

EI-659/SALVI

EI-659

ELISA BOSCHI SALVI

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ITALY, 1915

AGE 10

PASSAGE ON "THE DUCA D'AOSTA"

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.

SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Monday, August 28, 1995. I'm in Cohoes in upstate New York at the Eddy-Ford Nursing Home with Elisa Salvi. Mrs. Salvi came from Italy in 1915. She was ten years old at that time. We are in Mrs. Salvi's home. Also present is Kelly Owens, who is a social work assistant here at the Eddy-Ford Home, and also Mrs. Salvi's roommate Ethel is present, too.

Can we begin, Mrs. Salvi, by you giving me your birth date, please?

SALVI: Yes. August 1, 1904.

SIGRIST: And where in Italy were you born?

SALVI: Anagni. It's only thirty miles from Rome.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

SALVI: A-N-A-G-N-I. Anagni.

SIGRIST: And what sticks out in your mind as a child about the town itself?

SALVI: Well, the town had a very beautiful area and old, antique. A lot of antiques in Anagni. From the Roman empire, there was walls all over the city. Around the city there was all walls. And when Italy became independent that's what they used, they used to fortify themselves over there. That's what I remember. When I came here, it was so different.

SIGRIST: Tell me about what the buildings looked like in town?

SALVI: The buildings were all stone, not lumber like over here. That's what, everything was stone, marble. Stone and marble, that's all. That's what I remember.

SIGRIST: Is there a specific building in the town that sticks out in your mind?

SALVI: It was a cathedral, a beautiful cathedral.

SIGRIST: And what sorts of things do you remember about the cathedral?

SALVI: The paintings in there, the old, old, old paintings. Years and years ago, it was a Catholic, and that's what I remember so good.

SIGRIST: What kinds of paintings were they?

SALVI: Saints and sculptures, and just beautiful. The ceilings, walls, everything was painted. Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me the house or apartment that you lived in as a child?

SALVI: What I lived in was a stone, it was only two-family. We had a, on one side there was another, another family was on this side. And we had a little store downstairs like these country stores, and that's how we made our living over there. My father was here. My mother was independent.

SIGRIST: What was that, how many rooms did the house have?

SALVI: We had four rooms. Just my brother and I and my mother.

SIGRIST: And what kind of floor did you have in the house?

SALVI: Stone, rocks.

SIGRIST: The floor was stone also.

SALVI: Stone also.

SIGRIST: And how did you, how did you light your house?

SALVI: Electric at that time. We had already electric over there.

SIGRIST: That was very progressive.

SALVI: The very year that I was born, that's the first time they put the lights on in that country, in that city.

SIGRIST: Did you have heating in that house?

SALVI: No.

SIGRIST: What was the climate like?

SALVI: Fireplaces. We had fire. The climate was beautiful. Winters was bitter, but we always had clothes and fireplace and other heating things, you know. But that's, we didn't have no heating.

SIGRIST: Is there a, is there a piece of furniture in your house that sticks out in your mind?

SALVI: Everything. Beautiful furniture. Over there we had it hand made. Carpenters made especially what you want. We had dressers, we had a beautiful bed, iron bed.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the bed for us?

SALVI: Well, it was all iron, these, um, post, you know. That's what it was, beautiful. The headpiece was beautiful and the foot was beautiful. Everything was beautiful.

SIGRIST: How was food cooked in your apartment?

SALVI: With a fireplace, and in little stoves at that time. Fireplace, and a little stove right next to it.

SIGRIST: And what kinds of food did you eat as a child?

SALVI: Same as we do here. Eggs, milk, butter. A lot of vegetables, home grown. Because we used to sell it. We used to buy from the farm, and we used to sell it to other people. Flour, my mother used to sell flour and things like that.

SIGRIST: Where did she get the flour to sell?

SALVI: She bought it from a magazine, they used to call it magazines where they used to get it in from big stores. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Is there a special dish that your mother made when you were a child that was a particular favorite?

SALVI: Chicken soup. ( she laughs ) My brother liked one thing, and I liked the chicken soup.

SIGRIST: What did your brother like?

SALVI: My brother liked those big shell macaroni with a lot of sauce. And I didn't like sauce. I still don't like it. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever tell you anything about your birth?

SALVI: I wasn't born in that one house. I was born in my grandmother's house, not too far from where I lived.

SIGRIST: And did your mother or anyone in the family ever tell you about the circumstances about when you were born, a story about when that happened?

SALVI: Well, they expected a girl, they expected a boy and they got a girl. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: And were you named after someone?

SALVI: No. The midwife named me. My mother asked the midwife, and the midwife named me. Elisa. I don't know why. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

SALVI: Alexander.

