

**EI-56**

**FELICITA GABACCIA SALTO**

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LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. I'm at Ellis Island and it's July 19th, 1991 at 10:30 a.m., and I'm here with Mrs. Felicita Salto, who came to the United States from Italy in 1920 when she was six and a half years old. So, welcome Mrs. Salto.

SALTO: Thank you.

LEVINE: I want to ask you first where you were born? What city in Italy, or town?

SALTO: I was born in the city of Turino, Italy.

LEVINE: And what is your birth date?

SALTO: My birthday is August 30, 1913.

LEVINE: Can you remember much about the town? Did you live in that town up until the time that you came...

SALTO: Part of the time I lived there and part of the time I lived with my maternal grandparents, who were farmers in the northern part of Italy in a area called Masserano. It was mostly like summers and vacations but most of the time I lived, I was in Turino.

LEVINE: Masserano, can you spell that?

SALTO: Yes, M-A-S-S-E-R-A-N-O.

LEVINE: Okay, great. Did you go to school at all while you were in Italy?

SALTO: I had just been enrolled in September of 1919 but we came away before I was able to start.

LEVINE: Did you speak any English?

SALTO: No English whatsoever. No.

LEVINE: How was it that you happened to come to the United States?

SALTO: It's a little, I have to go back a little bit. My grandmother had come to the United States prior to World War I, sometime around 1914. I don't remember the exact year. And she lived here all through World War I. At the end of World War I, her husband, my grandfather, passed away. She had now, she was now left with two young teenage sons, and she had left in Italy, when she came away, my father and another son, who were the older boys of the family. She decided to return to Italy to live after her husband died. She came back and found Italy in a terrible, devastated condition and she couldn't reconcile to it because she had become used to the American ways. So she decided to sell the property that she owned in Turino, which was the apartment house that we lived in. So she sold the property and she said to my father and to her other son, who had just gotten married, "Come with me to the United States because you'll do better." And that's how we all sailed away for the United States in the beginning of 1920, the very beginning of January 1920. That's how we came.

LEVINE: Okay. Could you give me the names of your mother and father?

SALTO: Yes. My mother was Theresa and my father was Dominic and I have one brother, who was also with us, and his name is Aldo.

LEVINE: And what is their last name, your maiden name?

SALTO: My maiden name was Gabaccia. That's G-A-B-A-C-C-I-A.

LEVINE: Now, how about your brothers and sisters, what were their names?

SALTO: I only have the one brother, as I said, and his name is Aldo. Of course, Gabaccia. That's all I have, just the one brother.

LEVINE: Was your brother older or . .

SALTO: No, my brother is younger by two years.

LEVINE: Can you describe the place that you lived in the apartment house of your grandmother's?

SALTO: Kind of vaguely I remember it as being only two rooms. Very large rooms. One room we lived in and the other room we slept in. (She laughs.) That's about all I do remember.

LEVINE: Now, were there other family members living in other apartments in the building?

SALTO: No, all the other apartments were rented. So, I have no, I don't remember anything about the other people there at all. They were all tenants.

LEVINE: And was it a large building? A lot of apartments?

SALTO: I won't say that it was very large but I seem to recall my mother and my father talking about it. I think there were at least ten other apartments.

LEVINE: Now, did you have a large extended family in the town?

SALTO: In the city of Turino, no. There was just the one other uncle, who had been in World War I, and when the war ended and he was discharged, he had come to stay with us in our apartment, which [ was ] at that time when my grandmother came back from the United States.

LEVINE: Can you remember friends from Italy or games that you played?

SALTO: Not really, but I do have some little memories of going to the kindergarten, I guess that's what it was, when I would visit my grandparents, my maternal grandparents. I remember going to that kindergarten and learning little poems and the usual things that children I guess do (she laughs) in kindergarten but that's about it. I don't really remember anything else there, no.

LEVINE: How about religion? Were, was your family a religious family?

SALTO: We were, of course, all Catholics but I would not say that we were very religious. We were sort of "working Catholics" (she laughs), not going to either extreme or the other in the faith.

LEVINE: Would you tend to go to church on Sunday?

SALTO: Yeah, we went to church on Sunday and I was baptized and I received Communion and I had my Confirmation but it wasn't, I won't say that it was the peak of our life, as it is in many families, you know, yeah.

LEVINE: How about your father, what did he do?

SALTO: My father was a machinist. A mechanical machinist. Yes.

