

EI-840

RITA COSTA FINCO

BIRTH DATE: JULY 16, 1916

INTERVIEW DATE: DECEMBER 31, 1996

RUNNING TIME: 44:47

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PhD

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME

INTERVIEW LOCATION: CUDAHY, WISCONSIN

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 2/1998

TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

ITALY, 1929

AGE 13

PASSAGE ON "THE ROMA"

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Funding for this transcript, one of many interviews conducted with Italian and Sicilian women, was generously provided by interviewee Elda Del Bino Willitts, EI-8. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of Oral History, 8/14/1997.

LEVINE: Today is December 31, 1996, and I'm here at the home of Rita Finco in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Cudahy.

FINCO: Cudahy.

LEVINE: Cudahy, Wisconsin. Mrs. Finco came from Italy in 1929 when she was thirteen years of age. At the time of this interview, Mrs. Finco is eighty years of age, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Okay. If you could say where in Italy you were born.

FINCO: Asiago.

LEVINE: And that's A-S-I-A-G-O.

FINCO: Right.

LEVINE: Asiago. And, uh, your birth date, please?

FINCO: July 16, 1916.

LEVINE: Okay. And did you live in the same place in Asiago up until you were thirteen and left for America?

FINCO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, uh, your mother, what was your mother's name?

FINCO: Domenica.

LEVINE: Domenica. And her maiden name?

FINCO: P-U-L-L-E-R. Puller. Puller.

LEVINE: P . . .

FINCO: P-U-L-L-E-R.

LEVINE: Okay. Because you have Rodigarro[ph]? Is that . . .

FINCO: Uh, Rodigarro[ph]. That was, yeah, that was her mother's, I'm now confused. Her mother's name was

Puller. Her name was Rodigarro[ph].

LEVINE: Okay. Okay. So, and, and Domenica was her first name. And your father's name?

FINCO: Victor.

LEVINE: Victor. And, uh, did you have grandparents who were living nearby that you saw . . .

FINCO: Well, my grandparents, something terrible had happened. Uh, in the village, the first World War. And we had, they had to leave Asiago because the Germans were bombing the town. When they came back to Asiago, that town was demolished, and they moved back to the old homestead and they figured on rebuilding it. Well, one night a wall fell into them and killed them instantly, both of them. I remember, uh, I remember my grandmother feeding me coffee all the time. I used to sit behind her chair, and she would slip me a coffee. Uh . . .

LEVINE: How old were you then? How old were you?

FINCO: Oh, it was during the World War. I was a little kid, because that was, you know, World War One. And my dad was in the service. He was not there when I was born.

So I really can't say how old I was, but I distinctly remember her feeding me black coffee. That's how I still like it. (they laugh)

LEVINE: How about your grandfather? Do you have any memories of him?

FINCO: No, not much. You know, like I said, I was pretty small. I can't say how old I was. But, uh, I remember they lived, they had a big fireplace, and I always sat behind her. She would rock, you know, and I, that's when she would serve me the coffee. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Now was that your mother's . . .

FINCO: No, that was my dad's, my dad's parents, yeah.

LEVINE: How about your mother's parents? What do you remember about them?

FINCO: Uh, I only remember her being in a wheelchair, but they lived in Torine[ph]. They didn't live in Asiago. How they got separated, I don't know. My mother had two brothers. One was in the service, and the other one was sickly all the time. But we never see too much of them because, you know, it isn't like it is

now with the cars and that, so I only remember visiting my grandmother, my mother's mother. It was like a nursing home, and she was in a wheelchair.

LEVINE: Hmm. So how did you get there, to Torine[ph]?

FINCO: Well, that's what I never could figure out. See, my mother's, uh, my mother's like, uh, how my great grandfather and great grandmother, I don't know how they met, because now my mother's mother was French, and my dad, they were Italian, so I don't know how they met and landed in Torine[ph]. I don't know how my mother got to Asiago. You know, at that time, you didn't pay much attention, you know?

LEVINE: That's true.

FINCO: So . . .

LEVINE: How about brothers and sisters? Did you have brothers and sisters?

FINCO: If I had brothers and sisters? Yeah, I had a baby sister that died. My mother had a miscarriage. And then she had another, I had another sister that died from the flu. I don't know how old she was. Uh, I have a picture of her. Can you stop that (referring

to the tape) and I'll show it to you.

