

EI-740/GARRONE

EI-740

CONCETTINA BALLIANO GARRONE

BIRTH DATE: NOVEMBER 30, 1888

INTERVIEW DATE: APRIL 23, 1996

RUNNING TIME: 40:00

INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME

INTERVIEW LOCATION: SOUTH WINDSOR NURSING CENTER
SOUTH WINDSOR, CONNECTICUT

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 9/1997

TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

ITALY, 1909

AGE 20

PASSAGE ON "THE AMERICA"

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mrs. Garrone was 107 years old when she was interviewed, making her the person of greatest advanced age ever interviewed for the Ellis Island Oral History Project at the time of the interview (4/23/1996). Present also during the interview were her son and nieces. Funding for this transcript, one of many interviews conducted with Italian and Sicilian women, was generously provided by interviewee Elda Del Bino Willitts, EI-8. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of Oral History, 8/14/1997.

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, April 23, 1996. I'm at the South Windsor Nursing Center in South Windsor, Connecticut with Concettina . . .

GARRONE: Garrone.

SIGRIST: Garrone. Mrs. Garrone came from Italy about 1909 when she was twenty years old. Her birth date is November 30, 1888, and she is a hundred and seven years old.

GARRONE: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yes. And you look great for a hundred and seven.
That's just a terrific age to be at.

GARRONE: Yes.

SIGRIST: You're the oldest person I've ever interviewed.
Mrs. Garrone, where in Italy were you born?

GARRONE: I born, Italy, (Italian).

SIGRIST: Can you describe . . .

GARRONE: Carrobetto[ph].

SIGRIST: Carrobetto[ph].

GARRONE: Carrobetto[ph], (?). (Italian)

SIGRIST: Do you enjoy speaking Italian? Do you like to speak
Italian.

GARRONE: You bet I like it.

SIGRIST: Good. Try to speak English to me, because I don't
understand Italian.

GARRONE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: No.

GARRONE: I talk English.

SIGRIST: Okay, good.

GARRONE: I make some mistake.

SIGRIST: That's quite all right. That's quite all right. What was your father's name?

GARRONE: Giovanni Balliano.

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

GARRONE: Uh, uh, (Italian).

SIGRIST: That's okay.

GARRONE: He works on this field.

NIECE: In the fields.

GARRONE: He used to work outside.

SIGRIST: He worked outside.

GARRONE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: He worked outside. Did he work on a farm?

GARRONE: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yes? What kinds of things did they grow on the farm?

GARRONE: Wine, grapes.

SON: A vineyard, Mama.

GARRONE: (Italian)

SIGRIST: That's all right. Let her . . .

SON: (Italian)

GARRONE: (Italian)

SIGRIST: Mr. Garrone, actually, maybe if you went and sat down.

SON: Yeah, uh-huh.

SIGRIST: He, he grew . . .

GARRONE: Giovanni Garrone.

SIGRIST: Yeah. What did your father look like? How did your father look? What did his face look like?

GARRONE: Uh, look? I don't know, actually.

SIGRIST: What color hair did he have?

GARRONE: Eh?

SIGRIST: What color hair did your father have?

GARRONE: Uh, small, small.

SIGRIST: Small. He was a small man. What was your mother's name?

GARRONE: My mother, Angela Balliano.

SIGRIST: And, um, what did your mother do in Italy?

GARRONE: With who?

SIGRIST: What kinds of work did she do around the house?

GARRONE: My mother, she work on the, cook everything and do the dishes. Do the dishes. And after she worked in the (?), the mill. They used to make (?) for somebody else.

SIGRIST: What kinds of food did you eat when you were growing up in Italy?

GARRONE: What to eat? Pretty good, pretty good.

SIGRIST: Who made the food in your house?

GARRONE: My mother.

SIGRIST: What was your favorite food that she made?

GARRONE: My favorite thing we eat the beans.

SIGRIST: Beans!

GARRONE: Beans.

SIGRIST: How did she prepare the beans?

GARRONE: The beans, my mother, she cooks the beans, she made beans for the whole town.

SIGRIST: She made them for the whole town.

GARRONE: Okay.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

GARRONE: And she was a good shopper.

SIGRIST: And she was a good shopper.

GARRONE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Where did she, where could she go shopping in Italy?

GARRONE: Oh, just in a small town. In the same town.

SIGRIST: In the same town she could go. Did you have brothers and sisters?

GARRONE: If I have brothers and sisters? I had one, two, three, four, five. Five sisters.

SIGRIST: Five sisters.

GARRONE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Who was your favorite sister?

GARRONE: Everyone.

SIGRIST: Everyone. (HE LAUGHS)

GARRONE: I (?) to everyone.

SIGRIST: Yes. What kinds of games did you play when you were a child?

