

EI-511

LOUISA SCARZELLA GAUDIOSO
BIRTH DATE: APRIL 5, 1909
INTERVIEW DATE: AUGUST 1, 1994
RUNNING TIME: 46:15
INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PhD
RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME
INTERVIEW LOCATION: COPIAQUE, NEW YORK
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 2/1998
TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

ITALY, 1920
AGE 11
PASSAGE ON "THE DANTE ALIGHIERI"

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Funding for this transcript, one of many interviews conducted with Italian and Sicilian women, was generously provided by interviewee Elda Del Bino Willitts, EI-8. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of Oral History, 8/14/1997.

LEVINE: Today is August 1, 1994, and I'm here in Copiaque, Long Island, New York, with Louisa Gaudioso, who came from Italy in 1920, right around her eleventh birthday.

GAUDIOSO: Right.

LEVINE: And, uh, she came through Ellis Island, let's see. You were, were you detained there?

GAUDIOSO: Yes. We were detained a whole week.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. So you were at Ellis Island for a week.

GAUDIOSO: Right.

LEVINE: Now, uh, let's start, though, at the beginning, talking about life in Italy before you came that you can remember. Start with your birth date and the town you were born in.

GAUDIOSO: Well, I was, as you said, eleven years old, my eleventh birthday. And the name of my town was San Lorenzo.

LEVINE: Could you spell that?

GAUDIOSO: S-A-N L-O-R-E-N-Z-O. San Lorenzo.

LEVINE: And did you live in San Lorenzo . . .

GAUDIOSO: Yes, we lived all our life there.

LEVINE: All your life. Uh-huh.

GAUDIOSO: It's a small town, not too many people. What else could I say?

LEVINE: Well, maybe we could start with the house you lived in. Do you remember what it looked like?

GAUDIOSO: Well, we had a small house, and I could tell you, my father was in the United States when he got married,

and he came back to Italy to make the house bigger,
but then we got hit with the . . .

LEVINE: The First World War?

GAUDIOSO: No. The, oh, now I can't remember.

LEVINE: The earthquake.

GAUDIOSO: The earthquake, yeah. The earthquake. We got hit,
and our house, we had a church right near our house.
The church fell on top of our house. So our house
was all down, and my father, he was hurt. He was so,
they couldn't find him, because the house fell, you
know. My grandmother and my grandfather, they were
living down in the basement, and they weren't
touched. But my mother and father, they were living
upstairs. And my older sister, she was about three
years old then, and my father, when he heard the
noise, he went out to see what happened. When he saw
that everything was shaking, he went back to get my
mother and the baby and the house broke in half. So
he fell down, and all the stuff fell on top of him,
so he was really hurt. Then my mother and my sister,
my mother was carrying me. See, that's when I was
born, after that. My sister didn't get hurt, and my

mother didn't get hurt. They had just a few scratches, I guess, and everything like that. But they couldn't find my father. So they were looking with the candles to find him, because there was no electricity or nothing. So my grandmother, she was looking with the candle all around, all around, and she felt him. She felt him, she says to my mother, "Oh, he's alive, he's alive, he's warm." So then they took all the garbage out, I guess, all the stones and everything, because those are houses with the stones. And, uh, they took my father out. And my father had seventy-five stitches on his head. And the queen, Avilli, sent so much stuff for the people. Like the mothers, they were in a family way, she used to send blankets, sugar, cake, chocolate, everything for the people, you know. So my grandmother went over there to this, uh, and the people that were giving the stuff, they said to her, "She don't need anything, because her son-in-law came from the United States." They didn't know he was hurt and the house was all down. So my poor grandmother went home. So my mother didn't get nothing. So then they had barracks. They had to live in barracks, so many people there, you know.

And after a while, and then my father, when he got better, he came back to the United States, He came back to the United States.

LEVINE: So that must have been in 1909?

GAUDIOSO: 1909, 1908.

LEVINE: '08.

GAUDIOSO: I was born 1909. So when he came back to the United States, of course, then they were going to build a house bigger, instead of bigger it got smaller. (she laughs) But, anyway, the first World War, that was 1914, he sent for us, and, uh, we couldn't come because then the war broke out. We couldn't come. So that time we, my sister, my other two sisters weren't born yet. Yeah, they were born yet. They were born, too, and we couldn't come. So then 19, 1919 he sent the papers again, so we had to go take pictures, everything again. And we left, I remember we left in the morning. We used to have a bus at the town. It used to come in at twelve o'clock, once a day. And we had to leave with the bus, and we went to Reggio Calabria. That's the big town, you know, the big city. And we're about,

maybe about two hours away from there. So we got there, from there we had to go to Sicily, and you go by boat to Sicily. From Sicily we had to go to Naples, and that's where we got the ship.

LEVINE: Wow. Well, now, tell me your father's name?

