

EI-780

TOM D'AMATO:

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RESIDENCES: ITALY: ATENA LUCANA, SALERNO

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SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, August 13th, 1996. I'm in Long Meadow, Massachusetts, and I'm here with Tom D'AMATO. Mr. D'AMATO is the brother of Rose Di Giore (EI-779) whom I've just interviewed, and he came from Italy in 1919 and he was six years old at that time. And present, also, is his other brother, Sam, his sister, Rose and Adehl [PH] Hussan [PH] from the *Springfield Republican* newspaper. Mr. D'AMATO, can we begin by you giving me your name as it was in Italy?

D'AMATO: Gaetano.

SIGRIST: And can you spell Gaetano?

D'AMATO: G-A-E-T-A-N-O.

SIGRIST: And when is your birth date, sir?

D'AMATO: May 8th, 1913.

SIGRIST: And can you name the name of the town that you were born in, please.

D'AMATO: I was born in Anteno, Lucana , Provincia de Salerno.

SIGRIST: Right.

TD And I cannot spell it.

SIGRIST: Okay. Well, your sister did that so well for us.

D'AMATO: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me what your earliest memories of that town are, or of your life in general?

D'AMATO: Well, my earliest time I was told, that I was a devil. And that I would get in all kinds of trouble, and when I got into trouble, I would go to my grandmother, and she would protect me. I was getting in all—you know, young boys get in mischief doing this, "Don't go here," and "Don't eat this," and "Don't eat that," and I got in all kinds of trouble, and when the people came at, I would go to my grandmother, and she would take care of me.

SIGRIST: Do you remember a specific story about something you did? Something that you did specifically that you got in trouble for?

D'AMATO: Yes. We were fooling around in the yard with a bunch of young kids, young boys, and one was more aggressive than the others and he was more bigger than me, and he started to fool around. I got a hoe and I splitted his head open.

SIGRIST: With like a farmer's hoe?

D'AMATO: Yes, yes, and then I dropped the hoe and ran over to my grandmother, and I don't know what happened after that, if my mother had to pay for the doctor, I don't know. I don't recall.

SIGRIST: This grandmother, this is your mother—your father's mother was living with you?

D'AMATO: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about your relationship with your grandmother and what you remember about her as a person.

D'AMATO: Well, we used to call her Mamarella [PH].

SIGRIST: Mamarella [PH].

D'AMATO: That's an Italian thing and all I know is that she would take care of me, feed me and watch out for me. Wash me and dress me up and everything else. That I can remember.

SIGRIST: What did she look like? Can you describe her?

D'AMATO: Gee, no, I can't. The memory is not there. No, I can't remember that. No, I can't.

SIGRIST: What are some of the other things that you remember about Italy?

D'AMATO: I remember the night that we were taken—we were going to come to America that all our friends come over to wish us bon voyage and we were singing and we had some pans, we were making noise, you know, like that, because this was our last night. That we were going to go somewhere else, and we were all enthused about going. But I don't remember going. How we went to Naples. All I know is when we got there, I seen this big monstrous thing that I didn't know what it was and then I found out it was the ship.

SIGRIST: That was the Patria.

D'AMATO: The Patria, si. Si.

SIGRIST: The ship you came on. Before we get you out of your town in Italy, do you have any recollection of the countryside? Of being a child in the countryside or of games that you played, or something like that?

D'AMATO: Well, any kind of games. We played sometimes with a rock. We'd hit the—with a stick with a rock, we'd play like they—like a picky like. You know, like that. We played all kinds of games, and we used to get in all kinds of trouble. I did. I got in all kinds of trouble. They named me a name that my sister didn't tell you what it was.

RA: No.

D'AMATO: And it was spercie siepe. Now, spercie siepe meant that in any bushes, anything, if there was anything in the bushes, I would go in and get it, and it would be prickly stuff in there, but I would go and get

it. And they'd say spercie siepe, that I mean I would a devil and I would go in anything. I wasn't afraid of nothing.

SIGRIST: Can you say that name slowly for us?

D'AMATO: Spercie siepe.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

D'AMATO: No.

