

EI-756

JOSEPHINE CATALLI VANDI
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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PhD
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ITALY, 1929
AGE 7
PASSAGE ON "THE VULCANIA"

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VANDI: . . . when I knew I was coming, and my dream would be that I was coming to a place where it was just a street and trees, and that's it.

LEVINE: Oh.

VANDI: That's all I had in my imaginary mind of what USA was like. Isn't that something?

LEVINE: Let me introduce Josephine VandI. I'm in her home right now in Beverly, Massachusetts. It's June 12, 1996, and Mrs. VandI came from Italy in 1929 when she was seven-and-a-half years of age. She is, at the time of this interview, seventy-four years of age,

which is quite young. (she laughs) Okay. Let's start at the beginning. If, for the tape, you would say your birth date and where in Italy you were born.

VANDI: Okay? I was born in Pescina, Italy, January 21, 1922.

LEVINE: Okay. And Pescina is spelled . . .

VANDI: P-E-S-C-I-N-A.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, do you have much memory of Pescina?

VANDI: Uh, yes, I do. I do remember the house I was born in, and I did visit it a few years ago, about ten years ago, I should say. And when I was taking, taking a ride for a ride with my mother and relatives, we went traveling, visiting different places. I told them, I said why don't you take a street that takes me to the house where I lived in, and he says, "That's just what I was doing." That was my cousin that was driving. And so the minute he turned the corner I said, "There's my house, way over there." And he says, "You remember it?" I says, "Yes, I do."

LEVINE: What do you remember about it?

VANDI: Well, I remember that they were building a new church,

a new St. Anthony Church, just below us. And all I can remember is that I used to make mud puddles on rainy days, barefoot, in front of my house. And I never had a doll, but I did have a tea set and silverware, and I used to play with that. Then my mother had chickens, and she had sheep, a goat, and she used to send the goat out to pasture, and she used to make her own cheese, and then we had a little chick that came into the house, and it was a windy day, and when she was sending the chick out with the rest of them, the wind blew the door shut, and it killed that chick. And I was quite sad over that. So, and then I had a girlfriend named Josephine, and I wouldn't eat breakfast unless she came to eat with me.

LEVINE: What would you have for breakfast?

VANDI: Oh, bacon. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Now, did you have a pig that like every year in spring time . . .

VANDI: We had a pig, and my mother fed it. And my mother (she laughs) she was funny. (she laughs) She used to say, "This pig doesn't like pig food. It likes good food." So she had to give it, like,

cornmeal mush and stuff like that, you know, as if she was feeding a baby, making a pablum or a cereal of some kind. So he was very fussy, but every Christmas they would kill their pigs.

LEVINE: Can you remember that?

VANDI: Oh, I do, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: What was it like?

VANDI: They used to hang them up. After they killed them, they used to hang them up on a hook, with a hook, onto the ceiling. They had, oh, some kind of a pipe that they would hang it up on, and then they would cut it up, and they would preserve the blood, one thing they did. And with that blood they used to make something sweet out of it. It was very edible. It was good.

LEVINE: Was it like a sausage?

VANDI: No, no sausage. It was, it had honey and sugar. It was mixed in with a lot of nice ingredients, and it was tasty. And they saved it for Christmas.

LEVINE: Oh.

VANDI: This was all done around Christmas time. And then,

because we made our own sausages, and I remember how they used to do that.

LEVINE: Could you describe that, how they did it?

VANDI: Oh, sure, yeah. When they, uh, they would grind up the pork, and they would put seasoning in. I don't remember the seasoning, but I know that they used to season it. And, uh, then they would get casings, and they would have this machine, and they would fill the casings, and then they would go along, somebody would be tying it, you know? It would be my mother and a friend, some member of the family that would be helping her. And they would dry those sausages. They didn't have refrigerators. So they would hang them up to dry. And, uh, so whenever they wanted one they just cut it off and that was it. Yeah.

LEVINE: Wow. So it was like a salami, like a dried salami, kind of?

VANDI: Sort of, sort of. Then they made, they took the hind of the pig, and they preserved it with a lot of salt and pepper, and they rolled it in some cloth, and then they, they put it away. It's like, uh, I forget what they call it. I can't think of the word. Um . . .

Anyhow, it would last and last for a long, long time.

And, uh, they, they would use one whenever they wanted, you know. They'd cut it up and they'd give everybody some. Everybody in the family would share it. It wasn't just for one family alone.

LEVINE: Well, when you say everybody in the family, you mean like the extended family?

VANDI: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Your uncles and aunts . . .

VANDI: Right, right. They would all share in it, you know. They'd all get a share of it.

LEVINE: I see.

VANDI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, did you have a large extended family of aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins . . .

VANDI: I had, my mother had three sisters and a brother, and I saw all the sisters when I went back, and they had children of their own, so there is a large family there. All my aunts are dead now, but their children are alive, and I did see them, and they're wonderful

children.

LEVINE: Did you have much contact with your aunts and uncle, like, when you were a little girl living there?

VANDI: Oh, yes. Sure, we lived close to each other. And I knew my grandmother, too.

LEVINE: And what was your . . .

VANDI: But I didn't have her for long. No, I didn't have her for long. She died during the war, when the Germans came in.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. So, but did you know her? Can you re-, do you have experiences that you can recall with her?

