

EI-734

CONNIE (INCORONATA) BARBIERI DE VITO
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LEVINE: Okay. Today is March 25, 1996. I'm here in The Bronx, right near Westchester Square, at the home of Incoronata De Vito.

DE VITO: That's right.

LEVINE: She came to this country from Italy in 1921 when she was sixteen years of age.

DE VITO: More or less, yes.

LEVINE: And today Mrs. DeVito is ninety years of age, and looks terrific. (they laugh)

DE VITO: Would you ever believe I have all my teeth?

LEVINE: (she laughs) Really?

DE VITO: Would you?

LEVINE: Yeah, I believe it. Yeah.

DE VITO: You want to believe when my father died? My father died, he was one hundred and a half years of age.

LEVINE: Really?

DE VITO: I was there, and on the birthday my sister and I went to see him.

LEVINE: Oh, wonderful. Okay. Well, I'm really looking forward to whatever you can remember.

DE VITO: Yes.

LEVINE: Anything you can remember, any stories of things that happened to you, anything. I'll ask the big questions.

DE VITO: All right.

LEVINE: And you fill in whatever you can remember. Okay. Let's start at the beginning. If you would say for the tape your birth date and where in Italy you were

born. Let's see, your birth date, you told me before.
July 22, 1905.

DE VITO: '05, yes.

LEVINE: And say for the tape where you were born.

DE VITO: Lurolugana[ph]. Lurolugana[ph], provincia de
Tensa[ph].

LEVINE: And when you, when you think of Lurolugana, what do
you remember about it?

DE VITO: I remember everything. I had a good life.

LEVINE: Was it a big town? Was it a village?

DE VITO: It's pretty big. Not that small, no. I think, for a
small town, I think it was almost three thousand.

LEVINE: Oh.

DE VITO: That's not small.

LEVINE: And did you have a big family?

DE VITO: Uh, no. We have, my mother had a big family. She had
seven children. I'm the youngest.

LEVINE: Oh. What was your mother's name?

DE VITO: Uh, Maria Antonia Cardone.

LEVINE: C-A-R-D . . .

DE VITO: Cardone.

LEVINE: O-N . . .

DE VITO: E.

LEVINE: E. Okay. And your father's name?

DE VITO: Giuseppe Barbieri.

LEVINE: Okay. And that's your maiden name, Barbieri.

DE VITO: Yes, that's right.

LEVINE: And, and your brothers and sisters, can you give me their names?

DE VITO: Well, I'll tell you what, I could give you their names, but I can't give the age.

LEVINE: No, that's okay.

DE VITO: But see, I'm the youngest.

LEVINE: Oh, you're the youngest. Why don't you start with the oldest and you can work your way down.

DE VITO: My older one was, uh, Angelo Maria, my older one. Then there's another one, Asunta. Then there's another one, Maria Giuseppa. Then another one Vita Maria. My mother liked to put two names. I don't know why. Vita Maria. In fact, she lived right by here. And, uh, another sister just before me, Carmella. Then it's me.

LEVINE: And did you have grandparents? Do you remember any grandparents that you had in Italy?

DE VITO: I remember like yesterday. My grandparents, my father's father, I remember him, it was late '80s when he died. His mother died one hundred and four years of age. Yeah, I know.

LEVINE: Wow. Now, what do you remember about your grandfather? When you think about him, can you remember anything?

DE VITO: No. I don't remember much, because he died before my grandmother. I remember her more than I remember. I remember him lay in bed. He was bad, he was sick, and that's it.

LEVINE: Okay.

DE VITO: I don't remember much.

LEVINE: And what about your grandmother? What, what kinds of experiences do you remember with her?

DE VITO: She was one of these that she loved to dress up, neat and clean. And whenever I go, she takes me in the house. I remember takes me where she had her cookies, or she had something, always. Because I was the youngest of her son. You understand? So she, for me she was, I was like a princess. (she laughs)
That's it.

LEVINE: Did you ever go any place with her, or did you ever do any things together with her?

DE VITO: No, no, no. She was too old. No, no, no. She was too old. I barely remember, because she died, she died pretty old.

LEVINE: And what did she wear, like? What would she be dressed in?

DE VITO: Oh, they dress like old fashioned, scarf. But always buttoned, nothing shows like we do here, you know what I mean? And she had all the, uh, she had a pin here,

always with a pin, a beautiful pin.

LEVINE: At her neck.

DE VITO: At her neck. And everything's, the skirt, and the skirt.

LEVINE: Would she wear colors, or would she wear mostly . . .

DE VITO: No, no. No colors.

LEVINE: No colors.

DE VITO: The colors over there was more like the kerchief they wear. That was the color mostly. And the waist, what they make the, uh, blouse, whatever, whatever they had in style. That's it.

LEVINE: And so now how many children did that grandmother and grandfather have? They had your father, and then did they have a lot of other children?

DE VITO: Wait a minute. My father, I remember his brother was named Luigi. Another name was Pasquale. And then they had one girl, Rosamaria. That's how I know. I know all of them.

LEVINE: Now, uh . . .

DE VITO: I know I knew all of them.

LEVINE: What was your father like? What kind of a person?

