

EI-678

CARMELA PIRONE SAVAGE

BIRTH DATE: JANUARY 28, 1917

INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 29, 1995

RUNNING TIME: 58:40

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PhD

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME

INTERVIEW LOCATION: BOUND BROOK, NEW JERSEY

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 11/1997

TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

ITALY, 1924

AGE 7

PASSAGE ON "THE CONTE ROSSO"

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, 10/8/1997.

LEVINE: Today is September 29, 1995, and I'm here in Bound Brook, New Jersey at the home of Carmela Pirone Savage, who came through Ellis Island from Italy in 1924 when she was seven years of age.

SAVAGE: That's right.

LEVINE: And also here is your brother and sister-in-law. And your name is . . .

JACK: Jack.

LEVINE: Jack.

JACK: Giacomo.

LEVINE: Giacomo Pirone.

JACK: Yes.

LEVINE: And your wife's name?

JACK: Is Judy.

JUDY: Judy.

LEVINE: Judy Pirone. And so we're here today, and I'm looking forward to whatever you can remember, and if it's some person's name or place, the place where you were born, if you can spell it, that would be great.

SAVAGE: Where I was born?

LEVINE: Yeah. Okay. Okay. Let's start at the beginning. If you would give your birth date, and tell where you were born in Italy.

SAVAGE: I was born in Udine, Italy. Udine, northern Italy.

JACK: U-D-I-N-E.

LEVINE: U-D-I-N-E.

SAVAGE: Udine.

LEVINE: Okay. Northern Italy. And what was your birth date?

SAVAGE: January 28, 1917.

LEVINE: Okay. And, uh, did you live in Udine the whole time until . . .

SAVAGE: No. After the war, my father took us to Rocabacharonne[ph]. I think, uh, Rocabacharonne[ph], that's near Naples, thirty miles away from Naples, and we lived there till I came to this country.

LEVINE: Okay. So you, so you were really just about a year old when you moved? Do you remember . . .

SAVAGE: Well, right, I was born, right after the war, World War One, my father took us to where he, he was born, where he was born.

LEVINE: I see.

SAVAGE: And from, from Udine to Rocabacharonne[ph] would be about an eight, an eight-hour ride. So . . .

LEVINE: By what?

SAVAGE: By car, I guess, now, but I don't remember then, but I remember, uh, I don't remember when I came here, I was

a little baby, you know, but we had gone there to visit, and we went by, uh, by train, and then my grandmother on my mother's side, her and my uncle, he was a priest. They picked us up in a horse and buggy and took us from the train station, took us to, to the house that I was born in.

LEVINE: Oh. Oh, okay. Well, let's, um . . .

SAVAGE: And I was five years old when we made that last trip. And later on we went back to Rocabacharonne[ph], and from there we came to America.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. When you made that trip when you were about five, did you stay for any length of time before you returned?

SAVAGE: I don't remember. I don't remember that.

LEVINE: All right. Well, what was your father's name?

SAVAGE: Carmen. Carmen Pirone.

LEVINE: And your mother?

SAVAGE: Uh, her maiden name was Carissima Fancini, F-A-N-C-I-N-I.

LEVINE: And, uh, do you, you remember grandparents on both sides?

SAVAGE: Yes. Well, I remember my grandfather and grandmother, uh, when I came, on my father's side, the Pirones, and I remember my grandmother on my mother's side, when my grandfather had died, my mother was only two months old. But I remember I had an uncle that was a priest, and I remember the reason we went there when, uh, I was five years old, because he was having, he had new bells put on the, on the church, and the first time they were going to be rung, rung, we had to be there, and that's why we made that trip.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What was that uncle's name?

SAVAGE: Uh, Giacomo.

LEVINE: And do you remember anything else about him?

SAVAGE: Well, I remember him preaching. Uh, and I also remember when we got to this town where I was born, my little grandmother, she was signing, and she came running to meet us. I remember that.

LEVINE: And, uh, how about your, uh, your, uh, father's mother and father. What memories do you have of them?

SAVAGE: Well, I remember tagging along with my grandmother. Every place she went, I tagged along with her. And I used to go to church with my grandfather, and he used to, he used to, um, buy these nuts on a string, and he put them in his pocket, and I would sit, they had chairs in church, and I would sit beside him, and he would have these nuts in his pocket, and every once in a while to keep me quiet I'd put one of those nuts in my mouth. ( they laugh )

LEVINE: Where would you go with your grandmother?

SAVAGE: My grandmother? They had a vineyard up on a farm. They lived, like, in a small town, but then they had a farm, like, it was on the hills, you know, and it's still there. And every morning she would, they would have these here people go, my great, what they call them, like, not slaves, but these people working for them, and she would make breakfast, and she'd put the, like, she would make eggs, I remember her in these big, big frying pans, scrambling the eggs, and the homemade bread.

LEVINE: You mean, for the workers.

SAVAGE: For the workers, and she would put this big basket on her head and carry it, and it was like from here, oh, maybe from here to downtown here, say, what, about a mile we had to walk, and I would, she would say to me, "Hold on my apron," but I would have to go with her. And I remember her milking the cow, every morning, milking the cow, and then I had to drink the cream. That's why I'm this way.

LEVINE: You were forced to drink it.

SAVAGE: Yeah. ( they laugh ) Yeah.

LEVINE: What was in the basket that she carried on her head?

SAVAGE: The eggs for these workers, the eggs and the ham and the, not coffee, wine, that my father, my grandfather made the wine.

LEVINE: Do you remember that at all?

SAVAGE: Yeah, I remember, I remember every year that they would put these grapes in these big barrels and they would stamp on them, the guys would come in and stamp on them. I remember that, too. Yeah. And I remember them killing the pigs, too. ( she laughs )

LEVINE: Well, now, what, so they, they lived probably in the country.