VANDI: No, no.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

VANDI: No, nothing like that. But I do recall seeing her, and not for very long, really. She was a beautiful lady, a very pretty lady. Gray hair, short, like my mother. I think my mother looked just like her. Yeah. Um . . .

LEVINE: What was your mother's name?

VANDI: Antoinette.

LEVINE: Antoinette. And her maiden name?

VANDI: Ruggeri.

LEVINE: Could you spell that?

VANDI: R-U-G-G-E-R-I.

LEVINE: And your father's name?

VANDI: Carlo.

LEVINE: Carlo. And did, were they, did your mother and father both start out in the same town?

VANDI: Exactly, yes. He served in the Italian war, you know, when the Germans and the, uh, oh, I forget who else, the War of 1812, or 1918, I'm sorry. 1918.

LEVINE: The First World War.

VANDI: The First World War. Right. And, um, I don't know.

LEVINE: He went, did he go off to . . .

VANDI: He, yeah, he went there, right, right. He served there. And, uh, then he came home. He was safe. And he traveled back and forth to America five or six

times since he was sixteen years old.

LEVINE: What kind, what do you remember of your father from when you were a little girl before you came to this country?

VANDI: I didn't know him at all, except one morning I was, as I said previously, I was making mud pies along the gutter, the side of the gutter, in front of the house. It was a rainy day. And he came home, and he stopped me right near me, and he said, "Hi, Josephine," in Italian, Giuseppina. And, uh, I looked at him, and I didn't know who he was, so I didn't say a word, as far as I can remember. So he says, "I'm your father." And, uh, I didn't say a word. So when he went to the house, naturally, my mother knew who he was, and, uh, then she called me in, and she said to me, "This is your father. He came from America to see us." He was very devoted to my mother. He used to send back money so that she could live, and I guess she was the envy of a lot of people there, because a lot of them didn't have, you know, people that were supporting them. They had to support themselves. And, uh, it was hard for them, living was very hard in those days.

LEVINE: What had your father done for work before he went to America?

VANDI: Well, all they had was gardens. They, uh, had a big, big field. My mother owned a lot of land. She used to hire people to work for her. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: What did they grow on the land?

VANDI: Oh, they used to grow most anything, anything that they could. Yep. They had grapevines. Oh, yes, they had a vineyard, too. And they used to make wine. They had, uh, underneath their home they had, like, a big cellar, and they had a big vast. And when it was harvest time they used to come in with the baskets of grapes and put them in the vast, and they would crush them, you know.

LEVINE: Can you remember that?

VANDI: With their boots, up to here. Yeah.

LEVINE: With rubber boots?

VANDI: Oh, yeah, yeah. With thick boots. And, uh, then, of course, you know, they had barrels all lined up. And they would age some of it, and some they would drink

right away, you know. Keep them going until the good one was ready. And, uh, in the morning for breakfast they used to have like a submarine with either a sausage or anything, salami, you know. And, uh, put vegetables, whatever, tomato, whatever they had. They would eat it for breakfast with a glass of wine and go to work. They would go on this, uh, like a wagon, you know, like when you go on a hayride? They would all sit in one of those. And, uh, one morning when they were going to work it turned out to be a very stormy afternoon, morning, and, uh, lightening was, you know, bad. And there was an eighteen-year-old young boy that was sitting in the front with the person that was steering the horses, and lightening hit his foot, because he had hit foot on the metal part, and he died. And that left a very, very bad impression on my mother, that she was so frightened of lightening that she even made me scared. So every time there was a thunderstorm and lightening, she would take me and we'd go into the darkest corner in the house, or between, in one of the houses we lived in, we used to get between the refrigerator and stove. She always was so frightened of that, and she made me that much scared, too. Oh, yeah. She used to say, "Don't run

the water. Don't have any knives around," you know, nothing sharp or anything like that. And that was one of the things I remembered down there. And we used to go and wash clothes in a little river that was not too far from the house, and she would want to be the first one there, so she would get her basket with her clothes, and she would walk up there and get at the very top of it so that no other person's suds would go on her clothes. (she laughs) And that was cute, really. Then we would take those wet clothes back in the basket and walk back home to where we had shrubs, a lot of shrubs, and they would spread the clothes on the shrubs, because they had no clotheslines.

LEVINE: Now, you were an only child?

VANDI: Uh, no. Well, over there, yes. Yeah. The other one, she passed away. She was older than I. She would have been, what, a couple of years older than me.

LEVINE: Did she pass away . . .

VANDI: She died there.

LEVINE: When you, were you already born?

VANDI: No.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

VANDI: No. No, she died at fourteen months. I think she had what was going around, an influenza of some kind, and there's nothing they could do for them. And then she was cutting teeth at the same time. So I guess the two together killed her. So, then I came along, and she wanted to call me Agnes, and she changed her mind and named me Josephine after her. So I'm the second one, and my brother is the third, and he's up here in Bradford, Mass.

LEVINE: Now, but he was born here?

VANDI: He was born here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

VANDI: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything at all about medical practices or folk medicine or anything that had to do with illness and its treatment from Italy that you can recall?

VANDI: All I remember is that she used to put vinegar on her forehead when she had a headache. That's all I know.

