I did, because I mistakenly allowed Mrs. Ellis to tell me her entire immigration story before we even got to the recording studio. We were out showing them around a bit before we started the interview, and we were out on the third floor balcony overlooking the Great Hall and we were there for some time. I can't remember, if, if Brian couldn't get the equipment set up. It was the very first time that the, the permanent recording studio equipment had ever been used, so there may have been some problems in figuring out how to run everything. But anyway, we were out on that third floor balcony for the longest time and, and, low and behold, Mrs. Ellis told me her entire story while we were out there. And I, not knowing any different, let her tell me. Anyway, by the time we actually got her into the studio and the microphones hooked up, she had told me everything. And she was very tired and, and didn't really want to have to

repeat it all. One thing that we've learned doing these, lessons, people simply cannot tell the same story twice and, often times simply will not. They refuse to. So that was the lesson I learned. Never let an interviewee tell the whole story or any part of the story before you have the tape recorder going. Because I think we lost, not that it's a bad interview because it isn't, but it could have been a much better interview had she, had she not told me all of that ahead of time. Another thing I remember about that day is after the interview was over, of course, the ladies that accompanied Mrs. Ellis wanted to have her birthday cake and everything outside after we were over. Of course, there was no one on the island except for the staff because the museum hadn't opened as a museum yet. And we went outside. I remember Mrs. Ellis pulled me aside and said, you know, "Why, why are they making so much fuss about this. I don't really want to be here. And, you know, I didn't want to be here in 1910 and I don't really want to be here now." And I explained to her that her daughter, you know, thought that this would be a special way of celebrating her ninety fourth birthday. The, the women, in the meantime, the other women, were sort of

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photographing each other with the Statue of Liberty behind and they put the birthday cake in Mrs. Ellis' lap as she sort of struggled with it in her wheelchair and they all had photos taken around her and it was a real sort of photo opportunity for the family. I think ultimately it was probably quite exhausting for Mrs. Ellis.

Okay, the next interview, which would be EI-3 in the Ellis Island interview series, was with Walter Loebenberg. And that was conducted on September 5th, 1990. Mr. Loebenberg was a major donor to the Wall Of Honor. If I'm not mistaken, I believe he gave ten thousand dollars to the very first Wall Of Honor, sponsored by the Statue of Liberty/Ellis Island Foundation. And I'm sure that's probably how I found Mr. Loebenberg, through the Foundation. Mr. Loebenberg came up from Florida and his story, of course, is a little bit different because he came, he came through Ellis Island in 1939. But, but anyway, he seemed very pleased to be here before the museum opened and the interview went very well. It's certainly a very interesting story.

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The next interview, EI-4, was with Mr. Stoller, Louis Stoller, who came from Roumania in 1930. Mr. Stoller contacted me saying that her father was not well, she had read about the Oral History Project somewhere. You have to understand that there was great interest with the anticipation of the opening of the museum. There was tremendous media coverage of the up-coming opening and the different aspects of the museum, including the Oral History Project. And I suspect that she must have read something somewhere about the fact that there was an oral history project. She contacted me, said, "My father is not well." I believe he had, had a type of cancer, and could we interview him. And I said, "Sure." So Mr. Stoller came out with his daughter. It was, I remember meeting him on the, from the staff boat that came over to Ellis Island and thinking that he seemed awfully robust to me for someone I was led to believe was, was quite infirm. But, anyway, he seemed perfectly zippy to me, although he would later die in 1992. And Mr. Stoller related an interesting story also about being detained at Ellis Island in 1930, again later years. You have to also keep in mind that at that time we did not do hour long interviews. We only did half and

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hour interviews, for the most part. So all of these people, the interviews run about a half an hour or a little bit less.

And, in fact, the next person, Mrs. Panapinto, and that's EI-5, who was an extremely good-natured woman who had a very, very heavy accent that was difficult to understand. Her interview is only about twenty minutes, if I'm not mistaken. Mrs. Panapinto, she, I'm not sure how we found her. I know that, that her family contacted, I don't know if it was the Superintendent of the park at that time, Kevin Buckley, or somebody higher up saying that they had a daughter (correcting himself), they had a mother and she should be interviewed. Anyway, I went ahead and did it. And she was, she was quite elderly at that time and, uh, but, but kind of a lot of fun.

