

EI-873

ANTOINETTE IAMPIETRO DANTE  
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ITALY, 1936  
AGE 8  
PASSAGE ON "LA SAVOIE"

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LEVINE: Today is May 1, 1997, and I'm here in Bridgewater, New Jersey, at the home of Antoinette Iampietro Dante, who came from Italy when she was eight years of age in 1936. Now, today Mrs. Dante is sixty-nine, at the time of this interview, which means that you're a lot younger than most.

DANTE: Right, right.

LEVINE: That I interview. And this is . . .

DANTE: Maybe not younger than most, but . . .

LEVINE: That I interview.

DANTE: Oh. ( they laugh )

LEVINE: And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Okay. Well, I'm looking forward to this, and I hope that whatever you remember relevant to what we're talking about, you just say it.

DANTE: Okay.

LEVINE: Okay. Let's start, if you would say where in Italy you were born, and the date of your birth.

DANTE: Sambatalome Ingalta[ph], provincia Beneviento[ph], Italia.

LEVINE: And your birth date?

DANTE: September 11, 1927.

LEVINE: And did you live in the same place up until the time you were eight years old, and you left for this country?

DANTE: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: So that's where you were. Okay.

DANTE: Basically I was with my mother and my grandparents, real close to my grandparents.

LEVINE: And that's because your father had left earlier, is that right?

DANTE: Right, when I was . . .

LEVINE: When you were just a baby.

DANTE: When I was twenty-three days old.

LEVINE: Okay.

DANTE: Twenty-three days old, yeah.

LEVINE: Now, what was your father's name?

DANTE: Pasquale Iampietro.

LEVINE: Okay. And, um, and when he was in Italy, before he came here, what kind of work did he do in Italy? Do you know?

DANTE: I guess it was laboring, you know, uh, like farm work, because that's what they did. They farmed their ground, and they cultivated their ground, and that's as far as I know. I mean, that's what I would think that that's what he did.

LEVINE: And then when he came to this country before the rest of the family, what was he doing here before he sent for the rest of the family, do you know?

DANTE: Um, well, first he went to Brazil.

LEVINE: Oh, he did? Okay.

DANTE: He went to Brazil two years before he came to this country, because they could not come directly here, so he went to Brazil, and then they did farm work over there also. And here he did, um, construction work, construction work, and then they had the W.P.A. at the time when there was no work, or in the wintertime when there was a lot of snow or something they would work, you know?

LEVINE: Clearing the roads?

DANTE: Yeah, yeah, shoveling and shoveling and stuff. Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, do you know, uh, how it was that he went to Brazil? I mean, did he, did he, uh, travel with family members, or friends?

DANTE: His brother-in-law, which is my uncle, Salvatore Monico.

LEVINE: Now, that was your mother's brother?

DANTE: Yes.

LEVINE: Or that was . . .

DANTE: My mother's brother, yeah. And they, um, they went to Brazil, because they could not, they could not get, come direct to America, so they went there first.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

DANTE: And then his, uh, cousin, called him from Brazil, from, he lived in Millbourne[ph]. Peter Pet[ph]. He, um, he called them here to, um, to, you know, from Brazil.

LEVINE: Um, so he was, he was here in New Jersey? Is that where he was?

DANTE: Yes, yeah. Him and his sister, Ursula, uh, Asero[ph], was her name. They, um, they called for my dad. They were first cousins with my dad, and they called for my dad and my uncle.

LEVINE: And they called saying that they should now come?

DANTE: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: To, to the United States?

DANTE: Well, see, they wanted to come, my father and brother-in-law, they wanted to come, so I guess they used to correspond, so they called for them, you know? They made out the papers for them and all.

LEVINE: Maybe they sponsored them?

DANTE: Yes, yes, that's the word, sponsor.

LEVINE: Okay. So that's good. So it was through the family, anyway, that . . .

DANTE: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: That he came here. And, uh, meanwhile, back in Italy, you were with your mother.

DANTE: Right.

LEVINE: And your grandparents?

DANTE: Yes, yeah.