SAVAGE: They lived, like, they had, like, two homes. One, and all summer they would stay up in, uh, like in this farm, they had a little farmhouse up there. And then one house would be, like, in a small, a little small town, you know, about a mile away from the farm where they raised, when they had all the, my grandfather owned a vineyard, and I remember him, these men picking the grapes.

LEVINE: Was your grandfather, it sounds like he was somebody who had some status in the community. Was he . . .

SAVAGE: Yes, he was. He was a mayor of that little town.

LEVINE: He was a mayor? Do you remember anything about that?

SAVAGE: I remember he was a politician. He was always dressed up. My grandmother did all the work. ( she laughs )

LEVINE: Do you remember, do you remember what he, when he was dressed up, what he actually had on?

SAVAGE: Oh, yeah, he looked nice, yes. My grandmother was

taller than my grandfather, but he was stern. I had to sit on that chair in church and don't make a, don't even move. But I had to go with him. I wouldn't go with my grandmother, or my mother. I would have to go with him.

LEVINE: And what, and what was your mother like?

SAVAGE: Well, my mother was very beautiful. Yeah, she was very beautiful. And she was a seamstress, and, uh, and she sewed for people. She used to make wedding gowns. And so with my grandmother, her mother, uh, and guess what? I have a granddaughter that is a fashion designer in New York. She works for, I guess she takes it from them. In fact, my mother made that dress she's wearing.

LEVINE: Oh, wow. Okay. So that's the, that's the dress that your mother's wearing in the picture that we have on file.

SAVAGE: Yes. And she made our outfits, too.

LEVINE: Um, how about your father? What was he doing for work when you were still in Italy?

SAVAGE: I don't remember, at that time my father, first my

grandfather came here, and then my father followed him, right after the war, the First World War. And he stayed here, and then he sent for us. He was here about . . .

LEVINE: Your grandfather sent for you?

SAVAGE: No, my father.

LEVINE: Oh.

SAVAGE: Then my grandfather went back to Europe, but my father stayed here to make some money.

LEVINE: I see. So he wasn't traveling with you when you actually went, came.

SAVAGE: No. But he came, my mother didn't want to come to this country, so he wasn't supposed to come but, he, he wrote to my mother, and he said, "If you don't come, if you don't want to come with me to America," he already had gotten his half citizen papers, see, in them days you had to have, you had to be here so many years before you get your citizen papers, and then you could send for the rest of your family. He had gotten them, and he sent for my mother and us two girls. My mother didn't want to come. She wanted to stay in

Europe. But my father said, "Well, if you don't want to come, I'm taking my two girls, and you can do what you want. You could stay with my father and mother."

This is what my mother told me. I don't remember that, you know.

LEVINE: What, do you remember why your mother did not want to come?

SAVAGE: Because my grandfather wanted, they figured that if I, if my mother came here with us two girls, she would never see us again, which she didn't. They both, my grandfather and her, my grandparents didn't, we never went back, and they never saw my mother. And that's why, I guess my grandfather and grandmother talked her into it, and she had bought a lovely home which, I have two sisters that are there right now, they're going to go see this home, and my grandfather made her buy this home thinking, well, she won't go now because the house is here, you know? So that's what my father told her. So then when my father came, she wasn't packed or nothing, and she, she figured, "Well, I'd better go with my husband and my children." Because he was going to take us regardless if she wanted to come or not.

LEVINE: Do you remember when your father came back? Can you remember him coming back from America when you were still . . .

SAVAGE: Yeah, when he picked us up.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you remember seeing him . . .

SAVAGE: Yeah, I remember, he, I guess from Naples, that's where the boat left him, and then he had to have, he had to get a, uh, a train, and then somebody, he came, he came by horse and buggy to where we were staying, you know, in the small town, with my grandfather and grandmother.

LEVINE: And did you remember him?

SAVAGE: Yes. Oh, yes. Sure. Yeah. And I remember, I had long hair, so he came, and he said, "This hair's got to come off, because in America they, they wear short hair." So my grandmother's crying because he had cut my hair. And, uh, and guess what? When I went there in 1971, my grand--, one of my uncles, he said to me, "You know what? Your grandmother had that hair in a newspaper till last year," he said, "and then she, and then we threw it out because she was gone." She was

gone, she died during the war, the Second World War.  
Yeah.

LEVINE: How would you describe yourself as a seven-year-old girl, before you actually came here? What kind of a little girl were you?

SAVAGE: I used to squeal on my uncles because they were smoking in the barn, and my grandma would say to me, "Go, go take a look and tell me if they're smoking." So I would go and tell her. So then my uncles were, you know, they would be mad at me, because I'd tell my grandmother that they were smoking. ( she laughs )

LEVINE: Do you remember any celebrations or festivals or anything over there?

SAVAGE: Yes. My mother made a vow that if my father would come back safe from the war, we would go visit the shrine, they call it Montevirigna[ph]. Every year, as long as she could, and I would go with my mother. I was a little girl, and my uncle, we had to walk. I don't know how many miles it was, but it was a long, all night we walked to the shrine, and my uncle, one of my uncle would come with my mother and my grandmother, and they would carry me, I would get on

their back, and they would carry me, because you, you weren't supposed to, that was the law my mother made and my grandmother made. And we did that, I remember I must have been about maybe, well, I was about five years old when I remember this, and you go over there and, like, on the side, on each side as you're going to the shrine there was all these crippled people with no legs, and all that had made this, you know, it's like a devotion, and I was afraid. And my uncle would say, "They're not going to hurt you." And I said, "But I'm still afraid." So he would pick me up and carry me on his shoulders. Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you, was your family religious?