SIGRIST: And what did he do for a living in Italy?

SALVI: Well, the same thing with my mother, a store. And his people had a lot of land that they used to, they used to work. They had the grapevines, and they had vegetables, and they had a lot of fruit. Figs, and peaches, and things like that. They used to wait for the, the ripening, and then they used to sell them. That's what our living was.

SIGRIST: Did you know your father's parents?

SALVI: Yes.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about your paternal grandparents?

SALVI: They were very old, and by the time I was born I wasn't a first grandchild. And, um, there wasn't, like now they are so attached to the grandchildren. At that time they were very distant, you know. And that's the way it was.

SIGRIST: You said they were very old. Is there a story that you can tell about maybe something you did with one of your grandparents?

SALVI: No, I never was close to them. But my mother's parents were already dead, so that's, that's the only grandparents I know.

SIGRIST: So do you know how your parents met?

SALVI: They lived right across the street from each other. That's how they met. They grew up together.

SIGRIST: And you said to me before we started interviewing that your father went to America. What year did he go?

SALVI: I was three years old, 1907.

SIGRIST: And where did he go?

SALVI: He went to Pennsylvania. That's where they mined. That's where the work was, mining coal.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about his job as a minor?

SALVI: Well, I visited one of the mines.

SIGRIST: Once you got here?

SALVI: No, once I got here I visited one of the mines. We went for a vacation one time, and we visited those mines. It was cold. It was dreadful. They put the light, you could see the light in back of you, but then you walk miles and miles. ( she laughs ) And coal, coal all over. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did he have any family in America?

SALVI: No. He came because he wasn't on good terms with his parents. And then the war was on already, they was talking about war, so he came here. But already we was living alone, so he could do what he want. Because when they live with the parents, they usually get along, you know, they didn't like my father because he left over there. They didn't like it, that's all.

SIGRIST: So when your, were your grandparents living with you before he left?

SALVI: When I was a little baby, but I don't remember that.  
We was living alone.

SIGRIST: You were always living alone as far as your . . .

SALVI: Oh, yes. We lived alone all the time.

SIGRIST: How did your mother support the family when your  
father came to America?

SALVI: Well, she has a store.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about what kinds of things  
you sold in the store?

SALVI: We had sold flours, flour, flour.

SIGRIST: Flour, like for bread.

SALVI: Matches, you know, matches was very, matches, and, my  
mother baked and sold. She baked cookies and things  
like that and also sold them. And she baked things  
for weddings sometimes, for weddings. And that's, and  
then my father supported my mother, too, with what he  
made over here.

SIGRIST: So he sent money back.

SALVI: So he sent money. That's right.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about games that you played as a child?

SALVI: Hopscotch. Hopscotch, and the rope, rope, you know, we jump rope. That's about all I can remember.

SIGRIST: Tell me about religious life when you were young. What religion were you?

SALVI: Very religious. I went to a Catholic school.

SIGRIST: Oh, well, tell me about what it was like to go to Catholic school.

SALVI: And there was no boys there, just girls one building, boys another building. And I was, nuns were there, nuns. And we had to go to mass mornings, and we prayed during the day, a certain hour, we had to pray. And very, very disciplined. We, no (?). And we got punished.

SIGRIST: How did they punish you?

SALVI: No, just punished, like they put you in the back. They don't want to have nothing to do with you, in the back. But no, no.

SIGRIST: Does one, is there a nun that sticks out in your mind, one of your teachers . . .

SALVI: Yes. I think of them all the time. IN fact, I even wrote to them when I came here.

SIGRIST: Which nun sticks out in your mind?

SALVI: Well, the last one I had.

SIGRIST: And what was her name?

SALVI: Her name was Scolastica[ph]. I don't think (?) that name.

SIGRIST: Scolastica[ph].

SALVI: Scolastica[ph]. It's a girl's name, it's a girl's name.

SIGRIST: And why do you remember her?

SALVI: She was the last one, and she taught me, and then when I, they found out that I was coming to America, she planned a little party for me. And they all gave me little remembrances, all the students in my class gave me little remembrances.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what those remembrances were?

SALVI: Yes. One was a little locked, one was a little locket. Another one was a little medallion. It was a guardian angel, and my brother still had it, because when I came here, we never used it. So when my first nephew was born, I gave it to my sister-in-law so they could put it on the bed, and I think they still had it.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about your mother's personality. What was, what was her personality like?

SALVI: She was, um, heavy build. She had black hair. Very colorful complexion, very red cheeks. She had red cheeks. And she was a disciplinarian, because my father was here, she had to do it all herself. And that's about all. She was a good mother. Because then I had a little brother, and my mother never went out without the two of us, one on one hand, one on the other.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

SALVI: Hope.

