

EI-739

MICHAEL JUDICA

BIRTHDATE: JANUARY 6, 1906

INTERVIEW DATE: April 23, 1996

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 90

RUNNING TIME: 1:00:04

INTERVIEWER: PAUL SIGRIST

RECORDING ENGINEER: PAUL SIGRIST

INTERVIEW LOCATION: SOUTH WINDSOR, CONNECTICUT

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

SICILY, 1920

AGE: 14

SHIP: CONDEROSO [PH]

PORT: PALERMO

RESIDENCES:

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, April 23rd, 1996. I'm in South Windsor, Connecticut at the South Windsor Nursing Center. And I'm here with Michael Judica. Mr. Judica came from Sicily in 1920 when he was 14 years old.

JUDICA: That's right.

SIGRIST: Michael, can you begin by giving me your birth date, please.

JUDICA: 19—January 6, 1906.

SIGRIST: January 6, 1906.

JUDICA: That's right.

SIGRIST: Where in Sicily were you born?

JUDICA: Mellile [PH]. It's a town.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

JUDICA: Mellile—M—M-E—Mellile—L-L-I—Mellile—Mellile. Wait a minute. Mellile—Mellile—Mellile. It's spelled with—with M—with M-E—I mean, [unclear]—with a—with e.

SIGRIST: At the end of the word, you mean?

JUDICA: No, I mean over here where you see e, what you call a is e. But over there Mellile was—why don't you—why don't you—

SIGRIST: We'll look it up later. I can look it up later. What was the next biggest town?

JUDICA: Next biggest town?

SIGRIST: Yes.

JUDICA: Oh, used to be Syracuse.

SIGRIST: Oh, so it was a—it was a city then.

JUDICA: Yeah. You see, what—but it was a province of Syracuse.

SIGRIST: Of Syracuse.

JUDICA: Province. What you call, province?

SIGRIST: Yes. Provinca de Syracusa [PH].

JUDICA: Yeah, near there.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And what part of Sicily is that in?

JUDICA: What do you mean, what part?

SIGRIST: Is it in the western part of the country, the eastern part of the country?

JUDICA: That's the eastern.

SIGRIST: That's the eastern part. What—what sticks out in your mind about the town that you grew up in as a child? What—what sticks out in your mind about being in that town?

JUDICA: Oh, well. We used to go to school, you know. And we used to own [unclear] farms. We never used to work ourself. We used to have people working for us. Like, I had the two uncles, both the rich people. And they used to have beautiful horse. I always like horses. You know, when I come here, I bought myself a horse.

SIGRIST: But your uncles had these horses.

JUDICA: Yeah. My father never end up work on the farm. He used to work in the office. So—and I—I used to go—my uncle sometimes to run away from school. I used to get up to go to school [unclear] I used to take off. And I used to walk maybe two, three mile to reach the farm.

SIGRIST: What did they grow on the farm?

JUDICA: Oh, they were all growing wheat. They grow olive, you know? A lotta—lotta—lotta—lotta thing to—to make a business. They used to have, you know—there was a place, you know, with a horse [unclear]. And you know, how they make the wheat? You know when they make wheat? Take the wheat from the—that thing there. The horses, they go around and around and around. They step on—and they [unclear] the—and they used to sing, you know, want the horses to go round, like a roundtable at the—with the wood there. And we used to watch, the summertime, you know. You know [unclear]? Huh? You know [unclear] are? They used to steal their wheat from there. And you could see them and all—and a lion, oh, like soldiers. They steal it and they bring it back in their home. You know? We used to watch them. And—and, of course, you know, then they used to bring the olive, you know, in—in—in a place like—like, I don't know how you call—[unclear] call a stumblemento [PH], like a something where they—they crush the olives and everything. What do you call that?

SIGRIST: Like a—a press?

JUDICA: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: An olive press where they—

JUDICA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —smash the olives down?

JUDICA: Yeah, they used to smash. They used to have a—they used to put, you know, inside the—some place, a big—it was a big wheel, you know. [unclear]. And that was a big—a round thing, you know. They used to throw the olive there and that thing used to—the horses to go through

that thing there and push the wheel. And they used to smash the olives. Then after they do that, they're put inside a—some kind of bag, you know. They're put in that and the press to—to make the olive—the oil that come out. And some presses come out the oil and other presses to come out, you know, like a black stuff. You know, that is no good and they threw away that. And they used to make olive oil.

SIGRIST: What did they put the olive oil in?

JUDICA: Nothing.

SIGRIST: What kind of container did the oil go into?

JUDICA: Like a big—big—like some—like a big [unclear]. I mean a strong meg—they were not [unclear] by—by a rag. It was something else, you know.

SIGRIST: So that it would hold the oil inside it?

JUDICA: No, it didn't hold the oil. That oil used to run in—in the—in the [unclear] somewhere.

SIGRIST: I see. So the crushed olives are inside the bags.

JUDICA: Yes.

SIGRIST: The oil was running through the bag.

JUDICA: That's right.

SIGRIST: I see.

JUDICA: And then they used to make a—olive oil.

SIGRIST: And what did they do with the olive oil?

JUDICA: What did they do?

SIGRIST: What did they do with it?

JUDICA: Why, they used to sell it. Like, you know—you know, we had the barrels in my home. You know, we had the—we had another—another—another—another place, you know, next to my house. We used to call it Maya Zae [PH]. That means like, you know, a—like, you know, when—when you—when you—you [unclear] things inside someplace. What do you call that? We had the barrel, as you—the men used to go inside that to clean it. That's how big—used to be. You know that?

SIGRIST: And that's where oil would be kept?

JUDICA: And they used to keep—put inside those barrels and then we used to sell, you know, to the stores anybody wants to buy oil.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much you would get for your oil?

JUDICA: No, I don't remember that. I mean, I know—I know it was expensive.

SIGRIST: Were there different kinds of olive oil?

JUDICA: No, just olive oil.

SIGRIST: Just olive oil. Can you describe for me the house that you grew up in?

JUDICA: Yes. What do you want to know about the house?

SIGRIST: Well, just describe to me what it looked like.

JUDICA: You know, the house, the way they're built, you know, they're not built like over here with the wood. Way they're built without—without a—stones are big like this. You know? For the simple reason because over there we usually get a earthquake.

SIGRIST: An earthquake?

JUDICA: Yes. You know, sometime we used to get earthquake and they could see everything shake. So they built those house with bigger stones like this. You know? And they very strong. Because I remember my mother, when we used to hear sometime with the—the ceiling shake, we'd say, "Oh, [several words unclear]." I used to ask God, you know, [unclear]. [sentence unclear]. And sometime we used to get a storm—storm weather, just like they got in—in Miami. Big thunders, you know. But the wind over there was only one month, January, where I come from.

SIGRIST: What kind of a roof did the house have on it?

JUDICA: Oh, they got a big—they got—they got a lot of wood, you know. I mean, and the—and the—and the ceiling—I mean, the top, the roof, you know, is not paper like over here. That's by what you call a clay. They made it by clay and they put over there. So in other words, if you throw a stone on top of that you could break that. But that's what they used to use that.

SIGRIST: How many rooms did your house have?

JUDICA: We had five rooms.

SIGRIST: Five rooms.

JUDICA: Yeah, we had the room for my father to—to [unclear]—to, you know, work for his—for his labor. You know. You know, in office work. We had a room for my sisters. We had a room for us, me and my brother and a room, my mother and the kitchen and the lady who used to cook for us. A servant—what you call a servant.

SIGRIST: Tell me about the kitchen in the house. What was in the kitchen?

JUDICA: The kitchen. We had the place, you know, to make bread. And we used to make bread in our home. You know, they make that flours. They put in some place. They put in water and then they start working, making like a—like a—like a paste. You know, something like that. And then they make bread and then we used to put in that thing there in the oven. And they cook it. We used to make all kind of things, like in—for instance, you know, we used to make things, you know, for the wintertime. You know, for the—you know, the—oh, what do you call over here? Beautiful. We used to make with [several words unclear] everything and [unclear]. We used to have in the wintertime, you know, for just—for a little thing, you know, in the morning. Beautiful.

SIGRIST: Like dried fruit?

JUDICA: Yeah, but they used to be with—with—mix up with something. We used to make a dry sausage. You know, the sausage?

SIGRIST: Sausage?

JUDICA: The pork sausage. You know, we used to make it—we used to make it get dry. You know, get dry and then in the wintertime we used to [unclear]. Was beautiful. I don't know why they can't do over here. I [unclear] tell my daughter about that [unclear].

SIGRIST: Did you—did you keep animals in your house or at the house?

JUDICA: Oh, we had the—a dog.

SIGRIST: But you—where did the pork sausage come from? Where did the pig come from then?

JUDICA: We used to buy it from the store. Like, you know, my father, when they used to bring the fish—you know, the—the fish men, they used to come from fish. And they bring the fish, you know, in the market—what we call over there ma—here, we call it Main Street. Over there, we used to call it biatsa [PH]. And my father used to give it, you know, the okay. They used to bring us the best of fish they had in the market to us. Like, you know, then they got a St. Jos—St. Joseph holiday. They make it—or place it over there in this, what you call a biatsa. And the people there bring it, the gift, you know. And there they sell it. And I—and my father used to call me, “G-Jo [PH].” Used to call me G-Jo. You know what that means, G-Jo? G-Jo means something special. Used to call me from Main Street. I was about—well [unclear]. I was a little over the—this—that place over there, my house. And he used to come out. He used to say, “G-Jo.” And I used to play with the kids. And I used to go and he used to give me things that the fishermen—they used to give it to us, like lobsters, shrimps, a lot of good things from the sea. That’s why I say to sometime to people, “You don’t know what’s gone into this mouth.” You know? But that’s life. Now, I cannot claim that. My daughter’s got those things now.

SIGRIST: What was your father’s name?

JUDICA: Salvadore [PH].

SIGRIST: And what do you know about his family background?

JUDICA: He’s coming from Baron [PH]. They were Baron people. They still are.

SIGRIST: Baron—B, like a baron who owns—

JUDICA: Barone [PH], Barone.

SIGRIST: —property.

JUDICA: Barone.

SIGRIST: Barone.

JUDICA: Baron. It’s—it’s high class. In other words, a blue blood. Over here, we call blue blood. All right. So he marry my mother.

SIGRIST: Do you know how his—they met? How your parents met?

JUDICA: No, I don’t know that. All I know is that my mother used to tell me some Italian. I used to ask her. I says, “How the hell did you met my father?” Because he was from another town. He was not from the same town.

She says, "I met"—"How did you do it?" I said. "Well," she says. "You know, they used to come here for holiday," you know. When we got a holiday over there? San Sebastian [PH]. You know, San Sebastian is the—is the—the—the patron of the town. You know when I say patron is the b—

SIGRIST: Pageant?

JUDICA: He's the boss of the town. When the big holiday, you know, a lot of people, they come from every town. Even a Chinese. We used to get even a Chinese to come over there to sell things when they got the—the holiday over there, San Sebastian. Now, they've got over here a [unclear] town. They still got the same thing. They got the church with the sa—with the name San Sebastian. So—and that's how they met. But, you know, my father and my—my—the uncles—I don't remember my grandfather though.

SIGRIST: What—what did your father do for a living? You said he did office work. What specifically did he do?

JUDICA: I don't know. All I know, he used to work in the office. That's all I could tell you.

SIGRIST: What was his personality like?

JUDICA: Oh, he was a good man and a tough man too. I mean, he was a man that—he don't give a damn about nobody, especial my—my uncles. They never used to get together with my uncles, who—my mother brothers. You know?

SIGRIST: When—when you were a little boy—

JUDICA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —was there something that your father taught you how to do?

JUDICA: No. I remember [chuckles] when he used to come from work, you know, in the wintertime—you know, over there we got a—we got a coat, you know, for the wintertime. Over there, they use a cape. Something, you know, you put around this way in the wintertime. We used to go on to him, me and my sisters—and the dog used to bark. His name was Leon [PH]—Leonin [PH]. Lion. He used—he used to jump—he used to dance with us. And us, as kids, we used to—we used to—we used to be under his cape, you know. And my mother used to prepare the food for us.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

JUDICA: Sabastiana [PH].

SIGRIST: Sabastiana. And what was her maiden name?

JUDICA: I don't know what you mean, her maiden name.

SIGRIST: Her name before she married your father. Her last name.

JUDICA: Sabastiana Cammito [PH].

SIGRIST: Cammito.

JUDICA: Cammito.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

JUDICA: Cammito. C-A-M—Cami—M-I-T-O.

SIGRIST: Cammito. And what do you know about your mother's background?

JUDICA: She come from a rich family. As I say, I never see my—my grandfather or grandmother. I don't—I never see them.

SIGRIST: You never saw them—your father's parents or your mother's parents?

JUDICA: That's right.

SIGRIST: Yeah, I see. On—tell me a little bit about your mother's personality.

JUDICA: She was a good lady.

SIGRIST: Is there a story that you'd like to tell about your mother when you were a child?

JUDICA: She was a good lady. I remember, you know, there used to be a man, you know. [unclear], we used to call him. He was pert-near blind, that poor man. He had two sons. One used to be in the macaroni business. You know, used to make pasta. And another one was a butcher. And these kids, they used to put a [unclear] around his face when he used to walk. I never forget that. And he used to come to me—to us for charity. And he used to come to us and my mother used to give him some bread, some fruits. [crying]

SIGRIST: That's okay. Just take a minute.

JUDICA: Yesterday. I remember like it was yesterday. They used to—they used to—

SIGRIST: That's fine. [unclear]

JUDICA: Those were grandchildren of his and that poor man, you know, he used to live in a place, you know, in—like a—like a—I don't know, a something—there was some place over there. There used to be a little—like, a cave. And this poor man used to live there.

SIGRIST: The blind man—

JUDICA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —lived in a cave.

JUDICA: And he used to come to us, you know. And my mother used to help him. And these grandchildren, they used to light a match in front of him, his eyes. Can you imagine that?

SIGRIST: They were very cruel.

JUDICA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yeah. What—what—when you were a small child, what—what games did you play as a small child? What kinds of games did children play in Sicily at that time?

JUDICA: Well, we used to play—you know, we used to jump each other. You know, you—you bent down a little bit. We used to—jump over.

SIGRIST: Like leapfrog.

JUDICA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Call that leapfrog in this country.

JUDICA: Or we used to have a rope, you know, pull each other, you know, when—when—a bunch this side and a bunch other way. Or we used to [chuckles] throw stones to each other. That's something that I know over there.

SIGRIST: Did you ever get hurt?

JUDICA: One time, hit him in—in the head. Yes. Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any—any little songs or nursery rhymes that you learned as a small child?

JUDICA: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Could you—could you say one or sing one for me that you learned when you were a small child?

JUDICA: I'm already [singing in foreign language]. I used to sing it to my daughter.

SIGRIST: But when you—when you were a little boy in Sicily.

JUDICA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yes.

JUDICA: But they—I don't remember what they used to sing to me, though.

SIGRIST: I see.

JUDICA: Because I was a baby.

SIGRIST: You were a baby. Did your mother or father ever tell you anything about the day you were born? Is there a story about when you were born that they told you later on?

JUDICA: My father never tell me anything. All I know, my mother, she used to telling me that my father destroy everything she had. You know it? She says, "Your father's always been strufotend [PH]." Strufotend means you don't give a damn. You know, he don't care about them from—by—for my mother—brothers. And they don't care for him either. That's why they never helped my mother.

SIGRIST: But they let you go to visit them on the farm.

JUDICA: I used to run and go to them.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

JUDICA: They don't want to take me but I used to leave—leave the school and go to them, because they used to have beautiful horses and I like to ride it. And as I say, one time a horse kicked me right in my chest. Boy, it knocked me down and I lost my voice for awhile. I couldn't talk. Good thing he didn't get—sometime I think, good thing didn't hit them in the

face. Well, he would have killed me. So I still remember that—was yesterday.

SIGRIST: Tell me about how World War I affected your family.

JUDICA: World War I?

SIGRIST: What do you remember about that period during World War I, 1914 to 1918?

JUDICA: Well, my brother had to go in the army. You know, and on account, because, you know, my brother—my father had some cousins, big shot. They give my brother a good job there in the army. Instead of being in infantry, they put him in artillery. [unclear]. They got a two—two places. They got a first, a second, of third place for artillery. He used to be at the end.

SIGRIST: He was in the third artillery.

JUDICA: That's right. In other words, he was safe. No chance to get killed. That's—I remember that. Because he's a cousin [unclear] my father that—to make him do that. Still, I don't know where he was.

SIGRIST: You never saw him during that time?

JUDICA: No, I never see him.

SIGRIST: Well, what about your own family? Were you affected by, like, food shortages or anything like that at that time?

JUDICA: After my father come over here, yes. After my father come over here.

SIGRIST: What year was that?

JUDICA: Well, he come here in 1915. And around 19—1919, 19—1920 before we come here, we really used to be in a bad shape for—for—

SIGRIST: Can you describe a little bit some of the hardships that your family had to endure at that time?

JUDICA: Well, I remember one time, you know, we had picture, big [unclear] with the—with a God, picture. You know, with the—with the—with the crown.

SIGRIST: A picture of God?

JUDICA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

JUDICA: And she was so despair, crying, she punch the picture. I never forget that. And she said, “God forbid—when God put food in the house, he’s going to take away when he destroy.” And it—it did.

SIGRIST: What did you eat during that time?

JUDICA: We used to eat good but that still—I mean, we’re not eating very good. And we used to beg, you know, our parents—my uncles to feed us a little bit. In other words, we used to ask them to [unclear] like a charity, which we’re not used for that. We used to live good. But my father destroy everything. So that’s why he come over here. And when he did come over here, he took only one—one daughter with him, the oldest one. And my mother says, “Why don’t you take the whole family, as long as you’re going to America?” “No,” he says. “I’m going to come back.” So when he come over here he didn’t come back. And we never used to get no money. And my mother, one day, you know, was so—so despair, crying. And the picture, I never forget, was near the door right there. She punch it and she was crying, says, “God forbid.” She says, “When you put the food in the house, he’d take away when he destroy it. Just like happen to me. You know, I had a good life over here. Good life. I got a farm, you know. We used to raise chickens.

SIGRIST: This is here in America.

JUDICA: Yeah, Win—South Windsor.

SIGRIST: We’ll talk about that in—

JUDICA: Yeah, all right.

SIGRIST: A little bit later. Why did your father take one of the daughters, as opposed to one of the sons?

JUDICA: I don’t know. I don’t know. That’s the reason I don’t understand.

SIGRIST: Do you know where he went when he came to the United States?

JUDICA: Yeah, Middletown.

SIGRIST: Why did he go to Middletown?

JUDICA: Because most of my—my people from my town, they all go there, Middletown. Yeah, that's—that—Middletown is—all my—my piasan [PH]—what do you call it—people, they go there.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when he left to go to America?

JUDICA: No.

SIGRIST: No. What was the name of the sister that he took with him?

JUDICA: Gressie [PH].

SIGRIST: Gressie.

JUDICA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Gressie.

JUDICA: Graciela [PH].

SIGRIST: Graciela.

JUDICA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And—

JUDICA: She was the oldest one.

SIGRIST: She was the oldest. And who was next?

JUDICA: One was Carmelina [PH].

SIGRIST: Carmelina.

JUDICA: Another one was Angelina [PH].

SIGRIST: Angelina.

JUDICA: Another one was Helena.

SIGRIST: Helena. And then—

JUDICA: Me.

SIGRIST: You, you're Michael.

JUDICA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And there was another brother too. Correct?

JUDICA: The brother was the biggest one, the oldest.

SIGRIST: He's the one that went to war.

JUDICA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And what was his name?

JUDICA: Jovanny [PH]. John.

SIGRIST: Jovanny.

JUDICA: Yeah, John.

SIGRIST: Oh. What did—what did Graciela when she came to the United States with your father?

JUDICA: I don't know.

SIGRIST: She wasn't in communication at all?

JUDICA: No.

SIGRIST: No. I see. What—what did you know about America?

JUDICA: When we come after 1920 she was already marry. She marry a fellow that her brother was the boss of the Sal—the Russel [PH] Company in Milltown [PH].

SIGRIST: The Russel Company?

JUDICA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Uh-hmm. When you were growing up in Sicily, what did you know about America? How did you think about America?

JUDICA: What I know it? Used to be one man—he come once in awhile—come from America, next to—to us. Was not a rich man, no. He was just a working man. But once in awhile he used to come back. And we used to ask him about America. And he used to say, "America. God forbid if you get sick." He said. And we used to say, "What do you mean? God forbid if we get sick?" "Oh," he says. "The doctors, they ruin you. The

lawyers,” he says. “They kill you. They don’t care for people, “ he says, “in America.” That’s what he used to tell us and I believe that. That’s true. And you know it’s true—not—they don’t want no help, the people. They want a sick people. That’s why they went to college.

SIGRIST: How—how did your mother go about preparing to come to the United States in 1920? How did that come about?

JUDICA: How? I don’t know how we did. We sell probably all—all our furniture and everything to get the money to come here. That’s all we did. We sell it. Sell that [unclear].

SIGRIST: You still hadn’t heard from your father or you did hear from him?

JUDICA: Oh, and then when we’re here we see him.

SIGRIST: But before you got here, you—you hadn’t heard from him at all?

JUDICA: Yeah, we used to hear him all right.

SIGRIST: Oh, okay.

JUDICA: But he never used to send no good money to make us live.

SIGRIST: I see. So you knew he was in Middletown.

JUDICA: Yes.

SIGRIST: But he wasn’t sending anything back.

JUDICA: That’s right.

SIGRIST: So your mother sold all the furniture.

JUDICA: Everything, even—even the house.

SIGRIST: And the house. What else did you and the family have to go through before you could leave Sicily?

JUDICA: Then we went in Syracuse where my brother was. You know, my brother get marry after—you know, and he live in Syracuse, because he had a good education too. So he used to live there. And we stayed there. Then I had another uncle. My mother brother—he was a drugstore man, pharmacist. You understand what I said? Pharmacist?

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

JUDICA: We live with him for a little while.

SIGRIST: Was that also in Syracuse?

JUDICA: No, it was in Priolo [PH].

SIGRIST: Priolo.

JUDICA: That's a small town. That's a small town. Then, you know, I don't know how we did—did decide, we ship it to America.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

SIGRIST: Do you remember what the family took with them to America? What did you have with you when you came?

JUDICA: Just [chuckles]—we—we had—[unclear] we had the clothes on. We had nothing to bring here.

SIGRIST: And where did you have to go to get on the ocean liner?

JUDICA: What do you mean?

SIGRIST: Where—where did—what city did you have to go to—

JUDICA: Palermo.

SIGRIST: To go to Palermo.

JUDICA: That's the capitol of Sicily. It's the biggest city—biggest city in Palermo—in Sicily.

SIGRIST: And—and—and was it in Palermo that you got on the ship?

JUDICA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes. Do you remember the name of the ship?

JUDICA: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: What was it?

JUDICA: Conderoso.

SIGRIST: Conderoso. And was that the first time you had ever been in Palermo?

JUDICA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Does anything stick out in your mind at, being a 14-year-old in this big city for the first time?

JUDICA: Well, you know how kids are. They look around. They see things. I used to see them—the—it's a mountain over there. They call it Etna.

SIGRIST: Mount Etna.

JUDICA: It's a volcano now. Don't you know? It's a volcano?

SIGRIST: Yes.

JUDICA: Sometime it [unclear] snows. Sometime you see [unclear] over there. So I—we used to look at how big it was. But it was a beautiful city.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay in Palermo before you got on the ship?

JUDICA: Not very long. Maybe about a day.

SIGRIST: Who's traveling now? It's you, your mother—

JUDICA: And my little sister, Helen.

SIGRIST: And Helena, Helen. Just the three of you.

JUDICA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What about the other brothers and sisters? Obviously, one's in America.

JUDICA: My brother stay in Italy.

SIGRIST: Yes.

JUDICA: And the other, Carmelina, Angelina, they went before us.

SIGRIST: They went to America before you.

JUDICA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Were they—were they with your father in America?

JUDICA: Yeah, with my father. Yes. But I mean, they didn't go with my father.

SIGRIST: No, but they came later on.

JUDICA: After.

SIGRIST: But they [unclear]—

JUDICA: They come—they come in at Middletown, just the same. And then they get married, of course. And I remember one guy, you know—he's dead now. He never used to like me. [chuckles] And I used to see the way he used to kiss my sister. "That son of a bitch," I used to say. "Look at that." He used to put her hands down there—how you like that—when they used to kiss. They used to kiss, you know, separate, you know, in a different room. And I'm nosy guy, you know. I'm a nosy guy, you know. I can't help it. I used to watch it to see what they doing. And I used to say, "Well, that son of a bitch." I said, "Look at what he does."

SIGRIST: He was getting a little too personal with your sister.

JUDICA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Tell me about being on the Conderoso and what you remember about being on the ship.

JUDICA: Yeah. Yes.

SIGRIST: Where did you sleep on the ship?

JUDICA: Those—they got it, like—like, you know, soldiers. They—they got what you call a—one, two, three.

SIGRIST: Bunk beds.

JUDICA: Bunk beds, yes. What do you call—bunk beds, yes.

SIGRIST: Bunk beds.

JUDICA: But I never used to eat. I used to drink vermouth because I—I couldn't stand the sea. I got seasick.

SIGRIST: Who was—who—how many people slept in one room?

JUDICA: Oh, maybe about a—let's see—not too many. Maybe about six, seven or eight.

SIGRIST: Was your whole family in one room together?

JUDICA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yes.

JUDICA: Yes, they were together, went with us.

SIGRIST: So—so you didn't like being on the sea. You got seasick.

JUDICA: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Yeah. How—

JUDICA: No, I like the sea but I don't like when—[chuckles] when the ship goes up or down. You know? Jeez, when used to get a storm, you know. And the water used to come, Boom! The ship, you know, sound like a thunder. And the ship used to go down. But I say it was a big ship, you know. We never be afraid of that to say we're going to get drowned. It was a big ship. There were two ship that day, Conderoso and Condeverte [PH]. That one was Condeverte. Condeverte means green.

SIGRIST: The green count.

JUDICA: Yeah. They were two beautiful ships and they were expensive to travel in the ship there.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much the passage cost at that time?

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

SIGRIST: What did your mother do while she was on the ship?

JUDICA: [chuckles] Nothing. She used to stay with us.

SIGRIST: Were there other places on the ship that you could go?

JUDICA: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Where did you wander on the ship?

JUDICA: But I never used to go no place because it—you know, when the ship would move, you know, you can't walk. I used to feel like if I want to be a—like a drunk driver. So I still stay—lay down in the bunk bed there and drink a little vermouth once in awhile.

SIGRIST: That would settle your stomach a little bit.

JUDICA: That's all. That's all.

SIGRIST: What time of the year is this? Do you remember what month you're traveling?

JUDICA: Well, I know was not wintertime. Was not wintertime. Was the summertime. I don't remember the real month though.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how long the ship—the ship took to get from Sicily to the—

JUDICA: Ten days.

SIGRIST: Ten days.

JUDICA: Yes.

SIGRIST: And do you remember being up on the deck of the ship ever?

JUDICA: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Yeah. What—what could you see up on the deck of the ship?

JUDICA: We used to see the water, the sea. Sometime we used to see a big ship. You know, what you call—a fish, I mean.

SIGRIST: Oh, a big fish.

JUDICA: Big fish sometime jump in the water. But that when—when the water was nice [unclear]. When the water was working hard, I used to sleep.

SIGRIST: [chuckles] Right.

JUDICA: [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Good time to go—go under.

JUDICA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when the ship came into New York harbor?

JUDICA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Did you know what that was?

JUDICA: We call that Strata de Liberta [PH]. Las Strata de Liberta. The Statue of Liberty. Yes.

SIGRIST: And what happened—when the ship came into the harbor—

JUDICA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —what happened then?

JUDICA: What do you mean, what happened then?

SIGRIST: Well, the—the ship comes into the harbor.

JUDICA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Then what's the next thing that happened?

JUDICA: Well, then, you know, they bring around somewhere in New York or somewhere where my father's come and pick us.

SIGRIST: Did you have to go to Ellis Island—

JUDICA: What—

SIGRIST: —after the ship came in?

JUDICA: What do you mean?

SIGRIST: Well, wh—when the ship came into New York—okay? When the ship came into the harbor—

JUDICA: No. I was talk about first, we went to the island where the—when the—before they come there they bring another place they call a Batteria [PH]. That must be the island.

SIGRIST: Well, there's—there's the Battery. The Batteria, the New York Battery. That—that's probably when the ship docked.

JUDICA: Used to call it Batteria. I don't know how they call it in English.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Well, what do you remember about being there?

JUDICA: Well, was a nice place. In was good we're in America. And I say, "Where's my father?" We had to wait for my father. Then they had to

bring us to someplace over here in New York or somewhere or to—to land it. And then my father has to get us.

SIGRIST: And tell me what it was like to see your father.

JUDICA: Oh. [chuckles] That seem something beautiful. Really bea—

SIGRIST: [unclear]

JUDICA: We feel safe after we see my father.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And where did your father take you?

JUDICA: In Middletown.

SIGRIST: How did you get from New York City to Middletown?

JUDICA: By train, I guess.

SIGRIST: And do you remember anything about that trip, going to Middletown? Maybe seeing things you've never seen before.

JUDICA: Well, we used to see farms. We used to see a lot of things. Sometimes we see cows in the field.

SIGRIST: What about when you were on the ship? Did you see anything for the first time that you had never seen before when you were on the ship?

JUDICA: Well, when I was in the ship, you know, I see how beautiful the ship was and how big is, you know. I mean, before you—ship was moving, you could walk around. It was a real big ship. They used to have a lot of things. They—they used to have a rope thick like this, you know, in the ship there. I think those they—when they—when they—the ship landed, to tie it up.

SIGRIST: Got big ropes.

JUDICA: Yeah, big—thick one. Or there was so many there, round, big one. We used to look at those things. We used to see, you know, the people that go in the office. You know, they got a thing on the front when they—when they drive with a ship there. We used to watch those things.

SIGRIST: So you had some fun on the ship.

JUDICA: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: You weren't sick the whole time, I guess.

JUDICA: No, I was not sick but I couldn't eat.

SIGRIST: Couldn't eat. What job did your father have in Middletown?

JUDICA: What job? He was working with this—this man that the—a brother that marry my sister. He was the boss over there in the—in Russel Company.

SIGRIST: The Russel Company. And what kind of company was that?

JUDICA: They used to make brakes for the—for the—for the cars.

SIGRIST: Brake for automobiles?

JUDICA: Yes.

SIGRIST: They made brakes for automobiles?

JUDICA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Where did your father live in Middletown?

JUDICA: In Middletown.

SIGRIST: But where in Middletown? Do you remember what kind of building he lived in?

JUDICA: Oh, it was a very bad. Was Green Streets. That's when they begin, when we come here, is near the river. Gosh, I was thinking the other day about the flood. If that place is still there, it must be a—a flood. Then we move. And my sister bought a house. And we used to—she had a two-family house and we live on Pearl Street.

SIGRIST: Pearl Street.

JUDICA: Yes. First, they got a Main Street. Then there's a Grand Street; then there's a Pearl Street. That was a beautiful place. But first, in the beginning, we used to live in a green house. We used to call it Green—Green Street, we called that. It was a—there were all one section of houses. You know? Just—

SIGRIST: Did it have electricity in it?

JUDICA: [chuckles] No, we used to use a kerosene lamp.

SIGRIST: What about—did it have a bathroom in—in the house?

JUDICA: Yes, they did.

SIGRIST: Did have a bathroom.

JUDICA: But they had no—no—no—took a bath. You couldn't take a bath. That's what I think of sometime, like in the Old Country, you know. All the money we had and everything, we had no running water. We had a man to get the water for us. I remember the guy. He was not a—I mean, a really smart guy, you know. He was a poor man. He used to come to us. He used to get a jug big as this. He used to go and fill it up and bring it to us. And Mother used to give him some money. But that—sometime I think about I had four sisters and my mother. How the hell they take a bath if there no water? This I think now. You know that? That time I didn't think about it.

SIGRIST: Well, how did you take a bath in Middletown?

JUDICA: In Middletown they had a place, you know, somewhere. My brother-in-law used to bring there. We used to take a bath.

SIGRIST: Oh, you mean like a public—

JUDICA: Yes.

SIGRIST: —bath place.

JUDICA: That's right.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Did they have one for women also?

JUDICA: I think so. I mean, in the Old Country, that's what I think of many times. How the hell—no, because we had—they wanted to wash me everyday, you know. I said, "Jesus Christ." I said, "I'm not stinking." I said to them—"Well, you've got to get washed." "Yeah, but I'm not dirty," I—and then I said to them. I said, "Look, where I come from we had no water and we never used to wash it." I said, "How come"—I said, "Then we never used to stink?" That's the question. I never remember my sister stinking [chuckles] or my mother stink, or me stinking. In fact, I'll tell you one thing that you don't know. The reason why the Italian people they got a shine hair is because they don't wash it. You know that? Because when you wash your hair all the time you take the oil, the natural oil of your skin and your hair, they get dull. Don't you know that? Ever see a dog how they shine it? I had a—a dog [unclear] of Mike. He's a farmer

dog and he used to be so shine. I never give him a bath. And I got a pond over there on the farm, big one. I never took him over there. In fact, I bought myself a boat, you know, to go over there. But I try once and I get scared. [chuckles] I says, "Never mind"—I says.

SIGRIST: Tell me about how you learned English in the United States.

JUDICA: How I learn it?

SIGRIST: How did you learn English, to speak English?

JUDICA: I don't know. By teach—listen to you, listen to the other guy.

SIGRIST: Did your father speak English?

JUDICA: Not very good, even though he was here before me. He was a real Italian. And there's a lot of people in Middletown. Not now—maybe now they've got a good education. But I'm talking about many years ago. Those people, they come from my town—from hometown. They couldn't speak English at all. I remember [unclear] factory where my father was working. One time my brother-in-law, he took me over there just to see what they're doing. And by God, you know, the people, they don't—they don't have to speak English at all. I says, "How the hell do they do it?" But, you know, the boss was Italian. My brother-in-law was Italian. So they used to do all right.

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

JUDICA: [laughs] You want me to say that? "You'll go to hell," or "You son of a bitch." Huh? That's—

SIGRIST: All the words you weren't supposed to learn.

JUDICA: Yes. [laughter] That's easy to learn it.

SIGRIST: Did your mother try to learn English?

JUDICA: No, my mother never talk English.

SIGRIST: No? Never had any reason to, I guess.

JUDICA: No, no reason at all.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

JUDICA: Because she had [unclear] reason she going to work. You know what I mean? She was [unclear] woman to stay home. That's all.

SIGRIST: Did they try to put you into school when you got to America?

JUDICA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about that experience?

JUDICA: They put in a school and then, you know, they had to stop because I was sick.

SIGRIST: What were you sick with?

JUDICA: Epileptic.

SIGRIST: Epileptic. Yeah, you were—

JUDICA: Yes.

SIGRIST: —epileptic. Yeah.

JUDICA: Yeah. So I didn't go no more.

SIGRIST: Then—then what did you do during the day if you didn't—

JUDICA: What did I do? I used to play with the kids sometime.

SIGRIST: How did they treat your epilepsy? What kind of treatment did you get for that?

JUDICA: Oh, I got a good treatment. I got a good medicine for that.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what it was, how in 1920 they would—they would treat that?

JUDICA: In the begin, you know, they don't know about. But, you know, they give me some injection. My father used to give it to me. And believe it or not, I've got a—two needle in my back. Used to break the needle in my back—in my—in my butt. You know? [unclear] to shake and break the needle there. And I still got two inside there, which I've been asked them what I'm—you know, they take x-ray and this and that. I said, "Could you see it?" No [unclear]. But it's still there somewhere.

SIGRIST: Do you know what he was injecting into you?

JUDICA: I don't know. But it was not the medicine I got now. The one I got now is a good one.

SIGRIST: Well, this is, you know, 76 years ago. It's different.

JUDICA: Oh, yeah. That's a long time ago.

SIGRIST: A long time ago. Can you tell me about the first job that you got in the United States?

JUDICA: The first job?

SIGRIST: The first job. How did you—

JUDICA: I never worked for nobody. After my mother die—you understand?

SIGRIST: How old were you when she died?

JUDICA: Well, I was still young. I was a little bit over 20 years old.

SIGRIST: So this is just a few years after she got to America.

JUDICA: Yeah. After she died, my sister took my father with them and they throw me out. So only one sister help me. One sister help me. She was good. At that time, was a bootlegger business, you know. They used to sell whiskey. When I used to go—and the other sister—I remember this, one I call Gressie, the older one.

SIGRIST: Graciela.

JUDICA: Yeah. I asked her to—if I could sleep in her house. Well, says, "For tonight be all right." Then her husband, when he comes from—with a store. He had a business, you know. He wake me up and he says, "Didn't your sister tell you, cannot sleep here?" I says, "Oh, yes. She tell me." They used to throw me out. And this sister, Carmelina—God bless her soul. She helped me to learn my trade, barber. Yes, she make me sleep—she had another place where they used to keep the whiskey and all—has to sleep in the other side, the house over there. And I learned the trade and all in the barber school. And then after I learned the trade and all, I met my wife. One night, I was [unclear]—there used to be a Front Street, the one time, and now where they call it Columbus Avenue. That time it used to be Front Street.

SIGRIST: This is in Middletown?

JUDICA: No, over here in Hartford.

SIGRIST: Oh, in Hartford. Uh-huh.

JUDICA: Yes. Front Street was all Italian and Jewish, all cheap house and everything. So one night I was looking for a friend of mine and had to climb on the second floor. And the light was so dim, you know. They go out [unclear] see it. And I went—went up and I said to myself, “Gee.” I says, “I hope I—I’m afraid I’m going to get lost up here.” So my wife answer me, “Maybe.” And I fell in love with her without even see the girl. Would you believe it?

SIGRIST: What was her name?

JUDICA: Zena [PH].

SIGRIST: Zena.

JUDICA: Regenzena [PH].

SIGRIST: Regenzena.

JUDICA: Yes, I used to call her Zena.

SIGRIST: What was her married—maiden name? Her name before she married?

JUDICA: Labella [PH].

SIGRIST: Labella.

JUDICA: Yes. So what happened? I went away. I didn’t see her. Next day, you know, I’m a funny guy, you know. I used to be good looking, well dress up. I knock on her door. As I say, those people—like my family from my wife, they come from poor family. Understand? Her father was a goats man in Italy.

SIGRIST: A goat? Goat.

JUDICA: Goat man. Yeah, he used to sell them milk for the—house to house. So they opened the door and I said, “Where’s your daughter?” And they look at me just like when they see God. There were [several words unclear]—another one. They all look at each other. Then [unclear] say, “Who the hell this guy is?” I say, “Where is your—your daughter?” [unclear]. And I come in—inside the house. I says, “Where is your daughter?” I says, “The one I saw last night.” I said, “[unclear] last night.” She was in other room. She come out. “Oh,” I says. “Did you tell your mother I’m going to marry you?” She started smile when

she's—when I said that. And my mother-in-law, she still look at me—who the hell this guy is? Because they never see a good-looking guy like me. I was a real good looking. I got a nice moustache, beautiful, a fancy one. You know, with a razor I used to fix it good. So my father-in-law was there and I says, "What's your name?" He said, "Joe." Well, I says, "I'm going to marry your daughter. Don't you know that?" They didn't say a word. They didn't say, "Who the hell are you?" They said—they don't say nothing. So little by little, you know, we started to get together—together. Then I got married and my sister helped me [unclear] was a Depression time.

SIGRIST: What year did you get married?

JUDICA: In 1929, was a Depression time. And the one—we had the Republican president. What was his name? I forgot. Hoover? [unclear] Hoover?

SIGRIST: Hoover.

JUDICA: Yeah. And my sister still helped me. I remember one time, you know, I had the chicken in my refrigerator. It was already come, you know, to investigating of the house from the—from the—the town—what you call—the welfare. She says, "You got a chicken?" I says, "Yeah." Well, they said, "Then you don't need no help"—she said. "What do you mean, I don't need help? You mean to tell me somebody cannot give me a chicken?" I said. "That's my sister give me a chicken. Is anything wrong with that?" "Well, if your sister give you a chicken," says, "ask her to help you." So I grabbed by the arm, you know, and I said, "Get out here before I throw you out." And I push him out.

SIGRIST: Michael. We don't have a lot of time left and I want to save some time so that you can sing for us on tape. What I—what I'd like you to do is I—did you used to sing at the barbershop?

JUDICA: Yes.

SIGRIST: I would like you to sing something that you used to sing while you were working at the barbershop.

JUDICA: Give me a little more water and I'll—I'll see if I could sing.

SIGRIST: Because that—we—we—I'm going to pause this—just the name of the song you're going to sing.

JUDICA: "Let the World go Away."

SIGRIST: Something in Italian.

JUDICA: Oh, in Italian.

SIGRIST: Something in Italian.

JUDICA: Oh, my God. I don't know if I could sing to that. That's opera.

SIGRIST: Well, can you—can you do something? Some Verity [unclear].

JUDICA: [singing in Italian]

SIGRIST: Thank you. What was that?

JUDICA: "Torno Sorendo." [PH]

SIGRIST: From—

JUDICA: Italy.

SIGRIST: From—Italian song.

JUDICA: That's Italian.

SIGRIST: I see. Michael, I'm going to ask you one more question before we end.

JUDICA: Yes.

SIGRIST: And I want to know if you had some advice to give to a young person—you're 90 years old now—what advice would you give a young person so that they could lead a long, happy life?

JUDICA: Oh, [unclear] be a teacher. I—

SIGRIST: You've got to do it in two minutes or less.

JUDICA: You see, it's how you see people. They give coffee to children. That's wrong. You know, you'll ruin the health of the people because the coffee, it don't suit in your nerve. It paralyze your nerve. You understand? This has been proved to me by people come in my home. The first thing, they ask me for a cup of coffee or smoke cigarettes. And I says, "Why?" "Well," he says. "You know, it's a habit." No. I say, "You feel nervous, don't you?" "No," he says. [unclear] I said, "Go ahead, smoke. But let me open the window," I said, "if you want to smoke in this house." Because I don't smoke. I used to smoke the pipe.

SIGRIST: So no coffee, no cigarettes.

JUDICA: No coffee, no soda, no junky food.

SIGRIST: No junky food.

JUDICA: A lot of people in love with junky food, like potato chips. That's no good for you.

SIGRIST: We've got to end now, Michael, but I want to thank you very much for letting me ask you all these questions about your life. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Michael—

JUDICA: That's all you want to know?

SIGRIST: —Judica on Tuesday, April 23rd at the South Windsor Nursing Center. Thank you very much.

JUDICA: That's all you want to know?

SIGRIST: That's all we have time from you.

JUDICA: How dare you say that.

SIGRIST: [chuckles]

[END OF INTERVIEW]