LEVINE: And did you mother . .

SALTO: My mother, my mother was mostly a housewife but she did go out to work for awhile after we first arrived in the United States and she was in the sewing field.

LEVINE: But in Italy, she, she was a housewife.

SALTO: No, in Italy she was just a housewife.

LEVINE: When you did decide to come, how did you afford to come?

SALTO: That was going back to my grandmother again. She, when she said "Come to the United States, you'll do better", she said "I will pay your passage for you and you come with me." And that's, she was the one who put the

money out for us to come over.

LEVINE: And did you want to come? Do you remember how you felt about it?

SALTO: I really don't have any recollection of that. I mean, we were with my mother and father and my brother and there was just family, and I guess we went (she laughs) because everybody, you know, they were taking us.

LEVINE: Do you remember at all how your mother felt about coming?

SALTO: That I remember a little bit because my grand, I remember that my grandfather, my maternal grandfather, was accidentally killed a week before our sailing date and my mother, I remember, was very up set. We, she was, in fact, we often thought it had probably a lot to do with the fact that she was so terribly weak all the way across because of the loss and she was leaving all of her family behind.

LEVINE: And how about your father, how did he feel about it?

SALTO: Well, my father was very glad to get away. (she laughs heartily) We had a very hard time in Italy during the war and he was very much interested in hearing all the good things that my grandmother, or his mother, had to tell him about the United States, so he was really itching, you might say, to get here.

LEVINE: Can you remember anything that your grandmother told the family about the

United States before you came?

SALTO: Not really, but I'm sure that it must have been all about the good things because otherwise she would not have been wanting to come back.

LEVINE: Now when you say "the hard times during the war" that your father experienced, can you be specific about what it was he...

SALTO: Well, my father was already working in a machine shop, a government machine shop, prior to the break out of the war. So when Italy did get into the war, he was just kept on. He was not sent to the front or to the war. He was just kept on there. So that there was never the threat that he was going to go. But conditions were very bad. The food was scarce, and many times we, this, I really don't remember but I know from hearing my mother and father talk that many times there were days that we didn't have anything to eat . . . or whatever there was given to my brother and I. And I remember them talking about hours on line to get a loaf of bread and different items that you need were either not there. And I think, but this I don't myself remember, but hearing my mother and father talk, that was when she would send my brother and I to her family on the farm so that they thought at least we would have food because the farmers always managed, you know, to have something to eat. So that was about what I remember them talking mostly about it. Yeah.

LEVINE: Can you remember anything else about Italy during the war or before you

left? The situation?

SALTO: Not really, what it was like I don't remember it mostly, you know, except from hearing my mother and father talk about it, yeah.

LEVINE: Now, do you remember at all, like when you left was there a sendoff?

SALTO: I remember when we left because we left at night. And there was nothing. The ship just pulled out of the harbor and that was it.

LEVINE: Now, you left from Genoa?

SALTO: From Genoa.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about the trip from Turino to Genoa?

SALTO: From Turino to Genoa, no. I have no recollection of that. I, I imagine we must have gone by train. There's no other, there were certainly no automobiles or, you know; the only way to go, at that time, was by train.

LEVINE: So you think maybe you went that day and then that night your ship left?

SALTO: I can't say. I can't say.

LEVINE: Okay. Do you remember what you took with you? Anything that you

brought to the United States?

SALTO: No. Nothing at all except that I guess whatever clothes my mother felt that we needed. But I don't remember anything specific that I took, no.

LEVINE: Can you remember anything that your mother or father took that they wanted to have with them in the new country?

SALTO: Not really. No. No. My father was so glad to leave everything behind. (she laughs)

LEVINE: He wanted to start fresh.

SALTO: (laughing) That's right.

LEVINE: Let's see. (pause) Did you take any food with you for the trip?

SALTO: No, no, no. No. We didn't take any food because aboard the ship we were, I guess, I don't know what you would call it, but we had cabins with beds. And we went to the dining room to eat on board ship.

LEVINE: So you were not in steerage. You were in first or second class. Do you remember?

SALTO: Yes. I remember going into the dining room to eat. And I remember one time when the sea, the ocean was having a storm I guess. I remember

things in the dining room sliding around and having to hold on, you know, like that. But, and I remember running around on the deck, you know. And I remember them serving us tea, which was very strange to us 'cause we never drank tea. We were only used to coffee. (she laughs) Yeah. That's about what I remember. And I remember playing ball on the deck with my youngest uncle. See, remember I said my grandmother had two young sons with her and the youngest uncle was in his early teens. And that was my Uncle Peter and I remember playing ball on the deck with him. Yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: So, will you recount who of your family was actually on the ship?