GARRONE: (?) Well, when I was a child, I play the ball.

SIGRIST: Played with a ball.

GARRONE: The ball.

SIGRIST: What would you do with the ball?

GARRONE: I take a (?) together (?) ball, in front of you. You

got the ball, you got the ball and (?). Let me show you the ball, they tell you where you go. (?) go around your way, that's all.

SIGRIST: And that was your, that was a game that you played.

GARRONE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Do you remember any songs that you sang in Italy?

GARRONE: Eh, it's kind of hard to remember that. Any one you remember, you help me.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any songs?

GARRONE: Which one?

NIECE: I don't remember some of them.

SIGRIST: That's all right. We'll go on to something else. Do you remember how your family celebrated Christmas in Italy?

GARRONE: Oh, yeah! Oh, yeah! I remember that. My mother, she prepare a week before. A week she called, what do you call it, the (?)? What do you call it? I forgot the name.

SIGRIST: The name of?

GARRONE: (Italian)

NIECE: A chicken, Monya[ph]?

GARRONE: No. I forget it. A turkey!

SIGRIST: A turkey!

GARRONE: Turkey!

SIGRIST: Turkey!

GARRONE: Another thing is to buy a (?), you go out, you buy a turkey. But not the turkey's too small. A big one, because I've got nice family all over here. Okay. Anyway, he come home with a big, beautiful turkey. I still remember. I was five years old. My father (?) too good, (?) everyone (?) one, see, you put in the (?), it come nice, and you cook it. (?) to cook the turkey. And you cook so beautiful, (?). My mother, my mother's mother, Caterina[ph], she was very happy, and she used to do it (?). Like her mother (?), and Friday, (?) Sunday, (?). What, (Italian)?

NIECE: Thanksgiving.

SIGRIST: Thanksgiving?

GARRONE: Sunday, Friday.

NIECE: Thursday.

SIGRIST: Thursday?

GARRONE: I forget!

SIGRIST: That's okay, that's okay.

GARRONE: That's okay?

SIGRIST: That's okay. You're doing a great job. Can I ask you another question?

GARRONE: Anything.

SIGRIST: Good. Do you remember what kind of clothes you wore in Italy?

GARRONE: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. (SHE COUGHS)

SIGRIST: That's all right. Take your time.

NIECE: She's got a cold.

GARRONE: I (?). I run in the (?), they used to call Moncarlo[ph], Moncarlo[ph]. It's a city where you go

buy your coat, you can buy anything. But I (?) you can buy the best thing you can get.

SIGRIST: You can get the best deal there.

GARRONE: I (?) like my mother, I say, "Come on, Contadina, come with me." I bring her there, we buy (?). First time, I get for my granddaughter, my grandmother, she was awful good, good, good grandmother, and work. And, how you say? "All right. I (?) what you told me." I come home, I put the table, the grandmother. "What you have today?" "Oh, (?)." And this woman, she was, how (?) she used to work on the (?), on the farm, she used to work (?). You know (?)? She put her hand right there on the flour. It was (?) my mother, she died. The flour, how does she say, this mother. (she is moved) And this thing belong to you, too. And this thing belong to you, too. And this one, too, belong to you, too. And this one belong to you. My mother, she say, "This one must belong to her." But my mother, she say, "Mother, (Italian)." My mother, she say, "(?)." And she give this one to my mother. All right? And (?). They had to hear the cooking, the frying. It's frying nice, nice, nice. My mother, she was so happy, she started crying. She was so

happy. She had (?). (she is moved) It's something, I guess. She cooked, and (?). She (?). (Italian) Risotto, risotto.

SIGRIST: Did you ever help your mother do the cooking? Did you ever help your mother cook?

GARRONE: No. My mother, she cooked!

SIGRIST: She did all of that. What were your jobs at the house?

GARRONE: My mother, she keep the apples, green apples. Me, my first sister, she was a, she was married already, you know? (?) She was married. That she was married, she had to help my mother, because my mother, she worked (?), and she was sixteen when she was married. She was sixteen, sixteen years old. And she said to your mother, "Mother, don't worry about it. Don't worry. I'm going to help you." (?) she had, she had beautiful, beautiful lasagne. Beautiful risotto. Beautiful (Italian). (?). My mother, she was so happy.

SIGRIST: Can I ask you another question?

GARRONE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes? Did you go to church in Italy?

GARRONE: Oh, ho, the first time. The first time (?), everybody in the church. It was not too far away. My mother, she said (?). Come on, Louie. Louisa, my sister, your (?). Maria, the third one. (?), the fifth. Yeah, the fifth one, Rosina. (?), (Italian) Maria.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the name of the church?

GARRONE: Maria, Rosina, Louisa. I forget.

SIGRIST: You forget. Did you like going to church?