LEVINE: Well, maybe we should do that afterwards.

FINCO: Okay.

LEVINE: You can show me then.

FINCO: And then I had a brother that was two years younger than I was, and two weeks before we were to sail for America, he was sick. They gave him castor oil. That did him in. He died two weeks before we were ready to leave. So that was pretty sad.

LEVINE: Do you remember the kind of treatment, I mean, what kind of medical treatment people got, or . . .

FINCO: Well, like I said, if you had a tummyache, then the doctor would give you castor oil. With him it was deadly because after a while they found out he had a ruptured appendix. So, you know, I don't know, like I said, I know it was a sad time for everybody, but we had to leave.

LEVINE: What, um, were you a religious family?

FINCO: I'd say so. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember any of the religious occasions from when you were a little girl?

FINCO: Oh . . .

LEVINE: Like, do you remember, uh . . .

FINCO: Making Communion.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And was there a certain ceremony that you . . .

FINCO: Oh, yeah. There was a big, there was a big to-do about that, you know? Of course, at that time you were six years old when you, you know, received Communion, which you don't do now. You have to understand what you're doing. At the time you, you know, (she laughs) you really don't realize what it was, you know? But that was it, I guess, you know?

LEVINE: How about, like, births or marriages or deaths? Do you remember any of the ceremonies in Italy around any of those kinds of events?

FINCO: Uh, the thing I remember, everybody used to wear black, you know? Everybody wore black.

LEVINE: Do you know why?

FINCO: Well, at the time I didn't, but later on I thought maybe it was because, you know, the sadness, or. I know when my brother died, even when I came to the States here, I had to wear a black band around, you know? And finally after a while I said to my, well, this is ridiculous because, you know, everybody asked, of course, I couldn't speak a word of English, and everybody's pulling on my band wondering what it was, you know? And finally my mother gave in and took it off. But I know when anybody died in the family, all the children had to wear a black band.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. And how about religious, like, events like, uh, saints' festivals or . . .

FINCO: Yeah, they . . .

LEVINE: Do you remember any of those?

FINCO: They used to have those in the summer. Uh, that I remember. I remember we had a big field of daffodils, just right on the town. The fields was loaded with daffodils, and us kids used to, uh, go and bring home, you know, armfuls. There was, because, even up to this day daffodils are my favorite because I think of

those days when we used to pick, they were wild, you know, out on the field. And, uh, we just picked them by the armloads, you know? And we used to take them home. They'd put them in big bushel baskets because, you know. (she laughs) Ah. I mean, there's things I remember, and then there's things I, ah, you know, kind of slip by.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, now, in the town that you, was it a big place?

FINCO: No, very small.

LEVINE: Very small. It was like a village?

FINCO: Uh, well, maybe a little bigger than a village. Uh, I know that, see, at the time when the guy got married, the wives moved in with the family. And we had a, I remember a great big house, stucco, and my dad had a big family. So when we got married, my mother went in there with the family, and two other of the brothers moved in with the family, see? And, uh, one had a, in the same building one had a shoemaker shop. One had, uh, like a restaurant. And, uh, one of the daughters was making hats, one made dresses, all in the same building, but each had a room that I remembered one

that made dresses, I always used to go in, she used to teach me how to sew on her sewing machine, you know? So, uh, it was a big family, but it was altogether not always happy. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Well, it must have been a big house.

FINCO: It was. It was like a, what would you say around here, uh, I don't know. Uh, a great big building. And it was stucco, you know? One thing that surprised me when I came to the U.S. to see all these houses made out of wood. You don't see, I never saw that over there.

LEVINE: And do you remember, can you describe any of the shops that your aunts or uncles or anybody had within that same building?

FINCO: Well, it was a regular, you know, people used to come and get fitted for dresses, measured for dresses, and one just to make just hats. Each one had their own thing, you know, that they did. And it was all in the same building.

LEVINE: Wow. So, um, do you remember, like, market day in . . .

FINCO: No.

LEVINE: Were there regular shops where people bought food,
or . . .

FINCO: Oh, yeah, yeah. They were all small shops, you know,
not big shops. They were, well, one room things.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what did you do for fun? Do you remember
what you did when you were a little girl?

FINCO: Well, that town gets a lot of snow. We used to sleigh
wagon. And, uh, and bike riding and, you know, little
things like that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And how about school? You were in school
there?

