

EI-817

ELISA RICCIARDI VELLUCCI

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ITALY, 1919

AGE 17

PASSAGE ON "THE AMERICA"

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LEVINE: Today is October 4, 1996. I'm here in Staten Island with Elisa Vellucci. Mrs. Vellucci's son Chris is here and his wife, and Mrs. Vellucci came in 1919 when she was seventeen years of age from Italy.

VELLUCCI: From Italy.

LEVINE: To, uh, the United States. At the time of this interview, Mrs. Vellucci is ninety-four years of age.

VELLUCCI: That's right.

LEVINE: That's right. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Okay. If we could start at the beginning, if you would say your birth date and where you came from, where you were born?

VELLUCCI: Well, I was born March 2, 1902, in the city of Casserta[ph], near Naples. Casserta[ph], it doesn't make any province. It's a city. It's a city, not too big, but very important. I know the Americans sign the peace in 1945, '45, '46. That's why I . . .

LEVINE: They signed the peace treaty?

VELLUCCI: The American, and they signed the peace, the Second World War where my son was, he was an amputee.

LEVINE: Oh.

VELLUCCI: He fight. In 1945 he was wounded very bad, and that's all the history I can give. Since I came over here, I lived in Washington, DC for twelve years, because my sister wants help in the store, and then I came back to Brooklyn because I like Brooklyn. And then after my husband died and I didn't have nobody over there, I came to Staten Island because I had a, my other son that he passed away. And I have over

here four grandchildren and six grandchildren, and five great grandchildren. Five. That's right. Three boys, one girl. That's my story.

LEVINE: That's your story. Okay. Well, let's go back, uh, to the time when you were still in Casserta[ph], in Italy. Were you there up until you left for your first seventeen years? Were you in the same place?

VELLUCCI: Yes. It was in a small, a small, let's say village, near Casserta[ph]. To go to school, for fourth grade, I had to walk about I guess two miles to go to school to make the fourth grade, because in the small town they only had up to third grade. One room here, the second grade, the one, and third grade. I liked to go to school, but it was too much. I needed a pair of shoes every week, so I quit, I quit.

LEVINE: You had to walk so far, you mean?

VELLUCCI: It was far at that time, and there was no bus, there was nothing over there. And to go to school I need a pair of shoes every week. And then my mother, every time I used to ask for two cents for the books we had to buy, all the books, she says, "You want me to send? You want me to go to school?" She wants me to

be a schoolteacher. But when she had to give me the money for the books, because we had to buy the books, and she started, the answer is I quit the school.

LEVINE: What did you do, then, after you quit?

VELLUCCI: What I do? Ah, I learn to sew a little bit. We had a piece of land. My sister, she was five years older than me. She would go to work, I fight to go with her, even though I was five years young, I had to go with her. She worked, and I had to work. And that's how in Italy, until I came in this country. My, you know, it was right after the war. My father was sixty, and sixty, at that time, it was an old man. And we were, one sister was married and she was in Washington, DC. She was living over there. She had . . .

LEVINE: Well, let's talk more about Italy, and then we'll talk later about that.

VELLUCCI: Yeah, oh, Italy.

LEVINE: So, um . . .

VELLUCCI: Well, he didn't do much. I went to Naples, about two, three, three or four times before, uh, you know,

before I sailed for the America.

LEVINE: What was your father's name?

VELLUCCI: Vincenzo.

LEVINE: And what was your mother's name?

VELLUCCI: Nunziata Vellucci. My mother was the same name of my, uh . . .

LEVINE: Husband.

VELLUCCI: Husband. Because his father and my mother, they were cousins, you know. And, uh, that's all. That's why we have the same name. But I didn't know my husband until I came in this country, because he was born in Galletta[ph], and I was born in Casserta[ph], so we never, we saw each other over here. And we weren't that close, you know?

LEVINE: Well, um, what do you remember about Casserta[ph]? What do you remember about the town?

