

EI-8

ELDA DEL BINO WILLITTS

BIRTH DATE: APRIL 28, 1911

INTERVIEW DATE: NOVEMBER 5, 1990

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

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TRANSCRIPT ORIGINALLY PREPARED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 4/1991

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ITALY, 1916

AGE 5

PORT: GENOA

ABORTED PASSAGE ON "THE ANCONA"

ULTIMATE PASSAGE ON "THE CASERTA"

RESIDENCES: LUCCA, ITALY

SAN FRANCISCO, CA

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mrs. Willitts uses April 28, 1911 as her official birth date. However, upon recently obtaining her original birth certificate from Italy, she discovered that her actual date of birth is April 29, 1909. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., NPS Oral Historian, 3/7/1995.

SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. It is Monday, November 5. We are here with Elda Willitts who came from Italy in 1916 when she was five years old. Would you please state your full name and date of birth.

WILLITTS: I'm Elda Willitts. I was born on April the 28th, 1911.

SIGRIST: Okay. And what was your maiden name?

WILLITTS: Del Bino. Capital D-E-L Capital B-I-N-O.

SIGRIST: I see. And um, where, where in Italy did you come from?

WILLITTS: I came from Luca, which is close to Florence.

SIGRIST: Uh huh.

WILLITTS: And we came from the port of Genoa when we left, from the port of Genoa.

SIGRIST: I see. Let's talk a little bit about your parents. What was your father's name?

WILLITTS: My father's name was Dominico Del Bino. My mother's name was Sabina Del Bino.

SIGRIST: I see. And what did your father do for a living?

WILLITTS: He was a gardener and, uh, worked for a doctor there, a Doctor Matteucci, who had residence in Italy but also lived in San Francisco.

SIGRIST: I see. And, um, did you live on the estate of this doctor?

WILLITTS: No, we did not, he just worked for him. We lived on our own little, um, one story place.

SIGRIST: Let's talk about the house you lived in.

WILLITTS: We lived in a very humble home. I remember it having a backyard and I remember having breakfast on the window sill where it was a wide window sill and I remember my mother giving me coffee and milk and bread that I would dunk in the coffee and eat it while I was looking outside at the children playing.

SIGRIST: Now your father being a gardener, did he keep a garden, your own private garden?

WILLITTS: No, we had nothing there. We had no land at all but, they, my mother worked in the fields for other people, but we had no land where we were.

SIGRIST: Did she work for the same doctor?

WILLITTS: No, no, she just worked out in the fields to make

money to support the family.

SIGRIST: I see. Did you keep animals at all?

WILLITTS: Not at all, no.

SIGRIST: O.K. Talk about your brothers and sisters. Start by naming them.

WILLITTS: All right, I have six sisters and two brothers. I will go by age. The first one was Beppa, then came Giovanna, then came Algisa, then Paolina, my brother Amerigo, my brother Joe, my sister Eda and I'm the baby.

SIGRIST: What wonderful names your family has. Um, whose decision was it to come to America?

WILLITTS: My father. He was a gardener and didn't seem to be able to get to provide for the family the way he really wanted to.

SIGRIST: It was a large family.

WILLITTS: It was a large family, although the older ones did

start to work. And...

SIGRIST: What sorts of things did they do?

WILLITTS: They worked for J.P.Coats at that time. I mean...

SIGRIST: In Italy?

WILLITTS: In Italy.

SIGRIST: Really.

WILLITTS: J.P.Coats. The thread people.

SIGRIST: Making thread, sure.

WILLITTS: Right. And my four older sisters worked there and none of the others worked and my Dad decided he had had enough of poverty and with eight children he wanted them to have a better home like everybody else and America then, even then was known as the Land of Opportunity. And so through this doctor that he worked with he was financed by him and went to San Francisco and he left with my older brother, the older of the two brothers and settled in San Francisco and

he left in 1912, I was born in '11, and he worked at Italian Swiss Colony in San Francisco.