Anyway, the next person, EI-6, Joseph Allatin, is an important interview for this whole collection because, to, to date, in the twenty year history, almost twenty one year history of this project, he came through the earliest of anyone who has ever been interviewed out of the, you know, whatever it is, a thousand plus

interviews we have in the collection. [this distinction was usurped by Fannie Russell, EI-895, interviewed in May of 1997, although Mrs. Russell's year of immigration, 1893, is an approximation based on information she supplied during her interview] And he came over from Italy in 1894 when he was, uh, probably almost six years old, five or six. Anyway, Mr. Allatin came out. He was brought out here by the staff of his nursing home out on Long Island. They brought him out and he had a little brown suit on, and they brought him out in a wheelchair. You know, it was a long ride. They took, they took some kind of transportation from, from King's Park, Long Island, which I believe is out by Huntington somewhere, into Manhattan and then onto the boat. Now, he was one hundred and two at that time. This is, this is soon after the museum had opened. We were officially opened at that point. The interview was done on September 27th, 1990. And he came all the way out here and we got everything ready and he was very nervous, apparently. A nice guy, big glasses, I remember, and a moustache. We brought him up and we wheeled him into the recording room. There was also press coverage of this interview. The Long Island

newspaper, the local newspaper around King's Park had sent a reporter out to cover the interview. And the reporter was a, a good natured woman who seemed very interested in everything that was going on. Anyway, we wheeled Mr. Allatin into the studio, placed him where he was to sit during the interview. He was in a wheelchair. And I was seated across from him. And I told him the preliminaries, what to expect and everything. Anyway, we started, we started the interview and Mr. Allatin threw up. He, he apparently got sick on the boat. He gets seasick. He was too embarrassed to tell anyone and, anyway, he threw up his lunch which they had, they had eaten when they first got here. And he was very embarrassed and it was a very difficult situation. And I can remember Brian Feeney, looking at Brian through the window in the recording, through the recording room where Brian was running the equipment. I could see Brian sort of started looking sick at the same time. Anyway, we got Mr. Allatin cleaned up. The, the people from the nursing home, there were two women, cleaned him all up and, and we tried again. We, we started the equipment going and we did the interview. We did about a half an hour interview with, with Mr. Allatin and it really

was an honor to be sitting, you know, seated in front of a man who was so elderly and, and who did have memories of his experience and certainly of, you know, living in, in Manhattan at the turn of the century. Anyway, when we were finished, I thanked Mr. Allatin and, and off they went. A while later the woman who had been out here, the press woman, wrote an article, a rather scathing article, about, about how Mr. Allatin had gotten sick everywhere and how, was this worth dragging this hundred and two year old man all the way out here, you know, for anyone, would anyone be interested? It was really an awful article and it really broke the hearts of the women who worked at the nursing home who had brought Mr. Allatin here because they really trusted this journalist. She had done articles for the nursing home before. They couldn't believe that she would write something as awful as this and the fact that Mr. Allatin was so embarrassed to begin with that it had happened, they didn't even want to show him the article because they just thought that, that he would be heartbroken and humiliated by it all. Anyway, the women also told me later, the nursing home staff, that he had gotten sick on the way back, too. That, that being on boats makes him sick

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and he didn't want to tell anyone because he would, he was embarrassed by that. Anyway, we later saw Mr. Allatin again at a, at a later visit to that nursing home where he lived, but I'll tell you about that when we, we get there.

The next interview in the collection, EI-7 with Edward Cholakian, now Mr. Cholakian showed up on a day I wasn't here and sort of presented himself. And Brian Feeney, not wanting to lose the interview, decided that he could probably do the interview. So he, he got a hold of Felice Ciccione, who, as I said before, was the Curator of Collections, and in five minutes flat just kind of taught her which buttons to push and, and Brian did the interview with Mr. Cholakian. And, and the best thing about this interview is the fact that Mr. Cholakian had trachoma, which is the, the dreaded eye disease that, that you could be deported for, and talks, talks quite a bit about the treatment of, of the, of the trachoma and what they did at Ellis Island in order to treat that.

The next interview, EI-8, is with Elda Willitts, and

that was conducted in November 5th, 1990. And Elda has been a special friend to the Ellis Island Oral History Project ever since. Elda is a small woman with sort of thick, black, well it was black when she was young, I'm sure, but it's white now, thick, black, short hair. And she gave what, to this day, stands as sort of the perfect thirty minute interview talking about her family coming over from Italy in 1916. She was five. She tells one of the best eye stories that, that we have in the collection about a man on the ship frightening her by telling her that when she gets to Ellis Island they're going to examine her eyes with a hook and when it happened to him, once upon a time, his eye fell out and he had to put it in his pocket. And frightened her to death. Anyway, Elda, I immediately liked Elda very much and, and she me. We hit it right off and she has remained a good friend all this time since we did the interview. In fact, she later, more recently, wrote her whole autobiography and, and we're mentioned in that about, she mentions this experience of giving her life story at Ellis Island as being something significant in her life. Elda, Elda has been to Ellis Island a couple of times, well, at least she was here November 5th to do

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the interview. She came once again and has remained in contact ever since. And she's a wonderful person.

