

**EI-549**

**JOSEPH CERAOLO**

**BIRTHDATE: AUGUST 11, 1904**

**INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 16, 1994**

**AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 90**

**RUNNING TIME: 39:23**

**INTERVIEWER: ELYSA MATSEN**

**RECORDING ENGINEER: PETER HOM**

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**ITALY, ESTIMATED 1915**

**AGE: 11**

**SHIP: DANTE ALLIGERI**

**PORT: GENOA**

**RESIDENCES:**

- **ITALY: CAPODORLANDO, PROVINCE OF MESSINA, SICILY**
- **U.S.: PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA; CALIFORNIA**

**MATSEN:** Good afternoon, this is Elysa Matsen for the National Park Service. Today is the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 1994, and I'm in the home of Mr. Joseph Ceraolo, and I'm here with his wife and with Peter Hom, who is doing the recording for us. Mr. Ceraolo, you came from Sicily.

**CERAOLO:** Sicily.

**MATSEN:** What year was it that you came?

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- CERAOLO: Jeez, I know it was during the war, because when the war ended, I was here.
- MATSEN: Do you remember how old you were when you came?
- CERAOLO: I think I was about twelve.
- MATSEN: You were about twelve years old
- CERAOLO: Something like that.
- MATSEN: Okay. Where were you born?
- CERAOLO: In Sicily, that's prov... province of Messina. And that the town, the name of the town, was Capodorlando.
- MATSEN: Do you know how to spell that?
- MRS. CERAOLO: C-A-P-O
- CERAOLO: Capital C, C-A-P-O-D-O-R-L-A-N-D-O. Capodorlando.
- MATSEN: Okay, what can you tell me about the town? Can you tell me what it looked like?
- CERAOLO: Well, it's a beautiful little town near the ocean. And they used to every year, they used to have fairs, you know? People used to bring horses, cows, and they used to trade it. Some had horses that wanted to trade with somebody else or sometime they used to sell 'em. And, and there was a church right on top of the hill, and sometime they used to

bring the, the animal in this church, and they used to bless them. I think they do it over in Mexico too, over here. And...

MATSEN: What did people do in the town? What, what did most people do for a living?

CERAOLO: Well, where I was born?

MATSEN: Yes.

CERAOLO: It, it's a farm, the (?), a lot of farms over there that plant a lot of vegetable and a lot of lemon orch... lot of lemon orchards over there, and the people work in lemons, like my, my sister, Angie. She used to work wrapping lemons, you know. And she was about, I don't know, she was about fifteen years old, (laughs) she used to work wrapping lemons. And then they used to put it in a, in a case, and they used to send them all over the world, in this country too, I think. And it's, just, it's, it's just like California, I feel at home here.

MATSEN: Very similar climate?

CERAOLO: Yeah, yeah.

MATSEN: What can you tell me about your father? What was his name and what did he do?

CERAOLO: His name was Giuseppe, and he used to sell water to the farmers over there. But, he passed away when he was about thirty-five years old.

MATSEN: What did he look like?

CERAOLO: Well, he wasn't not bad looking man. He was a little short, but he was nice looking man, and he had a, he had, he was building a home for one of the brothers, and all at once he got a pain in his stomach, and he crawled home. I think he, it must have been appendicitis or something. And the doctors, you know they were so far away, we had no doctor where we lived, they, they, they had to go to town. That was pretty far, and he, he passed away over there. He was a...

MATSEN: It was maybe an appendicitis or something like that?

CERAOLO: It could have been appendicitis. And he was about thirty-five, I heard.

MATSEN: Is there a story that you could tell me that you remember from your childhood growing up with your father?

CERAOLO: Well, I know they, they used to own a wagon in a, and, and I, they used to, I had some half brothers, and they, they used to take me with them, you know different places. There was one place, they, they used to call it, oh, in Italian, say it, "aqua dolce," that's sweet water. I remember I was a ba... a kid, a little baby, I still remember, and I don't know he was, he was taking some of it, delivering some and, and then my, my father, a lot of times he's taking me to town, Capodorlando, kind of show me off (laughs). But I was so bashful when I was kid, small.

MATSEN: You were shy.