SIGRIST: Really, in the vineyard?

WILLITTS: Well, but it wasn't a wine company at that...

SIGRIST: It wasn't a wine company?

WILLITTS: No, it was just a, well, they farmed the land and sold the produce and he got room and board there and stipend. And the stipend he saved so he could send for his family in America.

SIGRIST: I see. And so the doctor that he worked for financed the trip over.

WILLITTS: Over and then helped us later on to come over too.

SIGRIST: So your father had a very good relationship with this doctor.

WILLITTS: Oh yes, very good. It was through him, I think, that doctor was instrumental in advising my father that that's what he should do and that how it, really, I

mean, the seed was planted by the doctor and he decided to do that then.

SIGRIST: All right. Now while your father was in California and you said your oldest brother was with him...

WILLITTS: Right.

SIGRIST: What did your mother do?

WILLITTS: My mother was always a homemaker. She never, she just always cooked and took care of the children 'cause there was seven of us left and my four older sisters worked. But she never did and she never could even read or write. I mean, because, in Italy they didn't think it was necessary to educate women.

SIGRIST: So was it the kids that were left at home that were supporting the family?

WILLITTS: Family. The four oldest sisters.

SIGRIST: Those must have been very slim times then.

WILLITTS: Yes. We knew what poverty was. I mean my mother was

frugal and we always ate but we didn't do much of anything else.

SIGRIST: Let's talk about, for instance, your clothing when you were kids, did mother make it?

WILLITTS: Well, my mother did and then one of my sisters went to a , she took up dress making and so she's the one that really provided the clothes for the family. And they used to go out into the fields then, like we didn't live where we had a yard but there was a lot of open land and you know my mother would pick salad out of the fields and turnip greens to cook and so we lived really off the land in a way, and you'd get, like we didn't have a lot of meat but I remember my mother saying "one stock fish", everybody dipped, would cook it and you dipped your bread in it so you could eat that because there wasn't that much more to eat.

SIGRIST: Interesting. Do you remember, for instance, church life at all?

WILLITTS: Oh yeah, I mean that was really a big part of our life.

SIGRIST: Your parent's were very religious?

WILLITTS: Yes and I was brought up that way and at that time we were and the priest would come to the house and bless the house every Easter. Eastertime was a big deal where you had to clean the house from top to bottom and really get it so the priest could come in and bless it.

SIGRIST: Interesting.

WILLITTS: Yeah, so...

SIGRIST: There must have been a church in town then too?

WILLITTS: Yes, and I didn't live very far from the church.

SIGRIST: I see.

WILLITTS: I mean that's how I found my home when I went this time 'cause where the church is, if I walk down two blocks, that's where my house was.

SIGRIST: Let's talk a little about your father. Now he's working in California.

WILLITTS: Right.

SIGRIST: And he's sending part of his stipend back.

WILLITTS: Right.

SIGRIST: I assume he's keeping something for himself.

WILLITTS: No doubt. But he had room and board so I guess as long as he kept a little change he didn't need much.

SIGRIST: So how did you find out you were going to America?

WILLITTS: Because, well they had planned that. As soon as enough money was saved. Oh no, that was planned before, they both decided that he would come here and work and as soon as we had enough money, whenever that was, the rest of us were going to come to America.

SIGRIST: I see.

WILLITTS: And that happened four years later.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, for instance, your mother making the

announcement, you know "We're going to America!"

WILLITTS: "We're going", oh yeah, I mean this is really interesting Paul. Um. We were scheduled to come to America and all passports were ready and my other brother that was with us was sixteen years old. This was during World War 1. And passports ready, ready to go and he had not gotten a military release, his military waiver had not come in. And we could not leave until he had gotten it. So it didn't come and we had to postpone the trip. And, uh, we were all real disappointed and real upset because we didn't know when it was coming. But it came within a two week period, we left on the 13th of May of that same time and in the meantime while there, we found out we were scheduled to come over on the "Ancona", the "Ancona" was torpedoed and sunk and no survivors.