SALTO: Yes. On the ship there was, of course, my grandmother and her two young sons, my Uncle Peter and my Uncle Lewis. Then there was the older son that she had left behind in Italy; that was my Uncle John and his bride, my Aunt Mary; and then there was my mother, my father, my brother and myself. We were the group that came together.

LEVINE: And what was your grandmother's name?

SALTO: My grandmother's name was Felicita Gabaccia.

LEVINE: And, were you particularly close with any one of those family members?

SALTO: We were the closest, I think, to my Uncle John because he had been left in

Italy and I remembered him as I was growing up. And he came back to us when we had, when the war was over, so he was, I think, the closest feeling of the family. Yeah. See the others had been in the United States so I had no contact with them until they came, but Uncle John had been there.

LEVINE: Now, what was the name of the ship that you sailed on?

SALTO: The name of the ship was the Dante Alighieri.

LEVINE: Can you describe the living quarters that you had on the ship?

SALTO: Vaguely. I remember it was a cabin and we had like four bunks, for my mother, my father, my brother and I, and that's about all I remember though. I don't, don't really have a picture in my mind of that cabin.

LEVINE: Is there anything besides playing ball with your uncle on the deck that you recall happening aboard ship?

SALTO: Not really. Not really. No.

LEVINE: And you say your mother became ill?

SALTO: My mother became ill, yes.

LEVINE: She was the only one?

SALTO: She was the only one, and most of her illness was just do to seasickness. She was very very weak when we came away and we had a long crossing. We had left, I don't remember the day we left but it was early in the first week in January and we didn't arrive into the United States until January thirtieth. So she had a long stretch of seasickness and in the condition that she was so weak, she couldn't hold food down and she couldn't stand up and she had to lay in the bed all the time. And that, that, that's how she was when we arrived at Ellis Island.

LEVINE: I see. Now you mentioned that your father made sure everybody came on deck when you were entering New York Harbor.

SALTO: Yes. New York's harbor, because they all wanted to see the Statue of Liberty. He called all the family, see, as I say, he was so anxious to get here that he didn't want to miss a moment (she laughs) of it.

LEVINE: Can you recall anything he said to you or...

SALTO: No except that he had called, you know, everybody. He went around to the cabins and called us and said "Come up. Come up. We're going to see the Statue of Liberty. We're going to see the Statue of Liberty." That's about it.

LEVINE: And did it mean something to you at that time?

SALTO: No, not to me. It had no meaning to me. It did to him! (laughter)

LEVINE: Then do you remember your first impression of New York City from the boat?

SALTO: You mean, when we docked?

LEVINE: Well, when you could see the skyline or were approaching ...

SALTO: I don't remember anything about that at all. No.

LEVINE: How did you get from the ship to Ellis Island?

SALTO: We were put on a ferry of some kind. They put my mother on another ferry and took her, I believe, to the isolation hospital. Is there an island called Hoffman Island around here? I seem to have that name in my mind that she was taken to Hoffman something. Maybe it was Hoffman Hospital. I (she laughs) don't remember.

LEVINE: I'm not sure. [ Interviewer's Note: Hoffman Island was nearby and contagious disease hospitals were located there. ]

SALTO: Anyway they took her away and they took us on another ferry and brought us to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Can you remember your impression of Ellis Island when you arrived?

SALTO: No. I don't have any impression of when we first got here. My first vivid impression of being here is when they tried to remove me from my father to send me with the women and, and make me live with the women and, while he and my brother stayed with the men. That's the first thing that really hits me about Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Can you describe that? What that was all about?

SALTO: Because I, I was absolutely frantic. I didn't, my mother was gone and now they were going to take me away from my father! And, of course, I, I'm sure I must have cried and carried on a great deal. And, of course, my father just refused to do, to let me go, and, although he spoke no English, he did have brothers and sisters who were left here when my grandmother had gone back on her trip and they were aware that, you know, they had come to see what everything was about. And one of my uncles, he said that he would see the authorities and see what could be done. And I don't remember what he did but I remember that it was finally settled that my father had to sign some papers whereby he assumed full responsibility of my welfare and that if anything should happen to me the government would, he would have no recall in other words. And so he did, he signed that and that's when I was told that I could live with him and my brother in the section with the men.