GAUDIOSO: My father's name was Natale Garcella[ph]. N-A-T-A-L-E. And he was here about 19, maybe 1978, '79 maybe, you know. He was here a long time.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

GAUDIOSO: He used to go back and forth my father.

LEVINE: So he, he had gone back and forth a few times before you were born?

GAUDIOSO: Yeah, oh, yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: And he, and he came back . . .

GAUDIOSO: He came back over here.

LEVINE: When, no, but when your mother was carrying you, that's when he came back.

GAUDIOSO: He came back again, yeah.

LEVINE: Earthquake.

GAUDIOSO: The earthquake.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GAUDIOSO: But he was there when the earthquake came. See, he just came back home when the earthquake came.

LEVINE: Now, was he sending money to the family.

GAUDIOSO: Oh, sure, yeah. He was working for a dollar a day, my father.

LEVINE: What was he doing?

GAUDIOSO: He worked in different jobs. When he first came, the first time he said he worked in Buffalo, New York, and they had, they had so much snow that they had to make trenches before they could go out, and he used to work for a dollar a day.

LEVINE: And that's before you came over.

GAUDIOSO: Before we came over, yeah. Then from there he went to West Virginia. His sister was living in West Virginia, so he went to West Virginia. He went to West Virginia, and he used to work in the coal mines,

but he didn't go in the coal mines. He used to, he used to have a good job then. He used to open the fans for the workers down, for the coal mines, they used to get the air with the fans, you know? And he used to open those fans in the morning and close them at night when the workers used to go out.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

GAUDIOSO: And he had a good job. He was making seven dollars a day then. He had a good job. So then when we came, the owner of the coal mine used to tell my father, "When your family comes, you're going to get a house." You know, because he lived with his sister. And he used to go and cut his grass, take care of his things, you know? But when we came, we had to live in one room, six people. Where my father was because, you know, the houses over there in West Virginia, they're small. They've got two bedrooms upstairs maybe and one room downstairs, in the kitchen. So we lived six, six people in one room. So then my father says to the owner of the coal mines there, he says, "I need, you know, I need the house, you know, my family came." So he says, "Well, go look for a house." He says, "There's an empty house,

you take it." Because over there they only pay for very cheap the houses at that time, you know, when we came. So they went and, uh, one of my sister want a drink of water and, uh, they were looking for the house. And when they went to look for the well, where the well was, you know, my mother saw all colored people. When she saw all colored people, she started crying, my mother, you know, because we never saw colored people. So my father said, "What's the matter?" She says, "You brought me over here, you know, with my kids over here. I don't want to stay here." So he says, "All right, we're going to move away, you know. If I can't get the house," he say, "don't worry about it. We'll go someplace else." So that's what they did. They changed, my father changed, from one town they went to another town. We went to another town, and he had the house. But then he was working, company work, piece, piece work, like, four dollars a day. See, he lost his good job, and he was making four dollars a day. Then we had, uh, I used to go to school. My older sister didn't want to go to school.

LEVINE: Well, before we talk about school in this country,

when you were, when you were back in Italy, do you, uh, well, first of all, do you remember any experiences with your father in Italy? Do you remember him coming back?

GAUDIOSO: Oh, yeah. Well, when my father came from, when he used to come back and forth, you know, he was sick. Because when he was working a dollar a day, he got sick. Because they used to load, he used to work two jobs. They used to load trucks, and when the trucks used to go out, they used to lay down on the ground, and he got sick. He got sick and went to the hospital. So my mother couldn't get no mail from him. So, you know, she figured maybe he was dead or something, because he couldn't write or anything. Because he didn't know how to read or write, my father, or my mother either. So my older sister, one night she says to my mother, she got up in the morning, she says, "Ma, my father, I dreamed my father came home." So my mother says to her, "Go away. Don't, don't tell me those stories," she says to her. So, as I said, the bus was coming at twelve o'clock, so we lived near Abiats[ph], you know, they call it the Abiats[ph]. So my sister,

we're right near, one, maybe two, two houses away. She goes over there, and she sees the bus coming, and she waits there. She waits there, and she sees my father coming down. He had just a little suitcase and a stick, you know, to hold himself, because he had, what you call it? Sciatic on the leg. Oh, before that my mother says to her, says to my sister, "If your father comes, even if he don't bring, he comes naked, as long as he's well," you know? So when my sister saw my father, she ran back home and she says to my mother, "Ma, Ma, my father came, my father came." And my mother says, "Go away, don't kid me," you know? So she says, "No, my father came." At the meantime, my father reached, because my father, my mother was outside on the stoop, like, and she saw my father coming. But then my mother, right away, he sat on the chair, and my mother says his leg was hurting him, and he jumped, you know, he was hurting. So my mother, right away she went to the doctor, because everybody knew my mother, small town, you know? So she says to the doctor, "My husband came home. I want you to come because he's sick." So the doctor came over the house. My mother says, "You've got to tell me the truth. You've got

the kids, and you've got your wife." You know, he thought maybe he went someplace, he got sick. So my father says, "I swear on my wife," he says, "and my kids, no." So he told him the story that he used to work two jobs, he used to lay down on the ground. So for six months he was sick, and then he got better, he got better. After six months, he came back again. He came back to the United States again, and that's when, you know, he called for us.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So did you ever, when your father was in Italy, when you were a little girl . . .