I don't know of any others, no.

LEVINE: And how about ceremonies, like either surrounding death, or birth, or . . .

VANDI: Okay. I witnessed my youngest aunt's wedding, and that was a big time. And what they do, uh, they put an arch, decorate the street from side to side, and they've got, like, lanterns and different things that they hang on these arches.

LEVINE: Are the arches, like, homemade?

VANDI: Homemade.

LEVINE: Out of wood, or something?

VANDI: No, I think it's a wire or something, and then they hang things on it, and maybe about three or four on that street where the bride comes from, and then they walk to the church. And from there I don't remember anything else. At Christmas time it was beautiful. They used to decorate the aisles with all kinds of greens, palms and, oh, my goodness, like oranges, orange trees and lemon trees and things like that, really pretty.

LEVINE: Now, is it cold there?

VANDI: Very cold. The temperature was the same as here. Oh, yes. Yep. Oh, they used to get some real bad snowstorms. Right.

LEVINE: What kind of transportation was . . .

VANDI: Walking. And as far as I know there were no horses. We had no horses to ride on. We walked everywhere we went. But in those days we didn't go from here to Boston. We stayed right in the same town that we were born in, you know.

LEVINE: Was it a big town? Were there a lot of people there?

VANDI: It was a good-sized town.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Were there shops, do you remember, at all?

VANDI: No, I don't remember shops.

LEVINE: Do you remember a market day, or market day?

VANDI: Yes, yes. Market day. They used to come with carts, and they would display whatever they were selling, and my mother would go and she would get what she wanted, and, yeah, I do remember that. Uh-huh.

LEVINE: So what would they do? Would they actually pull a cart along?

VANDI: Yes, they would.

LEVINE: They would walk it to the market?

VANDI: Exactly, yep. There were two people, it had one piece of wood on this end, and a piece of wood on this other end. Both of them would pull with that, you know, hanging on to that. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember any market days? Can you, can you remember the market, or . . .

VANDI: Oh, they used to have displays of copper. Who could put out the most shiniest copper kettle out, and they would hang it up on the wall. And that's all I remember. That was kind of a picture in my mind. That was really beautiful to see.

LEVINE: Now, would they be selling it, would they be selling the kettle?

VANDI: They would sell it. They would sell it, yep.

LEVINE: Were there coppersmiths in town, do you know? Was that something people did, or . . .

VANDI: No, but most of their utensils were copper. Yeah. We used to go and get water with a copper kettle, a twelve-quart. What we would do is get a towel and roll it, and make it like that, a donut. Put it on our heads, and then we would get the kettle with the water and carry it on our heads. My grandmother who was, my father's, my father's mother, she was ninety years old, and she would still go and get water and put that on her head and walk as straight as a stick. Unbelievable.

LEVINE: But now you, as a young child, you wouldn't have carried water.

VANDI: Oh, well, I would carry something small. I wouldn't go for those big things. No, no. But I remember where the fountain was. Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, what was the fountain like? This was like a community fountain?

VANDI: Yes, yes. All you do is pump it, and the water came out, and that was it. Because we didn't have running water, no. And we used to fill it, as big a kettle as we could fill, so that it would last us until the next

day. Yeah. And every day we did that.

LEVINE: And that was like a ritual every day. And how about, like, did you have outhouses?

VANDI: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. That's what they had. And in the wintertime when it was cold, cold, we had fireplaces. And we used to sit in front of the fireplace. And I remember our legs used to have designs on them from the heat. I don't know what you call that, but anyway it was, uh, I used to say to my mother, "Look at my legs," and she used to call it something in Italian, I can't remember it. But, anyway, we, that's where we sat to keep warm. Then we had bedwarmers, because you've heard of those.

LEVINE: Was that a stone?

VANDI: No. That was, uh, made of copper, and it had a cover, round, with a long handle, and you would put the ashes in there, cover it, seal it tight, and then put it in the bed and just warm up the sheets and then take it out. That was that, yeah. And I used to do my homework sitting in front of the fireplace in the wintertime. I used to recite my poems that I had to have ready for the next morning. I had nuns for

teachers. And they wouldn't let us go in the room unless we recited our homework standing outside the building.

LEVINE: Wow. Oh, so you couldn't go in if you didn't do that.

VANDI: If you didn't know your lesson, you couldn't, she wouldn't let you in. (she laughs) Then I marched with the Fascists.

LEVINE: You did!

VANDI: Oh, Mussolini's outfit, black and white dresses with the cap and the tassle. Oh, yeah. We were, they were very strict with us. We had to have those uniforms to go to school. Yeah, yeah. So . . .

LEVINE: Do you, when did you start school? Do you remember?

VANDI: My mother started me very early, because she, she was busy working with the people she had hired, so she had me in school at the age of five, and then in the summertime she had me in summer school. So I did very little playing. Yep. I was always in school. And I was promoted to the third grade when I came here.

LEVINE: Oh.

VANDI: Yep. I was promoted to the third grade. And when I came here, they put me in the third grade. But I had come here August 29th. School started the day after Labor Day. I don't remember the date. And they expected me to know third grade work. I mean, I only knew "yes" and "no." That's all I was able to learn until school started. That's all I learned, "yes" and "no." So, uh, they set me back, and I went to the second grade, and from there on I went up.