SIGRIST: Wow.

WILLITTS: And I've been a fatalist ever since.

SIGRIST: (he laughs) Wow.

WILLITTS: I know. It's easy to become one.

SIGRIST: Yeah. It really gives you pause. Let's talk about, did you feel the effects of World War 1 at home?

WILLITTS: No, no. I didn't personally and see my brother never got in so it was just a case, we lived it as you do like now hear that there's a war going on and that's the way we lived it.

SIGRIST: All right, let's talk about, you said you left from Genoa?

WILLITTS: Genoa.

SIGRIST: Let's talk about, how did you get to Genoa?

WILLITTS: Train, yeah. I'm sure we went by train. And, uh, we went aboard ship. When we got on the ship there were only a handful of people there and then the boat went down to Naples and then with Naples we really filled in.

SIGRIST: And what was the name of the boat you did end up on?

WILLITTS: Um, the Caserta. C-A-S-E-R-T-A. Caserta.

SIGRIST: Did you take a lot of belongings, luggage?

WILLITTS: Well, whatever we could carry, not in our luggage, whatever we could carry and blankets and, tied together with bundles. And we carried those. We had a couple of suitcases but most of the stuff was in bundles.

SIGRIST: How do you think your mother felt during all this? Do you think she was remorseful about leaving Italy or was she...

WILLITTS: No, she, I mean, she, we wanted to come to meet, to come with my Dad and to be with the family again and to be with my brother and I give her a lot of credit because through it all, even when we found out about the ship being torpedoed, it had no effect on her at all, she said, "If we're destined to be there we're going and this is what we're going to do"

SIGRIST: Wow. I do give her a lot of credit for huddling all those children.

WILLITTS: Exactly.

SIGRIST: Now, of course, you probably didn't really remember your father, you were, you were, very, just a babe in arms...

WILLITTS: I didn't, right, I didn't.

SIGRIST: So you were sort of going to meet someone you didn't even know.

WILLITTS: Didn't even know.

SIGRIST: Did you have photographs?

WILLITTS: Yes. And he was a handsome man.

SIGRIST: Uh, huh.

WILLITTS: A really handsome man. Something like my son (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Who is very handsome.

WILLITTS: Yeah. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Now, you, you boarded the boat in Genoa.

WILLITTS: Right.

SIGRIST: And then it went to Naples and filled up. Talk a little bit about the voyage over, how long did it take?

WILLITTS: Oh, the voyage was a harrowing experience. It was during the war. We had a lot of safety drills. And naturally we came steerage and believe me it leaves a lot to be desired.

SIGRIST: Talk about that a little bit. Why is steerage so horrible?

WILLITTS: Well, I mean really, it, well, if even people got seasick, I mean it was evident all over.

SIGRIST: Yes.

WILLITTS: I mean open space where everyone lived in commune like and, but we were real fortunate. When we got on board one of the officers took a liking to my sister Eda, who is the seventh.

SIGRIST: So how old is she?

WILLITTS: Well, she was seven years older than I was, so I'm five, she was twelve. So this officer took, because she reminded him of his daughter and he, so we got to do galley duty as a family, we peeled garlic, we peeled potatoes, we cleaned vegetables and he gave us first class food. And so we were on deck all the time rather than downstairs. We really lucked out.

SIGRIST: Were you, were you fortunate enough to be able to sleep up on deck or did you still have to sleep down in steerage.

WILLITTS: No, we slept downstairs, though, yeah, I mean, I remember going down there and getting out as soon as you could. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: I bet. Do you remember any other details about the boat? Talk about the safety drills. What did you have to do?

WILLITTS: Well you had, well it's like now, you were given a number and you had to, and there was a boat there and

in case anything happened and you'd have to go to a certain station when they called and they blew this siren or whatever it was, you'd have to go to a station and be ready in case you'd have to get on the...

