

EI-470/MANCINI

EI-470

MARY FIERAMOSCA MANCINI

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AGE 10

PASSAGE ON THE: *PADRE*

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mrs. Mancini is the sister of John Fieramosca, Interview EI-471. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of Oral History, 2/7/1996.

LEVINE: Okay. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. And it's May 4th, 1994. I'm here in Coltsneck, New Jersey with Mary Fieramosca Mancini. Mrs. Mancini came from Sicily when she was ten years old in 1924. Well I'm very happy to be here.

MANCINI: Glad to see you. Very happy to meet you.

LEVINE: Okay. And let's, let's start by your saying your birth date and where you were born.

MANCINI: My birthday is January 6, 1914, and I was in Ragusa, R-A-G-U-S-A, Sicily, which is also Italy. It's an island in Italy.

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LEVINE: Now did you live in Ragusa until you left for America?

MANCINI: Yes, we did.

LEVINE: Okay. What do you remember about the town? What do you remember...

MANCINI: My town where I was born?

LEVINE: Yeah.

MANCINI: Well, to me it was a beautiful town. I lived across the street from a villa which over here they call a park. And it had beautiful flowers, roses, all kinds of games you could play in there. I also...

LEVINE: What were the games? Do you remember what kinds of games?

MANCINI: Well, "hide and go seek," and then we would, we would pick and we would try to see who caught the most, who found the most snails. They have a different name for that. It's, I guess it would be in the fish family. They come out after a rain, and you bring them home and

you cook them. And Mom would cook them with tomato sauce and onions, and they were delicious.

LEVINE: Ah.

MANCINI: Uh-huh.

LEVINE: Were they little?

MANCINI: They were maybe as big as a fifty cents or dollar, a silver dollar, or a silver fifty cent piece. But it came into a shell. It was in a shell. And then their heads would come out, and you see their little eyes and little antennas [sic] sticking out. (she laughs) They were cute. We used to play with them. We had no toys to play with, so we played with things like that.

LEVINE: Huh.

MANCINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Can you remember anything else that you played with?

MANCINI: Well, we used to have hickory nuts that we used to pick on the ground and play with them like they play marbles

here. You know, you throw the marbles. I think there were five or seven marbles, and you throw them, like you play marbles and mimps, you know. Or, or jack. You play games like that. Of course, if you had a ball, you played with a ball, if you were lucky enough to have a ball. Uh-huh. Hide and go seek. And then we had a lot of religious, not games, but like little plays we put among our children, you know, especially around Easter holidays or Christmas. Jesus is born, and then Easter holiday when he was crucified. And...

LEVINE: Would, you would act it out you mean?

MANCINI: We would get three, four children that lived right there in the neighborhood because children were not allowed to go away from the house. And the park was, you just cross the street, and there a park. And you would play just on that one spot where your parents or whoever's watching you can look across the street and see you, that you were okay. Also I remember during the war, first world war, we had German women and children that stayed at the park. Probably they had no, I don't know the story about that. All I know, remember very well, the mom would give me breakfast or lunch outside. I would sit by my front door. The step

there had a little chair, I would sit there, and she would give me my breakfast or lunch. And I would sit there, and this little girl would come out of the park and watch me eating. And one day I, I went out there across the street, and I gave this little a piece of bread before I put it in my milk. And, and we made friends. Then she used to come out every day. When I would be out there she would come out every day, and I would give her bread or fruit. Whatever I was eating I was sharing it.

MANCINI: Because then I was not allowed to go across the street.

LEVINE: I see.

MANCINI: Mom said you don't, because she didn't who would be behind the hedges there.

LEVINE: Well, was a whole lot of German people...

MANCINI: I just remember, this is vaguely, but I remember that little girl had blond hair, and she would come out, there was an opening in the hedges and she would come out from there. First she would peek to see what's going on, and then after a while she would actually

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come out into the sidewalk. Hmm-hmm.

LEVINE: Now did you actually then play together after...

MANCINI: No.

LEVINE: No.

MANCINI: No. She got her bread...(to Mr. Mancini) Don't bring Buddy in. Ooh.

LEVINE: We better turn it off. Yeah, we'll stop for a minute.
(break in tape) Okay we're resuming. I'm speaking with Mary Fieramosca Mancini. We were saying now that, you were saying about the little girl, the little German girl.

MANCINI: The little, little girl, yes.

LEVINE: So you were never allowed to play together...

MANCINI: No, no.

LEVINE: ...but she just appeared and...

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MANCINI: I didn't even know her name. No, there was no, no words, nothing said. Just that I showed her the bread, and I, I said to her, "Come here," in Italian, and whatever when she seen the bread, I guess she came over. And, you know, she was hungry probably.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything else about Germans being in the town?

MANCINI: No. No. I don't remember anything else. They probably were not allowed to walk around. I don't think, maybe they were, I know the women and children, they had them in a park. That's all I know about it. My brother says he never seen any, but see, he didn't still like I did. I had to be by the house and not move around.

LEVINE: Yeah. And tell me about the religious life of your family.

MANCINI: Well, we're Catholic. Very religious. And my mother came from a very religious family. She had two, two uncles that were priest. One of them was almost going to be ordained, but then he changed his mind. And then we had, she had first cousins that were nuns. I

remember the cloister, but anyway they were nuns. And they'd stay right in the city. And then there was a, a few that lived in a monastery up in the mountains someplace. I don't remember the name of that town. I was real small.

LEVINE: What was your mother's name?

MANCINI: Giovanna Li, well, I'll say it in Italian, Licitra. L-I-C-I-T-R-A.

LEVINE: That was her, her maiden name?

MANCINI: Her maiden name.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MANCINI: Yes. And her family was, my, my grandfather was Licitra. And his, it was his family that the brothers were priest. And...

LEVINE: Now do you remember your grandfather?

MANCINI: No. My grandfather died very, very young. Both of my grandfathers. They died, they never, they never seen

any grandchildren.

LEVINE: How about your grandmothers?

MANCINI: My grandmother? Yes. I remember my grandmother. The day we got the letter, Mom got the letter that we were going to come here, my grandmother happened to be in our home, and she started to cry. She didn't want to hear that we were going to leave and go so far away. (she cries) Anyway, they happened to have a parade on that day for Benito Mussolini. And my grandmother said, "Come on, Marie, I'll take you to the parade. I don't want to hear anything about you going to, to America or any place else. I don't want to hear nothing, and let's go, let's go out." So my grandmother took me out. And that was the last time that I spoke to her, because right after that she got a stroke, and two days later she passed away.

LEVINE: Oh.

MANCINI: So...

LEVINE: So this was in 1924?

MANCINI: Right. May of '24.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MANCINI: Yeah. And my father's mother, she was a sweet, sweet grandma. We left her there with, we left her there with two grandsons. Her daughter had died. She had no husband. My grandfather died when my father was only about six years old. So she raised the two children by herself. And she even took an orphan. I don't know how he was an orphan, but she took him and raised him. So my two cousins from my aunt's, my aunt boys, they stayed with Grandma, and they took care of her until she passed away. She over ninety years old. She lived a long time.

LEVINE: Now, what was her name?

MANCINI: Manuela Fieramosca. That's her maiden name. Yes.

LEVINE: Now do you remember any experiences with her, things that you did with her...

MANCINI: Oh, yes. I remember we'd go over there. She'd always have a snack for us. Mom would bake bread and pies

and, and we would go there once a week and bring the bread and such. And most of the time I didn't go. I only went on holiday because I was too small, and, and anyway. But any time any of us went there she would always have snacks for us. And then she would come and see us. And one time she came over, and I was crying.

I had just had an accident. I have a scar in the finger here that you can see. (she shows her finger) Can you feel it?

LEVINE: Yeah. Yeah.

MANCINI: That I said to my brother, I says, "Make me a bed for my little doll." He was a good carpenter. He was studying to be a carpenter, going to apprentice school. So he says, "Oh, no, I don't want to be bothered." He gets mad when I tell him this. He says, "No, I don't want to be bothered." I says, "Please do it." He says, "No." So I took the ladder, went up in the attic, I got the axe, and boom, instead of hitting the piece of stick that I was going to make the bed, I hit the, my finger. And my grandmother walks in just then when my finger was bleeding, and she got so upset. She asked me what it was, I had to tell her the truth. And she says, "Well, let me take care of you first, and

then we'll take care of him." (she laughs) So anyway, I remember that. Oh, she cuddled me, and she, she was really a tiny, sweet woman. Very sweet. So...

LEVINE: Did you ever go places with her? Can you remember going to the market or...

MANCINI: No.

LEVINE: ...anyplace?

MANCINI: No.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MANCINI: No. No. Mom, we, I don't, I don't think they took children then to the market. Children stayed home then. The mother's went and did the shopping. Or most of the time if the fathers were at home, they had the a kind of job, they would do the marketing and bring, and it's not, it was not like here that you go shopping every day. You, you bring, like, you're going to make bread. In those days they made bread, so you have the wheat in the house for the year, the flour for the year until the new crop comes in. And, but you made your

fresh bread once a week, and it stayed fresh good. And whatever baking Mom had to do. So she made it for her mother and my mother for, because they were both widows. But see, my mother's mother had many children, so she was getting stuff from the other children. Where my other mother just had my mom. Her daughter had died, so my mom took care of her. Hmm-hmm. So that's what we did.

LEVINE: Yeah. So what was your father's name?

MANCINI: Santo. S-A-N-T-O. Santo. No middle name.

LEVINE: And what did he do for work?

MANCINI: All right. As a young boy I think he started maybe fooling around making shoes or fixing shoes, and then he fooled around with flowers making bouquets. I know when he courted Mom he'd make a bouquet of flow, roses, flowers or whatever, and he'd bring her a bouquet. But his job, he worked as a manager of a duke, duchess, what would they call it here. Castle, I guess.

LEVINE: Oh.

MANCINI: Castello. So he would managing the whole place there. He had about, between twenty, twenty-five people working under him. And...

LEVINE: There was a duke and duchess living in...

MANCINI: In the castle, yes. And I don't know who else, if they had children or not, I don't remember that. And my sisters and brother, they were all born there. And he worked there until about a year before we came here because he was getting ready to come here. The reason he came here, it was World War One, and they were already calling men with five children. And he says to mom, he says, "You know," he says, "I'll be the next one that they'll be calling to go to war." He says, "What do I do? Do I leave you and the children. I might be killed, never come home. What do I do." He says, "I don't know what to do." And then he come home another day, and he would say to her, "You know, there's a place they call America. And over there they're making all the people come in so they can help to build the United States, this America." Not United States. He didn't say that, he said America. He said, "What do you think if I go over there, but I have to go far away across the ocean and all." Well Mom didn't

like the idea, but she says, well, it's really up to you. Nobody wanted him to come. But he thought of us children. "If I get killed, my children will be left alone." So I was the baby then. I was about I guess a year old when this was going on or two. So I guess he made up his mind, and he had to resign, and until he got ready to come here, he was doing, it was a, I don't know what, a millionaire I guess in town or in the vicinity of our city. And he said to my father, he says, "Before you go to America, you got to do," there was a, some kind of a garden, a place in the estate of the duke, that this man seen it and he might, he liked what my father did. He says, "I want you to do the same thing for me. You have to do that for me before you." He says, "I'll pay you well. You got to do it."

He says, "Suppose I have no time to finish it by the time they call me." He says, "You'll finish it. They're not going to call you the same day you leave," you know, "They'll give you notice," you, blah, blah, you know, all that. So anyway, Pop did it for him. And...

LEVINE: And what was it? Do you, was...

MANCINI: Well, an estate. He had a big estate also. It's in a

garden. It was, I don't know how to explain it. It was like a puzzle made into hedges, that you went into this place, and you had to find your way out. A tricky place...

LEVINE: Like a maze, or something like that?

MANCINI: Something like that, right. So, can't find the words to, to explain it right. And when he did that, the fellow, the gentleman was so happy, he says, "Okay, now you can go anyplace you want to go." He paid Dad well, and, so.

LEVINE: Was that something that...

MANCINI: It...

LEVINE: ...that people did in Sicily, made those kinds of hedges, or was it...

MANCINI: I think that came out of my, my, my father's head.

LEVINE: Right. Uh-huh.

MANCINI: Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: So he sounds like an artistic or creative person...

MANCINI: Pop? Yes. Was with flowers, with hedges. He would cut hedges for us in the places that we lived here, and it would be, it's a masterpiece. You got, every, had to be in place.

LEVINE: Hmm-hmm. What else was he like? How else would describe your father?

MANCINI: Well, I...

LEVINE: From when you were a little girl, if you can remember.

MANCINI: I can't describe him, see, a lot of these things I found out later. I didn't, you know, I was too little to really take in. And then not only that, Pop retired from that place where the duke was when I was only about a year, two at the most. What can a child of two remember. I don't remember anything like that. So, but my sisters and my brother, they remember it well. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember the doll that, that you wanted your

brother to make the bed for? Can you describe...

MANCINI: It was just a little rag doll. A little small thing. And you would make a cradle as big as your two hands together, and it would go back and forth. He would make wooden bicycles, my brother did. Yes. Made a wooden bicycle and...

LEVINE: Like a model of one?

MANCINI: A model one, yes. But, you know, I was able to sit on that and ride around. The wheels are going around just like a bicycle, only it was wooden, you know. It didn't have no chains or anything like that. But it was really, we used to have a lot of fun.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MANCINI: And that's what we used to play, you know. We used to make toys, any, anything, he'd get a piece of stick and make a toy. He made a great big wagon that I made it go down the hill and broke it on him. And he's says, I catch you, I'm going to kill you. (she laughs) But he never did. He was my baby sitter. And of course, he was a boy. I'd have guessed he didn't like that too

much. But he was a good brother. Yeah. Yeah. I love this country, but I love also the country where I come from. Because I had a very happy childhood. Very happy ten years. The only sad thing that happened to me, when my grandmother died. Of course, when Pop left, all I remember my mother saying, "Papa's going to go to America. Now, you kiss him good-bye." I, and she picked me up to him, he was sitting on the carriage. And she said kiss him good-bye, and I, I started to cry. I said, "I want to go, I want to go with Papa." And she said, "You can't go." And then Pop pulled away, and that was the two sad things that, and when my grandmother died. Yeah. That was...

LEVINE: Now how about your brother, you had two sisters and a brother?

MANCINI: No, we were, four, I have four sisters. Two remained in Italy because they were already married.

LEVINE: Oh. Uh-huh.

MANCINI: Yes.

LEVINE: Okay.

MANCINI: So.

LEVINE: So what are your sister's names as, from the oldest on down?

MANCINI: From my, my oldest, the first child name was Emmanuella after my grandmother, my father's mother. My second sister, her name was Concetta. She was named after my mother's mother. And they were married. And my oldest sister had two little girls when we left, and the younger one, Concetta, had one little girl. So.

LEVINE: And then what about the other two sisters?

MANCINI: The other two sisters, they came, we came to the United States.

LEVINE: What were there names?

MANCINI: Salvitrice. S-A-L-V-I-T-R-I-C-E. Salvitrice. She was seventeen when we came here. My other sister. She's in the passport. She passed away. She was fifteen. Her name was Giovanna.

LEVINE: And, and then your brother John?

MANCINI: And then my brother John, and I was the youngest one.

LEVINE: And you came. And, tell me about religious celebrations or observances that you remember from Italy, anything.

MANCINI: Well, Christmas is, Christmas is a big, big, big religious holiday. You go through the whole thing from when Mary got, that she was going to have a baby, you go through the whole thing. And then Jesus is born. And that's, it's, it's beautiful for children. It's beautiful for children. Easter is a sad, to me anyway, it was very sad because Christ was crucified. And you go through that in church. They'll have, the people really, they go way out and they have a big piazza. You know what a piazza is? Okay. And they would demonstrate Jesus carrying the cross, and how he was nailed to the cross. And before that, they go through the, the garden of, how do they call that in Italian? I forget how they call that in Ital, where he goes to think about everything, what am I doing, am I doing right, am I doing wrong. And they have the people actually act this out, you know. And it comes so

natural to the people. They're not actors or actresses. But it comes so natural. I remember Mom would sit in the chair and recite the whole thing for me from when I was a child. I know by heart that when Easter time comes for the week they're doing Lent, that the week, the Holy Week, that's so sad for me, because that was, you know, in your mind all the time. Mom would say, she'd recite what Mary said when she went looking for her son, and how she found out that she was going to be crucified, and Mary Magdalene and all that.

Then when, it was really, the holidays are really beautiful, were beautiful. I don't know if they still, but I, yes, they do, at a certain point they still celebrate them. They go all out for the holidays, religious holidays. And then, see, our patron saint is Saint John the Baptist, for whatever reason. I don't know, but we have a church in our city, Saint John the Baptist. Very rich parish. And Mom and Dad were married there, they had their baptismal there, they had all their sacraments there, and we did also. And also I read in our Bible that Saint John the Baptist walked the mountains of Siragusa, Siragusa.

LEVINE: Hmm.

MANCINI: Walked the mountains of Siragusa, so it's right there, you know. And, and you think about it and you, and you find out, geez, Saint John was right here. I wonder how many more saints were here, you know. People are very, very religious. And when you're religious, you're religious. That's it.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MANCINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: So, so when the children were acting out these, these stories of the, of the...

MANCINI: Right. We're just imitating the adults, because they're doing it, so we'll go to the park and do the same thing. Yeah.

LEVINE: It sounds like it was very much a part of your life and your feeling...

MANCINI: (a telephone rings) The biggest part of our life and our families.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MANCINI: Yes.

LEVINE: Do you want to get that or, the phone? We can pause.

MANCINI: No. My...

LEVINE: Oh, he'll pick it up in the office?

MANCINI: Yeah, he'll pick it up in the office. It's all right.

LEVINE: Let's see. Did you go to school at all?

MANCINI: Yes. I finished fifth grade, and I had to start...

LEVINE: This is in Sicily?

MANCINI: In Sicily.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MANCINI: I had started half way through, no, not half way. School opened in September like us here, and I went until November. A couple of months in sixth grade.

LEVINE: What do you remember about school there?

MANCINI: Well, I remember...

LEVINE: Maybe you can compare to what it was like after you got here?

MANCINI: I loved school in Italy. I didn't like it here because of the language. And because of the children, they couldn't take foreigners from the other side. They couldn't speak. They wouldn't be, children were not nice, most of them. They were naughty, you know. I would go home crying every day. But in Italy I was happy. And when, then I went to a religious school where there, it's a convent, where they teach you to, girls, where they teach us to embroid [sic], to sew, whatever you're interested in learning. And I learned some of that. And then is school when you start, I was very good in geography. They had a map of the world, a map of Italy, I would get right up there and point out, the teacher would say, "Where's Genova?" Stick it right there. "Where's Milan?" Right there. Where's this, you know, find it. "Where's America?" And I would go, "That's where my father is." And then I got

the bright idea, I said, I asked my teacher, I said, "When I learn how to write," I said, "would you teach me how to write a letter to my father?" And she said, "Sure, anytime." She says, "We're going to work on that." And she taught me. (a dog barks) And I wrote to my father the first letter. I was so proud of it. And he answered me. And then I wrote often. And when I came to this country and I lost my dad, my dad gave me his precious box, and there was all my letters in there. (she cries) So I learned something that made me very happy. And to know that my father appreciate them, because he saved them. So.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything else about Italy that you think of when you think of your first ten years, or anything about your childhood?

MANCINI: Well, my sister, when, the oldest one, when she got married, her husband came from a different town. So no vacation time, when they would take the vacation, they would take me. And it, and we stayed with her husband's family. And they had a vineyard where they grew grapes and made wine. And I enjoyed that, going on a train. The first time that I ever been any place away from home. And, and maybe I was about eight, nine

years old then. So I enjoyed, they had chickens there and I played with a red hen. She would come to me and sit by me and I would play with the hen. And I was a very quiet child. I think I was a good, good kid, what they say here. (she laughs) Very quiet. Obedient. God help if you weren't. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Was your mother strict?

MANCINI: In a sense, but very loving. Very loving. If you were doing something naughty she'd just pick up her had and she'd go like this. (she gestures) "I'll give it to you." But you never got it. She really, very, hmm-hmm. Mom was very loving, very giving. Yeah.

LEVINE: Did you have any chores that you had to do when you were still in Italy? Do you remember anything?

MANCINI: No. No, I was the baby.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: You were the apple of everybody's eye?

MANCINI: (she laughs) Well, I, I guess they figure I didn't know how. You know, I didn't know how, but I watched and I listened. I was a good listener. I guess that's why I remember everything. I watched everything that Mom or my sisters did, and I learned by watching them. And I listened. When they talked I never butt in, and I would just listen. And I remembered everything. It stayed here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MANCINI: So.

LEVINE: Do you remember any foods that your mother or grandmothers or sisters made in Italy?

MANCINI: Food?

LEVINE: Yeah.

MANCINI: Yes. Well, Easter time we made cheesecake, which you know what ricotta is. You hear it on television.

Well, we make ricotta pies. That's an Easter holiday.

And then we make a lamb pie. That's a tradition to have lamb for Eastertime. And you would have them Easter morning. You can't eat meat until Easter morning. All that week you, you can't have no meat. So. And they would make biscuits that they were so crispy and soft they would melt in your mouth. They were made out of all eggs. All different kind of goodies. There, some, some stuff was made with honey.

And then we had the fennel, fennel seeds, if you ever seen them. They mixed that with honey. And you have to cook it. Honey and almonds. And you cook that until it thickens, and then you put it out on a bread board, and you roll it out like you would bread, and then you cut it in pieces, like shape of a diamond Mom used to cut them. And that was like a candy for us. Hmm-hmm. That was a Christmas candy we had. Each holiday you had something special. And let's see. Christmastime was ravioli time. Eastertime was the lamb pies, the cheese pies. Well, whatever. We even had special food for, for Halloween night, Mardi Gras night. Yeah, we had special food for that. Everybody would get rid of their meat because the next day would be Ash Wednesday. So that everybody would cook their food, whatever they had, and they would put it

outside. And all the neighbors, we all, the people would be dressed up for, it's Halloween, you know. They'd be dressed up, and you go from house to house. The men would play mandolin, guitars. It'd be a lot of fun. That was fun time for us.

LEVINE: So as you went to everybody house you would eat whatever they had...

MANCINI: You would eat whatever you, they had put out. Yeah. Hmm-hmm.

LEVINE: So Halloween was before Holy Week? Or...

MANCINI: Ash Wednesday, the night before Ash Wednesday would be a Tuesday, and that would be Halloween.

LEVINE: Oh. Uh-huh.

MANCINI: Whenever Ash Wednesday came, Halloween was the day before. Hmm-hmm. Yeah. So. We have...

LEVINE: Are, are there any other holidays that you remember?

MANCINI: Well, there are the big ones. And then of course, for

Saint John the Baptist, that would be a big celebration. The farmers have already finished working in their farm. Their wheat was in. Their beans, dry beans, you know. Everything was taken care of, and they would go to the city for the weekend and celebrate this big holiday. See, each part of Italy has a special patron saint, saint, and they would celebrate whatever time. Ours was Saint John the Baptist. And you celebrate that with fireworks. And they would sell all kind of goodies when you go there at the, at the piazza. Uh-huh. And that was a good time for us. I remember my brother-in-law put me on top of his shoulders to see the fireworks. So, nice time we had.

LEVINE: Yeah. What did you know about, well, you were writing to your father, so he, he, did he tell you anything about America in his letters? What did you know before you came?

MANCINI: No. No. Pop just say that he was so glad to hear from me, that now I'm a big girl I can write, and Papa some day would be coming back. Never said about us going to the United States.

LEVINE: Oh.

MANCINI: He had intentions of coming home. But as time went by I guess he changed his mind, and maybe he figured this would be a better country to raise his family. The only bad thing was that we had to leave two sisters behind. And in the meantime one of them died at twenty-four. So Mom had a great loss, and Pop never seen her. So, but...

LEVINE: Do you remember packing up to leave?

MANCINI: Yes. Yes. Mom, everybody was packing trunks and suitcases. And we had to pack, I had to get my, my own little personal thing. You never went out without bread, because you never knew if you were able to get anything to eat. Made sure you had a little package of bread and cheese so you could nibble on. Uh-huh. You had to do that.

LEVINE: So do you remember any particular possessions that your mother packed or that you brought that were personal?

MANCINI: Well, no. I remember I made myself a little nightgown

at the convent. Hand made, embroidered. I, I took that for my trip. That, that's the only thing that, no toys or anything like that. Pictures of my three little nieces we left behind. That's all.

LEVINE: So when you left, do you remember actually leaving?

MANCINI: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. We got on a train and we went, first we went to Catania. That's where my brother-in-law people, where my brother-in-law came from. And then from there we got another train and we went to Palermo. That's where we got the ship to come to the United States.

LEVINE: And did, did you have any examinations or anything before you left...

MANCINI: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. We went through that, and we had to go for passport pictures. And we did that in Italy. And in Ragusa. And my brother had a, he didn't have to, but my mother says, "Your hair is nice and thick," and they shaved the hair. He wasn't told to do it, but he figured with, we had a lot of people on this ship, he's not, don't know what you're going to pick up. So girls, you can't shave your hair, but

brother had to shave his hair. (she laughs) That was Mom's orders, not that he had to. Yeah. So, so the reason that, when we got to Ellis Island there, it really, Mom had gotten twice double pneumonia. And after that she would get a slight temperature. It didn't matter, didn't count, didn't make any sense, but she would get this here slight temperature, and they caught that when we got to Ellis, to New York.

LEVINE: Well, now, was your mother in good health as far as you knew when you left?

MANCINI: Yes. Of course. That only would last...

LEVINE: Did she have...

MANCINI: That would only last a couple days, then it would go away, this temperature.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. But she was getting that in Italy, but then she was okay?

MANCINI: She was fine. She was fine. And...

LEVINE: Why don't you say the name of the ship for the tape.

The name of the ship that you came on.

MANCINI: So, we, we picked up the ship, the, the name of it was Padre. P-A-D-R-E. Of course, it's not, it was not a ship like you see today, a luxury liner. But we had never seen a ship, so to us it was a big, like a big mountain. And it didn't have that you went into the ship so easily. We had to climb a ladder, scaffold, I don't know what they called, rope ladder, I guess, or something. And it was at night time. I really couldn't see good. Maybe my brother will remember that. I don't know. But we had to climb up to the ship to go up there on the ladder. And that was scary because you got the water below and if you miss a step you might fall. To me, I was a little girl. I was afraid. But...

LEVINE: And what, what about the voyage? Is there anything you remember about that?

MANCINI: Well, there incidents. We, we used to go to the chef, that the kids found out where the kitchen was, and, and you go there and the chef would give them a big potato. And we were five, six kids all together. And Mom was in charge of two more to bring them to the

United States to their family. So they would get, we'd get a potato every day. And it was, when it was my turn to get the potato, I was afraid to go because you had to climb up another ladder to go up there. And, but my brother said, "Go ahead. Go. He's not going to hurt you, the chef. Go ahead. Go get the potato." So I finally got the potato. I got one once, and I says, "I'm not going to go again." (she laughs) So, and the food was good. We had a cabin with five, well, we were four girls, and Mom, five, and my brother, we were six in our cabin. And my brother bunked with the other boy that we took here. We took a boy and a girl. So we were six in our cabin, two, four, six, yeah. Six people in our cabin, and my brother was with the other boy. So...

LEVINE: Do you remember the ship coming into the New York Harbor?

MANCINI: Also that came in the dark. Yes, because Mom said, "Look, look." We start seeing those, not pigeons, what do they call them by the water...

LEVINE: Seagulls?

MANCINI: Seagulls. Right. Mom seen them and she says, "Oh, we're coming. We're approaching land." She said, "Come on," you know, "go on the deck. You can, you can see the," so we went up on deck and we were watching the birds, the seagulls. And, but actually we, no, I, I don't remember seeing it going into the port. I don't remember that. I remember, though, getting off the ship. And to me it looked like I got into a real small boat to go to Ellis Island because they told us they had to bring us to the hospital to go with Mom.

LEVINE: So, did your mother become ill aboard ship?

MANCINI: She must have.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MANCINI: Because they wouldn't let her go on the ship if she was not well. She was fine, couple of days after that.

LEVINE: So did you go by the small boat to Ellis Island at night?

MANCINI: At night, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what was your impression of Ellis Island when you first got there?

MANCINI: It was scary. (she laughs) Like I said, you, you, small boat, and you're in the water, and then you go into this here big room. That's the room, that big room downstairs. And we were already examined in, at the port, so we didn't have to be examined there, but Mom was. They took Mom away. I remember the back of that Ellis Island, that room where they took her to the infirmary. And I remember that. And, of course, we were tired, and we were crying they were taking my mother, and we couldn't go home with my father. It was sad, very, very sad. And then they took my brother away, and...

LEVINE: Why did they take your brother?

MANCINI: Well, because they separated the women with the men. So the three girls, we were lucky, we were together. But he was alone. I, I'll let him tell you the story about the way he looking for us and he found us.

LEVINE: Hmm-hmm.

MANCINI: Yeah. So.

LEVINE: So, had, you, you didn't have any contact with your father?

MANCINI: No, he come to the, to the port, to Ellis Island. I don't think it was every night. Maybe every other night he would come and bring us a nice meal. And we stayed with him. We spent time with him, would visit. Pop came to visit us. Oh, yes. I don't know how many times he came, but he did come to see us. And each time he came he brought us food.

LEVINE: What, do you remember what he brought you?

MANCINI: Chicken. I remember the chicken was so good. Yeah. And he brought white wine. Yeah. And he brought fruit. Yeah. I don't think he brought any cake. I don't know. But I remember the chicken was very good. Good food. We were getting spaghettis [sic] in Ellis Island, and it was like tomato juice on the plate and six spaghettis floating in the juice. (she laughs) And, and then we seen bananas, which we had never had

bananas. And well, then the first time we had bananas we didn't, I didn't like them anyway. But then I got to like them, because that was about the best thing that we had, the bananas to eat or we eat bread and sugar. They had cubes of sugar. And...

LEVINE: Did, did Ellis Island give you the bananas? Was it, was that..

MANCINI: Yes. Yes. Yes. They had to, they, I think they had somebody, I don't think it was a dish that you took it. That I don't remember. All I know is getting a banana, and, and eating it. Yeah.

LEVINE: And, and then it was bread and sugar?

MANCINI: Well, they didn't give you that. You took the bread, because they put bread on the table, and there's sugar there I guess for coffee, whatever. And I would, I would eat bread and sugar.

LEVINE: Rather than the, rather than the macaroni and the...

MANCINI: Rather than the, right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MANCINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MANCINI: Uh-huh.

LEVINE: Okay. So, let's see. So your, your mother, did you have, have any contact with your mother while she was being treated?

MANCINI: Not, not until the third day, until my brother found us. See, we were looking for each other, and we could never find each other outside. We'd go out outside to look for him, and he would look for us. So, but he's the one who found us because he changed his route. So he'll tell you about that.

LEVINE: Okay.

MANCINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: And so, then your father would visit with your brother and your sisters?

MANCINI: All of us. They would take, except my mother. We would all go out, visiting room, I guess. Which would be the visiting room? I have no idea which. I know there were a lot of seats like there were in the theatre, you know, in the room. Anyway we would go into the visiting room and Pop would be there. And they had a rope there. You couldn't cross over the rope.

LEVINE: Oh.

MANCINI: Yeah. They had a rope there.

LEVINE: What was it like being with your father who you really didn't know...

MANCINI: Well, he was strange to me, but my sisters and my brother remembered him better. The first time I seen him real close I didn't want to go by him. And my sister poked me. She says, "Go. That's Papa." I says, "I don't know him." I said, "I, I don't want to go." But then, you know, he, he would call me, "Come on, Maria. Come on, come on." You know. And I finally went to him, and then I really loved him.

Yeah. Even Pop had a, like a mustache, you know, with little curls here. (she indicates) He had wavy hair, and his mustache would just curl. And couldn't touch his mustache. That was his pride and joy. Yeah.
Yeah.

LEVINE: So when was, how, what was the reunion like with your mother. When, when did that happen...

MANCINI: Oh, God. They took us to the infirmary. When my brother started hollering, you know, I want to see my sisters, my mother, then they got us all, all the kids together, and we went to see Mom in the hospital. Of course, Mom starts crying, we all start crying. Then we didn't want to leave her. Going to take care of her, you know. So, "You'll see Mom when she gets rid of her fever." And we tried to tell her, tell them that it was not a disease that she had. It used to be like a weakening condition that she would get from the double pneumonia that she had a few times. She probably will catch a little bug, just to, to give her a little temperature, but then she will get rid of it.
And, but we couldn't get nobody to listen to us. So they had to keep her until the fever went away.

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LEVINE: Well, where were you sleeping? What were your accommodations...

MANCINI: We, they had a big dormitory. A big room where all the beds were. I know it was, yes, and there were, two, two sisters slept down below me. No, we were three sisters. I slept with my older sister. But we slept, they were double beds, bunks. Yeah. There were a lot of beds in there. But they were nice and clean. We'd get clean sheets every day. That I have to say. Very clean. The floors were spotless. Very clean.

LEVINE: Is there anything else you can remember about Ellis Island and the time you spent there?

MANCINI: Well, we didn't do too much. We didn't, just the, you know, we walked when, when it was nice outside, until we found my brother. Then we would see him, go walking every day and see him. And, and not really too much. There was no movies there, no anything like that, no games, nothing. You just had to keep yourself occupied.

LEVINE: Do you remember how you felt being in the...

MANCINI: Felt? Very, very lonesome, very, I didn't like it. And I would go, I was mad at my father. Why did my father make us come over here when we were so happy over there. We were all together. We had our relatives, our friends. It was a drama for me. And I'm sure for my sisters, too. But as a child I can remember me sitting outside having my breakfast, having my lunch, and being happy about it. Enjoying the, the smell of the flowers, enjoying, even the rain you enjoyed. Of course then the, those snails would come out. But they have a, a different name for them. I can't think. It's a big thing, and you go in the restaurants. Can't remember.

LEVINE: Well, describe when you, when your mother was well, and you got the family together before you left Ellis Island.

MANCINI: Well, when we got together she says, Mom was very happy. She says we're finally get home. She, she was sorry she, she came here because she was separated from her kids which she had never been separated. And it was very joyful, crying and laughing at the same time. We were going home, "Papa, we're going home,"

you know. And it was very strange going home. Everything was strange. I guess there was a train that we went home with. Everything happened at night time, though. We went home at night. I guess Papa worked every, during the day, and he would come at night to see us.

LEVINE: What was your father doing in this country?

MANCINI: He worked for Singers Sewing Machine. He had gotten a pretty good job towards that.

LEVINE: Was he, was he maintaining the machines or he was sewing...

MANCINI: No, no sewing. Maintaining the machines, whatever he was doing in the plant. That, that I don't know.

LEVINE: I see. Uh-huh.

MANCINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: So, so can you remember leaving Ellis Island, coming to Elizabeth, any things that struck you as really new and different and...