SAVAGE: Yes, very religious. Well, my mother's brother was a priest. And, uh, my grandfather went to church every Sunday, and I went with him. And my grandmother and my mother, we'd go, and then I wouldn't go with them, but I had to go with my grandfather, because he bought me the nuts. Then he was, on the way home they would stop and have coffee at outside tables, little black coffee, him and his politician friends. ( she laughs )

LEVINE: Do you remember anything, like, about that, about that, about the coffee place, about the men, and what they talked about, anything?

SAVAGE: I don't remember what they talked about, no. I was too little, I guess. But, uh, I remember him buying, he had to buy the (?) before I went to church. ( she laughs )

LEVINE: And do you remember anything else about the town, like shops or market day?

SAVAGE: There was no shops.

LEVINE: No shops.

SAVAGE: I don't remember no shops. There was one drugstore, but you had to go, like, um, oh, to me it was far, you know, like a couple of miles, I would say, to get medicine or something, and there was no doctors in there. It was just a small village, really, we used to go, and very rocky. All rocks.

LEVINE: And how did you get around?

SAVAGE: Walk.

LEVINE: Walk.

SAVAGE: Yeah. I remember, with my grandfather, he used to go to Naples every year for mud baths.

LEVINE: Oh!

SAVAGE: Because he had rheumatism so bad. And, but he would be gone, like, a couple of weeks. And I remember him going in this horse and carriage, you know? But there was one thing that I remember. This man with a horse and buggy, he would come with bales of, um, not bales, what would you call it, material, and my mother would buy, and my grandmother would buy this material, and my mother, and then my grandmother said, "Now, what kind, what would you like?" You know, and I would, you know, pick out the material I wanted her to make me a dress with. I was little. ( she laughs ) I must have been a pistol. ( she laughs ) And, uh, my mother would make me the dress. He would come, like, maybe once a year, or something like that.

LEVINE: And was there a market day in your town?

SAVAGE: Yes. They used to call the market, the people used to bring their things there, like vegetables and, uh, like my father, my grandfather would kill this pig,

you know, like, around, I don't know when it was, but it was cold. Out there it wasn't too cool, like it would be here, and then they would bring these hams and things, they would make cheese, you know, and they'd smoke it, and these hams, they would smoke, and they'd be hanging near the fireplace, and I fell in the fireplace one time, because I was too nosy.

LEVINE: You mean the ham was smoking?

SAVAGE: Well, I was sitting there with my grandfather near the fireplace, because that was the only type of heat, but it didn't get that cold there, and all we had was the shawls that my grandmother used to knit for us. We didn't have a coat. And I was sitting there playing, and my grandfather, I remember him reading, and he said to my grandmother, he says, "You'd better watch her. She's going to fall in this fire." Sure enough, I did. I still got the mark over here someplace that's on my hands. And, then after that I couldn't sit near the fireplace no more. But I remember the hams, and my grandmother had a big oven in her kitchen, and she used to bake bread. I remember that. I remember her taking the bread out with this big long thing, and then on Easter time she would make

this egg bread, and she would make me a, me and my sister a little bunny or a little chick, you know. She'd shape it out herself.

LEVINE: Out of bread?

SAVAGE: Yeah. And for Christmas you know what we got?

LEVINE: No.

SAVAGE: Dried prunes, dried figs, uh, dried, dried fruit, and she would put it in a little basket, and that was our Christmas present.

LEVINE: Did you believe in Santa Claus?

SAVAGE: No. ( a plane flies overhead and can be heard in the background on the tape ) I didn't know it was Santa Claus until I got to this country.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember the religious festivities around Christmas or Easter?

SAVAGE: No, I don't remember. No. I don't remember that.

LEVINE: And do you remember any other things that your grandmother or your mother cooked or baked?

SAVAGE: Well, I remember her baking bread, and then I remember

her making soup, and spaghetti, of course, you know. And I remember her, uh, going to this farm, and they would pick the tomatoes, but the tomatoes are real small, and they would, they had long bottles, like, and she would line up a funnel, and she put these tomatoes in this bottle, through the funnel, and then top them with something that I remember, and then they would be boiled in this big, outside, in this big, round, like a big pot. But for me in them days it was big. I remember that. and I remember then when they got the wheat, and they put it on this concrete, uh, it was like . . .

LEVINE: Like a platform?

SAVAGE: Yeah. And they would beat it, uh, the wheat.

LEVINE: What would they beat it with?

SAVAGE: Uh, they would beat it with, like, long, like tree, things from the trees. That's how I remember.

LEVINE: Branches?

SAVAGE: Branches. And they would beat it, and then they would take the straw, you know, out, and then they would collect the wheat. And then they would take, I

remember taking it down to the mill to have it ground up to make flour. I would, because I would go with my grandmother.

LEVINE: Uh, anything else? What about social life there? What did people do for fun and recreation?

SAVAGE: I don't remember. Nothing, I guess. They just worked, and went to church, and gathered with their friends around there. Some of them came here with us, and, um, that's all. But I do remember when they had a christening or something, I remember, like, my grandfather played the accordion and I remember that. But not very good. ( she laughs )

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you remember any songs from then?

SAVAGE: No, I don't remember that, no.

LEVINE: And dancing? How about that?

SAVAGE: Oh, they used to dance all right. Yeah.

LEVINE: Um . . .

SAVAGE: My mother was a great dancer. So was my father. ( she laughs ) Yeah.

LEVINE: And how about you as a child? Do you remember playing games, or did you have friends that you . . .

SAVAGE: We had a few friends. I had a few friends but, like I tell you, not too many. And then, uh, I remember going to a private school. I remember that.

LEVINE: A Catholic school?

SAVAGE: I don't know if it was Catholic, but I didn't go there very long, because then we came to this country. Yeah, I remember that.

LEVINE: So you had cousins around and, uh . . .