LEVINE: So you were greatly relieved.

SALTO: So I was greatly relieved that that could be, you know and, of course, my father felt that he was going to have to be very watchful of me because the people were all kinds, all types, all nationalities, all walks. Some of them were there because the United States was not letting them in because there were dubious reasons why they could be let in. So he felt very very concerned that he was going to have to be extremely careful with me. And so when, I don't remember just when but probably in a day or so, when one of his sisters came to visit, he said to her that he wanted her to buy a harness. And to bring the harness to him the next visit. And that's how he got the harness and he put the harness on me and tied me to the belt of his pants so that I could only wander a certain distance. In other words, that's how he kept me for the rest of the time that we were at Ellis Island.

LEVINE: So then what were your living quarters once your father was...

SALTO: We were just in this huge room. They only had two big rooms I think. I remember the room was huge and it was filled with men! And then, of course, the very first night that came he also refused to take me into the sleeping compartment, the sleeping area. so again I think there was some kind of arrangement made through my uncle and whatever authority he spoke to and all. They would come and take my brother and I and my father in the evening after we had been, had our dinner. And they would bring us to some area, and I asked about that when I was here visiting and I was told, after I explained, that it was probably was in one of the other buildings

that they're still working on. They would bring us there and we were put into a room with three single beds and a lavatory. And they would lock us in and we would spend the night there. And then in the morning a guard would come again, unlock the door, by that time we would be up and dressed, and take us back into the main room again. So that that was how I spent the days. The days with my father with the harness on. And at night in rooms of our own, in a room of our own with separate beds. Yes. That part was arranged for us, you know. But we took our meals with every, everybody else.

LEVINE: What was that like? What were the meals like? Do you recall?

SALTO: One of the things that I remember about the meals is the white bread. We hadn't seen any white bread that I could remember because during the war you just didn't get white bread. And even when we came away from Italy it was still a novelty to see it just out on the table for everybody to help themselves with it. (she laughs) Yeah.

LEVINE: So was the food desirable? Did you like eating the food that you got there?

SALTO: I would believe so because I don't recall my mother or my father ever saying anything, you know, unkind about whatever food there was for us that we had to eat. Yeah.

LEVINE: And do you remember anything else about how you spent those days? You

were here ten days?

SALTO: Yes, ten days, all told, mostly with my father and with my brother. We played together. We were very fortunate because we would get visitors every day. See, because everybody was out so they were, and then of course there was three aunts and one uncle who all spoke English. They had been here and they had gone to school, night school, some of them. And so they had, you know, the use of the language and they would come and visit. So we would have visitors almost everyday. In fact, every day we had visitors. And they would always bring us something, you know.

LEVINE: Like what would they bring?

SALTO: Little toys. I remember my brother got a mouth harmonica and I got a little doll and I got a mirror and a comb. So that we would pass the time with whatever items they brought to us, you know. And I'm sure there were other toys that I don't really recollect anymore. And my brother and I, see, my brother being only two years younger, you know, there was a communication between the two of us. And so we would play together mostly you know and my father would get involved with us, you know. And then sometimes he would have conversations with some of the other men that he had, you know, that were Italians and they would, you know, compare notes; where they were from and where were they going, and so forth. So that was it. That was how we spent our days.

LEVINE: Did you see your mother at all during that time?

SALTO: No. We didn't see my mother at all until the day before we were going to see her we were told, I don't remember if we were told by the people, you know, by the authorities in Ellis Island or whether the news was brought to us by one of the family visitors but we knew the day before that the next day we were going to see her. And that's how it was. They brought her from her hospital on the ferry to us and then when we were all together we were finally processed and we left. Yes, we left for New York City.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about that, about the leaving of Ellis Island?

SALTO: Just that we were on this ferry again, which had been a novelty when we came from the ship to Ellis Island on the ferry, and then again being on a ferry to go and then, of course, when we left the ferry we were with the family, my uncles and my aunts, whoever had come down to be with us. And we were all brought to my grandmother's home. She had already rented an apartment, a large apartment; so that there was room for us to go right there to her.

LEVINE: Do you recall the address of the apartment? It was in New York City, right?

SALTO: No. It was in New York City but I remember it was on 37 Street. (she laughs heartily) I don't remember avenues or anything, but this (still laughing) thirty-seven stays in my mind. Yeah.

LEVINE: And, do you remember your impression of that? When you got to the apartment and when you were in the neighborhood...