SIGRIST: Or, Mrs. Digiori [PH], can you?

DIGIORI: S-P-E-R-C-I-E.

SIGRIST: S-P-E-R-C-I-E.

DIGIORI: And then S-I-E-P-E.

SIGRIST: S-I-E-P-E.

DIGIORI: Spercie siepe.

SIGRIST: That was your nickname?

DIGIORI: Yeah.

D'AMATO: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: What—what do you remember about your relationship with your mother in Italy? What do you remember—

D'AMATO: Well, I barely saw my mother, because they would leave, say, on a Monday morning and they wouldn't come back home on a Saturday. And I wouldn't see my brother, Sam, or I wouldn't see my mother. I'd see my sister, but I was always with my grandmother. I was always with her. Slept with her. Her and I, we slept in the same bed. Of course, I was a little kid, and I slept with my grandmother because we didn't have no room, and when my mother come home, my bed was on top of like a trunk. They put a mattress there and I'd sleep on top of that because I was small. I don't think I weighed fifty pounds at that time.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, did you have any toys of any sort? You mentioned playing with a rock.

D'AMATO: [Laughs] Yeah, we played with the chickens. We played with any kind of animals, with the dogs. We played with them, but it was mostly all kids. Any game that, you know, we knew, we would play with, yeah.

SIGRIST: You mentioned you remember the sort of send off that you had.

D'AMATO: Yes, I remember that. Yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, as a small child, having any concept of what America was?

D'AMATO: Never. I didn't know what it was. I didn't know where we were going to.

SIGRIST: How did you—when you were in Italy, how did you perceive your father? How did you think about him?

D'AMATO: Well, the only thing, I see my father, my mother would show us pictures. I didn't know how he was or how he was or how he acted or anything. I didn't know that.

SIGRIST: I see. It was just kind of foggy to you.

D'AMATO: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, and that's what it is. You know, when you're six years old, you can't remember too much.

SIGRIST: When you saw the big ship—

D'AMATO: Yes.

SIGRIST: What are your recollections of being on the Patria?

D'AMATO: Well, first of all I was a-scared. I was a-scared because we had never been in the water. We never saw a big ship, and when we got onboard, as my sister Rose will tell you, my brother Sam had to go with the men and I had to stay with my mother and my sister.

SIGRIST: They separated people by sex.

D'AMATO: Yes, yes, and I would get in all kinds of trouble. I would run—I was told, I'd run all over the ship, and the only time that I would come down is when they used to go by—that my sister didn't tell you. That they used to come and feed la piccini. They going to feed the small people with the soup or whatever they had for the day. La pasta por la piccini, and only us babies could take it. The grownups couldn't have it, and

that's the only time I would report there. But the other times I was always getting in some kind of trouble.

SIGRIST: Rose, could you spell piccini.

DIGIORI: P-I-C-C-I-N-I, piccini, means small.

SIGRIST: P-I-C-C-I-N-I. I see.

D'AMATO: La pasta por le piccini.

SIGRIST: Something they made just for the little kids?

DIGIORI: Yes.

D'AMATO: Yes. Yeah, and they would—

SIGRIST: Do you remember there being other little kids on the ship?

D'AMATO: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, we used to run around the ship. I remember running around the ship and I remember one time that somebody picked me up and brought me back to where I was supposed to stay and they talked to my mother and my sister to keep me there because I was always a little devil.

SIGRIST: Yeah, a little handful.

D'AMATO: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

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

D'AMATO: No, I don't. The only recall that I have and it's still in my memory and I'll die with it, we went from Naples—we stopped at Portugal. We had to get off of our ship in Portugal—Portugal, and I remember going across the gangplank and looking in the water way below. We had to get off our ship because there was a sickness my sister, Rose, didn't tell you about.

DIGIORI: Well—

D'AMATO: There was what they call influenza and they had to inoculate everybody. We had to get off of that ship, Patria, and get off another one that was standby, and we stood there three days while they fumigated the boat. Then we went back again. That's all it is.

SIGRIST: Of course, there was a terrible influenza epidemic in 1919.

D'AMATO: Yes, there was. Yes, there was. Yes, there was. My memory of getting of the boat is very, very—all I know is there was a big statue there and everybody was laugh... crying, and I didn't know (emotional), what it was. [SNIFFING]

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollection of Ellis Island and seeing your Dad for the first time?

D'AMATO: Well, we were in this room. Somebody brought us in this room and they let us stay there. We were all sitting down there and all of a sudden I'd hear a big noise, you know, and the door flew open and my mother says, "Quide, dua de Patria" "[Italian]." This is your father. Of course, I had seen pictures of him, but I didn't know who he was or anything. We sat there like, you know, we just sat there and he did all the talking and then finally they let us go and we got on a little boat. Cripes, I think I was sick going over and then he gives us some fruit. We don't know what the devil it was. We threw it over in the ocean. It was a banana. We didn't know what it—you know, we never knew what a banana was. And then we took a train. We come to Springfield.

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollection of anything that happened on that train ride going up to Springfield?

D'AMATO: No, I slept. My mother told me, and they told me that I slept all the way through. Now, what I remember, and it's vivid in my mind, when we landed in Springfield at the old Union Station, it was near Leyman Street.

SIGRIST: It was a train station?

D'AMATO: Yeah, train station. We got off. There was a ramp from the station that come down into Main Street, and if the newspapers could find that picture, they'll know what I'm talking about. There was a ramp that come right down into Main Street, and we come down there. The ramp, I don't know how we got down there. We didn't know where we were. It was night time and we were all hanging onto my mother, walking, walking and walking. Then we come down to my uncle, my Uncle Tommy and we stayed there. And the next thing I remember, in the morning, that we want to say we're going back to the old country. We didn't want it like we were here, because there was snow and there was sleighs, horse and sleighs going down Water Street. Now it's Columbus Avenue and we were on the corner of Williams Street and Water Street. We stayed there I think one or two nights, and I saw the

snow and I went to my mother crying, "I don't want to stay here. I want to go home. I want to go home." (Holding back tears)

Then three or four days later, we moved down to Howard Street and there was a—

SIGRIST: Hubbard?

D'AMATO: Howard.

SIGRIST: Howard. Howard Street.

D'AMATO: And I remember went to bed that night and the house shook. "Where are we? The house shook. Where are we?" We were right next to the tracks on Howard Street. The end of Howard Street, right next to the tracks, and the trains would go by, you know, freight cars and all. And what the devil? You know, we were talking to my mother. [unclear – Speaking in Italian] See, I wanted to go back to Italy. That was my home. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me about how long was it before they put you in a school?

D'AMATO: Well, I think they put us in a school about two weeks later.

SIGRIST: Two weeks.

D'AMATO: And I'm going to tell you something. It was the hardest things to swallow because none of the—none of the kids would talk Italian to me, and they would make fun of me. That I couldn't talk English, and they would make fun of me. Even my own kind a people would make fun of me because I wouldn't talk Italian—English.

SIGRIST: There were other Italian children—

D'AMATO: There were, but some of them, other than my pisans, they would make fun of me because I wouldn't talk English.

SIGRIST: And if I remember correctly, Rose said they put you both together in the kindergarten.

D'AMATO: Yes, and I would hold onto her hand all the time because she was my life saver. Because any trouble I would get into, she would take me out of it.

SIGRIST: Do you remember a situation where you got into trouble at school?

D'AMATO: Yes. There was one fellow who was Italian and he was always egging me on, egging me on, and now I threw a rock at him or something, and he come after me, and he got me on the ground and he was doing a—he was punching me, and all of a sudden he flew off, and there was my sister on top of him, punching him, putting his head on the sidewalk and everything else. After that, nobody would bother me no more because they knew that my sister would take care of me. And that's how we went through life. And we managed to survive, and I'm going to tell you something. Now that you hear this different situation in this country, they've got it made. We did not have it made. My sister didn't—Rose didn't tell you. We ate out of one dish. We didn't have no money for nothing and we had maybe three fork, four forks. We ate out of one dish. My mother would cook, on the table, we all ate out of that because we didn't know any better. We didn't know any better and my father would go out and get the wood and coal. "What's this?" We didn't have a stove to heat. We didn't—you know, it was cold in the wintertime. And we had a tough winter.