LEVINE: How was the school in Italy compared with the one you later went to here?

VANDI: Uh, it's just a one-room. It was a brick building, and we all sat in a long bench. Nothing different.

LEVINE: So there were different grades in the same room?

VANDI: Uh, that I don't know. I really couldn't tell you that. All I remember was my room and, for two years I went to that, you know, I mean, for the length of time that I went to school through the second grade, that's where I went, to the same building. But I know one thing, after you finish so many grades, which isn't as many as here, you go on to what they call a junior high, and in your, when you're twelve years old you're

practically in high school down there. That's how fast they teach you. Yeah.

LEVINE: So did you go early in the morning, and did you, what did you do in lunchtime when you were in school?

VANDI: I think we went home, if I remember. And then we'd go back again. I think so. Yep.

LEVINE: Uh, do you remember any foods that your mother made that you particularly liked?

VANDI: Oh, she used to make bread a lot, oh, yeah. Um, oh, yes. She used to make, uh, sweets. See, she and, uh, my aunt used to cook for brides, for weddings, and they knew a lot of meals and, uh, pastries, so they, she always was a good cook. Yeah. Uh, I know pasta fagirole. That was a famous one. And polenta was another one. They used to make, that's cornmeal mush. And they would make that, and they would serve it on a wooden table, and everybody would sit around the table, and they would each have a section of that cornmeal, a big spread of it. And on the top would be either a blackbird or a sausage. They would kill blackbirds, and they would put one on every setting, if they had enough, or they would have a sausage. And

that's the way we ate the cornmeal.

LEVINE: You mean, the cornmeal was on one wooden . . .

VANDI: On one wooden board, right.

LEVINE: And it was cut into sections.

VANDI: It was solid, it was solid. No, no. It was all one big . . .

LEVINE: One piece.

VANDI: Right. In other words, after they cooked a great, big kettle, they'd put it on this wood, and it spread. Then it hardened, soft of sets. And you sit, say, at this corner of the table, you get that portion, and someone else gets another portion, and that's how they served it. They didn't make individual place settings, you know.

LEVINE: And what about the blackbirds? How did they cook them?

VANDI: I don't know how they cooked them, but I know that they were clean. They weren't black on the dinner table, you know. They must have boiled them, I guess. I don't know.

LEVINE: Did they catch them there? Do you remember that?

VANDI: Yeah, they used to. Oh, yes. Yes. Then we had trees. I remember climbing trees where we had, uh, cherry trees. And I used to climb the cherry trees, and I would get the cherries, pick the cherries, and I would get the ones that had the double cherries hanging from them, and I would put them around my ears, and I would go home, I'd say, "Mom, look at my ears." So I had earrings. And, uh, then we had walnuts, and we had wheat, where we had to thresh the wheat. They would put a big tarp on the street, and then they would put all their wheat, the grain, on there, and then they would whack it with something. I forget what they used. And, uh, then they would pick up all the, uh, the skins, and the brush, or whatever came from it, and they would throw it away, and they would have the, the wheat clean. Yep.

LEVINE: It sounds like there were a lot of sort of community kinds of, uh . . .

VANDI: Oh, yes. They worked a lot together, they really did. And all this, they used to save in, uh, big bags. Not paper bags, cloth bags. The almonds, they used to

save those and put them up in their attic. Um, oh, that, that hind from the pork, I was trying to remember, that was, uh, smoke, like, smoked, smoking it. And, I'm going back to that.

LEVINE: Yeah, okay.

VANDI: Then the, uh, walnuts we would put in bags, and we would put, uh, wheat. They would store it, you know. And, um, she would be the first one, after she made her bread in the morning, to bring it to the bakery so that she wouldn't have to wait in line, you know, so that her bread would be done first and she could go home before anybody else.

LEVINE: I see. So she made the bread at home.

VANDI: She made the bread . . .

LEVINE: And then brought it to the bakery.

VANDI: Right. And the bakery, yeah, and cooked it.

LEVINE: And people waited for their bread to cook?

VANDI: Oh, yes. They had, there was a line waiting, yeah.

LEVINE: So I guess you'd want to make sure you got . . .

VANDI: Your own bread. Sure, right. Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Was that like a social, for your mother, was that a social time, like at the bakery?

VANDI: Sort of, because they didn't have any sociabilities, you know, no social times. Uh, I think what we have as Halloween, they celebrate it also, but not, I don't think it's the same time. It's probably the same as down south here. Um, they dress up in costumes, you know, the Mardi Gras. And they have prizes for the best dressed, or the one that stays up the longest or lasts the longest, you know, in the party. And that's what she used to do. Other than that, they didn't have anything else.

LEVINE: Now, this was for adults rather than children?

VANDI: Right. Children didn't do much, nope. Not that I can remember.

LEVINE: Was your mother, were your mother and father strict with you? Well, I guess you mentioned your mother . . .

VANDI: Very. Very strict.

LEVINE: In what ways was she strict?