VELLUCCI: Casserta[ph] is a small, not very big town, but it has a lot of small village, you know, around the province of Casserta[ph]. Casserta[ph] alone is a city, but not that big. Not a big, big city, but

very cute.

LEVINE: What was the main street like? Do you remember the main street?

VELLUCCI: Well, I remember Corso Berto Prima[ph]. That was the main street. It was, it's a, it's a, what do you call, Suzy? It was a nice, uh, a nice city. Not too big.

LEVINE: Did it have shops on the street?

VELLUCCI: Oh, yes. We had to buy a pair of shoes, we had to go to Casserta[ph]. We had to buy a dress, we made ourselves, you know, we'd buy the goods, and, uh, the city. And the important thing was, uh, open, la marqueta[ph], open?

SUZY: Open market, like.

VELLUCCI: Open market, on a Saturday. Everything they sell, even gold earring, but the real gold. And everything. Fruit, things to eat, and things to wear. That was nice. My mother used to go there, but we didn't go. But I went, in 19, 1963 I went back, and they had a feast. They called it St. Anna Feast, and it was beautiful. I saw before I came in

this country. But when I went over there, we went to see. The firework they do over there, nothing impress me over here. It was a lot. And, uh, well, there's another thing, I got to ask my daughter-in-law, she knows. (Italian) with the, you know, when they (Italian)? (voice off mike) No, no. The Madonna, when they, when the church went around the city, and then was in the market, they had the fireworks.

SUZY: The fireworks, yeah.

VELLUCCI: The bomb.

SUZY: The bombs?

VELLUCCI: The bomb. The bomb that was so, so . . .

SUZY: Loud.

VELLUCCI: Tremenda, loud, that Madonna had a pair of earring like this, and the earring, the vibration, the earring, they used to do like that. I remember. Oh, just thinking, you know, that affected me, because after so many years.

LEVINE: Do you remember the festivals from when you were a

girl growing up? Can you remember religious festivals when you were a girl?

VELLUCCI: Oh, yes, oh, yes, oh, yes. That was our enjoyment, you know, the feast, you know, the fireworks. And, when I say the Madonna, this was in Casserta[ph], you know, a little fanatic like they, the Neapolitan, you know, when they have a, when they have a feast. And, look, I can't speak very good English. I hope you understand.

LEVINE: Yeah, I understand. Now, what else did you do for enjoyment besides the feasts?

VELLUCCI: We had to go to church almost every day, again some time. And Sunday afternoon we had to go to church. We welcome, when my father used to say, "Go to church," we were allowed to go out and see the friend and have a little walk around and laugh. That's all it was. Then once in a while, see, I'm not very close. I had a brother that he was, he came from America, he took us to the movies in Casserta[ph], he took us to a pasticceria[ph] where you have gelato, ice cream, you know? We knew, but if I make you laugh, we have two pigs. My mother, sometimes she

says, "You got to clean the pig's house." That's what we did we enjoyment. No, we had a lot of fig tree, if you know what the figs are. They figs, they're fruit.

LEVINE: Figs, uh-huh.

VELLUCCI: Yeah. And, uh, my breakfast was on top of the one with a piece of bread and fresh figs, which after so many years my nephew brought me some figs from the yard, the small one, but we had a, we had a fig tree. Not that we were rich, but we dried those figs, because there were so many. And I used to go on top of the roof, over the tree. I wasn't scared. Only once I fell, only once.

LEVINE: And what was your father doing for work?

VELLUCCI: Well, my father, I can hardly, let's see. He was a miner, a miner.

CHRIS: He used to work in a quarry. My father worked in a quarry.

VELLUCCI: You know, sometime he'd take, you know, the contract himself when it was a little late, and then he had to do work with him, but the work wasn't steady. But he

didn't like to work in the field, you know, in the, he didn't like that. I don't know why he bought that thing. And that's the life, uh, it was a dull life, I've got to say that. It was dull in one way, and exciting in another way. We enjoyed. We were happy.

LEVINE: What about your mother? Did she work, or did she . . .

VELLUCCI: No.

LEVINE: She was at home.

VELLUCCI: She was home. She got married in another city, Gaeta[ph], they called it. My father was in Casserta[ph]. After the work finished, he took my mother and my brother to Casserta[ph] to stay there, because he had to, he owned a house, which was only two rooms, but it was his own. And my mother, she never worked. She made a lot of work. Not that we worked, you know, just worked in the field and wash the clothes. I never washed the clothes, because I was too young. She had somebody, you know, that, uh, needed a little money, a little food, and they help, and my mother give a little money. In other words, we weren't rich, but we were not poor, very poor.

No. We had our own food.

LEVINE: And how about brothers and sisters? Who did you have for family?

VELLUCCI: My older sister, she got married in 1913 before the war start. Her husband had to come from, from America. He already was over here. And his mother wants to give him an Italian wife. So they got married, and they came in this country. They came directly to Washington, DC, where she lived, where she die over there at the age of ninety-two.

LEVINE: And then, that was your older sister. Then what . . .

VELLUCCI: Then I got another sister, she got married when I came in this country. She had to get married, and at that time they're still, the fellow still want a, the dowry, the money. (she laughs) So much gold, so much this, so that's why I came over here. And my father was old. We didn't have cash anyhow. We had a house, things, but we didn't have, we didn't have cash. So I came in this country. But my father told me, "If you don't like America . . ." When I go back. My father came in this country in 1902. I was

two months old. He didn't like, because he couldn't speak English. And, uh, he told me, "If you don't like America," he used to tell me, "I sell another pig, and send for you." (she laughs) That's a true story, you know.

LEVINE: Did you think you would want to come back? You thought you might want to come back?

VELLUCCI: Well, for the first year I didn't like over here.

LEVINE: Why? Why was that? Why didn't you . . .

VELLUCCI: Because I couldn't speak the language, and I couldn't go to the night school because my, my brother didn't want me to go. I could go to work, but I couldn't go to school in the night. So I learned a little bit with the children. That's all, I mean, and that's why I can't even speak very good. You know, I stay in Washington, DC twelve years. If I didn't speak a little bit, you know, it was dead. Over there there was no Italian people. And I learned a little bit. The kids, they used to go to school, get me the small book, the children's book, and I learned a little bit. Not correctly, but I do pretty good.

LEVINE: You did fine. Uh-huh, uh-huh.

VELLUCCI: That's my story. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Okay. So . . .

VELLUCCI: It's not an interesting story.

LEVINE: Yes, it is.

VELLUCCI: But it's a . . .

LEVINE: It's very interesting. Tell me about, anything else about religion in your family, when you were growing up.

VELLUCCI: Well, I think we used to read a little Catholic religion. My mother's here. She made us go to church. On Sunday she was very Catholic. Well, I am Catholic. I don't go to church every Sunday, but once in a while the priest come over here, Father O'Hara. He give me the, uh, I don't know what you say, that thing that you put in your mouth. He says, I introduce . . .

: The Communion.

VELLUCCI: The Communion.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And anything else about, uh, any foods that you remember that your mother made that you particularly liked when you were growing up? Any kind of food?

VELLUCCI: Oh, yes. Pasta fagiole, macaroni, pasta (Italian). Once in a while we had a chicken. We had some eggs. So when we were sick we got the eggs and we got the little milk, and then I, we eat everything. We had a lot of fruit to eat. That was one good thing, you know? The fruit. In Italy the climate, the climate is beautiful. You know, it's not too cold, and not too, and we had a lot of broccoli. But there is in the (?). Well, I say broccoli, the other thing, zucchini, zuke. All those things. Nothing special. But, uh, I remember all those things.

LEVINE: Do you remember, uh, why the family came here when they did? Who did you travel with when you came?

VELLUCCI: When I came over here? My brother, my sister-in-law, and a little kid, she was about two years old. I came over here because I know my niece, you know, I came in care of my brother because he was, I was seventeen, and he had a child. He was about, he had,

my brother. He went to two wars. The First World War he went to Tripoli, uh, something like Africa, maybe my son will remember better than that. Then the second time he came because he had the fiance in Italy and he wanted to get married, and, plus, he wanted to defend his country that was associated with America, you know, with the Americans. And Italy, they were, uh . . .

LEVINE: Allies.

VELLUCCI: Friends, allies, that's it. You know, sometimes I've got to think before. That's, uh, that's the story.

LEVINE: So your brother wanted to come to this country?

VELLUCCI: Well, he tried to work in Italy, but the work wasn't that much, uh, you know, that you find. He worked for a year a couple of years, and then he decided to come back to America. I had another two brothers over here, and they live in Chicago, Chicago, Illinois. Yeah. They live over there. I don't know, they work as longshoreman, what they do. They were good boys. Not, uh, not to think to keep a penny, you know, to accumulate a little money, no. Maybe they made a little money and they spend it,

that's all they were, but they were good boys.

LEVINE: So why was it that you got to go along with your brother when he came to this country?

VELLUCCI: Oh, no. I didn't have it. I went with my other brother.

LEVINE: Yeah, the one that you came with. How come you went with him and his wife and child?

VELLUCCI: No, no. When I went over here?

LEVINE: Yeah.

VELLUCCI: Because he was, he came to America. I never thought to come to America. When he decided to come back to America, that was the second, the third time, he never went back. I says, what I'm doing over here? If I got to get married, they want money. And I better go to America. Maybe I can go to work over there. And, uh, I do my own, I earn about two, three hundred dollars, and then I spend on some clothes and shoes, this and that. What can I tell you? The life was very, not very dull. My brother, we work, and he took the, his wife and the child and me to a theater in New York. That's all we do. And we went to eat a

pizza. And he work fixing shoes, that's all.

LEVINE: Do you remember when you left your, Casserta[ph], when you left to go, where did you sail from to come to America?

VELLUCCI: Well, the first time I was a baby. I don't remember, the first time. My father was here already, and he didn't want to go to school. My older brother, he was about, uh, twenty-two.

: I think she misunderstood you.

LEVINE: Yeah. When you came to this country, when you were seventeen.

VELLUCCI: Yes.

LEVINE: Do you . . .

: That was her first time.

VELLUCCI: That was the first time.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, do you remember leaving Casserta[ph] and leaving for the port?

VELLUCCI: Oh, sure.

LEVINE: What was that like, leaving your . . .

VELLUCCI: Well, it was very sad. The boat, they used to call it Pieroscofo[ph], the boat. Then they called Anava[ph], and then they called something else, now they call a boat. And, uh, I was crying. My father was crying from outside. And the Neapolitan, they started singing the song (Italian), Santa Lucia. There was something. It's a sad song. I don't even like to remember. You know, that they think why they, the boat started. That I cannot forget.

: They were singing a farewell song.

VELLUCCI: You know, just to the, then I went back every thirty-two years.

LEVINE: Well, tell me about what you packed. What did you take with you when you came to America?

VELLUCCI: Well, not too much. A few dresses, a good pair of shoes that I used (?), and I pay fifty leaves, and another couple of pair of shoes, and some dresses that I used to do myself, you know? I told my mother, "Give me some sheets. I don't want to say to my sister-in-law give me the sheets." Which they

don't want to give to me. (she laughs) It was my sheet. And then I says, "Mom, give me something to remember." She give me a golden pin which somebody stole from me the last day I was in the boat. This is a little thing, but it's a true thing. Well.

LEVINE: So when you got to, uh, Naples, was that where you left from?

VELLUCCI: Oh, yeah, that's we all leave to Naples, because Casserta[ph] is nowhere near the city, any port. It's inland.

LEVINE: So, what, did you have to spend any time in Naples before you left?

VELLUCCI: No, no, because it didn't take us long to go back to Casserta[ph], you know, when we had to do, we had to go talk to, my brother had to find something, when he can leave, this and that. But he, well, you know, I wasn't afraid. There were some people, they were afraid to go to Naples. Not me.

LEVINE: So how did you, how did you think about going to America? Did you, were you afraid? Were you excited? What was on your mind?

VELLUCCI: Nothing was on mind to begin. I went to work,
fifteen a week. It was a lot of money.

LEVINE: Well, before we talk about that, talk about the
voyage on The America.

VELLUCCI: Oh!

LEVINE: What was that like?

VELLUCCI: Well, it was, it was not anything like when we went
back. We had to wash our own dishes, dishes made out
of metal. And, uh, the bed, they were dirty. There
were a lot of lice. I'm not ashamed to say. There
were so many people in the boat that, uh, the boat
wasn't big enough to carry this. And, uh, there was
so many people in one big room, up and down, that, I
don't want to go into it.

LEVINE: Well, go ahead.

VELLUCCI: Sometime when you were sleeping and little kid
pee . . . (she laughs)

LEVINE: Oh, from the top bunk.

VELLUCCI: All down. And I said, "Gee, I'm all wet!" You know,
you remember once in a while.

: How many boats did they have in a row.

VELLUCCI: Because so many boat, they came back to America. And we got on one, they were very small. And nothing, we had to eat on the floor. Not the food on the floor, we sit on the floor. And it was very rough. After, after I went there for thirty-two years, I feel like a queen. Everything was so nice on the boat, you sit, you have a glass for this, a glass for that, a dish for this, a dish for that. I felt like I had vacation after that.

LEVINE: Is there anything else about that voyage or The America, the ship The America, that you can recall?

VELLUCCI: No. When I came over here, I never saw, I never saw the, uh, the ocean before I came to America. And when it was bad weather I said to my son, "Oh, look, look, Dominick, the mountain over there." He look out there. "Where?" It was a bad weather, and the water went up, and I thought it was a mountain. That's the only thing I remember. And I remember that I had to go wash the dishes, and everybody washed, washed together. That was very awful, I'm sorry, darling.

LEVINE: And how about when you came into the New York Harbor?
Do you remember seeing, seeing New York, seeing the
Statue of Liberty?

VELLUCCI: Oh, yeah. As I say, we must going to the Ellis
Island. I personally visit, you know? And then the
soldier and the American citizen, they proceed for,
for New York, because when I got out the boat, the
thing, I saw the, the elevator that my father used to
say (?), the train that goes in here. (she laughs)
I don't know. My daughter-in-law, she knows how to
speak better. And I says, "Gee, you know, I don't
know that the elevator had the thing." He says, "It
just, it just in the air." It didn't affect him.
Then we got out, must be at the ferry down the
Battery Park, and we got in the boat. And my sister-
in-law, she says, "Alisa, we're moving." I says, "So
what we're moving? We didn't go anyplace." She
says, "Yes, we're moving." And then I got up on
myself, I saw the water. I says, "Yes, we do move."
But from Battery Place to go to Brooklyn wasn't,
wasn't that much, uh, traffic, you know, the five
cents we used to pay.

LEVINE: Tell about your brother and why it was that you didn't have to go to Ellis Island.

VELLUCCI: Not my brother. No, he was a soldier. Look, if you have to make the telephone, go ahead. (she addresses her son)

: No, no, no. I'll call later.

VELLUCCI: My brother, he came over here when he was fourteen years old. He used to work, I think, for twenty-five cents a day giving the drink to everybody that work. My father say that he work on Pennsylvania STation when they built Pennsylvania Station. That I can say it's true. And my brother didn't want to go to school. My mother wrote to my father, "You'd better take him, because he's getting bad." He don't want to go to school. He don't want to . . . So, and my other brother follow him, and then they got Americanized, you know? Then they came back, and then they want to come back right away over here. You know, they came over here when they were children, and my, my older brother, he never went back. When we, when he came with me, I went back twice. He never went back to see my sister or

anybody.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Before we had the tape on you mentioned something about because your brother had been in the army?

VELLUCCI: Yes.

LEVINE: Well, tell about that, about . . .

VELLUCCI: Well, everybody was free to go to Italy with the free, uh, don't pay nothing the voyage, what do you say?

LEVINE: Free passage? Free, a free fare?

VELLUCCI: Yeah, free fare, that's right, and free fare to come back. And he had a fiance in Italy, they used to say, "If you don't go to fight, you never can come back to here, to Italy, you know, your own." So he came back, and he stayed there about three, four, five years, three, four years.

LEVINE: He was in the army.

VELLUCCI: He was in the army. He was in the . . .

CHRIS: He was in the Italian Army.

VELLUCCI: Yeah, naturally, if he went to Italy . . .

CHRIS: Yeah, he was also the Turkish, uh . . .

VELLUCCI: That was the other war.

CHRIS: The Turkish war.

VELLUCCI: My brother . . . (voice off mike) My brother, he was about twenty-two years old, and I mean more than that, more.

LEVINE: So, in other words, because he was in the Italian Army . . .

VELLUCCI: Yes, he had a free voyage, fare, to come back, also. See, he and his, uh . . .

LEVINE: Wife.

VELLUCCI: And his wife and the child, yeah. But I had to pay.

LEVINE: I see. But then when you got to Battery Park, the reason you didn't have to go to Ellis Island is because he was allowed to go through?

VELLUCCI: I must go there, but I . . .

LEVINE: But you just don't remember.

VELLUCCI: I didn't go out of the boat. So we proceed for New York City. That's all I can tell you. You know, at that time I was just a thing. There was another, there was another land that I, that I came over here, and then, no, I didn't have my mother or my father. I had three brothers over here which . . . (she laughs) Which was a little scary.

LEVINE: What? Why was it scary?

VELLUCCI: Because one, he was so jealous of that cute, don't have to go out in the night, you can't do this, you can't do that.

LEVINE: So your brother was very strict with you.

VELLUCCI: Oh, yes. Especially two of them. But the other one was very nice. I wasn't even allowed to go to, to a theater with my younger brother, because my, my sister-in-law, she says, they see you with your brother. They don't know it's your brother.

LEVINE: So what did you do? Did you go to your other brother's house, or how did you go after your . . .

VELLUCCI: No. I went with the brother that he was settled over here, you know, in Brooklyn. And, uh, because his wife, she knew how to speak a little bit English, she was here, and she find me somebody that take me to work. You know, I had to work, because I didn't want to, I don't want to depend on my brother for a quarter, or whatever I need. And, uh, that's the whole life.

LEVINE: So what kind of a job did you get right away?

VELLUCCI: Oh, no. Sew, cut this thing. Then I say to the boss, I can speak, I can work on the machine. I says I don't like, I can make a little bit more. He says, "When the machine is empty that I got a place, you gonna be there." And they give me the machine. And I was stupid at that time. I didn't think to work steady and make a little money. I used to work. I made thirty dollars or something like that, more than get dress and get anything I want, all my money. That's, until I got married, and I was assembling.

LEVINE: Well, uh, tell me about some of the things when you first got to this country that were new to you that you had never seen before. You said the elevated

train, that was one thing, but do you remember anything else?

VELLUCCI: That's impressed me, that's impressed me too much, and the boat, you know, the ferry boat. It wasn't that much, because from Battery Park to Brooklyn wasn't that much.

LEVINE: How about anything else? Anything about where you lived, or food, or anything else that was new to you?

VELLUCCI: No, no. No, no. I, my sister-in-law cook lima beans with the pasta, macaroni. And we were so hungry that, uh, it looked delicious. (she laughs) I mean, that I remember. We stopped at my aunt first, and she gave us milk and coffee and bread, something like that. See, we didn't have any breakfast at the, at the boat. We didn't have nothing to eat.

LEVINE: So, uh, do you remember, um, you worked in the sewing factory.

VELLUCCI: Yes.

LEVINE: And then you stayed working there until you met your husband? Were you working there then?

VELLUCCI: No. After I got married I didn't work no more.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Were you working there when you met your husband?

VELLUCCI: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. And where did you meet him? How did you meet him?

VELLUCCI: He used to come and see my brother, because they were distant relatives, and he used to come over there, and he told me, and I say no the first time. Well, that's, that's a long time story. And, uh, I don't even like to say in front of my children. (they laugh)

CHRIS: Go ahead. What are you going to say?

VELLUCCI: No. (they laugh) Papa came to see, uh, my brother.

CHRIS: Yeah? And he asked you for a date?

VELLUCCI: And he asked me for a date. When he used to come over there, I had to sit between the store and, because my brother can see me that I was in the store. Oh, there is one thing, though. Maybe this

makes you laugh. When I came in this country, it was about two, three days, I was with my brother, that he had the machine to, to do the, to patch the shoes, and I used to help him. So I came out from the back of the store. Somebody was in the store. I was seventy. I was not pretty, but I was young. So the man came over here, he says, "Philip," he must have said, "Philip, that's your sister?" And he caressed me. So my brother got mad. He . . . (she laughs)

And he says, "Oh, Philip, I didn't do nothing." He went near him, and he says, "I only do that." When he touch him, he got all the shoes, and he throw . . . (she laughs)

LEVINE: He threw them at him?

VELLUCCI: I was laughing.

CHRIS: In other words, he was very protective.

VELLUCCI: He threw them at him. He run away. The only, I didn't understand then, but I saw, when he touch him, he was, he felt funny that he touch him. He got all the shoes, and he started throwing. (she laughs)

That was something that I never forget.

LEVINE: So, um, what did you like about your husband? What was it that you felt . . .

VELLUCCI: No, my husband was a quiet man. He was, uh, he lost his mother and father when he was still young, so he had two sisters and a brother that he had to take care, and he came, he came to this country, they came to this country. And, uh, my life was very quiet but very, very nice, you know? I went to, the sister was my age, and we never fight, we never, we were happy. No rich, but happy. What do you want, candy, Suzy?

SUZY: No, Ma. (?)

LEVINE: What was your husband's name?

VELLUCCI: Frank.

LEVINE: Frank. Ricciardi.

VELLUCCI: Vellucci.

LEVINE: Vellucci.

VELLUCCI: My father was Ricciardi.

LEVINE: Right, right. Okay. And, um, then, uh, how many children did you have?

VELLUCCI: Two.

LEVINE: Two. And their names?

VELLUCCI: Chris and Vince.

LEVINE: Vince.

VELLUCCI: Like my father. I have (?).

LEVINE: And, um, when you, when you think back about coming to this country as a young, as a young woman, seventeen, how, what sense do you make of it, or how do you think about that change . . .

VELLUCCI: That I don't remember. I just made up my mind I want to come to America, maybe for some reason. I had a, I had a boyfriend in Italy, yes, and he told me, "When we get married tell your mother and your father not to buy too many things. Give me the money cash, so I can open the store." I couldn't, I couldn't stand him for that. And I didn't write him any more when I came over here. That's all. And it was, uh, I just didn't want to, that's true, though. I didn't want nothing from him, because I was sure what I would find over here.

LEVINE: Well, you mentioned before that you saw so many changes in your life, things that have changed that are different now than they were.

VELLUCCI: Well, change, change the country. That's what I'm talking about. Over here, years ago, it was different. Not too many people over there own a car. It was a different life. I think I remember it because I'm much, much older than you. And, uh, I remember we didn't have much then. We didn't have a car. We didn't have an apartment with everybody there their own room and all. But we were happy. We used to go to Coney Island, we spend ten cents, we used to go to Coney Island, we were happy. A glass of soda and one dog, five cents, or five cents. That's all we could afford. There's things to remember. But if you want to remember everything . . .

LEVINE: You can't remember everything. Were you here during, you were here during the Depression. Do you remember the Depression? How did that affect you personally?

VELLUCCI: I couldn't find a job. My young brother, one, my brother, he had a, you know, he fixes shoes, and he

was a shoemaker in Italy, but over here everybody used to buy. And I used to help him to fix the shoes on the machine. That's all I used to do. But the other two, they were looking for a job, but it was already bad. The woman, they could find a job better than a man at that time, sewing. I said, well, we made a little money. My sister-in-law and I, we dress, we went to work. We couldn't go to the theater every week. It was a dollar each at that time, and a dollar was too much money. Now you got my whole story.

LEVINE: Well, let me ask you this. What were the high points? What makes you feel very satisfied about your life?

VELLUCCI: Oh, don't believe that some time. I was wishing for something else, but I was already satisfied with the life. We were, we had a very quiet life in Italy, and I didn't expect to go dance over here, which I didn't even know how to dance. That's all. There's a lot of little things, you know, you . . .

LEVINE: What do you feel proud of?

VELLUCCI: Proud? That, uh, we had a quiet life, and satisfied.

And I had two sons, but this one, he lost his foot in the war. That was, was not satisfying. And the other one passed away about three or four years ago.

But I'm satisfied I have six nice grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren, one great-granddaughter. Yeah. That's right. Only, oh, yeah. No, you have a daughter. That's your great, your granddaughter, she's my great-granddaughter. Lisa.

CHRIS: Yeah, she's my granddaughter.

VELLUCCI: Yeah. Well, she's my great-granddaughter.

LEVINE: Right.

VELLUCCI: And he has a great-grandson that he's going to graduate from, uh, from college.

CHRIS: Yeah, that's the one I was trying to get a hold of.

VELLUCCI: Well, try again.

CHRIS: No, I'll try from the outside.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, we're just about finished. Is there anything else that you can think of about . . .

VELLUCCI: Nothing . . .

LEVINE: Coming to this country, your life here, or . . .

VELLUCCI: No. When we reach this country, not too much. My brother, he come, you know, about a, a block away, he work. And I come in between, and his wife, and I got married. I says, "We didn't go to America, we didn't came to America yesterday. It's the first time we came over here." I didn't know the way. (she laughs) You know, it was some time. (voice off mike)

LEVINE: Um, how about this time in your life? This time in your life?

VELLUCCI: This time?

LEVINE: When your children are grown?

VELLUCCI: Well, I'm satisfied to see the children. They're nice, can't be any nicer than what they are. He's got the, got two sons, one is working in the courthouse over here. And the other one, he's working in the bank, I don't know. Tommy. Tommy works in the bank.

CHRIS: Tommy works for the Union Bank of Switzerland, a vice president.

VELLUCCI: And the other one is in the civil court, I think you call it, not too far. Once in a while he come over here at lunchtime. And then they have a granddaughter and grandson. Am I right?

CHRIS: Yeah. I have four grandsons, three grandsons and one granddaughter. Now you're getting me all mixed up.

LEVINE: Okay. Well . . .

VELLUCCI: I think you've got enough.

LEVINE: I think we can end here. I think, I thank you very much. It was a very interesting interview.

VELLUCCI: Well, I don't know.

LEVINE: And, um, I've been speaking with Elisa Vellucci, who came from Italy in 1919 when she was seventeen years of age. Today, October 4, 1996, you're ninety-four years of age.

VELLUCCI: Yes. I'll be ninety-five in March.

LEVINE: Okay. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm signing off.