MANCINI: Well, everything was different. All the lights on the street, and people with cars, and that was different.

We didn't have cars in Italy then. You see a car here and there. And then my father took me for a pair of shoes because he didn't like the shoes I was wearing. And he got me high button shoes and I didn't like them but I had to wear them. So it was very different. The stores, which we didn't have stores the way they had them here. Things on display. You go in and try shoes on, where in Italy they made them.

They measured you and they made your shoes, or they, they, your clothes were being made, you, you know, you're being measured. Over here you just went in a store, and, and you bought clothes. Until Mom got the knack of going to stores and buying material and my sisters, they start making their own clothes because we were used to that. We made what we liked. So. But it was, it was different. A lot different. The school was a lot different. Language was really a tough thing. I was very good in arithmetic.

Geography, I didn't know the United States, but I was good in arithmetic. My, my first year that I was to school, not even maybe six months after I won the contest in the principle office saying the time table

from one to twelve. So that was a big thing. I went home happy that day.

LEVINE: So how long did you stay in school?

MANCINI: Oh, not long. I stayed four, as soon as I was fourteen years old I quit. And I went to vocational school once a week until I was sixteen. Now the reason for that, I had wanted to be a nurse. My father didn't say, didn't want me to be a nurse. He says, "No." He says, "You're not going to be a nurse." So I says, "Well, then I'm going to go to work like my sisters." My sisters went to work in a sewing place. So, I says I'll do that. So that's what I did.

LEVINE: So, we just, we have about four minutes. So tell me how you met your husband.

MANCINI: Oh, how I met, this is my second husband. My husband died. How I met him? Just walking and tripped on the sidewalk, and, and he was working in the gas station, and that's how I met him. (they laugh) He says, "Can I," right away, "Can I take you out?" I says, "I don't go out." He had the nerve to find out who I

was, where I was, and found out where I lived, and that's how we met.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And how many children? Did you have children?

MANCINI: I have two sons.

LEVINE: And, and what, what's your husband's first name, your first husband's first name?

MANCINI: Norbert.

LEVINE: Norbert.

MANCINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: And, not Mancini.

MANCINI: No.

LEVINE: No, that's your name now.

MANCINI: No. No. My husband, my late husband died in '68.

LEVINE: And what was his last name?

MANCINI: Wordanski [PH].

LEVINE: Wordanski. And, and your son's names?

MANCINI: Eddie and Floyd.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MANCINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: And, let's see. What do you feel most proud of that you've, that you've done in your life or makes you feel really satisfied.

MANCINI: That I've done in my life? Well, I've raised two beautiful boys. Not because they're my sons, but everybody tells me I have two beautiful sons. Good people. And the most, that I got to Ellis Island and I'm doing this, because I've been wanting to get there since I came.

LEVINE: Tell me what difference you think it made to you having been born in Sicily, coming here as a, as a ten

year old and then living the rest of your life here. Do you think that made a difference in the kind of person you, or...

MANCINI: No. I really, I don't really think that I have changed much from when I was a little girl, my nature. Since my husband died I changed a little, to open up my mouth a little bit more, defending myself, which I never did. I don't think, no, I don't think that that has anything to do with it. I, I miss, I miss where I come from. I love where I come from. I love United States. Don't get me wrong. This is my country. But I love where I was born, maybe because of the, my, my young days. I have good memories. See, that, somebody asked me that couple days ago. I said, "Don't get me wrong." I said, "I love United States." I says, "But I love where I come from, my birth country." I, I was happy. I was a happy child. When I came here you have problems in school, you have problems with the language, you have problems with people that, I would go home crying and Mom would say, "Now who did what to you?" And I would just, wouldn't say anything. I would just cry. And you had to get used to your Dad that which he was away from me for eight years. You have so much that you have to learn.

People were different to me here. Over there, you know, until you get to know the people, I guess. I had a school teacher that was very good to me. She would take me to her home and try to work with me to learn. She taught me my numbers, which she was very proud of that. And, and then she knew the, the children that were naughty to me, and she would change, she'd put me up front. Up front, it was only the smart children that went up front, you know. I wasn't smart yet. (Levine laughs) But I don't know if she knew any Italian or not. But when she seen the books that I had, and the books and what, I, I left, I was in sixth grade. They put me here in fourth grade.

They demoted me two years. That was a big blow to me. I was much bigger than the other children. So that's why I didn't want to go to school anymore. I quit at fourteen. So, couldn't, you know, I think that took a lot out of me.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MANCINI: I'd get, you know...

LEVINE: Yeah.

MANCINI: ...stepped on. But I'm not blaming United States for that. I could blame my dad, but it's not his fault because he was trying to make it better for us. So it's just part of life.

LEVINE: It sounds like things got better.

MANCINI: Yes. Oh, yes. Yes. We had a lot of, you know, family problems, sickness and whatnot, but everything is great. My brother did great. Very proud of him. Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, we're, we're at the end of the tape now. And I want to thank you very much...

MANCINI: I hope I answered your questions...

LEVINE: ...for a very interesting story. You did, you did beautifully. Thank you. So I've been talking with Mary Mancini. And we're here in, in her brother John's home in Coltsneck, New Jersey. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm signing off.