SIGRIST: Then did they call role once you got to the station.

WILLITTS: Right! Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you, do you remember any entertainment on the boat at all?

WILLITTS: There wasn't any. No.

SIGRIST: Did any people who were down in steerage with you have musical instruments or read or sing or dance?

WILLITTS: I don't remember anything like that at all on the boat. So there must not have been because I don't remember from conversations anybody ever mentioning that, but on the boat now I have to tell you an experience I had because even, Paul, in Italy, Ellis Island was a dreaded part of the journey.

SIGRIST: Yes.

WILLITTS: 'Cause they, they knew you could be deported, you could be detained if something was wrong with you, it was well known what you had to go through so it was important that we all stay healthy and all be examined.

SIGRIST: Yes.

WILLITTS: When I got on the boat, I was only five and this little, this gentleman who had been back and forth several times and he took, well my mother took a liking to him because he was so knowledgeable about it.

SIGRIST: He spoke Italian?

WILLITTS: He spoke Italian. Oh yeah he was, and so he took me on a walk one day and he said, "You know what? When you get over to Ellis Island they're going to be examining your eyes with a hook," and he says, "Don't let them do it because you know what? They did it to me-one eye fell in my pocket. (Paul laughs) So you can imagine how I entered this..."

SIGRIST: Sure, this impressionable young girl!

WILLITTS: Right.

SIGRIST: Listening to a story like that.

WILLITTS: Five years old and we weren't cosmopolitan, let me tell you. I mean...

SIGRIST: You believed him.

WILLITTS: Of course, I mean I was five! But I was really five, I was not twelve like they are here. So we get over there and everybody has to pass and I'm on the floor screaming. And you know what, Paul, I passed without a physical. I passed the eye test because the other seven passed.

SIGRIST: Yes.

WILLITTS: And I guess they must have known.

SIGRIST: Well, you were all very lucky that you ate well on the boat.

WILLITTS: That's it.

SIGRIST: That was the real trick.

WILLITTS: No doubt that was helpful.

SIGRIST: Did you get sick on the boat at all, sea sick?

WILLITTS: No.

SIGRIST: You were up on deck, so...

WILLITTS: No, no, because, and you know it's a wonder I didn't because I'm prone to sea sickness and I can't, none of us really did. I mean, no we were a pretty lucky bunch.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how long it took?

WILLITTS: Sixteen days.

SIGRIST: Uh, huh.

WILLITTS: A long sixteen.

SIGRIST: Rough seas? Smooth sailing?

WILLITTS: It was and well, we went, anyway the long way,
whatever it was, we didn't come straight across right.
And so, sixteen days and then five days it took, it
was a twenty one day trip before we got, and on the
train sitting up all the time. It was...

SIGRIST: Yeah, a long haul.

WILLITTS: Like now.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, of course you were just a kid, but do
you remember, were you all pretty much Italian in
steerage or were there people who spoke other
languages?

WILLITTS: No, we all stayed with the Italians on the ship we
were Italian, different dialects.

SIGRIST: Right.

WILLITTS: Because in Naples and wherever they came from but we
all understood each other. It was great on the ship

until you get here and then, of course, there's a language. I mean, I wonder how we made it.

SIGRIST: All right, um, so you arrive in New York Harbor. Do you remember anything about the Statue of Liberty? Did you see it?

WILLITTS: Well, I do through my sisters and my mother because when they saw the Statue and after sixteen days there and being on "terra firma" we were in America. (she is moved)

SIGRIST: So they were very happy to see the Statue.

WILLITTS: The land of opportunity.

SIGRIST: Yes..yes. Now the boat docks and you are taken to Ellis.

WILLITTS: Right.

SIGRIST: And, uh, just talk a little bit about what you remember. What were your impressions?

WILLITTS: Oh, Ellis Island?

SIGRIST: Ellis.