GAUDIOSO: No, I don't remember my father. See, we didn't know my father. We used to have pictures of my father, we used to say to my mother, "Ma, everybody's got a father. We don't have a father?" So my mother used to say, "Yeah, there's your father, on the picture," she used to tell us.

LEVINE: What was your mother's name?

GAUDIOSO: Carmella.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

GAUDIOSO: Erameta Carmella. E-R-A, R-A-M-E-T-A.

LEVINE: And what kind of a woman was your mother? What kind of a personality did she have?

GAUDIOSO: She was a homemaker, you know, a homemaker. My mother was sick all the time, too. She had arthritis. She was very sick all the time. Then when we came here, she was operated on. But we didn't know what she had, because we were young, you know? We didn't know. She went to the hospital and, uh, every time she used to eat I think she used to get a pain in her stomach or something. I don't remember.

LEVINE: What kind of work did people do in the town when . . .

GAUDIOSO: Well, we didn't, we used to stay in the town all the time. If people don't have farms, you know, they don't, most of the people there, if they have a farm or something, they go out every day, they go out to work in the farms. But we never went. We used to go to school. We were four sisters. The four of us used to go to school. And in the summertime we had to go to private school. My father used to say, write to my mother, "Send my kids to school."

Because they didn't know how to read and write, because when he had to write a letter he had to go to someplace else, you know, find somebody to write a letter for him. So every year he used to, every letter he used to write to my mother, "Send my kids to school, send my kids to school."

LEVINE: What was school like for you?

GAUDIOSO: Oh, I used to like school. See, my older sister didn't like school.

LEVINE: Why did you like it?

GAUDIOSO: I used to like school. I used to like the school.

LEVINE: Was it a strict school?

GAUDIOSO: Oh, yeah, it was a strict school. Yeah, they're strict over there, they're strict. Then I had, we had an aunt, she was a little jealous. She used to say, once she says to my mother, she used to say, "What are you going to make your daughters? All teachers?" Because we used to go to school, you know. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Did you have grandparents?

GAUDIOSO: Yeah, I had grandparents, and my grandparents lived in the farm all the time. That's why I says, if they have farms, they live all out. And I used to get up early in the morning. Wednesday we didn't have school. One day we didn't have school. And I used to sleep by myself because I used to bleed, my nose used to bleed. Somebody touch my nose, I used to bleed. And my, my three sisters used to sleep with my mother in the big bed. But I used to sleep all by myself. I used to get up in the morning when I didn't have school, and I used to go to my grandfather, and my grandfather used to be in the farm with my grandmother. My grandmother maybe was two blocks away, or a block away. He used to call her, "Maria, Maria." That was her name, Marie. "Come, come give the milk, make the milk for the Louise. Louise came." He used to love me. So when we came over here my grandfather says to my mother, "Leave me Louise over here, because she can stay with me." So my mother says, "No, Louise got to come with me. Wherever I go, she's got to go. My husband would kill me then."

LEVINE: What was your grandfather's name?

GAUDIOSO: Dominick.

LEVINE: And whose mother and father . . .

GAUDIOSO: That was my mother's father and mother. See, my father's mother and father, they were dead, they were dead.

LEVINE: So do you remember any times on the farm when you would go and visit?

GAUDIOSO: Oh, sure. I remember everything. They used to, every Christmas my grandfather used to kill a pig, and he used to kill it for us, his grandchildren. My mother used to say, "Take it to the fair," because they used to go to fair once a year, sometimes twice a year. My mother used to say to him, "Take it to the fair and sell it," you know? So he used to say, "No, I'm not going to sell the pig." He says, "I have to kill it for my grandchildren, because I, this year I see them, next year maybe I don't see them no more." We had a good grandfather.

LEVINE: Do you remember that whole procedure of killing the pig and . . .

GAUDIOSO: Yeah, yeah. I remember everything, yeah. They used

to put him on a slat, on a big bench, and they used, a couple of people used to go and help. And they used to get the blood, you know, and make pudding and something like that, and they used to make the stuff.

They make the sausage, the salami and all that stuff, they used to make. And we didn't, we never used to buy anything. All, my mother used to buy the things, other things, you know. But the things like the wheat and the flour and the vegetables, things like that, we never had to buy nothing, olive oil, because my grandfather used to have everything. So he used to, and my mother used to go and help him sometimes, you know? When she felt well, she used to go and help him.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What do you remember as your favorite, uh, meals when you were little?

GAUDIOSO: Uh, the macaroni, when they used, they make home macaroni in the home towns, you know.

LEVINE: How about bread?