CERAOLO: A lot of times we used to visit somebody and they wanna offer me something to eat, and I say "No, no, no." And all at once, I'd pull my mother's shirt, skirt.

MATSEN: What can you tell me about...

CERAOLO: (?)

MATSEN: Can you tell me about your mother? What did she look like?

CERAOLO: Well, she was a nice looking woman, and when my father die, oh she had a hard time to take care of us, and I remember when my father died, he left quite a few debts over there. Lucky, my, my mo, the court, they let her go, they didn't charge, charge her with any of that. And for us, when we were kids, you know, we used to go to swim in the ocean. And going to the, before we, we passed a lot of farms over there, they had a fruit over there, watermelons (laughs). We used to, we used to steal a watermelon and take it, take 'em to the ocean (laughs), and we used to put them in the water over there so they'd get cold. And over there, at that time, no bathing suits (laughs), and the, and the women used to be far away from us. But when they used to go to in the water, they used to have a, a sheet, bed sheet! (laughs) To get, to get inside the water when they come out

MATSEN: So they'd wrap it around them?

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CERAOLO: They were, to get in the water, then when they come out, but there was no men near there, it was just women. (laughs)  
They didn't have no bathing suit, nothing! (laughs) And the sun, and, and we had grandparents, my mother's...

MATSEN: Tell me about your grandparents.

CERAOLO: And my grandparents, there was my mother's father and mother, and my, my grandfather, he had a little farm over there, vineyards, grapes, and every year he used to make, he used to bring the juice to a meal over there. They used to put it in great big place over there. The men used to get in there with their feet and smash, smash, and I, I used to get in there with the, with the men to smash, smashing the grapes! (laughs)

MATSEN: And that was to make wine?

CERAOLO: To make wine. He used to sell some, and then he made some himself, see. And

MATSEN: Do you remember their names? Your grandparents' names?

CERAOLO: Well, the name was Giuffre.

MATSEN: But, their first names?

CERAOLO: The first name, my grandmother, her name was Concetta, Concetta.

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- MATSEN: And, and her last name? How do you spell that, do you know?
- CERAOLO: G-I-U-F-F-R-E
- MATSEN: Oh great, okay.
- CERAOLO: That was, and they had a son over here, and he used to wanted to sponsor us.
- MATSEN: Is that your brother, that's your father's...
- CERAOLO: That's my mother's, my mo... my mother's brother
- MATSEN: Your mother's brother.
- CERAOLO: Yeah. And one, and for awhile, we were living with them too, and they had two boys, and then when they grew up, one was a lawyer and one is a famous doctor over in, in Philadelphia. And...
- MATSEN: Why don't you tell me a little bit more about Italy?
- CERAOLO: Oh, Italy?
- MATSEN: You remember so much. What did your house look like? Do you remember your house?
- CERAOLO: Well, the house, the house was just one room! (laughs)

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MATSEN: Okay, and how did you do the cooking? How did your mom, did your mom do the cooking, or did your father do any of the cooking?

CERAOLO: No, my mother done the cooking. She was a good cook too.

MATSEN: What would she make?

CERAOLO: Well, she'd make pasta, she used to make gnocchi, a, roast with a lot of vegetable because we used to get the meat over there about once, once a month. There was a store over there, they used to kill a pig, you know, and then we have, we go there get some meat. But, we used to have chickens, we used to get, get our own eggs.

MATSEN: So you had, did you have a garden? Is that where the vegetables came from?

CERAOLO: No, we used to buy the (?)

MATSEN: Oh.

CERAOLO: Because there were a lot of farms over there. And my, my mother used to bake the bread. And she used to put her hands, you know

MATSEN: Knead.

CERAOLO: Work

MATSEN: Yeah.

CERAOLO: Work the dough, and she used to make the best bread around there. And, and my grandfather, I used to go with him sometime, I think, his, his first name was Cono, I think. C-O-N-O. And I used to go with him and work in the farm with him, you know.

MATSEN: What would you do on the farm?

CERAOLO: Well, I had a little hoe and help him. (laughs) Help him, help him out, and then it was time the grapes, I helped pick grapes and, and take it to, to the place where they used to smash it and squeeze it with a big, big brick, brick thing there (?), they had a great big, like a pole, and they used to go around squeezing the crop, you know, because that's what makes the wine stronger. I used to get in there with them, (laughs) and, and I, I'd remember my grandmother, she used to dry figs. I don't know how she did it. But...