SALTO: I remember the apartment because it was huge compared to the two rooms that we had lived in the apartment in Italy. And that was the one thing it seemed like, I guess it was like if I had gone into an auditorium maybe (she laughs) but I remember feeling, "wooo, what a big place to live," you know. And I remember meeting a cousin, first cousin who was a daughter, an aunt, you know, the daughter of an aunt of mine who had been born in this country and who grew up here, you know. And she was four years older than I when she, when I was then six and a half. And when she came to visit me in the apartment with my grandmother I remember she brought me a beautiful box, which I later learned was an empty five pound candy box, but she had filled it with hair ribbons because girls wore those big bows on their heads then and that was her present to me when I, my first present in the United States was from this cousin, Anne. Her name was Anne and she brought me this box, which I thought was gorgeous but I found out later (she laughs) was an empty candy box.

LEVINE: How about the hair ribbons?

SALTO: Oh, I got to wear the hair ribbons. They were, it was filled with beautiful hair ribbons to wear in my hair, yeah.

LEVINE: Did you have long hair?

SALTO: Yes, relatively long, kind of down to the middle of my back. Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, in that neighborhood, were there a lot of Italian immigrants or were there, was it a mixed neighborhood?

SALTO: I don't remember. I don't remember what kind of a neighborhood it was, no.

LEVINE: And did you stay living in that neighborhood?

SALTO: We, we lived with grandmother, I think a very short time; just so that they were, my mother and father were, able to find their own apartment. And then I remember we moved somewhere on Ninth Avenue but I don't remember the blocks or anything but I remember it was on Ninth Avenue because of the elevated train! There used to be the elevated train on Ninth Avenue so I remember it was on Ninth Avenue and we had a cold water flat, (she laughs) I think is what they used to call them, and we had a kitchen and two bedrooms and I don't think there was any kind of a living area. The kitchen was kind of, you know, you lived in the kitchen. And that's where we, we stayed for about two and a half years and then we moved out to New Jersey.

LEVINE: So you stayed at your grandmother's, within the year you moved to Ninth Avenue,

SALTO: Within the year we moved out, yes.

LEVINE: And then you stayed there two and a half years and where did you move to?

SALTO: We moved to the town in northern Jersey called Woodcliff Lake, yes.

LEVINE: And that's where you grew up?

SALTO: And that's where I grew up, yes. I grew up in Woodcliff Lake. Yes.

LEVINE: Now, can you remember your father's, he was so anxious to come to this country, do you remember him early on when you first were here?

SALTO: He got work relatively quickly as a machinist. And I don't recall what happened but towards the end of the two years there, he was let out of work and two of his sisters had summer homes in Woodcliff Lake. Homes?! They were cabins (she laughs) that they used to go to. You know, in the summer. And one of the husbands was a mason and he asked my father to go there, in Woodcliff Lake, with them and that he would find him work in the masonry work.

LEVINE: Could we just pause for a second? We'll just turn the tape.

END OF SIDE A

BEGINNING OF SIDE B

LEVINE: Okay. Want to continue about the mason?

SALTO: Yeah. So my father went by himself and my mother and my brother and I were left in, in the apartment. And after awhile, he made connections with a factory in the nearby, in the town of Pearl River, New York; and he was able to back into machine work. And in the meantime, he and my Uncle John decided that they would buy property, build a house, and move to Woodcliff Lake, which is exactly what they did. So, that's how we got, moved back into Woodcliff Lake.

LEVINE: Did your mother or your father learn English?

SALTO: They both learned English well enough but it was always a broken English. It was always, eh, they always needed to have help. And I became their interpreter as I got older because I remembered my native tongue, and I still do for that matter; I can still speak my Italian dialect. And so, but they managed very well: They were both, they had both had enough schooling in Italy, they read, they could write, and they could do mathematics, you know arithmetic, not the high mathematics (she laughs), but they were able to function very well.

LEVINE: What was it like for you starting school and speaking only Italian?

SALTO: Well I started school in those two years that we were in New York. And I have very little recollection of the school except that I could not, I would sit there and not, not realize what was going on at all. And finally one day, my father refused to have any other papers except English, American papers, newspapers. He was going to learn and he refused to have any other, any Italian papers in the house. So that I would look at the papers that he would buy. And he would, he used to buy, I don't remember now what the paper was but it was a paper that ran a lot of pictures because with the pictures it would help him to understand what he was reading. So I would, of course, would look at it and of course, I would look at what I now know were comics and I would try to figure out what the comics said. And of course, I was going to school. And I can still remember, Janet, to this very day, the day that I read and I knew what it meant. It was like a revelation to me, to be able to look at those words and I KNEW what it meant. To this day I can still remember that. Yeah. So it was like, it was like a whole opening of a new world to me, the fact that I KNEW what I had read.