SIGRIST: In Italian?

SALVI: Yes. Esperanza, in Italian.

SIGRIST: Esperanza.

SALVI: Or Hope, Hope.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

SALVI: Miniconzi.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

SALVI: M-I-N-I-C-O-N-Z-I. How would you pronounce that, if you wrote it down?

SIGRIST: N-I-C . . .

SALVI: M-I.

SIGRIST: M-I.

SALVI: N-I.

SIGRIST: M-I-N-I, Mini . . .

SALVI: Conzi. C-O-N-Z-I.

SIGRIST: Z-I.

SALVI: Z-I. Okay, over there there's no K.

SIGRIST: So you said, you described what she looked like, and she was working hard, obviously.

SALVI: Hard. That's all she done. And, you know, she done a lot of knitting. And she used to knit for people, and the wives would send it to the husbands in America because they would say it was so cold over here. She used to knit underwear, long drawers and shirts, socks, gloves. And she used to sell them also, too, in the store.

SIGRIST: Were there things that your mother taught you to do around the house? I'm thinking of, the knitting reminded me of this. Did she teach you how to . . .

SALVI: Yet, a little bit. But I was, I was small, and I know she, my mother done it all. But she did show me how to knit like that. I used to watch her all the time. But she wanted me, schoolwork was in her mind. She wanted me to go to school. She wanted me to go to college.

SIGRIST: Could your mother read and write?

SALVI: Yes.

SIGRIST: Could your father read and write?

SALVI: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: I should also ask you, what was your maiden name, your father's last name?

SALVI: My name, Boschi, B-O-S-C-H-I. Boschi.

SIGRIST: B-O-S-C-H-I.

SALVI: That's Boschi, yeah.

SIGRIST: What were some of the other chores that your mother had to do around the house?

SALVI: Well, just housework. She had a sister. Her and her sister got along beautiful. They used to have a washday on Thursday. That's when, we didn't have any school, so she'd take us to a certain place where they used to have a lot of running water. And she used to go there, and that's all she done. She didn't do any, we didn't do nothing. We just played with my brother, watched my brother when she would go downstairs to tend the store, and that's how we (?).

SIGRIST: When was your brother born? How old were you when he was born?

SALVI: He was born 1907, January 1st, 1907.

SIGRIST: And what was his name?

SALVI: Eugene.

SIGRIST: And was he named after anybody?

SALVI: No.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when he was born?

SALVI: No.

SIGRIST: I was just wondering if . . .

SALVI: I remember when she nursed the baby, but I didn't remember when he was born. I was a little older, yeah.

SIGRIST: How did you feel about having a baby in the house?

SALVI: I liked him, because I was all alone. Everybody had a brother and sister, and I didn't have any. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Um, you were talking about the cathedral. How did you practice your religion at home?

SALVI: At home my mother would never go to bed without

praying, and get up we had to pray. And then we went to Catholic school. That's where they done all the religious teaching.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the prayers that your mother, or that you said before you went to bed?

SALVI: Yes.

SIGRIST: Could you say one of them for us on tape in Italian?

SALVI: (Italian) Angel of God, my guardian dear. And I don't remember it all now.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any songs that you sang as a young girl in Italy?

SALVI: Not really.

SIGRIST: No. So your father came to America, and what did you know about America when you were a young girl in Italy?

SALVI: Nothing. Only what my father used to write in the letters.

SIGRIST: And what did, what was he telling you?

SALVI: What he said was awful hard work, very, very cold. He

was telling how many inches of snow that they had. We didn't have any snow in that area. And that's about all I know about America. But then when I came, instead of in Pennsylvania, we located in Amsterdam, New York.

SIGRIST: Okay. Well, we'll get to that when we get you to America. Do you remember your mother saying to you, "We're going to go to America."?

SALVI: And I didn't like it. She didn't like it.

SIGRIST: I was going to say, how did you feel about leaving?

SALVI: I didn't want to come. My mother never broke up the house when we left. She says to my aunt, "I'm coming back." We never did go back.

SIGRIST: You mentioned, your mother had her sister in town, but her parents were dead. Did she have other family?

SALVI: Yes, she had two brothers, two brothers.

SIGRIST: And was she close?

SALVI: Not too close.

SIGRIST: What did you pack to take with you to America?

SALVI: Well, just, she had a lot of clothes made for me over there.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of them? Can you describe the dresses that you wore?

SALVI: Well, I used to wear ruffles at that time, and I remember I had a sailor dress, and my brother had a sailor suit. That's all I remember. Shoes, she had made shoes for us and everything.

SIGRIST: What did shoes look like at that time?

SALVI: They used to button on the side. I remember those shoes that, you know, up to the ankle, and they button on the side, with a shoehorn.

