

EI-870

MARY NAZARO STRACCO

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ITALY, 1921

AGE 9

PASSAGE ON "THE GIUSEPPE VERDI"

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LEVINE: Today is April 30, 1997, and I'm here in the home of Mrs. Stracco.

STRACCO: Mary, yeah.

LEVINE: Mary Stracco, in Netcong, New Jersey.

STRACCO: That's right.

LEVINE: And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Mrs. Stracco came from Italy at the age of nine years.

STRACCO: 1921.

LEVINE: In 1921.

STRACCO: Nine years old.

LEVINE: Wow. And . . .

STRACCO: I lost my mother when I was five, and we came to America four years later.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, let's start, if you would say your name when you were born, and your birth date.

STRACCO: When I was born my name was Mary Nazaro, and I was born October 12, 1912.

LEVINE: Wow. Columbus Day, huh?

STRACCO: Yeah.

LEVINE: (she laughs) Okay. And, um, what was your mother's maiden name? What was your mother's whole name, including her maiden name?

STRACCO: My mother's maiden name was Marguerite[ph] DeLorenze. Then she married my father, and it was Nazaro. But her maiden name was DeLorenze.

LEVINE: Now, is that like, is it separated at all?

STRACCO: It's D-E, Capital L-O-R-E-N-Z-E. DeLorenze, yes.

LEVINE: Okay. And, um, Nazaro is N-A-Z-A-R-R-O?

STRACCO: N-A-Z-Z-A-R-O. Yeah.

LEVINE: A-R-O. Just one R, huh?

STRACCO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. And your father's name?

STRACCO: Sam. Sam Nazaro.

LEVINE: Okay. And, um, where in Italy were you born?

STRACCO: I was born in St. Petite[ph]. It's about fifty miles before Naples. It's a little town down south. And my father used to grind, uh, the wheat into flour. He had a mill.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. And did you stay in St. Petite[ph] up until you were nine?

STRACCO: Up until I came to America, yeah, I stayed, yeah.

LEVINE: Okay.

STRACCO: I mean, I went to Rome, and I went to see the, things like that, but I always came back home to my house,

yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, when you think of those nine years when you were a little girl in Italy, what are the things that stick with you about that time?

STRACCO: Well, I'll tell you. Even though I was nine years old, when I was only six or seven we used to go down a big brook and wash clothes on a stone, scrub them on a stone, and you had to get there early enough so the, so you would get the clear water. Because if you got there late, the ones up on the top had dirty water, and it would come down to you. And after we washed them, we used to dry them on stones, put them in a basket, and carry it on our heads back home to St. Petite[ph]. I went in the fields and picked the grapes. I had a very hard life, but I had a healthy life, a healthy body. But we were tough. Barefoot. I never had shoes. Walked on those stones. I never got no corns or nothing. Over here you buy, you spend fifty dollars for a pair of shoes, and you can't walk.

LEVINE: So, so . . .

STRACCO: Yeah, my life was not, oh, and another thing. When I was five years old, over here you go to preschool.

Over there they send you to the convent.

LEVINE: You went to the convent?

STRACCO: I went to the convent, and that's where I learned how to crochet, how to knit, make socks, embroidery. To the nuns, I went to the nuns.

LEVINE: What were the nuns like? How did they treat you?

STRACCO: Oh, they were very nice. But it was within, I only had to walk about a mile to go to the convent. It was up on a hill, and we lived at the bottom of the hill. Oh, she was very nice. And my mother, she used to give me one egg, and I used to bring it to the nun, and she would boil it, and, uh, give it to us, give it to me at lunchtime. Yeah. Oh, I remember a lot of things. Then every Tuesday they had a Novena at our church. We had no cars, nothing. We walked two miles to go to church. And all the way on the road while we were walking we used to sing, say the rosary. It was a, you know, it was a really, it was a small town, but everybody was so, we were always together.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Can you remember any of those songs that you used to sing?

STRACCO: Well, we used to sing Ave Maria. Now, that's a, they're all Catholic hymns. That's about the main one. We used to sing Ave Maria and Viva Maria, you know. I know them by . . .

LEVINE: You want to sing them? Just a little, just a little snap of it, for the tape?

STRACCO: We used to sing this one a lot. We used to sing (she sings in Italian). That's The Blessed Mother, Maria. See, we used to sing that she loved us, and like that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Wow.

STRACCO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, how about, like, reading, writing, arithmetic. Did you learn that at the convent, too?

STRACCO: Yeah. I went to school, but I didn't, when I came here we, I forgot. My husband could read and write, but not me. No. 'Cause I was, I was nine years old. I was in the kindergarten. Then I was the tallest one. I'm so little now, yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, before we talk about here, let's talk,

um, more about life in Italy. So you, now, you say your mother died when you were five.

STRACCO: Yeah.

LEVINE: What did she die of? Do you know?

STRACCO: The World War Two, World War One, the flu, influenza that was going around, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember that?

STRACCO: Oh, yeah. And my mother, they laid her out on a bed. They didn't have no caskets. And in those days everybody, they were dying like flies. And we had a wooden box, and we put my mother in it. And, uh, then during the night, my sister was very, very sick. We thought she was going to die. Then instead of, then my mother was well, so my mother died, and we used that casket for my mother instead of my sister, and my sister's the one that lived, and she took care of all of us. She was only eighteen at the time. She, my father never got married. My sister raised all of us. I was little.

LEVINE: Your sister, the eighteen-year-old, was the oldest child?

STRACCO: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: And then how many more were there, in between her and you?

STRACCO: Eight. One died in Italy. My mother and my brother are both buried in Italy.

LEVINE: Your brother died as a child?

STRACCO: He was eighteen years old. Yeah, same thing.

LEVINE: Also the influenza?

STRACCO: They were dying terrible. You probably don't remember, because you're not eighty years old, but the influenza, they died terrible. It was like an epidemic.

LEVINE: Did they have any kind of treatment?

STRACCO: No.

LEVINE: Anything that they did to try to stop it, or . . .

STRACCO: No. Like, if you knew it was coming on, they would give you whiskey or something like that. But they just died. That's all there was to it. They didn't

even have a chance to get a doctor, they died so fast.

Anybody that knows anything about the war, they know I'm telling the truth. Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, um, let's see. You came here in 19 . . .

STRACCO: '21.

LEVINE: '21. So, um . . .

STRACCO: And when I came in 1921, there was no cars. They had to come and get us at the station with a horse and sled, the snow was so deep.

LEVINE: In New York?

STRACCO: In Dover.

LEVINE: Oh, in . . .

STRACCO: Yeah. No, from New York we got the train into Dover. And then while I was on the boat, see, when you get off the Ellis Island, they keep you there two, three days, because you had to go through the customs. And we were there about five days. They made my father strip because they were afraid that we probably took something. What could you take? Nothing.

