

EI-480
THERESA PETARDE PISTILLI
BIRTH DATE: JULY 30, 1898
INTERVIEW DATE: JUNE 20, 1994
RUNNING TIME: 58:06
INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE
RECORDING ENGINEER: PETER HOM
INTERVIEW LOCATION: ELLIS ISLAND RECORDING STUDIO
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 4/1996
REVISIONS BY: CHARLES MITCHELL, IRV SILBERG

ITALY, 1920
AGE 19

SHIP: "THE TAORMINA"
PORT: NAPLES
RESIDENCES:
 ITALY: EMILIA
 US: GERMANTOWN, PA

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service.

PISTILLI: You better add a little bit before, because I don't hear pretty near nothing.

LEVINE: It's June 20, 1994, and I'm here with Theresa Pistilli.

PISTILLI: Pistilli.

LEVINE: She came from Italy when she was nineteen, not quite twenty years old.

PISTILLI: No, [not understood] fourteen. I was born July, 30th July, 1898.

LEVINE: Okay. The 30th of July 1898 was your birth date. And you came to, uh, through Ellis Island in 1920. Okay. Well, I'm very happy that you were able to come here today with your family, and I'm looking forward to whatever you can remember. If you can, let me know if you can't hear me well, and also try to speak in English.

PISTILLI: So no-- what do you want to - what do you want to know now?

LEVINE: I want to know where you were born.

PISTILLI: I was born in Emilia, Provincia Brota Moriggio [ph].

LEVINE: Do you remember, did you live there until you left for America?

PISTILLI: I was there because my father was in the army there, from Abruzzo. See, I was Genovese. My mother was Genovese. I was born there, and another sister, named Natalina. Then, uh . . .

LEVINE: Where did you move after you left for . . .

PISTILLI: Then I stayed there. Only my mother and my father, he was in the army and he was -- my grandmother, she had a restaurant in the quarter, in the quarter where my husband -- my father was working. It was the Service. And my mother, she was a young girl, she was helping her mother from there. And then they come (?), and (?). Then my grandmother, she couldn't -- after the army was over, my grandmother, they took that restaurant there from the army, and she started to make a fruit stand.

LEVINE: A fruit stand?

PISTILLI: A fruit stand. And my mother, I was started to grow, I want to go into kindergarten, and my mother used to go around to the restaurant, bring all the sample that my grandmother used to make. You know, we used to sell fruit, fish and everything. And I went to kindergarten, my grandmother -- I stayed with her, I sleep with her. Then my father had not too much work there. Decided he want to come to this country. He had a brother, Frank Pertardi. My fa--my father's name Pertardi.

LEVINE: P-E . . .

PISTILLI: Pertardi, Pertardi.

LEVINE: Pertardi. Okay.

PISTILLI: And he had another brother that he left young, he went to Chicago, Peoria. He wanted to go see, he went to Newark for Frank --to - to - Frank. He work there for six month, then he got a job, because my uncle Joe, second brother, he was a scavaci [ph]. Came to be fabbrici [manufacturer], okay. In Italy they used to work on stone, making the monument.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PISTILLI: Then I, when my father went to -- back in this country, he stay about three years and he come back. Come back, he decided to go to see his home town. I was that time, I was already about nine -- nine-and-a-half I was going to, I was in the fourth grade. I went to school. He took me first to his home town, because he wanted to go see his gran-- [not understood] they die lost in - find nobody, he only find an uncle who was a priest, and my grandmother used to live there.

LEVINE: Oh. So you went with him just . . .

PISTILLI: Huh? No, I didn't see them. I see the priest. I stay there. Tell -- tell my father for his son, he fix the house, he want to bring the family from there, from Moneglia. He want to make a living in

his home town. They didn't find much work. And my mother had two chil-
fi-to-- me, my sister, two other boy that die. Boy what we raise, he was
eleven months old when he die. Uh-huh. Then my mother came and, uh, in
November, uh, I live with the priest, he help us a little bit. My father
used to send money to him take care us. My sister, another one in there,
Connie come back. My mother came pregnant again, and she have a little
girl. My sister, she never see my father. 'Cos November the 11th, when
Armistice Day came, my father used to say, "Ooh, I gonna send for you."

Then we came and - some relation asking me, "Hey, Theresa, how long
your father didn't - did-didn't write?" "Oh, it's not too long."
Because at that time one letter took thirty days. No, some - she -- not
that they - not that relation go you work to get a younger girl. Well I
make embroidery, crochet, anything. Not a girl, they said [not
understood] -- to get, "Hey, Theresa, how long your father didn't write?"
"I don't know. Why you asking me for?" "No, nothing," she say. And the
lady - the lady what were working together in the room, his name Louisa,
and she say, she say, "Theresa," she started to cry. And she try to--and
she --. "Why you crying for?" "Nothing, that's nothing, nothing."

Meanwhile, in my impression, something was wrong. Then I went to
the priest, my uncle, the priest, because we lived there. I said to him,
Zi--, my uncle I called Zio, Antonio, I said, "Louisa," I said, "Louisa,
she asking me for my father die. My father write." "Oh, what's the --?"
The priest, he was in same (?) - A guy told her that she was - the lady
was crying. He went, he said, "All right, Theresa. I'm going to church
five o'clock in the afternoon, you know, to say rosary." And I had a
relation, a relation family lives there two mile, three mile away. He
went there, he said, he went there, call [not understood] name Concetta,
"Concetta, did you hear anything, did you hear some news?" "No, why?"
"Somebody ask Theresa if her father died." And she said, "No, no. My
son wrote me a letter," Charlie, my father, I called him Charlie, "He
was, he was sick with the flu." At the same time, my father die here, I
had a bad case, whole day.

LEVINE: You had a bad case of the flu.

PISTILLI: I had the flu, yeah, too, only me. My niece, my daughter's,
my sister's daughter, she was six months old, she didn't get it, and my
sister, Concetta, she didn't get it, and my mother either. Only me. And
I was so sick the priest he came to the house. He used to come through
the outside. He said, "What can I do for you? You seventy-eight. Am I
supposed to go crazy with my head." I holler. The same night, somebody
else relation, -- not relation, but come from the same little town. She
was crying. "Carolina, Carolina, Carolina, my sister." Her die-- was
dying with that flu. And all the commotion, all the priest, [not
understood] the priest told me that my father was sick with the flu, I
start to scr--, "Oh, no, something is wrong. My father must die." And
ever-- people they start to me scream, and everybody I hear who was here
then. "Oh, we know about two, three day." And the letter came he was
dead. (tearful) Then we left me, my mother, my sister Concetta, and my
sister Lina. She was - she was twenty-one. She was two years older than
me. And my sister, Concetta, she was seven.

LEVINE: What was your mother's maiden name?

PISTILLI: Josefina, my mother. Gorle, Gorle, the name.

LEVINE: Gordalena.

PISTILLI: Gorle. G, G-O-R, LE, L-E, E. Gorle, the name. Josefina Gorle. We left, too, the priest was father, Antonio Pertardi [ph].

LEVINE: Were a lot of people getting the flu at that time?

PISTILLI: They say they had - they had the news. I start to scream. I say, "I find out -- gonna -- find out that my father die."

LEVINE: Hmm.

PISTILLI: WE went to ma-- we went to church. A priest may be go -- all through the church, make a - make a big funeral and the day when I went to church, I have, she says, "How many people they hold for me in the church?" I said, "I don't know why - my no [not understood]." Everybody knows who my father was really dead. (tearful)

LEVINE: Do you remember his funeral?

PISTILLI: Sure I remember the funeral. No, no the funeral, just they do in church.

LEVINE: Oh, just church.

PISTILLI: He was bury here, see. When I came back in this country the first time I did, my relation, they took me to the cemetery. That's the start of my life. I am in the boat, Ocean so bad. I was supposed to have relation, friend. The storm was so bad. We used to carry the dishes off at that time, in (?) they give a table and you had to go get your dish and wash it and put it back in the bag.

LEVINE: This is on the ship.

PISTILLI: Huh?

LEVINE: Yeah, on the ship?

PISTILLI: On the ship, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, before we talk about that, tell me, tell me what school was like for you.

PISTILLI: Ah?

LEVINE: What was it like in school, when you were in Italy. When you were a little girl and you went to school?

PISTILLI: In the school?

LEVINE: Yeah, what was school like?

PISTILLI: From my home town, I went to the town, and then I, I went to the fifth grade. And I had a such a teacher, she was only eight-- eighteen years old, the teacher. And to tell the story, I learn one poem. I couldn't -- explain it to you?

LEVINE: Yes.

PISTILLI: I got it right here.

LEVINE: Can you say it?

PISTILLI: I, yeah.

LEVINE: Okay.

PISTILLI: I still remember that poem.

LEVINE: It's okay. Take your time.

PISTILLI: Where did I put it? C'e` un area provincia Borta Moriggia [ph] See that's all address where I was born. I wrote myself, tell my daughter all these things.

LEVINE: Okay. Do you think you can say that poem?

PISTILLI: I got a poem. Nella - Nella (See, my daughter, she can't spell it in Italian) .

LEVINE: Okay. Well, why don't you do it, and then . . .

PISTILLI: Factory, where the iron, big factory. He was a worker, my father. And this is the story. Nella ferriera (they used to work on tools. How you call, a ferro? Like you make any kind of tools.

LEVINE: Uh, you mean a . . .

PISTILLI: Where they're making all the tools, and making a, the stuff what to make everything out of that, see? She can explain it better to you. Senza la My father, so you say, (Italian), says that (Italian) Nella ferriera senza la sorte im-- . This story, many worker there, he never (?), because he was working hard, because he was happy. E Babbo, so he used to sweat to work in that place, to make the children have good shoes and send it to school. Ma when I get big, I'm gonna tell my father to rest, and I want to work for you. This poem I learn over there, and I said it in school when I was in school. And this teacher, she can't forget it. When I went back in '64 to Italy, soon as she see me she grab me, and she says, (?), I want you to come to my house. You come and see me. Sure I want to see my teacher. Soon I got there that morning she had two other teachers in there, and she said, "Theresa, Theresa, repeat, repeat the poem that you learned in your home town." Oh, and everybody's so pleased.

LEVINE: How did you feel?

PISTILLI: Oh, I feel my foot. Today I'm crippled. I've got a bad leg. I would go back if I could go look my home town.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Can you say the poem for the tape/

PISTILLI: Huh?

LEVINE: Can you say the poem for the tape? Go ahead.

PISTILLI: Yeah?

LEVINE: Yeah.

PISTILLI: I said it, and nobody listened to me.

LEVINE: But can you say it in Italian the way you said it for your teacher?

PISTILLI: In Italian, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah, go ahead.

PISTILLI: Nella fucina della ferriera/ senza la sorte imprecar/ il Babbo suda per lavorare/ che io non abbia le scarpe rotte/ e far mia scuola bene 'struir/ lavorerebbe anche la notte/ però[?] Babbo senza dormire/ ma quando gli anni raggiungerò/ dirò a mio padre che si riposi/ e Dio, per lui lavorerò/

[In the forge of the ironworks/ without cursing his fate/ Daddy works and sweats/ so that I won't have broken shoes/ and so I can get a good education/ he would work even the night/ however [?] without sleeping/ but when my years add up/ I will tell my father to rest/ and, God, for him I will work]

LEVINE: Why do you think you remember that for all these years?

PISTILLI: All these years, yeah, all these years. I was ten years under my, about ten, ten years old. I went back in the fourth grade. Soon I got to my home town. Then was hard life. I used to wash clothes for somebody, because we needed (?) work there. After my father die, that little bit that he had, they had, the priest, he had money. My -- he die without a will. And we live in the house. He used to say, him, the priest say, "This house gonna be to you. This, where I live, there was one (?) that was going to go to (?) and Frank. Because he had his name, the priest, Pertardi.

And we work, I went to wash clothes for somebody. When my sister, she start earning -- she had a machine, she was working with, you know, with the lettering - embroidery -- and we live. Till I got so tired, I started, my sister, she was grow, she don't feel too good either, said, "I'm going to go to, I'm gonna write to my relation." For they send me, my uncle, see, my father die before he was a citizen, and the city no want to recognize, according to my sister come and she

couldn't get, I sent for my sis-- she couldn't get nothing when she grow up. I sent for my sis.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did your mother want to come to America?

PISTILLI: Who?

LEVINE: Your mother.

PISTILLI: No, she came, she came.

LEVINE: She came with you?

PISTILLI: She lived there, after, we stayed there with the priest until he died, too. My f-- I got the news that my father die, October he died, the tenth of October, 1918. And the priest, he died 19, February the 19th. And he die without a will. And he had four sister, the priest. And my grandfather was his brother. See? only got one person -- my father. One father he had four. My father had two brothers, Frank, the one in Chicago, and a sister, her name Joanna. She was living in (?). Then I got tired, and I decided to come in this country.

LEVINE: How did you get the money to come?

PISTILLI: Huh?

LEVINE: How did you get the money to come?

PISTILLI: The money, a little bit, one quarter my fa-my mother - my father got it. 'Cause he had, he saw, always his share, he had five of four. Then some of that money, and I sold all of my linens. I was making a hope chest, you know. And I got, at that time you could come for a hundred lira.

LEVINE: So you were doing embroidery for people's hope chests?

PISTILLI: Yeah, me, my sister, me. We crochet. That's we live. I used to -- I had a aunt, I used to go help her. She had a lot of men work in the field. She had to bring stuff for them, and I used to go and I help her to cook, to bring it. I work all my life, till I come here, and I start to work. God bless, I got a job right away, soon I get here.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you had heard about America before you came? What did you think it would be like?

PISTILLI: No, because of my father, he was (?) the war. That's why you went three time, and he come back.

LEVINE: And he'd tell, he told you, do you remember what your father said?

PISTILLI: Huh?

LEVINE: Do you remember what your father said about America?

PISTILLI: Well, yeah. Because we was happy. Soon the war was gonna start. He's gonna send, uh, He did not send's-- .

LEVINE: Did your father like being here?

PISTILLI: Oh, he loved to be here, yeah. Then he was brought in Chicago. He could have stayed there till the time he went to see his brother, in Peoria. He said, "I want to go to Italy and see my - my relations, I want to go see." And he said, "You stay here. You got a job here. Don't go." "No, I'm gonna go." That's when my mother came back. My father came back, she had a -- my mother came to be pregnant, and my sister, she was born, name Connie, Concetta.

LEVINE: What was your father's first name?

PISTILLI: Pasquale. They call him Charlie. Pasquale. Yeah.

LEVINE: And, uh, were you close to your grandmother?

PISTILLI: Huh?

LEVINE: Do you, were you very close to your grandmother?

PISTILLI: Oh, yes. I live with her.

LEVINE: What do you remember about her?

PISTILLI: Oh, she was so good, and she used to, after she, she moved from the - for the army gonna - my -- my father was sent home because the war was--. She was working a canteen, and I used to help her. And then - and then she start the business, she would roast chicken -- chestnuts. She used to roast chestnuts on the corner besides. After -- after the fruit-stand, because she used to take them in the church six o'clock in the morning. She took me to the wharf, buy all this stuff, and I used to (?) with the wheel and go, walk about three miles from, uh, from (?) I couldn't say.

LEVINE: You'd walk three miles.

PISTILLI: Yeah, to go to the place where she had the stand. And then twel-- about one o'clock, then she went first in the wintertime, she had corn. She used to roast the chestnut.

LEVINE: Were they good? Do you remember them?

PISTILLI: When I came, when me and my sister, we used to come home. She used to make a chain. She puts it around her neck. Boil it, they boil it.

LEVINE: A chain of chestnuts?

PISTILLI: She put - she used to, and we live together. Then my father, I went, we left him, when he took me to his home town and she was broken-

heart and my mother stayed there for two more months, three more months. Then she came the twenty-third of February.

LEVINE: That's when your mother came?

PISTILLI: That's when, then my sister, she was born, she was six -- sixteen months when he left her again. Then he died after three years.

LEVINE: Yeah. When you think about before you came to this country, what are the kinds of things that you remember most? What do you remember most about Italy when you were . . .

PISTILLI: Ooh, I was a [not understood] a child at that time, you know? My mother, she was so good, she used to, she used to - she used to play the lottery, you know. She used to sell the thing, you take for present, they use. You buy ticket, and you, and she used to sell them. I had all, all toys when I went back to the town. Everybody couldn't, who speak Italian, used to talk in dialect, dialect. Then I - then I started to go, everybody, that teacher who was so good to me again. That's all I remember. Then I got married. I was happy in here.

LEVINE: Do you remember any foods that your mother or your grandmother made?

PISTILLI: Oh, that's where my father teach me, soon I went to town, my father was a good cook. He used to make homemade macaroni, and he'd teach me, made the bread, and I was twelve years old when I make a loaf, a big loaf of bread like this, and I couldn't reach it. See they have in the hall in the corner of the house, and you shovel. I couldn't reach it. My father had to get out of bed to put . . .

LEVINE: To put the bread in the oven?

PISTILLI: Yeah. To put the bread, and I-I learn - [not understood] make it how you (?), any kind. My mother used to love fish. She had, where she worked herself, she had another place. Somebody else is selling the fish in the same place. We used to eat with a lot of fish. (?), more (?) being sick -- my head. I fell, and I hit my head. About two months before my daughter went to Italy, I had a bad fall, and I had five months in (?). My sister, my son took me to the eyeglass. I was lucky I didn't lost my sight. Since now I lost one now. I -- I crochet all the time here. I made so many spread.

LEVINE: What did you, what did you do for fun? Did you do things for enjoyment when you were . . .

PISTILLI: Huh?

LEVINE: What did you do for enjoyment? Like, what, when you would be with your friends in Italy, what kinds of things would you . . .

PISTILLI: My husband, when my father was there we had a good time. When I got married, we had . . .

LEVINE: Well, you weren't married when you came to America.

PISTILLI: I wa-- two years later.

LEVINE: Two years later.

PISTILLI: 1922, I got married.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, we're going to . . .

PISTILLI: My father was all right. We had a good time. And then my son, he got sick later. He was seventy-eight, and we had to put him in a home.

LEVINE: Oh, dear. Well, let's stop here. We're gonna pause, so we can turn the tape over.

PISTILLI: Huh?

LEVINE: We're going to stop for a minute and turn over the tape.

PISTILLI: All right.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: So, we're resuming now. I want to ask you about leaving home and going to the boat that took you to America. Do you remember leaving home?

PISTILLI: Huh?

LEVINE: Do you remember when you left home, when you packed your bags to come to America?

PISTILLI: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Tell me about leaving. What did you take with you? What did you take in your suitcase?

PISTILLI: When I got here?

LEVINE: When you came.

PISTILLI: Well, I was happy, my cousin was here. It was Easter time. I know she said she had a boyfriend for me. I was going to get marry. And she had a big Easter egg. (Dr. Levine laughs) And she said everybody was there, because I just came. But then, it was, it was, her husband was, too, too, I don't like it, I don't like it --I didn't like it. I say, and I went to live with my cousin, another cousin. And then I went to work, I got, in a factory where they making the string for, to pull the shades down.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

PISTILLI: I used to make the string.

LEVINE: Well, first, what about the ship you came on?

PISTILLI: Huh?

LEVINE: What ship did you come on? What ship did you sail to America on?

PISTILLI: Taormina, Taormina.

LEVINE: Taormino. And what do you remember about the voyage?

PISTILLI: It was nice. We had a storm one day. A friend of ours, and she said, "Oh, till tonight we're going to have a rough, a rough ocean, because the fish are coming up." They used to see the fish come up near the boat, and remember, and I used to (?) the other lady. We were, it took the men, only me girl. I had to wash the dish in the boat and put them back again. And we spend - we spend Easter.

LEVINE: On the boat?

PISTILLI: On the boat.

LEVINE: Did you have any kind of a religious . . .

PISTILLI: Huh?

LEVINE: Did you do any religious service on the boat for Easter?

PISTILLI: No, no. I wasn't - I was -- everybody was sick. The day, make (?). All at night the ocean was so bad, everybody throw up. In the morning they used to wash it with a big hose on the ocean floor. There was nothing to - to be brag about it. It was worry, more worry. It was, and the girl's asleep on top of my bed, she was a Sicilian girl, and she said, "Oh, Mama." She was crying. "Mama, Mama." She used to holler, "To make me come here, and now I'm gonna die on the boat." She was so sick. When I got here, I cried. I didn't see nobody. I see a lot of boats. I know but my father wasn't here. I have no relation at the boat.

LEVINE: Well, do you remember when the boat came into the New York Harbor?

PISTILLI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

PISTILLI: Yeah. See the Statue of Liberty.

LEVINE: Did you . . .

PISTILLI: And they put me in the home, and I stayed there all night.

LEVINE: Well, when you saw, did you know what the Statue of Liberty was?

PISTILLI: Uh, I went the second time with a relation from Staten Island. My father had a relation on Staten Island, New Dorp. We went to see himself, and one day my sis-- I was pregnant with my daughter, and I went all the way up, six months. I got married in '20. Yeah, I went - I was six months pregnant when I went all the way up to the Statue of Liberty.

LEVINE: I see. (they laugh) Well, what about Ellis Island? Do you remember when you came from Italy, what was Ellis Island like for you?

PISTILLI: Oh, no, I don't remember. Only remember just to get out of the boat, and they brought me a --- this, around. I don't know where I was. And when and they give me a room to sleep. And the next morning when I get up, I tell you there was a lot of bug. How you call it, bed bug, in the hold, so bad. And I couldn't wait till I got out. And they took me downstairs, they give me breakfast. I remember there were some fried eggs. That's all I remember.

LEVINE: And then you, how did, after you went through Ellis Island, where did you go?

PISTILLI: I went, they put me in a bus, and I went to my cousin's house.

LEVINE: And where was that?

PISTILLI: Oh, Germantown, they used to call it.

LEVINE: In Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. Uh-huh. And what, how did, do you remember how you felt when you were on that bus?

PISTILLI: Huh?

LEVINE: Do you remember how you felt when you were on the bus going to Germantown?

