

EI-569

MARGARET IMACULATA CASILLO ASSAD

BIRTH DATE: DECEMBER 3, 1913

INTERVIEW DATE: NOVEMBER 21, 1994

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PhD

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 2/1998

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ITALY, 1921

AGE 7

SHIP: "THE MINNEKAHDA"

RESIDENCE: GROTTAMINARDO, AVELLINO

US RESIDENCE: WORCESTER, MA

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: Okay. This is November 21, 1994, and I'm here with Margaret Assad, and we're here in Our Lady of Mount Carmel Center, and it's in Worcester, Massachusetts. And Margaret Assad came from Italy in 1921 when she was seven years old.

ASSAD: About seven, yes.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I'm very happy to have finally gotten here, and I'm looking forward to this. Why don't we start with you saying your birth date, and where in Italy you were born.

ASSAD: I was born on December 3, 1913, in the town of Grottaminardo, province di Avellino.

LEVINE: Can you spell the town?

ASSAD: G-R-O-T-T-A-M-I-N-A-R-D-O. Grottaminardo. Province di Avellino. Uh, province, P-R-O-V-I-N-C-E, di, D-I, Avellino, A-V-E-L-L-I-N-O.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, uh, were you in the same town up until the time you left for America?

ASSAD: Yes. I was born, and I lived there until we left to come to the United States.

LEVINE: Okay. Do you, did you ever go back there?

ASSAD: Uh, I did go back, uh, with the Venerini[ph] sisters, when they went on a trip. Do you remember how far back that was? That would be about, this is 1994, maybe about '88, I think, or '89. 1988 or 1989. I did go back with the Venerini[ph] sisters, from Worcester.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, let's talk about the town as you remember it up until the time you left, what it was like. When you think about it, when you were growing up there, what are the things you remember about it?

ASSAD: Well, when I was born, I was born on December 3, and December 8th is the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and I really, my real name is Imaculata Casillo.

LEVINE: Spell your last name.

ASSAD: C-A-S-I-L-L-O. That was the name that I had when I was born. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: Did you, were you ever told any stories about your birth, or anything that you, was handed down in the family about that?

ASSAD: Not really. There was a few things that were interesting, like we, uh, we had, uh, our home, and then we had land which was on the outskirts. We lived in the city, but we had land in the outskirts. And near the house, also, we had what they call a cantina[ph], like you would say here a brewery. And we had a vineyard, and we had men that would go out and work and cultivate the land. And, uh, they would go and raise the, uh, harvest, and we had a little, what would you call that, made with straw.

LEVINE: Thatched?

ASSAD: Yeah, a little, like a little hut made out of straw, so that on days when it rained, if the workers were there, they had a place to go and shelter themselves.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything else about the vineyard?

ASSAD: Yes. And, uh, now we had what I said, the cantina. And all other people in our town that raised grapes, they would make wine. So they would bring the grapes to us, and we would make the wine for them, and they would come with horse and buggy and put them in maybe ten gallon little barrels and take it to their home after we made the wine for them.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about that, the making of the wine?

ASSAD: Oh, yes. My father, he built, my father was a carpenter, and he built all the barrels that we had, and each barrel, uh, oh, they were huge. You had to get on a stepladder to get into them. So we had big ones that were open at the top where they would bring the grapes, we would put the grapes in the, uh, in that big tub, and then they would have men special for that and they would crush them by going into the, this vat, and the grapes would come out from the bottom. I mean, the wine would come out from the bottom, and we would fill the, uh, different little barrels, and then as they came to take them away, you know, the people that had brought the grapes, they would make an appointment, you know, certain ones would come a certain day, others would come a different day, and

they would take the wine home with them.

LEVINE: Wow. How would, were there any special characteristics that somebody had to have to be a wine, a grape crusher?

ASSAD: Not really. They had to be real clean. (they laugh) Real clean, that's all that really mattered, and that they were willing to do that.

LEVINE: Did people, was that a job people wanted?

ASSAD: Oh, yes, oh, yes. We were very selective as to who we chose to do that, because that was very important. And then, uh, we had, uh, of course, we had our own wine, too. And we used to sell it to the general public that would come, and in those days it was very, very, uh, poor. There wasn't much money, but there was a lot of love and consideration and respect for all the ones that did come. Now, some of them would come, and they would say, uh, oh, can I have my wine today, but I'll bring you my two cents tomorrow. That would be like a quart. It was a little more than a quart bottle, for two cents. And, "But I haven't got the two cents today, but I'll bring it when I come next time." And my mother would say, "That's all right. I'll fill it up. Whenever you've got it, you bring it." But most of the time we never got it. (she laughs) But my mother was very generous at all times. She liked to help the poor because we were not rich, but we were considered wealthy because we had our home, we had our land, we had plenty to eat. We had, um, we raised pigeons, we raised rabbits, we

raised chickens. And, uh, so we had an abundance of everything we needed for the house. And we, we raised our own wheat in the, uh, in the farms, and then we would bring it to the mill to have it ground into flour.

LEVINE: What was your mother's name?

ASSAD: Rosaria Abruzzese.

LEVINE: Abruzzese was her maiden name?

ASSAD: Her maiden name, Abruzzese. Her married name was Casillo.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How do you spell her maiden name?

ASSAD: Uh, A-B-R-U-Z-Z-E-S-E. Abruzzese.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And, uh, and your father's name?

ASSAD: My father's name was Eugenio Casillo.

LEVINE: Okay. And you had brothers and sisters?

ASSAD: We were six children. My oldest brother was Stanley. Uh, let's see. My sister, Maria Miguela, my brother Tomasso, my sister Catherina, and I was the baby, Imaculata Casillo. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Uh, now, uh, who did all the, like, raised the pigeons and the chickens and all that?

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ASSAD: Uh, my mother took care of most of it. But then, you know, the children that grew up, they, you know, they would go to feed them or, you know, help to clean it, or in between, you know. But my mother did most of it. She ran the, you know, the brewery and the wine place, and, uh, she got the men to have to go to the farm to do all the, uh, most of the time.

LEVINE: So your father was farming? He was on the farm?

ASSAD: My father was a carpenter.

LEVINE: Oh, he was a carpenter.

ASSAD: Mmm.

LEVINE: I see. And your mother was running the farm and the brewery.

ASSAD: Yeah, but he had time in between when he wasn't, you know, if he wasn't working.

LEVINE: I see.

ASSAD: Yeah.

LEVINE: And did you go to school when you were there?

ASSAD: Uh, I started to go, and school out there, it wasn't like it is here. It was just one room, and it was all grades all together. And, uh, you didn't have to pay the teacher. You brought her a loaf of bread, or you brought her

some fruit, or you brought her, uh, anything that you could, you know. You didn't have to pay with money. But some did. I mean, if you could, you would. You'd give them, you'd bring, you know, but everything counted in the line of pennies or a lira. A lira in those days was like twenty cents, way back in those days.

LEVINE: Well, in other words, the teachers weren't paid.

ASSAD: No, no.

LEVINE: They would only . . .

ASSAD: No, no. They'd just volunteer. They volunteered, they had, it was like, they had a room and, uh, most of them were like in their own home. It wasn't compulsory to go to school in those days. If you wanted to then you chose someone that would teach you. And there were many people who didn't know how to read or write or do anything in those days.

LEVINE: What would you learn in school? What do you remember about school?

ASSAD: Well, you learn, you started from the ABC and up, you know, and it started into little words, and then in little sentences, and so forth. Yeah.

LEVINE: So, um, so you were in the same room, school room, with your brothers and sisters then?

ASSAD: Well, they were older than me. They had already gone, you know, ahead

of me, since I was the baby.

LEVINE: You'd go in . . .

ASSAD: Yeah, I was the baby, so they were much older than I was. And, uh, during, I don't remember what the year was, but during the influenza time they had out there, we were all pretty sick. The whole town was. I mean, it was just a, a devastating time. And, uh, we were, the five of us recuperated, but my little brother Pasqualino he, he, uh, he passed away. He was seven years old. Yeah.

LEVINE: What else do you remember about the influenza epidemic?

ASSAD: Well, there's many people that died, and it was really, really bad. Uh . . .

LEVINE: Were there doctors in your town, or . . .

ASSAD: There were doctors, but not too many, not too many. And in those days they didn't have too many doctors, you know.