MATSEN: But she used to dry them?

CERAOLO: Dried them. And, and when they were ready to eat, all, there was a lot of sugar and they were really white. And every time I go there, why she used to fill my pocket for the, with the, with the figs.

MATSEN: What was, what, what was it like in your house, well, first of all, I don't think, we're jumping ahead here. Did you tell me how many brothers and sisters you had?

CERAOLO: Well, I had, my mother had, well, we were what, two sister and two brothers.

MATSEN: And their names? What were their names?

CERAOLO: And, Fr, Fr, the brother was Francesca, Francesco, but he passed away, and the, and the sister, one of the sisters was Angela. She passed away too, and the older sister was Josephine, Josephina in Italian, and she passed away too, and I'm the only one left.

MATSEN: So, two sisters and one brother?

CERAOLO: Yeah, and they all left.

MATSEN: And your. So, your house was only one room in...

CERAOLO: Only one big room (laughs).

MATSEN: One big room. How, can you describe for me what it, what it was like to have dinner in your house?

CERAOLO: Well, we had a table and chairs. We used to sit like anybody else. (laughs)

MATSEN: Every, at a certain time? Would you always have dinner at the same time?

CERAOLO: Just about.

MATSEN: And everyone would be there?

CERAOLO: Yeah.

MATSEN: And what would you, what would you have for dinner?  
Typical dinner?

CERAOLO: Well, the, the most was pasta, you know?

MATSEN: What kind of sauce would she put on it?

CERAOLO: Well, over there, there was no, nothing in cans. She had to  
make her own sauce from tomatoes.

MATSEN: Oh, that must have been great.

CERAOLO: That's how she made the sauce, she had to boil it for quite a  
while. And then

MATSEN: What was your favorite thing that she would make?

CERAOLO: Well, I guess pasta.

MATSEN: The pasta?

CERAOLO: Tomato and meatballs.

MATSEN: How about religion? What can you tell me about religion  
when you were in Italy?

CERAOLO: We, we were Catholic. We had a church right, right next  
door to us, and I remember we used to keep the, what do

you call it, the chalice, we used to keep it with us over there, and they used to have a, the priest used to come over there on once a week on Sunday, and then we used to give him the chalice.

MATSEN: Was that because you were so close to where the church was? Why did you keep it?

CERAOLO: Yeah, right next door the church was!

MATSEN: Oh, so you, that's why you kept the chalice at your house?

CERAOLO: Yeah, that, so nobody steals it. (laughs)

MATSEN: How about holidays? Can you remember a Christmas there or...

CERAOLO: Well, over there they used to have a feast every year.

MATSEN: Okay, tell me about that.

CERAOLO: And, and they used to, the band they used to come from, I think from (?), that's a town on the other side of Messina, I think that's where, beautiful band. And, and every, and they used to come over there, you know, they used to sell, you know, (?), they call (?), over here what they call them, Tina? Didn't you hear?

MRS. CERAOLO: Yeah, I'm listening to you, but I don't remember what you call them here.

CERAOLO: You know, like (?)?

MRS. CERAOLO: I don't know.

CERAOLO: The one out by Dona Clara [?] once in a while.

MRS. CERAOLO: Oh, Garbanzo beans.

CERAOLO: (?) The (?) beans. I don't know how they used to...

MATSEN: Oh, Garbanzo beans, okay.

CERAOLO: Yeah, they, they used to get them, I don't know how they used to do it, they had a, (?), I don't know if they put it in water first to get 'em a little soft, and then they used to put it in the heat, you know, and they used to turn white. And I, I remember there was a pile on the table over there, boy, but that was so good! And the, and the, they had all different things over there. And they used to get this, this saint, you know, that carried in on a thing, you know, by four or five men, carried, in procession, you know, like that. That was every year.

MATSEN: And what was that, was that for Christmas or was that for any specific holiday or is that just a once a year feast that...

CERAOLO: Just once a year feast. That's they used to do. They, well, they used to say, "San Giuseppe," that was the saint over there, San Giuseppe, in that church.