SIGRIST: And how did you wear your hair when you were young?

SALVI: My hair was long. I always had light hair, and I got dark. I got gray. But it was long, yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you talk about how you bathed at that time?

SALVI: Well, my mother, once a week she used to have a big bathtub, and that's where we would bathe. We got the same thing here. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Did you have running water in the apartment that you lived in in Italy?

SALVI: No.

SIGRIST: No. Where . . .

SALVI: It was just downstairs. We didn't have to go too far for the running water. That water was delicious. Nothing like this.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me how you celebrated Christmas in Italy?

SALVI: Same as now. I celebrated the same thing. I always, we used to make certain pastry. And we used to get ready about a week before. We used to make some special, not bread. She used to make it about a month ahead of time, because they say when it was aged it would taste better. And all the fancy things that go for Christmas, to have Santa Claus, but we used to have a Befana, we call it. We didn't know Santa Claus.

SIGRIST: What did they call it?

SALVI: Befana.

SIGRIST: Befana. Can you spell that?

SALVI: Bethany, like. Yes. Befana. B-E-F-A-N-A. Befana.

SIGRIST: So that's actually just after Christmas, right?

SALVI: Yes, after Christmas, the sixth of January, Epiphany.  
That's when we used to have it there.

SIGRIST: And then were there special things that you did at  
that time?

SALVI: Yes. That's when we'd get our presents, La Befana.  
For Christmas we don't get nothing. We just, a  
beautiful dinner, and we see friends and, you know,  
parents, relations, that's all.

SIGRIST: All right. So you mentioned that you had dresses made  
before you came to this country. Do you remember  
anything else that you took with you when you left for  
America? Well, yes, you mentioned the remembrances.

SALVI: Yes, that the girls gave me. Yes.

SIGRIST: What about your mother? Do you remember things that  
she took with her?

SALVI: Well, my mother had, she had a lot of gold. When they  
get married there are certain, you know, certain,

according how you can afford it, you know. And she had some, her own earrings, like they wear now over here, and a wedding band and everything like that. And she had a watch around her neck. I don't know what kind of watch it was, but I know it was a watch.

And that's all. No diamonds or nothing like that, but rubies and things like that, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did your father, your father was still in America, right? He didn't go back to Italy to escort you over.

SALVI: But he did come once.

SIGRIST: Well, yes, do you remember, what do you remember about that?

SALVI: My brother was a little boy, and I went to kindergarten. And my father came to meet me that day, and I didn't know my father because I didn't see him. And he wanted to pick me up, and I threw the basket at him. ( she laughs ) He says, "I'm your father." I says, "I don't know you, I don't know, I ain't got no father." But then he picked me up and he brought me home and he had a lot of gifts for me, silk pants and things like that.

SIGRIST: So he brought silk . . .

SALVI: Then he come back, then he come back here again.

SIGRIST: He went back to America.

SALVI: And then we came, then we came.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, where did you go to get the ship?

SALVI: Naples.

SIGRIST: And do you remember how you went from your town to Naples?

SALVI: Train.

SIGRIST: And does anything about that train ride stick out in your mind?

SALVI: It was a long train ride, it was a long, and I never was on a train before. I used to see him, in our city, but far, far away, I used to see the train, but I never been on it, and I never seen it close until that day.

SIGRIST: And how did you feel about being on the train?

SALVI: I got sick, yeah. I used to get in the carriage in

the old country, in a carriage. So, horses, you know,  
but never a train.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay in Naples?

SALVI: Three days.

SIGRIST: Three days. And what happened to you during those  
three days?

SALVI: Well, we had to go through all kinds of examination.  
We had to be, what they give you?

SIGRIST: Vaccinated?

SALVI: Shot, vaccinated. And they want to know your history.  
What did you have since you was a little girl, and my  
brother and my mother, too. And they asked about my  
father, and all these things. It took three days.  
One day you go to one place, another day you go  
another place.

SIGRIST: Where did you sleep in Naples?

SALVI: In a special place where all these immigrants go.  
It's terrible. I wouldn't want to go through it  
again.

SIGRIST: Can you describe what it looked it on the inside?

SALVI: Yes, you will see all kinds of people. And only us Italians on the ship. There was all kinds of people. They had to come to Naples, because that was a big port. So when we'd go to bed at night, there was all sorts of people.

SIGRIST: And, of course, your mother's got two kids with her, right? Did anyone else from your town travel with you?

SALVI: Not at the time, but I know there was somebody going all the time, yeah.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the ship that you got on?

SALVI: Duca da Osta. D-U-C-A, D-A, O-S-T-A. Duca da Osta.

SIGRIST: And tell me what you thought when you saw the ship.