WILLITTS: Well, they are through my family really that I remember the, well, it was a traumatic feeling for them and a beautiful feeling.

SIGRIST: And frightened. They must have been frightened.

WILLITTS: Frightened because all of a sudden you don't, all of a sudden you're in a new land, strange language, customs, and you sense that right away.

SIGRIST: Sure.

WILLITTS: And it was...But we got help. I often wonder how we made it but this gentleman that I told you that was aboard ship guided us and so, to Chicago. And then we made it on our own.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, you remember not being examined, of course.

WILLITTS: Right, right.

SIGRIST: Yelling and screaming and um, do you remember, were you fed at all at Ellis. Did your mother ever speak of that or do you remember?

WILLITTS: No, and I don't think we were. Is it possible that we weren't?

SIGRIST: Yes, it's very possible. You went through very quickly.

WILLITTS: Quickly, see, no and I just, you know, what I remember being on the island, I remember my family really crying.

SIGRIST: Yes.

WILLITTS: I do. The family really did. I was crying because I was afraid.

SIGRIST: Once they got through.

WILLITTS: They, right, once we passed it because that was really something dreaded.

SIGRIST: Sure. And it was a great relief.

WILLITTS: Right. When it was all over I remember them saying how thankful they were and thank God for being here.

SIGRIST: Who met you at Ellis? Did somebody come and meet you?

WILLITTS: Nobody.

SIGRIST: Nobody.

WILLITTS: There was no..., all of us had to make the trip all the way to San Francisco on our own.

SIGRIST: So, um, how did you get your rail tickets?

WILLITTS: I imagine we had them before we left.

SIGRIST: I see.

WILLITTS: We had the whole thing, yeah. Is that possible?

SIGRIST: Oh yes, sure. I suppose it's possible. Your mother was an adult so she didn't necessarily...

WILLITTS: Yeah, right. And another thing, like I, they say you

needed twenty-five dollars to get in. And I'm sure that's about all we had.

SIGRIST: Yes.

WILLITTS: And you know what I was thinking, I figured I made this trip over penniless and I'm coming back, and you know what, this really was a land of opportunity for me. I'm not penniless now.

SIGRIST: You've had a good life. You're glad you came. (they laugh)

WILLITTS: A good life. I'm delighted I came. It was wonderful.

SIGRIST: So, um, all right you, you've gone through, everyone is relieved, um, you get your luggage back. I assume there was no problem with that.

WILLITTS: All the, yeah, no. We had no problem.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you were wearing when you went through Ellis?

WILLITTS: No, but it couldn't have been an awful lot, Paul, I

can tell you (they laugh), because we didn't have very much over there.

SIGRIST: All right, so um...Let's talk about...

WILLITTS: I know, I know we didn't have any coats or anything.

SIGRIST: Yes. When did you arrive here? Do you remember what season it was?

WILLITTS: Yeah, it was, we arrived, well it took five days so we must have arrived here at the end of April because we got to San Francisco the sixth of May.

SIGRIST: I see.

WILLITTS: So it took sixteen. We left on the thirteenth, yeah twenty-ninth or thirtieth of April and we got into San Francisco. I had a birthday arriving that time.

SIGRIST: Yes.

WILLITTS: And you know what, I don't even remember anybody saying "Happy Birthday" to me.

SIGRIST: They had other things on their minds (they laugh). Do you remember anything about the rail trip across the country?

WILLITTS: Yes, because we just sat up all the time and I remember they used to sell lunch boxes here.

SIGRIST: Here at Ellis?

WILLITTS: Right. And I remember my mother saying we're going to buy enough stuff here to last us the whole way 'cause we're not going to spend any more money. And we did. And...

SIGRIST: Do you remember what was in it?

WILLITTS: Sandwiches and cookies and that's about it. And they were all kind of strange to us then 'cause we never had that, sandwiches was not a popular thing back there. But it was great. But you know what, all the sandwiches disappeared in a matter of a day or two and there was no more money and so we had to go the rest of the trip on candy bars and as little as possible to survive the whole thing.