VANDI: Oh, gosh. She didn't want me to go with people that had bad names, because, you know, she was afraid that I'd get the same bad name, and then, oh, they wouldn't let me go out with fellows and, you know, until they thought it was all right. And, oh, they used to wait behind the door waiting for me. They'd tell me come home at a certain time, and if I didn't they'd be right there waiting and wondering what happened. So I was saved a couple of times, because I broke a heel once, and another time my watch stopped. So I had to limp one time, and then I didn't know what time it was the next one, so I was saved both times.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Let's see. Is there anything else, you mentioned the fireplace. Is it a stone house, and a stone fireplace?

VANDI: It was stucco. They still are stucco. And these are row houses. These were built after the war. Because during the war a lot of them were really damaged. There was hardly anything left. So this is what they

used to have, the old Pescina, before the war. Now, after the war, they called it the new Pescina, right.

So there's two sections, two parts to it.

LEVINE: I see.

VANDI: So in order for people to have homes, they built all these stucco, one long stucco place. And each family has a dining room, a kitchen, and a bedroom.

LEVINE: All one floor?

VANDI: All one floor. No ups and downs, and no doors like we have. They have curtains. They had curtains on their doors. That's it. And not much land, very little. I remember all we had was a tree in back of ours. That was it.

LEVINE: But your mother had land someplace else?

VANDI: Oh, yes. They had to travel. She used to call that Fucine, F-U-C-I-N-E. Fucine. That's where, uh, a lot of people went there, and they each rented a certain section of it, and they, uh, grew whatever they wanted on it. And they would pay the owner so much for the rent.

LEVINE: I see. So was there any other industry besides, um, agriculture and . . .

VANDI: Well, they had a mill where they, the flour mill, where they ground up the grain and made the flour. Uh, that's all I remember is the flour. Oh, then, in Ortona, O-R-T-O-N-A, they had the confetti factory, and I visited that, and that's a beautiful place, too. Yep.

LEVINE: Now, when would the confetti be used?

VANDI: For weddings, any time, special occasions. You can always go over there and buy a package and eat them casually, if you want.

LEVINE: Oh, confetti. I was thinking it was the paper things. What is confetti?

VANDI: Oh, no. This is almonds.

LEVINE: Oh!

VANDI: Almonds, what do you call those? There is another name for them. They use them at weddings.

LEVINE: They're covered? They're covered with a shimmery coloring?

VANDI: Yes, yeah. They usually put three in a, a little, uh, they make a little bouquet with three in them, and use them as gifts for showers and things like that.

LEVINE: Do you remember any superstitions that were prevalent when you were little growing up?

VANDI: No.

LEVINE: Any attitudes that your mother tried to instill in you, any ideas about how you should be or how you should live, or . . .

VANDI: Oh, yes. She always used to say, "Keep your name honorable." Oh, definitely. She says, "I don't want you to get involved with the policemen or the courts. I want your name to stay out of that. I don't want you to get in trouble with anyone." And that always was fixed in my mind. And I brought up my children the same way. Keep your name clean. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you know why it was that your father sent for you and your mother at the particular time when he did?

VANDI: Because he had been, because he had met some people from our home town that lived here in Beverly. And so

he wanted us to come. In fact, he was working in Detroit, Michigan, with the Ford company, making Ford automobiles. And, uh, oh, I don't know, many years he worked there, and, uh, he traveled on to Haverill, Mass, where someone told him there was a friend, or they used to call them pisan, that's a person that lives in the same town with you, and, uh, that he wanted him to meet him, so when he went there he knew him. He said, "Yes, I know your family. They live in such a place." And they said, "Yes, right in the same town." So then from Haverill, this other family told him there was one here in Beverly that came from Pescina also. And so he, uh, was very anxious to meet them. So he traveled on to Beverly, and he did meet this family. And it's true, they lived in the same town. And so he says, "What am I doing out there in Detroit? I might as well come here." So they told him, they said, "Well, if you come here, you can get a job in the leather factory." So that's what he did. He left the, uh, Ford, and he came here, and he went to work for A.C. Lawrence in Peabody. And, not knowing, after he called for us, that Depression would start. So that was really bad, because when my mother and I came, about a year later, in the '30s, I believe

it was, my brother was born, he was a baby, and, uh, she got very, very sick. We thought we were going to lose her. She had swelled up terribly, lost all her hair. There was no hair left on her head. And doctors didn't know what was wrong with her. So all her friends kept wondering what could she have, you know. And, uh, so someone mentioned, an elderly lady that lived on such a street, and she says, "I'm going to have her come to look at you." So she came, and she looked at her, and she says, "Well, I think maybe I can help you." So she got some burlap bags, and she went over to where the United Shoe Machinery Corporation is on Elliot Street. There used to be bushes growing along the sidewalk. Don't tell me, ask me what the name of the bushes were, because I don't know. It had leaves, certain leaves. So she got all the leaves she could from those bushes, and she put them in those burlap bags, and went straight to my mother's house. Whether they boiled them or not, that I don't know, because I was in school. So, uh, what they did was they covered her completely with these leaves, from head to toe. For how long, I don't know. For how many days, I don't know. And before you know it, the swelling was going down, and her hair was

starting to come back, and she, she lived to be ninety-one. (they laugh) So there you are.

LEVINE: Now, was this an Italian woman.

VANDI: Yes, she was Italian.

LEVINE: Who made the remedy?

VANDI: She was Italian. I don't know whether it was a remedy or not, but that's what she did, and that's what I remember.