FINCO: Oh, yeah, I went to school there. And, uh, I
had (she laughs) kind of an experience. I think I
was about ten years old, and Mussolini came to town,
was going to come to town to, uh, it was a big
monument. He was going to dedicate the monument. And
we had to write an essay like, you know, about
Mussolini. Well, needless to say, my parents were not
happy with Mussolini. My dad, he hated him with a
passion. And, well, he was here. My dad was here.

He had to be here five years before we became citizens. So I wrote an essay, and I got the bronze medal. So at the dedication, I was supposed to go there. Needless to say, my mother refused to send me. My aunt said, "No way." (she laughs) And, uh, I didn't go. And, of course, when I went to school the next day it was, "How come?" You know? Well, I was sick, you know, they lied. So there was, I couldn't understand at the time why they did that to me, you know? Just because they had nothing. As I said, my dad hated Mussolini with a passion. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So, uh, how was the school compared to the school you went to after you came to this country?

FINCO: Uh, I was ahead in marks here, but then, you know what held me back was the English language, you know, because I didn't know how to speak the language. But I did skip a few grades, and then, I had, I went to, uh, a Catholic school, and the nuns were really, really nice to me, you know?

LEVINE: In Italy?

FINCO: Over here.

LEVINE: Oh, here.

FINCO: When I came here.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. And how about there? Was it a Catholic school there?

FINCO: I think they were all Catholics. (they laugh) They were all Catholics over there. They had no choice.

LEVINE: Okay. Let's see. Uh, how about foods. Do you remember any foods that your mother made there in Italy that you particularly liked?

FINCO: Uh, you know, it was the pasta and the beef roast. But we never got red sauce. See, that's northern Italy, and there was butter, cheese, rice. But, uh, I didn't, she never made anything with tomato sauce. Even to this day I think over there it's like that, northern Italian. They go for the rice and the white pasta. So after we got here, I liked it with the sauce. (they laugh)

LEVINE: So when you were getting ready to go, uh, how did you feel about leaving?

FINCO: I didn't want to leave.

LEVINE: What was . . .

FINCO: Well, there was sadness at the time, too. And, uh, I, uh, I didn't like the idea of coming here. My mother didn't either. But we had no choice at that time, you know? My dad was here for five years.

LEVINE: Had he come back at all in those five years?

FINCO: No, no. And my mother and dad never wanted to go back. That's one thing, they never wanted to go back. Even though, like I said, life was good out there for them. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: Well, do you know what your father's main reason was for bringing the family to this country?

FINCO: He hated Mussolini. (they laugh) Well, you know, he used to disappear a lot, and we couldn't figure out where he was going, because everything was hush-hush. At the time, well, you know, there's always like the police, carabinieri[ph], they used to call them, they were all for Mussolini, and then a lot of the people weren't. Like you get it in different countries, too, you know, how they're against the government. And then later on when I, we came to the U.S. I found out

where we used to disappear. They used to hide in the mountains. They were, like, what would you call them? Freedom fighters?

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

FINCO: And they used to hide out when the special police used to come to town. Because if they caught you, what they did to you, they kept feeding you castor oil. Yeah! So after the police, you know, went, left the town, then everybody would come back.

LEVINE: I see. So your father really had strong beliefs.

FINCO: Oh, you better believe it. Yeah, he was, of course, I don't think the few men with him had any choice but, you know. So then he waited until he was a citizen, after five years he went to school and got his papers. Well, then they started the ball rolling for us to come in, and I think it's because he waited until he got his paper and they couldn't deny us the passport.

LEVINE: Because you were then citizens . . .

FINCO: They could have detained my mother, but she, I was underage. I was automatically . . .

LEVINE: Right.

FINCO: But, uh, so we left.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, now, do you remember leaving your town and getting to Genoa?

FINCO: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: How did you go?

FINCO: Uh, by train, yeah.

LEVINE: And did you have to stay in Genoa for a while?

FINCO: I think we stayed overnight. Uh, and then we boarded the ship, and it was a long ride.

LEVINE: What do you remember about the voyage?

FINCO: We all got sick. (she laughs) Seasick, of course. You know, and, uh, well, the accommodations at the time were okay, you know, they weren't that bad, I don't think, as I remember, but it was a long, long time to be a on a ship.