LEVINE: And, uh, did you have sisters and brothers?

DANTE: No. I lost a brother when he was eighteen days old. He was older than I was.

LEVINE: Oh.

DANTE: So, can you imagine leaving, you know, my mother had lost a son, then she had me, twenty-three days old, and then her husband leaving, knowing that they might never see each other again? I mean, that's got to be, I don't . . . I couldn't do it today. I couldn't do it today.

LEVINE: Well, now, was this, um, the grandparents. Did you have grandparents on both sides, or . . .

DANTE: Well, um, we were, we lived closer to my, uh, dad's mother and father, to my dad's parents.

LEVINE: So you . . .

DANTE: My mother, she, um, had a stepmother and her father lived a little bit further away. Not too far, but further away. And I didn't seem them as much. I was mostly with my dad's parents. I remember them the most.

LEVINE: Tell me what you remember about them.

DANTE: Well, I don't know. I remember, uh, my, uh, my grandfather sitting on a trunk, and I would stand on

his feet, and he would, um, you know, pick me up, up and down, like, you know, I was a small, and I remember that. That's about the one thing. And then another time they took me on a donkey to the farm with, uh, to see my mother where she worked, you know.

LEVINE: What was your mother doing for work?

DANTE: Well, she worked the farms, you know, the farms, she worked, yeah.

LEVINE: So she would plant and harvest and all of that?

DANTE: Yeah, yeah, yeah, for different people, you know, different people, or for themselves, you know.

LEVINE: How about your grandmother? What do you remember? Did she ever do things with you, or . . .

DANTE: I don't remember too much. No, I don't remember anything somehow.

LEVINE: Okay. And how about aunts, uncles, cousins? Did you have much cousins?

DANTE: Yeah, I had cousins, yeah. I had cousins, yeah. I had cousins. Um, you know, we would play. One time we were cooking something on the fireplace, and, I

don't know, we left, we went to get, I forget what it was, uh, like barrettes or something, to my other cousin. Can you imagine leaning? I couldn't have been more than seven or something like that, you know, close, maybe, before I came to this country.

LEVINE: And you went to get what, did you say? What did you say you went to get?

DANTE: A barrette or something, you know, for the hair, like, you know? Yeah. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: Were you a religious family?

DANTE: Well, we always went to church, and we go to church, you know. My father was an altar boy, but then when he came to this country he changed his religion. He became a Pentecost. Yeah. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: How about food? Do you remember any food from when you were a little girl in Italy, things that your mother made, or maybe your grandmother made, that you . . .

DANTE: Well, there was polenta, pasta.

LEVINE: You must have had things, also, from the, from the

farm.

DANTE: Um, you know, potatoes, that kind of stuff. Not too much meat. We didn't have meat.

LEVINE: Did you have any livestock, or anything like that?

DANTE: My mother, they used to have it when she was a young girl, her parents. That's what they would have. That's what they had. They had live, you know, my mother, uh, I don't know if they had chickens or anything like that. Something like that, but no other. But, her family, they, you know, they were, that's what they had. They had cows and things.

LEVINE: I see. And did they still have them when you were little, your mother's side?

DANTE: No, no, no.

LEVINE: Okay. And how about, did you . . .

DANTE: Of course, my grandparents, they were old, and they were old already. They were, like, in their, in their seventies, like, when we left Italy. Yeah.

LEVINE: I see.

DANTE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah, so they were . . .

DANTE: Yeah.

LEVINE: More or less retired.

DANTE: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Um, how about, uh, school? Did you attend school?

DANTE: I went to school. Yeah, I went to first grade, and, uh, that's what I remember.

LEVINE: Yeah? What was . . . ( voices garbled ) Do you remember any experienced . . .

DANTE: Going to school, and that was like before the, and all I remember is, uh, we had our uniforms, and then it was Mussolini. He was, you know, already, and they were training, they would train us for, uh, how do you say it?

LEVINE: Like to march and all that, the parades and all that?

DANTE: Parade, or something like that. You know, I just remember being in line and, I mean, it wasn't any strict thing. It was, you know, just being in line,

and it was like a light blouse with a dark skirt, you know? I don't even remember if it was black or blue, you know?

LEVINE: And di you, like, sing, or did you have . . .

DANTE: I guess just walking, marching, you know, something like that, you know? But that's as far as that. And I remember dancing, um, my mother, I guess she brought me to dancing school, I guess a couple of times. I was in a play or something, I don't know, on a stage or something like that, you know? Yeah.

LEVINE: And, uh, how about, like, fun? Did you have . . .

DANTE: I don't know if I want to . . . Well, I don't know if I want to say this. No, I'm not going to say it.

LEVINE: Okay.

DANTE: If you . . .

LEVINE: If you decide. Wait, we can just pause for a second here. ( break in tape ) We're resuming here. Uh, all right. So, uh, as far as having fun, did you have, like, a best friend? Did you play games that you can remember what they were, or . . .

DANTE: In Italy?

LEVINE: Yeah.

DANTE: I really don't remember. No, I don't remember playing games. Well, I guess we did play, but I don't, you know, not . . .

LEVINE: Not . . .

DANTE: Specific, yeah, yeah. I do remember one time my cousin went, um, she took me to her place of work. She worked for a family, she was, like a, she would take care of the house and stuff. And, anyway, she must have been watching for me, but that day she, um, she combed my hair, and she put a barrette of these people on me, and, um, I went home with this barrette, and I got hollered from my mother. She, oh, she scared me, she said, "The cops are going to come after you." She thought that I took it. I said, "Mom, I did not take it. My aunt put it on me." You know. But, anyway, it left such a fear, you know, to this day I never took anything from anybody, you know? So.

LEVINE: Um, talk about celebrations, or ceremonies. Do you remember anything, either connected with the church,

or, you know, the way you observed certain, uh, holidays, or, uh, feast days, or any, do you remember anything of that . . .

DANTE: Not too much, not in Italy, not in Italy. No, no. No. The only thing I remember is then, you know, coming to America, which you have on there. You have the different informations on there.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, I'm going to ask you some of the same things, just, you know, it's in your voice. But, um, so when you, do you know why you and your mother came at the time that you did come? Do you know why it was then that you came?

DANTE: Well, because my father had to wait five years to become an American citizen. And, um, then, after the five years he, by the time he filed for his papers, then another year went by, and so that's why he was, in two years he was in Brazil, so that was eight, over eight years, eight years and five months, I think.

LEVINE: Well, okay. So do you remember, did you have any examinations prior to leaving Italy?

DANTE: Oh, yes. Yeah. We were examined, and we were, and,

um, I guess, well, I have a birthmark in my head. I still have like a knot here, and they must have thought it was some sort of a contagious disease, and so they shaved my, uh, they cut my hair off.

LEVINE: Now, this was in Italy.

DANTE: In Italy, yeah.

LEVINE: Were you on the ship, or . . .

DANTE: No, no. This was before, right. This was before, I think, when you, um, you know, you go for your physical, and I think that's when they did it. Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, that must have been traumatic for an eight-year-old little girl, to have her hair shaved.

DANTE: I wouldn't walk around without my hat. ( she laughs )

LEVINE: Oh.

DANTE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. So do you remember actually leaving, saying good-bye to your grandparents?

DANTE: Oh, yes, yeah, I remember leaving. And, um, it was

very difficult, because, uh, knowing that we would never see them again. And the one thing that I do remember was, um, that my, um, my mother didn't want to speak for four hours from the Sambatlome[ph] to Naples to get the boat. It was a four hour ride, and my mother did not speak one word because she was so heartbroken. And, um, you know, that left me an impression that I remember to this day. And, um, it was not being able, seeing, um, all my relatives, uh, any more. And as it was, my grandparents, within fifteen months after we were here, the three of them died within a year or two, like that.

LEVINE: Can you remember anything that any of them said to you, like, you know, did they give you any, like, advice, or did they seem . . .

DANTE: I just remember them hugging, you know, like that, and crying. Everybody was crying.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you remember leaving the town?