SAVAGE: Oh, I had a bunch of cousins. But, at the time I came, no. We were, my sister and I were the only two grandchildren. And the rest of them, just my father was married. And, of course, I had, on my mother's side, my uncle was a priest, and, uh, I have an aunt that lived in Naples, and her husband had passed away, and she had, a boy was born to them, with her husband. Her husband was killed in the service, and so this little boy, she remarried. This little boy didn't want to go back to his mother and, uh, my, he stayed with my grandmother and the priest, and he went to

college, he became a doctor. He just died two years ago. He was, uh, I think he was about six years older than I. Yeah.

LEVINE: So, um, do you remember, then, when your father came back to Italy to bring your mother and you and your sister over, what happened? Did they, they didn't, they didn't sell the house, they kept the house?

SAVAGE: Oh, the house is still there. In fact, we gave it to my uncle. Yeah, the house stayed there. They came back, and . . .

LEVINE: Your uncle the priest, or . . .

SAVAGE: No, my uncle the priest died when he was very young. The uncle that's still living now on my father's side. Because that's where the house is, in the little village.

LEVINE: Could you describe that house?

SAVAGE: Well, when I went back in 1971, uh, my uncle had it all remodeled, and you wouldn't believe, it's beautiful. In fact, my two sisters are going to go see it now.

LEVINE: Well, can you remember what it was like when you were a little girl?

SAVAGE: Yes. It's all, it was like, it was build like under a mountain. It's all made out of rocks. And on the first floor there was a big oven there.

LEVINE: Oh, a stove?

SAVAGE: An oven, a stone oven where my father, he wanted to be a baker, she figured when he comes home, he's going to start this baking business, you know? And then upstairs I remember going through, like, steps, steep steps, and there was this huge big room, that's all I could remember there.

LEVINE: Was that a sleeping area upstairs?

SAVAGE: Upstairs was a sleeping area. Yeah. And downstairs was like a kitchen and this big oven. That's all I could remember. But now that I went back, it's all remodeled. Yeah. Uh-huh.

LEVINE: Uh, so, do you remember your mother packing things to take with her?

SAVAGE: Well, I remember her packing, she wanted to bring her

mattress, which was handmade.

LEVINE: What was it made out of?

SAVAGE: It was made out of, uh, wool. They had sheep, and every year they would, I remember that, too, when they used to do the sheep, take the wool out.

LEVINE: Describe whatever you can remember about that.

SAVAGE: Well, I remember my grandmother, she would shear the sheep. And then this wool, and I don't know what they did with the wool, but I remember the mattress made out of the sheep wool, and she wanted to keep it. And it was all tufts and everything. So I remember my grandmother helping my mother. They fold this thing up, and they tied it with a rope. And then my grandmother put another piece of cloth, like a big. I remember that. And that was it.

LEVINE: And so it came over in that . . .

SAVAGE: It came over, my mother brought it to America. Yeah.

LEVINE: And what else did she take with you?

SAVAGE: Uh, she took some copper pots and pans. In fact, uh, we had little dishes made out of copper. And, uh, my

mother had them. Maybe they're down in the cellar or something, you can find them. My sister and I had one little dish that was ours and, uh, she brought them, and some silverware, you know. And, uh, she brought all her, uh, sheets and pillowcases that she made, my mother made herself, towels, linen towels. They didn't have like we have here. They were made out of linen, the towels.

LEVINE: You mean, not dishtowels. You mean regular towels.

SAVAGE: Regular towels, and dishtowels also. She brought all, all that, you know, the things from here, from there. Yeah.

LEVINE: And personal things? I mean, did your mother make clothing for you . . .

SAVAGE: Yes, my mother made all our clothes, underwear and everything. And my grandmother knitted our stockings. Yeah, I remember that.

LEVINE: They were made out of wool?

SAVAGE: Yep, out of, wool stockings, and she knitted our shawls. We didn't have a coat. But when my father came to this country, he knew that when we were going

to come here it was going to be cold, so he brought my sister and I and my mother a coat.

LEVINE: You mean he brought it from America back to Italy until you came back.

SAVAGE: Yes, so we could wear it when we came over. Yeah. I remember that.

LEVINE: Do you remember, uh, leaving? Do you remember, like, what, did people see you off, or how . . .

SAVAGE: Yes. My grandfather came with us. My grandfather, uh, we left the day before, because we were, had to make the ship in Naples. My grandfather came with us, and we got in a horse and buggy, went, rode into Naples. It's about, say, it would be about an hour's ride. And there, overnight, we stayed with my aunt on my mother's side, and we stayed there overnight. And then the next day, and my grandfather stayed there, too, and he bought my sister and I big dolls. Yeah.

LEVINE: Oh. You remember, can you describe the doll you had?

SAVAGE: I remember the dolls. ( she is moved ) And, um, and then the next day we had to make this boat, and I remember my aunt waving to us, and my grandfather, and

he was crying and hugging us. I remember that. And I never saw him any more. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember your mother or father telling you anything about, about America, or what you might expect to find, or . . .

SAVAGE: Well, my father, no, I don't remember any. But all I remember here, when we landed in Ellis Island, then we had to wait . . .

LEVINE: Wait, before we talk about Ellis Island, tell about, uh, the name of the ship, and anything you remember about the voyage.

SAVAGE: Oh, yes. The name of the ship was Conte Rosso and, what else now? And I remember we, we had to, we slept on bunk, bunk beds. The men on one side, and I was wondering how come my father isn't coming over to see, but they weren't allowed, only once a day to come and see us, or whatever. I didn't see much of him. And the ladies on the other side. And we had to climb this little ladder, and we were like on the top bunk, the three of us. I don't know how many bunks, but I don't remember eating anything because my mother didn't like anything, she couldn't eat anything, but

this one day they were making chicken soup, and my mother said, "Maybe I could at some chicken soup." And we went, like, there was like a dining area with these long, long tables, and the soup was put in our plate. And all over once, the boat tipped and all the . . .