DE VITO: My father was a hardworking man, well off, work hard.
And he knew how to be very strict, because with me I,
once you obey your parents, you have no trouble. You
understand?

LEVINE: So you were an obedient little girl?

DE VITO: You have to, under him you have to.

LEVINE: What would he do if you didn't?

DE VITO: Like years ago, they slap you around. They give it to
you. See, my older sister, she was a little, she
likes to, uh, how would you say, maybe she saw a man,
or she saw a young man, and she laugh. My father
couldn't see to that. Either you'd be straight, or
you'd get it. Me, I never, my father never, never
looked at me sideways.

LEVINE: Now, you said your father was well off. How did he
come to be well off?

DE VITO: He was in this country three times. The last time he
went home, he worked on the Brooklyn Bridge, this

side. They laid the cement. They had to wait, years ago you had to wait three months to get a ship to go home. You follow me? So he stayed with my sister, my sister lived, uh, her name the, I remember the, 344 Pleasant Avenue, East Side, downtown.

LEVINE: Okay. So, in other words, your sister was here, too.

DE VITO: Oh, yes. My sister.

LEVINE: What, your father came first? Did he come before . . .

DE VITO: My father doesn't stay with nobody, because my father work on the railroad from, uh, his last stop was Albany, West Albany.

LEVINE: He worked on the train, or making the tracks?

DE VITO: No, no. No tracks. No, no tracks. That's what you call hard work.

LEVINE: So your father came over here, worked on the, uh, railroad.

DE VITO: Yes.

LEVINE: Then he, he went back.

DE VITO: Yes.

LEVINE: A few times. Then at some point your sister came over?

DE VITO: Wait a minute, wait a minute. When my father came in this, from this country, I don't remember. I wasn't born yet.

LEVINE: Right.

DE VITO: This is a long time ago.

LEVINE: Right. I understand.

DE VITO: I was born after, when he come home, about nine, ten months later I was born. And I don't remember anything else.

LEVINE: So, but when you said that address on Pleasant Street . . .

DE VITO: Pleasant Avenue.

LEVINE: Pleasant Avenue. Who was . . .

DE VITO: This my other sister, Vita Maria, that lived here before, the one we went home to see my father at his hundredth birthday.

LEVINE: Okay. But, now, you say your father lived on Pleasant Avenue, or not?

DE VITO: No. He was there just for a little while, that he worked on Brooklyn bridge.

LEVINE: I see.

DE VITO: Soon the ship came in, he left.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. Now, we talked about your father's mother and father. How about your mother's mother and father. Do you remember them?

DE VITO: Uh, no. I don't. I don't remember. They died pretty young. My mother only had one brother, and that's all I know.

LEVINE: What was his name?

DE VITO: I remember. Uh, Donata, Dennis. Denny. In fact, he's, he married my, uh, my aunt. My, wait a minute. My uncle was my mother's brother, and Rosamaria was my father's sister. That's it. I remember that much.

LEVINE: Yeah. Okay. So, do you remember the house you lived in when you lived in . . .

DE VITO: Yes, yes, yes. We lived in some place, the name was Piazza San Marco. It was very exclusive for the town, and we lived on this side, and on that side there was the church.

LEVINE: And do you remember, could you describe the house?

DE VITO: Oh, yeah. We had a big house. It was about six rooms, upstairs, downstairs. Yeah.

LEVINE: Did you have, like, a garden, or anything?

DE VITO: No, no, no, no. Not over there, because we, then my father bought property far away, and he had all the things that you can think of. We sell grapes by the tons, contracted for the year. We made everything in there. It was, you, you name it. We, then we had a garden, and he had the most beautiful watermelon you ever lay your eyes on. They were like this.

(she gestures) Because once you had water on the property, I don't know if you understand me what I'm saying, once you have water on the property, boy, that, everything's there. Tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, you name it, it's there. All kinds of green, all kinds of fruit.

LEVINE: Wow. Now, did you have livestock at all?

DE VITO: Not at all.

LEVINE: No.

DE VITO: No. No, no, no, no. You cannot have livestock when you have, uh, a vineyard. What happen? No.

LEVINE: Right.

DE VITO: You could watch, sometime I watch California, I say, my God, just like home. Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember the process of making the wine.

DE VITO: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Why don't you tell about that?

DE VITO: Well, the process we had, one big, at that time my father had a machine. Now, we're going back a lot of years. My father always had a machine, electric.

LEVINE: And what did that machine do?

DE VITO: Grind the grapes. And you put the funnel on and go down to the big barrel downstairs. Well, that's down, all the way down, because in the summertime you had to

wear a jacket, sweater, to go down there, because otherwise you'll catch cold, you'll get pneumonia.

LEVINE: So it was like a cave almost.

DE VITO: That's something like that. That's how you keep your wine cool and good, to last till next year.

LEVINE: And then did your father sell that wine? How did he do that?

DE VITO: No. Wine we never sell, but my father sold the grapes.

LEVINE: Oh.

DE VITO: Contract the grapes, yeah. That's all.

LEVINE: And when you, speaking of food, what were your favorite dishes, your favorite things that you liked to eat when you were a little girl?

DE VITO: We ate a lot of vegetables. We had, we used to slaughter our own pigs. You dried up whatever it was, the sausage, the, uh, what do you call now? Uh, bacon. You save all that when you slaughter the pig. We used to slaughter two pigs a year. And that's where we made all this.

LEVINE: And then did you smoke it? Is that how you preserved it?

DE VITO: No, no. Some time, you don't smoke it. Some time you, uh, some time you do. I don't remember exactly what they used to do. I mean, I remember my father slaughtered the pigs. I was always there.

LEVINE: Oh, tell about that.

DE VITO: I had to watch it.

LEVINE: Say what you remember from that.

DE VITO: Oh, well, I remember, my father would slaughter the pigs in the house. I was the one to see if the throat was cut. You know, what a nerve. Everybody, my sister, everybody run away, but I was there. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Would he slaughter the pig for a special occasion?

DE VITO: No, no. We slaughter two a year. One before, around Christmas, another one before March.

LEVINE: Around Easter.

DE VITO: Yeah. Two, the one around March smaller, the other

one was big, because we see, you save, when you slaughter a pig you save everything. You don't throw nothing away. Okay? You had to live that way.

LEVINE: Now, did your father raise these pigs, or he bought those pigs?

DE VITO: No, no, no. We raised them. In the country, not in a house, a (Italian word). In the country. Then there comes a time that you had to go home, or, say, around, let me see, around October, you hide the, uh, we live near the railroad that you could use transportation. A horse, or cars, to take this pig to (Italian word), you understand? And you only had to climb a few steps from the Piazza San Marco to the house. And that's it. Stay there a while, and then there's a time of the day, you set a date to slaughter the pigs.

LEVINE: And did other people do that? I mean, were you aware . . .

DE VITO: Not everybody could afford it, my dear. This is somebody that's well off, okay? Let me put it this way.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And did your family do other things because

you were well off that a lot of other families
couldn't do besides slaughter the pig?

DE VITO: No, no, no, no. You don't, they don't do nothing. If
you don't have a place in the country that you can
raise them, there is, years ago, now it's prohibited,
no more, you can't do that no more. It has to be out,
out of the town. At that time, they could raise it in
the house. And people, I remember, I said to my
mother sometimes, I said, "Oh, that house is very
dirty." She says, "But they have a pig in there."
But we never had a pig in our house. Because we, uh,
in the summertime we never, (Italian word). We were
always in the country. Well, that's the life, believe
me.

LEVINE: Do you remember going to school?

DE VITO: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Did you, what was that?

DE VITO: I went to school till the fourth grade. That's fourth
grade then, it was elementary school. Then if I want
to go to high school, I'll be in town also, uh, it's a
little further than. But at the time already, my

parents went to the country. I would stay alone home?

Not me. I wouldn't stay alone. For no reason at all. I just didn't like it. And I never go, I went to the fourth grade, that's it.

LEVINE: Now, your mother and father moved to the country? They moved out of the city?

DE VITO: No, you don't move. You have the property, you have a house there. You just go for the summertime.

LEVINE: Oh. Uh-huh.

DE VITO: In the wintertime, no. The wintertime, you know, everybody's home, in town.

LEVINE: I see. Because you're working out there in the summertime, too, right, with all the things that are growing.

DE VITO: Oh, yes. IT's a lot of work, it's a lot of, me, I never did any work. I'm going to be honest with you. I was young. What I will do when my father used to pick up the grains, you know the grains. Did you ever see grains the way they raise it here in this country? You never saw a picture of it?

LEVINE: Well, yeah, I've seen, yeah, I mean, I, like wheat
and . . .

DE VITO: Wheat, wheat.

LEVINE: Yeah, sure, yeah.

DE VITO: Not wheat. No. It has to be, it comes up, and then
gets mellow. There's a time to pick it up, and it has
to be picked up in the month of July, at the end of
July, and you've got your grain.

LEVINE: And you would help your father do that?

DE VITO: No, no, no, no. No, not me. I used to bring the
flask with wine, because he wanted, he'd never stop.
When you pick the grain, you have to work day and
night. You can't fool around. That's why I says it's
a lot of work, hard work, but the people survive very
well.

LEVINE: Now, did your father have other people working on that
land besides himself?

DE VITO: No. Only once a year his brother, name I told you one
name was Louie. He was the one, he liked to drink a
little bit. He came over to clear up the, where we

had the water, where the garden is, was. The water come, and we have, water comes out of the, like a mountain, and goes down the, oh, you fix like a bathtub, big thing. Every year the, uh, the dirt comes down. He had to clean it up. Every time, once he came over and cleaned it, that was hard work. That's why my father asked him. And he cleaned the whole thing up, and then your water would be there, and sometimes you have, it all depended. It rained much, sometime. Like here. You know, you have a drought, you know what I mean? Sometimes it rain, sometimes the water just went over. That's why I don't, all that, the tomatoes we had? Forget it. Okay?

LEVINE: Was your mother a good cook?

DE VITO: Very, a very good cook. A very good cook. See, in Italy you don't eat, over here, no matter what time, what time you get up, you eat at any time. Over there, about nine o'clock, that's your breakfast. Then when it comes that the, it's too hot in the afternoon, everybody don't stay out in the field. Everybody goes. We had a, something like a, the grapevine went up and covered the whole front.

LEVINE: Like an arbor.

DE VITO: Ah, beautiful. And you see those grapes this big, those, those, really sometimes I wonder. Sometimes I says, "How do you know this is good?" I says, "I just know." They don't know that I was born in it. And in the summertime, then when it gets in the afternoon about four o'clock, when the sun turns, and then everybody goes do what they're supposed to do. But you have to work hard to be wealthy, believe me.

LEVINE: Now, did your mother do any work besides taking care of the children?

DE VITO: No, no. My mother didn't work very much, no. No. She was in the house preparing the cooking, and preparing for the afternoon, or night. All depends, some time, nine o'clock it was still daylight, we'd still eat outside. We had no electric light there, you know. Kerosene lamp. It's quite a ways, it goes back, from the town, there it was back, three miles. It's quite a ways. There's no lights there. Now I understand they have lights all over. I says, "Sure."

LEVINE: What about religion? Was your family very religious?

DE VITO: You have to be religious. What do the Jewish people do for their religious? You have to do it. We did the same thing. My mass was nine o'clock mass. I had to go. Otherwise the priest from across the street, he calls my mother. "What's the matter? Your daughter forgot to get up this morning?" I was already going. My mother says, "She's coming." And they teach you, believe me, when they teach you, it's the Latin. I say the mass, when a young man who was in there, they run around. The priest calls me. Was not a regular priest, was a little higher, to serve the mass. I was never ashamed. I used to love it.

LEVINE: I thought it was little boys that served the mass.

DE VITO: They're supposed to do, but nobody's there. Sometime they missed out, or they're not around, or whatever. They called the people that understand the language, that understand the Latin. Number one, you have to know Latin, and that's why I was there. Many times I did that.

LEVINE: Did, did you think that . . . (she clears her throat) Excuse me. When you were growing up, was, were the boys treated differently than the girls?

DE VITO: No. It's up to you. I remember me, I, we sat down, and my girlfriend and I, we sat down, and we played jacks. Big, too, she was about seventeen years of age. We were only seven or eight. And they started to make fun, you know, started being funny. I didn't say a word. Then they sat down next to me. I got up, I go to the gutter, pick up a stone, and I broke his head. Then he comes to my mother, says, "You know, your, Carlo's my brother." She says, "My son is not here." She says, "My son went away with his father in the country." "No," she says, "she did it." It was me. She says, my mother said, "Are you ashamed to come over to say that she did to your son?" I says, "Get out of here before I throw you out." You see, over there it's like here, too. You want play with the boys, you play with the boys. I was always enemies. I don't want nobody ten foot near me. Always complaining. And, believe me, it's good.

LEVINE: Can you say anything else about your disposition when you were a little girl, what kind of a personality you had?

DE VITO: Well, personality was, I was very, I was intelligent, and when I couldn't get my way, I banged my feet. I

remember that. That's it. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Was your mother easygoing?

DE VITO: My mother, oh, my mother was easygoing. My mother was one of the sweetest women you ever come across. God forbid, my mother said to me one time, says, "Wait till your father gets home." Then I shut up. Because my mother wouldn't do it, but my father will. So I kept quiet. I was never nasty. I was never running around. I could never stand that.

LEVINE: What else did you do for fun? Like you said, you were playing jacks. What other kinds of things do you remember?

DE VITO: Nothing else, there's nothing else there, there's nothing.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything that had to do with music or dancing?

DE VITO: At that time, no. The only music was the organ in church. It's a long time ago, you know.

LEVINE: Okay. So, um, how was it decided that you would come to this country?

DE VITO: What I decide? I had one, we had one brother in the family. All girls, one brother. And that was such, I loved that young man so much. When he wrote a letter, I swear to goodness I used to cry when I used to read his letters. And I said to, I said to my mother, "I want to go see my mother, my sister and my brother. See, my sister that sent for me lived out west, Waterloo, Iowa.

LEVINE: Well, how did it, after your father came back, then what? Did your sister go over? How did your sister, when did your sister go?

DE VITO: Oh, my sister was married on the other side. And her husband came, then she came. My older sister, I'm talking about. And that's it.

LEVINE: I see.

DE VITO: Then when we came, I came here, I didn't come here for speculation I was going to go to work. I came here to see my, my family, because when you get to Ellis Island there, you have a different line, you know.

LEVINE: Well, who in your family was here when you came?

DE VITO: My brother, my two sisters.

LEVINE: And who was the young man that wrote the letters that you thought?

DE VITO: Mike, my brother.

LEVINE: I see.

DE VITO: And when you get there, everybody else, I was well dressed. I had a, my mother, everything is dressmaker, private, on the other side. There's no such thing as hanging on the rack here. Everything, a beautiful dress. And I saw one line on that side, the people that came here for different reasons, to go to work, they didn't know what they were, that's another line. You could find that out, too. There's another line. And, uh, you know, I never saw my sister, but being I had pictures on the other side, I recognized her.

LEVINE: Now, is this the sister who went to Iowa?

DE VITO: Yes, that's right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And do you remember the letters that Mike wrote that you, that made you feel like you thought they were so wonderful? What kind of . . .

DE VITO: Mike, he was a good boy. He was a, what would you call it? When you have five girls and one boy, you know, it means a lot. And I want to go over, come over and see my brother. Then when he came at the Ellis Island, it was him, he didn't come in. He was on a boat. HE just waved to me when we come out. My brother-in-law and my sister was there. My other sister didn't come. And my brother-in-law was there.

LEVINE: You said you didn't remember the name of the ship, but that it left from Naples.

DE VITO: Yes.

LEVINE: And you thought you traveled about twenty-one days.

DE VITO: Yes.

LEVINE: What else do you remember about that voyage? Well, first of all . . .

DE VITO: It was horrible. (she laughs)

LEVINE: First, do you remember when you left your home? Do you remember leaving your home?

DE VITO: My home? Oh, you have to go by railroad. It's quite a ways, from Naples to Lurolugana[ph] it's quite a

ways.

LEVINE: Did people get together to see you off?

DE VITO: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: And who was traveling with you?

DE VITO: Uh, wait a minute. My, uh, my brother-in-law, one of my sisters' husband, my brother-in-law, he was, uh, in fact, he was, uh, municipal, he was guard of the town.

LEVINE: Oh.

DE VITO: He wasn't policeman, but he was a guard. Like here, I don't know, over here they don't have things like that. But he took, with him I came to Naples. And I was there, and then I had, some relation of my mother had to have a, uh, I'm making soup here. I'd better close this up.

LEVINE: Oh, good.

DE VITO: It's closed. I, uh, see, when you're on the way, somebody has to sponsor you. It was my mother's second cousin, that he came here, and his name was Jerry.

LEVINE: And he sponsored you?

DE VITO: Yeah, oh, yeah. He had four, five of us, we came from the town. You have to have that.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Did you have, you got your visa and everything? Do you remember that part, before you came?

DE VITO: Oh, yes. He got the visa, and then you have the, uh, they take you to, you don't know what they did years ago. It was disgusting. To me, I was all right. They look at your hair piece by piece. X-rays, chest, x-ray, even my feet. What do my feet have to do with it? If I had flat feet, they wouldn't let me go. If I couldn't write my name, when I pass over there, when I pass there, they gave you, the American embassy there, to read, I started to read, he took it away from me. And somebody who was from my town too, because, he didn't pass because he couldn't read it. He never went to school. Whatever he learned, little words here and there. That's it.

LEVINE: So when you got to Naples, what, did you get any

examination there?

DE VITO: That's what I'm just telling you.

LEVINE: Oh, that was when . . .

DE VITO: That was everything. You had, the strand of your hair, piece by piece. You know what they're looking for? Nits. See, I was blonde to begin with, and I had hair down to here. They wanted to cut it when I got there. I says no. So they took a couple of people, combed that hair, see if I had nothing there. They left it. But I had hair, blonde. Okay. See, my father was red. They called Joe Red. That's why I was blonde.

LEVINE: And, uh, so when you got examined, then did you stay in Naples for any period of time?

DE VITO: Oh, no, no. We stayed there five days before we went on the boat, five days.

LEVINE: Was that the first time you'd ever been to Naples?

DE VITO: The first time, yeah. You don't go anyplace. Where do you go? Young people over there, they don't let you go traveling here and there. What it is today, I

don't know. IT's a lot of, because my son told me. He said, "Ma," because he went there. He says, "Ma, there's a lot of difference." I know. Not then, no. Unless you're married, uh, they had business to go there, it's fine. But, no. They don't go no place.

LEVINE: Was it, was it exciting for you to, like, go to Naples, to be in that city . . .

DE VITO: Well, right now in Naples I find, I tell you what I find in Naples. Very dirty. I didn't like it at all. See, where we come from, the street was clean. We live in the best part of the town. I didn't like it much.

LEVINE: And you didn't like it when you went there, when you were leaving for this country?

DE VITO: When we got on boat, I like it. We got on boat, all these five people I knew, this name, this man that took. There were a lot from my town, they came over. Yeah. But I could only stay with this man that was related to my mother, and he had five people. We all slept together.

LEVINE: And what was the voyage like?

DE VITO: The voyage was all right. We went to, uh, we went to Africa, you know?

LEVINE: Oh!

DE VITO: It was the first time I saw colored people. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you thought when you first saw . . .

DE VITO: I thought it was disgusting. I wanted to go back so bad, because they were all colored. So what do you do? Then most of the voyage we were in bed, we were so sick. You know how many days that is? And all the people I know that, the people I know, I never, you see, the worst thing is when the people got on boat. I did it myself. The first day I got there, I was hungry, I ate. You eat too much, that's the worst thing to do. You're not supposed to eat. Then, and then I went back with my daughter. She was seven-and-a-half years old, the one that lives up in Rochelle. I'll take her down, we went down to Rex, it was one of the biggest ships, just before the war, and come back with the Condo[ph] de Savoy which, great ships. Still, you had a little bit, not much. But she was good. Up and down, the dining room. "Mommy, you want

something? I'll get it for you." Me, right away my head was turning. She was good.

LEVINE: Did you have any experiences on that ship when you were coming from Naples to this country that first time, anything that happened aboard ship that you remember?

DE VITO: No, no, no, nothing, nothing.

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

DE VITO: Yes, I remember so clear. But, you see, it already, your stomach's already upset. You don't come into the harbor here, you go to Ellis Island. That's it.

LEVINE: What do you remember about that, about Ellis Island, your impression?

DE VITO: It was very clean. I liked the idea it was, the, uh, the guards they had there, they were very polite. They ask your name, they all understood a little bit, but that's all I could tell. And when they look at my, uh, my papers, going on the other side, the other people who were just on the other side, they were all eating sandwiches, coffee, whatever they feed them. I

didn't eat anything, because I was all ready to go out. So soon, uh, my sister says, uh, "Incoronata Barbieri," I recognized my sister, and I didn't, I didn't remember her. Why, because the pictures, sent the pictures over. And that's it.

LEVINE: What was it like to see her there at Ellis Island?

DE VITO: Well, I'll tell you what. The impression of Ellis Island was just my brother, because I didn't know her. She came here, she come in this country before I was born. And that's why I held myself, I can't explain to you, like you have no, no affection. You get used to it. That's it.

LEVINE: But was your brother there at Ellis Island, too?

DE VITO: He was on a boat. He didn't come, no, you couldn't come in, that many people. There were only two people.

LEVINE: So do you remember when you saw him on the boat?

DE VITO: I saw him, from the top, he called me from the water. Oh, God! Now, you know, it's too bad. My brother died very young. That's, young, fifty-one years of age. That's why. So, what are you going to say.

LEVINE: So what did he do? He called your name? He was in the boat, and he called your name?

DE VITO: He called my name. When we got home to my sister's house on Pleasant Avenue, I told you, he says, "First of all, I'm going to tell you something." He said to me, "I want you to listen to me. You're going to learn how to speak English. We don't speak Italian here." He scared the heck out of me. He says, "When I ask you (Italian), it's not (Italian). It's a glass of water. Because if you don't do that over here, everybody thinks you're a fool." That's why I got so scared, right away I catch up everything.

LEVINE: So he said if you don't do that over here, everybody what?

DE VITO: Everybody takes you for a fool.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. Yeah. (she laughs) Uh-huh. So you took his advice?

DE VITO: Oh, yes, I did, yeah.

LEVINE: And what was it like learning English? Was it hard?

DE VITO: For me it was nothing. Then I got used to it, then

naturally my husband was born here.

LEVINE: So how did you meet your husband? Well, first let's, before we say that, your first few days here, your first few weeks here in this country, do you remember things that struck you as new or different?

DE VITO: What I remember, one thing stuck to my, my sister had a brand new stove. Everything was coal and gas years ago. Struck me funny, because on the other side we didn't have no, no gas, not even coals. Wood fire. That's really the first thing that stuck to my head. I says, "This is great." Why, I don't know.

LEVINE: Anything else that you remember that was new and different?

DE VITO: Not too much.

LEVINE: So you stayed there on Pleasant Avenue?

DE VITO: I stayed with my sister on Pleasant Avenue. See, I'm supposed to go with my sister to Waterloo, Iowa. (she sighs) My sister had four boys, no girls. That's why she wanted me there. And the first thing, you know, why I did that, don't ask me, because they were good family, good, I didn't want to go, because

they were all boys in that house. Why? I stuck to your mind some time, and I didn't want to go. So my sister took off without me, and I was, remained with my sister here.

LEVINE: So then how did you meet your husband?

DE VITO: Well, I met my husband, I went to, we went to, well, you don't know this place. Our Lady of Mount Carmel, 187th Street, there's a church there, and we went to see, with my sister, see, it was (Italian), we went. And my father-in-law was there, my husband's father. And he says, "You want a real Italian girl?" He says, "We're going to see so-and-so." So they got in touch with, that's how I met him. That's it.

LEVINE: And what was your first impression of him?

DE VITO: My husband? Ah, he was, the first impression was I know he was a good man. Hard work, and good looking. He had hair, then he lost all his hair. All right? He was blonde, his skin was just like, just like mine, blonde. Then all of a sudden, about three years after we got married, he lost all his hair. You figure this out.

LEVINE: So did you see him for a short time before you got married, or a long time, or . . .

DE VITO: I, he used to come over to the house. I wasn't allowed to go out together. You know the old-fashioned way, which I didn't mind it at all.

LEVINE: But who was, who was being strict with you? Your father wasn't here, or was he?

DE VITO: No, no. My father wasn't here, my brother-in-law, my sister. My brother-in-law. My brother-in-law was big, six-and-a-half foot tall man. You want to play with that man? He was working on the subway.

LEVINE: Building it?

DE VITO: No, no, in the subway, conductor.

LEVINE: Conductor.

DE VITO: Yeah. That's it.

LEVINE: So when you got married, where did you go? Where did you settle?

DE VITO: With my in-laws.

LEVINE: Oh.

DE VITO: They live on, uh, Washington Heights. Uh, you know where the, I think you heard about a Jewish college there, in Washington Heights, there's a Jewish college.

LEVINE: Yeshiva?

DE VITO: Yeshiva. Right across the way my, my mother-in-law, I lived together with them.

LEVINE: And how was that?

DE VITO: We had to stay together. He, my husband didn't make much then. Then he had a better place to work, and then we moved downtown, and then we moved back. I lived at 2440 Amsterdam Avenue. The whole house, forty-seven tenants, they were all Jewish people. I was the only Italian. Believe me, I got along so good. They used to love me, and my kids. Then I had the kids. Oh, they were great, really beautiful.

LEVINE: Now, did you ever work?

DE VITO: Never. I never worked a day in my life. No, not at all.

LEVINE: And what did your husband do for work?

DE VITO: My husband had one of his friends, my mother-in-law's friend, they open up a barber shop on, Delmonico Barber Shop, and he had twelve barbers in there. So he wanted my husband, because this man here, the boss, he wasn't born here. My husband was different. He used to take the, uh, they call up for the appointment. He used to put down the appointment. And then he'd make good money around Christmas time. All those, I don't want to tell you. I used to, I remember all these men he knew. They were all Jewish people, all well off, every one of them. They loved him. He's, uh, every time it was Christmas, everybody with a dollar, everybody, but money. I don't mean little money.

LEVINE: Where was the barber shop?

DE VITO: On Madison Avenue, Delmonico. No, not Delmonico. No, no, wait a minute, wait a minute. Next door was the Chamber, then they put a, they just build it, then they put it down again. I don't understand, what was the, the whole thing about it. They just put them up, not just put them up, he was there about fifteen years. But they knocked that hotel down again. It

was a shame. Then he went to work on Delmonico across, right on, on 59th Street.

LEVINE: So that was his, that was work, a barber. That's what he . . .

DE VITO: No, no, no, no, no. Get the appointment.

LEVINE: Oh, I see.

DE VITO: Get the appointment for the people. He wasn't a barber, no.

LEVINE: So, um, when you look back on your life now, what things give you satisfaction that you did?

DE VITO: I had a good marriage, good children, good grandchildren, and I have great-grandchildren now.

LEVINE: What was your husband's name?

DE VITO: Joseph.

LEVINE: And your children's names?

DE VITO: Uh, my son, he was the older one, Pete. Uh, the girls, Sarah, she lived in Fairfax, Virginia, and Marie is this one here, lives in New Rochelle.

LEVINE: And how do you feel about the fact that you came to this country when you were . . .

DE VITO: I feel great because I'm glad I did, but I hate the, then I went to see my parents when I took my daughter over.

LEVINE: Were you, when you came here, when you first came here, and then you got married the next year, were you happy you had come? Were you always happy you had come?

DE VITO: I was happy. Yeah, I had a good man, and I was in love with the man, and he was good to me.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So then what prompted your return, your going back to Italy?

DE VITO: Oh, you mean to visit?

LEVINE: Yeah.

DE VITO: Oh. Well, then I went to visit, it was about, let me see now. I took Marie the first time when I went with the boat. The second time I went to see my, my parents again. It was my father's hundredth birthday. My sister lived down here. We went together.

LEVINE: How did it seem to you when you went back to your, to where you had grown up? How did it seem to you after you lived here a while?

DE VITO: It didn't seem nothing, because he, my, my mother, my mother and father was there, that house wasn't any more. They sold the house. I was with, my sister, they had a beautiful home, but I mean home. The terrace was, from here to that fence all the way back there. Flowers galore, beautiful life. And that's where my father, when I went over, I says, "Pop, how you feel?" "Oh," he said, "pretty good." His hearing, forget it. Because mine the same thing now. I could hear the grass growing in the backyard. And he said to me, "How's your husband?" I says, "He's all right." He says, "I saw in a picture," he says, "he looks to be a very good man." And he says, I says, "How's your teeth, Pop?" "You know," he says, "I'm so mad. For the first time I lost one tooth on the side here." (she laughs) Okay? He used to shave with a straight razor. My nephew over there, he bought this new stuff they had. He didn't want it. That never shaves so close. You should see it. And in the veranda, the lodge, they call them, in Italian,

lodga. Well, I call veranda. You know what I'm talking about? Sit there, put the glass there, you sit down on a little stool and, uh, on the chair, and shave. His strap, and I says, and he was reading without glasses. Ah, I said to my sister, "Is that Pop . . ." See, this was the, and the bathroom was here. It was a big room. It was not a regular bathroom. The bathtub on that side, and you could, here. And he was reading aloud. I says, uh, "Who's reading that paper?" "Pop. What do you mean who's reading that paper." "Where's the glasses?" He said to me, "What's those lenses on your face?" when he saw me. "What's the matter with you? Throw those things out."

LEVINE: Can you remember any, uh, things that your mother or your father told you about, you know, how you should live, what you should do, what you shouldn't do, right or wrong?

DE VITO: You see, that goes up to individual child. Then I was a level head. I wasn't the type to run out, run around, this and that, and they never told me anything. They says "God bless you" when I left, and that's it. Nothing else.

LEVINE: Do you keep any of the ways of, that you learned when you were a little girl in Italy? Are there any customs, or any ways of doing things?

DE VITO: The cooking only. I'm sorry, only the cooking. That's it. Oh, yeah. The cooking. It has to be.

LEVINE: And how is this time in your life now that, now that you're older and your children are grown?

DE VITO: Well, I'll tell you what. I have good children, and I have great children, and I have great grandchildren now. I feel my life, it's full. I got enough. I live here alone, I got a ten-room house here. All right, the three rooms upstairs, I close it up. My daughter used to live here, the one that lives in Virginia. Her name's Sarah. That's about it.

LEVINE: Do you, do you have a circle of friends? Are there people around that you still see, or . . .

DE VITO: This here, now, my daughter comes, they go shopping for me. When my son comes down, puts me in the car, we go a certain place, we go to Arthur Avenue where the old Italian stuff are, all the goodies that you want, we go there. Then over here I have a good

neighbor here, he's Italian, she's Filipino. They're very good people. And down further I have an Irishman that takes care of everything in the yard here. Then I have another friend right by there, she's always ringing my bell, what you need, what you don't need. I don't need anything now. This refrigerator, I have a regular freezer downstairs, and I have another refrigerator downstairs. I have another apartment down there. I have a stove. When my family used to come in every weekend, what do you think we do? So, my life was, I tell you what. My life was wonderful.

I can say, uh, my husband never stopped me to do anything. I end up, one time, since 1931 I was driving a car, 1931, I got my first license. Then I bought myself a Chrysler, Chrysler New Yorker. And I have trouble with it. It's not a lemon law like today, something goes wrong. You, you go here, you go there, and you have to hold the, uh, the wheel on the side, because he'll go the other way. You know how many time I went to the garage? They couldn't do anything about it. It was like, today it's different.

Then from then I bought an Oldsmobile. I bought an Oldsmobile, and then my son used to go up Goshen, New York. That's where he got married, that's where he

lived, near there, where he is now. And then I says, "What I have to do?" I'm left without a car. So I went out and bought a Chevy. I bought three new Chevy, one after the other. I didn't like the way they go, I change another one. I'm going to tell you something else. I never got a ticket, never passed a red light. When I, uh, you know, I stopped by my license, I got a nice piece of paper from the State of New York, the A1 driver. I never, never, never remember, uh, I went all over the creation, don't get me wrong. I went downtown. I went to Orchard Street there where all the Jewish, I had to go shopping there, I went with the car. I didn't know how to take a subway. I didn't know how to take a bus. You told me today where to go with the bus, I don't know. Remember.

LEVINE: Some of the things that you remember, because you lived through them, like the Great Depression. Do you remember when the Depression was?

DE VITO: Not me, not my house.

LEVINE: No?

DE VITO: No, no, no, no. No, no. We always have plenty, we

all have good home. When I bought this home here, and when I left, you know what bothered me when I left the, my friend, the Jewish people, on 2440 Amsterdam Avenue?

LEVINE: Where was that on Amsterdam? Uptown? Way uptown?

DE VITO: It's near the Yeshiva College, like I told you.

LEVINE: Oh, right.

DE VITO: Not, about four or five blocks away from there. It's near there.

LEVINE: How about the second World War? Do you remember when it was wartime, when . . .

DE VITO: Yes, I remember the wartime, naturally.

LEVINE: How did it affect you?

DE VITO: It didn't affect me at all. My husband's making money, we always had enough. And my children were old. My son never went into the service because he had flat feet. See, my son had rheumatic fever, and he was in the hospital, medical center, three months. Years ago because you had rheumatic fever, they'd let you stay in the hospital, and they don't let you get

out of bed, and he got so heavy. So, no. I never had, I'll tell you what. I was never depressed. If anything, I was, oh, how am I going to explain to you? I had everything I want.

LEVINE: Can you remember anything else that happened in this country, maybe a political thing, or a, or anything that affected you that was a change, like maybe when television came out, or when, uh, anything like that?

DE VITO: No. It didn't bother me. Before the television we had the Victrola. Then I had a beautiful television, Feda[ph]. And the kids, they used to stay around, I remember. Down in the living room then, I don't even remember, dining room or living room, sit down and listen. Now, now I have a television here, one in there, one upstairs. I had one down in the basement, my grandson take it, the one in Virginia.

LEVINE: Well, it sounds like you've had a very nice life.

DE VITO: My life, it's wonderful. And I can't complain. I can't complain now, because I have good children, and good grandchildren. They, that phone didn't ring today because I tell them what I was doing, otherwise that phone will kept ringing all day. I don't want to

hear it. I told them, everybody stay off my phone.

(they laugh)

LEVINE: Okay. Is there anything else you'd like to say before we close? I think maybe we covered it all.

DE VITO: I think I did.

LEVINE: I think you did a wonderful job. I want to thank you so much. It's really been a pleasure . . .

DE VITO: Well, I'll tell you . . .

LEVINE: Talking with you.

DE VITO: I'll tell you what. Glad you come over.

LEVINE: Thank you.

DE VITO: It's something that you feel like talking, because my life was wonderful. The only thing that wasn't wonderful any more when I lost my husband. That was, that's it.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

DE VITO: But I live in this house here fifty-five years, bought this fifty-five years ago, and I'm still here.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, we're going to end here.

DE VITO: Yes.

LEVINE: I've been speaking with Incoronata DeVito, who came in 1921 when she was sixteen years old from Italy.

DE VITO: That's right.

LEVINE: And today she's ninety years old, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service on March 25, 1996, and I'm signing off.