GARRONE: (she laughs) Oh, yeah. Oh, (?). (?) We had to call everyone. When your mother (?). And we have two names to go. (?) in Italy (?). Very quiet. And (?). You make, you, you (?). And (?) to you, I (?).

SIGRIST: Do you remember a prayer in Italian?

GARRONE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Could you say a prayer for me in Italian?

GARRONE: (she prays in Italian) (she coughs)

SIGRIST: We have water, too, if that would be helpful. Would

you like a glass of water? Would you like some water?

GARRONE: (?)

SIGRIST: Water.

SON: Acua. You've got to say, "Acua."

SIGRIST: Acua.

GARRONE: Acua? Oh, yeah. I like it.

SIGRIST: Here. (voices off mike) Mrs. Garrone is just having a sip of water. I should say for the sake of the tape that there are one, two, three, four, five family members in attendance.

GARRONE: Oh, my! Thank you. (?)

SIGRIST: Can I ask you another question?

GARRONE: Sure.

SIGRIST: Why did you want to come to America?

GARRONE: (she coughs) The first time I want to go to work because I (?) my father. My father, he come around. I was fifteen years old. I come, he come with me, he teach me to go to school, to do (?), to weave, to

cook. My father was a good cook, too. My mother, she usually cook.

SIGRIST: Why did your father want to come to America?

GARRONE: He didn't come to America.

SIGRIST: He didn't.

GARRONE: No. He teach me home, to cook. And he said, "Be careful. Your mother, if she doesn't think it's good, she give it to you." I tell her to give it to me. (?), my mother. (?) And (?) the school, first school. First school I went Aviana[ph]. Second school Aviana[ph], third school, I forget.

SIGRIST: That's okay. That's okay. Um, did you enjoy going to school?

GARRONE: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: What was your favorite subject in school?

GARRONE: (?) Everything. I was having a good time. I see everything. (Italian)

SIGRIST: Mrs. Garrone, could your mother read and write?

GARRONE: On the bike?

SIGRIST: Could your mother read and write?

GARRONE: Oh, my mother? You bet.

SIGRIST: She could.

GARRONE: She wrote along on the family. (?) with your mother, with my mother. Oh, yeah. And she say, "Be careful. You (?) and you're going to get it." (?) We say, "Mama, we (?)." My mother, she give me a test. She (?), and my mother she say, "(?)." My mother, she a happy woman. (she coughs) Something else?

SIGRIST: Yes, I have another question for you. Did you, who came with you to America?

GARRONE: What? What?

SIGRIST: When you came to America, who came with you?

GARRONE: (she coughs) (VOICES OFF MIKE)

SIGRIST: That's fine. That's okay.

GARRONE: (she coughs) Oh, my. (she coughs) With me in America it was, I remember the (?).

SIGRIST: Do you remember saying goodbye to your mother?

GARRONE: I remember this yet, because I say goodbye to everybody. I say goodbye, I say, "Goodnight, and (?)." I say to the people, "Goodnight." When we used to go to night, and they say, "You used to say (?)." Goodnight, goodbye, hello. They used to say (?). Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you took with you to America?

GARRONE: Took? Nobody. Nobody. I went had my (?) to go to America with my mother. (she coughs) And I come (?). My mother, she come first. (?) my father said to my mother, she come first. Okay. (?)

SIGRIST: Do you remember the name of the ship that you came on to America?

GARRONE: (?) No. The ship?

SIGRIST: The ship.

GARRONE: America!

SIGRIST: The name of the ship.

GARRONE: America!

SIGRIST: Was the America.

GARRONE: Yeah. America! I remember now.

SIGRIST: And, um, how long did the ship take to get to America?

GARRONE: Thirty days.

SIGRIST: Thirteen?

GARRONE: Thirty.

SIGRIST: Thirty! Thirty, or thirteen?

GARRONE: No.

SIGRIST: Fifteen.

GARRONE: Fifteen.

SIGRIST: Okay. Thank you. What do you remember about being on the ship?

GARRONE: Ah, I don't want to be a fleusy.

SIGRIST: You don't want to be a fleusy?

GARRONE: A fleusy.

SIGRIST: What does that mean?

GARRONE: I means you go around snooping with these people (?).
All right?

SIGRIST: Okay.

GARRONE: You know now?

SIGRIST: I know now. Do you remember where you slept on the ship?

GARRONE: What?

SIGRIST: Where did you sleep on the ship?

GARRONE: Fifteen days, sixteen days. Yes, sixteen days, and (?). And they sleep (?).

SIGRIST: Did you get seasick?

GARRONE: No! I'm not seasick. I get in, my father was there.
(she coughs) (?)

SIGRIST: Are you okay?

GARRONE: My father was there, my sister was there.

SIGRIST: So your father was with you.

GARRONE: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: And your sister was with you.

GARRONE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And is your mother with you?

GARRONE: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes, the whole family is together.

GARRONE: (?) To go (?) before, they will (?) any day. After, a happy day. My father, he, he prepared everything, everything. He (?) with my mother. He said, "You were very good." My mother, she was (?). But, she don't talk to (?). (she is moved) My mother, she was a good mother.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when the ship arrived in New York?

GARRONE: I remember. Oh, I was so happy, my mother, she was there. My mother, she was there waiting for me. I was happy.

SIGRIST: What happened in New York? When the ship arrived, what happened?

GARRONE: Well, no. No, no (?). My mother, she come with my father and mama and sister. Again your people (?) people. And the ship on this side. And she come, she come. She was happy, too. She was glad she was the sister. The sister and the brother, and the brother,

too. And after (?) sister talk, and the brother talk, they find the people, they're happy. They're happy to be here. And we say, "Yes, we're happy. First we got, we got everything, the job. You wait. No worrying about your job. They don't us don't worry. Your job, I know you've got (?). All right. They put me in the job right away.

SIGRIST: What kind of a job did you get?

GARRONE: (?), just like the stick.

SIGRIST: The stick?

GARRONE: The stick. And (?) comb, comb, (?). That's, you can tell right away. He put me on the job right away. I am (?). I was, I was, I was a (?) woman, and they say, "Be careful. Be careful (?) cooked." I said, "Okay, I do my best, I do my best." My mother told me that I was the best. I say, "Okay. (?) Who's the best?" The mother with two girls, she embraced me, she kissed me. Oh, my God! (she is moved)

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

GARRONE: You come over here tomorrow, you're going to look. If

you look, you pay, because I didn't arrange it yet. My father tells me (?). He say, "Yeah, yeah. (?) Yeah." But I'm out, I'm out to say, hey, I (?) too much, I can't say that too much. I'll show, I'll tell you. I came here for the first time, nothing. My father, huh! He was, like, happy. Father, (?). He's taking (?) right away, give it to the boy, and the boy (?). And now I don't know. You've got to get the most check, you know. Now they're still working. They're still working now. It's hot! (?) people. Those people, they're, they (?). They like it. But you got to be careful. Sometimes something jump. (?) But a gun (?) on your job, work, and don't talk no more. Don't talk no more. (?) class, and they stay. How long they stay in California, mama? How long they stay in California? You don't remember? No.

SIGRIST: Can I ask you another question?

GARRONE: Sure.

SIGRIST: How did you learn to speak English?

GARRONE: (?) She was talking English. This girl, she was (?) to me regularly. She talked to me like a sister. Figure, she owed me. (she coughs) She owed me

because I was talking to her sister, and she knows something already of my language, (?) language. And she said, (Italian). Come on. (Italian) My niece, my niece, she heard. She won't (?) in English. She painted the, what do you call that? (?) Don't worry. (?) Because she works over here. And she was my Rosa, my girlfriend, (?) America. But (?). My father (?), my mother (?). I have fifteen years, father's the best, and the father the best, fifteen years, was good (?), was good English. They give me the test, I pass, and they give me (disturbance to the microphone) what you call it?

SIGRIST: Like a badge?

GARRONE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: A badge. Because you, because you passed the test?

GARRONE: I passed the test. Okay. That's all.

SIGRIST: Before we end the interview, I want you to talk Italian for me on the tape.

GARRONE: (?) You (?).

SIGRIST: Just talk, just talk some Italian for me.

GARRONE: Italian.

SIGRIST: Say, um, what?

NIECE: Her nieces are here (?).

SIGRIST: Your nieces are here.

GARRONE: What?

SIGRIST: And Angela, Angela's going to speak to you in Italian.

This is your niece, Angela, and you guys talk in Italian for a little bit for me. Okay, go ahead, Angela. (Mrs. Garrone converses in Italian with her nieces)

SIGRIST: Mrs. Garrone, could you say your rosary for me.

GARRONE: The rosary?

SIGRIST: Yeah. Say the rosary, in Italian.

GARRONE: (she prays in Italian) I brought a rosary for my friends over here, do a good job. You can do something, don't worry about it.

SIGRIST: Can you say the rosary prayer for me in Italian?

GARRONE: Rosary?

SIGRIST: Yes, in Italian.

GARRONE: (she prays in Italian)

SIGRIST: Thank you very much. Thank you.

GARRONE: Thank you to you.

SIGRIST: Thank you. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with
Concettina Garrone on, on . . .

GARRONE: You think I passed?

SIGRIST: You pass. You pass with flying colors.

GARRONE: Thank you to you. (voices off mike)
(Mrs. Garrone's nieces sing in Italian)