SALVI: Oh, I never saw anything so big. I never saw all that water. In Naples, it's ocean. And all those ships at the port over there, I, "Ma, which one we're going? Which one we're going?" She says, "I don't know either. Wait till tomorrow. Wait till tomorrow."

SIGRIST: Can you describe where you slept on the ship?

SALVI: Yes, all berths, like so many people in one berth, and four or five in another berth. That's where, they kept the Italian people on one, you know, in one place, and the other people, 'cause there was a lot of nationalities going at that time. It was, Naples was a big port. They all come over there to sail.

SIGRIST: What sticks out in your mind about being on the ship?

SALVI: I never met so many people, and I never heard so many languages spoken. That's what I heard.

SIGRIST: Did you, did you get seasick?

SALVI: Yes, terrible. Every day seasick. My brother never got seasick, but I did.

SIGRIST: Was there a way that they treated your seasickness?

SALVI: Yes. I used to go to the doctor. They give me medication, but it didn't do any good. The doctor told my mother, "Once she puts her foot on the ground, she's going to be cured." And I was. Then I was hungry, because I didn't eat all the while I was on the ship. I never ate.

SIGRIST: Do you know what kinds of food they served on the

ship?

SALVI: Well, regular food that we would have at home. A lot of soups, very good food. Fish galore, because it was fresh every day. Coffee, too, they had tea hour for the children and everything. And movies for the children also. So it was nice, but I never want to go that again.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what class you traveled?

SALVI: First, no, no, third.

SIGRIST: Third class. And, um, do you remember if you had your luggage with you?

SALVI: Yes.

SIGRIST: And where did they feed you?

SALVI: Oh, we had dining rooms. They call for a number, we had a number. When they call a number, you go. So many people go at a time. They had two, one, two and three. Some go eleven, some go twelve, some go one. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Were there any special precautions taken because this was wartime that you're traveling, it's World War One.

SALVI: Yeah, but it wasn't, the United States wasn't in war already, and neither was Italy. Italy went to war in 1915 or something like that. Italy was still not in the war.

SIGRIST: So this didn't affect your travel at all?

SALVI: No. But certain people wasn't able to travel any more, because they were sixteen or seventeen, they would let no young boys travel at that time already. They couldn't go out of the country.

SIGRIST: How long did the ship take to get to New York?

SALVI: Thirteen days.

SIGRIST: And do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

SALVI: Oh, everybody was looking for the Statue of Liberty. I wasn't looking for it. I didn't care. What was the Statue of Liberty? But we seen a flyer that says she's got her hand up and this and that, and there's a flame in there at night. So that was a thrill when we got close to it, close to it.

SIGRIST: And what happened once the ship got into New York harbor?

SALVI: Everybody was waiting, everybody was waiting for their relations. It was full of people. But when we got there, everybody had to go one place, you had to go to another place, everybody had to go to another place. We had to be all examined.

SIGRIST: And did they take you to Ellis Island?

SALVI: Oh, yes, that's where we were.

SIGRIST: That was where this was going on.

SALVI: Right.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about being at Ellis Island?

SALVI: I remember a lot of people were crying. A lot of people were crying. A lot of children were crying. "I want my father. Where's my father?" But it was sad because a lot of these people didn't know how to talk English and didn't understand anybody. They had interpreters, but one in every so many people. They didn't understand nothing, and we didn't understand nothing either.

SIGRIST: Did you undergo any kind of examinations at Ellis Island?

SALVI: Not really, not really, but they give us . . .

SIGRIST: The vaccination?

SALVI: The vaccination. And they asked all kind of questions. And I think we had quite a, with the doctors, too, you know, they examined the children. Ask my mother a lot of questions, too, what we had, measles and like that.

SIGRIST: Did you see anything at Ellis Island that you had never seen before?

SALVI: Yeah, I seen them eat bananas, and I didn't know what they were. Bananas, yeah. But, all those big buildings. Those were monstrous buildings.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay at Ellis Island?

SALVI: A day, that's all. Just overnight. And then we went to Amsterdam, New York.

SIGRIST: Now, how did you get from New York City to Amsterdam?

SALVI: The train.

SIGRIST: And did anyone come to Ellis Island to meet you?

SALVI: No, but we had relations in Amsterdam. They had a family in Italy. They came to spend the summer there, and they sailed with us. They were related to us. So they knew just where to go. We got the train and we went to this place where my father was.

SIGRIST: I see. So you really did have somebody with you coming across that helped out.

SALVI: Right, right, right.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything about the train ride from New York to Amsterdam?

SALVI: I thought we'd never get there, it was so long.