LEVINE: The plates . . .

SAVAGE: So we didn't have no chicken soup. But my grandmother had, she had packed a cheese, and she had made biscuits, cheese and biscuits and all kind of dried fruit, and that's what we ate, for seventeen days. My mother told me that. I remember that. But I remember the biscuits, and I remember the cheese, and salami, uh, yeah, I remember that.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Do you remember anything going around on the boat, on the ship at all?

SAVAGE: Yeah. But, uh, the toilets, they were like, I remember a pipe, and my mother would take us every morning, and I remember little sinks in the bathroom,

I guess it was supposed to be. And this water came out of this pipe, and she would wash us, a sponge bath, you know, and she would change our clothes, and then we would go back, and then it was so dirty, the ship was so dirty that my mother wouldn't allow us to walk around. So we would go up into the, into the, you know, where we slept.

LEVINE: Oh, to the bunk.

SAVAGE: To the bunk. We were on the bottom. We came third class. We were, my father couldn't even afford a, you know, first class. So we, and then, yes, I remember that. But the facilities were, uh, I remember it being dirty. My mother says, "Don't you go there." In fact, the day that we were supposed to arrive, well, my mother dressed us up in, you know, we were going to arrive, we were going to see relatives and all, waiting for us, and she put big hair ribbons in our head, and a beautiful dress. Well, me, I didn't listen, I went down, and I fell in a puddle of urine. ( she laughs ) My mother gave it to me, because she didn't have nothing else to put on me. She says, "What am I going to do now?" ( she laughs ) My sister listened to my mother, she was three-and-a-

half, she had to hold onto her. Me, I was smart, you know? I was going to go play with the other kids down there, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember when the ship came into the New York Harbor?

SAVAGE: That I don't remember. I just remember Ellis Island and being out in the cold there, and it was cold.

LEVINE: Okay. What were your impressions, then, of Ellis Island?

SAVAGE: Well, I remember it was like a, a long walk, but it was made out of wood, and there was, on the side, like, there was things to hold on, you know. And I remember my mother, she was tired, I guess, and cold, waiting for my father. We had all gotten examined, and my mother and I, and my sister, and then my father, what held them back, I don't know, if it was some luggage he had to get, or something. And I remember sitting outside on benches, and it was so cold, and I could see the water, you know. And then, after that I remember too clearly I must have, it was getting dark already, and I remember coming into Bound Brook. We got on the train . . .

LEVINE: Well, do you remember anything about the examination you had?

SAVAGE: Oh, yeah. The examined our ears and all, and at that time we did have an earache, both of us.

LEVINE: Were you detained at all?

SAVAGE: No, we weren't detained for the earache, because our chest was clear and all. They looked in our head if we had lice. That, if you had lice, they had to be cleared off before you, you came, they got off the boat. And, uh, but we weren't, just our ears were a little infected. I remember having an earache anyway, but that didn't detain us, no.

LEVINE: Then how did you go? Do you remember leaving Ellis Island and getting to Bound Brook?

SAVAGE: That I don't remember, even Ellis Island, but I remember getting to Bound Brook. We got on the train, and then our relatives met us here in Bound Brook.

LEVINE: And who was that?

SAVAGE: My uncle. He's dead now.

LEVINE: What was his name?

SAVAGE: His name was, uh, Benjamin Pirone. Yeah. And, uh, I remember that, and I remember, uh, from the train station here in Bound Brook we walked, and there used to be a drug store called D'Angelo's Drugstore. My, my uncle took us in there, and I don't remember if he bought us something, but we walked all, about a mile to where they lived on Fisher Avenue. And we stayed with them for a month until my father could find rooms. Yeah.

LEVINE: Say that again, the avenue, the name of the avenue.

SAVAGE: Fisher Avenue.

LEVINE: Fisher, uh-huh.

SAVAGE: Fisher Avenue. And that's, I remember all the family met us there, you know. And, uh, yeah, we stayed with them for a month until, uh, my father got, found an apartment, you know.

LEVINE: Do you remember any of your early impressions of this country, things that struck you as new or different, that you never seen before?

SAVAGE: Well, the schools. To me they were so big.

LEVINE: Did you start school right away?

SAVAGE: A month after, March 1st, I started. And I didn't go into kindergarten. They put me in first grade. And I didn't know the language, you know, but I got by.  
( she laughs ) And I remember going, it wasn't too far from where we lived, going to school.

LEVINE: How was the school here different from the school you had been going to?

SAVAGE: Well, I didn't go in Italy too much, but the school in Italy was just a room, you know, and there was a teacher. I remember a teacher, and, of course, I was, maybe I must have been about five years old when I started, you know. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: The school in Italy had all different grades in the same room?

SAVAGE: No, I just remember one room.

LEVINE: Just one, just your grade.

SAVAGE: One room, yeah, one room. That's all it was.

LEVINE: And all the children were about your age?

SAVAGE: Now, that I don't remember. It was a private school, yeah. Everybody didn't go to school. Yeah. But my, uh, my mother, uh, you know, enrolled me into it.

LEVINE: Do you remember any of your teachers after you, after you got here?

SAVAGE: Oh, yeah. I remember Miss, uh, Miss Mane[ph] and Miss Wilson. And, in fact, one of them just died not too long ago.

LEVINE: And how were they to you?

SAVAGE: Very nice.

LEVINE: You struggled with the language and everything.

SAVAGE: No, they, we got along very well. One time I remember I got mad because one of the teachers said something about a whop, so I went home crying, because I didn't know what whop meant. It wasn't bad anyway. And, uh, my father marched into school, "Don't you call my daughter a whop!" ( she laughs ) Yeah, but otherwise I didn't have no problem.

