

EI-680

ANGIE (ANGELINA) PAPER A YARNELL  
BIRTH DATE: MARCH 20, 1914  
INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 30, 1995  
RUNNING TIME: 53:22  
INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.  
RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME  
INTERVIEW LOCATION: BRIDGEWATER, NEW JERSEY  
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 10/1997  
TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

ITALY, 1922  
AGE 8  
PASSAGE ON "THE AMERICA"

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 Saturday, September 30, 1995. I'm in Bridgewater, New Jersey with Angelina Yarnell. Mrs. Yarnell generally goes by the name of Angie. ( Mrs. Yarnell laughs ) Mrs. Yarnell came from Italy in 1922. She was eight years old at that time, and she, with her family, was detained at Ellis Island for forty days in 1992. Anyway, thank you.

YARNELL: (?)

SIGRIST: That's okay. We're on tape now. Um, can we begin by you giving me your birth date.

YARNELL: March 20, 1914.

SIGRIST: And tell me where in Italy were you born.

YARNELL: Um, Ruvo Del Monte, provincia Potenza.

SIGRIST: Can you spell all that?

YARNELL: Ruvo is R-U-V-O, Capital D-E-L, M-O, Capital M-O-N-T-E, I think.

SIGRIST: Ruvo.

YARNELL: Del Monte.

SIGRIST: Del Monte.

YARNELL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And what was the province?

YARNELL: Provincia Potenza.

SIGRIST: Potezna. P-O . . .

YARNELL: P-O-T-E-N-Z-A.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me where in Italy that is?

YARNELL: That's, that I can't tell you. Southern part, because we very seldom had any snow. Every time we had snow,

it would be just, it would come down and melt.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you remember about the area, the geography of the town, and the . . .

YARNELL: Well, they were all small houses. It was a very small town.

SIGRIST: What, can you describe the town itself what it looked like?

YARNELL: Well, once in a blue moon you would see a car, and we would run to the highway to see that car go past. That I remember. ( she laughs ) But other than that, I remember my grandmother living like you had to go up cobblestones, and she was way up high, and there was a church there.

SIGRIST: Did your family live in the town?

YARNELL: Right in the town.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the house that you lived in for me?

YARNELL: It had a cellar, and I think it had two rooms, and that's where we lived.

SIGRIST: What was the house made out of?

YARNELL: That I don't remember. I think it was brick.

SIGRIST: Why do you remember the cellar? What was in the cellar?

YARNELL: Wine. ( she laughs ) My father always made wine there.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how he did that?

YARNELL: The old way of making the wine, with your feet, in a big, round barrel. And they would use their feet to, you know, to, how would you say it now? ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Stomping the grapes.

YARNELL: Stomping the grapes. That's right.

SIGRIST: Did you do that? Did the family stomp the grapes?

YARNELL: No, no, no. My brothers did. I had three brothers.

SIGRIST: And then after the grapes were stomped, what would your father do next?

YARNELL: Well, it had to ferment, I think, after a week or so. He would turn the . . .

SIGRIST: The spigot.

YARNELL: The spigot, and the wine would come out. And then I don't know what he did with it after that.

SIGRIST: So that's what was going on in the cellar.

YARNELL: Yep, and put it in a barrel.

SIGRIST: Anything else that went on in the cellar?

YARNELL: That's it. That was, as far as I remember it was only for wine, and maybe to store things.

SIGRIST: The two rooms were above the cellar, yes?

YARNELL: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yes. And tell me what the function of those rooms.

YARNELL: Well, we had a fireplace. I think that's the way my mother cooked, on the fireplace. We had no stove. But the two rooms were, like, combined, like one big room. And I think my brothers slept up. It was like, what would you call it now? Like an attic. My brothers slept up there, and we all slept downstairs.

SIGRIST: How many brothers did you have?

YARNELL: Three.

SIGRIST: Can you name them for me?

YARNELL: My brother Patsy, my brother Danny, and my brother Dominick.

SIGRIST: And how is Dominic spelled? Is there a K at the end the way he spelled it, or just a C?

YARNELL: C.

SIGRIST: Just a C, okay. What was your father's name?

YARNELL: Frank.

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

YARNELL: The vineyard.

SIGRIST: Oh, that was his job. He worked in the vineyard, or he owned the vineyard.

YARNELL: He owned the vineyard

SIGRIST: Can we talk a little bit about that?

YARNELL: No.

SIGRIST: No.

YARNELL: I don't remember a thing, because they never took me there.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about your father, what his personality was like?

YARNELL: Well, he came to the United States. I don't know what year it was, and he went back and forth three times. The last time he said he wasn't going to come out there, because my mother didn't want to leave her mother. Then finally we, I think my sister came first, and my two brothers, and then the rest of us came.