SIGRIST: And you thought the train ride to Naples was long.  
( he laughs )

SALVI: I thought this was terrible. ( they laugh ) I wouldn't want to go through it again.

SIGRIST: Who met you at the train station?

SALVI: Well, we went right to the, well, I think my father then, I don't remember, it was at night. Oh, Albany, we stayed to Albany, then we had to get another train. And, uh, it was in the night of mine. My father, I

think I remember my father. He was hugging and kissing me, but that's all I remember until the next day. And the next day, God, where do I live? Wooden house, over there no wooden houses. The houses were all stone and sturdy, you know? Then over here all wooden houses, and fences around, you know, there used to be fence around? Amsterdam was a very small town.

SIGRIST: Tell me about the house that you went to live, where you went to live.

SALVI: Yeah. That was a big, that was a big one-family house. They had a big family, and they had a couple of boarders. My father was boarding over there. But that was his aunt and uncle, you know? And, uh . . .

SIGRIST: Were they all Italians, all the boarders?

SALVI: Oh, yes. We had one, one big room for my father and mother, and one big room for my brother and I. And that's where we lived. We ate all together. We cooked all together and ate all together.

SIGRIST: This was at the boarding house.

SALVI: At the boarding house.

SIGRIST: Who ran the boarding house?

SALVI: It was his uncle and aunt, his uncle and aunt.

SIGRIST: And tell me a little bit about what, about their personality.

SALVI: Their personality wasn't, you know, it was young boys there, and I didn't understand them. They said they were cousins of mine. I didn't know now cousins of mine. But, uh, it wasn't nice. And then my, it was in May. And my father started us to school right away for fear that we wouldn't want to go to school.

( referring to her roommate ) She want to go out, maybe?

SIGRIST: Do you want to go out, Ethel? Okay. We're just going to pause for a second. ( break in tape ) Okay, we're resuming now. You said your father put you in school immediately.

SALVI: Because he was afraid that the next, it would be too much for us around, he wanted to get us in school before we got acquainted with everybody, until the fall. So that's what we done.

SIGRIST: Well, what things about going to school at first stick

out in your mind?

SALVI: Everybody made fun of us.

SIGRIST: How did they do that?

SALVI: "You got, look at the shoes. Look at this, look at that sailor dress." My hair, my hair was long, and over here they wasn't wearing it. I don't know, it was just, I wouldn't want to do it again, that's all. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me how you learned English.

SALVI: Oh, my father put us through school right away, and he had a girl come in, a neighbor of theirs, that she taught me a lot of the, you know, the alphabets. In English, the alphabets in Italian are different. So she taught me a lot of those little things. Then I was in the fourth grade in Italy. They put me in the first grade over here, just for my language. I knew a lot of the work. I knew a lot of the work, and arithmetic and everything. But they wanted me to learn to talk.

SIGRIST: Were there other Italian children in this class?

SALVI: Yeah, but they had been here before, so they knew some of the language.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the first word in English that you learned?

SALVI: Well, I don't know. "No, no, yes." Yes and no.  
( they laugh )

SIGRIST: Did your parents speak English?

SALVI: My father knew some, but my mother didn't know anything, no. She wanted to go back.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: What was your father doing in Amsterdam for a living?

SALVI: He was working on the railroad, on the railroad.

SIGRIST: And doing what, exactly?

SALVI: Well, what they do, send the railroad ties, what, they put in, ties and things like . . .

SIGRIST: So he was doing manual labor on the railroad.

SALVI: Well, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember which railroad it was?

SALVI: It was, um, I think the New York Central. West Shore,  
West Shore.

SIGRIST: West Shore.

SALVI: That's also in Amsterdam. West Shore, in New York  
Central. Yeah.

SIGRIST: And did your mother get work when she came to New  
York?

SALVI: My father wouldn't let her go to work.

SIGRIST: Why?

SALVI: Well, because she didn't know the language. How would  
she get there, you know? She wasn't, we wasn't used  
to ice. We never got ice over there, walking, you  
know, in snow like that. We didn't get it. We was  
afraid to walk. We was afraid we, you know, we'd fall  
and get hurt. Of course, us, we was younger, but she  
was, you know, she was, I didn't know how old she was.  
But, uh . . .

SIGRIST: Do you remember the first snow that you saw?

SALVI: Yes.

SIGRIST: Well, what sticks out in your mind?

SALVI: Well, we liked it, we liked it. ( she laughs ) That was liked, because everybody had a sleigh, we didn't have no sleighs in the old, there was no sleigh over there. There's no snow.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay in the boarding house?

SALVI: A year.

SIGRIST: A year.

SALVI: Then we got our own house.

SIGRIST: You said your mother didn't like it. Tell me a little bit about why she didn't . . .