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SIGRIST: Did you, um, now obviously this must have been a sleeper train. I mean, you must have had...

WILLITTS: Oh but no, we just, no, no, no.

SIGRIST: You just sat.

WILLITTS: Sat the whole five days. All of us, all seven of us.

SIGRIST: Oh, that must have been awful.

WILLITTS: That's it, I tell you. We made it by a song and a prayer. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Now, now you stopped along the way.

WILLITTS: We stopped in Chicago.

SIGRIST: Did you ever get out?

WILLITTS: In Chicago I remember getting out and I remember, this is cute, I remember my mother's thinking I was looking rather peaked so we were going around and looking and she sees a pie that she says, "Elda, you're going to have that because it's egg yolks and you need

nourishment" and I don't like eggs. (they laugh) And you know what, it was--an open face apricot pie. That's how much we knew about pies.

SIGRIST: She thought that those were eggs. How interesting. So you said it took six days to get across the country. Talk about seeing your father when you...

WILLITTS: When we got to San Francisco my one brother was working for the Fiord D'Italian which is still a restaurant in existence but its moved from where it was but my father was up in Asti at Italian Swiss Colony.

SIGRIST: Right.

WILLITTS: So he didn't know just when we would be arriving but they phoned him and he came in the next day and he had a flat ready for us on Lombard Street in San Francisco which is now part of 101 as you're travelling, and but it was such a small place and there was ten of us, nine because he went back to Asti because we were not self-supporting.

SIGRIST: Right.

WILLITTS: And we lived for a long time, until my sisters got a job, with food he'd send us down from up there and fruit in season.

SIGRIST: Really.

WILLITTS: And we lived on that.

SIGRIST: Talk about the flat a little bit. Can you describe it?

WILLITTS: Yes I can because it was only two bedroom flat and uh, every room, even the dining room, was a bedroom and...

SIGRIST: You had a lot of people in that...

WILLITTS: Nine people.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

WILLITTS: And I remember sleeping, there was three in every bed and I was in the middle all the time. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: With whom did you sleep?

WILLITTS: With two of my sisters and, uh, they used to squash me if I was sitting, sleeping in the middle so I would sleep at the foot of the bed and that wasn't pleasant either.

SIGRIST: Oh my. Was there a bathroom? Did you have a kitchen and a bathroom?

WILLITTS: One bath. Yeah we kept the kitchen and naturally the bath and everything was sleeping quarters. But then my sisters started working for California Packing Company, which was really the Del Monte label people and through that, then we were able to move to a bigger place where we had better accommodations for sleeping.

SIGRIST: So how long did you stay in that one flat?

WILLITTS: I would say only about four or five months.

SIGRIST: I see.

WILLITTS: I mean, until everybody was able to work and earn a little money and then we moved down on North Point

near Ghiradelli Square, you've probably heard of that and we moved there.

SIGRIST: I see. Did your father move back?

WILLITTS: No, my father. I really only got to know my him and he died, what was it about six years after we were here and I only got to enjoy him for two years because he was up there really trying to still support the family from up there, would visit and then he came down and stayed with us for a couple of years and then he, he passed away.

SIGRIST: May I ask how your father died?

WILLITTS: Of pneumonia. He was the healthiest man, Paul, he had never been sick in his life and at that time there was no cure, we didn't have any antibiotics and he was gone in five days. And that was a shock.

SIGRIST: And how old was he?

WILLITTS: He was fifty six when he died.

SIGRIST: I see.

WILLITTS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: He worked hard all those years.

WILLITTS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So what did your mother do after that?

WILLITTS: Well my mother still remained a homemaker and all the children kept running the family. That's the way we were brought up. We all shared, we all, everybody gave her the money, she ran the household, if there was anything left we would do it, if there was nothing left we would do nothing.

SIGRIST: Did she learn English?