LEVINE: But you were traveling with another family? Is that it?

FINCO: Uh, there is another family, they, uh, her, this woman and her children, they, uh, her husband was living in Chicago at that time.

LEVINE: But did you know them? Were they from your town?

FINCO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

FINCO: Yeah. But they were in another compartment, or whatever. We very hardly saw them.

LEVINE: I see.

FINCO: And I remember, too, taking showers, you had to wait for hours to get to take a shower, you know.

LEVINE: On the ship.

FINCO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you were in a cabin.

FINCO: Yeah.

LEVINE: And you mentioned that, uh, everyone seemed to talk a lot about what they might expect in the new country. Can you remember any of that, what people were saying,

what people were thinking about when they were going to . . .

FINCO: Nothing much. You know, except that, uh, some were happy, some were sad, you know. My mother was sad. Now, this woman from Chicago, she was very happy to, you know, to come, but I don't know, it was a, it was not a pleasant trip at all.

LEVINE: And it was a long trip.

FINCO: Yeah, it was. I think it was eleven days. Rough waters.

LEVINE: And so when the ship came into the New York Harbor, what was that like for you?

FINCO: It was a nightmare. First, I don't know if you saw the old, the old Ellis Island how they had it. We were like cattle, you know? Long corridors, like, separating, and you go round and round, and then you have, they had doctors there that checked you over. And my mother got quite upset, because I had a great big scar on my arm from a vaccination, and they claimed that I probably was carrying something. You know, they were strict at the time. And my mother

said, "You can't stop her. She's an American citizen, and there's nothing wrong with her. It's just that the vaccination got infected." Well, they finally let us through. And then when we disembarked, there was, I don't know what you call, almost like a Red Cross or a, people that was taking care of all these, uh, people getting off the boat.

LEVINE: It could have been an Italian-American benefit society.

FINCO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about it?

FINCO: Well, they took us to, it was like a boarding house where we stayed overnight, because we had to take the train the next day. And I remember, uh, going to a, uh, going outside and, my mother and I and this other lady, and we went to a, it was like a grocery store, and I think we bought some, at the time it was, well, I didn't know what they were, but donut sweet stuff. And my mother holding money in her hand and, uh, and the proprietor, you know, helping himself and giving them change. We didn't know did he cheat us or not. Well, that's a chance you're taking. But, uh, they

were very nice people.

LEVINE: Now, um, nobody was meeting you? Your father wasn't coming to Ellis Island?

FINCO: No, uh-huh. No, none of the people there seemed to, you know, they were all shipped around different places, you know, always with somebody.

LEVINE: So then did you, did you have like a tag on you?

FINCO: Yeah, yep. Yeah, we had to have tags. And then in the morning they came and took us to the terrain.

LEVINE: And do you remember the train ride?

FINCO: It was long, that's all I can remember, and looking at these houses, they were made out of wood. (she laughs) We couldn't, it was a funny thing, you know, because out there it was either marble or stucco or something, but we passed these little towns and see all these houses made out of wood, we couldn't figure out why, you know? Because I think it's because wood was cheaper here than it was out there, you know?

LEVINE: So when you got to Milwaukee, is that where you got off?

FINCO: No, we got off in Chicago.

LEVINE: Chicago.

FINCO: And this woman that we came with, her relatives came and picked us up, and we spent the night there. And then we took, my mother and I, we were the only ones that were going up in the upper peninsula, you know. So they took us to the train and, uh, and then we landed in Ironwood, Michigan.

LEVINE: Iowa Michigan?

FINCO: Ironwood.

LEVINE: Ironwood. Ironwood, Michigan. And then did your father meet you there?

FINCO: Yeah, and all the relatives were there.

LEVINE: Do you remember that reunion?

FINCO: Yep.

LEVINE: Could you describe that?

FINCO: Well, I was kind of happy and then sad because, you know, my dad having lost a son, he left when he was so young, and then all of a sudden he was, you know, my

brother wasn't there. It was sad. But, uh, you know, they had a lot of, a big party, and my dad had a house ready for us to move in. Of course, at that time, he worked in the mine. One thing I've got to say about him, five years, every month Mother got a check from him, every month.

LEVINE: These were coal mines?

FINCO: Iron, iron mines.

LEVINE: Iron mines. Iron, uh-huh.