SIGRIST: What was your father's personality like? What was he like as a person?

YARNELL: He was a good person.

SIGRIST: What were some of the things, even here in America, what were some of the things that he enjoyed doing for himself?

YARNELL: Playing cards. ( she laughs ) Every Saturday and Sunday he enjoyed doing that.

SIGRIST: What did he look like? Can you describe him in words

for me?

YARNELL: He had a moustache. ( she laughs ) He had curly hair.

SIGRIST: What do you remember of your father in Italy? What sticks out in your mind?

YARNELL: Not too much. Because, like I said, he was back and forth, back and forth. I don't remember too much.

SIGRIST: Did he ever bring you anything from America on one of his trips back and forth?

YARNELL: I imagine he did, but I don't remember what. I imagine he did.

SIGRIST: What was your mom's name?

YARNELL: Nicole.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

YARNELL: Rita. R-I-T-A.

SIGRIST: Her maiden name was Rita.

YARNELL: Yep.

SIGRIST: And tell me about your mother.

YARNELL: My mother, wait a minute, my mother's name was Maria Nicole Rita. That was her middle name.

SIGRIST: Maria Nicole Rita.

YARNELL: Rita, yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me about your mother, and what you remember of your mother in Italy?

YARNELL: Well, she worked very hard with all of us. She struggled.

SIGRIST: What were some of the things that she was responsible for in the house?

YARNELL: Taking care of us. My father used to send money, and she managed.

SIGRIST: Who did the cooking in the house?

YARNELL: My mother did.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you ate?

YARNELL: A lot of macaroni. ( they laugh ) A lot of vegetables, too, yeah. And fruit. We had a lot of fruit.

SIGRIST: Where did the food come from?

YARNELL: From the farm, I guess.

SIGRIST: Did you have to purchase the food?

YARNELL: No.

SIGRIST: No.

YARNELL: I think they stored it, like, for the winter. I think the only thing you bought was, I'm not sure now, macaroni. ( she laughs ) And meat.

SIGRIST: What about bread? Where did bread come from?

YARNELL: My mother made it.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of that process?

YARNELL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you tell us about it?

YARNELL: Well, she used to mix it, and then let it rise. And then make, make a loaf, like, and we never bought bread. She always made it, as far as I could remember.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's personality like?

YARNELL: ( she sighs ) What could I say? ( she laughs ) She was very good to us. She was a good mother.

SIGRIST: Is there a story that you like to tell about, about maybe you and your mother when you were a little kid, a story that comes to mind about maybe something she did or some experience you guys shared together? No. Okay. You mentioned your grandmother. That's your mother's mother?

YARNELL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What sticks out in your mind?

YARNELL: That was her stepmother.

SIGRIST: Her stepmother.

YARNELL: Her first mother, her mother really died when she was only about two. She was very young. And then my grandfather remarried. But she was just like a grandmother. She treated, you know, she loved us all.

SIGRIST: Did she live nearby?

YARNELL: And she never wanted us to come out here. She was very heartbroken.

SIGRIST: Tell me about things that you did with your grandmother.

YARNELL: Not too much.

SIGRIST: Did she live near where you lived?

YARNELL: Not too far. She lived up on a hill.

SIGRIST: I see, but in the same town?

YARNELL: Yes. Not too far.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about visiting your grandmother at her house? You mentioned going up the cobblestones.

YARNELL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Are there any other things that stick out in your mind about going over to visit your grandmother?

YARNELL: Not really.

SIGRIST: No.

YARNELL: No.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what games you played as a kid in Italy?

YARNELL: I don't think I played any games. No games. I remember knitting with my cousin, but that's it. But as far as games . . .

SIGRIST: What about school? Did you go to school in Italy?

YARNELL: Not too long.

SIGRIST: So, could your parents read and write?

YARNELL: My father did, but not my mother. Every time she had to sign her name, she had to put a cross.

SIGRIST: What about religious life? What religion were you?

YARNELL: Catholic.

SIGRIST: And does anything stick out in your mind about your religious life in Italy before you came to this country?

YARNELL: My mother was very religious, very. She used to go to church every Sunday. I can't remember whether I went, but she did.

SIGRIST: Were there any ways that you practiced your religion at home inside the home?

YARNELL: Not really.

SIGRIST: Saying prayers or something.

YARNELL: Oh, we said prayers, yeah. Before we went to bed.

SIGRIST: Tell me about, um, Christmas, or a religious holiday that you remember celebrating.

YARNELL: We got together with my grandmother, the family. That was it. No toys, no nothing.

SIGRIST: Was there a special food that was served at that time?

YARNELL: Oh, everything.

SIGRIST: But what is everything? Pretend someone's listening to this that doesn't know anything.