LEVINE: And that was during the time when you lived on Ninth Avenue?

SALTO: Yeah. And then of course, when we moved to Woodcliff Lake, I went to the elementary School there. Yeah, and that was the real country school. There were two grades in each room. And I graduated the eighth grade, and then I went on to high school.

LEVINE: It would be nice to have a clip of that comic strip that you learned to read on.  
(Both laugh)

SALTO: Yeah, I wish I could remember what it was. (laughs)

LEVINE: So then, you, you're father, did he take any English classes or any thing like that...

SALTO: Neither he or my mother, they just learned it by the , you know they pulled themselves up by the boot of their straps. (laughs)

LEVINE: Now, were the people that they tended to talk with, were they speaking Italian in the neighborhood and on the job?

SALTO: In the neighborhood there were a number of Italians, yes; but at work my father was only with English speaking. Well, his brother finally came to work there too, my Uncle John, so of course, he could speak to him, but the majority of people spoke English so that he had to, you know, really learn it in order to get along with his fellow workers. And my mother also. She went into the sewing line and although there were some women, you know, who spoke Italian, she did have to also learn to speak English because of the people that she worked with. So that they, they did learn their English that way. They never learned to write it, you know. Well, I take that back. My father learned to write his checks, (she laughs) and he learned to write in English.

LEVINE: Did you experience any bigotry or any persecution because you were immigrants? I mean did you ever feel that you were prejudiced against for that reason?

SALTO: Not really. Not really as a family, you know, or as all of us. I had two little incidents but they were really very minor. It was mostly because I was a little girl. But having been born in Italy, I had little earrings on. And when I was going to school and had my little earrings on, I used to get a lot of comments from my, eh, fellow students shall I say, about "Look at her. Look at her." 'Cause at that time no little girl in the United States wore earrings. And so I finally carried on so that my mother took my earrings out so that I would not have anybody saying things to me about my earrings. That's about the only thing that really was, and then I mean it's such a minor...

LEVINE: Well you remember it . .

SALTO: But it, I remember it for that reason, yes.

LEVINE: Can you remember things that your mother and father retained that came from Italy, like ways that they had about how they did things or what they ate or what they ...

SALTO: Well, the really, the way we ate maybe is about the only thing. We were

raised strictly on three meals a day. There was none of this eating in between meals. There was none of this snacking before you went to bed. And you sat at the table and you ate from the beginning to the end. And, you ate everything. There was no such thing as "I don't like this." If mother cooked it, you ate it. That's about the only real strictness I remember about the ways that we had. And also our meals did not contain very much in deserts. Our end of a meal was fruit. And that was about it. And so that even now that I'm an old lady, I still only eat three meals a day.

LEVINE: Now was your father the disciplinarian?

SALTO: Oh, absolutely, he was the disciplinarian and a very strict one, yes. Yeah, he really ruled us.

LEVINE: Can you remember any other strictness that he enforced in the family?

SALTO: Well, of course, there was no talking back and you did as you were told and you did it when you were told. And, you didn't go anywhere unless he approved of it and you didn't wear anything unless he approved of it. So, the whole scope of anybody who was strict, he was it!

LEVINE: Can you remember when you were older and you started seeing boys, was he strict in that regard as well?

SALTO: Very strict in that regard as well. (both laugh) Yes. Yes. He was.

LEVINE: Would you say that your mother and father were interested in becoming Americanized or were they wanting to retain their Italian heritage? I mean, did they lean more one way than the other or...

SALTO: No, my mother and my father wanted to become Americans very very much. My father wanted to become a citizen the minute that he was eligible for it. And he did. He got his book of what he had to learn and he used to make me sit there and ask him the questions, and drill him and drill him and drill him. Until he was eligible for his citizenship papers. And, I believe at the time only five years was required to become an American citizen. And almost on the day that he arrived, he became an American citizen. My mother was not eligible to become a citizen under his papers but my brother and I were. So that I never had to get my own papers; I became a citizen through my father's citizenship. And my mother, he kept after her until she was, she only had to wait, I don't remember, but there was a very short period if your husband was already a citizen, you only had to wait a short period and then you could apply, and she did. And she became a citizen, too, very quickly. They didn't waste any time to become American citizens.