FINCO: Yeah. So . . .

LEVINE: Did he ever talk about what it was like working in the iron mines?

FINCO: Bad, yeah. But they had no choice, you know? There were no safety precautions or anything like they have now.

LEVINE: Now, was there a large Italian community?

FINCO: In Ironwood? Yes, yeah. Still now I think there's a lot of Italians up there, you know.

LEVINE: So were there people from your town who had actually

gone there, besides your father?

FINCO: No, he had a brother. But, uh, I think they were the only two that were from, you know, from Asiago. The other ones were from another part of Italy.

LEVINE: So do you remember those first few days and weeks in Ironwood? Things that struck you, besides the houses of wood. Were there any other things that . . .

FINCO: The cold, it was very cold up there, and a lot of snow. Even though in Asiago they get a lot of, they had a lot of, it was like a, a winter, people came up in the mountain skiing, and tobogganing, but it didn't seem that it was that cold. It was different or something. But, uh, I cried a lot. I didn't want to stay.

LEVINE: Really? You wanted to go back. And how about your mother?

FINCO: My mother was happy to be there. She, uh, my dad and I, my dad and my mother, they, you know, they didn't want to go back. But I did.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember when that changed for you, when you felt like you wanted to stay?

FINCO: Oh, it must have been a good two, three years after I kind of, you know, managed the English language. That made it easier.

LEVINE: What was school like when you first went to school when you couldn't speak English?

FINCO: It was very hard. But, like I said, I went to Catholic school up there, and I had two sisters. I went to Catholic school, and they took a lot of time with me. You know, what is that book, See Jane Run, See Spot, See, you know, for . . . (they laugh) That's the reason I was not happy, even though they would put the math on the board and I would, you know, because math is, numbers are the same, you know, that I, you know, they were really surprised that I could do math. But English, See the dog run, See Spot. But they, uh, they spent a lot of time with me.

LEVINE: Were there other children who were also immigrant children in your school?

FINCO: No, I was the only one at the time.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what was it like being with your father, because you really hadn't been around him for so long.

FINCO: I don't know if I was so happy about, in the evening, after, you know, the celebration was going on of my aunt, she cornered me and said, "You know, you never said Papa once the whole evening, and I think it's about time you started calling him Papa." And I couldn't, you know, I just couldn't somehow. He was a stranger to me, you know? But later on I came, you know.

LEVINE: What was your father like?

FINCO: He was a hardworking man, very hardworking, you know. They all were up there in the mines.

LEVINE: Yeah. Did he have any attitudes or values or ways that he wanted you to be or, that you can remember him trying to instill in you?

FINCO: Well, they all, you know, like most of the parents, want what's best for you, the kids, you know.

LEVINE: Was he a strict father?

FINCO: Yeah, but then my two sisters came along. Then he stopped. (she laughs) My, uh, our sister always said, "You made a path for us." (they laugh) Yeah.

LEVINE: And how about your mother and father. Did they want to become Americanized, do you think, or did you think they wanted to hold onto the Italian ways?

FINCO: No, they, you know, they went along with whatever it was. Even though, it's not easy. It wasn't an easy life. But . . .

LEVINE: Did your mother work at all?

FINCO: No, no. Women didn't work at that time.

LEVINE: Um, let's see. Um, so, so did you stay, then, living in the same town, uh, the rest of your growing up?

FINCO: Yeah, yeah, until I got married.

LEVINE: Okay. And when did you get married?

FINCO: Ay, September 4, 1937.

LEVINE: And how did you meet your husband?

FINCO: Up there. He was from Ironwood. His family was from Ironwood.

LEVINE: And what is your husband's name?

FINCO: Was.

LEVINE: Was.

FINCO: Henry.

LEVINE: Henry. And, uh, how many children, then, did you have?

FINCO: I had, uh, I think I had so many, so many kids.
(they laugh) It seems like I've got more than four kids. I have nine grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren, so that's a big, you know. I got to think their names. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Well, when you look back on the fact that you came here as a thirteen-year-old and lived the rest of your life out here, how do you think about that? Do you think coming to a new country at that age made a difference in the kind of person you were, or that it influenced what you did later, or do you think that experience somehow made a difference in who you are and . . .

FINCO: Uh, I think I, uh, I think I have the tendency to be frugal because out there, out in Italy, in Asiago, it seemed, and when my dad sent me checks, that we didn't have a hard life, you know. If my mother wanted

something or a kid wanted something.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

FINCO: Because my dad was working when we came from Italy. And it was all right for a while, but then the mine closed down, and it was very hard.

LEVINE: Oh, this was the depression.

FINCO: Yeah, depression. And, uh, well, you know, you had to do without a lot of stuff, and I think, uh, I learned how to be frugal and, uh, even nowadays sometimes I think, oh, why am I like that? You know? But I don't know. It's just one of those things you learn, I guess, you know, when you have a hard life, and all of a sudden they change it, you have the tendency to look back a little, you know?

LEVINE: Right. Well, do you, can you remember specifically during the Depression how it affected you and your family?

FINCO: Oh, yeah. It's a, it, uh, we never went hungry, one thing, my dad always, but you had to do without new shoes, you had to do without a new dress. I remember

going to high school, to the prom, and one of my relatives, she had a taffeta dress and she knitted for me, you know. And it was very nice at the time but, you know, I wanted to go to the store and buy a dress. So it was, it was hard for a while, you know.

LEVINE: What did your father do when the mine closed?

FINCO: You know, I, at the time I didn't think they had welfare like they have now. But yet I remember seeing packages like of rice, of pasta, or something like that. So, I mean, I think the government was subsidizing these miners. But he, he seemed to, like I said, it was tough, but we never went hungry.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And did your father ever get involved in organizing the workers in the mines against the bad conditions or any of that?

FINCO: No, no. I don't think at that time you had, you dared. You know, it isn't like now. You just kept your mouth shut, otherwise you (?). And another thing, see, we lived in a mining, in a house that belongs to the mine, the company. They own the land, and, uh, and they built houses, and then you rented from them.

LEVINE: Did they also have a store where you bought things?

FINCO: No, no, no.

LEVINE: Hmm.

FINCO: No.

LEVINE: So the whole community, then, was working in the mines?

FINCO: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: At least the houses around where you worked. Uh-huh.
Uh, so then did you ever work, or . . .

FINCO: Yeah, when I graduated from high school I worked.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What did you do?

FINCO: I, uh, you couldn't get a job. Most of the kids were, came to Chicago or Milwaukee. But then at that time I was going, I had started going with my, what was my boyfriend at the time. And his sister worked at a place, uh, it was like an old age home, so his sister said, "Oh, we need help around here. Why don't you work for us?" So in the morning I worked in the office. In the afternoon I had to work in the

kitchen. But the only time we could go home, it was every other weekend because we're, it was out of Ironwood. We had to take the bus to get there and come home. So I worked there for a while. And then, uh, when my husband, we were not married yet, he moved to Cleveland to get a job down there, and then he came back in the fall and we got married, and I moved to Cleveland with him.

LEVINE: Oh. So is that where you raised your family, in Cleveland?

FINCO: No. We only lived there for five years. I had, the first two children I had in Cleveland. And then, uh, we moved up here because of working, there was a lot of jobs, and, uh, he worked at a company over there that he wasn't too happy with, so we moved. We had some friends here in Cudahy, and they said, "Come on up. Laddish[ph] up here is hiring."

LEVINE: Where is that, Laddish[ph]?

FINCO: It's, uh, oh, they make parts for pl--, it's a big plant. It's a . . .

LEVINE: Pipe fittings and things like that?

FINCO: Yeah, they make engines or planes for, you know, big, big things. So that's what, he got a job over there.

LEVINE: So, uh, when you think about your Italian side and your American side, how do you think about it? I mean, do you have certain qualities that you consider Italian and certain qualities you consider American?

FINCO: I imagine some of them, you know. Uh, I don't think about it. But, uh, I'm happy I'm here, not there.
(she laughs)

LEVINE: Yeah. Okay. Do you feel like you maintain certain Italian ways of doing things, or . . .

FINCO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Attitudes, and . . .

FINCO: I don't know. (she laughs)

: I don't know. I grew up with her, too, so I guess that's . . . (they laugh)

FINCO: Except for making pasta and the rice, I don't know . . .

: Soup.

FINCO: You see, uh, the thing is, uh, there's not too many Italians in Cudahy.

LEVINE: Oh.

