

EI-6

JOSEPH W. ALLATIN

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**RESIDENCES: MARSCITO, SUBURB OF NAPLES
LOWER EAST SIDE, NYC**

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. We are here at Ellis Island with Joseph Allatin who came from Italy in 1894. Mr. Allatin, could you please state your full name and your date of birth.

ALLATIN: Joseph W. Allatin. August the twenty-third, 1888.

SIGRIST: And where were you born?

ALLATIN: A town called Marscito, Italy, right outside of Naples. It was a suburb of

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Naples.

SIGRIST: I see. What did your parents, what did your father do for a living?

ALLATIN: He was a contractor, a construction worker.

SIGRIST: I see. And your mother?

ALLATIN: She did nothing. She was a lady of leisure.

SIGRIST: I see. And did you have any brothers and sisters?

ALLATIN: Two brothers and two sisters. Two brothers are dead. Two sisters are living.

SIGRIST: What were their names?

ALLATIN: My first, one name was Pat, Patrick and the other fellow was James.

SIGRIST: And the sisters?

ALLATIN: The sisters (he pauses and laughs). Wait a minute.

SIGRIST: That's all right. (They laugh.) We'll get back to it.

ALLATIN: Wait a minute. I got it ... The sisters' name ...(he pauses) Oh, I can't... Geez, I got it on the tip of my tongue, darn it. I can't...

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SIGRIST: Maybe it will come to you later on. Let me ask you what your mother's and father's names?

ALLATIN: My father's name was Antonio and my mother's name's Mary.

SIGRIST: I see. And you said he was a construction worker. What did he construct?

ALLATIN: A plain ordinary laborer, that's all.

SIGRIST: Did houses and that sort of thing?

ALLATIN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: I see. Do you, do you remember anything about when you were a child in Italy? For instance, do you remember what your mother cooked for you, if she did any cooking for you or anything like that?

ALLATIN: All I can remember is that my mother used to put me on her back like a piggy back and take me out to the vineyard where she was going to dust the vineyard, the grapes with a powder.

SIGRIST: Wow. Did you live near this vineyard or did you have to go to it?

ALLATIN: No. It was a couple miles away.

SIGRIST: I see.

ALLATIN: She had to carry me piggy back.

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SIGRIST: So she worked in the vineyard sometime then.

ALLATIN: Yeah. It was her own property.

SIGRIST: Oh, it was her own property.

ALLATIN: Yeah, sure.

SIGRIST: Did you live in a house or apartment?

ALLATIN: A house.

SIGRIST: You had your own house, I see.

ALLATIN: My grandmother had the house, not me.

SIGRIST: And it was your mother's mother?

ALLATIN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: I see. Had they lived in Italy all their lives?

ALLATIN: Yes.

SIGRIST: I see. Well now let me ask you a question. Do you, do you remember who decided to come to America?

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ALLATIN: My father came first.

SIGRIST: I see.

ALLATIN: And he was here four years when he sent for us. We landed here in 1892, February.

SIGRIST: Okay. Your father came first and so it was just your mother and the two...

ALLATIN: And me. I was the only one. My mother and I came. I was the only boy they had. The others were born when they got here.

SIGRIST: Oh, I see. Your brothers, they were born here.

ALLATIN: Yeah. They're domesticated. I'm imported.

SIGRIST: I see. (Mr. Allatin laughs). Do you remember what port you left from in Italy?

ALLATIN: Naples.

SIGRIST: You left from Naples. Do you remember the name of the boat?

ALLATIN: Oh, wait a minute, now I don't know. I was only a boy.

SIGRIST: I see. Was Naples a far way away from where you lived in Italy?

ALLATIN: About an hour's ride by train.

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SIGRIST: So you went by train to Naples.

ALLATIN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: When you, do you remember being on the boat at all?

ALLATIN: Oh yes. I remember being on the boat. I remember being washed overboard, too.

SIGRIST: You were washed overboard?

ALLATIN: Oh yes. I was right to here (he gestures) in the water.

SIGRIST: Really. How did that happen?