LEVINE: Well, tell me, first of all, why was it decided that the family would come to America when you did?

STRACCO: Well, during World War One two of my brothers came to America. They were young. One was seventeen. They came here, they got a job, and then they saved a little money, and they sent for the rest of us.

LEVINE: Do you remember what kind of work they were doing here in America?

STRACCO: Yeah. My one brother was a shoemaker, and the other one was a tailor, see? He got a job with one of, because most our relatives were all in Dover.

LEVINE: That's where the two brothers went?

STRACCO: Yeah. We were all in Dover. We've all been in Dover since I got, till I got married. We were all in Dover. Some of my aunts and uncles were already there, and my brothers came, and they lived with my aunts and uncles. They saved a little money, they rented a house, and they sent for us, five of us. We all came at one time. And we were down at the bottom of the ship, in third class. And the rats were going around on the floor. I thought they were cats, they

were so big. It was awful. Twenty-one days on that ship. And the name of the ship was, uh, I can't think of the name now. Luigi Rendi[ph].

LEVINE: Luigi . . .

STRACCO: Rendi[ph], yeah. That was the name of the ship that we came on.

LEVINE: Now, um, before you, uh, came, did you have any examinations in Italy before you got on the ship that you remember?

STRACCO: Oh, yeah. You have to, you've got to pass a physical. The doctor examined us on the ship before the ship took off. Yeah.

LEVINE: Was there any problem with anybody?

STRACCO: He told me, he told me to keep quiet, because I did all the talking. I was so little.

LEVINE: (she laughs) Did anybody have any problems?

STRACCO: No, nobody. Just my one sister, she limped a little bit, but that's because she hurt herself on the ship. But no, we were all healthy. But when I, when we got to Dover, jeez, I, I don't have no bottom teeth, see?

I never got my second teeth from the water here in Dover. I never got my second teeth, never. My baby teeth fell out, and I never got my other ones. Yeah.

LEVINE: And that was from the water, you think?

STRACCO: Yeah, because I went to all the dentists, and they said it was the change of the climate, the change of the water. And then I was eating different food, you know?

LEVINE: Let's just finish up with Italy. Did you, um, what kind of food did you eat? What do you remember eating?

STRACCO: In Italy, my mother, she used to make bread. She made, everything was handmade. You couldn't go buy anything. There was no stores.

LEVINE: No stores in the whole town?

STRACCO: No. Whatever we got, we got it in the fields, like the peas, escarole, apples, oranges, cherries, figs. We ate that, and my mother used to make bread. Then we made our own macaronis, and then potatoes we got in the fields. There was no stores.

LEVINE: But the food was plentiful?

STRACCO: Oh, sure, because, uh, we didn't have to wash it either like they wash it here. The rain used to wash it.

LEVINE: You didn't use . . .

STRACCO: We used to go in the field, pick whatever we want to pick, put it in a basket, put that basket on our heads, and walk two miles home with it. We picked grapes and made wine. We picked olives and made our own oil.

LEVINE: You made your . . .

STRACCO: Sure.

LEVINE: With a, you ground down the olives?

STRACCO: The olives, and then they had to let them go through a net, let them age. And then we even put it in, uh, in, like, jugs. And the tomatoes, the same thing. We used to get the tomatoes in the garden, and then we had a regular sifter. We used to pass it through the sifter, and we used to lay it on a board, and then we put fig leaves on the top, and that's what we would

have all winter. It would be like really, really thick tomato paste. There were no tomatoes. When we made pizza, we went in the garden, picked the tomatoes, took them home, peeled them, put them on there. Made our own dough, made our own macaronis. You name it, we made it.

LEVINE: Well, you must have had a big garden.

STRACCO: Oh, my God, sure. Fields and fields. And not only that, it wasn't only ours, we used to share it, if your neighbor next door, then he would work his half, we would work our half, and we all put it together. We loved our neighbor over there, not like here.

LEVINE: Now, were you a religious family?

STRACCO: Oh, yeah, yeah. Oh, my God.

LEVINE: Church?

STRACCO: Oh, please. My mother used to make us go, I still go every day, every morning.

LEVINE: You never stopped going?

STRACCO: Every morning I'd get up and I'd go, unless the weather's bad and I can't make it. No, in Italy, my

mother wouldn't feed you if you didn't go to church.
She was very, very religious. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember any ceremonies or any things that happened, like at the church that were, like, either feast days or holidays?

STRACCO: Oh, sure. We used to have, at the eighth of September, in my little town, the eighth of September, it was the birthday of the Blessed Mother. And we used to sing and go to church, decorate all the town with, well, not lights. We didn't have lights. But, you know, like papers, and sing and everything. And I had a grandmother, that was my mother's mother. After my, uh, grandfather died, we had to, we used to stay with her every night. And she had a bedroom as big as my living room. We had to go back and forth, back and forth, and say the rosary every night, or we couldn't go to bed. She was very . . .

LEVINE: Back and forth where?

STRACCO: In the room.

LEVINE: Oh, walk back and forth?

STRACCO: Yeah, back and forth in the room, until we finished

saying the rosary, yeah.

LEVINE: Wow.

STRACCO: And all my mother's sisters, they're, my mother only had one brother and three sisters, and they all came to Dover.

LEVINE: Wow. Now, what do you remember about that grandmother, your mother's mother? What do you remember? Any experiences with her?

STRACCO: Oh, she had, uh, like, in other words, where she lived was like a balcony. You know, in Italy they have these balconies. And you would go out on a balcony. There was a big, big grapevine, and we used to pick the grapes and go inside and eat them with her with bread. Oh, she was real tall. Nobody in my family's tall. I'm short. They all are. But my great grandmother and all them, they were all tall. Yeah. And then my father, when he would come home from the fields or riding up to the, the wheat, they used to have, like, a canteen. They used to go in there and play cards and bring their own little wine and drink it, and then they would come home. It wasn't like here, you got to put money on the table in order to

have a beer. Over there everybody, everybody bought what they had. They all drank, and they were merry.

LEVINE: How do you think about that life now, now that you've lived another kind of life here in this country? When you look back on that . . .

STRACCO: Well, I'll tell you, this life here is much easier. You don't do as much. But the love, the love that was in Italy is not here at all. Over there everybody loved one another. Like my mother would kill chickens, they would all come over, we would all eat. Then the neighbor would kill a pig. We'd go over there and help her. Over here they don't do that. Nah. There's, this country's not, like Italy, everybody's lovable. And we used to go to school. And in Italy nobody had anything to play. We used to get little stones by the shore, by the river, and we used to play jacks, throw one stone up in the air and grab the other one, and grab that one. Like here they got a ball and jacks. We'd play, then we used to play Ring Around The Rosy. We used to sing it in Italian. Oh, we had our good, but we all had to work. You didn't do nothing for nothing over there. It was a very, very hard life. But you enjoyed doing it,

because you wasn't alone doing it. Everybody did it with you.

LEVINE: I see. Now, did you have a best friend, or were you . . .

STRACCO: Oh, yes. She just called me up. She's in Florida.

LEVINE: Really?

STRACCO: Yeah. She lived right . . .

LEVINE: From Italy?

STRACCO: She lived next door to me in Italy.

LEVINE: Oh, my gosh.

STRACCO: We came over here together, and we both got married the same day. But her husband's been dead about thirty years. Mine just died. Oh, yeah, she calls me up all the time.

LEVINE: Now, did she used to live around Dover, or around here?

STRACCO: Oh, yeah. She lived next door to me in Dover, when I came from Italy, right next door.

LEVINE: How could, how was it that she traveled on the same boat with you?

STRACCO: No, no. She came later. She came later, because the guy that was going to marry her went out there and brought her here. He was in America. No, she came here about, oh, maybe a month or two after me. But I knew her from over there.

LEVINE: Now, when you were settled in Dover, when your family first came over, was there a lot of people from, uh, St. Petite[ph]?

STRACCO: Yeah, all my aunts and uncles.

LEVINE: In Dover?

STRACCO: They were all there. And a lot of the neighbors, they all came over. Little by little they all landed in Dover. There wasn't anybody left in St. Petite.
(Dr. Levine laughs)

LEVINE: Really?

STRACCO: Yeah, it was nice.

LEVINE: Okay.

STRACCO: And then the streets in Italy, they're real, real narrow, you know. And you never saw a car anyway. If you did, you'd go crazy looking for it.

LEVINE: But you didn't see cars in Dover when you first came there either.

STRACCO: No, we had a horse and buggy and sled, like that. And a trolley car. I used to go to work on a trolley car when I first came from Italy. I couldn't speak English, and my brother had a tailor shop up in Wharton. You know where that is? So we used to get trolley car in Dover, on Blackwell[ph] Street, and go to Wharton. I didn't know how to tell the conductor to let me off. I kept right on going. (Dr. Levine laughs)

LEVINE: Okay. Well, now, tell me. You got on the, you went to Naples. Where did you get the ship?

STRACCO: Yeah, in Naples.

LEVINE: And did you stay in Naples?

STRACCO: Well, no . . .

LEVINE: First of all, do you remember leaving home?

STRACCO: Oh, yeah. We left home with a horse and carriage. We left St. Petite[ph], and we went straight to Naples. When we got to Naples, we only had to wait, I think, four or five hours, and we got on the ship.

LEVINE: Oh.

STRACCO: Oh, you didn't stay in no hotel. Who's going to pay the hotels? We didn't have no money.

LEVINE: And, also, your mother, like, did your mother have a funeral? Do you remember anything about that?

STRACCO: Oh, they laid her out on the bed. And another thing, after they buried my mother, before we came to America, in Italy, you know, they didn't have very many big plots, they used to dig up the graves and take the skeleton and put it in a square box like that, with all the bones and all, and then they would put that in the wall of the church. My mother and my brother are both in this box. And if I would go to Italy now, and I would want to have a mass said for my mother and my brother, they would take this drawer out, there's a glass on the top with my mother's name and my brother's name, they put it on the altar, and they say the mass. You wouldn't see the bones, but

that's, my oldest brother, he went over there four or five times after he came here. I never went back. But, no, all my brothers went back. In fact, this year, he went to Italy and married her, because she was our neighbor in Italy.

LEVINE: Oh, my God.

STRACCO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Huh. Okay. So then when you got on the ship . . .

STRACCO: Yeah.

LEVINE: You were traveling, who was traveling with you? Your father?

STRACCO: My father, my two sisters, and my brother, and myself. We were five, because the other three were already here. My brother Frank, my brother Allen, and my brother Tony, they had already come, about two, three months ahead of us. And then they rented a little house, they bought some furniture, it wasn't good furniture but, you know, like a flea market, and we lived in Dover. Then we, that's where, then my sister got a job in Dover sewing, because she was a seamist in Italy. She used to teach how to sew. And she got

a job in a coat factory. And she used to sleeve all the, sew all the sleeves of the coat, for three cents a dozen.

LEVINE: Wow.

STRACCO: Yeah. And when I got off the boat, we had a good friend of ours, she was very heavy. She had a kitchen as big as my living room. I scrubbed that, at nine years old, on my hands and knees with a scrub brush and a cake of Kurtman's[ph] soap and a rag, in the corners, all over. It took me all, for ten cents. That's all she gave me. Five cents I used to buy those green, peppermint green leaves. You used to get ten, oh, for a penny, and the other nickel I used to go to the movies and see (?) Comedy. Yeah.

LEVINE: That's here?

STRACCO: Yeah, in America, right here in Dover. Every Saturday I used to go over there and scrub her floor for ten cents.

LEVINE: Wow.

STRACCO: Yeah.

LEVINE: So, when the boat, how about the passage on those twenty-one days. Did anything happen during that time on the voyage?

STRACCO: Yeah, they all got sick from eating, but I didn't.

LEVINE: You didn't eat?

STRACCO: No. I was young. No, you had to stand in line with the little can, they used to put food in there. It looked like dog food. No, I didn't eat it. But then when we ducked at Ellis Island, my brothers came with a little rowboat, underneath the ship. And we used to, we dropped a rope. And they tied a big package. They had chicken in there, they had potatoes in there, they had candy in there, and they had those Hershey kisses, a whole bag. That's the only time, I ate the whole two pounds, and I got sick. But otherwise I didn't get sick at all. I used to run all over the ship. Up on the top, down on the bottom, all over.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STRACCO: Yeah. Oh, but the beds were terrible. They gave us these Army blankets. We didn't have, we slept on springs. There was no mattress. Because we were in

the third class, see, because my brothers couldn't afford the second class. It was a lot of money. And as it was then, five hundred dollars to make five people come here, now what do you pay? And it was twenty-one days, now in twenty-one hours, you're over there. No airplanes, we never saw airplanes, nothing.

LEVINE: Now, were there other people from St. Petite[ph] that were coming on that same ship that you came on?

STRACCO: No, it was just us. But they had already been here before, then they came later.

LEVINE: And was there, did people make music and sing and all that on the ship? Do you remember anything like that?

STRACCO: Nah, we just used to get together on the docks and sing Italian songs. There was no, uh, nobody played any instruments. They were all too sick. And not only that, when the ship used to go, ooh, you could hear it, those big wheels underneath. A lot of people, you don't get seasick today.

LEVINE: No.

STRACCO: No, like, in other words, we used to get together, wherever we were, and they all would get around, talk

Italian and sing songs. We made our own music.

LEVINE: Were you down in a cabin, or in a big, like, dormitory space?

STRACCO: No, it was the bottom of the ship, the whole bottom of the ship.

LEVINE: The whole bottom.

STRACCO: And there was a lot of beds there, maybe two, three hundred people. And we slept like dogs. It was so dirty. Twenty-one days wasn't, you know, it was a long time.

LEVINE: Well, now, how come you were on the ship in the harbor when your brothers came and brought the food? Did you have to stay aboard ship?

STRACCO: We had to stay there three days. They go to the, three days on the ship. Then after we got off the ship we had to go to the customs at Ellis Island, and we were there three more days.

LEVINE: Now, tell, describe what happened at Ellis Island.

STRACCO: Then when I came, when we came to Ellis Island, that thing is still there, a big, big desk, and there was a

man behind it, and he would question you, see? And he kept asking me, "Why did you come to America?" And I told him, I says, "Because we didn't have nothing to eat over there. We were hungry." Then he made me say it again. He says, "Who are you going to go see?" I says, "My brother, Frank." I used to call him Cheech, you know, that was, that's how you say it in Italian.

I said, "My brother Cheech I used to go see." "And why did, uh, Cheech send for you?" I said, "Because he had the money to send for us." We didn't have no money. Oh, the questions he asked me. And then he says to me, "And where's your mother?" I used to talk, he made me say so many times in Italian, then I told him, in Italian, I says, "What's the matter? Don't you understand?" But he just wanted to hear me talk, being I was little, and I used, oh, he asked me a lot of questions. "And where you gonna go after you leave here?" I says, "I'm going to go to my brother Cheech's house." "What are you going to do there?" I says, "I don't know. Whatever he tells me to do, I'll do." I went to school, two days later he took me to school, and I got lost. I didn't know how to get there. What the heck, I didn't know. In Italy there was just one road. That was it. (Dr. Levine

laughs) Just the neighbors on each side of the street, you don't get lost. No, they asked me a lot of questions over on Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Were you separated from your father when you were being questioned? Do you remember?

STRACCO: No, we were all together, but one at a time. In other words, my father couldn't say, "Say this," or, "Say that." No, no, no. My father would be over there, and I'd be over here with that man. Then my sister would come next, but I was talking Italian. They all knew what I was saying. So if they said the same thing, see, my father knew what I was saying, and he said that, but the reason why he picked on me, because I was small, and they knew I wouldn't lie, see? My other sisters, my brother and my sister, they were wise. If they asked them a question, they probably would answer it different. But me, I was honest, and I told him the truth. Whatever he asked me, I told him the truth.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STRACCO: I wasn't lying.

LEVINE: When you were nine years old, how did you feel about coming here? Do you remember?

STRACCO: Yeah. When we came here then around the holidays we used to go to all our aunts and uncles and wish them a Merry Christmas. And then, my father's brother was here before us, and he had a grocery store on Sussex[ph] Street. We got off the train, with the horse and buggy, and the snow was so deep my brother put me on his shoulders. And we went over to my father's brother to eat. Well, when I saw all that food, I almost went crazy. He had a fruit store. He had great, big pears. I picked one of those pears, and I started eating. I didn't know he had to pay for it. I thought he got it in the backyard. So I sat down, I started eating, and my brother says, "You know, Mary, in America you don't take these. You have to pay." I said, "How am I going to pay? I ain't got no money." So he says, "Well, I'll pay for you. You don't take these things." Well, I didn't offer it. It was my father's brother. Heck, I could have anything he had. I didn't know he went to the market and bought the food. See, we didn't know that. Then after that we, we knew we had to, you know, pay for

it. My sister did all the cooking and everything. I used to go to school, and, today the kids get on a bus to go to school. I walked one mile to go to school, another mile back for lunch, and another mile back to, after I had my lunch, then another mile to go back home. Today they got to get on a bus. Why don't they walk like I did?

LEVINE: What kind of experience was it for you going to school?

STRACCO: Oh, my God, it was terrible, because I didn't know what the teacher was saying. She says to me, "You have to go to the bathroom?" I shook my head. I didn't know what she said. She took me by the hand, and she put me outside in the hallway, and the fountain of the water, and I was dying for a drink of water, but I didn't move because she put me there, and I stayed there. Then she come back out, and she said, "Did you go?" I nodded my head again. I never moved, because I didn't know what she said. I never moved. I stayed there, you know. No.

LEVINE: Then how was it learning English?

STRACCO: The kids made fun of you because you came from Italy.

I had long, long hair. I had a ponytail. They used to pull on my, on my hair. Oh, little by little you either learn or you don't, you know. And then, like, you know, the teacher was very nice. Some nights I used to stay after school, and she used to tell me different things, you know? And then my other cousins that were here before me, they used to tell me that thank you, thank you means grazie, see? And good morning means buon giorno. See, what, I didn't know. So then, you notice I don't even have an accent.

LEVINE: No.

STRACCO: My girlfriend, she's got an Italian accent, yeah.

LEVINE: She grew up in Dover, she came to Dover, too, right?

STRACCO: Yeah, but she didn't go to school, because she came, and she came, when she was over, she got married at seventeen. I was nine years old, see. But I knew her from Italy. Yeah.

LEVINE: So . . .

STRACCO: This brother here, he was a shoemaker.

LEVINE: And he was shoemaker in Dover?

STRACCO: Yeah, right on Sussex[ph] Street.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STRACCO: And my brother that died in Italy, my brother Joe, he used to make shoes. He wasn't a shoemaker, it wasn't to repair shoes. He used to make them. Take your foot in the clay, and make you a pair of shoes. He died eighteen, during the war, too. And six months later my mother died. I think she died of a broken heart. I don't know. No. No, we had it, it wasn't easy living in Italy. You had to work for everything you got. Work in the fields, scrub clothes on a stone. Today they've got automatic washer, dryer. I still got an old machine downstairs. I don't want no automatic. I got the one with the wringer. It's good enough. Nah. I don't go for whirly things. I'm satisfied with what I have, see? Nah.

LEVINE: Do you think coming to this country as a nine-year-old made a big difference in the kind of way that you are?

STRACCO: Well, sure, because everything I did over there, when I came here, I didn't do. I didn't have to go in the fields and pick grapes or pick apples or anything like that. They used to go to the store and buy them. But

then I scrubbed floors to make a little, get a little money. My sister went to a factory where they made coats, and she, we all, then I went to work where they made stockings. After I got out of school I went to the hosiery in Dover. I worked there. And I was only sixteen then. I graduated eighth grade when I was sixteen. Well, I started kindergarten at nine. See? No, it wasn't, it was pretty tough.