FINCO: I had one lady friend, but she passed away a long time ago. And, so you kind of lose touch. And especially after my mother and father died, you know, you cannot lose the fact I, pushing me to brush up on my Italian because they're planning, we're planning to go in September. I keep telling them I'm not going. Too far. (she laughs) You're going.

LEVINE: Oh, that will be wonderful.

FINCO: So, uh, I don't really mingle with any Italian that speaks. I had one lady friend across the street, but she speaks southern Italian, and I can't understand a word she's saying, the dialect is so different, you know?

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How about the satisfactions in your life? What do you look back on as being really satisfying that you, that you've done, or that's been a part of your life?

FINCO: Oh, I think having the children. Which from there I

got so many grandchildren and great grandchildren, I think that's probably the best thing.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

FINCO: Uh, we live now, you know, we lead a simple life, and expect a great many things. So that was pretty good.

LEVINE: What about life now, now that your children are grown and you don't have to . . .

FINCO: Well . . .

LEVINE: Carry around.

FINCO: They're very good. I get, they call, they help me out, you know? And a lot of time I get disgusted, I think I'm going to sell this house, and they know that I don't want to move into an apartment and, you know, they, they say, "No, stay there. We'll help you out," you know, so they are good. And my grandchildren, they call me, come over with the kids, you know? So, you know, I'm going to stay here till I can't no more. So, I don't know. Is that your . . .

LEVINE: Is this? Yeah, that's my sister. What about, uh, I saw that you had apparently somewhere in the family

put family pictures in the Kodak display at Ellis Island.

FINCO: Yes.

LEVINE: Could you talk about that? How did that come about, and . . .

FINCO: Well, this is my daughter-in-law and my daughter there, the one that got that going, you know? They sent the pictures in and, uh, I don't know, letters, and they got information.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

FINCO: From there that's when they went, uh, when I had did all this. Like I said, it was, it must be, uh . . .

: About ten years ago.

FINCO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, um, let's see. And you put your name on the Wall of Honor.

FINCO: Yes, uh-huh. We went to see that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, now you're very, you're going to be very well represented there. Kodak display, and the

wall of honor, and the Oral History Library. (they laugh)

FINCO: Oh, I really got, I got so emotional when we went to Ellis Island, you know? I can still picture when you're walking down those, like they were a corridor, like they say, like, cows, you know, round and round, you know, there were so many of us. And, uh, it was not pleasant, you know? But, eh.

LEVINE: Now, did you stay overnight there at all?

FINCO: Yeah. We stayed overnight in New York.

LEVINE: Did you . . .

FINCO: Where? I don't know.

LEVINE: But not in Ellis Island.

FINCO: No, no, no. Yeah, they helped us, yeah. I don't believe anybody stayed there.

LEVINE: Well, some people were detained there.

FINCO: Oh, detained, yeah. Some of them, yeah, that's right, yeah. I remember some people crying.

LEVINE: Do you?

FINCO: Yeah. But I know how upset my mom was about, you know, just because I had such a mark from the, you know, vaccination, you know?

LEVINE: Was she thinking that they might send you back?

FINCO: Well, I think, it looked like for a few minutes that, you know, the doctor was talking, and my mother was furious, you know, telling him there was nothing wrong.

LEVINE: So is there anything else that you can think of that maybe we didn't touch on yet that has to do with your coming to this country?

FINCO: No, I don't think so. That's about it, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, I'm glad that you visited and filled in this form and we got to talk with you.

FINCO: Like I said, the first time we came and I said we have to come back, you know, I says, you just don't get everything in one day.

LEVINE: Oh, no. There's a lot to see.

FINCO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

FINCO: And the one day that was stormy that we had to go back so we had to cut the tour short. So . . .

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I want to thank you very much.

FINCO: Well, thank you. And, like I said, I didn't know what it was all about. I was telling my kids, I says, "God, I don't know," you know. Because they did, my daughter-in-law and daughter did so much research, my daughter says she has a lot of stuff, you know, that she had from there.

LEVINE: Well, um, we keep, also, a folder on file on anybody who has an interview in the collection. So if there's any pictures or written information or anything that you would like to be on file at Ellis Island that has to do with your immigration, you know, we, at any time, I'll give you my card and you can send it.

FINCO: Okay.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I've been speaking with Rita Finco, and she came from Italy in 1929 at the age of thirteen. Today is December 31, 1996, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm signing off.