DANTE: Yeah, right.

LEVINE: Do you remember leaving? How did you leave?

DANTE: I left with a car, and we had the big trunk, which my

sister still has it in her home, a big trunk, um, that, you know, was hitched onto the, uh, to the car.

LEVINE: It was in an automobile.

DANTE: Right. It was an automobile, right. It was an automobile, yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. And, um, and that, you went by automobile to, uh, the port? Do you remember . . .

DANTE: Naples, yeah. To the port in Naples, yeah.

LEVINE: And then did you have to stay in Naples, or did you, were you able to get aboard the ship . . .

DANTE: We got on, well, I don't remember if it was right away or, you know, I think we got on. I don't remember hanging around there. I think that's, we got on there, yeah.

LEVINE: It was just you and your mother?

DANTE: Yes, and there was, um, and I guess the driver, the driver. Yeah, it was just my mother and I and the driver. Yeah. No, but I, no one else came with us.

LEVINE: And . . . ( voices garbled )

DANTE: It's not like today. Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Interesting. So then you got on the ship. Now, can you remember anything about the Conte (?) . . .

DANTE: Yeah, well, it was a beautiful white boat. It was just beautiful. Because I don't think it was too old. And, um, it was, um, a lot of people got sick from it, but my mother and I, we did not get sick. One girl or two that, I don't remember, but one specific, that was from our same town, she was very sick, she was very sick, yeah.

LEVINE: You mentioned on the questionnaire that you, your mother was buying silk scarves.

DANTE: Yes.

LEVINE: From a small boat. Was that in Naples?

DANTE: No, it was on, in, yeah, on the way over here.

LEVINE: Oh, on the way.

DANTE: Yes. Now, I don't remember if it was closer to, uh, Europe, or closer to America. I remember it was a

beautiful day. I think it must have been closer to when we came to, uh, you know, closer to America. It was a beautiful day, and there was this little boat, and there were, people were buying these scarves from the boat, you know? And, uh, I remember just that alone, I would love to go on a boat, but now I'm afraid of it. ( she laughs ) So, um . . .

LEVINE: So what would people do? They would point out which ones they wanted, and then they send it up, or . . .

DANTE: I don't know how that worked. Uh, I don't know how that worked. I guess they, uh, they must have been showing them, yeah, and whichever one they wanted, or, that's what they picked out, you know?

LEVINE: Of course, it's also possible that the ship, I'm not sure about this, but it may have gone to different, uh, ports before it came over.

DANTE: Uh-huh.

LEVINE: And, you know, it could have been in one of those. You know what I'm saying? Like it maybe was Naples, and then it went to some European port before it crossed the Atlantic.

DANTE: Yeah.

LEVINE: I don't know about that, but I actually could look and see.

DANTE: Well, we had to pass the, um, the canal. What is that canal now called?

LEVINE: Well, I'm not sure . . .

DANTE: If it came through there. I don't know if it comes through there. Well, anyway.

LEVINE: Well, do you remember when the ship came into the New York Harbor? Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty? Do you remember seeing New York?

DANTE: No, no, because no one pointed it out to us, no.

LEVINE: So when you got here did you go, like, right to Ellis Island?

DANTE: Yes, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you have . . .

DANTE: But we didn't get, we didn't get off and, you know, and stay there. We didn't . . .

LEVINE: You didn't have to stay over, no.

DANTE: No, we didn't stay over, no. No.

LEVINE: What do you remember?

DANTE: I remember that, uh, we got off the, uh, the boat, and it was like a lamp, and there was that lamp there, because I saw it now, this time. And, uh, my uncle picked me up. He carried me. And, um, I was wondering why my dad didn't, but then he and my dad must have been busy with the luggage and the trunk and, uh, paperwork. And, um . . .

LEVINE: And what uncle was that? The one that . . .

DANTE: Uncle Salvatore, the one that came to this country with my dad.

LEVINE: I see, uh-huh. And do you remember seeing your father, because, of course, you wouldn't even recognize him, because you . . .