MATSEN: Do you remember Christmas or Easter in your house?

CERAOLO: Well, for Christmas, I remember my mother used to make, used, she used to boil egg, then she used to make dough, and it just, it was kind of sweet, you know, and if, if you was one years old, she'd put one egg in that dough, if you were two, she'd put two, three, the ones were thirty, forty years old, (?) all the eggs over there (laughs), buy a lot, like a cake you know, buy a lot for...

MATSEN: How about on your birthday? Do you remember what you did on your birthday in your house?

CERAOLO: I didn't do no, nothing for my birthday.

MATSEN: Nothing?

CERAOLO: No.

MATSEN: How about games that you played as a child? Do you remember playing games with other children?

CERAOLO: Yeah, we, we used to play, I forget the, I can't think of the name, that we used to, us kids used to play, we used to put a, on a tile that had it on the roof, you know, and we used to roll it down there. If mi... mine hit yours, I, I win!

MATSEN: Like marbles? Marbles or...

CERAOLO: You know what, what they call it, Tina?

MRS. CERAOLO: No, I don't know anything, I've never heard of...

CERAOLO: Not the walnuts, not almonds, there's the other kind, they're round.

MATSEN: A kind of a nut?

CERAOLO: It's a nut.

MATSEN: Hazelnuts?

MRS. CERAOLO: Hazel, hazelnuts?

MATSEN: Hazelnuts?

CERAOLO: I think hazelnut. We used to roll them down. And then another game we used to play, we used to cut a lemon on both side, and then we used to roll it down, I think of it, I don't know what we used to put on the top. And we used to play that game, and then we used to play another game. A stone, you know, we used to, a, a flat stone that we used to throw it.

MATSEN: Oh, okay into the water.

CERAOLO: Used to throw it and, I don't know what we were playing for, but then there was another game that there were like, like a, over there they call 'em (?), it's a, a, like, there 'bout this long, you know, and 'bout this round, and we used to throw it, and there was one that we stood up, we used to put pennies on there, and the closest one that comes to that, close to the pennies one, you win. (laughs)

MATSEN: Sounds like horseshoes. Sounds kind of like horseshoe game. Sounds like a horseshoe game, kind of.

CERAOLO: Well, it, we nev... we never did play horseshoe, but we used to play, but, we used to put, I think, you know like the bowling over here? We used to put a bowling, bunch of them, you know, and then we had a bocce, we'd throw it over there, see how many we could knock down. (laughs)

MATSEN: It sounds like fun to be a child there.

CERAOLO: Yeah, we, we, I had a lot of fun.

MATSEN: What can you tell me about coming to America? Why did you come to America? Who decided to come to America?

CERAOLO: Well, she had a brother over here.

MATSEN: Your mother?

CERAOLO: Yeah, and he was pretty well known over (?), so he sponsor us, and, and we came and we were living with him for a while, and then we moved, liv... lived by ourself. But then one of the sister, the older sister got married, and she came to California, see?

MATSEN: Well, tell me a little bit about your voyage here. Can you tell me, do you remember the name of the ship?

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- CERAOLO: Dante Alligeri. And we took the, we got on the ship in Genoa. That's where we took the ship.
- MATSEN: How did you get to Genoa? Do you remember how you got there?
- CERAOLO: We got a, well a train took us to Messina, Messina we took a ferry to Calabria, and then we took a train over there and we went to Genoa.
- MATSEN: How long did it take you to get to Genoa?
- CERAOLO: Oh, boy.
- MATSEN: Sounds like a long trip.
- CERAOLO: A couple of days, It was a long trip and them seats, you know, we didn't have the money to get a good, first class, so we had the hard seats. (laughs) I was so sore when I got out in Genoa, my leg was so stiff that, that I fell! (laughs) (?)
- MATSEN: When you got off the train?
- CERAOLO: When I got off the train.
- MATSEN: Do you remember what you brought with you? Do you remember what you packed?
- CERAOLO: Well, we had a big, big case over there.

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MATSEN: Trunk?

CERAOLO: Trunk, yeah. Had some clothes, I guess.

MATSEN: Was there anything that you brought because you really wanted to bring it, had to come with you?

CERAOLO: No

MATSEN: Or did your mother

CERAOLO: No

MATSEN: Do...

CERAOLO: No

MATSEN: Your mother did the packing?

CERAOLO: No. Whatever she put in there was okay. But, that boat!

MATSEN: Tell me about that, what was the boat like?

CERAOLO: When we got on the boat in Genoa, we stop at Portugal, and Portugal that, you know, at that time no diesel, they used to load up coal. And I bet we stay so long over there, and I remember them, them Poor, Por... the, the Portugese, that's what they call, we used to give the, the crew, the officers, used to give them something to eat. Boy, there were poor people that were starving. I felt so sorry for them.

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MATSEN: Now you said...

CERAOLO: And they were carrying the, this coal on their back for days over there it seems, and then when they got through, we took off. But when we got in the deep waters, I got so seasick.

MATSEN: Where did you stay on the boat? Where were you?

CERAOLO: Third. Third class.

MATSEN: In the steerage part.

CERAOLO: It's cheaper, you know. And I got so seasick. I don't know how long it took, took me to get over, but at night, when we got, this was during the war, there was no lights on the boat. It made me cry. (crying)

MATSEN: Why don't we stop just for a second here? (recording paused)

MATSEN: Okay, we're back, and it's nighttime on the boat

CERAOLO: And, and, and one night while we were out there, each, each group to their own boat, and the waves, whoo they were about 10 story high

MATSEN: So it was a rough sea.

CERAOLO: The, the, the boat used to go down and then come up again.

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MATSEN: Real rough seas.

CERAOLO: And...

MATSEN: Do you remember what time of year it was? What time of year was it when you sailed?

CERAOLO: Well, when the war ended I was, I was in Philadelphia.

MRS. CERAOLO: Joe, she wants to know...

CERAOLO: Ah.

MATSEN: What time of year was it when it, when you were sailing?

CERAOLO: It was wintertime.

MATSEN: Oh, it was wintertime.

CERAOLO: Wintertime.

MATSEN: So the seas were rough.

CERAOLO: Yeah, because when we reach New York, it was snowing there.

MATSEN: How long do you think you were on the boat?

CERAOLO: It seemed forever.

MATSEN: When you're sick, I'm sure it seems forever.

CERAOLO: And, and, and one night, I don't know if they dropped something in the water, made a big, big noise. I said to myself, "Here we go in that big ocean, then big wave, what can we do over there?" No, they had rowboat, they didn't have no, I don't think they had motor on it.

MATSEN: Now at night that, you told me just a minute ago, I don't know if we got it on the tape, that they would turn the lights off on the boat?

CERAOLO: Oh, no lights at all. Never.

MATSEN: And they made you wear life preservers? Did you have to...

CERAOLO: When, when we, go dangerous places, you know, they...

MATSEN: Did you have to sleep in them? At night, would you have to sleep in...

CERAOLO: We would sleep in there, but then they used to wake us up.

MATSEN: With the life preservers on?

CERAOLO: No, no.

MATSEN: Okay.

CERAOLO: They used to wake us up. We had to go up on the deck, each group to the boat. But it was terrible. And I thought I'd never see America.

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MATSEN: And then you came to America.

CERAOLO: Yeah, it's a (?)

MATSEN: Do you remember anything, like eating food on the boat?  
Do you remember that?

CERAOLO: Well, they had all different kind of foods. Most all I  
remember is pasta.

MATSEN: They had pasta on the boat?

CERAOLO: Yeah.

MATSEN: Oh. Were there people just from Italy on your boat, or were  
there people from other places?

CERAOLO: I, I think the ones were all from Italy.

MATSEN: Everybody on the boat was, was from Italy?

CERAOLO: And I felt sorry for some of them. You know, over there they  
used to have a bunch of doctors, and they check everybody.  
Anybody that was something wrong with them, I felt sorry for  
them, they had to go back.

MATSEN: Now is this when you got to Ellis Island?

CERAOLO: Ellis Island.

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MATSEN: Oh, that's when the doctor's checked you, after you got off the boat?

CERAOLO: Yeah, yeah, and I thought I'd never see the Statue of Liberty.

MATSEN: Did you see...

CERAOLO: And then when we were there, the army was over there, you know?

MATSEN: Did you see the Statue of Liberty?

CERAOLO: Yeah.

MATSEN: Do you remember seeing it?

CERAOLO: Yeah, I, I saw it from the boat.

MATSEN: And then what, what did Ellis Island look like when you saw Ellis Island, do you remember?

CERAOLO: Well, it looks nice to me, and that's the first place, the first time I, I drank tea, I like it so much. (laughs)

MATSEN: Hot tea?

CERAOLO: Then the, we were, we were in one table, and the other table, another table next to us was the army. And I, I remember they used to eat so fast that I wouldn't have time to drink my tea. (laughs) And then...

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MATSEN: What did you have to eat when you were on Ellis Island?

CERAOLO: Well, I know we had American food.

MATSEN: Was there anything you remember seeing that you'd never seen before? Food, anything?

CERAOLO: Well, I notice, the first thing I noticed was lot of food here. In Italy at that time was no food. They used to ration the flour. They used to get so much flour a month. That's all they got, and then you had to make it last.

MATSEN: So there was more food here, you think?

CERAOLO: Well, over here, lot of food.

MATSEN: How long were you on Ellis Island?

CERAOLO: I don't know, remember. About three, three days or so.

MATSEN: So you stayed overnight?

CERAOLO: We had a, we had to wait until my uncle come over and pick us up.

MATSEN: Do you remember where you slept, where you stayed? What did it look like?

CERAOLO: Well, it's in, it was in Ellis Island, in there you know. They had a hotel or something, and we slept there.

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- MATSEN: Rooms? They had rooms for you to sleep in?
- CERAOLO: Rooms, yeah, and we slept there. I (?)
- MATSEN: Did you go outside and play, do you remember? Did they, they take you outside for a while or...
- CERAOLO: No. No, not while I was there.
- MATSEN: Do you remember meeting or seeing any people when you were on Ellis Island?
- CERAOLO: Oh, there was a lot of people. M, most, lot a, lot of serviceman that was there.
- MATSEN: Did you talk to any of them, do you remember?
- CERAOLO: Well...
- MATSEN: Did they speak to you?
- CERAOLO: They, they used to wave at me. (laughs) And I remember what the, the doctor asked me when I got there. He ask me, I gonna say it in Italian, alright?
- MATSEN: Okay.
- CERAOLO: (speaks in Italian) I say, (Italian) I say, "Eighteen." And (Italian) is four and five. And, so he tap on my, he tapped me on my head, and I went. (laughs)

EI-549/CERAOLO

MATSEN: Now, now what did he ask you? Say it in English because...

CERAOLO: Okay. "How much is five and four?"

MATSEN: Oh.

CERAOLO: I said, "Nine." "How much is nine and nine?" "Eighteen." So he tapped me on the head.

MATSEN: You were fine, and you could go at there.

CERAOLO: (laughs) We all were fine.

MATSEN: So who came to pick you up from Ellis Island?

CERAOLO: My uncle Tony.

MATSEN: Uncle Tony.

CERAOLO: Yeah, that's my...

MATSEN: And where did you go from there and how'd you get there?

CERAOLO: By train.

MATSEN: Okay.

CERAOLO: By the train. And we stayed with my uncle Tony for a while.

MATSEN: Where did he live?

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- CERAOLO: He live, I believe it was on, on, on 10<sup>th</sup> Street.
- MATSEN: In New York.
- CERAOLO: In, in, no, Philadelphia.
- MATSEN: Oh, in Philadelphia.
- CERAOLO: We, we went to Philadelphia, yeah. And I used to love a, I remember, I used to love the shows with cowboys. (laughs)
- MATSEN: You used to go to the movies and watch or...
- CERAOLO: Yeah, in Philadelphia. Where I was born, there was no movie.
- MATSEN: So that's...
- CERAOLO: Boy, I love that.
- MATSEN: Who used to take you?
- CERAOLO: Every, every, every Saturday we'd, we watch a show near there.
- MATSEN: Would your uncle take you to see these movies?
- CERAOLO: No, we used to walk over there. Us kids used to walk a lot. And (?)...
- MATSEN: Do you remember the names of any of them that you saw?

CERAOLO: What I remember, you to remember...

MATSEN: I won't know, but maybe somebody who listens will.

CERAOLO: (laughs) I don't think he knows either.

MATSEN: But somebody who listens

CERAOLO: Was before.

MATSEN: Might know.

CERAOLO: Pearl White, Raymond Navarro, they were playing, they were playing.

MATSEN: Oh they were in the movies that you saw.

CERAOLO: And, and they were playing every week, you know, once a week. And then the cowboys, (laughs) I love that!

MATSEN: Now...

CERAOLO: They fight the Indians. (laughs)

MATSEN: What did, what did Philadelphia look like, do you remember what it...

CERAOLO: Oh, it's a nice town.

MATSEN: What did it look like then though?

CERAOLO: No, I don't know. And the, the transportation they had, wonderful. Streetcars going both ways, this way, that way, that way, and it take you all the way out. I don't know what they have now, I don't think they have 'em anymore

MATSEN: Probably not.

CERAOLO: Maybe they got buses, but the streetcars were the best.

MATSEN: Now, how long did you stay with your uncle?

CERAOLO: I think we stayed about a year or so, then we got our own place and...

MATSEN: Where was your place? Was it in Philadelphia or...

CERAOLO: In Philadelphia, yeah. But then, you know I told you, one of my sister got marry, came to California, and then she, she call us to come here, so we did. Let's see, but, the, the, Angie, but my sister Angie, she got married Philadelphia, she met a...

MATSEN: Do you remember that wedding, what was the wedding like, do you remember?

CERAOLO: That was small wedding. That was small wedding. And he was pretty nice, nice fellow. And, and then they had one own boy there, and then they came to Calif... California, then they had, let's see, three boys and a girl. And...

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- MATSEN: When did you come to California?
- CERAOLO: Well, after the war ended, I came to California.
- MATSEN: Did your mother, your mother came as well?
- CERAOLO: Yeah. And then my, my sister Angie, she had four girls and three boys.
- MATSEN: Oh my goodness, a big family.
- CERAOLO: (laughs) She, she had a big family, yeah, and they were all making out alright. And what else can I tell you?
- MATSEN: What was your, what did you do for a living? What is, where was your first job, what was your first job?
- CERAOLO: Over here?
- MATSEN: Yeah.
- CERAOLO: I was wo... (coughs) my brother-in-law got me a job where he worked, he was carpenter, and they were making beds over there. They used to call 'em disappearing beds, they used to go in the closet, you know?
- MATSEN: Like a Murphy bed, kind of?
- CERAOLO: And, and you used to open the door, and there was a bed over there, and you, you put 'em down. And, I used, I used

to paint over there, you know, little thi... small things, I used to paint.

MATSEN: And then what was, what did you do after that?

CERAOLO: Well, after that, I, my brother-in-law got a job, what's, Angie's husband got me a job where they used to make pianos.

MATSEN: Oh.

CERAOLO: So I quit that, and I, and I went over there.

MATSEN: Doing the woodwork? Did you do the woodwork on the pianos or...

CERAOLO: Well, we were putting veneer. No, wait a minute, this was in Philadelphia, I was doing the, out here I, I was working disappearing beds, the beds that go in the closet.

MATSEN: Oh, okay, but the, the piano work you did when you were in Philadelphia.

CERAOLO: That was in Philadelphia, yeah, they used to put 'em in there.

MATSEN: Do you, do you remember anything about going to school here?

CERAOLO: I went to school in Philadel... in Philadelphia.

MATSEN: What was it like?

CERAOLO: The, was Francis, the name of the school was Francis Reed School, the name of the school, Francis Reed.

MATSEN: And did you speak any English when you came here?

CERAOLO: No. (laughs)

MATSEN: How did you learn?

CERAOLO: She, (?), I remember, she, few words my, my aunt used to kind of teach me a little bit, you know, and my neigh... my cousins, but little by little, I forget the teacher tell me some, you know, that I don't unde... I used to say, "I don't understand." (laughs)

MATSEN: You knew that one, "I don't understand." (laughs)

CERAOLO: Oh, boy.

MATSEN: Do you remember your neighborhood in Philadelphia? Were they a lot, were there a lot of Italian people?

CERAOLO: Oh, lot of Italian, and the houses were next to one another, and the steps were just about together.

MATSEN: Were the neighbors friendly to you?

CERAOLO: Oh, they were friendly. They're very, in the summertime when it's so darn hot over there, nobody could sleeps, they had everybody used to sit on the porch, talk, you know.

MATSEN: Do you remember any kind of bigotry or persecution when you came to this country or were you treated very well by everyone?

CERAOLO: No, I was treated very well, but then America was different. You never had all these rapes, killing, killing babies, at that time, no. And the law was more strict then. Anybody kill anybody, too bad, the, they used to put you in electric chair or something because I remember there was two Italian that, that were trying to bring the union back there, you know for that, they kill them? Just because they want to bring the union over there, and they kill them, and now look, it's union all over, and the union done lot of good. I remember what we used to work up to five, six days a week, forty-eight hours, forty-eight hours a week, the union come in, five days a week, eight hours a day.

MATSEN: So do you think the union was good for you? Did it help you?

CERAOLO: Yeah, it helped everybody here. Otherwise, there would, we would be working like slaves over here, it does a lot of good.

MATSEN: Well, tell me how you met your wife.

MRS. CERAOLO: (laughs)

CERAOLO: Oh, (laughs). Angie's, we used to work together in the furniture, furniture place with Angie's husband. And we bought two tickets, and they were having, raising money,

they were having a striker dance over there, so I took the tickets, and I we... I went over there.

MATSEN: To the dance.

CERAOLO: To, to, to the dance, you know? And I knew some girls over there that she, that were living like near her, and I took her over there, to the dance.

MATSEN: So you invited your wife to go to the dance with you?

CERAOLO: No, not with me, she was with the girls.

MATSEN: Oh.

CERAOLO: I met her over there.

MATSEN: Oh, okay.

CERAOLO: At the strike dance. And she was against the, all, all, but the door, she was like this. I kind of like her looks (laughs). So, so they introdu... the girls introduce me to her, and I, I made a date. And from then on, I don't know about, how long it took, we get married, Tina?

MRS. CERAOLO: About a year.

CERAOLO: About a year we get married. And then we had two children.

MATSEN: What are their names?

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- CERAOLO: Joanne and Phillip. Joanne got two, two beautiful girls.
- MATSEN: Oh, granddaughters.
- CERAOLO: Granddaughters. And, and my granddaughter, she has two g... two little girls. And my son's got three boys and one girl. The girl married, she liv... she moved to Alaska, and she has a little, a little girl.
- MATSEN: So you have a great granddaughter.
- CERAOLO: And the, and the oldest son.
- MRS. CERAOLO: They're on the wall.
- CERAOLO: And, I'll show 'em on the wall, and my, my, my son, old son, he's in the Air Force. He been in Air so, Force for about ten ye...
- MATSEN: Grandson, okay.
- CERAOLO: Yeah. He been in Air Force for about, about ten years. And when he got in, his, his job was fueling bombers up in the air, and that's what he was doing. I, I guess he still does, but now I heard that he got a bunch of medal and he's got a crew under him.
- MATSEN: Oh, that's terrific.
- CERAOLO: And now, they sent him to Germany. He's going to stay over there I don't know how long.

MRS. CERAOLO: ?

CERAOLO: He been all over. They sent him all over, you know? And now, I think he's going to go to Germany. So I don't know, let's see what I'm, yeah, I told you about my son, he's in air conditioning.

MATSEN: Oh, that's what he does.

CERAOLO: Yeah, and my daughter, her husband got his own business, so they're doing well.

MATSEN: Doing very well.

CERAOLO: They're doing very well.

MATSEN: Terrific. If I was to ask you one last question about coming to America, are you happy that you did that or

CERAOLO: I, we all were, we all were to come to America. And I'm glad, America been good to me, real good, I own my home, I got a car, if I was over there, I had nothing. If I was in Sicily, I would have nothing over there.

MATSEN: Well, thank you very much for this interview. It was wonderful to talk to you, and the stories were great.

CERAOLO: You think it was alright?

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MATSEN: Yes, thank you so much. This is Elysa Matsen, I'm just going to sign off now with Peter Hom, Mr. and Mrs. Ceraolo, on September 16, 1994 for the Ellis Island Oral History Project. Thank you.

CERAOLO: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW