

EI-505

SEBASTIANA ROSA PASSIONE AND TINA PASSIONE BIANCHINI

BIRTH DATE: JANUARY 12, 1915 and JANUARY 11, 1934

INTERVIEW DATE: JULY 26, 1994

RUNNING TIME: 1:01:00

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 5/1996

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SICILY VIA ETHIOPIA, 1951

RESIDENCE: MALLITELLO/ASMARA

AGES 34 (AS RECORDED IN THE INTERVIEW) and 17

US RESIDENCE: BROOKLYN, NY

PASSAGE ON "THE VULCANIA"

PORT OF EMBARKATION: NAPLES

LEVINE: It's July 26, 1994, and I'm here in the Ellis Island Oral History Studio with Tina Passione Bianchinini.

BIANCHINI: Bianchini.

LEVINE: Bianchini.

BIANCHINI: Si.

LEVINE: Yeah, Bianchini, and Mrs. Sebastiana Passione, who is Tina's mother. And they came here through Ellis Island in 1951. Tina was seventeen years old at the time, and Mrs. Passione was thirty-four years old at the time. They were accompanied by Tina's brother, John Passione, who was sixteen years of age. Now,

they arrived at Ellis Island on January 18, 1951, and left Ellis Island on January 25, 1951. They stayed a week at Ellis Island due to the fact that John Passione was mute. And, so that is why the family was detained here. At the time of this interview, Mrs. Passione is seventy-nine years old, and Tina Bianchini (she laughs) I got it, is sixty years old. And, uh, so they were living, were born and living in Sicily up until 1936. Then they went to Africa until 1950. They came back to Sicily to see their family for two weeks prior to leaving in January 1951 for America. Well, I'm very happy that you both were able to come here. I'm looking forward to the story. Since Mrs. Passione doesn't speak English all that well, I'll be speaking with Tina. Tina will answer my questions, then Tina will ask her mother, and then if there's anything more, Tina will relate it to me, so that we're not talking at the same time on the tape. Okay. Let's start, Mrs. Passione, your birth date.

PASSIONE: July 12, 1950.

LEVINE: No, your birth date.

PASSIONE: Birthday, birthday.

LEVINE: July 12th, 19 . . .

PASSIONE: '50.

BIANCHINI: '15.

PASSIONE: '15.

LEVINE: '15, okay. And, Tina, your birthday?

BIANCHINI: My birthday is January 11, 1934.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, Mrs. Passione, were you born in Sicily?

BIANCHINI: Yes.

PASSIONE: Si.

LEVINE: And the name of the town, and if you could spell it please?

BIANCHINI: The name of the town, it's called Millitello, and it's spelled M-I-L-L-I-T-E-L-L-O.

LEVINE: Okay. And, uh, Tina, were you born in Millitello?

BIANCHINI: Yeah, I was born in Millitello.

PASSIONE: Yes, Millitello.

LEVINE: Millitello.

BIANCHINI: Yeah. And then, like, when I was about two years old, I went back, my family took me to Africa.

LEVINE: When you were two.

BIANCHINI: I was two years old, and my brother was one years old.

PASSIONE: No. You were three years.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, what were the reasons why the family left Sicily and went to Africa?

BIANCHINI: Yeah. The reason why we left Sicily because things were going very bad in Italy. And at the time they, my father had an opportunity to go to Africa to work.

LEVINE: What was his work?

BIANCHINI: He was a carpenter.

PASSIONE: Carpenter, yeah.

BIANCHINI: He was a carpenter. There was a lot of work in Africa.

LEVINE: Where in Africa were you going?

BIANCHINI: Asmata [ph]. Asmata [ph]is spelled . . .

PASSIONE: Etea.

BIANCHINI: Etea, Etea.

LEVINE: Could you spell that?

BIANCHINI: Etea? Yes. It's E-T-R-E-A. Etea.
[Actually, Eritrea]

LEVINE: And what, what country in Africa was that?

BIANCHINI: It was, uh, East Africa, Ethiopia.

LEVINE: Ethiopia, okay.

BIANCHINI: So the family moved there, and my father worked there. And then a few years later, my father always had a burning dream to come to America. So we put ourselves on a waiting list, and in 1950 he left for America, my father. And six months later we joined him.

LEVINE: I see. Okay. Tell me, Tina, what you remember about Ethiopia as a little girl.

BIANCHINI: Okay. I remember I, we had, like, a house, you know, a house. I used to go to school.

LEVINE: Can you describe the house?

BIANCHINI: Yes. We lived in a three, like a three-room. It was like a ground floor house, a ground floor, and we had three-bedrooms, a kitchen, a bath, and then we had a big, big yard with trees and flowers. And I remember the beautiful weather there was. It was always, the temperature was always seventy-eight, and at night would drop to, like, sixty degrees. And, uh, I remember my, uh, I remember my friends.

LEVINE: What do you remember about them? What did you do with them?

BIANCHINI: We used to go, we used to take, we used to go to church, and we used to take walks along the avenue and talk about boys, of course. You know, and then I remember when I used to go see the, the African weddings, for instance, you know, I used to love that, watch all that music, with drums. And, uh, and the dancing.

LEVINE: Can you describe what it was like?

BIANCHINI: It was like, yeah, the African dance. They were wearing, like, all these, uh, animal skins, and then they were with swords. Swords, they were, like, dancing around, and we were just sitting around and clap the hands. And, uh, you know, like an African friend used to take me there.

LEVINE: Were there a lot of Italian families over there?

PASSIONE: Oh, yeah.

BIANCHINI: Yes, because, see, Mussolini went over, when he conquered Ethiopia it became an Italian colony, so a lot of Italians immigrates to Ethiopia. And then, like, the reason most Italians left, because the Ethiopia wanted independence, so most Italians, they left. We went to Italy, we came to America.

LEVINE: Was it about that time that you left?

BIANCHINI: Yeah, it was about that time, like when I started things going bad, like, with Africa, in 1949. That's why my father went to Saudi Arabia. He went there for two years, then he came back, and then he decided that, uh, then the paper came through to come to America by then.

LEVINE: I see. What was school like in Africa?

BIANCHINI: Well, in the school was, uh, it was an Italian school, like it was an Italian school abroad. All the teachers were Italians, and, uh, we, uh, we used to go from nine, from nine to one o'clock. And, uh, and then, it was just like a school, you know, like in Italy. Because everything was run by the Italians, and we spoke Italian, and the second language we spoke French.

LEVINE: Because Ethiopians spoke French.

BIANCHINI: Yes. But, uh, I mean, the African language was Tegri, and the Ethiopian language was Marreck, but I never bothered to learn because, like I said, everything was run by the Italians, so the official language was Italian.

LEVINE: And could you speak French as well?

BIANCHINI: No, just a few words. Then it became also American for a little while. British, I'm sorry.

LEVINE: English, uh-huh.

BIANCHINI: British, English. And then there was an army base,

an American army base. In fact, most, a lot of my friends married Americans, and they left for America before I did.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Tina, would you ask your mother what she remembers when she thinks back of that time in Ethiopia living there?

BIANCHINI: Yeah. (Italian) Mamma, cosi tu ricordi-di l'africa? Cosi tu ricordi?

PASSIONE: (Italian) Di l'africa? Mi ricordo che cosicché un paese che mi piaceve; un paese differente; un paese che viva cultura; un paese che troppo bello, costruzione moderna; un paese che appaiare...attivare[ph]

BIANCHINI: (Mrs. Passione speaks in Italian while Mrs. Bianchini is translating.) She says that she remembers most of all that she really liked to live there, because it was a new country,--

PASSIONE: The same America.

BIANCINI: and the culture, she remembers the beautiful, you know, the African culture, she was interested in --

PASSIONE: (Italian)e poi, come sei dici un paese che non moncava niente.--

BIANCHINI: Then there was everything, mostly.

PASSIONE: (Italian) Come sei (gionbiesse[not understood])
moderno. Costruzione moderno.

BIANCHINI: It was a modern country, because it was just built.

PASSIONE: (Italian) e un paese che—

BIANCHINI: The climate was nice.

PASSIONE: (Italian) disso di faccione ec[co].

BIANCHINI: The climate was beautiful

PASSIONE: (Italian) So beautiful, un climestra ordinario

BIANCHINI: Yeah, the climate most of all.

PASSIONE: Temperatura seventy-one, no cool no snow.

BIANCHINI: She had no snow.

PASSIONE: No hot.

BIANCHINI: It wasn't that hot, no hot.

PASSIONE: (Italian) Ha c'e va four stagione one day.

BIANCHINI: In other words, they had the four seasons in one
day, she says.

PASSIONE: One day, four stagione (Italian), one day. Yeah, I
like it over there.

BIANCHINI: She liked it very much, she said.

PASSIONE: (Italian) Seguire come my mot[her]. Aveva twenty years, -- Young girl, twenty years.

BIANCHINI: She says it was a, you know, like a mother.

PASSIONE: (Italian) Aveva twenty years, quanto mente di l'af[rica]

BIANCHINI: She says she went to Africa when she was twenty years old. And from the moment--

PASSIONE: Young Girl

BIANCHINI: she set foot there, she liked it.

PASSIONE: Twenty years.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Um, and, so you, did you make the same kind of foods that you did in Italy, in Sicily?

BIANCHINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: When you were in Africa?

BIANCHINI: Yeah, she did, she did. Yeah, she cooked. (Italian) Tu é cucinato lo stesso cucinare in italia?

PASSIONE: (Italian) Lo stesso.

BIANCHINI: Yeah, same thing, she cooked.

PASSIONE: No change.

BIANCHINI: It was, everything. Because everything was imported from Italy, see.

PASSIONE: (Italian) E america, same thing com'è in africa.

BIANCHINI: She says even in this country, in America, she still eats the same way.

PASSIONE: Same thing, same thing. No change.

BIANCHINI: As in Sicily, she never change.

PASSIONE: No change.

BIANCHINI: The way her mother taught her, that's the way she cooks.

PASSIONE: Same thing (Italian) come quando io era in africa.

LEVINE: Now, what, can you say any dishes, any kinds of food, any meals that are Sicilian that you carried through, through Africa, and even here in America, the things that you still like?

BIANCHINI: (Italian) Tu hai quando esa in africa, che mangiare

hai portato la che facevi, che mangiare? E che poi li porta lo fai anche qua.

PASSIONE: (Italian) La faceva come fare qua pastasciutta rissotto verdure.

BIANCHINI: She used to make risotto. She still makes it.

Passione: [superposed] (Italian)[not understood]

BIANCHINI: Risotto, that's some kind of rice, that she cooks it in broth, with mushrooms. She she's made it over there, she can still make it over here.

PASSIONE: And, listen, no change.

BIANCHINI: She says it's the same.

PASSIONE: (Italian) io son in qua ma son in africa.

BIANCHINI: By the way, she lives like she lived in Africa. She was young, and I guess our ways were set by the time she came here.

PASSIONE: (Italian) sole masta, come sei dice, collamente in africa [ph, sp]. No change.

LEVINE: No change. Okay. Now, so your father left for Saudi Arabia when things in Ethiopia . . .

BIANCHINI: Were changing, were changing.

LEVINE: And they wanted their independence.

BIANCHINI: They wanted their independence. So there wasn't that many jobs any more, so he decided to go to Saudi Arabia, and he went there for three years.

PASSIONE: Three years.

BIANCHINI: For three years, he went there.

LEVINE: How come he decided on Saudi Arabia?

BIANCHINI: Because it was a new country. They had the oil, and they were looking, and the American people were looking for carpenter, mechanics, and electrician, and my father applied for the job, and they gave him the job, and they lived there for three years.

PASSIONE: Three years.

BIANCHINI: And he left the family in Africa (?).

PASSIONE: Me and my son and my daughter in Africa.

LEVINE: What was it like, uh, for you in Africa once your father had left for Saudi Arabia?

BIANCHINI: Well, he would . . .

LEVINE: What changed?

BIANCHINI: Well, changed, because we were left all by ourselves, and things were changed. And, uh, well, uh, we, my father, we could support ourselves, so my father used to send us money. And then, you know, we were very, a little bit unhappy, because the head of the family wasn't there any more, especially for my mother. You know, we missed him very much.

LEVINE: Gina, would you ask your mother how she felt when your father went to Saudi Arabia?

BIANCHINI: (Italian) Come ti sentisti[sic][sentirsi] quando ha andato a Saudi Arabia?

PASSIONE: (Italian) Io senti da sola.

BIANCHINI: She says she felt lonely, lonely.

LEVINE: Now, how about your brother John? Was he born mute?

BIANCHINI: No. My brother John, when he was about a year old, he got meningitis, and it took away the speech and the hearing.

LEVINE: So you were in Sicily when this happened.

PASSIONE: Yeah.

BIANCHINI: Yeah. When this happened, we were in Sicily.

LEVINE: Was there an epidemic of some kind, or . . .

BIANCHINI: No, no. No epidemic. Just, that's the way my mother explained. That he was, uh, he fell from a flight of stairs, and then the next day he got a fever, and they took him to the hospital, and any diagnosis, she fell by the stairs.

PASSIONE: (Italian) No My son aveva 13 months. My daughter aveva 2 years. Allora come sei dice, giocare bambin[o] uno vede c'era di scale.

BIANCHINI: It told her, Ma. The stairs.

LEVINE: The stairs.

PASSIONE: (Italian) My son fell down, but tutto this, the skin venuto male in citta c'e lo bruise spinare, the skin.

BIANCHINI: He was sick, he got sick. And they took him to the hospital, and he was sick for about a year. And he remained, you know, deaf.

PASSIONE: E rimessa cosi che mute e no sent'.

BIANCHINI: He's been like this. He's still like this.

LEVINE: Was he able to have any kind of schooling?

BIANCHINI: No. They didn't go to school, because the war broke out, and then we left for Africa. And when my father inquired about the school, they didn't have these kind of schools. They had a regular school, and they wouldn't take him, they wouldn't take him. Actually, he was with a very limited education.

LEVINE: Can he understand you?

PASSIONE: Oh, yeah.

BIANCHINI: Yes. Because we talk some kind of sign language, so he understands whenever we talk to him.

LEVINE: So, um, let's see. How about your religious life, as a family, when you, before you came to this country?

BIANCHINI: Well, we were Catholic, and we still are.

LEVINE: Did you, did you attend any kind of services on a regular basis, or how about, uh, holidays?

BIANCHINI: Yeah, we go to church, Catholic church.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Were there any big, uh, sort of pageantry, any occasions when, that were religious occasions that you remember taking part in, either in Sicily or Africa?

BIANCHINI: Well, in Africa I used to go to church every Sunday, and I used to be very active in, uh, you know, organized, like the basketball we used to play. And I used to go to the nun. I used to participate in embroidery, and come after school, Sunday school I used to go.

PASSIONE: (Italian) C'era come sei dice con legg[e]

BIANCHINI: Like school, I was at school.

PASSIONE: (Italian) C'era scuola di come si chiamo, high school.

BIANCHINI: In fact, I finished all my high school in Africa. I used to be very active in church. Which I'm still, I'm still writing to my church in Africa.

PASSIONE: (Italian) C'è la scuola cattolica. Tutto tutto c'è.

BIANCHINI: I'm still writing to my pastor.

PASSIONE: (Italian) E c'è scuola di misteri. C'è la, che...

BIANCHINI: I used to be very, I used to belong to, every Sunday, when it was Easter, you know, we would do a lot of things with the pastor and the nuns.

PASSIONE: C'è l'università.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, now . . .

BIANCHINI: And here we go to church. In America we go to a Catholic church, and also some of the church speak Italian.

PASSIONE: Yeah, yeah.

BIANCHINI: My mother lives in an Italian community.

PASSIONE: Indiana speak italian, arabic speak italian, e hebrei, qualche (monteguila) [ph].

BIANCHINI: She says there were a lot of different kinds, nationalities now. A lot of Jewish people, and a lot of, uh, a lot of Arabs, you know. It was a mixture.-- Nationalities.

PASSIONE: Poi di suole c'era.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, um, so your father went to Saudi Arabia, and he was there for three years.

PASSIONE: Yeah.

LEVINE: You were still in Africa. He sent money back.

BIANCHINI: Yeah.

PASSIONE: Coming back Africa.

LEVINE: And he was working, uh, as a carpenter.

BIANCHINI: Yeah.

PASSIONE: Yes.

BIANCHINI: For an American company.

LEVINE: An oil company?

BIANCHINI: An oil company, yeah.

PASSIONE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. Then he, he put in, he, do you know why, then, he wanted to leave and come to America?

BIANCHINI: Yeah. He wanted to leave, because he wanted to stay with the family. He didn't feel like staying in Saudi Arabia all his life. And coming back to Africa, there was no more work for him. Like, there was very little work. So he wanted to, he felt that he didn't want to stay there no more. There's no

future for my children, and I want to work. I want to, I want to make something of himself, you know. So, and, uh, he felt that he wanted to go, he wanted to go back to Africa. I mean, he wanted to go to, uh, America.

LEVINE: Did he leave for America right from Saudi Arabia?

BIANCHINI: No, no.

PASSIONE: No.

BIANCHINI: He came in, and in the meantime the paper came through with the visa. So he left, he left and went about a year after, I think.

LEVINE: A year after . . .

BIANCHINI: After he came back from Saudi Arabia.

LEVINE: So he came back to Africa.

PASSIONE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Stayed for about a year.

BIANCHINI: For a year. And then the paper came through, and then he left.

LEVINE: Okay, okay.

BIANCHINI: In 1950.

LEVINE: And then your papers came through after that.

BIANCHINI: So then, uh, six months later my papers came through, and we left to join him, to America.

LEVINE: Okay. But first you went to Sicily.

BIANCHINI: But first we went to Sicily, because we wanted to see our family. My mother wanted to see for one more, you know, wanted to see the mother, our mother, our brother, and, of course, I wanted to meet my grandmother and my relatives. And we stayed two weeks there.

LEVINE: Ask your mother what, um, what her mother was like, what kind of a personality, what kind of a temperament?

BIANCHINI: Oh. (Italian) Che tepore tua madre?

PASSIONE: Tepora nice, per ho no conosciut[o]. I ci con ha conosciuti moment[o]. Yeah, non ha conosciut[o]

BIANCHINI: No. She says my mother was a nice person, but when I saw her after so many years, I almost didn't

recognize her any more. She changed from the way she was.

PASSIONE: My father died 1944.

BIANCHINI: Because her father died.

PASSIONE: My brother, military. My mother was sole [only, alone], quando mi, da italy. allora my brother, my come si dice, cognata...

BIANCHINI: A brother was married, a brother, she went to Italy, the brother was grown up, married, and, uh . . .

PASSIONE: C'é un bambino

BIANCHINI: And then, uh, her mother was a little older, but she really, she changed.

PASSIONE: My mother changed.

BIANCHINI: She found her very lonely.

PASSIONE: My mother changed, my brother (Italian) Dov'é mamma?.

BIANCHINI: Yeah, she didn't recognize her.

PASSIONE: Braccetto braccetto, per ho non conosciuto.

BIANCHINI: She didn't recognize her. Like when we got off the taxi . . .

PASSIONE: She change.

BIANCHINI: . . . the mother was standing right there, and she asked her, "Where's my mother?" And her brother says, "She's right here. Don't you see her?" She didn't recognize her. And they started to cry.

PASSIONE: Allora comincia to looking per my mother. Alle tu no non é my mother.

LEVINE: What was so different about her that you couldn't . . .

PASSIONE: A change.

BIANCHINI: I don't know, she changed.

LEVINE: What changed so much?

PASSIONE: The change, because the change, perché my mother in ma si sole tempo di guerra.

BIANCHINI: Her husband died, and she was left all alone during the war.

LEVINE: I see. What was your mother's name?

PASSIONE: Alfia Rosa.

BIANCHINI: Alfia Rosa.

PASSIONE: My father, Rosa.

LEVINE: And what was your father's name?

PASSIONE: Rosa Salvatore.

LEVINE: Salvatore, uh-huh.

PASSIONE: Capisc[i]?

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And, um, do you remember your grandparents?

BIANCHINI: (Italian) Che tua nonni[sic].Remember?

PASSIONE: My grandma? Yeah, my grandma, remember, remember.

BIANCHINI: She remembers.

PASSIONE: The young girl, yeah, I remember my grandma, quando
1936—come sei dice andate in l'africa.

BIANCHINI: She remembers her grandmother when she left.

PASSIONE: And my grandma die . . .

BIANCHINI: The grandma die one week before she left before she
left for Africa.

PASSIONE: And me, one week Africa. I remember my grandma.
Yeah, yeah, I remember.

LEVINE: What do you remember. Ask her, when she was a little girl, what she remembers doing with her grandmother.

BIANCHINI: Così tu ricordi? Così tu ricordi di tua nonno[sic] con é lei piccoini?

PASSIONE: Oh, every day my grandma.

BIANCHINI: She used to go to Grandma every day.

PASSIONE: Every day.

BIANCHINI: She loved to go there every day.

LEVINE: And what would her grandmother do? Would she tell stories?

BIANCHINI: Che ti fa di faceva da nonna

PASSIONE: No, [non] sagomare il tro parlantica.

BIANCINI: No, cosicché te le contava le storia, le fiabe..

PASSIONE: In giameo[ph,sp] con da leggere come di ho dovere, my grandma, she have one daughter, my grandma. She had a big family.

BIANCHINI: A big family. That's why she liked it. She was only . . .

PASSIONE: My mother and the two children . . .

BIANCHINI: There was four of them at home.

PASSIONE: [not understood] the family.

BIANCHINI: So she liked to go there.

PASSIONE: I remember every day my grandma, every day. Yeah, yeah, I remember questo.

LEVINE: Would she tell you stories? Would she sing to you?
Do you remember . . .

BIANCHINI: (Italian) [not understood] le storie?

PASSIONE: No, sai c'è non bambini -- over there

BIANCHINI: No, no, she says (?). But, uh . . . (Mrs. Passione speaks in Italian.) There were a lot of kids there. She remembers there were a lot of kids.

PASSIONE: -- insistiva insieme. Poi, come sei dice, danda volta faceva mangiare si mangi va la.

BIANCHINI: She says she used to cook, and all the kids used to eat there.

0:24:45.8

PASSIONE: My father scream (Italian).

BIANCHINI: She says that when she came home, my father used to yell and say, "This is like a hotel. It's not your

house. You're never home."

PASSIONE: Me and my brother, Nicolino.

BIANCHINI: Everybody was going to grandma's, all the kids.

PASSIONE: All the family, because there's more family, five children. She had a big family. My family, too. Another family, the brother of my father, too, (Italian).

LEVINE: Do you remember any of your grandfathers, either of your grandfathers?

PASSIONE: No. Grandfather, no.

BIANCHINI: No.

PASSIONE: No.

LEVINE: And was this your mother's mother? No, this was your father's mother, your grandma.

PASSIONE: The mother (di) my mother.

LEVINE: And do you remember them, your grandmother, Tina, I mean, your . . .

BIANCHINI: No. I remember when I went to Italy, but I never

spent any, just two weeks. I never spent any time.

The first time I saw my grandmother was when I came back from Africa. I grew up without the grandparents.

LEVINE: Ask your mother what she noticed had changed in Sicily after she came back from Africa, what changes she noticed, if any.

BIANCHINI: (Italian)

PASSIONE: Oh. (Italian)

BIANCHINI: She says after the war, when I came back, she says, it was really changed. I felt that the people were confused right after the war. (Mrs. Passione speaks in Italian.) She says there wasn't the town from before. She says, you know, it was just out of the war. There was no jobs. (Mrs. Passione speaks in Italian.) Everything was bombed from the war. It was really, uh . . . (Mrs. Passione speaks in Italian.) She says everything was changed.

LEVINE: Ask your mother, did she want to stay in Sicily, or did she want to come to America?

BIANCHINI: (Italian)

PASSIONE: Yeah.

BIANCHINI: She said when she saw all this confusion, a lot of people unemployment, she says she really didn't want to stay there, because she felt if I stay there how am I going to live. So she says, uh, I think my husband did a good choice. We are going to America.

LEVINE: So do you remember, uh, then going to the ship to come to America?

BIANCHINI: Yes, I do remember.

LEVINE: Ask your mother how she felt saying goodbye to her family.

BIANCHINI: (Italian) (Mrs. Passione speaks in Italian.)

PASSIONE: (Italian) My mother, one daughter.

BIANCHINI: She felt very bad. She felt like that was the last time she was going to see her mother. (Mrs. Passione speaks in Italian.)

PASSIONE: Same thing. It was really tough.

BIANCHINI: She said it was really painful to live to, uh, with my brother, all the, and my mother, he says,

because, after all, she says, I only spent, she feels that she spent only a few years with her mother. That's why she really, got to really know her. And then she also felt who knows if I'm going to see her again since I'm leaving for America. That's how she felt. (Mrs. Passione speaks in Italian.)

LEVINE: Where did you go from, uh, from Sicily to take the boat?

PASSIONE: Uh, from Sicily we took the train, and we went to Naples.

LEVINE: And it was the three of you.

BIANCHINI: The three of us, yes.

PASSIONE: I was in Italy 1956. My husband died over there.

LEVINE: Wait. Let's wait until, let's keep talking now about the trip, to the trip to this country, okay?

PASSIONE: Oh.

LEVINE: So what was the name of the ship?

BIANCHINI: The ship, uh, the name of the ship was the Volcania.

LEVINE: Okay.

BIANCHINI: It was a big ship, a very big ship.

LEVINE: Okay. We're going to stop here, and Kevin's going to flip the tape, and then we'll continue with the voyage.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Okay. We're starting with side B now, and I'm speaking with Sebastiana Passione and Tina Bianchini, who, uh, are here, who came in 1951 with Tina's brother, John. Uh, now, we're talking about, you came on the Vulcania.

BIANCHINI: Yes.

PASSIONE: Vulcania.

LEVINE: Do you remember any examinations, anything prior to Ellis Island that you went through?

BIANCHINI: Um, no, because all the examination was done in Africa. So, so we didn't went through anything.

LEVINE: What was the nature of the examination in Africa that you had?

BIANCHINI: Before, we had a physical. We had, completely physical. Me, my brother and my mother. And prior to that my mother went to the, uh, the American Consul, so they could release the documents that my brother was a mute and deaf. Because my mother was afraid that maybe they'll find some kind of objection, because he was like that.

LEVINE: So you were assured before you left that your brother would be allowed to enter, or not?

BIANCHINI: No, we just thought of that, you know.

LEVINE: You just went to the embassy.

BIANCHINI: Yeah, the embassy. The embassy in Africa, the American embassy.

LEVINE: And did they give you any papers or anything?

BIANCHINI: Yeah. They did give me a paper, saying that John Passione is a mute, and he's deaf. That's all.

LEVINE: Okay. So then, do you remember the ship? What, the voyage, how, how was the voyage for you? Did

anything happen during the voyage that you remember?

BIANCHINI: The voyage, except for the seasick, it was okay. Like, see, because we traveled in January, we had, like, a couple of storms. And my mother felt seasick. And for the whole ten days, she was down in the cabin. And my brother and I, and we met other kids, like us. We were just having a good time. We had a good time going up and down the stairs, going down, going up, around the deck.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And how, do you remember coming into the New York Harbor?

BIANCHINI: Yes, I do.

LEVINE: What do you remember?

BIANCHINI: When, uh, the boat approached, uh, we, the first time we saw, it was about seven o'clock, about eight o'clock at night, and the first thing I saw was a beautiful statue, all illuminated. And then everybody says, "That's the Statue of Liberty. We're home." So I told my brother in sign language, "We're home, we're home." And, uh, we got very emotional, but my mother couldn't see her, because

she was still sick in the cabin with the seasick. But I think that it was the most beautiful thing that I ever saw in my life when I saw the Statue of Liberty. At eight o'clock at night with his hands, with the torch in her hand. Then the boat, you know, proceed for the New York Harbor.

LEVINE: And do you remember, uh, the, New York? Do you remember seeing New York?

BIANCHINI: Yes. I remember, and I also got very excited when I saw the skylight of New York. I think that also was a beautiful scene, since I never seen anything like that. I was really excited.

LEVINE: And then your mother came . . .

BIANCHINI: Then I called my mother. She came up. Because the boat was, you know, standing, going very slowly, so she was able to get up.

LEVINE: Um, then you were ferried to Ellis Island. Tell me your impressions . . .

BIANCHINI: Probably what happened was prior to that, that when we approached the New York Harbor, the police, the official, the official says, "Okay, everybody gets

on line, because we process, we have to process the papers." So my mother gives the papers, and, uh, the police, the immigration office looks at us, and he says, "You can't get off the boat." So, and we couldn't understand English, so somebody interpreted for us, and they told my mother, no, you cannot, because they're going to detain you because of your son being deaf and dumb. So my mother said, "Well, but why? He's just a mute." So he says, "No." He says, "We have to take you to Ellis Island." So my mother still didn't understand, but some of the official spoke Italian, and my mother explained to them that my father was waiting downstairs on the dock. "Please, let me tell my husband that I'm not getting off. They're going to take us to Ellis Island." So she was in a company with an office, an officer. We stayed on the boat, and two officers, they took her downstairs to meet my father. And she explained it to my father that we can't get off. They're going to take us to the Ellis Island. So my father was very shocked about it, and, uh, he didn't say anything. So, and then the officer says, "Okay." He says, "We have to go back." So we went back on the ship, and then the officer says, "Well,

come on, follow us." We got into a van, and then they took us to the Ellis Island. There was a boat, the ferryboat. We were very scared. We were crying. And, uh, we didn't know why they were taking us there. So, and then when the boat approached Ellis Island we got off, and they, we followed them to, uh, to a room, where there was this policewoman, and, uh, that was the first time in my life that I had seen a policewoman. She said, "Well, this would be where you sleep, and this is the blankets. And, uh, and your brother, because he's a man, he has to sleep in another room." So I says to the woman, I says, well, she was talking to my brother, and I says, "No, my brother can't understand. Tell me." So she says, "Well, I wanted to give him the blanket. You got to sleep." So then after they told us, uh, "Follow me. I'm taking you to the dining room." And, uh, she says, "Get the tray." I always remember this. "Get the tray, get on line, and get your food." And we started to cry. (she laughs) We cried.

LEVINE: You and your mother?

BIANCHINI: Yes. You know, I understood what she meant, but,

uh, we really started to cry, because we felt like, uh, I don't know. We felt, uh, we got upset, we got emotional. So we got our food and then, again, with the policewoman, she took us to the dormitory.

LEVINE: And your brother went to the boys' dormitory.

BIANCHINI: Yeah, the boys' dormitory.

LEVINE: Well, it must have been frightening for him.

BIANCHINI: Yeah. Well, I explained it to him, that the rule, we're going to stay here maybe just a day, but we ended up staying six days. So every day, uh, then, uh, the next day they called my mother, and told her that she had to go see the doctor with my brother, and they asked her all kind of questions. "Does the boy walk by himself?" And my mother says, "Yes." "Does he dress by himself?" And, uh, and my mother says, "Yes." So then the next day again, they called her again, because they wanted to make sure that my mother would say the same thing, and also they wanted to make sure that he was really deaf and mute. Because they thought that because he was that way he might carry a contagious disease. So that's why we were detained for the six days, because every

day they would check him out. And that was very frustrating, because then my father used to come and visit us at night. And one night my father says, "Maybe you have to go back. I don't think you're going to, they're going to give you the okay." So we started to cry, and we really wanted to cry, because my mother didn't want to, you know, we didn't want to go back. We had nothing to go back for. Because we had nothing in Africa, we couldn't go back in Italy, so we really cried a lot because of that. And because of that, you know, my mother felt, uh, she still has a scar, let's say. You know, she never forgot that, because it was really six terrible days.

LEVINE: Well, now, what did the, do you remember, was your brother put in the hospital here?

PASSIONE: No.

BIANCHINI: No. It wasn't a hospital. It was just go, and they have an infirmary, like. You know, and they were just checking him, like, you know, checking his lungs, everything.

LEVINE: And could he talk to you? Could he let you

know . . .

BIANCHINI: Yeah. He could have let know, like he would say, "Why they checked me? There's nothing wrong with me." He says he always wondered why they checked him, and my mother had to explain it to him. Like I didn't go with her, because I would sit on a bench in the big hall, you know, talking to other people that were here already six months. And when I used to hear that, you know, all kind of things would go through my mind. I always think, "What about if I stay here six months? What if they send me back? What are we going to do?" It was really a dramatic experience, very dramatic.

LEVINE: So for you Ellis Island was not a happy place. I mean, you, when you were here, you were really scared and . . .

BIANCHINI: Yeah. We were scared, yes. We were scared. We were.

LEVINE: So, uh, so your father came every evening.

BIANCHINI: Yes, every evening.

LEVINE: Did he, did he, uh, did he bring anything? Do you

remember any of the first things that you encountered in this country?

BIANCHINI: (Italian) (Mrs. Passione speaks in Italian.) Oh, I thought you did. No, we didn't bring anything.

LEVINE: Okay. So when, tell me about the day that you were told that you could come into the country.

BIANCHINI: Oh, yeah. Well, then the doctor, the doctor was very nice to us. You know, he was very nice. And he said, "Okay, your problem is over." He says, "We realize there's nothing wrong with your son. You're free to go." So we got, we got very, we were up and, you know, jumping up and down from joy, and we felt, "Oh, we're almost home, we're almost home." You know, and we were very happy, very happy to leave. Yeah. That was the most beautiful day of our life, when the doctor told us, "You're free to go to the new land."

PASSIONE: That lady, (Italian).

BIANCHINI: So now, go. So the policewoman, the policewoman escort us to the, to the ferry. And my father came to meet us.

LEVINE: At the ferry.

BIANCHINI: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, um, so, what was the reunion like with your father in this country?

BIANCHINI: Oh, it was wonderful. It was nice. And, uh, he took us, it was very, we were very excited, but what happened was my father, had rented an apartment in New York, in East Side New York, and he told the bad news. He said, "Well, you know what happened with the apartment? It burned down."

PASSIONE: Oh, boy, oh, boy, oh, boy, oh, boy.

BIANCHINI: We have to go, you have to go to, we have to live where Anne, our Aunt Anne Maria for a few, for a few months, until I find another one, because at the time it was very hard to find an apartment in New York. And there were a lot of apartments in Brooklyn, but they were too expensive in Brooklyn. We couldn't afford it.

LEVINE: So he had the place in the Lower East Side?

BIANCHINI: Yeah. My father found a place, yeah, in the Lower

East. When he came in this country, he roommate with somebody in Mott Street, Mott Street. (Mrs. Passione speaks in Italian.) It was like some kind of loft, you know. And, uh, and we used to, sometimes we took the train from Brooklyn and visit him, my father, you know. And he would show around. And I remember, like, Mott Street, there were a lot of Italians there selling a lot of vegetables and fruits.

LEVINE: So he had a roommate in Mott Street, and the rest of the family went to Brooklyn at first.

BIANCHINI: Yeah, with my aunt, with my aunt. We lived there for about . . .

PASSIONE: The sister of my mother.

BIANCHINI: It was my mother's, my grandmother's sister.

LEVINE: Right. So your father, what was he doing for work here when you first came?

BIANCHINI: He worked, uh, he found a job as a carpenter.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. So he always did carpentry.

BIANCHINI: Yeah. He always worked. Yeah, eh worked.

LEVINE: And what was your father like, temperament, personality. How would you describe him?

BIANCHINI: My father? Well, I would describe him that he was a very good provider. He had a temper. Yes, he did have a temper when he used to get mad, but he was, like, very family-oriented, and a hard-working person.

LEVINE: Can you think of what it was, what kinds of things would make him angry?

BIANCHINI: Uh, when things, uh, like, uh, when things didn't go his way, let's put it this way. Yeah, he didn't, because he wanted, he was a very, I would say, a perfectionist, that's why, so he used to get mad.

LEVINE: How about, ask your mother how she would describe your father.

BIANCHINI: (Italian) (Mrs. Passione speaks in Italian.)
Well, she says, the way I told you, she says he was all for the family, very hard work person, very smart.

PASSIONE: Very smart.

BIANCHINI: Yeah. That's how she would describe him.

LEVINE: Okay. So after you stayed with your aunt for a little while, then where did you live after that/

BIANCHINI: Then we found a place in, on East Broadway, that was near Canal Street, you know, near Little Italy, let's put it this way, Little Italy. We found, uh, an apartment on the fifth floor, and, uh, we lived there for about five years.

LEVINE: What was Little Italy like when you first came here?

BIANCHINI: Well, uh, like, for instance, we used to go to butcher, and everybody spoke Italian, and they used to go to the, there were no supermarkets, all small stores, and most people spoke Italian, and the ones that didn't speak Italian, uh, you know, they knew, they were of Italian descent, they knew a few words, which we managed, between the sign language and the little Italian they knew. But most of them spoke Italian, yes.

LEVINE: Ask your mother how she felt about her years in Little Italy here?

BIANCHINI: (Italian) (Mrs. Passione speaks in Italian.) She

said, she says it was a little bit like Italy, because they spoke Italian, even though it wasn't really Italian, it was like a dialect. She says she felt (?). (Mrs. Passione speaks in Italian.)

LEVINE: So you were happy there?

BIANCHINI: Yeah, she was happy, but she always . . . (Mrs. Passione speaks in Italian.) But she always remembered, like, the old country. (Mrs. Passione speaks in Italian.) She always remembered the old country, you know, (?) friends. Because we were happy in New York. (Mrs. Passione speaks in Italian.)

LEVINE: Different mentality. (Translating what Mrs. Passione said.) (voices garbled) Ask her what different mentality, what was the difference of the mentality there.

PASSIONE: (Italian) Different than the people today.

BIANCHINI: Well, there was, among the Italians there was a very different mentality because, see, these people, they lived in New York, they came many, many years ago, they came. And they, uh, they didn't change. The

way they were, that's the, otherwise, the way they were, they remained. See, because we, uh, maybe because we traveled, we would be a little bit, uh . . .

LEVINE: More cosmopolitan, had their own sophistication maybe or something.

BIANCHINI: Maybe, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay, so, um, so your father continued to work as a carpenter.

BIANCHINI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Did you go to school, or did you work then?

BIANCHINI: No. I had finished all the school, and because I couldn't speak English I worked in a factory.

PASSIONE: No, the school (?).

BIANCHINI: And my mother worked in a factory. She worked in a garment center, and I worked in a dress center.

PASSIONE: My father, my husband speak English (Italian), in Africa.

BIANCHINI: She says my father spoke a little bit of English,

because he took it a little bit, because he knew he was going to come, because the fact that he worked for the Saudi Arabia were American, and then he took a course, of English, eh knew a little bit.

LEVINE: I see.

PASSIONE: Yeah.

BIANCHINI: I, we didn't know that much.

LEVINE: Did he become a citizen?

BIANCHINI: Yes. After five years he became a citizen of the United States.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And you, too?

BIANCHINI: Not my mother. I did. (voices garbled) John, my brother John, became. (voice off mike) My mother can't speak English.

LEVINE: How did John become a citizen? What did he have to do to show he . . .

BIANCHINI: Well, we had to study a booklet. So, and I became a citizen. Then my brother wanted to become a citizen, and because he was a deaf and dumb he

couldn't read the book. (Mrs. Passione speaks in Italian.) So I explain it to the immigration office, that my brother wanted to become an American citizen, if there was any way they could help him. So the, the judge says to me, "Well, if he knows how to write a few words, you know, and answer through you some of the questions, he could." So, like, a month prior to his appointment, I studied with him.

So when he went in front of the judge, the judge asked him, "Who was the first president of United States?" And he knew that, he told him it was the one with the long hair.

PASSIONE: General Eisenhower.

BIANCHINI: Yes. And then he says, "Who's the president now?" And at the time was Eisenhower. So my brother says, "The one that always says like this."
(she gestures)

PASSIONE: I like, my son no like it over there.

BIANCHINI: He raised his hand. Which (?).

PASSIONE: My son no like it over there.

BIANCHINI: And, um, oh, he says, the judge was very pleased.

He says, "Oh, he knows it was the president or not."
And then he says, "Write me, write me a sentence."
And he wrote, I kissed my hands. He didn't know
(?). So, and I says, "Look, judge, you have to
excuse it that he says that." He says, he said to
me, "Oh, he wrote a sentence anyway, it's English,
so he's got his citizenship." That's what he did.
(Mrs. Passione speaks in Italian.) So the judge
was pleased that he was able to write in hand, and
he was pleased that even though he was a mute and
deaf, he knew who was the first president, who was
the present . . .

LEVINE: President.

BIANCHINI: . . . of the United States. And so he got his
citizenship, and he was very happy.

LEVINE: He was very proud of that.

BIANCHINI: Very proud. He took everybody out to eat. (they
laugh) The judge was very nice. (Mrs. Passione
speaks in Italian.) He loves America.

LEVINE: I was just going to ask you about your brother. Do
you think he had a different life here than he would

have had in Italy, given his condition?

BIANCHINI: He has a better life, he has a better life here, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BIANCHINI: Because I think if he would have stayed in Africa, he would never be able to work. It's always in Italy. But America gave an opportunity to find him a job, even though he was a handicap.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, uh, your mother mentioned your father died young.

BIANCHINI: Yeah, my father died . . .

PASSIONE: 1956.

BIANCHINI: 1956, in Italy. He took the family to Italy in 1956.

LEVINE: So you were all in Italy when he died?

BIANCHINI: No. My brother was here, and my mother and I went to Italy. He wanted to see his, see, what happened, why he wanted to go in Italy, because when he came to America, he never had a chance to see his mother,

so he always wanted to take a trip to Italy to see his family. So, and he went to Italy, and he got sick and he died, and he was buried in Italy.

LEVINE: What did he get sick from?

BIANCHINI: He died, he died from kidneys disease.

LEVINE: I'm sorry?

BIANCHINI: Kidneys.

LEVINE: Kidneys. Oh. And do you remember the funeral?

BIANCHINI: Yes. I remember the funeral.

LEVINE: Was it a traditional Italian . . .

BIANCHINI: It was a traditional Italian funeral. They had the band. Everybody dressed in black. And we, and we walked behind the coffin until we got to the cemetery with the band, and it was very sad. Because that was the time, he died when things were going good for my father. That's when, you know, he died.

LEVINE: So his mother was alive. He went to see his mother.

BIANCHINI: Yeah. We went to see. Because, see, my father was,

he thought, "I'm going to Italy to see my family, and I came back to America and, uh, maybe we'll, uh, we'll buy a house. That was his dream, to buy a house, but he never succeed, because he died."

LEVINE: So then how much after that did you and your mother come back here?

BIANCHINI: So then after six months we came back here, and we started from scratch all over again.

LEVINE: And what, was it hard? Was it difficult?

BIANCHINI: It was very hard, yeah. It was very hard.

LEVINE: Tell me what you both did when you came back.

BIANCHINI: I went back to work. I went back to work. My mother went back to work. We moved from New York, because my mother didn't want to stay there. There was too many memories. And we moved, we lived, we found an apartment in Brooklyn, and we lived there, and we got on with our life.

LEVINE: Did your mother wear black for . . .

BIANCHINI: Yeah. She wore black for twenty years, and I wore black for six months, because I got married, I got

married.

LEVINE: After six months back?

BIANCHINI: Yeah. After six months I got married, and I took my
black off. But my mother wore black for twenty
years, I think, she did. Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, tell me your husband's name.

BIANCHINI: Walter Bianchini.

LEVINE: And your . . .

BIANCHINI: And I met him in Africa.

LEVINE: Oh. Tell me, just briefly. We have about five
minutes left, so . . .

BIANCHINI: I met him in Africa, and then he went to Italy and I
came to America. So, and after I got my citizenship
I went back to Italy. I married him, and I called
for him, and he came here.

LEVINE: Ah. You married him there?

BIANCHINI: Yeah. I married him in Sicily. We had a Sicilian
wedding, a traditional wedding.

LEVINE: Oh. So describe the traditional Sicilian wedding.

BIANCHINI: Well, we, um, we got married. We walked to the church. That was very unusual. We walked to the church, and the priests marry us, and then all the, all the town was there, all the town was, all the kids and people I didn't even know. And then when we got married we walked back to my grandmother's house. That was one more time that I saw my grandmother. And then, uh, we went, he was from Milan, my husband. So then he took me to his family, and then, like six months later, I left, and then I came to America, and then I sent for him.

LEVINE: I see. So, um, was your father alive when you were married?

BIANCHINI: No. My father was dead.

LEVINE: I see. So, okay. So, um, then, uh, your mother stayed in Brooklyn. And was your mother working in the garment industry?

BIANCHINI: Yeah. She worked in the garment industry until she retired. She retired '65.

LEVINE: I see. I see. Tell me, ask your mother what she

feels most proud of or grateful for in her life.

BIANCHINI: Let me see. Proud of . . .

LEVINE: What she's done that makes her feel good?

BIANCHINI: Oh, yeah. It makes her feel good that she's got a house. That's our life, the house. That's what she's proud of, that she was able to work, and to buy, you know, to buy a house, and live there. That's the most thing.

LEVINE: And also, uh, ask how she thinks it made a difference that she came to America for her.

BIANCHINI: Yeah. It made a difference that she was able to, uh, you know, to do all this. But, uh, deep down inside, she always, uh, think of the, what she left behind.

LEVINE: Ask if, ask her if she, are you happy you came to this country?

BIANCHINI: (Italian) (Mrs. Passione speaks in Italian.)
Yeah, she's happy. But she still . . .

PASSIONE: Die, and come back (?).

BIANCHINI: Yeah. She's happy she come back, but she always remember the young ones she left behind. She always says that.

PASSIONE: (?) to Italy.

LEVINE: And how about you? Just, briefly, what would you say you feel proud of, or how coming here has affected you in your life.

BIANCHINI: Okay. I'm prouder to be here, and, uh, I'm prouder that America gave me the opportunity to have more than my own country, but although I have all these things, there's always a part of me that was left in the old country.

LEVINE: Can you say a little bit, what was that part of you that you feel is still there?

BIANCHINI: Yes, I tell you. It's, I think, I grew up there, and I feel that it's where you grow up, it's your home, even though you go into another country, it will be always your home where you grew up, not where you were born, where you grew up. That's what I feel, till now. But I'm happy to be here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah.

BIANCHINI: I'm happy to be in America.

LEVINE: Ask your mother, is there anything she'd like to say before the tape closes?

BIANCHINI: (Italian) (Mrs. Passione speaks in Italian.) She says . . .

LEVINE: Is there anything else you'd like to say about coming to this country before the tape is over?

PASSIONE: Oh, America nice.

BIANCHINI: She says America's a great country. (Mrs. Passione speaks in Italian.) Yeah, and too bad she can't speak English. That's the main . . . (Mrs. Passione speaks in Italian.) She says she's got a lot of satisfaction. She says, but it's one thing that she wished she would speak English. (Mrs. Passione speaks in Italian.) Yeah, that's it. That's the whole thing, that's the whole thing. And I think, you know . . .

PASSIONE: Cleaning my house . . . (Italian)

BIANCHINI: She says she loves the house. That's her pride and joy is the house.

PASSIONE: One-family house, (?). (Italian)

LEVINE: Okay. And how about you? Anything you'd like to say just before we close?

BIANCHINI: Well, I'd like to say that I'm, I think my father did a great thing to bring us to America.

LEVINE: Okay. That's a good place to close. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. It's July 26, 1994. I'm talking with Sebastiana Passione and Tina Passione Bianchini, who came together with John Passione in 1951, and was detained here for seven days. Thank you very, very much.

BIANCHINI: You're welcome.