YARNELL: Ah, I think my grandmother used a lot of lamb, and that's what we used to have. She would make macaronis, and then have a roast, potatoes, that's it.

SIGRIST: What about other religious holidays? Do you remember like maybe a saint's day celebration, or something like that that might have taken place at that time, at Easter, perhaps?

YARNELL: Uh, I think I remember they had to walk to this church. I just about remember. And you had to walk there. But I can't remember what saint's day it was.

SIGRIST: But there was a procession.

YARNELL: But it was like a, oh, they used to have processions, too. Uh, but I remember this church was very small, and we used to go up there, walk it. That I remember.

SIGRIST: Was that the only way your family could get around, by walking?

YARNELL: Yeah, no car.

SIGRIST: No car.

YARNELL: No.

SIGRIST: No donkey? Do you remember there being animals in Italy?

YARNELL: No. I don't remember, we never had a donkey.

SIGRIST: Did you have any other animals?

YARNELL: I think my grandmother did. I think they had a donkey. No, no other animals.

SIGRIST: Can you describe what you were like as a young child?

YARNELL: ( she laughs ) I don't know. I . . .

SIGRIST: It's a hard question.

YARNELL: It is, I think it is. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever, or father, or anyone in your family ever tell you anything about your birth, about the circumstances around your birth?

YARNELL: No, I don't remember.

SIGRIST: People didn't often talk about things like that.  
( they laugh )

YARNELL: No way. No.

SIGRIST: So your father's going back and forth to America.

YARNELL: Yeah, at least three times.

SIGRIST: When he's in America, where is he?

YARNELL: I think he lived with his brother.

SIGRIST: Which was where?

YARNELL: In Raritan.

SIGRIST: Raritan, New Jersey.

YARNELL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And what was he doing in America?

YARNELL: He was working. He was working in Somerville. I think they called it the Cadillac, the Cadillac, something. It was in Somerville. It had to do with linoleum.

SIGRIST: Somerville is spelled S-O-M-E-R-V-I-L-L-E.

YARNELL: That's right.

SIGRIST: Having just gone by the signs a million times. ( they laugh )

YARNELL: He worked there for a long time.

SIGRIST: Was this a linoleum factory?

YARNELL: I think that's what it was, linoleum.

SIGRIST: Do you know how his brother ended up in Raritan?

YARNELL: He came out here before my father. There was only two brothers.

SIGRIST: Was there a large Italian population in that part of

New Jersey?

YARNELL: In Raritan?

SIGRIST: Yeah.

YARNELL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: There was.

YARNELL: A lot of Italians.

SIGRIST: I was just wondering how he actually ended up getting to Raritan. When you were a little girl in Italy, what did you know about America before you got here?

YARNELL: Nothing. I didn't know anything about it.

SIGRIST: You said your mom didn't want to come.

YARNELL: But she didn't want to leave her stepmother.

SIGRIST: Yeah. What finally convinced her to go? What did your father do to convince her?

YARNELL: My father insisted, I think, that we should all be out here. That's why we came out here.

SIGRIST: Did he go back to Italy to get you?

YARNELL: No.

SIGRIST: He just sent for you.

YARNELL: That's right.

SIGRIST: What do you remember as a child of the whole process of getting ready to leave?

YARNELL: I don't remember anything about that. The only thing I remember is going to Naples and my uncle took us there by train.

SIGRIST: So as far as in the actual town, the packing and all of that.

YARNELL: No.

SIGRIST: You don't remember any of that.

YARNELL: No, no.

SIGRIST: Do you remember a specific thing that maybe your mother took or your brothers took or you took that sticks out in your mind?

YARNELL: No.

SIGRIST: Maybe something that you had here in America that you

knew had come from the other side. You may not have taken anything, actually.

YARNELL: I know my mother had a trunk, and everything was in that trunk, but I don't remember what she, I guess all our clothes and stuff.

SIGRIST: Do you remember saying goodbye to your grandmother, or to anybody else in that town?

YARNELL: Yeah. I had two aunts out there, too.

SIGRIST: What sticks out in your mind about having to say goodbye to them?

YARNELL: It was heartbreaking. My sisters, they didn't want to leave. They, you know, they didn't, you know, you don't know what to expect because they were much older than me, and they had friends, and they didn't want to leave their friends. But they had, they had no choice.

SIGRIST: You said you had three brothers. How many sisters did you have?

YARNELL: All of them. We were four sisters.

SIGRIST: So you had four. Can you name the sisters too,

please?

YARNELL: My sister Jenny was the oldest, my sister Rose, my sister Carmella, and I.

SIGRIST: Carmella?

YARNELL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Carmella. How do you fall into the span of brothers and sisters? Oldest? Youngest? How do you fall into it?

YARNELL: How do I fall into it? I'm the youngest.

SIGRIST: You're the youngest in the family. Uh-huh. How many years . . .

YARNELL: I'm the baby.

SIGRIST: How many years were there between your oldest sibling and you?

YARNELL: I have to think on that. Oh, let's see, I'm eighty-one . . . I'd say about fifteen.

SIGRIST: So a good span of time, then.

YARNELL: Yes.

SIGRIST: When you were growing up in Italy, were your oldest brothers living in the house?

YARNELL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Even though they were so much older.

YARNELL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Because they were young men at that time.

YARNELL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you, do you, you said you remember going to Naples and an uncle brought you.

YARNELL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Does anything stick out in your mind about the actual trip to Naples, before you got there, from the time you left your town?

YARNELL: Yeah, we were on the train, and I had never been on a train. And then we got to Naples. We had to wait. Then he waited for us to get, we were examined before we got on the ship. Our hair, if we were clean, that I, sticks in my mind, because I remember going through my hair, and then my mother went first, and then they

just about looked at us, and we just went. In other words, the whole faith, the mother is clean, the whole family's clean.

SIGRIST: How did you wear your hair as a small child?

YARNELL: Oh, just plain. Real curly. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: What color was it?

YARNELL: Uh, dark brown. Yeah. But it was curly. I took after my father.

SIGRIST: Did you have to stay overnight in Naples before you got on the ship?

YARNELL: That I don't remember. I don't think we did.

SIGRIST: What did you think when you saw the ship? The first time, when you looked at the ship and you realized you were going in this ship. What did you think?

YARNELL: I didn't think anything until, until it got going, and I got sick. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: What was the name of the ship?

YARNELL: I have to look.

SIGRIST: I've got your paperwork here. It's, the America?

YARNELL: That's it.

SIGRIST: That's what we have written down here.

YARNELL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Um, well, tell me what you remember about being sick.

YARNELL: Until I got to America, I was always sick. I think all of us were sick.

SIGRIST: Where did you sleep on the ship?

YARNELL: On the cot. We didn't have any beds. I don't remember beds, because we were not first class. We were third class. My father couldn't afford it.

SIGRIST: Was the whole family together on the ship?

YARNELL: Yeah. We were always together.

SIGRIST: Are all your brothers and sisters going on this trip, or is it just some of them?

YARNELL: No. My brother Dominic, my sister Rose, Carmella.  
( a telephone rings )

SIGRIST: Oh, we're going to pause just for a second. ( break

in tape ) We're resuming after the phone call. You were just listing your brothers and sisters who came with you on the ship. Dominic, Rosa . . .

YARNELL: Carmella.

SIGRIST: Carmella, Angelina, which is you.

YARNELL: That's right, and my little sister.

SIGRIST: And what was her name?

YARNELL: Uh, Irma.

SIGRIST: Irma. I-R-M-A. And Mom.

YARNELL: And Mom.

SIGRIST: Right.

YARNELL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: I haven't asked you yet, what was your maiden name before you were married the last time?

YARNELL: Papera.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

YARNELL: P-A-P-E-R-A.

SIGRIST: P-A-P-E-R-A.

YARNELL: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: So it's Mrs. Papera and her children.

YARNELL: That's right.

SIGRIST: And you thought everyone got sick. Did you say that before we broke, that you thought everyone . . .

YARNELL: I know my mother was sick. I was the worst one. My sisters, they weren't too bad.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how they treated that?

YARNELL: I'm telling you, being on that boat it was, I thought it was miserable. You know, we didn't get treated like, you know, you sat at a table, you ate. We ate like sitting in a chair, and whatever they gave us, we'd eat. Most of the times we didn't eat.

SIGRIST: Did they give you anything for your seasickness that you can remember?

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

SIGRIST: Do you remember being up on the deck of the ship?

YARNELL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What did you do on the deck?

YARNELL: Just sit around and . . .

SIGRIST: What did you see when you were up on the deck?

YARNELL: Water. ( she laughs ) That's all you could see was  
the water.

SIGRIST: Do you know how long the ship took to get to New York?

YARNELL: I think fourteen days.

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

YARNELL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

YARNELL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you know what that was?

YARNELL: No.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me a little bit about how the family ended  
up being detained at Ellis Island.

YARNELL: Well, they examined my sister. She was two years old.

SIGRIST: So the boat docks . . .

YARNELL: The boat docked, we got off, and I remember going up a ramp and I guess they made, you know, like I had words that I can't remember. I think that's about it. But then they examined my sister and, uh, they wouldn't let her, she, according to them, my sister had some kind of a, I don't know what it was, and they wouldn't let her go through. So my mother was supposed to go back.

SIGRIST: Go back to Italy.

YARNELL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: This is Irma. Is that the youngest sister?