LEVINE: Were there other children who were coming from Europe

in your school, do you remember? Were there any others who were also coming here?

SAVAGE: See, a lot of our, that came in with us, uh, they went, they lived in Staten Island. From, when they got off of Ellis Island, they went into Staten Island, the ones, our relatives.

LEVINE: Oh, you had relatives on the same ship?

SAVAGE: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

SAVAGE: They, in fact. ( she addresses someone else in room )  
You remember Caffessa?

LEVINE: Is that the last name?

SAVAGE: Caffessa.

LEVINE: Caffessa.

SAVAGE: Yeah. Now, I didn't know if he, we seen him about, I don't know. He was here maybe fifteen, twenty years ago, and we haven't heard any more. Most of them are gone, because they were up in age, you know. But their children might still be around, but we didn't

get in contact with them.

LEVINE: So what was it, a mother, father and several children that were your relatives that were on the same ship?

SAVAGE: It was the mother, the father, and I think it was two, two children that came.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

SAVAGE: Yeah. That's all I can remember.

LEVINE: And it's C-O-V-A . . .

SAVAGE: It's C-A-F-F-E-S-S-A, Caffessa.

LEVINE: And how were they related to you?

SAVAGE: Through my father. I think they were cousins of my father. Uh-huh.

LEVINE: So, um, did you have any experiences that you remember when you were learning English?

SAVAGE: Well, I don't remember that it was so hard. I went through till the eighth grade. I didn't go to high school. I graduated eighth grade, then I had to go to work, because my mother, you know, had such a big family, and worked in a sewing factory. But I didn't

have no problems. I seemed to get into it. You know, I had a lot of friends, and, in fact, last night I went to Angie Buner's[ph] house. They picked me up, and we were there till eleven o'clock. One of my friends that I've known since I came to Europe, and she, uh, we were in the same grade together, first grade and throughout, right through. And we were talking, because I told her about you, you know. And she says, "Oh," she says, "let me know how you're making out, because we've been so busy," that, a lot of them are gone, a lot of my friends that I went to school with. And we always stuck together, yep.

LEVINE: This friend also came from . . .

SAVAGE: No, no. She was born, yeah, and she lived on Fisher Avenue. And, uh, that's how we met, and then she, we used to walk to school from the apartment where my father rented this apartment was only a block away from where we were staying with my uncle and aunt, and she lived down the street. And, in fact, one of her brothers, this friend's brother, married one of my, my friends, they were friends today, Martha, and we're still friends, so many years. Yep.

LEVINE: So, um, let's see. How did your mother like it? I mean, she didn't want to come at first.

SAVAGE: She cried a lot. She missed her parents. And, you know, she missed being there. But then she, I guess she had one kid after another so she came to forget about it. ( she laughs )

LEVINE: So how many children did your mother have after she came here?

SAVAGE: Nine. I'm the oldest of nine children, and he's the youngest, and we are all living, thank God. But my father and mother died. My father was only sixty-four, my mother seventy-eight. Yeah, when she died. But she was a sickly woman. She was always sick. Uh-huh.

LEVINE: Now, what did your father do when, when you, when the family came here?

SAVAGE: My father worked in Johns Manville, which now it closed. It was an asbestos plant. He worked there. Then later on, uh, they were laying off there, and he went to work for, uh, he was working as a caretaker on one of the, uh, for some rich people. He used to take

care of their, their estate and everything, the farm, not the farm, whatever, the flowers and all. He was a gardener, his trade was a gardener. And then, it was up on 22 now. When they made the 22 highway, they didn't want to be near the highway, so they let my father go, and my father went to American Cyanamid, which is, part of it is there, but he worked there for a while.

LEVINE: American . . .

SAVAGE: American Cyanamid. ( voice off mike ) Calco, it was called Calco, then it was sold to American Cyanamid. And he used to go to, we used to live down the west end, and to get to where he worked, you know, for these rich people, he would ride his bike with a little box in the back, and that's where he kept his lunch.

LEVINE: Oh. Do you remember the depression?

SAVAGE: Do I remember!

LEVINE: How does that affect you and your family?

SAVAGE: Well, it affected us very bad, because my father, there was no work. So I had, I remember him working

in front of this house. The road was being built, and in a ditch, and it was wintertime, and I would, my mother would pack his, a hot lunch for him, and I would walk from all the way, a mile away, to bring him his lunch, the hot coffee and lunch, right in front of this house he worked, he raised his family. And he would never go on welfare. I got a beating and a half because some lady said to my mother, "You know," she said, "a lot of people are getting things from welfare." She says, "Why don't you go? Maybe you could get, you know, some flour or something?" So my mother wouldn't go, but this woman, that was a friend of my mother, she says, "I'll take her. She'll come with me," and I went. So they gave you five dollars.

So with this five dollars we bought flour and all, and we loved pineapple in a can. So I bought this pineapple, my mother says, "Get a can of pineapple." And we were having pineapple for desert that night for supper, and my father said, "Where'd this pineapple come from? Where did you buy it?" My mother wouldn't tell my father that I got it from welfare. So it had to come out, so I got a beating. "Don't you ever go to the welfare! Who told you to go? Don't you ever. I'm going to work, and I'm going to make, and your

mother makes bread, and your mother makes soup, and that's what you're going to eat." He would never go on welfare. Yep.

LEVINE: So what was your first job after you finished school?

SAVAGE: Uh, in the sewing factory. And I was only fourteen years old. So they couldn't put me on the sewing machine, so I used to, you know, the girls would sew the, they were making little boys' suits at that time, and they would sew them, and they would come to this big, long table, and that's where most of my friends were, too, and we would clean all the strings, cut the strings off and, like, fold them, and then bring them to the pressers, and they would press them, and then they would be packed up till now, until I was sixteen. When I was sixteen, I'd start working on a sewing machine, and then I, from there, they used to call it the two cent shop and, believe me, that's all we made, two cents. I was making, like, seven dollars a week, but that was a good help for my mother. I went to this bigger place to work in Giddings[ph] where they made dresses for chubette girls like me. In fact, I was modeling them. ( they laugh )

LEVINE: You keep saying that, but you don't look that chubby to me.