ALLATIN: A deck hand, we were on, I was sitting on deck, you know, and I was holding onto the rail on back and the boat got, struck a wave and I, I went over. The fortunate thing was that there was a crew member at the rail and he grabbed me by the slack of the pants and I was right up to here. (he gestures)

SIGRIST: Wow, you were lucky (Allatin laughs). So just you and your mother came over on the boat?

ALLATIN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, for instance, where you slept on the boat?

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ALLATIN: It was steerage.

SIGRIST: You were down in third class?

ALLATIN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything about it? Did you enjoy being there?

ALLATIN: No, I didn't enjoy it one bit. It was a lousy trip.

SIGRIST: Yeah, it was a rough trip?

ALLATIN: Rough, rough trip, yes.

SIGRIST: Did you get sick?

ALLATIN: No, I didn't get sick but it was a rough trip.

SIGRIST: Did your mother get sick?

ALLATIN: No, she was a traveler.

SIGRIST: I see. Do you remember anything about, for instance, what they fed you on the boat? Do you remember where you ate or what you ate?

ALLATIN: No, I don't remember, no I don't.

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SIGRIST: No, nothing like that. O.K. So now you said you arrived in New York in 1894.

ALLATIN: In February.

SIGRIST: In February of '94. Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty for the first time?

ALLATIN: That was the first time I saw the Statue of Liberty, when I was standing on deck. And I had a hat on, the wind come along and took my hat off and I said to my mother in Italian, " Momma, there goes my hat." (he laughs). And I said to her, "Look at the Lady, the Lady over there!" (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Wow. So when you came into New York Harbor, did everyone come up on deck to look at the Statue of Liberty?

ALLATIN: Oh yes. They all, most everybody came up on deck, you know.

SIGRIST: I see, I see. Then once you were in New York Harbor, then what happened?

ALLATIN: Well, we got off at the dock and went to Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Right. Do you remember where the dock was? Was it up the East River or...

ALLATIN: Oh, I don't know. Uh, yeah, up the East River I think it was, I don't know. Somewhere's down there.

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SIGRIST: One of the rivers.

ALLATIN: And we were brought to Ellis Island and my uncle was there and took us out.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how long you were at Ellis? Were you there overnight or just all one day?

ALLATIN: Just the one day.

SIGRIST: I see. So, um, did you eat anything at Ellis?

ALLATIN: Did I eat anything at Ellis? No, I didn't?

SIGRIST: No. Do you remember what you were wearing when you got off the boat?

ALLATIN: When I got on the boat?

SIGRIST: When you got off the boat.

ALLATIN: Well, I was wearing a pair of corduroy short pants with a split in the back.

SIGRIST: And how did they get split?

ALLATIN: It was made that way.

SIGRIST: Oh, I see. (they laugh) Do you remember at all, Mr. Allatin what, what your

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mother brought with her when she came to this country? For instance, did you bring food with you, did you bring clothes, did have a lot of luggage?

ALLATIN: No, no. We didn't have no food. Just luggage enough to take care of us. That's all.

SIGRIST: I see. And...

ALLATIN: My father came here first and we came after him.

SIGRIST: When he came, where did he go to live?

ALLATIN: He went to live with my uncle on the West Side.

SIGRIST: In New York City.

ALLATIN: In New York City, yes.

SIGRIST: And was that the uncle who came to meet you at Ellis?

ALLATIN: That's right.

SIGRIST: Now what, what relation is he, your father's brother? Your mother's brother?

ALLATIN: My mother's brother.

SIGRIST: And what was his name?

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ALLATIN: Um, Alleers Diemus.

SIGRIST: I see. And what did he do for a living?

ALLATIN: He had a gin mill. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: That's interesting. So anyway, your uncle came and met you.

ALLATIN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And so you were allowed to go.

ALLATIN: Well, you see, my father was in the hoose gow.

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SIGRIST: Oh, how did he end up there?

ALLATIN: Well, on the job, somebody got nasty with him, you know, and he banked him over the head with a shovel.

SIGRIST: Ah, and they put him in jail for that.

ALLATIN: They put him in jail for a couple of months.

SIGRIST: So that's why he couldn't come and meet you.

ALLATIN: That's right.

SIGRIST: Wow. How did your mother feel about that? Was she expecting your father?