LEVINE: Do you remember any kinds of treatment that were given?

ASSAD: Uh, I really don't. I was too small to remember what they did or what they, but I do remember that I, we had this road where it was all rocks and, uh, a couple of the other children and I, when I was small, we were running, you know, and I tripped and I fell, and I cut myself on the knees, and to this day I still have a mark on my knee as a remembrance of the time that

I fell when I was a little girl.

LEVINE: Did you have, now, what happened? Did a doctor come, or how . . .

ASSAD: No, my mother brought me to a doctor. Yeah. But they didn't do things in those days like they do today, like, you know, you have a cut and they seal it so nicely so that you don't have any scars afterwards. But, uh, in those days you were lucky, you know. They just fixed you up so that it didn't set any infection.

LEVINE: How about, um, home, home or folk medicines? Were there any kinds of things that people did to treat . . .

ASSAD: We used to have different herbs, different herbs, that they used to make tea of. And, uh, they used to use it for a bellyache or a stomach ache or things of that nature, you know? But, uh, they used to have one, I remember, a Compomil[ph]. It's, uh, they used to use that like we use tea here.

LEVINE: And it grew, it grew right . . .

ASSAD: Oh, yeah, it grew in the, almost everywhere. It was just like a seed that would reseed itself, and every year it would come up again, yeah. And near the house we had those little small gardens, because our house was situated so it was on the, you know, on the street level, and then on the side of the house there were steps that you would go down, and that's, uh,

that would lead to a little garden we had in the side of the house. It was like a circular place. And there were other homes all the way around, but ours was an open field, so we used it as a little garden, and we had an olive tree there, where we raised our own olives, too, and we also had some olive trees in the farm, too, that, where the men used to go to cultivate our land, yeah. And the cantina was just on the left side of the, uh, the garden, and you had to go down, oh, maybe twenty, thirty, forty, maybe about forty or fifty steps down. It was very, very deep. You needed to put something on you, a coat or a sweater or something, to go down there, because it was so cold. And that's where we kept the wine. The wine was always nice and chilled.

LEVINE: And how about the inside of the house? Could you describe that, as you would come into . . .

ASSAD: Yeah, as you came into the house, the minute you went in the door, on the right hand side, we had a fireplace. That was our kitchen.

LEVINE: You cooked on the fireplace?

ASSAD: We cooked on the fireplace. We had a, the, uh, fireplace, and then on the, uh, next to the fireplace we had an oven where we baked our bread, but if you didn't want to do the baking, there was a bakery that, that's all she did, was you'd make your own bread, and you'd shape it into loaves, and you'd bring it to the bakery, and they would bake it for you. And you brought it

there, and you would leave it, and then you'd go back and pick it up. If you didn't want to bother, you know, baking it yourself at home. But not all homes had ovens in their homes, so most of them did bring it to the bakery. And then after, from the kitchen you would go into one big room, which was the big master bedroom, and off of the bedroom we had, uh, big glass doors that you would open up, and you'd go on the, uh, we'd call here a porch or a balcony, with all iron rods around it, and we used to have flowers, carnations and different flowers with pots all around that would be hanging down. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: Did you go upstairs to go into the house?

ASSAD: No. There was no upstairs over here. But, uh, then we had, off of that room we had, uh, oh, and when you went into the kitchen, I forgot to mention that, you know, the fireplace in the kitchen is here, but there was another room off of the kitchen here, and then the other one was straight ahead, and then off of that room was a, uh, another room where we kept all our provisions of all kinds, like you would have a storage room, and that's where we kept, everything was with shelves and with cabinets, all built in.

LEVINE: Was it . . .

ASSAD: Now, off of the, uh, when you went into the kitchen, you got the fireplace, and then you had the, uh, the oven, to bake with, and then there was a

door that you would go through on the other side, and that was another part of the house which my father built to go with the house. And downstairs was one big area, then upstairs we had three bedrooms.

LEVINE: So you, would you consider your house was very comfortable?

ASSAD: Oh, yes, yes.

LEVINE: In comparison . . .

ASSAD: Oh, yes. Yes, yeah. And we had the church right across the street from our house. The, uh, like here's the Di Sant'Angelo.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And tell about, uh, observances, religious observances, maybe Easter.

ASSAD: Oh, we used to have, uh, the feasts, our feast days were celebrated very highly. You know, when we have the, uh, what is it, the forty days before, yeah, the forty days before, Lent, we used to hang a big ball with all, uh, different, you know, pins on them, and with little streamers hanging down, and every day we would pull one that we would know how many days . . .

LEVINE: More.

ASSAD: More till, uh, till Easter.

LEVINE: Till Easter, huh?

ASSAD: Yeah. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: Well, did you give up something for Lent? Was that customary?

ASSAD: Oh, yes, yes. We fasted most of the forty days. You know, it was a very, very religious, uh, we, it was, uh, it was just a general thing, practically, with everybody.

LEVINE: What, when you say you fasted, would you, would you mostly drink water, or what would you have?

ASSAD: Uh, no, we wouldn't restrict it to just water. Uh, we, we didn't have, like, a lot of meat or, you know, things that, you would give up something that you really cherished, in a meal or something like that, and, uh, and then the, uh, Easter was very, very, uh, celebrated very highly. We baked and we cooked and we made all kinds of, uh, stuffed pies and all the Italian kind of pastry that you can think of. And, uh, and another thing I forgot to mention, like, uh, you know, a lot of the people would go to church in the morning and, uh, they were poor people, and they didn't have too much. And lots of times they would have children at home, too. And my mother, she would bake bread, or either bring it to the bakery, and have it for them. Every Monday was what we called, uh, oh, I can't remember now, uh, Purgatory Day, or Charity Day, or something of that nature, and she would give, she would cut the bread, because she used to make the big loaves, not the loaves like we have here, you know? And she would cut

them, you know, like in half or quarters, depending upon the size of their family, and every Monday she would give them bread to take home. Because bread, white bread, was not very popular. That was supposed to be something, like we have a delicacy here, uh, say you have pastry, you know. White bread was very scarce, because the flour was very, very expensive. And, uh, most of them ate cornbread, which is good for you. It's even better than white bread. But, uh, that cornbread was more popular. They used to have cornbread more than anything else. But white bread was considered a delicacy in those days.

LEVINE: So your mother would make white bread?

ASSAD: Yeah, to give to people. Every Monday that was, they would go to church and after church they'd stop, it would be like a little line, you know, a few people that, not too many but, you know, there was maybe a dozen or so, or sometimes more. It depended.

LEVINE: Well, you mentioned, um, before we started taping, that you had one grandfather who was alive.

ASSAD: My grandfather Michele was my mother's father.

LEVINE: And do you remember any experiences with him? Do you remember going places or doing things . . .

ASSAD: Well, no, you didn't go too many places. You didn't do too much in those

days, you know. It was mostly when we had feast days, like the feast of Santa Rocco, or a feast of the Blessed Mother. We had, uh, the Feast of St. Anthony. All the different holidays that we had was a feast day. Those were the days that we would get together and we would go, uh, what they called the, uh, Lo Sergio[ph]. It's a, it's like a, uh, a large area, like you would call a park here, or a meeting place, you know, a big area space, and they would put up, you know, the statue that they were celebrating, and they would have a band. And then they would have stands, all different stands with different kinds of pastry, and especially the tarallo. They used to have there, it was like a little donut.

LEVINE: How do you spell it?

ASSAD: Tarallo, like taralle.

LEVINE: Can you spell that?

ASSAD: Yeah, T-A-R-A-L-L-O. Tarallo.

LEVINE: And that, and that was . . .

ASSAD: Yeah, a lot of, yeah. And, uh, in fact when babies were christened or confirmed, in Italy they used to christen the baby young, and confirmation was also when you were young. You'd be just like walking stage. That's when you were confirmed, about three years old, or something like that, so that you'd remember. Now, I remember myself, when I was confirmed,

I had a whole, just like a, you know, instead of having a necklace, it would be a necklace of all these little tarallos. You know, they would put that right around you when you came out of the services.

LEVINE: Do you remember seeing any babies christened? Do you remember what kind of a service that was like?

ASSAD: Uh, I don't recall it too well.

LEVINE: How about the confirmation? Do you remember what, what was that like?