LEVINE: Can you remember the day that your father actually became an American citizen?

SALTO: Not, no, I don't remember the day. I remember more drilling him (she laughs) his questions.

LEVINE: Is there anything else that you can remember about growing up here in this country during the time you were going to school and before you were an adult?

SALTO: Not, I mean, I guess I became very Americanized because by the time we moved into New Jersey, I was then already in the second grade and I went all through the school to the eighth grade. And I graduated from the eighth grade from that little, we were a very small town and there were very few of us. And from there I went on to a four year high school. And I went through my four years of high school. I took the Commercial Course and I graduated and I was able to go to work. And I came to work in New York City as a Contometer Operator for Dunn and Bradstreet.

LEVINE: What's a Contometer Operator?

SALTO: (she laughs) I thought you'd ask that. Those were one of the very first machines that you did work on with numbers. You used to, we used to, the little machine added, divided, subtracted, did decimals. It was, you were a very, very advanced person (she laughs) if you could use one of those.

LEVINE: Oh, well you must have had a pride then, in that you were able to do that for work. Did you commute then from New Jersey.

SALTO: Yes. I commuted from Woodcliff Lake to New York City.

LEVINE: And then, where did you meet your husband?

SALTO: Well, that's quite a story. See, my father and his father were friends in Italy. One day while we were living there on Ninth Avenue, now, this I'm telling you because my father told it to me, not that I remember this, while he was out walking on a Sunday morning, he met this man that had been a friend of his in Italy. They had worked together. And here they became, they were friends, and here they found themselves in the United States practically next door to each other. But, his, my future father-in-law, was here by himself. He had come alone. He had not brought his family. So they exchanged, you know, talk, and that was it. And anyway, then, of course, we moved out to New Jersey and I'm sure he lost track of him and so forth. But in the meantime my future father-in-law had his eldest son come over to the United States. He brought him over. So the son, they were living here in New York City and he came over; he was already seventeen. So shortly after, he bought himself a car. So, his father said to him, "You know," he says, "now that you have the car, I would like to go and visit my friend Dominic out in Woodcliff Lake, where he's living now." So, they came out, he came out with his son, see. And that's how I met him for the first time.

LEVINE: Now, he was seventeen.

SALTO: Well he was, by then, a little older because this didn't happen right away. I'm sure that by the time they came up to see my father, he must have been

in his twenties by then, you know. So, I knew him, you know. Every once in awhile he would come up with father. But I had all my interests there in New Jersey and my work in the city. And, I remember one time he came up with his father and, before they left, he said to me "Do you ever stay in the city to go to a show or anything?" I said, "Oh, yeah", I said, "I do." And I did. He said, "Well, why don't you give me a phone number that I can reach you. Maybe we can go out." And that's how we started. We went out for the first time, and then we got engaged, and then we (she laughs) got married. (Both are laughing.)

LEVINE: So you were interested in him?

SALTO: Oh, yeah, we became, we both were very interested.

LEVINE: Oh, very nice. So then, how many children did you have?

SALTO: I had two girls.

LEVINE: What are their names?

SALTO: Gilda, G-I-L-D-A and Denise, D-E-N-I-S-E.

LEVINE: Now, do they have children?

SALTO: Yes, Gilda has three children. She had Robert, her oldest son; Christopher,

the middle son; and Michelle, the little granddaughter. And Denise is, at present, not married.

LEVINE: Well, do you, how do you feel about the fact that you came to the United States at such an early age and remained here?

SALTO: It was probably the best thing (she laughs hard) that could have happened to me because I certainly can't complain of my life in the United States. I mean it has been, the United States has been very good to us. I mean, my father's sentiments were already that he felt that the United States had been very good to him and to his family. Yeah. My brother, he was able to give my brother a college education and, going back again to the fact that I was a girl, he didn't think that I needed it because that was the way many men thought at that time, that it was better that the man have it. So, and we had a home. My father owned his own house and property. And so he felt that the United States had been very, very good to him; and I feel the same way, that it was, going back to my grandmother's words, "You can do better in the United States."

LEVINE: On that note,

SALTO: Yes.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, having spoken today with Felicitia Salto.

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SALTO: Thank you.

LEVINE: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW