

EI-804/RISCOTTI

EI-804
GIACOMINA IOLANDA RICHIEDEI RISCOTTI
BIRTH DATE: JULY 25, 1910
INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 23, 1996
RUNNING TIME: 40:38
INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.
RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME
INTERVIEW LOCATION: WESTFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 11/1997
TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

ITALY, 1920
AGE 10
PASSAGE ON "THE DANTE ALIGHIERI"

many
8.
ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Funding for this transcript, one of
interviews conducted with Italian and Sicilian women, was
generously provided by interviewee Elda Del Bino Willitts, EI-
Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of Oral History, 10/8/1997.

north
time.
SIGRIST: Good evening. This is Paul Sigrist for the National
Park Service. Today is Monday, September 23, 1996.
I'm in Westfield, Massachusetts, and I'm here with
Giacomina Riscotti. Mrs. Riscotti came from the
of Italy in 1920. She was ten years old at that
For the sake of the tape, I also want to say you may
hear a clock ticking in the background.
Mrs. Riscotti, can we begin by you giving me your
birth date, please?

RISCOTTI: Yes. July 25, 1910.

SIGRIST: And can you tell me the name that you were born with
in Italy?

RISCOTTI: Say that again.

SIGRIST: What was your name when you were born?

RISCOTTI: I . . .

SIGRIST: Your full name.

RISCOTTI: Giacomina Iolanda Riscotti, uh, Richiedei.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Richiedei, please?

RISCOTTI: R-I-C-H-I-E-D-E-I.

SIGRIST: Thank you. And can you spell Iolanda too, please?

RISCOTTI: I-L, L-O-N-D-A.

SIGRIST: Iolanda. Um, were you named after anyone in your family?

RISCOTTI: No. Yes. Gee, am I mixing up that?

SIGRIST: No, no. You go right ahead.

RISCOTTI: Yes. My grandfather's wife, my grandmother.

SIGRIST: Grandmother.

RISCOTTI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: On which side of the family?

RISCOTTI: On my father's side.

SIGRIST: So you were named after your father's mother.

RISCOTTI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Is that the Giacomina, or is that the Iolanda?

RISCOTTI: Giacomina. Iolanda, my mother gave me that middle name.

SIGRIST: For any particular reason?

RISCOTTI: No reason. Yes, for, you want to know the reason?

SIGRIST: Sure.

RISCOTTI: Because the king of Italy had a daughter named Iolanda.

Did
happened

SIGRIST: Do you know anything about the day you were born?
your mother ever tell you a story about what
the day you were born?

RISCOTTI: No.

SIGRIST: No.

RISCOTTI: No.

SIGRIST: Where in Italy were you born?

RISCOTTI: Cevo.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

RISCOTTI: C-E-V-O.

SIGRIST: What is that near?

RISCOTTI: Sondrio[ph], provincia de Sondrio[ph].

SIGRIST: And what part of the north of Italy is that?

RISCOTTI: Um, gee . . . Switzerland.

SIGRIST: Near Switzerland.

RISCOTTI: Okay. Yeah. I'm a little slow.

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

RISCOTTI: My mind. I'm a little absent minded, so, okay.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the town where you were born?

RISCOTTI: It was a small little town up in the Alps, a small town.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what the town looked like?

RISCOTTI: Little houses. I can't describe, I mean, uh, it's hard to describe a town. There were poor people, little houses, all houses, surrounded, you know, with a big yard in the middle and houses all around. And of we're all close neighbors, very close. As a matter

build

fact, my father build an outside steps to our old house where I lived in all of cement. My father that. I remember that very vividly, yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about him building those steps?

RISCOTTI: I don't remember that. I remember that my father built the steps. I didn't remember him.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me the house that you lived in?

we

RISCOTTI: Uh, well, it was an old house. One room downstairs

of

called the kitchen. It was a fireplace and two benches on each side. And in back, in back of one the bench, we had chickens, right in the kitchen.

And

then as you come outside, you go down to the cellar, very deep steps down to the cellar. That's the downstairs. The upstairs, you go up to the stairs where my father build, and there was a long porch.

it

was three rooms. And then up in the attic where we kept the hay for the cows, I recall once my grandmother, we carried these things, I don't know,

on

our shoulders, to carry the manure and the hay, something to, they made, the Italian, they carried

on

the shoulder so they could carry the manure and the hay. So my grandmother was carrying the hay up in

the

but
attic on this long porch. It broke in half, and she
came down with the thing on her back and the hay,
she didn't get hurt. And that's as far as I, as far
as I know about the house.

SIGRIST: What, do you remember the furniture in the house?

RISCOTTI: We had no furniture. Just a kitchen table and a,
a kitchen table, and I remember my brother and I were
eating spaghetti on this kitchen table with one
fork.

Yep.

SIGRIST: We're going to pause just for a moment. (break in
tape) Resuming, and Mrs. Riscotti's American-born
sister, Caroline Kaminsky[ph], has just joined us.
Mrs. Riscotti, you were telling me about the house
that you grew up in, and you mentioned that there
was
a fireplace with two benches on either side. What
did
you use the fireplace for?

RISCOTTI: For everything, for everything. For our meals, for
everything.

SIGRIST: How was the fireplace used for the meals? How did
you
cook on the fireplace?

RISCOTTI: It's hard to say. We had some thing hanging up that

we put the pot on, and then we pull it over on, over the fire. That's all I can remember.

SIGRIST: Whose job was it to do the cooking?

RISCOTTI: Oh, well, I was six or seven years old. I don't remember. It was grandma, my nona, my grandmother.

at
SIGRIST: And, um, do you remember what kinds of food you ate that time? You mentioned the spaghetti that your brother and you . . .

excuse
you
RISCOTTI: Potatoes. Potatoes, walnuts, we, not walnuts, me, mmm, what are those, those black things. Can turn it off?

SIGRIST: All right we'll pause. (break in tape) We're resuming, and you were telling us about the nuts. What kind of nuts were they?

trees
RISCOTTI: We had walnuts in the yard. And we had two big of walnuts. Then we made polenta, that's another thing.

SIGRIST: How do you make polenta?

You
RISCOTTI: With water and cornmeal. That's how you make it. stir it about for half an hour, then you, you put it

of, out on the plate, which is like, uh, like a piece

a loaf of bread. That's it.

SIGRIST: How did you eat the walnuts? What did you do with them?

bake RISCOTTI: The walnuts, we used them for baking. We used to
bread. bread at Christmas. We used them for Christmas

SIGRIST: So it would go inside the bread.

RISCOTTI: Yeah.

of SIGRIST: And then when we were paused, Caroline reminded you
the chestnuts.

RISCOTTI: Yes.

SIGRIST: How did you prepare the chestnuts?

RISCOTTI: We toasted them on the, on the fireplace. Toasted chestnuts.

SIGRIST: Did you eat any meat at all in Italy?

RISCOTTI: Not that I recall.

SIGRIST: No, no meat.

RISCOTTI: No.

for

SIGRIST: You mentioned that you had cows, that you had hay
the cows.

RISCOTTI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How did you use the cows?

RISCOTTI: For milk and butter.

SIGRIST: And can you, whose job was it to milk the cows?

RISCOTTI: My mother.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how she did that?

RISCOTTI: Vaguely, no. Just about . . .

SIGRIST: Your grandmother lived with you.

RISCOTTI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about your grandmother?
What was she like as a person?

RISCOTTI: She was a nice person.

you

SIGRIST: What did she look like? Describe her in words as
recall her.

She

RISCOTTI: She was a tall, good-looking person, very bossy.
was the boss. We never went hungry, but she was the
one who took care of everything.

from

SIGRIST: Is there a story that you remember about something
your grandmother did that sticks out in your mind

back then when you were a little girl?

RISCOTTI: No, no. No, I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Who else lived in the house?

RISCOTTI: No one. My brother.

SIGRIST: Well, it was your mother. Was she living in the
house?

RISCOTTI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah, your grandmother.

RISCOTTI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: That was her, was that your mother's mother, or
your . . .

RISCOTTI: Yes, my mother's mother.

SIGRIST: Your mother's mother. Your fa-- . . .

RISCOTTI: My brother.

SIGRIST: Your brother.

RISCOTTI: And myself.

SIGRIST: Was your brother older or younger?

RISCOTTI: Younger.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

RISCOTTI: Edmondo.

SIGRIST: Edmondo.

RISCOTTI: Edmondo.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

RISCOTTI: E-D-M-O-N-D-O.

SIGRIST: Thank you. Where was your father?

RISCOTTI: In America.

SIGRIST: What, do you remember when he came to America?

RISCOTTI: 1908.

SIGRIST: Oh, we're going to pause again. (break in tape)
We're resuming, and her son Ron has joined us also,

so

there are three of us in the room. Now, let's see,
where we were? We were talking about your
grandmother. Oh, your father. You said your father
came to America in 1908.

RISCOTTI: Yes.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

RISCOTTI: Giovanni.

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

RISCOTTI: I don't know anything about. I know we have
relative,
but I don't know anything about his family.

SIGRIST: Did your father ever talk about his childhood or
tell
can
any stories about when he was a young man that you
recall?

RISCOTTI: No. I don't recall. I don't recall.

SIGRIST: Um, when, when, um, what was his personality like?

RISCOTTI: A good person, a very jolly, good person, telling
jokes and making people laugh all the time.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. So he had a good sense of humor.

RISCOTTI: Very good sense of humor. Good, hardworking man.

SIGRIST: Do you know how your parents met?

RISCOTTI: Yes. My father comes from Brescia[ph]. My mother
comes from Valtalina[ph]. So my father went looking
for work, and he came to this place where my mother
was living, in Cevo, that's the town she was living.
town
And they were making a tunnel from one, from one
to another town, and he happened to get, to get the
job there helping making this tunnel. I remember
him,

that
I wish I could tell it in another way, but I don't remember it. I just remember a few little things he had said, and that's how he met her. Then, he's working in the town, then they came in Cevo, and that's where they boarded, with the people, in Cevo, and that's where he met my mother.

work,
SIGRIST: I see. So your father, when he was looking for
went to the are where your mother lived.

RISCOTTI: Yes, right.

SIGRIST: They were digging the tunnel, he boarded in a place where your mother was.

RISCOTTI: Yeah. Yes, right. Yes.

for
SIGRIST: That's interesting. Um, do you know what your father's profession was in Italy? What did he do
a living in Italy?

RISCOTTI: A regular, a regular laborer.

SIGRIST: A laborer. Uh-huh. Why did he want to go to the United States in 1908?

family
RISCOTTI: To make a little money so he could send for his
to come to America.

SIGRIST: Where did he go in 1908 in the United States?

RISCOTTI: Up Reese[ph] Mountain Road, with the quarries.

SIGRIST: In what town is that?

RISCOTTI: It's considered Westfield.

SIGRIST: He came to Westfield, Massachusetts in 1908.

RISCOTTI: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Why to Westfield?

RISCOTTI: Because where, that's where most of the people from,
from Italy, from the north, come, used to come here.

SIGRIST: And he got work in the quarries?

RISCOTTI: Yes.

SIGRIST: How, were any of his family here/

RISCOTTI: No, not when he came that, in 1908.

SIGRIST: Did he come alone in 1980?

RISCOTTI: I don't know how he came.

SIGRIST: I see. Did he return to Italy?

RISCOTTI: Yes.

SIGRIST: What year did he go back?

RISCOTTI: Could I have some help on this?

SIGRIST: All right. Ron, Caroline?

CAROLINE: Well, my father was here for about eight years,
so . . .

RISCOTTI: See, I don't remember . . .

SIGRIST: Just the date.

eight
CAROLINE: So it was like '15, 1915, 1916. He was here for
years.

SIGRIST: 1915 or 1916 he returned to Italy. Do you remember
when he came back . . .

RISCOTTI: No.

SIGRIST: To Italy?

RISCOTTI: No.

that?
SIGRIST: You don't remember him arriving or anything like

RISCOTTI: No, no. No.

family
SIGRIST: While your father was in Westfield, what did your
mother do to support the family, or how was the
supported?

a
RISCOTTI: You're asking me an awful lot of hard questions for
girl of seven, eight or nine years old.

SIGRIST: Well, you're doing, you're doing well so far.

RISCOTTI: What did she do? (she pauses) I can't tell you.

fun
SIGRIST: Okay. Can you tell me what a little girl did for
in Italy? What did you do when you were a little
girl?

them
we'd
RISCOTTI: I used to take, I used to take the goats and take
to pasture, take four or five goats with me, and
go in the woods and let them pasture, and we'd fool
around in the woods and play. I remember that very
vividly.

SIGRIST: Were the goats like pets?

RISCOTTI: No. We had them as, as a resource, you know.

SIGRIST: How did you use them?

RISCOTTI: Milking them.

SIGRIST: And then what would you do with the milk?

RISCOTTI: They, we used it.

that
SIGRIST: I'm just wondering how. Was there a special way
you used goat milk?

RISCOTTI: You make goat, goat cheese.

SIGRIST: And can you, can you describe how you made cheese?

RISCOTTI: No, I don't.

SIGRIST: You didn't have to do that.

RISCOTTI: No, no.

SIGRIST: What religion were you in Italy?

RISCOTTI: We were Catholic.

church
SIGRIST: Catholics. What do you remember about going to
back then?

RISCOTTI: I thought this was about, eh, I thought this was
about, what, in the island?

SIGRIST: Well, we're going to get you there.

RISCOTTI: I know. You ask me, I don't remember, and I'll
probably say things that they're not true. I don't
remember.

SIGRIST: Do you, um, were there any ways that you, that you
practiced your religion at home? Did you pray when
you were at home?

RISCOTTI: No, not that I remember.

SIGRIST: No. Do you remember celebrating holidays?

RISCOTTI: Yes, yes, at Christmas, yes, I remember that.

SIGRIST: How did people celebrate Christmas?

RISCOTTI: By going to church, and they baked bread, and they, they exchanged bread from family to family.

the
SIGRIST: This was the time that you would make the walnut, bread with the walnuts in it.

RISCOTTI: Right, right.

SIGRIST: Were there special songs that you sang?

RISCOTTI: Not that I remember.

celebrate
SIGRIST: No. Um, um, what about Easter? How did you Easter?

RISCOTTI: I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Did you go to school while you were in Italy?

RISCOTTI: I remember going to first grade, first and second grade.

SIGRIST: Does anything stick out in your mind about that?

take
um,
RISCOTTI: No. We used to go half a day, and then we, we'd off, we'd go in the woods and we'd gather, gather, dry wood to take home to start a fire. I remember that. I remember that.

SIGRIST: Could your mother read and write?

RISCOTTI: Yes.

SIGRIST: What about your grandmother?

RISCOTTI: I don't recall.

SIGRIST: But your mother could read and write.

RISCOTTI: Yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember your mother teaching you how to do things around the house?

RISCOTTI: No, I don't remember that.

SIGRIST: Nothing like that. Um, do you remember, do you remember your mother, for instance, how she did the laundry at that time. How did she wash clothes, or how did people wash clothes?

RISCOTTI: She used to go to a fountain in the middle of the town, which was cold water, water running all the time, an all-marble fountain, and they had a little shed where the, they used to boil their clothes in, in
a big boiler. It's all copper. They used to boil, and then they used to put them in this big, what did I
just say . . .

SIGRIST: To the boiler?

RISCOTTI: No.

SIGRIST: To the fountain.

RISCOTTI: The fountain, to rinse, to rinse them out, and then just hang them out.

SIGRIST: What did the clothes look like then?

RISCOTTI: Oh, I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Okay. Um, so your father came back to Italy in 1915 or 1916, and then what happened when he came back?

RISCOTTI: He came back to where?

SIGRIST: To Italy, to the town.

RISCOTTI: I don't know. I don't know what happened.

SIGRIST: Well, how was it decided that you all would come to America in 1920?

RISCOTTI: He decided that, to send for us.

SIGRIST: So he went back to the United States then?

RISCOTTI: He had come back to the United States, yes.

SIGRIST: I see. How did your mother feel about leaving Italy?

Do you know?

RISCOTTI: She was happy to leave, very happy. My grandmother

wasn't too happy, but my mother was happy. (voice
off mike)

SIGRIST: Yes, we're going to pause. (break in tape) We're
what resuming, and Ron has told me a little bit about
was going on between the father in the family, and
your father had come back to Massachusetts, and had
called for the family.

RISCOTTI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And, uh, so your mother decided that she did want to
come.

RISCOTTI: Yep.

SIGRIST: Yes. And your grandmother was not very pleased . .
.

RISCOTTI: No.

SIGRIST: . . . about that. What do you remember about
getting ready to leave Italy?

RISCOTTI: I can tell you one thing that I remember. My
grandmother had two big trees of walnut in the yard,
and she sold them. I remember this man coming, she
sold this, to this, she sold the tree with the
walnut.

That I remember. She sold the chickens. That's all
I

remember. Nothing else.

SIGRIST: Do you have any stories about the chickens being inside the house, anything you remember about that that might stick out in your mind?

were
RISCOTTI: No, the chicken were there, and that's all. They there.

SIGRIST: Um, all right. So you remember your grandmother selling the trees. Do you remember packing anything to take?

RISCOTTI: No, not a thing.

SIGRIST: Did you have to undergo any kind of examinations in Italy?

RISCOTTI: Not that I remember.

SIGRIST: Not that you remember.

RISCOTTI: No.

SIGRIST: Do you remember saying goodbye . . .

RISCOTTI: No.

SIGRIST: To anyone in the town.

RISCOTTI: No, I don't.

SIGRIST: So who is actually traveling to America now? You,

your mother, your brother, and anybody else?

RISCOTTI: My grandmother.

SIGRIST: And your grandmother, your mother's mother.

RISCOTTI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Right. Where were your father's parents at this
time?

RISCOTTI: They were in another town, another city.

SIGRIST: Did you ever, because you were named after your
father's mother.

RISCOTTI: Yeah, but we never had, we didn't have any contact
with them. They were far away.

SIGRIST: I see. Do you remember, do you remember where you
had
to go to get on the ship?

RISCOTTI: We went on a train. We went, we went to
Murobeno[ph],
and we got us a train, and we went, and we landed,
it
got to Genoa.

SIGRIST: So you went to Genoa to get on the ship.

RISCOTTI: Yeah, to get on the ship.

SIGRIST: Does anything stick out in your mind about being on
that train ride to Genoa?

RISCOTTI: No, no.

SIGRIST: Anything unusual happen? No. How long did you have to be in Genoa before you got on the ship?

RISCOTTI: I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the name of the ship?

RISCOTTI: Yes, Dante Alighieri.

SIGRIST: So you came on the Dante.

RISCOTTI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Um, do you remember how you felt as a young girl having to go on this ship?

RISCOTTI: I was very happy. I was, I was ten, my brother was seven, we were very happy to get on the ship.

SIGRIST: Had you ever been on a ship before?

RISCOTTI: No, no.

SIGRIST: Do you remember where you slept on the ship?

RISCOTTI: My mother was taken to the hospital, because she got sick, very sick, from, from the ship moving. So I slept with my grandmother in the cabin, and my
brother
must have been with us. I don't remember. But I remember sleeping in the cabin. That's all.

SIGRIST: Did you get sick?

RISCOTTI: No.

SIGRIST: Grandma didn't get sick?

RISCOTTI: No, not even my brother, no.

SIGRIST: Just your mother.

RISCOTTI: Mmm.

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

RISCOTTI: I remember taking my brother by the hand and going
going
upstairs, up in the first class. We saw some kids
we
going up there where they have toys. I remember
ship.
up and playing with them upstairs, and they thought
we
were lost. Everybody was looking for us on the
ship.
And finally we came back, and everybody was happy.
They found us.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how long the ship took to get to . .
.

RISCOTTI: Nineteen days.

SIGRIST: Nineteen days. What month are you traveling in, do
you remember?

RISCOTTI: I don't remember. But if we got here the 20th of

June, the 20th of May, figure that . . .

SIGRIST: Some time in the spring.

RISCOTTI: Some time in the spring, yeah.

SIGRIST: Is there anything else about being on the ship that sticks out in your mind, um, for instance, eating on the ship?

RISCOTTI: Yes. When, the first day we got on the ship, there was a dock, it wasn't moving, but on the deck was all table all set up for people to sit down and eat, and we all sat down, people from the south and from the north, and I remember we smelled hamburg, it must have been meat, it smelled good, you know. And when they brought it out, when they serve it on the table, everybody started to eat, and everybody started vomiting. Yeah. Everybody got sick, I remember that, one over another.

SIGRIST: Do you remember there being any kind of safety drills on the ship?

RISCOTTI: No.

SIGRIST: So you were on the ship for nineteen days, which is a long time.

RISCOTTI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when the ship arrived in the United States, when it came into the port of New York?

RISCOTTI: No.

SIGRIST: What do you remember next?

RISCOTTI: The next thing I remember we were in the room at,
uh,
what's the name of the . . .

SIGRIST: At Ellis Island.

RISCOTTI: Sitting there, waiting for my mother to come out,
because she was still in the hospital. And we were
worried whether she was going to pass the
examination
getting out, you know? And in the meantime my
father
came, and we were all sitting in this room waiting
for
her. Finally they came out and they examined her,
and
she was okay, too. Yep.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what it looked like at all on the inside?

RISCOTTI: It was a room with a lot of seats, and then there
was
a balcony. I remember the balcony. Is there a
balcony? Yeah, I remember that, yeah. And people
coming through there.

SIGRIST: Did you see anything there that you had never seen before?

RISCOTTI: No, I don't recall.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how long you were there?

RISCOTTI: No, we were there probably the rest of the day until we got, we got checked out.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing your father there?

RISCOTTI: No, I don't. No. I know he came, but I don't remember seeing him.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever tell you anything later about what she experienced at that time?

RISCOTTI: No.

SIGRIST: No.

RISCOTTI: Not that I remember.

SIGRIST: So she had been ill, but they examined her, she was okay.

RISCOTTI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And, um, where did your father take you?

RISCOTTI: We, we took, we boarded a train and came to Springfield, and then some friends of ours from

my Springfield took us up to East Mountain Road where

father had a house all ready for us.

SIGRIST: And that's here in Westfield.

East RISCOTTI: That's here in, up East Mountain. You know where

Mountain is?

SIGRIST: Uh, I don't actually.

RISCOTTI: Okay.

SIGRIST: It must be up on a mountain somewhere.

RISCOTTI: It was all woods then. Now it's like a little town.

prepared SIGRIST: Can you describe for me the house that he had

for his family to live in?

RISCOTTI: It was a house with three, with kitchen, downstairs
and a bedroom and two bedrooms upstairs.

SIGRIST: Did it have electricity?

RISCOTTI: No, it didn't, not at that time we came.

SIGRIST: How did you light the inside of the house?

RISCOTTI: With the, lamps, oil lamps.

SIGRIST: Did you have running water in that house?

RISCOTTI: No, we had a pump outside.

SIGRIST: Was there a bathroom of any source?

RISCOTTI: No, it was an outhouse.

you
girl,
SIGRIST: A little outhouse. What, what did you think when
saw this? I mean, how did you feel, as a young
you're going to be making a new life . . .

it
RISCOTTI: I felt good. At ten years old, I mean, what do you
expect, you know? From where we came it was like,
was like a castle, compared from where we came.

SIGRIST: Were there other families that would be sharing this
house with you?

RISCOTTI: No.

SIGRIST: No. So this was just for you.

RISCOTTI: Yep.

still?
SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Your father's working at the quarries

RISCOTTI: Yes.

he
SIGRIST: Can you just, tell me just a little bit about what
was doing at the quarries.

know

RISCOTTI: I don't know what he was doing up there. I don't
what he was doing up there. He was . . .

SIGRIST: What kind of a quarry was it?

RISCOTTI: A stone quarry.

SIGRIST: Right, but any specific kind of stone, or . . .

RISCOTTI: No, not that I know of.

SIGRIST: Were you put into school?

RISCOTTI: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me what it was like to go to school for
the first time here in the United States?

had

RISCOTTI: Well, we had a little schoolhouse up there, and we
an Italian teacher, and, and, uh, she explained to
me
in Italian what I was reading in English.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

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

RISCOTTI: No, no.

SIGRIST: No. Um, did your father speak any English?

RISCOTTI: Yes, broken English.

SIGRIST: Broken. What about your mother? Did she attempt to learn?

RISCOTTI: Yes. They all went to school.

SIGRIST: What kind of a school did they go to?

RISCOTTI: Night school up there. They had a teacher come up there.

SIGRIST: Were there other nationalities that lived up there?

RISCOTTI: Yes. I don't recall. There must have been, there must have been other nationalities.

SIGRIST: But other groups other than Italians . . .

RISCOTTI: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Were there southern Italians as well as northern Italians.

RISCOTTI: Yeah, a lot of them, yeah.

SIGRIST: How did the southern Italians and the northern Italians get along with each other here in America?

RISCOTTI: Each one mind their own business. Yeah. Not too well.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Well, of course, you know, a long history of conflict between the two groups. That's why I asked that question. (voice off mike)

RON: She even considers them, there's either northern
Italians or southern Italians.

CAROLINE: Right.

SIGRIST: Um, tell me a little bit about, um, when you were in
school, did you, did anyone make fun of you because
you were an immigrant?

RISCOTTI: No, I don't remember that at all.

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollection of helping your mother
learn English?

RISCOTTI: Me helping my mother?

SIGRIST: Did you and your brother help your mother?

RISCOTTI: No, no, no. Whatever she did, she helped herself by
going to school with the other women, and with my
father, and . . .

SIGRIST: Did, um, did your mother ever get a job?

RISCOTTI: No.

SIGRIST: She always stayed in the house?

RISCOTTI: Yep.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Uh, did your parents have children once they
came to the United States?

RISCOTTI: Yes, we had two children, they had two children.

SIGRIST: And can you tell me a little bit about that.

RISCOTTI: They had two children.

SIGRIST: Yes.

RISCOTTI: What can I tell you?

SIGRIST: Well, you can tell me their names.

RISCOTTI: One was Caroline, and one was Francesco.

SIGRIST: Who was born first? Caroline?

RISCOTTI: Caroline.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when Caroline was born?

RISCOTTI: Yes, I do.

here
SIGRIST: What do you remember about that? And she's right
to my left.

to
and
RISCOTTI: (she laughs) I remember going to school, and I
remember my mother being pregnant, and then I went
school this certain day, and this woman,
Mrs. Orlandi[ph], came down half way, I was coming
home from school, and she came down half way to meet
me, and she said to me that the doctor just come,
brought in a little girl in a box, with little holes

in so she could breathe. I remember that very vividly.

was SIGRIST: Whose job was it to take care of Caroline when she
a baby?

RISCOTTI: Me.

SIGRIST: And what were those responsibilities?

RISCOTTI: Rocking her, and cursing her. I shouldn't say that.
(they laugh) She cried all the time.

SIGRIST: How did your mother feel about having a, having a
child here in the United States?

RISCOTTI: She was very happy.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

RISCOTTI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What about when your brother was born? Um,
Francesco?

RISCOTTI: Francesco? I don't remember. Isn't that funny, I
don't remember. I remember my sister, but I don't
remember Frank.

you SIGRIST: Did you ever, when you got a little bit older, did
get a job?

RISCOTTI: No.

SIGRIST: No.

RISCOTTI: No.

SIGRIST: Never got a job to . . . What about your younger brother, Edmondo?

RISCOTTI: Edmondo.

SIGRIST: Edmondo.

RISCOTTI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did he get a job when he got a little bit older?

RISCOTTI: No.

SIGRIST: Like when he was in high school.

RISCOTTI: No, not that I remember.

SIGRIST: Not that you remember. Did your parents ever want
to go back to Italy?

RISCOTTI: No.

SIGRIST: Not at all.

RISCOTTI: My mother rather be dead here than be alive in
Italy.

SIGRIST: Even to visit.

RISCOTTI: Yep.

SIGRIST: And what about your father? Once he had everybody here, did he ever . . .

RISCOTTI: No, he never mentioned about going back.

SIGRIST: Did more relatives come to the United States?

RISCOTTI: No. Let's see, the relatives. (voice off mike)
I
don't remember.

SIGRIST: You don't remember.

RISCOTTI: No.

SIGRIST: Ron is saying Albert, over here in the corner. (voice off mike)

RISCOTTI: Oh, yes. An uncle.

SIGRIST: An uncle came over.

RISCOTTI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Was your family, were they the ones that brought him over, that sponsored him?

RISCOTTI: No, no.

SIGRIST: No.

RISCOTTI: It wasn't, it wasn't my uncle that brought him over. My father brought my uncle over, his brother over.

SIGRIST: I see. Um, were there, what were some of the ways that your mother and father held onto their Italian culture in their everyday life? What were some of the ways that they, they kept their Italian heritage? For instance, like, your mother's cooking? Did that change when she came to the United States?

RISCOTTI: Yes, it changed. Yeah. We had meat after we came here, which we never had meat in Italy. That's it.

SIGRIST: Was there an Italian church?

RISCOTTI: Yes, in Springfield.

SIGRIST: That, did your family attend to that church?

RISCOTTI: Once in a while we went.

SIGRIST: Once in a while.

RISCOTTI: My grandmother and myself, we used to go. My mother went when she could.

SIGRIST: What, what year did you get married?

RISCOTTI: Oh, my God, this is going on and on.

SIGRIST: We're almost done.

RISCOTTI: I hope so. 1929.