ASSAD: Yeah, well, you're so small, you see, when you're only about two, three years old you don't remember too much, you know? Yeah. But, uh . . .

LEVINE: How about other occasions when something, when a person went through a kind of a rite of passage, or whatever you want to call it? Was there a, maybe weddings, funerals?

ASSAD: Oh, weddings were very, very, uh, very happy occasions. Uh, you know, it would be all family gatherings, and friends, and, uh, with music. It's almost like they do here. But the only thing is they would have, uh, food that was out of this world. It was, uh, really great. They would have all kinds of homemade pastries, stuffed, stuffed pies of all, you know, with meat in it, all different kinds of meat. Do you remember what they call that?

LEVINE: Is that what you said, a stuff pie, before, when you said stuffed, you're talking about, uh . . .

ASSAD: Yeah, it's all stuffed, all different kinds of cold cuts, like.

LEVINE: It sounds great. (she laughs)

ASSAD: With cheese, and with cheese in it, ricotta. And, uh, and, of course, they had the homemade macaroni. Macaroni was the homemade type that you would mix your flour and water and, uh, some put a little egg in it, and then they would spread the dough, and then they'd make, cut it into pieces, and they would make their own macaroni, especially for, well, we had it that way almost every Sunday. That was our Sunday meal. They'd have homemade macaroni. Yeah.

LEVINE: And what would you have with it?

ASSAD: Well, we'd used to have meat. Uh, it would be rabbit meat, it would be chicken, it would be pigeon, you know, it would be everything that you raised yourself. They didn't have too many butchers in those days. Like if you wanted a special cut of meat, like you wanted a little veal, or you wanted some steak, or anything like that, you had to put in an order saying, well, that particular day we're going to have a veal, and you ordered what you wanted on that veal. So that before they butchered the veal, they would have enough customers to sell that veal immediately. It wasn't like today that, you know, you go in the store and you have all cuts

of meat and everything, because the refrigeration wasn't in those days. So that when they did butcher a veal, they would turn around and have the customers all ready to go and pick it up and, uh, so that that was gone right away. It wasn't something that they, you know, kept for any length of time.

LEVINE: Do you remember any other dishes that you particularly liked when you were a little girl that your mother made, or . . .

ASSAD: Well, there was all kinds of dishes, that we even have it here. They were plain dishes, but they really tasted good. (she laughs) We had some with, uh, beans and pasta. We had, uh, lentils, uh, with, uh, rice, lentils with pasta, uh, which was, uh, a real hearty meal, you know, it was good for you. And, uh, then we had the, uh, the other meals where they would put potatoes and peppers and veal, or if you had chicken or any other kind of meat that you had, and, uh, and make it into a, sort of a baked, they would bake it in the, uh, in the fireplace, you know, over the fireplace. They would just put it in a casserole and put it right in the fire, cover it all up, and let it cook on the fire. And we had a lot of barbecued meat, you know, it would be just on the fireplace, too.

LEVINE: Were you closest to any particular family member, would you say?

ASSAD: Well, we, we were all close. The families were always all closed. Uh, we had, uh, the only thing is, we didn't live close to each other. You know,

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one family lived maybe three or four miles away, another one lived two, three miles away, because they all lived, some of them mostly lived nearer to the farmland than the city.

LEVINE: When you say, you mean your family, like cousins and uncles?

ASSAD: Yeah, and uncles, yeah.

LEVINE: But didn't people live right near where you live, on your . . .

ASSAD: Oh, yes, oh, yes. It wasn't any of our family members . . .

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

LEVINE: What did you do for enjoyment? What was considered fun to do?

ASSAD: Well, we'd get together with some of the other children, and you'd play, or you'd pretend, you know, different things, like children do when they're small, and you have little games, or you hide and seek. Or, you know, because I was small at the time, so you really, you know, you really didn't go too far from the house.

LEVINE: How about, like, your mother and father? What would they do for socializing, or for enjoyment?

ASSAD: Well, a social life wasn't that great as far as, you know, we would have a

social life like on a Sunday we'd go visit one of our relatives, or they would come to visit us. Uh, then when it was a holiday we'd have sometimes, when you celebrate a holiday there it's two, three days. It isn't just that one day. And, uh, so that, uh, it, uh, it was really great on holidays. And there was a lot of holidays there, because we'd celebrate almost every saint day, and it was always, even if they didn't have a big band or a big time, the church would have something that would take place, you know, whatever celebration, and sometimes just the gathering would get together, and we'd have a lot of fun together. It was very, uh, it was a simple life, but it was a happy life. And you didn't have to be rich to be happy. The poor were always a kind of, you know, taken care off by those who had it. If you had more, you kind of helped the one that didn't have. It was that kind of a thing. Of course, it was a small town, and everybody knew each other, most of them, you know. And, uh, but it was, uh, I can remember all happy days. I don't remember anything . . .

LEVINE: I was just going to ask you, was there anything about your early life that you remember as not being happy?

ASSAD: No. It was always happy, happy times, happy days. Uh, it was always joyful and, uh, because there was nothing that you could be sad about. The only thing we were sad about, like, if somebody got hurt, or, you know, someone was sick. And, uh, and we all would go to try to help, you know, to help each other, even though it's a neighbor you don't know too

well, or anything like that, if you heard that they were sick, you would go and, uh, you would try to either bring them something to eat, or if they needed anything you'd go up to check and see what they, it was, the neighborhood was more like a family rather than . . .

LEVINE: Was everyone who lived in your, in your, uh, town, were they all connected with the same church?

ASSAD: No. We had, we had more than, we had SantAngelo, we had Santa Maria, we had San Tomaso, we had, we had three churches not too far away. Santa Tomaso we like, uh, as I said, there was the area where we used to celebrate the holidays, and you'd start from the corner there and come up. And there were all houses, the first one there was a church, and then after the church were all houses, and then came our house further up. And, uh, then you would go up, right in front of my house, you'd go up the road, it was kind of a little incline, like, and you'd go maybe, oh, what can I say, about five or ten minutes at the most, and you'd come to the Santa Maria Maggiore. That was the Mother Church. Santa Maria Maggiore was the, and a lot of the people from that other end would go to that church there. And then we had a lot of little chapels all over the town. We had little small chapels with different saints in them, you know. We had one, like, for Saint Anthony, we had one in another place for, uh, different saints, all over town. They were kind of spread out.

LEVINE: And how were . . .

ASSAD: And then on a holiday, we would go and the priest would come and say a mass at the chapel with the people that were near the neighborhood over there, but then others would go at the main church to celebrate, you know, if they were too near to the little chapel. Yeah. And I remember in the, in one of the main roads of our town, we had a huge built fountain. It was a beautiful fountain. It was the lower part, you know, where the water would drip out, and then it had like a lion's mouth where the water would come out of it, and then it had decorate, you know, the, it was the fountain with a beautiful setting at the top, and that was, when you went through our town, it was the main road, and you would go through there. And that, just, the water was just pouring out of that all the time. It was beautiful water, and another thing is we didn't have water in the house. We used to go with barrels, and we would go to the fountain, and we'd fill the barrel and take it home. So you went and got all the water you wanted. And me, as a little girl, I had a little tiny barrel, and I would follow my mother or my sister, you know, and we would make like a little donut with a scarf, and put it on our head, and then we'd take the little barrel and put it on top of that and we'd walk straight all the way home with it.

LEVINE: How about washing clothes? Where did you . . .

ASSAD: We used to go to the, uh, we used to have a fountain, another fountain, and it was regular good, clear water. It was the same thing as the drinking water. And it was built up like, uh, so that the water would flow, and it had,

uh, oh, what could I say? Like we have tubs here, you know, tubs that we have in our homes, only this was built of stone, and it was the whole length, maybe, that was built purposely for people to go to wash clothes. And, uh, the water would run down, and it had, you know, the, a long length of it, and you'd go there and you'd have, you know, you'd put your soap and everything and wash it, and you'd put it in the, in the, uh, water, you know, and rinse them out, and all that. And then if you had time you would take it and you would hang them. They were all different bushes and stuff like that. You would hang your clothes right on there and let it dry and take them home dry.

LEVINE: So would the women of the town, would they meet at the fountain?

ASSAD: Oh, yes, they would meet, oh, yes, yeah. Yeah. They would meet at the, at the fountain. And they all knew that, you know, well, so-and-so goes, you know, at eight o'clock, and so-and-so goes about nine, so that there was always, you know, a time that you, you would go when it was convenient for you, so that you wouldn't be overcrowded at the place. But there was more than one, you know, it wasn't just one spot. There was more than one place.

LEVINE: Yeah. You probably wouldn't know this, because you were so young, but do you know how many people roughly were in the town?

ASSAD: No, I don't.

LEVINE: It's not the kind of thing a child . . .

ASSAD: No.

LEVINE: Um, how about your father? What would he do for enjoyment? Would he get together with . . .

ASSAD: Well, they would get together, you know, with different men, that they would gather together, or they would meet at someone's house, or they would come at my house, or they would take turns, you know, for different things.

LEVINE: Now, what had you heard about America when you were a little girl?

ASSAD: Oh, we heard about America, that it was beautiful, and all we could see was beautiful flowers growing, and, uh, they had, uh, some snapshots that we used to be able to go and look. You know, they used to have these, uh, little, uh, what do you call . . .

LEVINE: I think they're called dioramas . . .

ASSAD: Yeah, you look into them, and they slide different pictures. You just move it, and you'd see a different picture. And they were all so beautiful. And we'd say, "Oh, isn't America beautiful? Oh, isn't America beautiful? And, uh . . .

LEVINE: Well, how was it decided that you would come?

ASSAD: Well, my father, he came here, uh, once before we came. And I don't remember the year he came, but, uh, it was, I'd say, maybe 19, uh, '08 or '09, something like that. And then he came back home . . .

LEVINE: So, in other words, he came here before you were born.

ASSAD: Uh, oh, yes. He came, no, no. This was, yeah, that was before I was born he was here already. He came once. And, uh, then he came back home. And, uh, then he, uh, extended, you know, we had, as I said, we had our home and then we had a doorway that we went into the next room, so that when he came back from here, he had worked and made some money, and he built upstairs where we had the extra bedrooms upstairs, because the family was growing and was getting big, we could use more room. So that's when he built upstairs, he built the whole, he put stairways, and we had the, uh, extra rooms upstairs. And, uh, then after I was born, he decided to come back again here. And when he came back that time, he had intentions of us coming over. He came with the will that we were going to stay here. See, first he came . . .

LEVINE: To make some money . . .

ASSAD: Money, and come back, and then, you know, he was always talking about how nice it was here and, uh, you know, it was a little better, there was a better chance of making a better living, and for, he was thinking of the children more than, you know, for ourselves, uh, I mean, for themselves,

my mother and my father, they had plenty to get by on, but they were thinking of the family. And, uh, so my father said that, you know, they would probably have a better change. And, uh, so he came back to America, and, uh, when he was here it was, the war broke out, 1914.

LEVINE: And he was here?

ASSAD: He was here. Well, when he got here and got settled, he tried to send for us, and the ports were closed, so we couldn't come. Then the war wasn't over till about, when he came the second time, he brought my oldest brother with him, my brother Stanley. And when he, when the war broke out, he was old enough to go in the service, so he went in the service. And, uh, but in the meantime my father was trying to get us to come here, so we didn't know that if you had someone in the service you would be preferred, you know, you'd get preference to come here. And, uh, he, uh, so my mother tried with the different agencies out there, too. And, you know, we didn't know about that part of it, you know. All we did was try to say that we would like to come, and we were trying to get passports to come to America, and there was no hope at all. So I don't know how it happened, but my mother happened to hear that if you have anyone, uh, that served in the service, or if you have anybody out there that's a citizen of the country, or anything like that, that you could come. "Well," she says, "my son was in the service out there." So she went back to the agency, and, uh, told him that, you know, my brother had been in the

service, and so we opened up the, uh, the chance of trying to get the papers and passports and everything to come here. But it wasn't, this was around 1919 or 1920, and it wasn't until 1921 that we finally got out.

LEVINE: Do you remember leaving? Do you remember leaving your town, and . . .

ASSAD: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: What was that like for you?

ASSAD: Well, you know, we, uh, we left and, uh, we landed in Naples. We left from Naples.

LEVINE: How did you leave? But what means of transport? How did you . . .

ASSAD: Uh, I don't quite remember how we got there, whether it was someone who drove us down, or whether we went just with a buggy. I remember being on a buggy so many times that, you know, we used to go on different holidays, like if the next town to us would have a holiday like we'd have in our town, it was a little town next, like say Shrewsbury or Marlborough or Northborough, we would hire a team, and we'd get on the team around two, three, four o'clock in the morning to get there on time for the holiday. And we'd all get together, and we used to bring, uh, our own food, you know, so we could have something besides what we would get when we got there, you know? And, uh, but I don't remember if it was one of those days that we went on a holiday, or whether we did the same thing

when we went to Naples.

LEVINE: Do you remember being examined or anything?

ASSAD: Oh, yes, yes, yes. We were, uh, we were all examined, every one of us. And there were some other people that were being examined, you know, that came, you know, you're usually together when you're waiting and all that, and a few of them didn't pass, and my mother felt so bad for them. They found something wrong, either with their eyes, or some, something that was wrong with them. And, uh, they wouldn't let them go. They had to go back home. And that was sad.

LEVINE: Do you remember the name of the ship that you . . .

ASSAD: Minnekahda.

LEVINE: And what about the voyage? What do you remember about that?

ASSAD: Uh, the voyage was good. The only thing is, uh, we landed at a certain part of the ocean when, um, everybody on the ship got sick. Everybody was throwing up. And, oh, it was terrible.

LEVINE: Where were, were you in steerage, or what kind of accommodations did you have on the ship?

ASSAD: Uh, we had regular bunks.

EI-569/ASSAD

LEVINE: You were like in the little cabin?

ASSAD: Yeah, a little cabin. We had little bunks, you know, one on top of another, and, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember coming into the New York Harbor?

ASSAD: Uh, yes. When, uh, we landed, and, uh, I think we went on a smaller boat afterwards to take us to Ellis Island. And, uh, we were all given a nice ham sandwich. I still remember, I can still taste it. It, you know, because we never had that soft, soft bread. You know how American bread is, and it was very soft, and beautiful ham in it, you know, that tasted so good. And, uh, and that was one other thing that stood out so much. I still, every time I have a ham sandwich, I can remember the ham sandwich I had when we first arrived at Ellis Island.

LEVINE: What else struck you about Ellis Island? Can you describe it, what it was like when you got there?

ASSAD: Well, we just waited around a little while. And then, you know, we, uh, my father and my brother were there to take us.

LEVINE: What was it like seeing them?

ASSAD: Well, it was great, you know. It was great. Yeah.

LEVINE: So you weren't at Ellis Island all that long?

ASSAD: We weren't on Ellis Island too long, no.

LEVINE: Were you reexamined there?

ASSAD: Yes, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about that?

ASSAD: No, but we, we passed it, yeah. We passed all the examinations.

LEVINE: So when you, uh, were reunited with your brother and father, and then you got back to Battery Park in New York, where did you go from there?

ASSAD: We came back to Worcester.

LEVINE: And did you, how did you come, on what kind of transportation?

ASSAD: Uh, I don't remember too well.

LEVINE: It could have been the train, or it could have been . . . It was probably a train.

ASSAD: Probably, I think it must have been a train. I think it was a train that we came on.

LEVINE: Do you remember your first, uh, impression of Worcester?

ASSAD: Well, to us, you know, it's, you know, it was like a, something greater than

the town that we were living at, you know, small. But when we, uh, arrived here, uh, of course, we didn't have anything. We just, my father rented the house, and we had to get furniture and everything, you know, to . . .

LEVINE: Your father rented the house before you arrived?

ASSAD: Oh, yes, yes. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember any, those first few days or weeks, do you remember anything new and different that struck you, like . . .

ASSAD: Well, when we arrived here, my mother had a brother of hers, Russell Abruzzese, and his wife, Maria. And, uh, they, uh, they lived on East Central Street. Do you remember that? And they were here already, and when we arrived, they helped us to settle, you know, to, uh, get things that we needed, you know, to buy a stove, because winter would be, you know, for the winter, and to cook with and all that, and, uh, our beds. But we had, my mother had brought our own mattresses from the old country.

LEVINE: Wow.

ASSAD: And they were delivered, you know, back here, in Worcester. And they were made out of all pure wool. It was all wool mattresses. And she says, "Oh, we may not be able to get that out there, you know?"

LEVINE: Were there any other things that your mother packed, or brought, or sent,

that you . . .

ASSAD: Oh, yes. We all, oh, wait. We all had jewelry from remembrance of the old country. We all had beautiful chains and rings. We all, you know, for my sister, and, because when we, my older sister, she remained in Italy, because my sister, Maria Mikele, because she got married. So she was out there with her husband. And, uh, my brother Tomaso, he also, he wanted to stay back there, he said, "Because I may have to go in the service now, and I won't be able to come." And, uh, so it was just my mother, my sister Catherine, and myself, that came here at that time. And my other brother Stanley was already here with my father.

LEVINE: And what did your father do for work once he got to Worcester?

ASSAD: He was working in The Norton Company. He went to work there. At first he was just a carpenter because when we went to live, uh, the house was owned by Mr. Emelio Ellaraya[ph], and he had loads of houses. He owned practically the whole couple of streets with all houses, and there was always some repair to be done. So my father worked for him for quite a while until we got settled and my father got to know, you know, the ins and outs of the place, and then he went to work at Norton Company.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And did he stay there?

ASSAD: Yeah, he stayed there for quite a while.

LEVINE: And then did you go to school here?

ASSAD: I went to school. I went to Gate Street School. (she coughs)

LEVINE: And what was that like when you first started school here?

ASSAD: Well, when I first started they just put me in with the regular class. There were no tutors. There was nothing there. Like today, now, if you're of a different nationality, they hire a tutor or they put you in a certain grade, and they have you speak your own language, and then your other. I didn't have any of that. You just put me in the class, and I just had to pick it up as I went along.

LEVINE: Were there other children who didn't speak English?

ASSAD: Not in my class, yeah. And, uh, so I, uh, I'd go there, I'd just sit and, you know, listen, and whatnot, but I couldn't answer the teacher or, you know. Of course, she understood that I couldn't, too. But once in a while, you know, she'd put something on the board, you know, for the others, and she'd go, like, you know, a certain word, and whatnot. And, well, I just tried to pick it up as, you know, they went along. But, uh, one day I, uh, I had to go to the bathroom, and I couldn't tell the teacher, you know, I was telling her in Italian, you know? And, uh, she said, and, uh, she wouldn't, she didn't understand what I was saying, so I got up and I was walking out of the school, out of the classroom, and she followed me, you know, she came outside. And I kept going (Italian), you know, I kept saying, "I gotta

go, I gotta go," you know. And she tried to hold me, so I just kind of kicked her a little bit, you know, just to get away from her, and I ran from here, and I went to the bathroom. (she laughs) And then from there I was scared to go in the class. I went home. That is one of my episodes. But I went back to school the next day, and everything was all right. She evidently found out what it was all about.

LEVINE: So was there anything in your learning English that helped you a lot?

ASSAD: Well, uh, I picked it up a little bit at a time in school, and, uh, I wasn't too good. I didn't pass the grade that first year, so I remained back and, uh, but, uh, as I started to understand and to be able to read and to write a little bit, you know, and, uh, I kind of put my mind to it. As you get a little older, you kind of understand a little more. And, uh, I, uh, I got so that after the third year I, uh, I did pretty good. I was getting all A's and B's. At first it was all C's and D's, but I advanced myself there. And then when I was in the sixth grade I got pretty near all A's.

LEVINE: Wow.

ASSAD: So the teacher said to me, "You know, Margaret," she says, you know, at the time I was going by my name, Imaculata, and, uh, but the teachers, uh, some would say, then they gave me the name of Marguerite, M-A-R-G-U-E-R-I-T-E. And I went by that name for a while. And then it was Margaret. So after a while I says, "Well, I might as either choose one or

the other," you know? So I made it definitely to leave it Margaret. It was easier to pronounce and to say. And that's how I come to being called Margaret.

LEVINE: We have about four minutes left, so let's try . . .

ASSAD: Yeah. Then when I was in the sixth grade and it was time for me to leave because we had to go to the seventh and eighth grade, my teacher said, "You know, Margaret," she says, "you know, you've got some very good marks and you, you know, you can go to prep." And, uh, I said, "What's that?" You know? She says, "Well, that's a little school where you can, you can have languages there, too. You can take up French, Latin, and you can, it would be like, you know, it's like, uh, she was trying to explain to me that it's like as if you're going to high school, you know? Like the first year of high school. She just said that for an example, you know, but it wasn't that. It was the seventh and eighth grade. So I said, "If I can go, I'd like to go," you know. She says, "Oh, yes, by all means," she says, "because you've got the grades." So I went to Belmont Street Prep, and, uh, I had a French teacher. I was taking up French. And, uh, and the other subjects that, you know, all that were required for the seventh and eighth grade. But on the last part of the eighth grade, I was about thirteen years old, twelve or thirteen, I was thirteen at the time, because, see, I was older than the rest of the children in my class. The others were, like, five, six years older, and I was already seven at the time, so that when I

left, when I was going to, uh, prep, I, uh, my father wasn't working at the time. It was Depression. And everybody was looking, there were people selling apples out in the street to try to earn a nickel. And, uh, so, you know, we had rent to pay, you've got to eat. My mother, she couldn't speak English or anything. There was nothing, you know, to do. My sister, she went to work, and she wasn't making very much. In those days if you made seven, eight dollars a week for forty hours, that was a lot of money. The men were working for, uh, if they made fifteen, sixteen, eighteen dollars, that was a big, big pay in those days. And, uh, so I saw things were tough at home. So during the vacation time I got a job.

LEVINE: What kind of job?

ASSAD: I went to work in a shoe factory. So I worked through the summer, I mean, while school was closed, but then I saw that, and my father wasn't still working, we needed money at home, and, uh, I stayed working. I went back to my teacher, and I told her that I wouldn't be able to go back to school. She cried. She says, "You were one of my best pupils." She says, "You could really, you know, be somebody, or, you know, to . . ." And, uh, I said, "Well," I said, "we got to eat, and we got to pay rent," I said. "So somebody's got to do it. My father can't find anything." And the only thing that he did do occasionally was for Mr. Ellaraya[ph] again, you know? But that would be go and fix a step, uh, you know, a doorknob that didn't work. So what did that bring him? Maybe a couple of dollars, you

know? And, uh, so I stayed and worked, and I never went back to school.
So I started helping support the family at thirteen years old.

LEVINE: Wow.

ASSAD: But I did go to, I tried to go to night school, night high, but they wouldn't accept me because I didn't have my grammar school diploma. So I had to go one year to a regular, for a regular class, and to get my diploma for the, uh, grammar school, and then I went to Carmice High School at night, and that's where I got my little education that I could, you know. And I worked all through my life, all the time.

LEVINE: Well, we're at the end of the tape here. I just want to say, uh, that I'm talking with Margaret Assad and that it's November 21, 1994, and we're going to continue on another tape.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

LEVINE: Okay. We're beginning now tape two, and I'm talking with Margaret Assad. And, uh, I didn't mention the first time, but Carmelita Bello[ph] is here, who's, are you the president of the Worcester Chapter of the Sons of Italy?

BELLO: Correct.

LEVINE: Right.

ASSAD: That's right.

LEVINE: And it's through Carmelita that I got to talk with Margaret.

ASSAD: Yeah. I'm also a member of the same.

LEVINE: Okay. Um, why don't you say your full name as you were born, and then your married name.

ASSAD: With my birthday?

LEVINE: No, you don't have to say it.

ASSAD: I was born in, with my name Imaculata Casillo.

LEVINE: And then how did you get to Margaret? What were the changes?

ASSAD: Well, when I went to Gate Street School, different teachers, they tried to, uh, translate my name into an English name, and at first they translated to Marguerite, then they translated to Margaret, and I eventually left it at Margaret. But my birth name is Imaculata Casillo.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, we were talking about your leaving school, and you started work. What was your work experience like?

ASSAD: Uh, well, in those days work was piece work.

LEVINE: This is in the shoe factory.

ASSAD: You were, it's in the shoe factory. And, uh, you would go in and naturally a shoe is put through so many processes, different, each one has their own little thing to do. Some stamp the material, some originally you started with the cutting room, they would cut the shoe, and would come to the stitching room, and then would get stamped the sizes on them. And, uh, then they would start the stitching of all the different parts of the shoes, and so forth. And, uh, that, different styles required different processes of working on the shoe, and if what you were doing came through, you had work, but if that particular type of a shoe that you were working on, that particular job that you were doing wasn't coming through, you would just have to be there. Because if you weren't there, the next person that was there and didn't have anything to do, they would do your work. So some days you would be there all day long and not work, but you had to be there to reserve your job. So some days you'd make only eight cents, some days you would make, uh, a dollar. Some days you'd make ninety cents. At the end of the week, I mean, if you, uh, earned eight or nine dollars, that was a good pay. And in those days you had to go Saturdays also. It was a six-day job. And, uh, sometimes you put in forty-four hours, and you'd get nine, eight, seven, it depended upon what you produced during that week.

LEVINE: Well, it must be different, like what were you, compared with the shoes

that you had in Italy, what . . .

ASSAD: Well, in Italy, in Italy, uh, the shoes out there were made to order. My brother, Tomaso, he was a shoemaker. You went to him and he would fit your foot and make the shoe according to the size you wear. And it was always a little larger than what you wore, because you had to let that pair of shoe last you a few years. And they did last. They were made with very good leather, leather soles and leather uppers. And, uh, but once you got a pair of shoes, you wore it for a few years. (she laughs)

LEVINE: So then did you stay at the shoe factory?

ASSAD: Uh, no. I, uh, from the shoe factory I went to work with a company called George C. Whitney Company, and that, they used to make, uh, Christmas cards, Easter cards, birthday cards. It was, uh, that kind of a factory, and it was pretty large. And, uh, I went to work there, and I was piece working over there also. But it was different. Over there you had work every day. And, uh, he would line up all the different kinds of cards, and you would put one of each in an envelope. When you go to the store and you buy these little packages with little Christmas cards or Christmas tags in them, that's what I was doing at the time. And, uh, I did that for about a year, and then I got laid off for a few months. And, uh, because all jobs were seasonal in those days. They used to work maybe nine months out of the year. Every factory had their own season that they laid off people. They would get everything they needed and, you know, get it out, and then be a

slack season for a few months. So when I got laid off from George C. Whitney Company, I didn't find work out here, but I found work in Spencer Shoe. Now, when I had worked in the shoe shop here in Worcester, I did mostly bench work. It was like, you know, just stamping or sorting or different things like that. It wasn't, I didn't work on a stitching machine. I would, I used the stamping machine, which was just to stamp the sizes and things like that, but I had never touched a sewing machine. So they were advertising for help in Spencer Shoe, and, uh, I, uh, I went to Spencer. I took the bus. The bus terminal used to be what we used to have at Trumbull Street in Worcester at that time, which doesn't exist today, and I got the bus from there, it cost me thirty cents for the bus, and it took me all the way to Spencer. And this was New Year's Day. In those days you didn't get holidays like you do today. You got Christmas, you got Easter, Fourth of July, and that, those were the holidays in those days. All the other holidays were not observed like they are today. So on New Year's Day I went and applied for a job, and I got it. There was one problem. I never did any stitching on a sewing machine. But they hired me. I told them I thought I could do it, you know. So I went and got a, they gave me a whole case of shoes. There'd be seventy-two shoes in a case. And they would come, uh, because they didn't have no soles or anything on them. You know, they're just the top part of the shoe, and they're on a string, like, you know, and they're tied at the top. So they gave me a case of shoes and they brought me to the sewing machine and, uh, told me to go ahead, you know? So I said to the, uh, the, uh, girl

that had given me the case, because she was, the boss was just the head one, but she had different ones that would give out the work to the workers. So the girl that gave me the work, I, uh, I said to her, "Would you mind just doing one or two of those shoes for me, just so I can see, you know, how it's done?" "Oh, no," she said, "sure." She sat down, and she, she went right, and this was fancy stitching. You know how the front of a shoe has all the little cutouts and designs? That, uh, and that's what that was. They call that fancy stitching. I says, "Boy, am I gonna be fancy." So she did one, and I says, "Try one more for me," you know? So she did. She says, "Okay." She says, "But I think you'll be all right." You know, she went off, you know? So I took the shoe, and before I said, "Now, could I have a piece of material just so I could get used to the machine a little bit before I try it on the shoe," you know, different machines work a little different. I said, "I just want to get used to it." "Oh, no." So she gave me a few pieces of the lining material. So I put it underneath the machine, and I just barely touched the handle, it goes whoooo. I just shook. I was so, you know, afraid. I says, "Oh, my God, how am I going to go around that whole fancy cutout?" You know, because they were only about, some of them were about a quarter of an inch, you know, that you got to go around the edges and then go to the next one and the next one. So I tried to imitate the design that was on the shoe on this piece of material, and I kept going, "Well, let me see if I can handle . . ." I just barely, you know, barely put my foot down on the pedal, you know, they just, and hold the machine back. And I tried to hold it with

my hand. But I eventually got so that I kept doing it over and over again. Well, I think I must have did that for about a half an hour, because I didn't dare try, you know, I said if I spoil a shoe I'll get fired. So I just kept it up, and I tried and I tried, and then finally I got courage enough that I could control the machine a little bit, you know? I says, "Well, I'll try one," you know? So I put the shoe underneath there, and I'd make one stitch, another stitch, and another stitch, and another stitch. And that's how it continued. And finally I got so that, you know, I could manipulate it a little bit. Well, you're supposed to do about three cases or four cases a day. I don't think I did six shoes all day long. I still have the same case. I came back the next day, I says, "I'm gonna get it no matter what." The next day I improved a little bit. Instead of six, I did about twelve, twice as much as I did the day before. The next day I finished the case. I did pretty good. So it took me three days to do the one case. Well, the next day, I got through with that, so I got another case, and, uh, I did pretty good. I didn't quite finish it, but I almost finished that one case in a day. And it went on. Each day I improved a little bit. Well, it got to be that after I was there about a week-and-a-half or two, I got so that I could manipulate it pretty good, so I got two cases done, then I got three cases done. And my friend that was working aside of me over there, she says, "You know, Margaret," she says, "you'd better slow down," she says, "because if you go over a certain amount, they'll cut our prices down." "Oh," I said, "is that how it is?" I says, "Okay. I'm glad you told me." So I just kept up with them, you know, whatever they did, and I stayed there for, three months were up,

and the George C. Whitney Company that I was working in Worcester called me to go back to work. So I went and gave the floor lady my resignation, you know, to say that I was going to go back, I was going to get through. And she said, uh, "Oh," she said, "you're doing so great." She said, "Why don't you stay? You know, we've got plenty of work." I said, "Yes, but, you know," I said, "I have a job in Worcester which is near to home, and, uh, you know, it's kind of hard to get here." I'd have to leave at five o'clock in the morning to walk all the way downtown and get the bus at Trumbull Square, and then be there for seven o'clock in Spencer every day. And, uh, I said, "Not only that," I said, "you know, thirty cents means a lot of money." It's thirty cents one way, that's sixty cents a day, so it took a lot out of my pay, although I was making pretty good. I was making better than I had been doing in the other place. I said, "This way I don't have to pay, you know, all that money out. I mean, I could use, my folks could use that money." And she says, "Well, we'll pay you the fare. Come. We'll pay you your fare." And, uh, I said, "No, I think I'd better take my job back home, because it'll be more convenient, you know?" So I did. I went back to my old job. When I went back, I didn't go back as a pieceworker on the, you know, putting the cards in the little envelopes. I was made assistant to the floor lady. I used to give the work out, this time. I used to give them, when they used to finish, the girls, like when I was working someone would bring me what I needed for, you know, to continue with my job. So this time when I went back she put me as assistant to the floor lady, not the boss, but the boss, and then there

was a floor lady, and then just, I would be the assistant, and she would tell me, you know, do that, and when it's all done you bring this to her, and you bring this to that, I was, that's what I did. So I was on day work then. I was on a weekly basis, eleven dollars a week.

LEVINE: You were proud of that?