In fact the next few people that we're going to talk about have all remained long time supporters of the Project since their interview. And, indeed, a personal relationship has established between me and the staff and these people. The next person, Betty Schubert, EI-9, was interviewed a few days, a couple days later, November 7th, 1990. Brian Feeney and I went up to her house, I believe, I think she was in Queens, Sunnyside is in Queens, I think. And Betty Schubert was in her apartment. She'd been in this apartment many, many years. Again, we were still using the little portable reel-to-reel thing, but this thing was anything but portable. It was quite bulky.

Brian tried to plug it in and apparently the wiring in the apartment was so old that you, it was picking up sounds going through the wires. So then Brian tried to, to use batteries to run the tape recorder and the batteries, we brought fresh batteries but several of them didn't work. So then Brian left, left me with Mrs. Schubert, with Betty, and ran out to go buy more batteries. And I sat with Betty and she, and

she is a wonderful person. She, she is a real character, also. Finally, when all was said and done, Brian came back and we did the interview. And, of course, Betty Schubert is the person who, who told perhaps one of our most famous and most used quotes in the whole collection, used out of context (correcting himself), used out of context, the quote about thinking that the Statue of Liberty was a statue of her mother when she came to, to America because her grandparents, with whom she stayed in Roumania while her mother was in America, had told her that her mother in America was a queen and sitting on a throne and, and, as Betty said, "We didn't know better, so when we saw the Statue of Liberty, naturally, I thought, you know, this was my mother." Betty, as I said, has remained a good friend to the Project. And then the following year, in 1991, the New York International Arts Festival did a big dramatic presentation here at Ellis Island and created a script from the oral history interviews. Of course, at that time, in 1991, we had, you know, just a few dozen, and Betty Schubert's quotes about thinking the Statue of Liberty was her mother and then, when she finally did see her mother, who was all dressed up and she really

did look like a queen, all of that material was used in the New York International Arts Festival dramatic presentation. And, in fact, the actress Allie Sheedy said those words. And after the evening was over, Betty was brought out, as were several of the other interviewees. After the performance was over, I approached Allie Sheedy to see if she would go introduce herself to Betty Schubert and she did and they had a small conversation. And I believe Betty said something to the effect of, "Well, you know, it's tough when you take things out of context." That seemed to be the biggest problem with it all that Betty had. Later, Betty was moved out to Wisconsin by family members. She had been in New York all her life and then, and then was shipped out. And I've recently heard from her and she's very unhappy out there. She just turned ninety not too, too long ago and she's very displeased about being in, in Wisconsin.

Anyway, I think we're going to pause in a moment and then I will continue talking about, the next person will be Isabel Belarsky, another great friend of the Project, after Kevin flips the tape.

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END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

We're beginning on side two of this tape of my personal remembrances of each of the interviewees and the circumstances surrounding their interviews. The next person we're going to talk about, which is Interview EI-10, is Isabel Belarsky. And she was interviewed on November 27th, 1990. And Isabel, perhaps more than all, has been one of the greatest supporters and a great friend of the Ellis Island Oral History Project. Isabel is the daughter of the famous Russian bass Sidor Belarsky, who later became quite well-known for his renditions of Yiddish songs. But earlier on had sung under Toscanini and sang in Russia. Anyway, they came to America in 1930 so that he could teach at Brigham Young University. Isabel came out. Isabel is an extremely vivacious woman. I first met Isabel when she was seventy years old which, of course, for us is kind of young compared to, you know, some of the people that we deal with. And Isabel was vivacious and attractive and had a wonderful sense of humor and, and came out with her long-time companion David, who, who is a wonderful

person, too. Anyway, Isabel has been out a number of times. She has done several television projects for me. I should say now that many times we involve former interviewees with various media projects. We, we're approached frequently by television and radio and, and even movie and documentary producers to supply immigrants whom we've interviewed for their purposes for documentaries or to do radio interviews or television interviews. I've already ment--, talked about Elda Willitts. She has done this for me in the past. And so has Isabel Belarsky and several other people who will, we'll be talking about. Isabel and I actually appeared on a children's show together. One of the projects that she did we, they came out here and spent an evening at Ellis Island and interviewed Isabel about what it was like to be here in 1930 and interviewed me about what it's like to interview these people about their immigration experience. Isabel is, has boundless energy and I'm very fond of Isabel. And, in fact, we even brought her in for a second interview. At the beginning of 1993, we were mounting an exhibit of ocean liner material and Isabel had come on the Aquitania and I knew that she had a great quote about that because her father had sung on the

Aquitania, sang in a singing contest. And I, I thought that if I reinterviewed her, I could get her to tell that story in a little better way than she had done it in the original interview. And sure enough it worked. And so Isabel has actually been interviewed twice.