ALLATIN: Yes, oh, she was expecting my father. When she seen my uncle she didn't know what to say, what to do, you see. So, (laughs) I can remember it, my uncle standing away over there and my mother and I were standing here, like, and he was saying, saying, "I'm your husband."(laughs)

SIGRIST: Oh, my. Do you remember when you and your mother were at Ellis, do you remember them examining you or asking you questions of any sort?

ALLATIN: No, no we didn't.

SIGRIST: Were there lots of people in the building?

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ALLATIN: Oh yeah, plenty. No, we weren't, we weren't on Ellis Island very long.

SIGRIST: Just enough...

ALLATIN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you, did you, when you were on the boat did you make any friends?

ALLATIN: I was six years old. I couldn't make any friends. No. Only thing was the engineer had a crush on my mother because she was a good looking lady.

SIGRIST: Yeah. (Mr. Allatin laughs) So were you allowed into the engine room or anything like that?

ALLATIN: No, we sat on deck.

SIGRIST: I see. And that's when a wave almost took you off.

ALLATIN: That's right.

SIGRIST: All right, so, um, you met your uncle and, um, where did you go? Where did he take you?

ALLATIN: To live with him.

SIGRIST: And where did he live?

ALLATIN: On the West Side, on Thompson Street.

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SIGRIST: Was your father living with him?

ALLATIN: No, my father was in the jail.

SIGRIST: Right, but was he, when he wasn't in jail was he living with your uncle?

ALLATIN: No, he was living with some family.

SIGRIST: But he was in New York, too.

ALLATIN: He was in New York, yes.

SIGRIST: I see. So how long was your father in jail?

ALLATIN: A couple of months. I guess when he come out we got an apartment right away.

SIGRIST: Do you remember where it was?

ALLATIN: (pause)I think it was on Madison Street.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything about the apartment? Did you live there a long time?

ALLATIN: Then my father came out and we moved...where did we go to live? We lived further up on the East Side. And there we, I, my mother and I went, we lived out in Astoria, Long Island.

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SIGRIST: I see. Did your father go with you?

ALLATIN: Oh yes, he come along with us, sure.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever have to work?

ALLATIN: No, she never had to work.

SIGRIST: She never worked.

ALLATIN: She never worked in her life.

SIGRIST: Would you say your father was making a good living here?

ALLATIN: Well, he was making a good living, yes.

SIGRIST: Enough to support you.

ALLATIN: Sure, enough to support my mother and me.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, you said your brothers were born here...

ALLATIN: Yes, that's right.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when, you said your brothers were born here, do you remember when they were born? What dates?

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ALLATIN: Well, I see. (pause) One brother, Pat, was born in 18..., (he pauses) I was, how old was I, I was twelve years , eleven years old. 1896, I think.

SIGRIST: So you were much older than...

ALLATIN: Yes, yes there's eleven years difference between my brother and me.

SIGRIST: And then the others...

ALLATIN: Come after.

SIGRIST: The others are younger than he. Were you already living on Long Island at that point?

ALLATIN: No, we were living in New York, we lived on the East Side in an apartment.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about those early years here in America because by then you were a little bit older. For instance, what did you do for entertainment?

ALLATIN: Well, at that time, you weren't born anyway, (they laughs) we didn't have any playgrounds like they have today. We made our own playground in the street, see. You played stickball. You cleared the street so you could play stickball. Many a time a policeman come along, "Kid, get out of here!" (he laughs) That's the way we did.

SIGRIST: Did you, did you have a lot of toys or...

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ALLATIN: No, I never cared for much toys.

SIGRIST: Did you have to go to school?

ALLATIN: Oh yes, I went to school, sure I went to school soon as I came here.

SIGRIST: I see. Can you tell me a little bit about, for instance, how you learned English?

ALLATIN: Uh, associating with the boys on the street.

SIGRIST: I see.

ALLATIN: Yeah. I picked up the language very quickly.

SIGRIST: You were a bright kid?

ALLATIN: I guess so.

SIGRIST: Did they make you take classes in English when you were in school?

ALLATIN: Yes, sure I went.

SIGRIST: How about your parents? How did they learn English?