SALVI: Everything was so different over there than she had over there, everything.

SIGRIST: Did your parents ever talk about going back to Italy?

SALVI: Yes. The war was on by that time. Not in here, not here, but in Europe already the war started, in May. We came in, we came in, we came in April, and they came in May, and war came in May. So my father says,

"Now, why don't we do this? When the war is over, we'll go back." And I said, "No, but why can't we go now?" "If I go there now, they'll take me in the army." That's that, you know? So we never went back. But then she died two weeks before the war stopped, when was it, Armistice.

SIGRIST: Your mother died.

SALVI: Yes.

SIGRIST: Oh, would you mind talking about why your mother died?

SALVI: She died, she got the flu, the Spanish flu. That's what she got.

SIGRIST: Was that . . .

SALVI: First they took, first my father got sick. They had to take him to the hospital. He was seriously ill. Then my mother got sick, so they both went to the same hospital, but not in the same room. My mother got more serious than my father. She got pneumonia right away, and she died. My father didn't know a thing about it. They didn't tell him, because they thought he'd die, too. They didn't tell him about Mother dying. But when he got better and he was ready to

come home, then they told him. He had to come home, because we were there all alone. But the lady upstairs took care of us. And she did, so my father come home, and we stayed there for about three or four years until we had to move, the lady wanted the whole house, so we had to move.

SIGRIST: How did your mother's death affect your life?

SALVI: Terrible. Nobody wanted to eat, nobody wanted to cook, nobody wanted to, no, nothing, nothing. My father (?), we didn't have anybody.

SIGRIST: Well, 'cause you're a little bit older at this point.

SALVI: Yes, fourteen.

SIGRIST: Are you still in school?

SALVI: I was fourteen.

SIGRIST: Are you still at, in school?

SALVI: Oh, yes. I was fourteen years old, yes. I went to school till I was nineteen years old.

SIGRIST: And then did you . . .

SALVI: And he didn't want me to quit. My father wanted me to

go through school. But I, I wanted to go work like the other girls. They all went to work, got a pay, and I wanted to do the same thing.

SIGRIST: What was the first job that you got?

SALVI: In a knitting mill. Oh, the boss was very nice, 'cause I could talk Italian, so Italians used to come all the time, and I was the interpreter. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: And what did you do in the knitting mill? Can you describe . . .

SALVI: I used to do, yes, I could do underwear, underwear. Just the machine, I used to work on the machine. We used to put sleeves on underwear. That's what I done.

SIGRIST: And how much money did you get for that?

SALVI: Nine dollars a week.

SIGRIST: Nine dollars a week. And do you remember the hours that you worked in the knitting mill?

SALVI: Ten.

SIGRIST: What time did you go in?

SALVI: We used to go seven till six. Ten, till six.  
Saturday, Saturday half a day, seven to eleven. Yeah.

SIGRIST: And then what would you do with the rest of the day  
off?

SALVI: I had housework to do, you know, I was fourteen years  
old. I used to get the washing done. I used to go  
bring it to the, I used to give it to the laundry.  
And just to clean around the house a little bit. My  
father was very good. He used to cook. I didn't  
cook, my father used to cook.

SIGRIST: What were some of his specialties?

SALVI: The same as we had it before, because same here, same  
here. Soups and vegetables and beans and string  
beans, because he used to like a nice, we used to have  
a little garden, too, you know, in the summertime.  
So, tomatoes and lettuce and things like that.

SIGRIST: Did your father remarry? He didn't remarry, no. Did  
he become a citizen?

SALVI: Oh, yes, he was a citizen. He already had his half  
papers already when we came. So I didn't lose  
nothing. I didn't have to go or nothing, no.

SIGRIST: He became a citizen automatically.

SALVI: Right, right, right, right.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, do you remember the process he had to go through to become a citizen?

SALVI: Yes, a lot.

SIGRIST: What did he have to do to become a citizen?

SALVI: Well, he had to go to school. He used to go to night school. My father was a great learner, you know, he wanted, and he used to go to night school. And then he went, he passed right away. He didn't have any problems at all. He had to go to Fonda. He didn't even get in Amsterdam. Fonda was a county seat. That's where they got all these papers, yeah.

SIGRIST: That's just a little town.

SALVI: Yeah. But that's what it is. It still is.

SIGRIST: What other ethnic groups lived in Amsterdam that you can remember?

SALVI: Well, in Amsterdam a lot of Polish people, a lot of Polish. But they had their own little area in

Amsterdam, just like we had it. But, um, in schools you used to get all kinds in school. There was Germans, I remember that's quite a few Germans came when I came at times. Polish people used to come all the time. Irish people used to come. We all had it in school. The school was all a mixture.