SIGRIST: I'm trying to—I don't recall from Rose's interview, what was your father doing for a living?

D'AMATO: He was a laborer.

SIGRIST: Oh, that's right, he was doing—did your mother go out and seek employment in any way?

D'AMATO: No, she didn't. No. My mother just stayed home and took care of the house and everything else.

SIGRIST: What about the children? Like how old were you when you got your first job?

D'AMATO: My first job?

SIGRIST: Your first job that you got paid for in America, how old were you?

D'AMATO: I was nine years old.

SIGRIST: And what were you doing?

D'AMATO: Tobacco farm.

SIGRIST: And how much did you get paid, do you remember?

D'AMATO: If I got six dollars a week, I got too much money, and I worked about sixty hours.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me exactly what you had to do on the tobacco farm at that age?

D'AMATO: Well, first of all, I lived in Springfield. We had to go to Feeding Hills, Mass, and if you missed the trolley that was five cents, you had to walk up and you had to be on the job at six o'clock in the morning. And you worked from six to five.

SIGRIST: And what did you do exactly?

D'AMATO: Well, it all depends. If you went on the tobacco farm, as the tobacco would be ripened, you go on the bottom, get the bottom leaves, put them in a bushel and somebody take them away. And you go up and down every row picking up the bottom leaves of the tobacco, and a week later you have to take the second leaves, if they were ripe, and do the same thing. And you had to work, and if you didn't work, they would send you home, and I got sent home more than once because the weather was hot and during lunchtime us kids would fool around. There was a pond near us. We'd go swimming and we'd forget to come out of the pond. We'd report late for work and the boss would say, "Go home," and send us home, and we wouldn't get paid for that day.

SIGRIST: What did you do with the money that you did get paid?

D'AMATO: What I did with the money? Gave it to my mother.

SIGRIST: And what did she do with it?

D'AMATO: Well, she had expenses. You know, she bought food and everything else.

SIGRIST: She was sort of the family bookkeeper?

D'AMATO: Yes. Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Your brother, Sam—

D'AMATO: Yes.

SIGRIST: He had a job?

D'AMATO: Yes, he worked—I think he was in this country two, three weeks and he got a job at Milton Bradley.

SIGRIST: Milton Bradley. Now, I know that as like an entertainment, games and things. Is that what they made at that time?

DIGIORI: Yes, making crayons.

D'AMATO: Yeah, he was in what they call making crayons.

SIGRIST: Crayons?

D'AMATO: Yes. Him and my brother-in-law, Carm, were making crayons at Milton Bradley. Rose's husband, Carm, and my brother, Sam, worked at Milton Bradley's making crayons.

SIGRIST: Before he was your husband. (He laughs.)

D'AMATO: Yes, okay.

SIGRIST: And was the money all donated into the family funds?

D'AMATO: All into the family.

SIGRIST: And what about your sister, Rose, and I'll ask you this question because I didn't ask Rose this. Did she got a job?

D'AMATO: Well, she got a job later on, too, and the money went into the house.

SIGRIST: And the money went into the house.

D'AMATO: All the house.

SIGRIST: Were you allowed to keep any portion of that money for yourself?

D'AMATO: Very little. If I got fifty cents a week, I got too much, and I enjoyed it because at that time we could go to a show. We could go to Polis Springfield at Court Square for twenty cents, twenty-five cents.

SIGRIST: Polis?

D'AMATO: Polis Theater.

SIGRIST: Polis. Rose, how do we spell Polis?

DIGIORI: P-O-L-I-S.

SIGRIST: P-O-L-I-S, and was that an Italian—

D'AMATO: No, no, it was a regular show. They had a stage show.

SIGRIST: Like a vaudeville house?

DIGIORI: Yes.

D'AMATO: Yeah, it was a vaud—and they had a—if I can remember the people used to come down there and have a vaudeville show. We had some—we had some of them—at that time they were very—they just getting up in the thing there, but we had a lot of the actors and actresses come down to Springfield, and that at the Court Square. Yeah, that's in Springfield.

SIGRIST: So that was a popular entertainment for people at that time?

D'AMATO: Yes, it was. Yes, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Were there ways that the family entertained itself at home?

D'AMATO: Well, the only entertainment that we have at home is when all our pisans would come over, talk about Italy, drink wine and or play cards, and the women would get together and so something. And one week we'd go your house; the next week go to another house. And that's enjoyment we had. We were close-knitted pisans that we all come from the old place in the old country.

SIGRIST: I should say for the sake of the tape that pisan is a fellow countryman.

D'AMATO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Someone from where you came from.

D'AMATO: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: So that's really an important way that the community sort of defined itself and held itself together.

D'AMATO: Right, right, right. Yeah.

SIGRIST: You said they talked about Italy.

D'AMATO: Yes.

SIGRIST: Did—what kinds of things did they talk about, that you remember?

D'AMATO: Well, they talked about all the good times they had in Italy, and how we were—they were closer together in Italy because we were in a small town and they were close together. But now, one family, we live on Union Street and another family live on Howard Street and another family lived down on Fremont Street, and too far apart. In Italy, you live here, next door, across the street, and you're all close together. Yeah.

SIGRIST: How long did it—let me ask the question differently. Your mother was not happy when she—she didn't want to come to begin with.

D'AMATO: No.

SIGRIST: And she was not happy when she got here.

D'AMATO: We didn't want to stay here.

SIGRIST: How long did it take before that began to lessen?

D'AMATO: Well, I think it started lessening when she had her first American boy, when Michael was born?

SIGRIST: And what year was Michael born?

D'AMATO: 1923—'24?

DIGIORI: 1920.

D'AMATO: 1920 my brother Mike was born, and then she was a little happier more because she had another son.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when Michael was born?

D'AMATO: I do. They threw me out of the house because they had a midwife taking care of the deliveries. A mid-wife. Doctors, we didn't know any doctors at that time.

SIGRIST: What about when your mother was pregnant with Michael? How did you—did you see her pregnant? Did you know what was going on?

D'AMATO: No, no, I didn't know what was going on. We didn't know. When you were seven, eight years old, you don't know those things.

SIGRIST: Just wondering what the social customs were.

D'AMATO: You know, you didn't. You know. You knew she was getting fat but for what reason? And then you hear her, she was moaning, and my father would throw us out of the house. We didn't know what for and that was it.

SIGRIST: Came back and there was a Michael.

D'AMATO: Got another brother. Then we were happy.

SIGRIST: And you think that that sort of turned?

D'AMATO: It did. After she had her second boy, then it turned completely around.

SIGRIST: Did your parents ever go back to Italy for any reason?

D'AMATO: My mother didn't and my father didn't and I didn't.

SIGRIST: You didn't?

D'AMATO: No. I figured that after awhile, I got to know this country. [CRYING] I enjoyed it. I happened to have a nice life. I went to work. I was an upholsterer and I worked. During the Depression I was very fortunate that I didn't know what it was to get laid off. I worked for a company that was just starting up, the Berkshire Upholstering Company, and that company was on Broad Street in Springfield, right across the street from my house. I lived on 82 Broad Street and they started up a company. The Berkshire Upholstering started across the street and when the owners would need help, they would come across the street and tell my mother, "Where's your boy?" and my mother would say, "Get him. Work! Work!" And so my mother would call me and the way my mother would call me, I got a nickname. My mother would call me Gaytano. Gaytano, see that's Italian. The kids picked it up and if you were to go down the South End now, or talk to anybody down the South End, they all know me as "Iodine," because Gaytano and iodine is the same thing.

SIGRIST: That's right, the American kids sort of turned it into a word they knew, iodine.

D'AMATO: Yeah, and I used to work for Mr. Jack Popkin [PH], one of the nicest gentlemen you could find, and I would deliver furniture for him. I would go and cut burlap for him for his people, and when I was sixteen years old, I got a job there and I worked with him during the Depression. I was like a fellow that took care of any repairs. They would send me out for repair work, and I would go out and repair work in the stores. I used to go to New York, New Jersey, Boston, Worcester to repair.