ALLATIN: I did it: I taught them.

SIGRIST: You taught them?

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ALLATIN: Yes.

SIGRIST: I see. Were they quick learners?

ALLATIN: No. Very slow.

SIGRIST: Well, actually your father must have known some English by the time you...

ALLATIN: Well, yeah, but very broken, you know. In fact, my mother spoke better English than he did.

SIGRIST: Really. So did you, how shall I say, so your mother didn't take night classes or anything like that.

ALLATIN: No, they never went to school. No, no.

SIGRIST: All right, let's talk about, what was your first job?

ALLATIN: Let's see, my first job was, I was sixteen years of age. I worked in a printing establishment.

SIGRIST: Were you on Long Island by then?

ALLATIN: Yes, I was in Astoria, in the printing department setting type.

SIGRIST: I see.

ALLATIN: Yeah, I learned how to set type. And then from there I left...

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SIGRIST: Did you get to keep your money or did you have to contribute to...

ALLATIN: Oh no. I gave my money to my mother.

SIGRIST: I see. Your mother did the cooking in the house?

ALLATIN: She did the cooking and everything.

SIGRIST: Was she a good cook?

ALLATIN: Ohh and how!

SIGRIST: What was your favorite?

ALLATIN: Everything she cooked was my favorite.

SIGRIST: Was there one thing that she,that you really looked forward to...

ALLATIN: No, no, no matter what she cooked I ate. She was a wonderful cook.

SIGRIST: Did you do any cooking yourself?

ALLATIN: Oh yes. I did a lot of cooking myself. When I was married I used to cook the holiday dinners for my family.

SIGRIST: I see. So you enjoyed cooking then.

ALLATIN: Oh, yes. I enjoy cooking very, very much.

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SIGRIST: Yeah, I do too. You talk about the holidays. Let's talk about when you were a kid, O.K.? Did you go to church? Was your family religious?

ALLATIN: Oh, yes. We went to church every Sunday.

SIGRIST: Were you Catholic?

ALLATIN: Yes.

SIGRIST: I see. Did you, like at Christmas time, was there a big celebration?

ALLATIN: Well, when I was young we had no Christmas tree. I'm going to tell you right now. Only when I got to be a young man about sixteen, then we finally, I decided, "Listen, I'm going to have a Christmas tree," I told my mother. She says, "What do you want a Christmas tree?" You know, they never had one. So I said, "I'm going to put one up anyway" and I put it up and decorated it.

SIGRIST: Did she like it once it was up?

ALLATIN: Oh yeah, sure. My father liked it too then.

SIGRIST: Did you have other family in America at all or was it really just your father and your mother and the brother, your uncle?

ALLATIN: That's all.

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SIGRIST: That was it. You did have other people who had come here.

ALLATIN: No, just my uncle, my mother's brother.

SIGRIST: And did he have a family?

ALLATIN: He had a family. He had two boys and one girl.

SIGRIST: I see. Did they also move to Astoria?

ALLATIN: No, they lived on Thompson Street all their lives.

SIGRIST: Oh, they still lived on Thompson Street. All right, let's talk a little bit about as you're getting older now. You had your first job at the printing press. Then what happened to you?

ALLATIN: Well...

SIGRIST: I assume your father was still doing contract work.

ALLATIN: Yeah. I gave that job up because the superintendent of the plant wouldn't give me what they called a "two-thirds card", see. Member two-thirds in the union would, gave me at that time eighteen dollars a week and I was only making twelve. And he says, "No, you'll have to stay. You got somebody else a head of you." So I said, "O.K.," I put on my hat and coat and walked out.

SIGRIST: I see. (Allatin laughs) So then did you get another job?

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ALLATIN: Oh, I got a job right away.

SIGRIST: What did you do?

ALLATIN: Uh, I got a job in a...,what the devil was the place...

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you did?

ALLATIN: Yeah, I was running, oh shucks, I can't remember. Geez. I did clerical work.

SIGRIST: I see. This was in Astoria, also?

ALLATIN: Yes...no, that was in New York. Then I moved to Astoria and I got, I worked for the Prudential Insurance Company and I had a job with them and that kept me going all the time.