WILLITTS: Very little because we moved to what is called "North Beach" in San Francisco, it's an Italian quarter. It was just like living in Italy again, you know. And she, like she would speak to my husband with a few words but she, she never learned the language, Paul.

SIGRIST: Your father must have learned English?

WILLITTS: Yes, he did, I mean, he did but my mother never learned the language.

SIGRIST: How did you learn English?

WILLITTS: I went to school. I was only five and I started from the first, I don't, I didn't go to kindergarten, I started in the first grade.

SIGRIST: And this was the first you had gone to school, right, because you...

WILLITTS: I didn't go to school in Italy, no, and it's the first time and it was, you know, anyone who moves from their birthplace to another land you do, everyone experiences a lot of prejudice, Paul.

SIGRIST: Yes, sure.

WILLITTS: There's a lot of embarrassing moments, Paul.

SIGRIST: Yes.

WILLITTS: But you know what, you survive and you become a better

person for it.

SIGRIST: Did you find a lot of anti-Italian sentiment where you moved? Although there was a large Italian population.

WILLITTS: There was in Italian quarter so I never had that feeling. Only as you got out, you know, going into the outside world so called, other than that. I mean like it's, "Mother doesn't speak English." (she says something inaudible) I mean, you know. And that's all right too, Paul, you know it was part of growing up.

SIGRIST: Sure.

WILLITTS: And you have to accept all that.

SIGRIST: Did you and your brothers and sisters work very hard to be "American?"

WILLITTS: Oh yeah. We became citizens. Everybody wanted to become a citizen as soon as we could because we knew what this country was doing for us compared to where we came from. There was opportunity, Paul. And you never had opportunity over there and we were ever so

grateful.

SIGRIST: Just very quickly because we are almost out of time...

WILLITTS: Right.

SIGRIST: Kind of sum up the rest of your life. (they laugh)

WILLITTS: The rest of my life. All right, I'm very happy, Paul.

I married a gentleman born in Michigan and we set up a business of our own in '61 under our name. It was then known as "Willitts Imports." My son took it over. It is now known as "Willitts Designs."

SIGRIST: When did you marry?

WILLITTS: When did I marry? In 1941. Then I stayed with my mother until my son, my husband came back from the service because he was in the service then. Then we put up a business of our own and my son took it over and now Hallmark purchased our business.

SIGRIST: I see. What sort of business was it?

WILLITTS: It's mostly, it's now into musical items, carousel

items, the horses, but we started out more in the cosmetic field and then went into imports and then my son took over and made it what it is today.

SIGRIST: What did your husband do before that?

WILLITTS: Salesperson, and that's how it happened and we started it by him still being out in the field. It was just the two of us and I running the shop and then from the two of us it branched out into something that is absolutely fabulous, Paul.

SIGRIST: Now, did you work your whole life?

WILLITTS: Yeah, well I brought a, only after I didn't, I worked until I was married.

SIGRIST: Yes.

WILLITTS: Well, and then, while I was married and Bill was in the service I worked. Then when I had Bill, my son, I didn't work until he went to school and then I went to work again.

SIGRIST: I see. Talk about, just tell me quickly some of your

first jobs.

WILLITTS: My first jobs were with Brown and Bigelow. It was a calendar company from St. Paul, Minnesota and then I went to Airwave Vacuum Cleaner Company.

SIGRIST: Really.

WILLITTS: And that's where I met my husband. He was a salesman there and I worked in the office and that's it.

SIGRIST: This is a good point for me to ask you, since we have one minute remaining, tell us something you'd like to say, what would your final statement be?

WILLITTS: My final...I mean I am so grateful to have been here. I wish I could convey to everybody what it means to be in this country and what this country has really done for me. And the dreams of my parents really did come true.

SIGRIST: Yes, well, thank you very much.

WILLITTS: I appreciate it, Paul.

EI-8/WILLITTS

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service
signing off with Elda Willitts.