LEVINE: So your, when your father sent for you, did you and your mother have examinations in Italy before you left? Do you remember?

VANDI: No, no. They examined us on the boat.

LEVINE: What was, what, do you remember anything that you or your mother brought with you?

VANDI: Such as what?

LEVINE: Anything that she packed to take with her to America?

VANDI: I don't, I don't really know. Clothing, to change. I don't think there was anything else. Pictures, pictures of, you know, our relatives, and that's it.

LEVINE: Do you remember leaving?

VANDI: Yes, yes. We walked through the woods to get to the station, to get on the train, and, uh . . .

LEVINE: Did anybody accompany you, or . . .

VANDI: Yes, one aunt did. Yep, one aunt did. And, uh, it was a sad day but, uh, it was a nice trip.

LEVINE: Do you remember . . .

VANDI: Then we, we went to, uh, Naples, and we went to this baroness' house. It was a big palace that she lived in. I called it a house, it's a palace, and she let us stay there overnight until the next day when we had to get the boat.

LEVINE: Now, how did you know her?

VANDI: Through my aunt. Yep. My aunt had introduced her to my mother, and so she had told, asked her if we could go there, because we were leaving, and she said, "Sure, come in." So we slept there at night. And I never forget when, um, one morning she asked me to go and get ice for her. She was going to make ice cream. And so I brought her the ice. I had to go across the

street. And they had all pebbles, stones, on the street. And, uh, so I went there, and, uh, when I brought it back, she, uh, made ice cream with it, and I remember that very, very clearly. Yeah.

LEVINE: So that must have been exciting for you . . .

VANDI: Oh, yes, that was. Oh, yes. What a beautiful place that was. Big rooms, high ceilings. Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: And do you remember what you or your mother thought about America before you came, what you expected, or . . .

VANDI: No, all I expected was, like I said, a street with trees. That was it. I didn't picture any houses or anything. All I could picture was that. To my surprise, it was all different, and beautiful.

LEVINE: So, um, when you got to the boat, you left from Naples?

VANDI: Yes.

LEVINE: What do you recall about the boat and the, uh, passage?

VANDI: Well, we got on the boat, we said goodbye to our, my

aunt, and, uh, we got on, and everybody was outside on the boat, you know, on the deck there. They were waving goodbye to all their relatives and so forth. And, uh, so, uh, we stayed there, and, uh, I don't know how long before the boat left, but we were sitting at the supper table in the big, big beautiful dining room, and all of a sudden I looked out the round windows that they have, and I saw that we were moving. I says, "Mom," I says, "we're moving." And she says, "Oh, yeah, we are." And that was it. But it was a beautiful boat. It really was very lovely.

LEVINE: Now, you were traveling, were you traveling second class?

VANDI: Yes.

LEVINE: And, uh, and so you, you always went for dinner in the dining room?

VANDI: Always.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And did anything happen aboard ship during that time of travel that you recall?

VANDI: Yeah, well, the weather was bad at times, and, uh, we even saw whales once in a while. But, uh, a lot of

the people were sick. A lot of them were seasick. And my mother had to take care of this lady and two children during the whole trip, because they were all seasick. I was the only one among the five of us that, uh, or four of us that didn't get sick. I was walking around the place every, you know, everywhere.

And, uh, the only time I did get sick was when I actually saw the youngest one. He, then it really hit me, and that was close to the U.S.A., and then I was okay after that. Yeah. It didn't last long. I remember making a telegram with my mother. We had to go up another flight of stairs, up to the very top of the boat, and there we sent a telegram to my father saying that we were arriving. And she says, "Be careful down those stairs!" I used to go down those stairs like nobody's business. She used to worry I'd fall down.

LEVINE: Now, were there steerage, or were there third class passengers on the same ship, do you recall?

VANDI: Yes, downstairs.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about the conditions that they had?

VANDI: No. I never saw them. We always stayed on our second class section. We used to have tea every afternoon, or coffee, whatever, and they had very good, delicious cookies. And, uh, then they would promenade all along the deck, you know. And then Sunday morning they'd have mass, and, uh, this priest gave the mass. AT least he was dressed as a priest at the time. I don't know whether he was or not. (she laughs) But I knew that priests didn't go with women, so my mother had told me, and, uh, when I saw him arm in arm with someone walking along, I says, "Mom," I says, "there's a priest walking with a lady." She says, "Yeah, I know." She says, "That's because we're on a boat." You know, anything. (she laughs) I didn't know any different. So then this lady sang Paulliacci[ph]. Oh, what a beautiful voice! Oh, she was gorgeous. I don't know whether she was an opera singer, or whether she had an operatic voice. I don't know. But that's what I'm so anxious to find out. I keep thinking it could have been Lilly Ponds. She was one of the oldest singers that I know.

LEVINE: Now, is this person hired, do you think, by the ship, to sing?

VANDI: I don't know. I don't know whether she was a guest, or whether she was a passenger. I have no idea. But the cooks were very good. They cooked very good meals. My mother asked them, she says, "Do you know how to make ravioli?" And they said, "Sure." So they made them that night, sure enough. She says, "Oh, my goodness, you made raviolis, because I asked you." They says, "Yes, signore!" (they laugh)

LEVINE: And the name of the ship?