SIGRIST: And how long did you work for them?

ALLATIN: Thirty one years.

SIGRIST: Oh, a long time.

ALLATIN: Yeah. (he laughs) I retired from them and I still get money from them.

SIGRIST: When did you retire from them? What year?

ALLATIN: 1953.

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SIGRIST: Wow. Tell me a little bit maybe about your personal life at that time. Were you still living with your parents?

ALLATIN: Before I, that, I was living with my parents all the time until I got married.

SIGRIST: O.K. How old were you when you married?

ALLATIN: Well, very young. I was twenty. All over a dispute with my dad.

SIGRIST: Yes, tell me about it.

ALLATIN: Ah, we got in a tussle, you know and I said, "All right" and I went out and I had this girlfriend and she was an orphan. So I said "What do you say, you want to get married?" She says, "What for?" and I say "I'm getting tired of taking the guff from my father," so she said "O.K., go ahead." We went to New Jersey and got married.

SIGRIST: Really. What was her name?

ALLATIN: My wife's name was Florence.

SIGRIST: I see.

ALLATIN: Florence White.

SIGRIST: Wow. And did you have children?

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ALLATIN: Three. Two boys and a girl.

SIGRIST: I see. How long were you married?

ALLATIN: Well, I lost my wife after sixty four years of marriage.

SIGRIST: Wow. A long time.

ALLATIN: Yup.

SIGRIST: Let me get back to your parents a little bit. What did they do in their later years?

ALLATIN: Nothing. I supported them.

SIGRIST: I see. Did your father retire from...

ALLATIN: Well he did on and off, you know. He did odd jobs, see.

SIGRIST: Well, and, of course, by then you had two brothers and two sisters by this time...

ALLATIN: That's right.

SIGRIST: Did they all live in that same area?

ALLATIN: Yes, they did. Not like today. They didn't move away from their parents. Right around the corner.

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SIGRIST: And, could you tell me a little bit about what your brothers and sisters, what they did. What did your brothers do for a living?

ALLATIN: Well, I had one brother who was an attorney and I had one brother who was a hooper.

SIGRIST: Now was that Patrick who was the attorney, or...

ALLATIN: Huh?

SIGRIST: You said you had a brother named Patrick.

ALLATIN: Yeah, he was the attorney.

SIGRIST: I see.

ALLATIN: And the other brother was a hooper, a stage man.

SIGRIST: Really, wow. Where did he perform?

ALLATIN: He performed all over.

SIGRIST: Was he a vaudevillian, or did he do...

ALLATIN: Huh?

SIGRIST: Was he in vaudeville or was he on Broadway?

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ALLATIN: Vaudeville.

SIGRIST: I see. That's interesting. Are you musical at all or were your parents musical?

ALLATIN: No, I was. I used to sing a lot when I was young now I don't sing anymore. I can't use it.

SIGRIST: Did you take voice lessons and everything?

ALLATIN: No, I never did.

SIGRIST: Did you play the piano?

ALLATIN: No. My fingers are too short. I can't stretch, right.

SIGRIST: Did your parents...

ALLATIN: No, they never had, they never did.

SIGRIST: Were your parents artistic in any way? Did your mother paint, for instance or, you said she was a good cook, I...

ALLATIN: She was a good cook, yes.

SIGRIST: Was she good with a needle? Could she sew?

ALLATIN: She was good with a needle, yup.

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SIGRIST: I see. You worked for Prudential for thirty-one years and then you retired.

ALLATIN: That's right.

SIGRIST: And then what happened?

ALLATIN: Then I went to work down on Wall Street for fifteen years and then I retired, 1881.

SIGRIST: Did you commute in from Astoria?

ALLATIN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Wow, that's a long commute every day.

ALLATIN: That's all right. I didn't mind it.

SIGRIST: And what did you do on Wall Street?

ALLATIN: Pardon?

SIGRIST: What did you do on Wall Street?

ALLATIN: I was a runner.

SIGRIST: Really.

ALLATIN: Sure.

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SIGRIST: That's interesting.