The next person, also a great friend of the Oral History Project right from the beginning, this EI-11, is Birgitta Fichter. I believe she actually says "Fishter"[ph]. I've always said "Fickter"[ph]. But anyway, she was interviewed on November 29, 1990, and she had come from Sweden. Mrs. Fichter is important, actually, in terms of the history of the Ellis Island Museum because one of our important objects that's on display, that gets a lot of attention in the Treasures From Home exhibit up on the third floor in the east wing is a pair of shoes. And these shoes were Mrs. Fichter's mother's. They are a pair of brown, high top, lace up, no nonsense shoes that her mother had kept all these years since coming to America from Sweden in 1924. Kept for sentimental reasons. Her mother said, "These are shoes that I stepped foot in, in America," and, and never wanted to get rid of them.

Anyway, they ended up donated to, to the collection here and sort of has, they have a whole case kind of build around them up in the exhibit. I met Birgitta when she was appearing on CBS television on Charles Kurault's Sunday morning show. He was interviewing Birgitta Fichter and another person, Manny Steen, whom we'll talk about later, that day and at that time I was happy to meet any immigrant that I could. We did not have the developed methods of finding people that we have now. And so I introduced myself to, to Birgitta and to Manny and, of course, both became part of our oral history project later on. Birgitta Fichter, again, has also done several projects for me and she's been very good, she's done her own lectures about Ellis Island. She's distributed Oral History Forms. She's been a great supporter of the Project. She also has beautiful skin. Birgitta has very creamy, white Scandinavian skin and it's, it's quite lovely.

The next interview, EI-12, was conducted on November 30, 1990 and this is a very unique interview. Unique, to this day it's unique in, in the whole collection. It's with John Carvalho. Mr. Carvalho had been a

patient in 1947. He had been detained, not detained but he had been brought out to Ellis Island, I believe, from the Merchant Marines and he was kept here for mental disorders. If I remember correctly, he had attempted suicide and was brought out here in 1947 and then underwent several months of electro-shock therapy here on the island. At that time we did not know as much about the fact that they conducted electric shock out here at Ellis Island as we have since found out. And so this interview was just one revelation after another. Mr. Carvalho was, was perfectly eloquent and his wife came with him. And his wife at that time, I believe they were married in 19-- , they were married at that time, and she came out in 1947 to visit him periodically and she would be consulting with the doctors. So what we actually have is a fascinating "two sides of the coin" kind of interview where Mr. Carvalho talks about the experience of what it was like to receive the electric shock, what it was like to be cleaned up afterwards, what life was like, you know, in the ward and that sort of thing. And then we have Mrs. Carvalho's point of view about, about consulting with the doctor, visiting her husband, what that experiencing was like,

that sort of thing. Because of the uniqueness of the interview we, we took Mr. Carvalho, and there was quite a train of us: Brian Feeney and Marcy Cohen whom I've mentioned before, and Frank DePalo who was also on the museum staff, Ken Glasgow who was on the AV [Audio Visual] staff, Peter Hom who was a student intern from City-As-Schools at that time who had just come to us in late November of 1990, myself, Mr. Carvalho, Mrs. Carvalho, I think that was everyone. We all went over en masse to Island Three, where the, where the wards were were and where the electro-shock therapy room was and all of that sort of thing. And we basically, Brian Feeney filmed Mr. Carvalho walking through the rooms and just telling about what took place where and how it was down. And Ken Glasgow followed up behind with a cassette recorder so that we would have a cassette version of the interview as well as a video version of the interview. And it's a, it's quite something. Unfortunately, everyone sort of was talking at once. Mr. Carvalho and I were up at the head of this little caravan and Mrs. Carvalho and Marcy Cohen were in the back. And so what actually happens in, in both the cassette and the video is you just have this noise. Just everyone is kind of

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talking at once and, of course, the spaces where we were exploring are abandoned and very echoey. And so it's not always, soundwise, the best recording but it is a unique interview to the Ellis Island Oral History Project, definitely.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, April 26th, 1994. We are beginning Tape Two of my impressions and circumstances surrounding each of the interviews conducted in the EI Series of interviews that began in June of 1990. We had just finished up Tape One with EI-29 and EI-30, who were Mr. and Mrs. Crespi.

We are now going to go on to EI-31, Albert Donner. Mr. Donner, again, is a later person, came from Poland in 1936. He was the only family member to survive the Holocaust, brought over to America by a cousin with the intention-- not by a cousin, by a brother with the intention that his entire family would be brought over one by one. But there simply wasn't time

and money apparently, and he was the only person who survived other than the brother. There may have been two brothers in America. I'm not sure. You'd have to check on that. But, but anyway, Mr. Donner was a somewhat quiet man. His wife had made most of the arrangements for him to be interviewed and, actually, it's a rather poignant interview for the very reason of, of his survival and, and that sort of thing.