VANDI: Vulcania.

LEVINE: Vulcania.

VANDI: Yeah. V-U-L-C-A-N-A, I-A. Uh-huh. In fact, I went to the library to see if I could look up this ship. I wanted a picture of it, just recently, maybe about three weeks ago. And I looked at every book on the shelves that were, uh, before 1929. I saw every ship . . .

LEVINE: But not that one.

VANDI: But not that one. Because what got me to do it was that on TV I saw a parade of ships one night. It was gorgeous. The history of all the big, big ships, made

by different countries. So I says, "Maybe they'll have that in there. I'll go get it, and then I'll know what the boat looks like." I went, and I was disappointed. I couldn't find anything. So I left word with the girl at the desk. She said I'd be willing to call the Boston library and see if they can find out something. So I gave her the name and the year before 1929, and see what they could come up with. I haven't heard from them yet.

LEVINE: Well, I'll look also. I may be able to help you.

VANDI: Oh, wonderful.

LEVINE: All right. So then you got to the New York Harbor. And do you remember that?

VANDI: Oh, yeah. Well, on the boat they, uh, before we arrived, the nurses and doctors were there, and they all came in, and they had us all, told us to get in line, and when we got in line they were starting to vaccinate us. And so my mother said, uh, "What's that?" And they says, "Well, she's got to, well, you've got to get vaccinated, both of you, you know, before you enter the States." And, uh, so my mother says, "Oh." So after they got through with me, no

sooner had they gotten through giving me the needle, and she rubbed it, she says, "I don't want . . ." No, the lady, one of the nurses, I guess, or the lady that were there helping out said, "What are you doing that for?" She says, "Oh, I don't want her to have a temperature when I arrive. I don't want her sick. You know, she's been healthy all this time." She says, "I don't want her sick." So she rubbed it off, but then they gave me another one. (she laughs) And that one had to stay. "No, she won't. She'll be all right. She'll be all right." I only had a slight temperature, not much. It didn't bother me as much. Because, you know, an arm can swell, and that's what she was afraid of, that it would give her trouble, and me trouble. And, uh, then they, uh, they said, "Now we have to check your hair." And she says, "You know, lady." She said, "I cannot check her hair, because it's too long. We're checking for, you know, different things that we have to look for, so we have to cut it." "You have to cut her hair?" she said. "Yeah." So they cut my hair. And then they messed it all up looking through it, you know.

LEVINE: This was still aboard ship?

VANDI: ON the board, aboard ship. Right. And then I guess a day after they did that, we landed. And, uh, we had to wait. The lines were long. And, uh, finally we got into this building, and I remember the door was right there, and you walk in the door, and there was a table, a little table with a couple of chairs to the right, and the staircase was right in front of it, and we went straight up to the top. They told us, "Go up there for your night quarters, and that's where you'll stay until morning." So we went up there, and there were loads of beds there. All, you know, regular beds. And, uh, we got into the corner one. Well, my mother saw a bug, and she was very finicky about bugs, so I fell asleep. Well, she didn't sleep all night because she wanted to make sure that there were no bugs around me, and so she didn't sleep all night long. Then we went downstairs the next morning and we ordered breakfast. And, my goodness, that table was filthy! It had hair and dirt, on a white tablecloth. It stood out like a sore thumb. And, uh, so she says, "No, we're not eating here. We're not going to eat." So that was that. So we refused it.

LEVINE: Do you know why it was that you needed to go to Ellis

Island and to stay overnight? Was there any problem?

VANDI: That's where the boat was going to dock, I guess. I don't know of any other reason.

LEVINE: Did your father meet you, then, or did someone meet you?

VANDI: Not in New York. From New York we boarded a train, and the train took us to Boston, and that's where my father met us.

LEVINE: I see. Well, now, when you were at Ellis Island, did you have any more examinations?

VANDI: No.

LEVINE: So you just got there in the evening. Did you get there in the evening, do you remember? And then you went . . .

VANDI: Late afternoon, late afternoon.

LEVINE: And then you went right up to bed.

VANDI: Yeah, uh-huh.

LEVINE: And then, uh, you were put on, or put in the, in the direction of the train station.

VANDI: Right, right. They told us where to go to get the train to Boston. And, uh, we got on it, and we came here.

LEVINE: Now, could your mother understand English? Was there someone speaking Italian to her?

VANDI: Italian, yes. Neither one of us understood English, no.

LEVINE: So when you got on the train, do you remember that journey, to, uh . . .

VANDI: Oh, I was very, you know, anxious to see everything. It was, you know, so different.

LEVINE: Do you remember any things that stood out as different when you, from the first few weeks or so that you were here?

VANDI: No. It was strange, really. It was a strange land, strange everything. You know, I couldn't really say much about that.

LEVINE: Yeah. And how about when you were reunited with your father?

VANDI: There, again, as I said, I only saw him that one day, and after that I didn't see him, you know, after he left, until we got here. And, uh, I accepted him as my father. I had to, you know.

LEVINE: What was it like getting used to him after you were here for a while?

VANDI: Well, I really couldn't tell you. I just did the normal thing, everyday living. Did what my mother told me to do, and that was it. And we stayed with this family. They, uh, had us live with them until my father was able to find an apartment, so we stayed with them for a few months. Yep. And then, uh, we left.