SAVAGE: I was always a little chubby. And, anyway, I went to . . .

LEVINE: Oh.

SAVAGE: I went there to work, and I was making better money, and things started to get better for us then. And then my sister, this one, she came to work with me, I got her a job in this nicer place, and she was making more money than I was because she was working on a special machine. So, uh . . .

LEVINE: So then, um, did a lot of the family go into the, into the sewing, uh, industry?

SAVAGE: Just my sister and I. That's it, yeah. We then, things got a little bit better, and then my brothers, then the war broke out, and my brothers went to war, and then, my oldest brother is a teacher, and then I have another one that, one in Florida that's a teacher, and he's a teacher. He's a principal. And then my two sisters, this one, she worked in the sewing factory with me. But my two sisters, they went

to high school, and one is a beautician, and, uh, that's it. And one was a policeman. One of my brothers was a policeman, and the other one's a plumber. Yeah.

LEVINE: And how did you meet your husband?

SAVAGE: ( she laughs ) My husband was from Chicago, and he, he came out here with, at that time they called them Bakalite[ph], and now it's Union Carbide, and he stayed with his brother next door to where I lived. And, uh, you know, he, we had well water then, that you pump. And the excuse that he wanted well water, he used to come to get the wall water in my father's place. And he met me, and my father was mad because he wasn't our nationality.

LEVINE: He wasn't.

SAVAGE: No, he was Lithuanian, and I was Italian. So he'd stop and talk, and then my father with, "You don't talk to him," and this and that. So then when my father used to make me mad because I couldn't go out, I was kept very strict, I used to say, "You know what? If you make me mad enough, I'm going to marry the Pollack next door." ( she laughs ) He said, "If you

marry that Pollack next door, I'm going to cut your legs off." I married the Pollack next door. ( she laughs )

LEVINE: How did your father take that?

SAVAGE: Well, at first he didn't like him, but then he was my husband's and my father's best friend. And, yeah, that's how we got married.

LEVINE: Wow. Now, was your husband also from Lithuania, or he was born here?

SAVAGE: No, no. My husband was born here, yeah. But his brother was born in Lithuania, and his father and mother came here also from Lithuania. And, uh, they lived in Chicago, like I said, and they had a hard life. My husband was only four years old when his father died, so he had a hard life, too.

LEVINE: And what was your husband's name?

SAVAGE: Anthony. Anthony, uh, Savage. Well, his name was Oasis. When his father came to this country he changed it to Savage. He said it was more Americanized.

LEVINE: And did you have children?

SAVAGE: Who, me? I had three.

LEVINE: And what are their names?

SAVAGE: My first daughter, my daughter is Joanne, and then I had two sons. One passed away, the one in the picture there. Thirty-one years old, he passed away. He was a schoolteacher. And then I have another one that's in Missouri right now, or else he would have been here, his name is Anthony, after my husband.

LEVINE: And you have grandchildren?

SAVAGE: Eight grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren.  
( she laughs ) Yeah.

LEVINE: Wow. Um, when you look back on, on, uh, the fact that you came here as a seven-year-old, do you feel like, um, it made a difference to you as a person in your life, the fact that you had come here as an immigrant, as a little girl, and then grew up here? Do you think that . . .

SAVAGE: No, I just sort of fit it in with all my friends, then I had plenty of friends, and I still do. And, uh, I

just went along, you know. I couldn't go, after school I couldn't go out and play with my other friends, because I had to come home and mind the other kids and do chores. So I couldn't go, you know, once in a while, you know, I could, but not very often. It was very hard, yeah.

LEVINE: What makes you feel satisfied that you've done in your lifetime? What makes you feel good that you've done

SAVAGE: Well, I've got wonderful brothers and sisters ( she is moved ) and, um, wonderful family. And I'm happy. The only thing is my husband passed away, and my son, but other than that I feel very lucky. Yeah. My kids are good to me. Like I said, my brothers and sisters, they, I can't even go out visiting, because if they come here and I'm not home they call the . . .

JACK: Well, sometimes she doesn't . . .

LEVINE: You want to add your two cents? Go ahead.

JACK: Well, because we're always concerned about her . . .

SAVAGE: Yeah.

JACK: She's done so much for all of us in the family. I, as

a matter of fact, as a youngster, lived with her, because my mom and dad were both sick. And sometimes she just takes off.

SAVAGE: I don't take off. I go see my friends.

JACK: And you try to get in touch with her, and the next thing you know my other brothers are calling me up, "You'd better run over there right away and see what's going on."

JUDY: See if she's all right. ( she laughs )

JACK: See if she's all right. But . . .

SAVAGE: Just like last night, Angie Buna[ph] called me up. She says, "Marie, my daughter's picking you up, you're coming to my house." So I went. I didn't get home, from six thirty to eleven o'clock.

JUDY: You're lucky we didn't call her. We wondered where you were.

JACK: Otherwise my other brother would call me up, "Go see where Camila is."

SAVAGE: Well, about a month ago they almost had the police. They almost called the police. But it's good to know

that they care.

LEVINE: Yes. Tell me about your mother and father and you. Did you carry on any of the ways from the old country, after you got here? Were there certain things that you tried to keep, hold onto, that were of the old country?

SAVAGE: No. My mother, uh, my father would say to us, "Speak to your mother in English," after we went to school and all, you know. But I still know my Italian, I can speak very well Italian. But, uh, we were very well, uh . . .

LEVINE: Americanized?