The next person that we're going to talk about is Mary Hovhanesian, which is EI-32. And Mrs. Hovanhesian lived in Lyndhurst, New Jersey. And this was a day trip for us. Brian Feeney got the government car and he and Carlo Scissura, the student intern from Pace University, and I drove out to Lyndhurst. Lyndhurst is somewhat of a working class town. I remember driving through Lyndhurst and on a local pub seeing a sign that said "Thursday Is Bladder Buster Night," which Brian Feeney thought was very funny. Mrs. Hovhanesian lived in a, in a nice house in a suburban neighborhood there, and during her interview both Brian Feeney and Carlo Scissura fell asleep. Now, this wouldn't have been so bad except that both were in plain sight of Mrs. Hovhanesian, who was facing,

more or less, all three of us.

I was rather embarrassed by it all, which brings me to another story that I should have mentioned in Tape One when I was discussing Charles Crimi, EI-1 [EI-469, Tape one, page three of the transcript]. During Mr. Crimi's interview, Brian Feeney fell asleep. And Brian was sitting there wearing earphones, with that chunky reel-to-reel, "portable" in quotes, recorder in his lap, his earphones askew somewhat and, and Brian sound asleep. In the middle of, of explaining some story, Mr. Crimi, looking for affirmation, turned to Brian mispronouncing his name, and said, "Isn't that right, Sweeney?!" Brian, of course, woke up, fixed his headphones and on we went. It was a wonderful moment.

Anyway, Mrs. Hovhanesian, it's sort of a one story interview. Her, the best part of the interview is the story about her mother being asked to read at Ellis Island. And we use that quote quite a bit.

EI-33 is Many Steen. Manny Steen certainly is one of the stars of the Ellis Island Oral History Project. As I mentioned in Tape One, I met Manny the day I met

Birgitta Fichter at, when they were filming Charles Kurault's Sunday Morning program here at Ellis Island just prior to the opening of the museum. Oh no, I'm sorry, it was after the opening of the museum. It was around that time, anyway. We drove out to Manny's house in River Edge, New Jersey. It was Brian Feeney running the equipment, Peter Hom and I, and Manny's wife was also there. Manny is just a wonderful person. He has proven again to be a, a great friend of the Oral History Project. He donated his cardboard suitcase, which he speaks of in his interview for the collection. Manny Steen has the distinction of being the first interview that ran two tapes, two one hour tapes [the first in the EI Series; two tape interviews are rare in the early sets of interviews but they do exist]. Prior to that, as I had said in Tape One, most of the interviews were a half an hour. A handful were an hour. Well, Manny's is about an hour and forty minutes or so, if I remember correctly. He had a vivid memory.

He had all kinds of stuff, including, if I'm not mistaken, his parents' wedding certificate from, from the 1890's. After Manny gave us this wonderful story of his immigration which we use over and over again,

quotes taken out of the interview, he and Mrs. Steen treated us to a rather lavish lunch of sandwich meats and cheese and all sorts of food in their kitchen. Manny has participated a number of times in media projects with me, most notably a Baltimore Public Television documentary in 1992, I believe, and worked with me with the BBC more recently in 1993.

EI-34, Anna Tenzer, was somebody that Carlo Scissura found out in the museum. In those days, we were much more inclined to just approach people in the museum, ask them if they would like to do an interview and bring them up. Carlo was excellent at doing this. In fact, he very much enjoyed going down into the movie theatres here at the museum. And in front of the captive audience would sort of push the ranger aside who was assigned to give a little introduction speech to the audience prior to the film being shown. Carlo would jump in and give a little "song and dance" about the Oral History Project, hand out Oral History Forms and inevitably would bring some poor, unsuspecting former immigrant upstairs to be interviewed. Mrs. Tenzer was one of those interviews. It's also important because it's one of the first interviews

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that Peter Hom conducted, conducted using the Oral History recording equipment. Although I think Peter actually, Peter's very first interview for running the equipment, no doubt under Brian Feeney's direction, was Luigi Morelli, EI-26, of whom I spoke in the first tape. But Peter, of course, as his relationship with us spun itself out, would be most useful running the equipment and, and has, continues to do that to the present [Peter Hom left the Oral History Project in 1997]. Anyway, Carlo did the interview and, and Peter ran the equipment for Anna Tenzer.

EI-35 is William H. Baker. Mr. Baker was the son of, of one of head psychiatrists here at Ellis Island between 1949 and '51, and in fact sometime later, about a year ago in 1993, Janet Levine interviewed Mr. Baker's father, Dr. James Baker. His interview is EI-280. Mr. Baker had wonderful child-like remembrances of Ellis Island, going to school on Governor's Island, and some of the patients who were in the, the wards receiving mental therapy and that sort of thing. Not unlike Mr. Carvalho, you'll remember I mentioned in, in the, in the first tape. Mr. Carvalho, EI-12. Mr. Baker has memories of these patients on the island.