ASSAD: Yeah, sure! Because men were making ten dollars a week. I was making eleven. So I, uh, I stayed on that for, oh, maybe four or five months, and someone left where they have the machines that you put the cards in, and then you just put the string on and the machine, you, uh, you know the little red string that goes on the tag, the little tags that you get with the little red string on them? Well, the machine, you put all these cards on a spindle, and then the machine would, you would control the machine that it would put the string through it. You had to, and, well, that was day work also. So that probably, because I was working on a machine, I got thirteen dollars a week. So I stayed there for quite a while. And, in the meantime, I'm going to school at night, also. And, uh, finally got to be a, oh, the fourth year, when we were going to graduate from the evening high school, and I took very sick. I got a touch of pneumonia. It was in the month of January and February. And, uh, so I couldn't go to work, and I couldn't go to school. So it came time for a diploma, I couldn't get my diploma because I had missed too many, too much time from school. So I had to go back another year, so I had to go five years instead of four years

in order to get my, my, uh, evening high school diploma. And, uh, so then I left there, and I went back to work in a shoe shop in Worcester. It used to be where the Walden-Worcester Ranch is now, and it was called the B.W. Footwear. So I went to work in that place. And, uh, I started in the, in the, uh, shoe shop by being a stitcher, just a regular on the machine and whatnot, and, uh, I worked there for, oh, maybe two or three years, and the floor lady that we had, she left. And where I had started by stamping the shoes, stitching them, going in there, originally going in the cutting room, like if a shoe was damaged I'd go in the cutting room and have the cutter cut another shoe, and, uh, then I was called what you call the cripple girl. The cripple girl means that when a case goes to the shipping room and one shoe is damaged, that means you've got to make up another shoe to fill that case. So I was chosen to do that. And I would start from the very beginning and go through the whole process of the shoe and bring it through the whole entire shop until that shoe was completed. And some of it I would do myself, and some of them the workers that worked on those machines would do it for me. And when the shoe was completed I'd bring it back to the packing room where they shipped the shoes out. So seeing that I knew the whole entire process of the shoe throughout the entire place, my floor lady left, so I was given the job of being the floor lady for the stitching room. So I was the boss in the stitching room. (she laughs) From being in the stitching room like that, I was in contact with the office a lot, all the time, you know, different ones that had problems, or a worker had some problems. And, uh, being one

that had gone through each process, I knew all the prices, like you were stamping a shoe would be five cents a case, and another one did topstitching, that's thirty cents a case, and another one did, uh, stitching the buckle on, or one did the binding around the shoe. And I knew all those jobs, and I knew the prices that everybody did. So the girl in the office took sick, and she wasn't there to take care of the payroll. So they would call me up. "Margaret, how much is this? How much is that?" There, because the other girls would try to take over the other girl's job. So, uh, finally the office manager said, "Margaret, why don't you come up and help them over here with the payroll, you know?" I says, "Oh, yeah, sure, I'll be glad to," you know? But I was still floor lady in the stitching room. So I'd go up in between, and I'd go up a little bit, you know, and I'd go through, I'd know the person that's working, I knew the job that that person was doing, and, uh, I would just go through the slip. I didn't have to go look on the chart how much that job was, you see? Where they would, they would come across top stitching, they'd have to go look in the thing, top stitching so much. And they would, then they'd have different style shoes. It wasn't just plain top stitching. It was binding or stamping or stitching or fancy stitching, or whatever it was. But they would have to refer to the price list all the time. So they couldn't keep up, you know, to get the payroll on time. So I'd just go in, I'd see who the person was and the job he did, because they would mark what they were doing. And, uh, and I would just take it and make it down and I'd go, well, twenty at six cents, two times six is twelve, I'd do it in my head, a dollar twenty cents,

and I'd have it at the bottom. I'd take the next sheet and, uh, did six cases, thirty cents, uh, three times six is eighteen, one eighty. You know, I'd just flip through the sheets. Well, it got so that I could do the payroll quicker than even the girl originally did it, you know? So the office manager, they got, they got me to stay as, uh . . .

LEVINE: Payroll.

ASSAD: The payroll person upstairs. So when it was time to do the payroll, even when the other girl came back, they had me go up to help her so they could get it done quicker, you know, to have it done. So that's how I started working in an office. So then I had gone, I had gone, they were here in Worcester at the time, but then they bought what they call the Slater[ph] Mills in Webster, Mass. So I had to travel all the way to Webster every day. And, uh, when we went to Webster, I was working in the office over there. So one Monday morning it was a real bad day. It was in the wintertime. It was the week after Christmas. Christmas was, like, say, Friday or Saturday, and this was the following Monday. And, uh, I got all the way from my house, all the way up to, uh, where Route 20 to go to New York and the other route to go to Oxford and Webster, it's like a branch. The minute I went from the right side of the road to cross over to the left, the street was kind of beveled, and it was covered with ice, just a coating of ice, all over. The trees had all ice on them. My car started to spin around and around and around. I didn't know where I was going to

end up. Finally I ended up in an embankment on the side of the other side of the road. And lucky enough there was a big ledge that was sticking up, and the rear end of my car ended on the end of that ledge. The car got damaged, but I was just shaken up. I mean, I was scared. But I didn't get hurt, you know, to, so I says, "Oh, my God, how am I going to get out of here?" You know? So finally I managed to get out of the car, and there was a Howard Johnson's at the corner, which is not there now. Now is that, um, oh, Jo-Jo's, Jo-Jo's is there now. But in those days it was a Howard Johnson's. And from that place on, coming back towards Worcester, that was all woods. There was nothing there, very few, you know, little places. And, uh, so I went to Howard Johnson's, and I called up the office to tell them what had happened, and I called up a tow truck to come and get my car out of there. And, uh, when I went, so I didn't go back to work that day, because I rode back with the tow truck to come back to Worcester. I didn't go home, but I went to my sister's house. That's the sister that had come here with my mother and myself, my sister Catherine. She was married then, and she had two children herself, and she lived on Carver Street. That's off of Belmont Street. And I told her what happened. I says, "But I can't go home, and I can't tell Mom and Dad, because they'll be worried every time I go to work now, they'll be worried." You know? She says, "Why don't you get a job over here?" She says, "There's a St. Pierre chain." If you remember, right in, it was right, now they have these housing, the, uh, elderly housing there now. They knocked the factory down. But she says, "Why don't you get a job

over here, be right near the house, you can come to my house for lunch at noontime, and everything." She said, "Why don't you get a . . ." I said, "You know, but now I have a good job out there. I'm on salary." I was making pretty good money then. And I said, "If I'm out sick I get paid. If I . . ." You know. And, uh, "If I take time off, I'm paid." And I said, "You know, going to a new job, I may not have that." You know, and I says, "Mom and Dad, I've got to support them. You know, we've got expenses." She says, "Well, I would try." And she kept after me. So finally after two or three weeks of her getting after me, I, uh, I did go and apply. But in the meantime, I hadn't told my folks that I was in an accident. When I went home without the car, I told them that something went wrong with the car, and they can't get the part right away. It might take a few days, or it might take a week. I don't know. And, so that I had to leave the car at the garage. So they never knew that I was in an automobile, in an accident. And, uh, so I finally did go and sign up on a Saturday. I took time off on a Saturday and I went up and signed up for the job in Worcester. So, uh, about two weeks later, he kept calling my house, the office manager at the St. Pierre chain. He kept calling my house. And, uh, my father couldn't speak English. My mother couldn't either. So when I'd go home, my father would say (Italian). He'd say, "A man called, but I don't know who it is or what he wanted." "Oh," I said, "well, maybe they had the wrong number," you know. "Yeah, it could be," my father would say, you know? Well, another week went by, he kept trying, and the same man called back again. So when he saw he couldn't get a hold of me, he wrote me a letter,

the office manager did, and, uh, he said, that "if you are still interested in the job, we have an opening for you. I would appreciate if you'd call me and let me know." What could I do? I was, I was sad to leave the place I was at because I, you know, I really was my own boss there, uh, I had keys to everything, to the safe, to the money, to the, we had a walk-in safe, and all the, anything that, you know, I was really, I said, "I don't know if I'm leaving a good job and going, I don't know where I'm going," you know, I'm leaving something that I know it's good, but I don't know. But my sister kept after me. She says, "You'd better take, you'd better take the job."

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE TWO

ASSAD: So I finally, you know, went over and, uh, I called him up, and I told him that I'd go up and see him on a Saturday. And he said, "Yes." He said, uh, "We would like a . . ." Because I was, that's just what they wanted, someone to take care of payroll and personnel and things like that. And, uh, I said, "Well, but I'll need a couple of weeks notice to give to my employer." "That's okay. As long as we know you're coming." You know, "That you will take the job, it's okay. Two, even three weeks if you have to." So I said, "Okay." Well, you know, that whole week went by, came Friday, I couldn't face my office manager to tell him that I was going to leave. The whole week went by, and I couldn't pick up courage, you

know, because they were so good to me, everybody, and all the girls in the office and everything. So finally Friday afternoon came, it was about, close to four o'clock, five o'clock we leave. So I told him. I said, "Jules." I said, "You know, I've got something to tell you." I says, "I've been wanting to tell you all week." I said, "But I didn't have the courage to do it." He says, "Why? What's the matter, Margaret?" I said, "You know how I was in the automobile accident when I, I was in the accident when I skidded with my car? So now my folks are always kind of . . ." I blamed my folks, you know. I said, "You know, they're kind of scared, every time, they're always waiting for me, you know, to make sure I get home and whatnot." I said, "And so is my sister." I said, "And you know how sometimes I have to take time off to go back to Worcester to take my mother to the doctor's?" You know, I used to have to leave during the day and go all the way back to Worcester to take my mother to the doctor's and then go back again. And, uh, I said, you know, "It's getting kind of hectic, you know. And, uh, I have a chance to get a job." I told him where I was going, you know, St. Pierre chain, and, "There they have an opening for me, and I, you know, I would like to take it," I says, "but I hate to leave here, you know?" He says, "Well, I understand." He said, "I know that you've been having a tough time lately where, you know, your mother isn't well, and you have to keep going back and forth all the time, and, uh, and where it's hard traveling, coming here, especially in the wintertime." He says, "As much as I don't like to see you go." He says, "But it's for your benefit." You know, he says, "It's better for you." He says, "It's okay if you want to

go." So that kind of encouraged me a little bit. So I called the office manager up and I told him that I would take the job. And, uh, I said, "The only thing," I said. (a drilling noise can be heard in the background on the tape) I said that I, uh . . . Oh, man. I said that I would accept the job. I said, "The only thing," I said, "I didn't give enough notice to my, you know, my office manager about it." And he says, "That's all right. You can do that, you know, you can . . ." But when I told my office manager about this, I said, "You know, I was supposed to tell you this Monday when I came in," I said, "but the whole week is gone, and I was going to give you two weeks notice, or three, whatever you need, you know, before I would leave here, so that you could get, you know, things all in order." And, uh, he says, "As long as you've got a place to go, Margaret, you go ahead and go. You just stay for next week. You just stay for next week. And, uh, you know, line everything up, and next week you can go and take your new job." So all I gave him was one week's notice, and I did go back, I mean, and I did accept the other job. And when I went to work at St. Pierre chain, I was there for twenty-four years. (she laughs) (a drilling noise can be heard in the background on the tape) And I made everybody happy. My sister was happy, my folks were happy, and the people I was working with were very happy, too.

LEVINE: And were you happy?

ASSAD: Oh, yes, very much so. And not only that, I was getting ten dollars a week

more in pay. (she laughs) And I didn't have to travel out of town. (she laughs)

LEVINE: This noise is interfering, but let's just finish. What was your husband's name?

ASSAD: John Assad.

LEVINE: And when did you meet him? When did you get married?

ASSAD: Oh, that was right after my accident. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Right between, while you were still traveling, and before you took the new job?

ASSAD: Yeah. When I, when I, when I, uh, took the new job. Because the accident, I left right after the accident, yeah.

LEVINE: And how did you meet?

ASSAD: Because he had a garage. He was in the garage business. And, uh, my, my sister's husband, my brother-in-law was the one, I never went to a garage. All I used to do was put gas and oil in the car. I never had any problem with it. So, it wasn't too old of a car either. So my brother-in-law said, "Well, we'll take it down to Johnny's garage," you know, so that's what happened. I met him through going there for business. And then, uh, once in a while if something was wrong with the car, my brother-in-law

would go in, I would have to drive down so he could leave his car and take him back. And so we got friendly that way, and that's how it started.

LEVINE: So, uh . . .

ASSAD: But the only thing was, I didn't get married for quite a few years after that, because my mother was very sick, and I wouldn't leave, although I had other boyfriends, even before that, but I would never leave my mother because she was very, she got a shock, she became diabetic, and she was very sick. She was bedridden. My mother never, ever saw a hospital in her life. I took care of her at home. And at the same time I was going to work during the daytime. In the morning I would get up very early, take care of my mother, feed her, wash her, clean her, whatever she needed, and then I'd go into work, and then at noon time I would take an hour-and-a-half for lunch, go home, and then I would come home at night. And then at the end of the week, if I didn't finish all my work in my office, I would go in Saturday and Sunday to complete, because payroll and all that stuff has to be done, you know, the following week. So that if there was anything I didn't finish, I would go in Saturdays and Sundays, and make sure that everything was right up to par all the time, so I had two jobs. One there, and one there. (she laughs)

LEVINE: How did your mother and father adjust to being in this country?

ASSAD: Oh, they loved it. Oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, um, is there anything you'd like to say before we close about the fact of having been born in Italy and coming here as a child and living out most of your life here, what difference that made to you.

ASSAD: Oh, well, it made a lot of difference because in Italy I was, you know, small, and I was just a little child then, and I didn't get around too much, except all I can remember is the beautiful holidays we always had, and we always went to all of them, and it was a joyous thing. But, uh, coming here it was altogether different, you know, with, uh, everything is more open, more, you meet more people, you associate with more people, uh, and, uh, it was a happy occasion all the time. I mean, uh, there's always some people. Some like you, some don't. And, uh, but, uh, you make the best of it.

LEVINE: What would you say you're most proud of that you've done in your lifetime?

ASSAD: Well, uh, the life I've led, which was always very good. I always saw to it that my family was always well taken care of. We were a happy family, all members of the family were always, were together, you know. Like my brother, he was in Italy. As I said, he went in the service, and he stayed out there, and he married, and then he did want to come here, but he couldn't because the ports were not open either for him. But finally, then he had two sons and a daughter, a daughter and two sons. And, uh, he wanted to come here so bad that he tried to come a few times, and he got

as far as New York but he had to go back, because he came a stowaway. So finally in 1960 I got a chance to, uh, get him to come here. And he said, uh, "Well, I'll come first, and then my, uh, after I get there," he said, "I'll send for my family, you know?" That would be his three children and his wife. And, uh, I said, "Oh, no." I said, "This isn't going to happen the same thing like when my dad, when Daddy came here. And then, you know, when he came, and then we couldn't come." I said, "If you're coming, I want you all, the whole family, to come. If not, I don't want you either." I said, "Either the whole family's coming together, and if you don't like it, you can always go back, but I don't know whether you'll be able to get here afterwards." So I said, "I'll send you your fare, and you make arrangements to come," I said. "And everything will be hunky-dory that way." I said, "But for you to come alone, I don't approve of it." So I sent him tickets to come by plane, and tickets to come by ship. I said, "Whichever one you can get on first, come." He says, "No, I don't want to come by plane." He says, "I want to come by ship." He says, "So that way we can have a little good time on the ship." (she laughs) So that's what happened. So in 1960 my brother, his wife and two children came. His daughter was the oldest one. She got married, so she stayed in Italy. So the four of them came here. In the meantime, I rented a tenement. I furnished it all with refrigerator, stove, bed, dishes. All they had to do was come in. And, um, so when they got here, they were very happy. Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Is there anything else you'd like to say before we close?

ASSAD: In regard to?

LEVINE: Just being, uh, maybe, uh, if you had to divide yourself up into being Italian and being American, how you would, uh, see your two sides, or . . .

ASSAD: No, I had no problem. I always mixed in well with everybody, regardless. The same thing like when I was working in on the different places, we had all kinds of nationalities. We had Lebanese, we had French, we had Irish, we had, I had no problem with any of them. I always managed to get along very well with them.

LEVINE: Well, I want to thank you very much for a most interesting interview. You gave some wonderful stories, and I really thank you. I've been talking with Margaret Assad here in Worcester, Massachusetts on November 21, 1994. You're eighty years old at this time.

ASSAD: I'll be eighty-one December 3rd.

LEVINE: Okay. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, signing off. Thanks.

END OF INTERVIEW