GAUDIOSO: Bread, when my mother, they make bread twice a month. They make the fresh bread, then they make, like, biscuits, long, long bread, and they dry it up. And

my mother used to have a big trunk, maybe that big, and they used to put the dry bread in there, for two weeks you had bread. But then they'd soak it, like, you know, before you'd eat it, something, they put olive oil.

LEVINE: So did everybody in town bake their own bread?

GAUDIOSO: Most of them, yeah. We had the oven in the house. In my house my mother had the oven. A lot of people don't have the ovens.

LEVINE: Right.

GAUDIOSO: My mother had a big oven in the house. And when I went to Italy, you know, I went to Italy . . . Marion, when I went to Italy? (voice off mike) No, what time Louisa was born?

: 1950.

GAUDIOSO: 1950 I went to Italy. My son was in the service in Italy. So I went to Italy, and then I went in my home town. I took my son and a niece of mine and, uh, I went these cousins, my mother's nephew that was my grandmother's brother's son, his family, I went to see them. So when I went there, when we went back to

the town, first thing, we live way up in the mountain, very fresh air. We have very good air. So when we got out of the taxi, because I had all the names, and I had a girlfriend that we used to play always together. Her brother was a priest, and they were rich people, real rich people, you know. And this, this girl, we used to play always together. We lived right next door, like.

LEVINE: What kinds of things would you play?

GAUDIOSO: We used to play different things. We used to play, like, jacks, you know, the jacks. We used to play like that. And, uh, but we used to be all together all the time. So when I went there in Abiats[ph], you know, we got out of the taxi. First thing my husband says, "Oh, my ears are ringing." So my son says to him, "Daddy, that's because the air is so clear up here." You see people with the rouge, no rouge on their face, regular color, you know.

LEVINE: So this is a mountain region where you were?

GAUDIOSO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember the name of the mountain?

GAUDIOSO: No, not the mountains, no. I don't remember the mountains. But we were right up on the mountain. You had to go all around, all around. But anyway, when we got there, I went, I saw all the old people. You don't see young people. The young people, they go away now because they don't have no work, you know, they don't have no farms, and they go away. So I see all these old people, they have like a seat with a big tree. That chins, when I saw that . . . (she laughs) But, anyway, I ask, like, some people, I say, "You know where these people are?" They say, "Oh, they were in Arvege[ph]." That's the big city. "They were in Arvege[ph]. Everybody went Arvege[ph]." At the meantime, I had the address of these cousins, and he says, this man says to me, "Oh, there's your cousin coming." He says to me, a young fellow. So when he came I says, "Where's your father and mother?" He says, "All right, I'll take you over their house." Because I didn't remember their house, you know. We went there, so I says to the father, "Where's your wife?" He says, "Oh, they're over at your house making the bread." But the house was all in ruins, you know, because nobody lived there, but the oven was all right. They used to make the bread

over there. (they laugh) It was good. So I stayed there. My husband, when I got there, all the neighbors that remembered me, you know, but I didn't remember nobody, everybody came up over the house, and my husband says, "The house is going to go down," so many people came to see me. Everybody was saying, "You remember us? You remember me? You remember . . ." I used to say yeah, but I didn't remember them. They say, "We remember you when you went away, you know, you was a kid." They used to tell.

LEVINE: Well, you can describe what kind of a kid you were when you were, like, when you were leaving, ten years old. What, how would you describe yourself at that time? What were you like?

GAUDIOSO: Well, I, you know, a regular girl, anyway.

LEVINE: Yeah. Were you, how did you feel about coming to America?

GAUDIOSO: Oh, we didn't feel nothing, because we used to come, you know, we used to come to see my father, you know. As I said, we didn't know my father. So my mother says, you know, that's better for you when we get

there, you know.

LEVINE: What about medical attention in your town?

GAUDIOSO: Oh, yeah, we had medical attention. And then the doctors, you know, the doctors over there, they know you. And when you call the doctor there, right away they come over the house.

LEVINE: What do you remember the treatment for your bloody noses was?

GAUDIOSO: Well, we had to, we went to, no, it was, it was like, uh, like somebody used to touch me like a little bit more, I used to bleed. But I didn't get no medicine for that, no. That's why I used to sleep by myself all the time, and then sometimes at night I used to feel wet, and I used to call my mother, "Ma, Ma, my nose is bleeding." And she used to come, she used to wipe me. Then it went away. Then it went away by itself.

LEVINE: How about religion? Were you a religious family?

GAUDIOSO: Yeah, yeah. I used to go every, every church. Especially when I had a pair of new shoes. (they laugh) I used to get out of one church and I used

to go to another church. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Where, how did you get your shoes?

GAUDIOSO: Oh, we used to, my mother used to buy them, you know, the shoemakers. They used to make it.

LEVINE: They would make them?

GAUDIOSO: Oh, yeah, they make your shoes, yeah. Good shoes they make, yeah.

LEVINE: So how often would you get a new pair?

GAUDIOSO: Oh, when they used to wear out. Because my mother had, you know, my father used to send the money all the time. We had the money, you know?

LEVINE: So there was a shoemaker in your town?

GAUDIOSO: Yes, a shoemaker in the town. Yeah, sure.

LEVINE: And, so do you remember any real celebrations, religious celebrations?

GAUDIOSO: Oh, yeah. When they had the holidays, though, they have a big feast. They have a big feast, and everybody comes. They have music, they have fireworks.

LEVINE: Is there anything different about the religious holidays that you remember . . .

GAUDIOSO: Oh, yeah, it's a lot of difference, because over there, you know, they're very religious. And they had the processions and everything. They're very religious, the people there. They go to church every day. Before they go to work, they go to church. Not like over here, you know? A lot of people go to church over here just to see the outfits. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Okay. Now, is there anything else about life, up until the time you left for America, anything that when you think back at that time and that place that you remember?

GAUDIOSO: Not really because, you know, we used to play, and that's it, you know. We used to play. Oh, then, uh, you know, the people there, in the afternoon, they sit all together, the neighbors, and the knit, who knits, who crochets, who embroiders. So I was, maybe I was about seven or eight years old then, and I said to my mother, "Ma, show me how to knit. Give me some wool and the needles. I want to learn how to knit."

So my mother says, "No, you're too little yet. When you get bigger, then you knit." So I went out, and I picked two feathers, chicken feathers, and I said, the lady that used to sew our clothes, I said to her, her name was Josephine, "Miss Josephine." I says, "Show me how to make the stockings." So she showed me. I used to make the bottom of the stockings, she showed me how to make, with the feathers, with the chicken feathers, because my mother won't buy me the needles. (they laugh) And then when I came over here, I learned how to do everything, crochet, knit and everything else. I did myself. I didn't go to school for that. I learned myself. I used to see you knit or something, or crochet, and I used to watch, and I used to do it.

LEVINE: So, um, so it was, the first World War was over, and then . . .

GAUDIOSO: Yeah, that's when, the Second, yeah, right.

LEVINE: The money . . .

GAUDIOSO: Yeah, right. He sent three thousand and two hundred liras. It's on the passport. That's how much it cost us to come here at that time. That's about

seventy, maybe about seventy-six years. Right?
About seventy-six years, I think.

LEVINE: So who were you coming with?

GAUDIOSO: My mother and my sisters, that's all.

LEVINE: And your sisters.

GAUDIOSO: Yeah.

LEVINE: And what were your sisters' names?

GAUDIOSO: One, the oldest one, her name was Maria. My, Louise,
my other sister, her name was Domenica, and the
youngest one, she's in California, her name was
Josephine.

LEVINE: Okay. So do you remember packing up to leave?

GAUDIOSO: No, not really.

LEVINE: Do you remember saying goodbye?

GAUDIOSO: Oh, yeah. I remember when we said goodbye to my
grandfather and all the neighbors, you know, I
remember that, yeah. Because they all come over the
house, you know, they come over the house, say
goodbye and everything. Who cries, you know. (she

laughs)

LEVINE: Your grandfather must have cried.

GAUDIOSO: Oh, yeah. My grandfather came with us to Regg[ph], to the big town. Not my grandmother, only him, he came. Because he used to love us. We were the only grandchildren he had. Then when we came here we want to send for my grandfather. We wanted, we made the papers and everything, but he didn't want to come.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Okay. So you got your papers, and then you went . . .

GAUDIOSO: To Regg[ph], to Regg[ph].

LEVINE: In Ren[ph] you went to Sicily?

GAUDIOSO: To Sicily, and from Sicily we had to go to Naples. That's where we got the ship then.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And do you remember the name of the ship?

GAUDIOSO: Yes, the Dante Alighieri.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what, were you examined at all before?

GAUDIOSO: You get examined when you leave, and then when you get off Battery Place they examine. Me, I used to have trouble with my eyes, you know? And, oh, I had, they used to put drops, my mother used to put drops in my eyes. But when we came to bed, I was, my eyes were all good. So we got to the Battery, and they passed, they don't even, you know, right away they pass you. They don't . . .

LEVINE: Well, before that, on the ship, on the Dante Alighieri, were you, what, what was it like? Were you down in the bottom of the ship, or were you . . .

GAUDIOSO: We came in the third class, the third class.

LEVINE: So you were in a cabin?

GAUDIOSO: Yeah. We had a cabin, yeah. And, uh, my older sister, we were kids, we never used to eat. We used to go all around the ship. My sister, my other two sisters and myself, we never used to eat. But my older sister, she wouldn't eat the food that they used to give us. My mother had to buy extra food for her, special food, you know? Because she was sick all the, she used to eat, and she used to throw up.

And I used to say to her, "If you don't eat, you won't throw up, and you're let Mama spend all the money." And my poor sister was sick all the time.
(she laughs)

LEVINE: So you had this cabin, and it was just your mother and your sisters and you.

GAUDIOSO: Yeah, us.

LEVINE: And then you went to a dining room?

GAUDIOSO: Yeah, we had to go to a dining room to eat. You had to be six people. We were four, five, six people around the table you had to be with. So we had another man with us. Each table had six people.

LEVINE: And do you remember any experience that happened while you were on the ship?

GAUDIOSO: No, not really, because we used to, you know, we used to run around all the time. And then we saw a colored man on the ship, the first time we saw a colored man. And, uh, I say to my mother, "Ma, he's eating." You know, he was eating. "He's got dirty hands, and he's eating? He's so dirty." My mother says, "No, he's not dirty. His skin is like that."

So, but when we went to West Virginia, you know, the colored people, if you walk on the sidewalk they had to, they used to get off the sidewalk and make you pass. And they used to call my father Christmas, because Natale in English is Christmas. And they used to call him, all the colored people knew my father. (she laughs) We used to, we used to go on the side when we used to see them, you know, because we were afraid. (she laughs) Then we used to, my father used to buy us ice cream. Oh, when we came with the, in the Battery place, we had to stay seven days there because my, the people told my mother, "Don't show your money, because they don't give you the right change." So my mother gets the money, she puts it in her breast, and she had the money. So that's why we didn't have enough money to go West Virginia five, six people, five people. (she laughs)

LEVINE: When you got, you must have been ferried out to Ellis Island.

GAUDIOSO: Yeah. You get, you get there, and then you stay there. You stay there, and they have a big table, maybe from here, half a block they had, they used to

put all the food there. They used to give you a lot of food. And everybody used to sit on the benches. At night they used to go wash clothes, the people, they used to wash clothes in the bathrooms, and so much noise and everything. But anyway, with my mother, we had to stay, we used to say to my mother, I used to say to my mother, a lot of people used to cry sometimes, and then they used to get the telegram, they used to go away. So one day I says to my mother, "Ma, we'd better cry." (she laughs) "We'd better cry. You see those people? They cry, and they're going away." So my mother says, "No," she says, "because we don't have enough money to go. Your father's got to send us the money." My poor father was a week without work waiting for us in Welch, West Virginia. That's the big city, in Welch. So . . . (she laughs)

LEVINE: So your mother, so your mother hid the money because she wasn't going to get fair change.

GAUDIOSO: Right.

LEVINE: So meanwhile you had no money to leave.

GAUDIOSO: No, we didn't have, she had a little money, but most

of the money she had. So my father, the bank used to use, you know, he used to use for his convenience, he was Italian, the fellow, and he used to do everything for my father. So my father had told him, "Anything my wife needs, you send it," you know. So he would stay seven, seven days before he got the news that we had to, we needed the money. That's why we had to wait seven days in the Battery Place. So after seven days we get the money. We got the money, we went to West Virginia. So we were . . .

LEVINE: What about Ellis Island? Can you remember anything about it?

GAUDIOSO: I don't remember too much. The only thing I remember, that they used to make so much noise at night, the kids hollering, you know, so many people. And the food. They used to put so much food, they put, like Jello, we didn't know what Jello was.

LEVINE: Did you see any other new things?

GAUDIOSO: That's, and on the train we saw the bananas. We used to say, "Those are cucumbers. Those are American cucumbers." They're bananas. And the ice cream, we used to eat the ice cream on the top, and the cone,

we used to throw it away, because we didn't know we had to eat the cone, because in Italy they have ice, you know, and different stuff, so we used to throw it away.

LEVINE: So you took a train from . . .

GAUDIOSO: Yeah, we took a train to West Virginia, we went to Welch. When we got to Welch, my father was at the station, and my older sister knew my father. She's dead, my older sister. And, uh, when she saw my father she says to us, "There's, there's Pop, there's Pop." We didn't know him. So my father come to kiss us, you know, we didn't have no love for my father because we didn't know him. Because the last time he was here maybe five years, and we didn't see him, so we didn't know him. So they he took us to a hotel. They had, the lady made dinner and everything, but we wouldn't eat. Then we went to his sister's house, and she used to cook. She used to use the lard. We were used with the olive oil. We wouldn't eat the food. My mother had to cook separate. But my father had to pay for the food, so he had to pay two times. And then, you know, we got our own house, and we lived there. And my older sister got married. She

was sixteen when she got married.

LEVINE: Was there a fairly large Italian community?

GAUDIOSO: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: In West Virginia, where you were?

GAUDIOSO: Oh, yeah, yeah. A lot of Italian people.

LEVINE: So did, uh, you go to school right away?

GAUDIOSO: Yeah, I went to school, like, and my other two sisters, we all went to school. All, my older sister, she didn't want to go to school.

LEVINE: So how did the school compare with the school that you had been in?

GAUDIOSO: Well, when we used to go to school, they used to make us sing Italian, and we used to sing for them, the three of us. Everybody used to laugh, you know. They used to love to see us sing.

LEVINE: Can you remember any of them?

GAUDIOSO: No, I forgot all the songs. (she laughs) We used to sing.

LEVINE: And, uh, so you stayed in school.

GAUDIOSO: I stayed in school until I was in junior high.

LEVINE: And then what did you do?

GAUDIOSO: Then I met my husband, we got married.

LEVINE: Where did you meet your husband?

GAUDIOSO: In, well, in West Virginia. He came from Brooklyn.

LEVINE: And was he working there?

GAUDIOSO: He came there to work, yeah, because in Brooklyn they couldn't get no work, and he came over there to work. But he was there once before, my fa--, my husband, but I didn't know him. But when he came the second time my sister, her husband was from the same home town that my husband is. So my sister came over the house, and she says to my mother, "Ma, a couple of fellows came from Brooklyn, New York. They're from my husband home town." But I didn't pay no attention, because, you know, I was young. I didn't pay no attention. So, at the mean time, my husband and this fellow, another fellow was talking by my sister, he was telling my husband that he married my

sister, Calabrese, they call, from the region, that's Calabrese, you know, the south. In the mean time, I got off the bus, and I used to have real long hair. And my husband, when he saw me, he says to this other guy, he says, "Who is that girl?" So this man says, "That's the sister who I'm telling you now that she married the man from our town." I didn't know them, you know. But my sister knew, saw them. See, I didn't, my husband wouldn't let me cut my hair. I was sick in the hospital and the nurse used to say, "Mr. Gaudio, let us cut her hair, they're too long, it's too hard." "Yeah, when she gets better she's gonna cut her hair," he used to say. He won't let me cut my hair. But then when I got better I says, "All of his home town people used to come from Italy, they used to have, they used to go cut their hair. One day I said, I used to get a permanent all the time, with the long hair, the waves, the used to have the waves, you know. So one day I go to the beauty parlor and I says to her, because she knew me, because I used to go all the time, she says, I said to her, you know, "Cut my hair, but not too short, just up to my neck." So I went home. So my husband comes home at night, he saw my haircut, he didn't say

nothing. When we went to bed he says to me, "You think you're smart, you cut your hair, huh?" I said to him, I said, "When I feel better I'm gonna grow again." I never grew my hair again, because it was too much bother to, they were too long all the time, you know. And I didn't, I didn't grow my hair no more.

LEVINE: So what changed for you, when you came and you settled in West Virginia?

GAUDIOSO: Well, everything changed. Well, everything changed because, you know, everything was different over here. Everything changed. Then when I got married, we came back to Brooklyn. See, before we came back to Brooklyn I was sick with my oldest daughter. I was two weeks in bed, and the doctor says to my husband, "She can't even sweep the rug if she wants to carry this baby." You know? Over there in West Virginia we had to bake bread, wash clothes, no laundry, nothing, over there. You have to do your own things. Everything you had to do. So my husband says, "Well." He says, "We go back. We go back to Brooklyn where I come from, and over there you don't have to do nothing." He says, you know, "You send

your clothes to the laundry, we buy the bread and everything." But my mother, when I got married, they went New Jersey, because my father had a brother there, and this brother used to write to my father, "Come over here, come over here." So they moved to New Jersey, Plainfield, New Jersey, they moved. And my father used to work in the park then, in the summertime, in the park. In the summertime was working, in the winter they didn't have no work, and they had to pay rent, you know. They had a little money saved. They used to use all the money up. So my mother says, "This is no good for us over here." So they went to Pennsylvania. My sister was living in Pennsylvania then, my older sister. They went to Pennsylvania, and that's where they were. But when we were coming to Brooklyn I said to my husband, "I have to go and see my mother before we go to Brooklyn." So my husband says, "Okay." So we stopped at my mother. When my mother heard that I couldn't do anything she says, "Oh, you'll get a job over here, and the sisters will do her things." But they had to do my, I used to make the bed, and that's all. You know, my husband used to work. He got a job. He used to work, on Saturday he used to be

home, and on Sunday he had to work, a Jewish factory.

LEVINE: In Plainfield, New Jersey?

GAUDIOSO: No, in Pennsylvania, Redding, Pennsylvania. My oldest daughter was born in Redding, Pennsylvania. So we stayed there till she was born. We stayed there till she was born. When I went to Brooklyn she was, oh, then my husband says, "Now I got to take her to Brooklyn because she's got to meet my brother, my uncles and my cousins and everybody. So my mother says, "No, if you take her to Brooklyn, you don't bring her back over here." So my husband says, "Oh, yes, I'll bring her back." So we went to Brooklyn and we stayed a week in Brooklyn and I went back to Redding, Pennsylvania. That's where my Rose, my oldest daughter was born. And we stayed there.

LEVINE: What, uh, what was your husband, what is your husband's name?

GAUDIOSO: Frank.

LEVINE: Frank. And, uh, your daughters, your children's names?