Instead of bringing the furniture back, I would get the material, go over there and work there. During the worst Depression, I didn't know what it was to loaf. I was taking home thirty-five, forty dollars a week.

SIGRIST: Your parents must have been very thankful for that.

D'AMATO: Oh, sure, and my mother used to always cry and say, "Look at him." I didn't weigh over a hundred and twenty pounds. "Look at that, he's working and all the others, his friends are on the corner doing nothing," and I'd work. I'd work all the time. And I enjoyed it and I worked hard for it. I wouldn't get much money, but I worked hard.

SIGRIST: Anything at that time was good.

D'AMATO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you get married?

D'AMATO: Uh, yup. [CRYING] I got married—

DIGIORI: He just lost her.

SIGRIST: Oh, I'm sorry.

D'AMATO: I just lost my wife January. We were fifty-eight years.

SIGRIST: I'm sorry. And do you have children?

D'AMATO: I have one daughter, Joanne Catterina, and I had one grand daughter and she got killed in a train accident in Delaware. Joanne. [CRYING] [unclear] They were going to Delaware to the Beach, Myrtle Beach, and three girls were driving one night and they didn't notice the crossing and the three girls got killed in 1992.

SIGRIST: Oh, I'm sorry.

D'AMATO: Three young girls.

SIGRIST: That's terrible.

D'AMATO: Yup. Yeah, and then my daughter remarried. She has a nice husband. Her husband's name is Tommy Catterina. He's a nice fellow and I just lost my wife in January.

SIGRIST: Was your daughter—or is your daughter interested in your Italian background, her Italian background?

D'AMATO: Yes, she is. Lately in life she's always tell me, "Daddy, I didn't do what you want me to do." I wanted my daughter to go to a Catholic school to learn Italian, to learn to read and write, and she didn't want to do it because she didn't want to leave her kids in the grade school that she was grown up with. You know, she didn't want, to want them. Later in life, she found out that it was very important for her. She can understand it, but she can't talk it. She went to Italy and when she come back—she went on a trip to Italy for a month or so. When she come back she said, "Dad, I'm sorry I never went to school to learn Italian," and even today she'll tell me that "I should have gone to school and learned Italian, read and write."

SIGRIST: Can you speak some Italian?

D'AMATO: Me?

SIGRIST: You can speak some?

D'AMATO: Yes, I certainly can.

SIGRIST: Well, what I'd like to do to end this interview. Rose, if you could come over closer to the microphone, and if the three of you could talk in Italian, talk to each other. Maybe talk a little bit—

D'AMATO: [Italian]

SIGRIST: Rose, get closer to the microphone.

[all speaking Italian]

DIGIORI: Sound okay? [all continue to speak Italian] He talks very little.
[speaking Italian]

SIGRIST: Well, why don't we do this?

SAM: Like now, I'm all tied up. Look like I'm in a jail.

DIGIORI: Yeah.

SAM: I'm getting used to this thing here.

DIGIORI: Yeah, well, none of us—

SIGRIST: Let's do this. Let's end the interview by you each saying your name one at a time and saying goodbye in Italian. And Tommy, you go first.

EI-780/D'AMATO

Tom: An exchange in Italian, laughing, talking to each other.
Rose &
Sam: stay five minutes. The rest of it, I'm going.

D'AMATO: [Italian] Gaytano D'AMATO: [speaking Italian] Goodbye. [can't really follow this anymore, all speaking Italian again] He's been married sixty years.

SIGRIST: Wow.

DIGIORI: He's got four children, yeah.

SIGRIST: Say goodbye in Italian.

DIGIORI: [they all say goodbye in Italian]

SIGRIST: Rose, you go ahead and do it once, too.

DIGIORI: [speaking Italian]

SIGRIST: What's your name?

DIGIORI: Paul. [speaking Italian]

SIGRIST: Gracia. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Tom D'AMATO:, Sam D'AMATO: and Rose Digiori, I love that name, [PH] on Tuesday, August 13th, 1996 with Adehl [PH] Hussan [PH] in attendance here in Long Meadow. Thank you all.

END OF INTERVIEW