YARNELL: Yeah. She couldn't walk. She was two years old, she couldn't walk. I don't know what they called it that she had. And they wouldn't let her come, you know, my mother had to go back. Then she developed the old-fashioned measles.

SIGRIST: This is still while they're at Ellis Island.

YARNELL: Yeah. She was put in a hospital when she developed

old-fashioned measles. I don't know how long she lasted there. My mother was with her all the while. And I wasn't allowed to go visit. I was too young. But my sisters did. Every day they used to go and visit my mother. She didn't develop the old-fashioned measles right away. After a while, I don't know how long, and then she died with the old-fashioned measles.

SIGRIST: She died at Ellis Island.

YARNELL: Yep.

SIGRIST: So she caught the measles at Ellis Island.

YARNELL: Yes, she did.

SIGRIST: And then she died . . .

YARNELL: She died there. She had them so bad that she died. And my father couldn't take the body to Raritan because he couldn't afford it. I don't know how much it cost, so they buried her in Ellis Island where they have a place.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about all of this experience, where you slept and what you did?

YARNELL: Every night we had to go for our blanket. And we slept, they had like a cot, one on top of the other. I always used to sleep on the bottom. That's what I remember. We didn't have regular beds.

SIGRIST: Who was in the room with you?

YARNELL: Uh, a lot of people. You weren't the only one, like your family. A lot of people that slept just like we did. And I think my brother went to a different, you know, part of the building.

SIGRIST: So it was divided by sects, the women were in one part and the men were in another.

YARNELL: I think that's the way it was. And, uh, my father used to hire, I think he was like a guard. And my father used to pay him to watch over us, and he would take me all over with him during the day, because I was the youngest one. My father took care of that.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: Do you remember what, some of the things that you saw on Ellis Island while you were walking around in the presence of this hired man to watch over you?

YARNELL: I don't remember anything. I remember a big recreation room. Once in a while, like at night, we used to go there and watch a movie. And I'll never forget it. I think my sister died right around Thanksgiving. And my mother came, they let her out, and that night they showed us a movie. I don't remember whether it was Thanksgiving night or the night before Thanksgiving. Well, we were, when the movie was over we were in such a rush to grab the blankets and grab our cot that we left my mother behind and lost her. Would you believe that? We couldn't find her. We cried all night. And the next morning my mother and a couple others were still in that room, and that's where they stayed all night. That was, that was an experience. That I remember.

SIGRIST: Your mother must have been beside herself.

YARNELL: Sure, we couldn't find her. And my sisters, they would ask, you know, one of the men there, uh, that we lost. Of course, we couldn't speak English, but they understood, you know? But then we, we found her the next morning.

SIGRIST: Never wanting to go to a movie again.

YARNELL: No, that's right.

SIGRIST: Um, did your mother sleep in the same room with you all, or did she have a . . .

YARNELL: Oh, she was in the hospital with my sister for the longest time. And then she slept with us until we got out.

SIGRIST: Do you remember eating at Ellis Island?

YARNELL: You had to stand in line to get a hardboiled egg in the morning. And I don't know what we ate during the day, but I remember my sister used to say, "Go get another hard boiled egg. Stand in line and get another one." And I did that, just to get two of them. But I don't remember what they fed us.

SIGRIST: Was there a special place where they fed you that you can think of?

YARNELL: Nope. Nope, we never sat up, I don't remember sitting at the table.

SIGRIST: What about, were you examined at all at Ellis Island during that time period?

YARNELL: Yeah. Once in a while, yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything about having to go through that?

YARNELL: Well, they examine your ears, you know, and that's it. But once in a while we were examined.

SIGRIST: Do, do you remember any of the staff at Ellis Island?

YARNELL: No.

SIGRIST: Is there a guard or a matron or anything like that?

YARNELL: The only one I remember is the one that took care of me, my father.

SIGRIST: How did you feel about this strange man having to follow you around?

YARNELL: He was good looking. I remember how good looking he was. He was young, and I didn't mind at all to go with him. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Did your father come out to Ellis Island?

YARNELL: Every weekend he was there, and he would bring us things to eat. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did your mother in later years ever talk about . . .

YARNELL: Oh, she always did.

SIGRIST: . . . this experience. What were some of the things that she told about her side of the experience, about tending to your sister, and . . .

YARNELL: You mean my sick sisters?

SIGRIST: Right.

YARNELL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: I'm wondering what your mother used to tell about . . .

YARNELL: Well, if my sister didn't die, my mother was going to go back to Europe, definite. Because . . .

SIGRIST: If they deported your sister.

YARNELL: Yes, yes. She would never leave her. She would never leave her. And my sister said, "We'll go back with, with, you know, with our mother." But my father didn't want that.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever talk about, for instance, how, what kind of medical treatments they did for Irma, or

how she was treated in the hospital, or any of that kind of stuff?

YARNELL: Oh, she was, I'm pretty sure she was treated all right, you know?

SIGRIST: I'm just wondering if you remember your mother saying, talking about those kinds of things specifically.

YARNELL: Well, she, you know, she had to be with her to take care of her. But I don't remember, uh, her saying anything. But she was with her day and night.

SIGRIST: Of course, your mother was, um, she was a little apprehensive about coming to America in the first place.

YARNELL: Yes.

SIGRIST: How did this, how did Irma's death make her feel about being in America? Did it have any effect on . . .

YARNELL: It did have an effect, because she didn't care if she went back. She didn't. She was heartbroken about, you know, losing the baby, but, uh, there was nothing she could do, you know? I guess if she didn't get the old-fashioned measles, which got her, my mother would

have went back. She had a, she had her mother out there, her stepmother. She had two other sisters, or one other sister she had, because the other one was in America.

SIGRIST: Is there anything else about the time that you spent on Ellis Island that sticks out in your mind? For instance, did you ever see anything in Ellis Island that you had never seen before?

YARNELL: Nothing. I didn't see anything.

SIGRIST: But, I mean, like maybe a type of person, or a type of food, or . . .

YARNELL: No, there was a lot of people. Type of food? You've got to be kidding. They wouldn't, the food was, hmm, very scarce, I think.

SIGRIST: You had to wait in line twice to get a hard boiled egg.

YARNELL: To get a hardboiled egg. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Do you remember the day you were released from Ellis Island?

YARNELL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the course of events of that day for me?

YARNELL: Well, we were happy to get out of there. My father came, then we, he had to go through a lot of signing papers, but we were happy to get out of there.

SIGRIST: And where did he take you?

YARNELL: You know, that I don't remember, whether we took the train, or he had somebody with a car. I should have asked my sister. I don't know whether he had somebody with a car, we all got in it, and I don't, that I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Where did you end up?

YARNELL: In Raritan.

SIGRIST: And how did you spend your first night in America?

YARNELL: It was beautiful.

SIGRIST: What did you do?

YARNELL: We had a bathtub. We had running water. My father had bought this place. We had a lot of room.

SIGRIST: Was it . . .

YARNELL: A lot of things that we never had in Europe.

SIGRIST: That first night that you were here, did anyone else come to greet you?

YARNELL: Just my father. He's the one that picked us up. And my sister, of course, she was out here, one of them, the oldest one.

SIGRIST: That was Jenny.

YARNELL: And my two brothers, yeah. And they had everything ready when we got there. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me the next couple of days you were here. Tell me about what the family did in the next couple of days. I assume your father probably had to go right back to work.

YARNELL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What did your mother and the kids do those next, that next week, say?

YARNELL: Well, I guess they did, you know, she hadn't seen her daughter for so many couple of years. It was mostly,

you know, with my sister, but we were always together.

SIGRIST: Did the kids, did you or the younger kids do anything specific that sticks out in your mind?

YARNELL: No, no.

SIGRIST: When were you put into school?

YARNELL: Right away. I was in first, first grade. I had a wonderful teacher. She knew I came from Europe, and she treated me like she was a wonderful teacher. She took a liking to me, and she used to give me a lot of things.

SIGRIST: Well, what do you mean she used to give you a lot of things?

YARNELL: Oh, maybe a compact that she didn't want, a little perfume. Things like that. And she had me right by her desk.

SIGRIST: Were you, were there other immigrants in the school, in that class?

YARNELL: No, no. Just my sister.

SIGRIST: She was put in the first grade also?

YARNELL: Yeah. She was three years older than me, but then she was moved. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Um, tell me how you learned English.

YARNELL: I only went as far as the eighth grade.

SIGRIST: But tell me how you learned English when you first got here.

YARNELL: The only place I learned English was in school, because my mother didn't speak it, my brothers didn't either. The only place was in school.

SIGRIST: Did your father speak English?

YARNELL: A little bit, yeah. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: I'm just, what I'm getting at is what was the process? How did they go about teaching you English? How did they do it, if they did it?

YARNELL: You mean, the . . .

SIGRIST: The teachers, or the students. How did they go about helping you to learn English?

YARNELL: Well, I had to learn my ABC's first, and then from

there on I learned.

SIGRIST: Well, do you remember some of your first words when it started making sense to you.

YARNELL: I remember the word, this friend of mine that I got close to, she said "eleven." And in Italian, eleven is wood. And I remember that. And my, you know, I made a few friends, and even my girlfriends used to try to teach me a little bit.

SIGRIST: Did it come easily to you?

YARNELL: Well, not too easy. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Well, it's hard. You're learning a whole other language.

YARNELL: That's right.

SIGRIST: Talk to me about your mother and her life once she got here and to America. Did she get a job?

YARNELL: No.

SIGRIST: No.

YARNELL: My mother never worked. She had so many, you know, we were seven of us. She had all to do with cooking and

washing, and . . .

SIGRIST: But, of course, not all seven of you are living there at that time.

YARNELL: The seven of us were all living.

SIGRIST: In America, too?

YARNELL: Yes.

SIGRIST: The oldest brothers?

YARNELL: Yes.

SIGRIST: You were all together in Raritan.

YARNELL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And could the older children speak English? Did they . . .

YARNELL: A little bit, yeah.

SIGRIST: What jobs did your brothers get?

YARNELL: My brothers? Uh, my brother Patsy worked in Somerville in iron works. That had to deal with, uh, metal. My brother Danny, oh, in the woolen mills, they had the woolen mills in Raritan.

SIGRIST: The woolen mills.

YARNELL: Yeah. They had that. I think that was the first job.  
And my sisters, too, worked there. They made pretty good money.

SIGRIST: Was your father still working at the linoleum factory?

YARNELL: Yes, at the time. Then he got a job in Ganellan[ph],  
in art color.

SIGRIST: And what was that?

YARNELL: Books, all the magazines. And he did maintenance, and  
my two brothers worked there. In fact, towards the  
end my three brothers were all there, and my father  
was there. They all worked there.

SIGRIST: What was the first job, did you ever work? Did you  
ever have a job that you were paid for?

YARNELL: When I quit, when I graduated I got a job in a sewing  
factory.

SIGRIST: How old were you?

YARNELL: Fourteen.

SIGRIST: And what did you get paid?

YARNELL: Five dollars a week.

SIGRIST: And what did you have to do, specifically?

YARNELL: I learned to operate a machine.

SIGRIST: What kind of a machine?

YARNELL: A sewing machine. And that's how I started.

SIGRIST: And what were you sewing?

YARNELL: I learned with, like, maybe, small things. It was a pants factory. I don't know what I did there, but I learned how to sew. And then I went to, uh, Balkins[ph], and I learned a little bit better there.

SIGRIST: Balkins[ph]?

YARNELL: Balkins[ph]. And I worked there a good many years. But it was still, it was five dollars a week.

SIGRIST: That first job you had when you were fourteen, how long did you work there?

YARNELL: I didn't work there too long. Maybe about a year. And then I went to Balkins, was a better, you know,

they didn't make pants. They had blouses, you know, and different, different things.

SIGRIST: Um, that first job that you had, how did your father feel about you getting a job?

YARNELL: Well, I was supposed to go to high school, and he said that I couldn't go to high school because my sister, my brother got married in March, my other brother got married in April, and my sister Rose got married in June. And he said he couldn't send me to high school because he needed the money. And that's why I went to work.

SIGRIST: So he was in favor of you going to work?

YARNELL: Yes.

SIGRIST: What did you do with the money that you made?

YARNELL: I handed it in.

SIGRIST: Handed it to whom?

YARNELL: My mother.

SIGRIST: And what did she do with it?

YARNELL: Buy food, whatever. What could you do with, well, you

could buy a lot with five dollars then.

SIGRIST: Yeah, it was, I was just wondering how she used the money, you know, that . . .

YARNELL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What about, what about your brothers and sisters who had jobs?

YARNELL: Yeah. I think they handed the money in for a while. But then my mother said keep it in case you get married, you'll have some money.

SIGRIST: Did your parents ever want to go back to Italy?

YARNELL: No.

SIGRIST: Did your mother personally want to go back to Italy?

YARNELL: Well, my mother always thought, you know, my grandmother, and she missed her a lot, and her sister that was there. The family, you know?

SIGRIST: Did they attempt some kind of a communication back and forth?

YARNELL: Oh, they always used to write to one another. My father used to write.

SIGRIST: On behalf of your mother.

YARNELL: Yeah, oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did, how long did you stay in Raritan? Is that, did you stay there for a long time?

YARNELL: Yeah, till I got married.

SIGRIST: Can you talk just a little bit about the Italian community in Raritan?

YARNELL: Well, we had a neighbor next to us, De Lucia. We were very good friends. And we always got together on a holiday. Uh, summer we always used to sit outside. That I remember, every night. But my father was strict, though.

SIGRIST: Their name was De Lucia?

YARNELL: De Lucia.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

YARNELL: Capital D-E L-U-C-I-A, I think.

SIGRIST: Were they from a similar area of Italy that you had come from, or . . .

YARNELL: I don't . . .

SIGRIST: You may not know.

YARNELL: They were Italian, yeah.

SIGRIST: You mentioned your father was strict. Can you tell me some of the rules that you had to obey around the house as a kid when you were growing up here in the United States. What were some of the house rules that you had to follow?