GAUDIOSO: My oldest, Rose, my second one is Dominick, my son,

my third is Carmella. She, they call her Millie for short, we call her Millie. My youngest daughter, her name was Lillian. She's dead. She died seven years ago. She was the youngest one. She had cancer.

LEVINE: So, uh, then you moved to Brooklyn.

GAUDIOSO: Then we went to Brooklyn. From Brooklyn . . .

LEVINE: Was it also a big Italian neighborhood?

GAUDIOSO: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, well, you know, they all get together, you know, they're, the home town people, they know everybody, like, you know. But I didn't know nobody there in Brooklyn. The first month, my husband had to bring even the bread home. I wouldn't go out. I was afraid to go out. Because I had her, my oldest daughter, she was a year old. I wouldn't go out. So he used to bring everything home. Then I used to, you know, I learned how to get out, and I used to go do my own shopping.

LEVINE: Now, were you speaking English?

GAUDIOSO: Oh, yeah, when I went to Brooklyn.

LEVINE: By then, when you went to Brooklyn?

GAUDIOSO: Oh, yeah. Oh, sure. Oh, in school they skipped me, in a couple of years I went to junior high. They used to skip me. Every year they used to skip me, too. Because I knew everything, you know. Only I didn't know how to talk good.

LEVINE: Right. Well, can you remember what was real helpful to you in learning English?

GAUDIOSO: Not really. Talking, I guess, with the kids, you know. That's, that was the main thing.

LEVINE: Now, did your mother keep a lot of the customs?

GAUDIOSO: Oh, yeah, yeah. Oh, sure.

LEVINE: Can you . . .

GAUDIOSO: We used to do the same thing like in Italy, you know. Cook, and my father used to have a yard, he used to make vegetables and everything like that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GAUDIOSO: But my mother used to cook. But my older sister used to help her a lot, you know. She liked, she used to like to stay home. She didn't want to come to school.

LEVINE: Now, did your mother and father become citizens?

GAUDIOSO: My father and mother didn't become citizens because my father didn't know how to read or write. When I got my citizen paper I said to the judge, "You know, my father's been here all his life, but he can't, he can't read and write." Oh, during the war they wanted to give him the citizen paper for nothing. And he didn't, because he couldn't write his name. So then we were teaching my father to write his name, because the judge says to me, "If he can write his name, we'll give him the paper." Then he, all at once he didn't want to write no more. He didn't want to learn no more. So he didn't have no citizen paper. Not my mother either.

LEVINE: So your mother and father stayed here, though.

GAUDIOSO: Yeah, they stayed here. Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Um, what did you feel, uh, particularly proud of, that's happened in your life?

GAUDIOSO: Oh, I don't, what could I say? The family, you know. My kids, my husband was good all the time. He gave us a good home all the time. He worked all his life.

He was real good, a good father and a good husband. Oh, he was strict. My kids were strict. They couldn't go out. Like now, my husband, they would go out now like they do now, he would be in jail. He would kill them. He was very strict. And my father was more strict than him. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh, let's see. Uh, do you think it made a big difference in your life, the fact that you were born in Italy, and you came here, and you . . .

GAUDIOSO: Not really, because I didn't know too much from Italy, you know, not really too much, because we had everything. Because my father was here, and he used to send the money to my mother, you know. We weren't poor. We had everything. And then my grandfather had the farm. He used to give us everything.

LEVINE: If you were to divide yourself up into American and Italian . . .

GAUDIOSO: Well, we went, I went to Italy. My husband wanted to make a house in Italy. I says, "Forget it." I says, "I'll die in three months. I'll want to go back home." This is my home. I didn't want to stay there.

LEVINE: So, now, do you have grandchildren?

GAUDIOSO: Yeah. I have, uh, fourteen grandchildren and thirteen great grandchildren.

LEVINE: Wow.

GAUDIOSO: And a grand, and a daughter-in-law, a good daughter-in-law, I have.

LEVINE: Great. Okay, well, is there anything else you can think of that, uh, you might remember about Italy, about coming here?

GAUDIOSO: Not really.

LEVINE: About getting settled here, anything at all?

GAUDIOSO: No, not really, because, you know, I was a young . . .

LEVINE: Did you see the Statue of Liberty when you first came on the boat?

GAUDIOSO: Oh, sure. That's the first thing you see. That's the first thing you see, the Statue of Liberty.

LEVINE: Did you know what it was when you came?

GAUDIOSO: No, no, afterwards, after you know.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I think we can stop here, and I want to thank you very, very much.

GAUDIOSO: Thank you, too, for coming out. (she laughs)

LEVINE: For a very lively interview. I've been speaking with Louisa Gaudio. She came in 1920 when she was just about eleven years old, from Italy. Today is, um, August 1, 1994. And you're what, ninety . . .

GAUDIOSO: I'm eighty-five.

LEVINE: Eighty-five.

GAUDIOSO: And my husband's ninety.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, thank you very much.

GAUDIOSO: You're welcome. And thank you for coming.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm signing off.