Number EI-36, Hattie Agrin. Mrs. Agrin, who was quite elderly at the time I was interested in interviewing, I had interaction with her grandson Glen. Glen approached his grandmother about us interviewing her. She said absolutely not. Glen came back, said was there anything the family could do, so I sent Glen the questions and a tape and some suggestions on how to conduct the interview. And so that year, in 1991, at Mrs. Agrin's birthday party, the family conducted an interview with her, which is quite good, actually, in spots. It was the first time that I have actually taken a tape into the EI Series of interviews that was not done by myself or a staff member. Usually if people, families, sends [sic] tapes to us of relatives who have been interviewed, I put them into what's referred to as the AO Series, which stands for "All Others." But I thought that this tape was, was good enough to, to be considered an EI Series interview. And indeed it is. And it also is a nice reflection of the attitude of a lot of elderly people when they are interviewed, "Why do you want to know this? Why is this important? Why are you asking me these questions?" And Mrs. Agrin expresses those sentiments

several times in the interview.

The next couple of interviews, EI-37, Elizabeth Longfield; EI-38, Max Mason, again both of these people, Mrs. Longfield and Mr. Mason, have remained good friends of the Project. Elizabeth Longfield, who was quite young when she came through Ellis Island, she was only four, has helped me out several times. She lives in California now and has, upon my asking, participated with various school children who are doing projects about immigration in, in California. Michele Cleveland is one student that comes to my mind but there were others. Mrs. Longfield has been very giving of her time and, and of her experiences to these students, so that the students could actually talk to somebody who, who went through the experience.

And in, certainly in Michele Cleveland's case, won all sorts of awards for that very project about immigration she was working on with Mrs. Longfield's help. Max Mason I remember most vividly because he told a story about being on a ship and flushing a toilet or a urinal and thinking he was sinking the ship. He's been to Ellis Island a number of times. Also, his great claim to fame, certainly, is that he

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lived at 92 Orchard Street on the Lower East Side when coming, when they first got settled in America, his family. And of course, that is now The Lower East Side Tenement Museum. So not only is he active with us at Ellis Island but he is also active with them.

The next two interviews were done on an interviewing trip down to southern New Jersey and into Pennsylvania.

They were both done on the same day, April 24th, 1991, almost three years ago. EI-39, Margaret Horan, came from Ireland in 1914 when she was eighteen and then from Mrs. Horan's we went to Ralph Hornberger, who is EI-40, in Langhorn, Pennsylvania. I'll start by talking about Mrs. Horan and her family. Brian Feeney and I went down to, to southern New Jersey, wherever Willingboro is, to the home of Mrs. Horan's daughter Martie Hackett. And that's where Mrs. Horan lived. Mrs. Horan was a rather frail woman with wispy white hair sort of pulled back, as I recall. Her interview is slow going. She had a wonderful accent, as I recall. And then we were treated to a rather elaborate lunch of sort of substantial meat and potatoes and that kind of, that kind of thing. It was

very nice to see that Mrs. Horan is obviously a functioning and important part of that household. Even at her advanced age, was doing dishes and serving us, that sort of thing. She was mentally alert, also.

We drove from that home to Langhorn to a trailer park. I'm not sure how to describe it. It reminded me sort of, of like trailer parks that you see in 1950's films, with little picket fences and little flower boxes and it was all quite charming. Ralph Hornberger lived there and he was in the Coast Guard at Ellis Island here in the early '50s, and ran like the company store that the Coast Guard had here. Mr. Horan (correcting himself), Mr. Hornberger, excuse me, lived in a, in a long trailer. I remember asking to use the men's room at one point and he said, "Just follow the hall." And I remember going room, a room, a room beyond, a seemingly endless hallway where the bathroom was at the end. In the middle of the interview with Mr. Hornberger, there was a terrible thunderstorm and, of course, the trailer was metal. And this, this can be clearly heard on the, on the tape. And, in fact, I, I was a little concerned when it happened because the, the thunderstorm was of such ferocity that the walls of this metal trailer began to

shake and quiver. It sounded a little bit like if you wiggled a saw, it was so dramatic. Brian Feeney also assisted in the interviewing of Mr. Hornberger. Brian Feeney had a particular interest in the Coast Guard tenure at Ellis Island and knew questions that I would not necessarily think of, you know, concerning the military and all of that sort of thing. So Brian, although he is not near the microphone, Mr. Hornberger and I were on a sofa together and Brian was sort of across the room, even though he is so distant he is a participating member of that interview. And, in fact, in future interviews also that dealt with this sort of thing, Coast Guard men, Coast Guardsmen, Brian often participated.

Number EI-41, Frances Testa was a, a good natured woman, another person that Carlo pulled out of the, the museum, probably when he was distributing forms. He didn't realize she was only two when he brought her up here. She was two when she came from Sicily in 1913. I, I remember the interview because I sat out in the area of the recording studio where the family can sit, and I sat with her daughter. And somewhere near the beginning of the interview, Carlo asks Mrs.