SIGRIST: Were there Italian organizations in Amsterdam at that time?

SALVI: Yes. One small, Sons of Italy it was, and I think they still got them. Sons of Italy.

SIGRIST: And what did they do for the Italian community?

SALVI: Not too much, but they got organized, and they used to have a, like field days and things like that, for recreation, things like that. Yeah. Churches, (?) in church.

SIGRIST: Were the churches important for social interaction?

SALVI: Yes, oh, yes. Yes, yes, yes, yes. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you ever go back to Italy?

SALVI: Three times.

SIGRIST: To visit.

SALVI: Three times, yeah.

SIGRIST: What was the, when was the first time?

SALVI: 1930. I was married already.

SIGRIST: And why did you go back?

SALVI: Well, my husband was from the same place, the same place in Italy as I was.

SIGRIST: How did you meet your husband?

SALVI: We knew him already. He was supposed to come. He was only a kid, and I was only small. But, um, they would make him come. He had to be a certain age. So they found out how old he was, and then they let him go. But only a few days he wouldn't have been able to come. So he came about the same time we did.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

SALVI: Nazarene[ph]. Did you ever hear that name?

SIGRIST: Nazarene[ph]. And, obviously, Salvi was his last name.

SALVI: Yes.

SIGRIST: And what year did you get married?

SALVI: '25.

SIGRIST: 1925. And children? Did you have children?

SALVI: I got one daughter.

SIGRIST: And what was her name?

SALVI: Dolores.

SIGRIST: Dolores. And why, in 1930, did you and your husband decide to go back to Italy?

SALVI: He wanted to see his family. He had everybody, he didn't have anybody here at all. He had all his family in the old country. Because they sent him for fear he would have to go to World War. That's why they sent him. They sent the younger one once, because the war lasted a long time.

SIGRIST: And how did you feel when you got back to Italy? How did it make you feel to be back there?

SALVI: Well, I was glad to see all my relations, and I was glad, I wish I was living there again. I liked that.

SIGRIST: Well, what things did you like about it when you saw it in 1930?

SALVI: Everything, my people, the area, the church, the school that I went. I remember all those things. And, again, a funny feeling. Of course, I was all alone over there. I didn't want to stay without my, yeah.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay when you went in 1930?

SALVI: Three months.

SIGRIST: Three months. So that's a good chunk of time.

SALVI: Yeah, three months. Then we went again, '51. Then I had a daughter, 11 years old, we took her. Yeah, she liked it.

SIGRIST: What's your daughter's name?

SALVI: Dolores.

SIGRIST: Dolores. Oh, yes, I asked you that. Um . . .

SALVI: But by that time a lot of people knew English.

SIGRIST: So Italy had changed somewhat.

SALVI: OH, yes, a lot. Yeah, yeah. Just like over here.

SIGRIST: When you think about who you are, do you think of yourself as an Italian or as an American?

SALVI: I'm an American. But I still think about Italy. I still like it. But I wouldn't want to live there now. See, I'm used to this over here, I got friends, my family, and, you know, I like it over here now.

SIGRIST: When do you think about Italy now?

SALVI: All the time.

SIGRIST: Now?

SALVI: All the time, because as you get older you think about the old things. There's no new things that I got to think about. Ninety-one years old, what can I think? I think of the old things. I wish I was there, I wish, what would have happened if I was, you know, still, still there, however that would be. I would have gone to college, I know that, because my mother was all education.

SIGRIST: If you had stayed there you would have gone to college.

SALVI: But over here, too, my father want me to go. I didn't want to go. But I went to high school to, what, two years. My brother didn't even want to start high school. He went with a boy, used to work in a hotel as a, what they call them, used to pick up the luggage for these people to come in.

SIGRIST: Like a porter?

SALVI: A porter. And that boy used to make good tips. So he got that, he wanted to quit school. My father said, "You crazy. Your mother would, you know, your mother wants you in school." HE didn't want to go any more, so he didn't go to school at all.

SIGRIST: Once you're making money, you don't want to go to school. ( they laugh ) What advice would you give a young person now, you're ninety-one years old, and a young person comes to you and say what things helped you to lead your life and to come to this point at age ninety-one?

SALVI: Good parents. I had wonderful parents. And my church and, uh, people, good people that I travel with. My father says, "Don't go with anybody that's no good. They got to be better than you are. Then you go."

That's what I would tell them. Don't go around with the ones that go in the saloon and go drink and gamble. That's what my father and my mother, everything.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Salvi, thank you very much for letting me come in and ask you these questions about your life.

SALVI: Well, I didn't say anything, you know what I mean, that I didn't want to say.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Elisa Salvi on August 28, Monday, 1995, with Kelly Owens in attendance. Thank you very much.