YARNELL: We had to do everything. Clean house, do dishes, and we, my mother wouldn't dare to get off the table when, you know, we were finished. She always waited for us to get up and clean up, because my mother did the cooking. That's the rules. And I had to wash eight floors every Saturday, from the bedrooms to downstairs.

SIGRIST: That was your job.

YARNELL: Saturday.

SIGRIST: On Saturday.

YARNELL: I didn't go shopping on Saturday. That's what I did.

SIGRIST: Um, what year did you get married?

YARNELL: 1940.

SIGRIST: And the name of your husband?

YARNELL: Nicholas Yarnell.

SIGRIST: And tell me a little bit about his background.

YARNELL: Well, he lost his father when he was pretty young.

SIGRIST: Was he born in the United States?

YARNELL: Yeah. ( she coughs ) Excuse me. He was born here.

SIGRIST: And how did you meet him?

YARNELL: ( she laughs ) I went to the St. Rocco Feast. That's where I met him.

SIGRIST: The same what?

YARNELL: The St. Rocco Feast.

SIGRIST: Oh, the St. Rocco Feast.

YARNELL: They would have fireworks. And that's how I met him.  
The fellow there he was with, I knew him, and he was with him, and that's the way we met.

SIGRIST: And you were married in 1940?

YARNELL: 1940.

SIGRIST: And did you have children?

YARNELL: Two.

SIGRIST: And their names?

YARNELL: Chris and Michael.

SIGRIST: Is Chris short for Christopher, or is it a woman's name?

YARNELL: No, it's a woman. It's a girl.

SIGRIST: C-H-R-I-S, or K-R-I-S?

YARNELL: No, C-H.

SIGRIST: C-H-R-I-S.

YARNELL: Yeah, she was the oldest. And Michael.

SIGRIST: How do you think your life would have been different if you had never come to the United States?

YARNELL: I'm glad I did. I really mean that. Because there it was, it wasn't living, really. As far as I remember,

it was rough.

SIGRIST: Did you ever go back to Italy to visit?

YARNELL: I would love to. Just to see where I lived and to, well, I only have cousins out there, but they moved to Rome, a lot of them did.

SIGRIST: Got out of the country and into the city.

YARNELL: Yep.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

YARNELL: But they do go there on vacation. They still have a little place.

SIGRIST: And you'd like to see it all?

YARNELL: I would like to see it all. The only thing, I don't like to fly.

SIGRIST: Well, I suppose you could take a boat. ( he laughs )  
Maybe you don't want to take a boat after your experience.

YARNELL: No, I had enough of boats. ( they laugh )

SIGRIST: When you think of yourself, do you think of yourself

as an Italian, or as an American? Or how do you think of yourself as a nationality?

YARNELL: I think more an American, because I was only eight when I came out here. Of course, I didn't have an education, which I should have, at least high school. But I didn't. My father couldn't afford it.

SIGRIST: Do you think that, when you raised your children, did you raise your children with a consciousness of their Italian heritage? I mean, was that part of their raising, to be conscious of the fact that they come from Italian blood? How did you approach that when you raised your kids?

YARNELL: I didn't think nothing of it. I mean, uh, they didn't learn the Italian language because my husband and I, when we didn't want them to know what we were talking about, we'd talk Italian. ( they laugh ) But he couldn't speak Italian too good.

SIGRIST: Did he learn it from you?

YARNELL: No, from his mother. They were different. They talked a little bit different. We're kind of, we killed the Italian language.

SIGRIST: Well, it didn't matter. You just didn't want the kids to know what you were saying.

YARNELL: But, uh, I feel bad that I didn't, really. I really do. I think I should have.

SIGRIST: Should have been more conscious of . . .

YARNELL: Yes.

SIGRIST: Did either of your kids ever attempt to learn Italian or study it at all, or . . .

YARNELL: A little bit, yeah. My Michael did, yeah. He went to college.

SIGRIST: What about your parents? Were they still living when your kids were around? I'm just wondering if, like, your mother spoke Italian to the grandchildren, or something like that.

YARNELL: Uh, my mother was still around. My father died when he was sixty-five, but my mother died in '93, but she was sick for seven years.

SIGRIST: Did she speak Italian to your children?

YARNELL: Uh, yes, because she couldn't speak English, but they

didn't understand. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Could your mother understand English, even though she didn't speak it.

YARNELL: Yes, she did. Yes, she did.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Yarnell, thank you very much for letting me come out and ask you these questions. I appreciate it.

YARNELL: Well, I hope I answered your, the best I could.

SIGRIST: You did a great job. You did a great job. Especially about the Ellis Island stuff, which was important, certainly. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Angie Yarnell on Saturday, September 30, 1995, in Bridgewater, New Jersey. Thank you very much.

YARNELL: You're welcome.