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Testa what her full name is and she rattled off a long name in Italian. And the daughter sort of, who seemed rather skeptical about all of this at first, just said, "Ah, she loves to do that." And then, by the end of the interview, the daughter seemed to have warmed up quite a bit and seemed like impressed with her mother and the whole situation.

EI-42, John Peter, was Peter Hom's second interview that he did. I, I've said briefly that Peter Hom was a student intern with us from City As Schools. Part of his internship, not only was to learn how to run the equipment but also was to conduct a limited number of interviews, transcribe those interviews himself and do various other activities with the Oral History Project. Anyway, Mr. Peter was chosen because he had written a lot on his form, much as Peter's first interview, Mr. Ohrn, was chosen. And so we went out to Mr. Peter's house in Franklin Square [NY]. I remember he had small dogs that barked incessantly that had to be put upstairs. He had a very gracious wife and a lot of very, very interesting 1940's furniture and appointments in the house. And Mr. Peter himself was a small man, sort of with ears and

not big at all. And perhaps the most interesting part of the interview is him talking about being in Burma during World War Two, which, of course, has nothing to do with the Oral History Project as such, you know, the immigration experience, but was just fascinating.

We were also treated to cake and dessert afterwards that his wife had prepared.

Number 43, Margarethe Suhl, is an interview I did here. Mrs. Suhl lives in New York, and told a rather dramatic story about leaving Europe during, during World War One, (correcting himself) I'm sorry, during World War Two.

The next two interviews, EI-44 and 45, are with Goldie Hauptman and Julia Greenberg. And this was a day where Brian Feeney and I went out together. Brian got the government car and he told me to schedule two interviews that were near each other. Well, I'm not that familiar with what's near what in the Manhattan area, so I scheduled Mrs. Hauptman who lived in Brooklyn and Mrs. Greenberger (correcting himself), Mrs. Greenberg, excuse me, Julia Greenberg who lived on Bennett Avenue, which was like the west side of New

York somewhere. When Brian found this out, he was not happy because it meant a great deal of driving between interviews, which I hadn't a clue about. But anyway, we got out to Mrs. Hauptman, and we were late, of course. And Mrs. Hauptman had to go to a wake, either a funeral or a wake, I think it was a wake. Anyway, we did the interview and Brian offered graciously to drive her to her friend's wake since we were the reason she was late in the first place. So after we did the interview with Mrs. Hauptman, we all got in the government car and we drove to the funeral home where Brian let off Mrs. Hauptman. And then we drove to Bennett Avenue to Julia Greenberg. It was quite a long drive and I realize, I realized why Brian was not pleased. When we arrived to see Mrs. Greenberg, she received us graciously. She was, a friend of hers from Scotland was there also. Mrs. Greenberg had lived in this apartment for many, many years and sort of presided from a chair, an armchair in one part of the room, with a cane. I remember throughout the interview Mrs. Greenberg talking about her very lovely mother and how lovely her mother was and beautiful and delicate. And at the end of the interview she said,

"Would you like to see a picture of my mother?" And Brian and I both said, "Sure." And she pointed to a painting, I think it was, or a drawing which is hanging on the wall behind where we were sitting, of a woman who perhaps less than delicate and beautiful. And we were quite surprised, I remember, that this was the woman that she had spoken about so lovingly throughout the whole interview as being so lovely and beautiful. But anyway, that aside, Mrs. Greenberg, not unlike Hovhanesian, talks about, it, it's a one story interview. And she, of course, tells the wonderful, wonderful story that's been quoted many, many times, that we use all the time, about her mother's featherbed being torn open here at Ellis Island, which is a great, great story.

Number 46, EI-46, is Nicholas Sabia. Mr. Sabia, uh, Brian Feeny and Carlo Scissura and I drove out to New Jersey to do the next two interviews we're going to talk about: EI-46, Nicholas Sabia and EI-47, Estelle Belford. Mr. Sabia lives in a suburban part of Wayne, New Jersey, a very lovely neighborhood. Lots of woods around because there are twittering birds throughout

the entire interview. Mr. Sabia was a little forgetful at times about what was going on and, in fact, Carlo was quite frustrated by the end of the whole interview. At one point Carlo asked Mr. Sabia about getting on, getting to Naples because Mr. Sabia came from Italy in 1916, getting to Naples, how did he get to Naples to get to the ship. And Mr. Sabia replied something to the effect of, "Well, you know, we got to Naples. We got on the ship and then we went to Alaska with my wife." And we suddenly realized that Mr. Sabia had confused two different ship rides at two different points in his life. Anyway, his wife came out and set everything straight. Mr. Sabia, I believe, had a son, if I'm not mistaken, in that house, who was a taxidermist. And the son, who was wearing some kind of a tee-shirt about Vietnam vets, kind of a burly guy, very proudly showed off all his stuffed animals; lamps made out of deer legs and deer hooves and coat racks made out of animal parts and various stuffed fish and wildlife that were scattered throughout the house and in the son's bedroom. Also out in the garage, I remember, the son was raising quail, live quail in cages that stacked, because he