SAVAGE: Americanized. You know, we went along, like, in school. We tried to, uh, do the things that the other kids did. I did anyway, and my sisters did, too. And then, of course, they were born here. But I don't remember having any problems. I just, I fitted in with the parades they used to have, and kept up with my friends, and we did little things together. And, but we always, we always, my father would say, "Now, speak to your mother in English, this way she'll learn." And my mother did learn very quickly, and she

knew, she understood, and she could even write, uh, read in English. Uh-huh. Yeah. But she was a very smart woman. Yeah.

LEVINE: Was there a large, um, Italian community here in Bound Brook?

SAVAGE: Yes, yes, there was, and they all were friends. And, like, when they had babies, they didn't go to the hospital. They had the babies at home. One would help the other. They would take care of the other little kids, and they would help with the washing. There was no washing machines for a long time. And they would cook and all until my mother was, was able to take care of us. Yeah. That's how it was them days. Uh, people just pitched in and helped. And if something, there was like, somebody had a lot of problems, like sickness in the family, they would all help one another. Yep. And you weren't scared to go out like you are today. It was nice. And on Sundays, you know what was our pass--, my mother and father's pastime? They would all come to our house because my mother had so many kids, and the ladies would just sit and talk over a cup of coffee, and the men, my father had a, what do they call, bocci?

JACK: Bocci.

SAVAGE: A bocci court in the backyard, and the men would play bocci, and, uh, and that was the thing that they did.

LEVINE: Did you know, aside from those cousins of your father, did you know other people from the old country?

SAVAGE: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Did your family know them from before?

SAVAGE: Yeah, oh, yeah. Some of them that came, like I said, some of them that live in Staten Island. And later on, maybe about five or six years later, I have friends that came here. One of them is nine years old, was nine years old when she came. I tried to get in contact with her. I don't know whether she came through Ellis Island or not. In fact, her brother was born the day after they arrived in this country, and they named him Americo[ph]. And, uh, but her husband passed away also. She's seventy-five years old now, and she's out in Texas with one of her grandchildren, so I couldn't get in contact with her. I was going to send you to her, you know?

LEVINE: Thank you. Well, the, what do you think about coming here? I mean, can you imagine what your life would have been like, or how different it would have been had you stayed in Italy?

SAVAGE: Well, I don't know. I think this was, my father brought us here for a better living, you know. He wanted us to get an education. I didn't get any. I wanted to be a nurse, but they couldn't afford to send me with the depression and all. But, of course, my brothers did. Yeah, and my sister could have went. She didn't want to go. She didn't want to go to high school, and she didn't want, she didn't want no part of it. But I did want to be a nurse, but there was no means. ( she laughs ) So.

LEVINE: And you mentioned a little bit you have so many friends that go back a ways. But how is this period of your life, after your retirement, and how is it for you?

SAVAGE: It's good. I can't, I have no regrets. And, uh, like I said, my husband's gone five years, and, uh, but he was a good husband and, uh, he provided for us. He always, this house was always, anybody had trouble, it

was always open for anybody. In fact, when the children got married, I wanted to sell the house and go into a smaller place. And he said to me, "Now, what are you going to do when your relatives come and visit? Where are we going to put them?" Is that true?

JACK: That's true. Absolutely true.

SAVAGE: That's what, that's, you know. Yeah. That's how it was. So, uh, we always, this house was always open for, well, the relatives, when they still come from Europe or any place, they come here, all the time.

LEVINE: So over the years you kept up with relatives from your town?

SAVAGE: Yeah, from my town. And we have people in New Brunswick. This person, she passed away now, but she lived next door to us in Europe. And she wanted to be my sponsor for confirmation. And then she came to America, and she said to my mother, "I'm still going to be her sponsor," she said, "by proxy." And before you know it, we came over here, and she was my sponsor. And she has children that I'm very good friends with them. And I stayed, during the

depression, there was no work in Bound Brook. I went to work in the fuse factory in New Brunswick, and I stayed at her house, and her husband would take me home on weekends. She was like a mother to me, Mrs. Bloomby[ph]. Mrs. Bloomby[ph]. ( voice off mike ) That's why I say, one helped . . .

LEVINE: One helped the other.

SAVAGE: Yeah. They always helped out.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything else you can think of that we might not have covered about the old country, coming here, or living your life out here?

SAVAGE: My . . .

LEVINE: Wait, I'm going to pause here for a second. ( break in tape )

SAVAGE: We were on Ellis Island here, and we were waiting for my father to come. We were sitting on a bench, like I told you. My sister was crying that her legs were so cold, because we had long stockings and a coat, but she was crying, she was very, very cold. So my mother found an old piece of fake fur. It was on the ground. So she took that, and she wrapped it around my

sister's legs. I remember that. But I was busy walking around. I didn't feel the cold that much. But she was sitting on my mother's lap. She was little, you know? Yeah. 'Cause we didn't think, my mother didn't think it was this cold, and my father brought us the coats. We had long, woolen socks on, stockings on, but that's how it was, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, uh, I want to thank you very much for a very interesting interview. And you may have been poor at some time, but it sounds like your life is very rich.

SAVAGE: Well, I'm, I'm leaving, I'm not rich, but I'm getting along. And I have, well, my wonderful family. All I have to say, help out, and they're here, all of them.

LEVINE: That's how I meant it.

SAVAGE: Yes, they're here. My children are very good to me. And, uh, I have a lot to look forward to. I'm not in need of anything. And my husband was very good to me, and all my family, too. He was always here for us all. So I have no regrets really, you know? I'm happy I met him and, uh, we had a good life together. We had fights. ( they laugh )

LEVINE: You're human after all. Okay. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I've been speaking with Carmela Savage on September 29, 1995, in Bound Brook, New Jersey, and I'm signing off.