SIGRIST: 1929. What was the name of the man that you married?

RISCOTTI: Mario.

SIGRIST: Mario. Riscotti.

RISCOTTI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me how you met Mario?

RISCOTTI: It's a long story.

that's
SIGRIST: (he laughs) Well, if you'd like to tell it,
great. If . . .

living
RISCOTTI: Well, I met him through another family. He was
in New Hampshire and he came to visit this certain
family that he knew here, and I, and my mother
happened, we were good friends with this family, and
my mother happened to be there with me, and we met
right there.

SIGRIST: I see. And, um, did you have children?

RISCOTTI: Yes.

SIGRIST: Obviously, I know you have . . .

RISCOTTI: Yeah, I have three children.

SIGRIST: And their names?

RISCOTTI: Robert, Richard and Ronnie.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Did your husband, was he from Italy, or was he born in the United States?

RISCOTTI: Yes. No, he was from Italy.

SIGRIST: Where in Italy was he from?

RISCOTTI: You want the town.

SIGRIST: Well, or the region.

RISCOTTI: The same place where I, the same region.

SIGRIST: From the north of Italy.

RISCOTTI: The north of Italy.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And what did he do for a living?

RISCOTTI: He worked up at the quarry.

SIGRIST: Did he live in that, that village up there? Oh, no, he said he was from New Hampshire.

RISCOTTI: No, no, no. We lived in Westfield.

SIGRIST: I see. Did you ever go back to Italy?

RISCOTTI: No.

SIGRIST: Did you ever have any interest in going back?

RISCOTTI: Yes, I did, but my husband died too early, and so
we,
happened
we didn't go. We were planning to go, but it

that we didn't.

is
you
SIGRIST: I see. Um, what, is there something about you that
uniquely Italian, something, something that makes
Italian, some part of your personality?

RISCOTTI: I love the Italian. I love to talk Italian. I love
the Italian language.

SIGRIST: Did your children learn to speak Italian?

RISCOTTI: Very little.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Can you speak some Italian for us on tape, or
maybe say a prayer in Italian or something?

RISCOTTI: No.

SIGRIST: Can you sing? That would be great.

RISCOTTI: Oh, no, no. (they laugh)

she
SIGRIST: Oh, please, sing. (voice off mike) What would
sing? What would she like to sing?

RISCOTTI: No. (voice off mike)

SIGRIST: Oh, please sing, do you know a song that you learned
as a little girl?

RISCOTTI: No.

SIGRIST: Like a nursery rhyme or something?

RISCOTTI: No.

SIGRIST: Or a Christmas song, or . . .

RON: Arrivederci, Roma.

RISCOTTI: No. No, you don't want me to sing.

SIGRIST: But your family might like it.

RISCOTTI: (she sings in Italian) That's about all I know.

RON: Oh, come on. Do some more (?).

SIGRIST: Just do one verse, and then I won't ask any more.

RISCOTTI: I don't know. I forgot it. Honest to God, I forgot
it.

Lord's

SIGRIST: Is there a prayer that you could say, like The
Prayer in Italian, or . . .

RISCOTTI: No.

SIGRIST: The Hail Mary or something?

RISCOTTI: No. I know all the English, but not the Italian. I
knew, I've known the Italian, but I forgot them all.
I used to say them all in Latin with my mother.
(Italian) I knew them all.

SIGRIST: Can you say it in English for us?

RISCOTTI: No.

SIGRIST: Okay. Well, I guess my last question for you is are
States?
you glad that your parents came to the United

RISCOTTI: Absolutely.

SIGRIST: How do you think your life would have been different
if you had stayed in Italy?

RISCOTTI: I have no idea. I would have met a man over there,
do
and got married, and lived their lives the way they
over there.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Riscotti, thank you very much.

RISCOTTI: You're welcome.

SIGRIST: I appreciate you . . .

RISCOTTI: You got me very nervous. (they laugh) I didn't
expect all those questions.

SIGRIST: Well, I'm sorry.

RISCOTTI: I thought you were just going to say about the
island.

SIGRIST: I didn't want you to be nervous. I'm just happy the
signing
tape recorder's working. This is Paul Sigris

off with Giacomina Riscotti on Monday, September 23,
1996, with her son Ron and her sister Caroline in
attendance. Thank you very much.

RISCOTTI: All right. Where is this going to be?

- 1 -

□