sells it to the local fish and game club for hunting and makes extra money that way. I also remember that while we were standing in the driveway getting ready to leave, Mr. Sabia came out and told us a wonderful description of how they made wine at home which, unfortunately, didn't get put on tape. As so often happens with these interviews, once a person's memory is triggered, memories sort of just keep coming. And, of course, there's a social element to doing these interviews, you know, you have to be chatty and friendly before and after. And, and this is a good example of, of when this sort of thing happens, you know, when great material is actually told to you after the machine is not running. From Mr. Sabia, we drove over to New Milford, New Jersey and interviewed Estell Belford who, again, is one of the stars of the Oral History Project. We turn to her interview over and over and over again. Mrs. Belford, who is, is almost blind, I believe, at that time lived with family members and, in fact, her son-in-law and a friend of hers were present at the interview. In fact, her son-in-law, at one point, went into the nearby kitchen and just started rattling ice cubes, I

can remember, during, during the interview. Mrs. Belford told, just gave a wonderful, wonderful interview. She came from Roumania in 1905. She was really only five when they came but it is, it is a fabulous interview that we turn to all the time. And, in fact, later the Oral History Project staff hosted Mrs. Belford and her family for a visit out here at Ellis Island.

The next interview, EI-48, Sylvia Bellovin, was, I believe, the student of a photographer who took pictures out here at Ellis Island. And that's how we all got hooked up. Mrs. Bellovin, as I, as I recall, was a little insecure about whether what she had to tell was important information. It's actually a very good interview and Mrs. Bellovin was a very sweet woman.

EI-49, Doukenie Bacos, is also a significant interview in this collection. Mrs. Bacos, unfortunately, is the one interview that I've done for the whole project that I felt that I should have done a better job with.

Mrs. Bacos was a fountain of information and, and we only, we barely got her into America by the time the hour was up. And we should have gone to a second tape, but at that time we had never really done that here at the Ellis Island studio and I wasn't quite sure how we would go about doing that, because I knew we would have to reset the whole equipment and put the tapes up. The recording engineer for Mrs. Bacos' interview was not Brian Feeney. Had it been Brian, I think that I would have just automatically gone on and made the signal to, to set up the machinery for a second tape. But it was Ken Glasgow, another member of the AV [Audio-Visual] staff here at the museum whom we used on a few occasions for the Oral History Project but is not a, does not have the knowledge of the equipment and what to do as, as, at that time, Brian Feeney did and much later on Peter Hom and Kevin Daley. So I made the decision to just end the interview when the hour ended and, and, sadly, I think that there was much more significant information that Mrs. Bacos would have gladly supplied. In fact, we probably could have stayed in Greece for the first hour and then gotten her to America in the second

hour. I learned a lesson during that interview. If you've got someone who, who has a memory and the ability and the eloquence to tell a story such as Mrs. Bacos did, that you just simply let them do it and you accommodate yourself to them.

EI-50 is Larry Meinwald. Mr. Meinwald, again, is a great friend and supporter of the Ellis Island Oral History Project, to this day has done several projects with us, the Maryland Public Television PBS documentary that I've mentioned several times in these tapes. Mr. Meinwald looks like a bit of a character. He's a short man with a big, waxed moustache that curls. He's eloquent. His interview is extremely emotional and, in fact, while we have always dealt with people who have, who have broken down in tears for one reason or another during an interview, Mr. Meinwald is perhaps, to this day, one of the most emotional interviews that I've ever been, been, that I've ever had the ability to, to conduct and to witness. Mr. Meinwald cried quite a bit throughout the entire interviewing process. His emotions, and I think it was quite genuine. I think that, that his immigration

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experience and his early years in this country were emotionally very powerful for him. Again, it's an interview that we turn to over and over again. And, and Mr. Meinwald is sort of an American success story because he came from nothing, born in Poland and is now an important real estate person in New York and he raises horses in upstate New York. He's a, a very, very interesting character.

EI-51 is Ruth Baeker Dick, whose father was the chief of mail and files at Ellis Island. She was someone that was just visiting Ellis Island and made herself known to the rangers. The rangers brought her to us.

Then Brian and I did a very short interview with her, the most important part of which is, is her memory of attending a Christmas party here when her father worked on the island. Unfortunately, she herself did not have that much more information about what it was like here at Ellis Island during her father's tenure.

We do have a photograph of her, though, which we have hanging up here in the studio, with a big smile and sort of thick, black glasses. I guess we're going to pause here for a moment. Kevin's going to flip the

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tape and we will continue with talking about each individual interview.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE TWO