LEVINE: Do you remember being called a greenhorn?

STRACCO: Yeah. Ginny whop. Yeah, sure. Oh, here comes a greenhorn, here comes a ginny whop.

LEVINE: Now, were there other people who came from other countries in Dover at that time?

STRACCO: No. Like Spanish or anything? No, no.

LEVINE: Polish, or . . .

STRACCO: They were all Italians, no, all Italians. The only Polish people that I knew, they was up in Wharton, and we were good friends, they were Polish people. Yeah.

LEVINE: How about, like, Irish, or . . .

STRACCO: No.

LEVINE: Scandinavian, anything like that?

STRACCO: No, no. They were just all Italians. In fact, they used to have a big, big, uh, holiday. The eighth of September they used to light up all Blackwell[ph] Street. A big band used to come. Because all the ones from St. Petite[ph], they were all mostly all in Dover. So we all celebrated the same way as if we were in St. Petite[ph], same thing. They carried the statue of the Blessed Mother up and down the streets. We went to church. See, we tried to make Dover like St. Petite[ph], but it didn't work because . . .

LEVINE: It faded out? Did it . . .

STRACCO: No, no. It faded out after all the, all the old people died. And still, up till today, the young generation that's left, at the eighth of September, they still have a big mass in church, and then they all go to a big restaurant and eat. They celebrate it that way. No fireworks or nothing. Because all the old timers, the committee, they were about fifteen or twenty men. They all got them, they used to go door to door and ask for donation. Whatever money you gave them, they used to have the fireworks. They used to

say the mass. They used to have all those Italian pastries outside, sausage and peppers. But then little by little they got old and they died. The young generation wasn't going to put up with that. No.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Okay. I wanted to ask you about your father. What did he do once he came here?

STRACCO: When he came to Dover, he got a job washing windows in a big factory, because he couldn't speak English, that was the only thing that he could do without talking. They gave him a rag and a pail, and he washed windows. And the factory was by a railroad track, and he used to walk three miles to get there. Nobody had a car, you couldn't get a trolley car, so he walked in, he washed the windows. But then after he washed the windows, he got a job, nowadays when the train goes by the gates go down, that's automatic. But when my father came, he had a little shack. He used to stay in that shack. He used to turn the wheels, and the gates would go down. That's, he did that after he, he

got a, he got a better job then, you know. He got tired of washing windows, and he put in for this job, and they gave it to him. Because he, but they gave it to him, but he had to go in eleven o'clock at night till eight in the morning in case the night trains come by, because during the day all the big shots took those hours. But my father went anyway.

LEVINE: And is that what he did, then, until he stopped working?

STRACCO: Yeah, and then he stopped, yeah. And my sister, she got such a bad toothache, took her to the dentist, and the dentist pulled her tooth. And, oh, my gosh, she almost died. She almost bled to death. And we didn't have no refrigerator. We had an ice box. The guy used to come and bring us a cake of ice and put it in there. Then it would all melt, then the next day you could wash the floor, because it would go over the pan. And we had to chop the ice and put it on my sister's face because, you know, she was terrible. The dentist was bad. He wasn't bad, but we never had a tooth pulled. We were scared. We never had no trouble with our teeth in Italy. See, over here is, everything is chemical. It's different. Yeah. But

my mother, she was, my mother was very good. She used to sew and take good care of us. She was a living saint, my mother was. You want an ice cube in there?

(referring to Dr. Levine's beverage)

LEVINE: No, this is fine. Uh, okay. so when you first came here, that first night when you took the, after you took the train and then the sleigh . . .

STRACCO: Then we went to, my brothers had a house, and we went there. And we all slept, we had three bedrooms, but we had two beds in every room, you know, like, and there was no heat. We had to get up in the morning, chop wood, and light the fire. And I killed my own chickens when I got off the boat. You couldn't go to the store and buy chickens like today. I chopped wood. Then we used to put coal in the stove, and we used to sift it, sift it, so then whatever was left we would use the next day. I chopped wood, I killed chickens. You name it, I did it.

LEVINE: You mean, you had chickens in Dover?

STRACCO: Oh, yeah. Yeah. My mother-in-law even had chickens here when I got married. We used to go get the eggs. And when I had my son, my oldest son, I used to get

up early in the morning. I had a door there. We used to close the door, and over here was a stove, and I used to light the stove to give him a bath. No bassinet. I used to, I had a little tub. Sometimes I used to put him in the sick. No. It was tough. Even when I first got married it was tough.

LEVINE: Now, you said that you stopped school at sixteen.

STRACCO: Yeah, and I went to work.

LEVINE: Then you went to work in the hosiery?

STRACCO: In the hosiery, where they made stockings, the stocking with the seams in the back?

LEVINE: Yep.

STRACCO: That's where, I went to work there.

LEVINE: And how long did you stay there?

STRACCO: Well, I worked until I got married. Then after I got married I went back to work again to help my husband pay for the house.

LEVINE: How did you meet your husband?

STRACCO: Oh, geez. I met my husband, see, he used to play the

guitar. And my brother, I was sixteen years old, and they gave me a party. And I said to my brother, "Gee, we don't even have somebody here for music if we want to dance." So he says, "Oh, yeah." He said, "I'll go get somebody." And my husband used to come to Dover a lot of times. They used to be on the corner, all the fellows from their town. They used to, so he played the guitar, and somebody else played the mandolin, and he brought them over the house, and that's how I met him. Then we used to go, do you remember Bertrand's Island?

LEVINE: Yes.

STRACCO: Then we used to go to Bertrand's Island for dances, and we used to get the trolley car. We used to get off at Landing and walk to Bertrand's Island, and then my husband happened to get a car. So then he took me home two, three times, and that's how I met him.

LEVINE: And what was your husband's first name?

STRACCO: Frank.

LEVINE: Frank.

STRACCO: He was twenty-one, and I was nineteen when we got

married.

LEVINE: So then you, you, uh, got married, and then moved here?

STRACCO: I got married in Dover, Sacred Heart Church in Dover. Then after we went on our honeymoon to Canada, then we came and rented a house. We used to pay five dollars a month rent. Oh, we only made ten dollars a week. A loaf of bread was only a nickel. So that's why. But then little by little we built and moved in this house, and my son was born in this house. He only cost me twenty-two dollars. Today they want two, three thousand dollars a child.

LEVINE: Is this Frank, your son Frank?

STRACCO: No, Joe.

LEVINE: Joe's your oldest.

STRACCO: No, Frank, I had him in the hospital, and he only cost me thirty-nine dollars. That's fifty-five years ago. See, Joe is sixty-four, and Frank is fifty-four. There's ten years difference. Yeah.

LEVINE: Wow. Um, do you remember, uh, any things when you

first came here that you had never seen before, that really struck you . . .

STRACCO: Yeah, the Statue of Liberty.

LEVINE: Did you have any idea what it was when you first came over?

STRACCO: I was afraid. I thought it was going to come down. And those buildings in New York? Boy, I held on to my sister's hand. I was afraid it was going to come down. I got so scared, because we never saw tall buildings like that in Italy. And then the ocean, oh, my God. I got scared. Especially, you know, when you come in the dock of New York, there's the Statue of Liberty, and all these other boats were around. Then we had to go into this big building and get interviewed and everything. Oh, yeah. To me, sure, I got scared, because I didn't know. I didn't know what the hell they were going to do to me. I thought maybe they were going to send me back to Italy. I held on to my sister. Yeah. And then I hadn't seen my brothers for nine years. When they left, when I saw them, you know, I was even afraid to get near them, because I hadn't seen them. I was a little baby. My

mother died at five, and they were already here in America.

LEVINE: Oh.

STRACCO: See? Yeah. Sure, I got scared. Then when we got on the trolley car, I held on. But after, I went on two, three times, I got used to it. But at the beginning, sure.

LEVINE: And did you like it here at first? I mean, in the beginning did you, did you feel like . . .

STRACCO: Yeah, because I went to school. And then a lot of my cousins from Italy were here. They were already here, my aunts and my uncles. It was like, they all came here, see. Then every Sunday, today they've got to, they get a taxi, they, every, every Sunday my sister, the one who raised us, and my other sister and myself, we all used to go and visit different aunts every Sunday. And we used to make homemade macaronis for them and everything. That was, not today you go, well, "Let's get in the car, we'll go visit so-and-so." Not then. Let's start walking. And we'd go, we used to go see all our aunts. Aunt Anna, Aunt Concetta, all of them, Uncle Mike. And the holidays,

we all got together. There must have been about fifty of us. We all got together, and who would make the macaronis, who would make the stuffed chicken. And we all, the holidays we got together with everybody, aunts and uncles and nieces and cousins.

LEVINE: Do you have any idea what your life might have been like if you hadn't come here?

STRACCO: Oh, over there, gee whiz, yeah. Well, it probably would have been happy because I wouldn't have known any better. You just make the best of what you have. I was all right when I was there. Sure, you come over here, just like now, I don't have an automatic washer. Yeah, if I get it, sure, it's better, but I'm satisfied with what I got. I'm not, you know, that's how it was when we came here. The things in Dover, we had a gas light. We didn't have no electric. A kerosene lamp. I used to do my homework on a kerosene lamp. And after they got the gas light. Then little by little they got the electric. Geez, when I had to pull the switch, oh, my God. I was even afraid to pull the switch. I thought I'd get electrocuted. See, because we never had those things. But if I stayed in Italy I probably would, I wouldn't have

known any different, and I'd have made the best of that, too, see? But, no, I was glad when I come over, see. And then . . .

LEVINE: You think you might have gone into the convent? You think you might have . . .

STRACCO: We used to go there. That was like, here it's pre-kindegarten. In Italy they used to send you to the convent. And then you would bring a little food, and the nuns would, that's how you paid them. You didn't have no money. My mother would make macaronis or a loaf of bread. If the chickens laid eggs, we would bring them, too. Because there was only four nuns, four nuns and one priest, and that's where she taught me how to crochet, how to make socks, how to knit. That's where, we learned there. Over here they teach you different things. I was only four years old when I went. Yeah. And then my mother died.

LEVINE: Did your father try to, try to teach you any kinds of attitudes, or try to instill in you some kinds of ideas?

STRACCO: Oh, yeah. We had to respect our aunts and uncles. No two ways about it, boy. You wouldn't dare answer

back. You wouldn't answer your father or your mother back. You had to do as you were told. It was discipline. Today, eeeeeee! The teachers holler at the kids if, the parents put the teachers in jail. Not over there, boy. You had to obey. And that was the main thing. They used to call it respect. (Italian) Your aunts and your uncles, and your brothers and sisters. Yeah.

LEVINE: And was your father very strict with you, like when you got older and you wanted to . . .

STRACCO: Well, no, because when we got older we wanted to go out and go to a movie or something. We used to go with my cousins. We were all girls. We had, like, one little bunch. Esther, Ida, Maria down the road, Tootsie. We all went together. There was no boys. You didn't go with no boys. Where were we going to get the boys? The boys, they used to play by themselves someplace else. No, it's not like today. Naturally, as I stayed in Dover, things got more modern, then I met my husband, we went out to the movies. We used to go to Bertrand's Island. But I still went with the girls and their boyfriends. You see, we were never, you never got pregnant then, boy.

We were always together. And even so, you got to keep your virginity until you're married. I'm a great believer of that. But today everything goes. They don't care.

LEVINE: Yeah. Uh, let's see, did you, do you keep some of the customs from, uh, from Italy, do you, today?

STRACCO: Oh, yeah. At Easter time I still make those old-fashioned pies with the ham, and I make those little round things with the honey. Yeah, I kept all that, because my husband, he was a typical Italian. He liked all that Italian food. And I, I don't even think I know how to cook American. I do everything Italian, because that's . . .

LEVINE: That's good.

STRACCO: Don't worry. They all like it. Yeah.

LEVINE: Did your, did your husband come over, too?

STRACCO: No, no. He was born right here in Etcon[ph], right here in the house by my mother-in-law. No, he was born here, he went to school here and everything. But he could read and write Italian, because his mother couldn't speak English. He went to school, he

couldn't speak English because that's, his mother talked Italian all the time. And that's how my older son can talk a little bit in Italian. Because when I went to work I used to leave him with my mother-in-law, and she talked to him in Italian. And when he went to Italy, he did pretty good, yeah. The only thing, I never went back, because my husband, he wasn't the type that liked to travel. For me, sure, any place but home. No, I cooked, I even make homemade macaronis like I made in Italy. I made my own bread, when you make pizza, I make my own dough. My sister taught me in Italy. We used to get up four o'clock in the morning and knead the bread. And we didn't make, we used to make ten, fifteen, twenty loaves. You share it with your neighbors and, you know. Then next week the other one would make, and give it to us. It was all one happy family. Not like over here. That's yours, this is, no. I'll tell you. The old-fashioned way, the way I was brought up, was a lot better than the way they bring up the kids today. So they were strict, and we had discipline. But it all paid off in the end. Oh, yeah, I cook everything the old-fashioned Italian way. My grandchildren love to come here. They go, "Nana, you

cook the way you always cook." Sure. I wouldn't even know how. I know how to make gravy. That's about it.

I make my own bread, I make my own macaroni.

LEVINE: You make your own bread? You don't buy bread?

STRACCO: Yeah, now I do, but I mean, when I make pizza, I make my own dough. I'm, when I make lasagnas, I make my own macaronis. I don't buy them. I do all that. Nah. And in Italy when we used to kill the pig, we made our own sausage, everything. Then we used to cure it in olive oil, in these big crates, tubs, you know. Then on the top we used to put fig leaves. Because in Italy it never snowed, once in a while, where I lived, if it did snow it would be like cheese on the macaronis. An hour later it would all be gone. We had no refrigerator. We used to eat whatever we saved. We used to keep it. Make tomato paste, tomato sauce. We didn't have no cans. Who's going to put your cans? Over here they can tomatoes, they put them in jars. We didn't have no jars. We had these clay pots, great big clay things. Put it in there.

LEVINE: With the fig leaves on it.

STRACCO: Then we had a grape vine downstairs from our house,

and we had an oven, and that's where my mother used to cook in Italy, in the oven. We used to put the bread on the, like a shovel. Yeah. No, I did all that. That's what I think, when I got married, I did the same thing. I didn't know any better.

LEVINE: And how is this time in your life?

STRACCO: What?

LEVINE: Now that you're in your eighties, how is this time?

STRACCO: Well, I'll tell you, I'm very content with, because I've got two lovely boys, five grandchildren, two great-grandchildren, and I, you know, oh, life is a lot easier. But to me I still like to do things the hard way. I'm not used to being modern, so I might as well tell you the truth, see?

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Now, did you visit Ellis Island?

STRACCO: Huh?

LEVINE: When did you visit Ellis Island?

STRACCO: Oh, I think it was two years ago.

LEVINE: And how was . . .

STRACCO: My neighbor had a bus, and we went by bus. And my name is over there on the stone and everything.

LEVINE: On the wall?

STRACCO: Oh, please. When I walked in there I started crying. I said, "This place hasn't changed in eighty years!" The beds were still the same, those old army blankets were there. I told that guy there, too. I said, "What's the matter?" I says, "The whole world got modern." "Well," he said, "you know, we're keeping it this way for . . ." Yeah.

LEVINE: Historical (?).

STRACCO: I told him, I says, "Boy, if I ever went to Italy now, I wouldn't be sleeping on these bunks." We'd sleep on nice beds, you know. Then they have music. They got everything on the ship. They didn't have nothing then. Lucky that we made it. Twenty-one days. Then we had a big storm. Oh, my God, the water came right up on the ship. Yeah. But when you're young like I was, those things, I figured, "Ah, so what."

LEVINE: Do you think your father was happy that he had come here?

STRACCO: My father was yeah. Yeah. But he went back I don't know how many times.

LEVINE: Oh, he did.

STRACCO: Yeah, because we, we rented the house that we were in, then he went back and he sold it. Oh, he went back two, three times. All my brothers went back. I'm the only one that never went there. They all went to see the old homestead and everything. I would love to have gone, but Frank didn't want to go, and I, I just didn't feel like leaving him for two or three weeks, you know. He didn't care. He told me if I wanted to go. Nah.

LEVINE: So what makes you feel very satisfied? What do you feel satisfied about having done in your lifetime? Is there anything that when you think of it you feel good, or proud?

STRACCO: Oh, well, I got a, I have a much better life than I had in Italy, you know? Over there is tough, but you accept it. But no, I would, I wouldn't change my way here to go back over there. No. This is better here now.

LEVINE: But how do you feel about, like, if there's part of you that's Italian, and part of you that's American, how do you think about that?

STRACCO: You mix it together. You try to be modern, but then sometimes you figure, oh, you're better off being old-fashioned. No, like, you know, naturally when my grandchildren come, I go right along, I go along with anybody. They want to go on a picnic? Ah, let's go on a picnic. You want to stay home? Ah, we'll stay home. No, I'm satisfied. I'm very satisfied with life. The only thing, I'm sad because I lost my husband. But otherwise, I had a good life. I had a hard life, but I always had a good life. My husband was very, very good to me. He treated me, anything I wanted to do, he never stopped me from nothing. I went to California, I went to Cape Cod, I went to Hershey, Pennsylvania. I went all over the United States. He never went. He liked to stay home. I went to Washington, DC I don't know how many times, to the Immaculate Conception. Oh, yeah, I loved to travel. But not now. No, I like to stay home. He didn't want to go. They want me to go to Arizona. I've got a grandson out there. I don't want to go.

What am I going to do there? I'd rather stay here.
Because I'm not that well, you know. I'm . . .

LEVINE: You look very well.

STRACCO: Yeah, I know. But, you know, I had all my stomach removed. That was full of cancer. See, I have no stomach. And I'd rather stay in my own little house. Every day I go down and visit my husband at the grave. Then I come home, my boys are always here, my grandchildren. No, I would, if they told me to go back to Italy, I would go for a visit, but I would never go live there. Oh, my God, no. Because things haven't changed. They're just as bad there as they ever were. They don't change. Then when we used to make the grapes, take off your shoes and smash them.

LEVINE: Oh, yeah, the wine?

STRACCO: Sure. We made our own wine. We made everything, our own oil. If you didn't make it, you didn't eat. Everything. And we used to peel the, the peas, the fresh peas, you know, you peel them. Everything was all fresh. There was no, uh, no chemical, nothing. The Lord washed the fields. Big bunch of grapes like that, you'd pick them, put them in a basket, put the

box on your head.

LEVINE: Wasn't it hard carrying things on your head?

STRACCO: After a while you get used to it. Sure, that's why I never got tall. I shrunk. (they laugh) That's what I tell my grandchildren. Me, I was always on the floor, scrubbing floors. (?) And the clothes, you know, after you washed them and everything, and you folded them up and they were dried, you had to walk four, five miles home with it.

LEVINE: With it on your head?

STRACCO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Mmm.

STRACCO: Yeah, but we used to sing and walk. We didn't do nothing. You got used to it, see? Just like here, they get used to all this modern stuff. The girls today, they don't know how to cook, if you take the book away from them and those frozen foods. If I have to go to the store and buy a box of cake, I wouldn't even know what kind to buy. I do everything from scratch. I'm better off. Hey, I'm eighty-five years old. Too late to change now. (Dr. Levine laughs)

And I've been happy with whatever I did all my life. I can't, I can't complain. My husband wanted to buy me an automatic washer. I didn't want it. I've got the one with the wringer. I've got a sewing machine downstairs that's a hundred years old, the ones with the feet, you know?

LEVINE: Do you use it?

STRACCO: Yeah, once in a while, but my granddaughter wants it, so I'll give it to her. Yeah. Yeah, I used to use it before to patch, or make a slip, dishtowels. I used to buy, and make my own. No. Now I try to do things, but if I can get away with it, you know, I get away with it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah. Okay. Well, I . . .

STRACCO: Because I think I did enough in my life. Now it's time to take it easy.

LEVINE: Yeah. Your idea of taking it easy is probably still doing a lot, I would think.

STRACCO: Yeah. I just had this rug put in two weeks ago.

LEVINE: Very nice.

STRACCO: See, and I told him, I said, "Make sure you put one down that I don't have to watch or wash," I said, "because I'm too old. I don't want to get on my knees." But, uh, it's, uh, when it gets dirty, I'll just go over it with the mop.

LEVINE: Okay. Is there anything else you can think of that maybe we didn't talk about that has to do with coming to this country, Ellis Island, going to Dover?

STRACCO: Well, I told you, when we got on the trolley car, there was no buses, nothing. Get off the station in Dover, you had to get on a horse and buggy. The snow was so high, so we got on the sled, and we went to my father's brother. They had a big dinner for us, then two, three days later another brother had a big dinner. Then, you see, because my father had three sisters all in Dover, and my mother had a brother, and their wives and their sisters, we were always together. One thing I learned when I came to this country, how to make a lemon pie, a Good Luck lemon pie. (Dr. Levine laughs) See, because we never made no pies there. What did we make? We made pizza, we fried the dough, but when I came to this country I learned how to make a lemon pie. But now I make my

own apple and everything.

LEVINE: Good Luck was like in a package?

STRACCO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh. Yeah.

STRACCO: They still have it, yeah.

LEVINE: Oh.

STRACCO: But, uh, nah, today they buy Mrs. Smith apple pies. How long does it take to get four, five apples and peel them and put them in? Ah, I make my own crust. I do everything. By the time I get to Shoprite, get in line, check out, walk home, I got the pie in the oven, see? Because I, that's one thing about me, I can't sit still.

LEVINE: Did you ever drive?

STRACCO: Oh, yeah. They made me stop driving when I had my operation. Oh, I drove for about fifteen years. I went all over. To the flower show in Morristown, to Epstein's. Oh, I went all over. No, I went, well, I didn't drive. We went to Wheeling, West Virginia, a couple of times. We had neighbors in New York. Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I . . .

STRACCO: Anything else you want to know, I'll tell you.

LEVINE: I'll tell you, this has been really wonderful. You remember so much, and you tell it so well, and it's really, I think maybe we've covered everything. I want to thank you.

STRACCO: And in Italy, when we walked about a mile-and-a-half, the church was on the left hand side, and on the right hand side was a convent, you know? So we used to go to church, and go to convent. And then I, in Italy, you know, the roads were very narrow. And the homes, they were off of the road. In other words, when you come out of your house, you come down the steps to the little alley, then you would hit the main road, and you would go straight to the church, or wherever. And my mother always used to stand at the end of that little aisle near my house, and she would wave to me, until I made the corner, then she couldn't see me no more. And she, today they got sandwich bags, paper bags. She used to wrap up a littoral piece of bread with a fig or an apple, and an egg in a napkin, tie it in a napkin, swing the napkin, and we used to go. And

when I got to the convent I used to give the nun the egg, and she would boil it.

LEVINE: Now, uh, what were the houses made out of where you lived?

STRACCO: Oh, all stone.

LEVINE: Stone.

STRACCO: Yeah. But once when we were there we had an earthquake, and part of my house fell down. And my sister, she was in the crib. My mother ran back in, grabbed her, and come out, and the wall come down. If my mother didn't run in there the wall would have fell, and she was only, she was sleeping. I think she was a couple of years old. Yeah. They ran in. Then when the, the thing used to blow up in Naples, the Vesuvius[ph], whatever you call that, you know, where the, we could see it from my house. Yeah, we weren't too far from Naples, about thirty, forty miles. But you can see. When it goes up in the air, you can see quite a bit. Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, what about the first World War? Let's see. You were, uh, well, you were probably too little. Do you

remember anything about it?

STRACCO: Oh, yeah. I was five years old when the war ended. And my mother says, my mother died November 21, 1918, and that's when the war ended. My mother was so sick the day before, and she said, "Gee," she says, "now at least if the Lord takes us, we're at peace, the war is over." Oh, yeah. The soldiers marched up the, up the street. And my neighbor, she had a brother that was in the war, and he come back, and oh, at night he used to scream terrible, because he thought he was still fighting in the war. Yeah. You know, when you're five years old in Italy, it's like you're fifteen here, because they teach you to do everything. They don't say, "Oh, don't do that, you're five years old, oh, don't do this, you're too little." No, you've got to do it, and that's why. Over here, oh, when you're sixteen they do this and do that. Over there I used to go to the fountain and scrub clothes. I was only four years old. My mother used to make me do the little napkins and the little towels, and she would do the sheets. I'd do the pillowcases, scrub them on the, on the stone, flat stones. Sure. Today, huh. Everything is, nah, I would never want to go back to

that kind of a life, but if I had to, I would. I would accept it, see, because I'm used to it. But now I'm used to all this luxury, open the refrigerator, and everything, self defrosting, where before we had an ice box. In the wintertime we used to have a box out in the window to keep the stuff cold. Oh, I went through plenty. But then now that I've got a life of leisure and I could do anything I want, I lost my husband. But I had him sixty-four years, so I can't complain. Are you married?

LEVINE: No, I'm not.

STRACCO: You never got married?

LEVINE: Well, I got married, but it didn't work out.

STRACCO: Well, it didn't work out, you're better off that way.

If you've got to live miserable, forget it. But my husband and I, we got along, we had two nice boys. No, he was good to me. The only thing, he didn't like to travel, he didn't like to go out and eat. But what did I care? I went to California. For a whole week I cooked a meal for him for every day, and I wrote on it which day he had to eat it. He didn't care. No, one thing, my husband was never jealous. He just didn't,

as long as I fed him, he didn't care what. Try one of these. (referring to food)

LEVINE: I will when we, let's finish this off. Is there anything else that . . .

STRACCO: Well, whatever you want to know, I can tell you.

LEVINE: Well, let's see. I'm trying to think. Maybe we'll pause here. (break in tape) We're resuming here. I'm just going to say that, uh . . .

STRACCO: There's not much more I can tell you.

LEVINE: Yeah. I think we . . .

STRACCO: I told you what, here, you want to take these home with you? (referring to food)

LEVINE: Okay, I'll take them when I go.

STRACCO: Here.

LEVINE: Okay. I've been speaking with Mary Stracco, who was born Mary Naz-- . . .

STRACCO: Nazaro.

LEVINE: Nazaro. Okay. And, uh, at the time of this

interview, you're eighty-four?

STRACCO: Yep.

LEVINE: Yeah, because you're going to be eighty-five now . . .

STRACCO: I'll be eighty-five in October, yeah.

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