PISTILLI: No. (?) I know I was going to my cousin. They had a address. I was being writing to her when I was in Italy. Garfield, Garfield Street in Germantown. I went to live on Wyatt Avenue with my cousin. That's when I got married. And my cousin is, is my father's sister's son. He's eigh-- now he's eighty-six. He'll be eighty-seven in September.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you went to Germantown, to your cousin, and then you got a job in the factory?

PISTILLI: Yeah. I working in, when I went to Germantown, then I work in the factory, I used to, in the machine, making the cotton, making the cotton to make . . .

LEVINE: To pull the shades.

PISTILLI: To make the string. I work there.

LEVINE: Had you ever seen a factory before you started work there?

PISTILLI: No. I used to see somebody, but a really small, taking the wool out of the lamb, and they used to make, and so it was a little town. It's no more today. Yeah.

LEVINE: So, um, how long did you stay at the factory?

PISTILLI: Where?

LEVINE: How long did you work there at the factory?

PISTILLI: I don't know. Then I got my real work, making chewing gum. I used to make chewing gum around a machine, and (?), they used to make bubble gum. (?)

LEVINE: How did you meet your husband?

PISTILLI: Huh?

LEVINE: How did you meet your husband?

PISTILLI: My husband, he came from the same town. He was getting marry. And then one day I went to the town, and we, to buy some material, next door, took half an hour, to make some clothes. We bought some, uh, I bought some, uh, cake, sweet cake in the cake store, and we brought it. When I got to (?), (?) the name of the town where we live, and then all the friends were working outside, you know, it was a nice day, I give a piece each. And this fellow, he was working, he was a farmer, a farmer, and he just got back from the army. He was getting married. And the whole family was so happy to make the daughter get married, they have to work to make it all (?).

(?), I give a piece, they took a piece of that chocolate - cake. He say he fall in love with me. And he left, he left that girl. (Dr. Levine laughs) And he came, he came after me. I left for - a Naple -- 21st of March. Like (?) of April. He came a month later. When he got to France, he got a boat from France, and he went to France, through France. Then you had the strike, he got the strike there. He had to stay one month in there, in the train from (?), from the home town to go there. He lost all his paper, he lost everything. He didn't have no money. He had to write back to his father to get, to get some more money to pay for the fare. Then he came here, then I was already engaged me. Me, I was engaged.

LEVINE: You were engaged . . .

PISTILLI: Another fellow, same town. And he was ready to give me a diamond, and I broke again. (?) The same guy started to go back.

LEVINE: What did you like about your husband?

PISTILLI: Oh, he was good man, too good. (tears) Too good for me to appreciate. Too good, yeah. And he bought me a new home.

LEVINE: When you first met him, do you remember what he was like, why you liked him then? When you first met him?

PISTILLI: No, anybody, no. Just, a friend, like he was my brother.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PISTILLI: And it happened to be that way, maybe that's what it is.

LEVINE: What was your husband's name?

PISTILLI: Rocco.

LEVINE: Rocco.

PISTILLI: Rocco Pistilli. My - my son is Pistilli now, my grandson. And he's got three sisters. When my brother die, my father die, only four months. (sobs) I can't take it out of my head. My husband build a big home, and I live on the (?), buy lots, he build house and my son and my nephew, they build a home right away, and I sold all of the - all of the stuff that I had in the other house when I got married, and my hus--.

LEVINE: What did your husband do here in America?

PISTILLI: He was a stone mason, stone carver.

LEVINE: Stone mason?

PISTILLI: That's my son, you see, go to Philadelphia, see what a beautiful thing my son made it, all the way up in the (?). He took his four kids, one day he took his kids to see the father, (tearful) and they start, he still have a lot of cough. He says (?), he don't want to listen to nobody. He was sick, when he was eighteen months old he had bronchitis. And I said, what if I have, I was worried for that because my sister, when she came, she find out she had TB when she got here. And one day the nurse she came from the hospital, she said, "Mrs. Pistilli, you got your small kids. Your sister's going to come home. She's much better." But you have (?) you go in there you get sick, you (?), you so strong pneumonia, and take in the hospital, and was put in the hospital nineteen days. At that time I didn't have no money at all. My father no work. I used to walk I used to walk from my house, all my house to the hospital, cry all the way up to that hospital, because I didn't have eight cents to pay for the, for the fare.

LEVINE: You went on the trolley?

PISTILLI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PISTILLI: That's my son. Then when I went to say goodbye through the wind-- I saw that doctor, the mask -- the girl put a mask on his face. Oh, I started screaming, he must - he must -- have got something bad. And then we got in, my sis--she stay in my house, she live with me, then she got married. It's a long story, a long, long story, take me --.

LEVINE: Now, tell me this, what . . .

PISTILLI: Now, my sister, she's in - she's in a home, too, she's eighty-eighty two.

LEVINE: What do you feel proud of?

PISTILLI: Huh?

LEVINE: What do you feel proud of that you've done in your lifetime? What makes you feel happy that you've done?

PISTILLI: My son.

LEVINE: Your son.

PISTILLI: He was waiting for me. He used to said to me, "Oh, Mama, you're strong. You gonna marry me." (sobs) It was mostly three months. And he left three g-three daughters--three sis-- and four kids.

LEVINE: Well, let's, let's go back to, um, your life here, and what, and what -- do you feel like you've carried some of the customs from Italy over to your life here in America?

PISTILLI: Oh, my sister, she came here. I sent for her.

LEVINE: Yeah. And then, are there certain ways that you have that are like the way things are done in Italy that you keep?

PISTILLI: Who, me? No. (?)

LEVINE: Yeah.

PISTILLI: No.

LEVINE: No?

PISTILLI: They were . . .

LEVINE: You cook in certain ways that . . .

PISTILLI: They're all big. They all got children. I got fifteen great-grandchildren.

LEVINE: Fifteen.

PISTILLI: I had two children. My son and my daughter, two children, two kids.

LEVINE: And what's your daughter's name, for the tape?

PISTILLI: Antoinette.

LEVINE: Antoinette.

PISTILLI: They call her Toni.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And your son.

PISTILLI: My son, is name his father, Rocco.

LEVINE: Rocco.

PISTILLI: Rocky, yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Um, do you remember, uh, when you were here in the beginning, were there certain things about this country that were so different to you then?

PISTILLI: (?) very good. Everybody work. You need to work, you could (?). First off, my father was on the war -- First World War.

LEVINE: Yeah.

PISTILLI: My sister, she got married, her husband was a priest, a priest in Belgium.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. Was it difficult for you to learn English?

PISTILLI: Huh?

LEVINE: Do you remember, do you remember trying to learn English?

PISTILLI: I didn't go to school, see, the little bit that I for-- -- when I was working. I had a nice boss, going to work, and he used to give me a special job. And when I live with my cousin, I used to get up at four o'clock in the morning, scrub - scrub outside for German Friday, leave everything clean, and go around in the, (?) the door open, because I was late, five minutes. He was so good that I know what I happen too. And I had to have operate - operate for hemorrhoid . I was in the hospital in Germantown. And one morning the door opened, somebody come in. I say, "Hey, Bill, what are you doing here?" It was my boss. Be with the pay to the people sick in the hospital.

And he was so good to me. When I saw him, then I was there for nine day, and I went to live with my cousin, till I got home, because I didn't have nobody here, my husband had to go to work. I stay one week there, and I got better. Then I got another operation, I get an operation on day thirty-nine, then I left to my feet. And I got -- I got a poor circulation. They couldn't take the bunion out. They had to take just the nail off. I suffer my feet, and the cramps at night and day.

LEVINE: How do you feel now?

PISTILLI: I - I broke my leg one night at my daughter's house. Get up in the middle of the night and I fell. And they put any -- when he put the brace, and I see I got both here. See, I couldn't, I couldn't move my leg, you know. And I walk good. I try to hold, I go in the chair.

LEVINE: Well, when you're, when you're sitting in the chair during the day . . .

PISTILLI: Huh?

LEVINE: When you're sitting in the chair during the day, do you think back about, about your life, and about times when you were a little girl, and things like that?

PISTILLI: I worry all the (?), my - my -- all I got in my head, full of -- full of things.

LEVINE: What's in your mind?

PISTILLI: I don't know. I sleep, I didn't sleep good. I got a lot of dreams, lot and lot of dreams. And my daughter, she used to give me a (?). But if I see something the day before and I dream in the night, then I sit, I feel, oh, God, it's this, and I (?), but I fell all the time. Now my fingers, I can't crochet no more. I made so many blanket, so many children's blank--. I think one day, I sixty-two blankets for bed-- bedspread. I'm tied in the house. Now she says -- my daughter, she said to me, "You can do lot of thing. You feel--. The doctor say, "You walk around and don't sit down. You sit down and no good. If you walk no good. What can you do?" I start the blanket, the baby blanket for my nephew. He used to come back for me. He went to Italy. His daughter going to have a baby for Christmas. And my daughter say I got a lot of worry. You better do something. Move your hands some more. And I started on, and I knit, I had to finish the next week. But I ain't going to start no more, because my eye -- this eye is bad, and this one is . . .

LEVINE: Well, what do you enjoy doing now?

PISTILLI: I enjoy, I used to love to cook. How many times cook ravioli, homemade, for all my family. My son, these kids, he says more I raised them, four. He used to go out, like my daughter, she used to bring her children on Friday. My husband, he used to, they had a store, a grocery store, my daughter. My son, my husband, before he came home, he used to take the kids and take them to my house on a Friday. And buy -- buy everything we needed, and they came on a Sunday to cook -- to eat at my house. My hus--my hus--, he was good work -- outside.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And that gave you a lot of pleasure?

PISTILLI: Oh, (?) work in the yard. I mean, and this week I made, I cook two pound of beans. Two pound of, I made the gravy. Nine pieces of each, like this. I make the gravy, and I cook the beans, and I made the

gravy all this afternoon, because a big pot like this, I made a lot of gravy to fry, fry meat first and then put. And then they came my nephew, he's for-years old forty-two. I got a daughter, she's forty-five -- granddaughter. So my daughter, the first daughter. They all came to eat. My whole - now this week they went to Italy, uh, daughter-in-law, she stay with me to keep me company.

And she said, "Theresa, when you gonna cook?" "I'm too tired, Jane." "I thought you loved to cook." I used to love to cook, but I ain't got the strength that I had. I made -- I made another, one day I made squash with mushrooms, like onions, peppers, big. I don't know if you use it. Another day I made, she, her husband's - he fishes, good fishe--, we had fish for two nights. She bought a pizza, because she's got two children, two adopted children, her daughter-in-law. I wash, and fold clothes. Then I help her to fold clothes, I wash, I put in the machine. But when I get tired, I get tired, I can't help her.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, are you glad you came to this country?

PISTILLI: Oh, yeah. I'm so glad, yeah. Well, I admire my (?). I can't forget my home town. I was ten years old. I went to school with a girl, she died - she die nine years old. Her mother was combing her hair, and she die in her mother's lap. And I went to the funeral for that girl before I went to, I move from there. And her mother, they made a statue for her made out of stone. I went back, when I went in '64, me and my husband, I went to see, I used to tell my husband, "I gonna go to my home town, yes, because I'm going to show you that statue, that girl die when I was -- she was nine years old." He couldn't believe, he couldn't believe it that I remember over there.

LEVINE: And did you see it?

PISTILLI: This was in '64. I went to see it, I took him, and we went in the cemetery. The cemetery over there is special in Italy, the stone work. And my husband, he loved that kind. But when we walked around, we used to stop. Because I'm tired. I say, "Let's go." Pasquale, "No, I want to see the other one. I want to see the cemetery." With the other statue, one statue look like she got a (?) through her, (?) stone. My husband, he knew that kind of work, he loved it. And my daughter, she used to say, my son, he said, "Why don't you go to Italy?" "Oh, I don't want to go." (?), see. He lost all ambition. He stayed with me for three or four months. It was no life for him. He get off of here, he go back to the girlfriend. Then he - he was living with her ten years. She was so good, she is so good.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, we're just about finished with the tape. Is there anything else that you'd like to add, that you'd like to say before we close?

PISTILLI: Huh?

LEVINE: Is there anything else you'd like to say that you can think of?

PISTILLI: What can I say? I won—I want to die. That's all I say now. I want to go into home. And they don't want to, she don't want to, I'm no home. And then my sister's dead, she (?). Coming here, -- you be-- (?). When I went to my daughter's, I was much stronger. Ten years - it's about -- It's two years about -- eight years I went to live with my daughter, nine years. And I was stronger, I moved from my house because I couldn't pay the tax.

LEVINE: Well, let me ask you this. Is there any advice, is there any advice that you would give to your great-grandchildren?

PISTILLI: Who can I tell? I tell - I tell you to teach you. Listen, today you can't teach nobody. Nobody, nobody would go through the life where I had.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. It was different.

PISTILLI: No, they don't listen. Me, I believe wash and clean, cook, everything on the (?). You crochet, besides. You go, it was. This morning when I get up, I went to took the dish out of the dishwash-- put away. I took the trash out. I went to get the paper.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you still do those things?

PISTILLI: I still, my, it's hard.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. Well, we're going to close here, because the tape is just about out. Uh, this is Janet Levine. I've been speaking with Theresa Pistilli.

PISTILLI: I can't be happy, because all my friends and my son, my friends (tearful) and my son die.

LEVINE: Mrs. Pistilli came from Italy in 1920, and today is June 20, 1994. I want to thank you very much. This is Janet Levine signing off.

PISTILLI: All right. Thank you.

EI-480/PISTILLI