LEVINE: Do you remember your first impression about school, or learning the language? Did you start school, then, right away?

VANDI: Well, after Labor Day. And, as I said, they put me in the third grade, and I was lost, totally lost. I understand there was a young boy there that was Italian that was trying to explain things to me, but I don't remember that. He said he helped me, tried to help me, but I don't know. I don't recall that at

all. So it's very difficult. It really was. I think I, I went through that year not knowing anything. I lost a year, really. But they had to put me in the third. So, actually they should have put me in the first grade. (she laughs)

LEVINE: You couldn't really understand anything, right?

VANDI: No, no.

LEVINE: But then, I suppose, it caught on after a while.

VANDI: Oh, yes, yes. Oh, sure. The next year I was all right, because I had all, the whole year to, uh, mingle with children and learn words.

LEVINE: Now, um, so the Depression, how did the Depression affect you and your family?

VANDI: Well, it didn't affect me too much because I was a child, but my mother got sick over it, and my father was depressed. There was no money coming in. She had to write to Italy to, uh, have all her property sold. She had my aunt's husband, who is a lawyer, do all the paperwork for her, and sell the properties, the house and the land that she had, and, uh, so when the money came in, it was only valued fifty dollars. And

down there she was a rich woman, I mean, with property you're considered rich down there. So that was really heartbreaking, and they were very, very depressed over that. And it was hard for anybody to get a job. He tried awful hard looking here and everywhere, and couldn't find work anywhere. And, uh, so she was good at making simple meals, and we all got by that way, you know. Meat wasn't really that important. They used to probably have a piece of meat once in a while.

But it was mostly soupy meals with different variations. Pasta, chicken once in a while. That's about it. Yep.

LEVINE: Now, were they able to grow some food where you were, or no?

VANDI: No, no. They didn't have a garden. They had no land. So they couldn't grow anything. No.

LEVINE: So then, um, did you work after you finished school? What kind of work did you do? Did you work it off?

VANDI: I finished school in 1941. I graduated from high school. And I had a business course. I was recommended to go to this place of business, and work there through a teacher's recommendation. But when I

got there, the wages were only ten dollars a week, and I had to pay for my cab, or someone to drive me there, and I wouldn't have been taking home anything. So I refused it, and I went into factory work, where I worked at Sylvania. And I was a welder making tubes for the service. So that's what I did. Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, when did you meet your husband?

VANDI: I met him in the seventh grade. Childhood sweethearts. Yeah. We met in school, and he chased after me all that while.

LEVINE: So, um, how many children did you have?

VANDI: Two, yeah. Cynthia and Ronald.

LEVINE: And do you have grandchildren?

VANDI: I have three. A girl, Katie, and two boys, Kevin and Michael.

LEVINE: Well, um, we're getting close to the end here. When you look back on the fact that you came here as a seven-year-old and lived out, really, most of your life here, how do you think about that as sort of immigrating to a new country and starting a life here?

VANDI: Oh, I'm very proud to be in this country. I love it.
And, uh, I think I've accomplished as much as I could for what my parents gave me as a start, and for what I could do. I didn't go to college because they needed money, and I had to go to work.

LEVINE: What do you feel proud of that you have done? What makes you feel satisfied that you were able to do in your life?

VANDI: Well, I was able to work and get married, have a family, two lovely children, grandchildren, and, uh, a wonderful son-in-law, and I had a wonderful daughter-in-law, but now they're divorced, so that was a trauma there to put up with last year. But other than that I've got beautiful grandchildren. I'm really happy with what I have, yes.

LEVINE: And how was it for you to go back and visit Ellis Island?

VANDI: Oh, the memory was great, especially entering the building. I didn't remember the statue, because I don't even know if I saw it. But the boat, I do remember and, uh, you know, going into the building was really something. It brought tears to my eyes.

LEVINE: Is there anything else you can think of to say that you'd like to include before we close?

VANDI: Well, I'm quite surprised. (she laughs)

LEVINE: To be interviewed.

VANDI: To have this go through. I didn't think it would.

LEVINE: Oh, well . . .

VANDI: I hadn't heard anything for such a long time since I wrote it that I gave up, you know. And I didn't think I would be interviewed. I thought that they would copy what I wrote there scribbled on. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Well, it's been a pleasure interviewing you.

VANDI: Oh, I enjoyed meeting you, too.

LEVINE: You have lots of good memories and details, and it's just really a great interview. I've been speaking with Josephine Vandi . . .

VANDI: Oh, I, can I interrupt?

LEVINE: Quickly.

VANDI: Okay. I forgot to tell you that they stole my favorite little handbag, beaded handbag.

LEVINE: At Ellis Island.

VANDI: At Ellis Island when they checked the baggage. Just one truck we had, which didn't have much in it, I don't think.

LEVINE: And so it was taken out of the trunk.

VANDI: They opened all of the trunks to make sure they didn't, you know, you didn't have anything that would hurt the country or the people. And, uh, they took my purse, which I showed you in the picture.

LEVINE: I'm glad you remembered that. Okay. I've been speaking with Josephine VandI. It's June 12, 1996, and I'm in Beverly, Massachusetts, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm signing off.