ALLATIN: I did, I was retired, you see, and I spoke to a friend of mine who was working down The Street and I said to him, "Jim" I said, "How about getting me a job down there" and he says, "Geez, I don't know. The only job you can get near is a runner" and I says, "That's all right with me" I says, "As long as I'm outside it's fine." So he says, "O.K. Come down to the office tomorrow and I'll introduce you." So I go down and I got the job.

SIGRIST: Wow. And you enjoyed that job?

ALLATIN: Oh sure. I was out in the open air all the time.

SIGRIST: Yes. And when you retired, when you first retired from Prudential, were you antsy? Did you want to go back and go to work?

ALLATIN: Oh, I was working for, I worked right away. I was off six months and I went to work.

SIGRIST: I see. Did you and your wife have any children?

ALLATIN: We had three children.

SIGRIST: Oh, right. I asked you that.

ALLATIN: Two boys and a girl.

SIGRIST: And what were their names?

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ALLATIN: The two boys were Thomas and Jerome and the girl's name was Florence.

SIGRIST: I see. And you said you retired from running in what year?

ALLATIN: 1953.

SIGRIST: No, from being a runner on Wall Street.

ALLATIN: Oh...

SIGRIST: Recently?

ALLATIN: Earlier. 19...See, I went to work for the Pru in 19, 19 something. 1902? I can't remember.

SIGRIST: Well, you worked for them for a long time. Before we close up here are there any stories you'd like to tell, any funny things happen to you or interesting things happen to you in the course of your life?

ALLATIN: Nothing.

SIGRIST: Anything you'd like to share with us?

ALLATIN: There isn't anything, the only thing I can share with you is that I love this country, see, and all I own was my own efforts but this country gave it to me. It gave me the opportunity. Many a time some of my friends said, "You going back?", and I said, "Nothing doing." I don't go back for nobody.

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Well you see, when I was eighteen, they sent for me to go into the army.

SIGRIST: I see! Italy did.

ALLATIN: Sure it did.

SIGRIST: Could you talk a little bit about that? You didn't go, obviously.

ALLATIN: No. I took the card and I... (he gestures)

SIGRIST: Did you serve for America?

ALLATIN: No, I was, uh, the First World's War I had two children when I was on, the day before the Armistice was signed I was going into the army. And I had two children. So I said, "Why", and he said, "Well, we need more men." O.K., I went home and told my wife and she started to cry. Oh, the next morning Mr. Graft, the chairman of the board called me up and said, "It's O.K. Joe, you don't have to go. They signed a peace treaty."

SIGRIST: You were lucky.

ALLATIN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: You were very lucky. Did your father do any military time in his life at all?

ALLATIN: No, no never. He was a young man when he left Italy and they never sent for him. Only if they did he wouldn't know anything about it anyway.

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SIGRIST: Yes, really. When did you become a citizen?

ALLATIN: 1924, I think it was.

SIGRIST: 1924. And did your parents ever become citizens?

ALLATIN: No. I tried hard to get them but I couldn't get that old man of mine, he was thick-headed...

SIGRIST: I see. Was he happy to come to America?

ALLATIN: Oh yeah, sure.

SIGRIST: So they were happy they made the choice to come.

ALLATIN: He wanted to go home one time.

SIGRIST: Yeah, when? Soon after they came?

ALLATIN: Oh, I was about seventeen or eighteen. So my mother said to him, "Who's going to go with you?" Says, "You or the family." She says, "Huh", so she laughed at him. I said, "You ask your sons." See. So my father asked me. He says, "I'm going to go to Italy. I want you 'cause..." I said, "Listen Pop, you want to go, go ahead." That's enough. He changed his mind right away. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Wow! And he never wanted to go again after that?

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ALLATIN: No, no more.

SIGRIST: Well. I think that maybe that will wrap us up here.

ALLATIN: O.K.

SIGRIST: I want to thank you very much. It's been a pleasure chatting with you. You've had a very interesting life.

ALLATIN: Yes I did. I had a very interesting life. I enjoyed my boyhood life very much.

SIGRIST: Good, good. Its been great to have you here at Ellis, even if it isn't the building (laughs) that you came through. Anyway, this is Paul Sigrist signing off for the National Park Service, what is it, September 27, Thursday.

END OF INTERVIEW