DANTE: Right. No, but I don't know. I don't know how we got to, well, my mother knew him. I mean, they knew each other, you know, so they, yeah.

LEVINE: And then where did you go? When your father and uncle

picked you and your mother up?

DANTE: Well, we went to Millbourne[ph] to, um, um, Uncle Peter and, uh, well, his sister's house, Ursula Seral[ph]. And, uh, then her husband, Danny, anyway. There was, her family there, and, uh, we were together with them, with my husband's cousins. We were at their home on, uh, 21 Mechanic Street. ( she laughs ) I still remember it.

LEVINE: Well, tell me, what was that first day and night like? I mean, when you were new in this country?

DANTE: Well, it was a lot of, um, it was a big dinner. I don't remember what we ate, but I remember it was a big dinner. Then we went outside. I played with my new cousins, and it was, um, I still remember, you know, going out there. I don't think anybody took pictures. We didn't have cameras like we do today, you know? Yeah.

LEVINE: So, um . . .

DANTE: And then we, um, later on we went to our home, um, to this two-bedroom apartment house that was not far from there.

LEVINE: Oh.

DANTE: And, um, we stayed there for two years. Then we went to, um, we moved to another house on, uh, Church Street, 25 Church Street, and that's where we stayed five years.

LEVINE: I see. How about things that struck you when you first were here, like the first few days and weeks? Do you remember, I mean, I guess everything was new, but . . .

DANTE: Yes.

LEVINE: Was there anything that stood out?

DANTE: Going to school, going to school and, I had to start out in, I guess by that time I should have been in third grade, but they had classes before that when children came from Europe they had special classes that you learn the English and crafts and everything, so that's what I remember doing.

LEVINE: Oh, so you were in the special class, and you got help with learning English.

DANTE: Yeah, yeah. They had them before. You know, now, I

don't know, well, today is different.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, did you, did you have a lot of difficulty with the language? Do you remember learning English?

DANTE: No. At one point when we were playing outdoors they said, um, uh, you know, she's smart, she's smart. And I went inside crying to my parents, "They're calling me dumb." Because in Italian the dialect of our town was "mot" is crazy, like, you know? ( she laughs )

LEVINE: Oh.

DANTE: And I thought they were calling me that, you know? No, that's not, you know, they're, he says you're smart, you're smart, you know? But, um . . .

LEVINE: So, um, did you learn English more quickly than your parents, which was often the case?

DANTE: Oh, yes, yes, yeah.

LEVINE: And what was that like?

DANTE: And we learned together, because then my mother went for her citizenship paper, and, um, I sort of would, um, give her the questions and, you know, between my father and myself, and, you know, so I learned with

that, too. Because I had to get my citizenship paper, too.

LEVINE: You didn't get it under your father's?

DANTE: I did, but I had to go for it. I had to go for it. So, um, when I went, I was seventeen years old and, um, they said, uh, my mind gets blank, gets a little nervous.

LEVINE: You went, your father got his first, and your mother . . .

DANTE: Well, my father had his citizenship papers in order for us to get here, then my mother and I went for it.

LEVINE: Oh, and you went the same time.

DANTE: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, so we had to study for it and, you know. But they didn't ask me no questions.

LEVINE: Oh.

DANTE: I was like, two questions they asked me.

LEVINE: Do you remember them?

DANTE: Well, one question specifically. They said, I was late ten minutes, and they said, "Now, are you going

to be late when you get married, too?" And, and that was one question. They didn't really ask me any questions. Oh, and I was seventeen, and they said, uh, you read the, uh, the magazine, Seventeen? I said, "Yes, I do." Which I did. And they said, "Well, when you become eighteen, will you read the Eighteen magazine?" I said, "They don't have any." So, you know, and those were the only two questions that they asked me, and I got my paper, you know.

LEVINE: And what about your mother? Did they . . .

DANTE: Yeah, she got hers.

LEVINE: Did they ask her?

DANTE: They asked her some questions, yeah.

LEVINE: About history, about this country.

DANTE: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So.

LEVINE: Okay. And how did your mother like it here? Do you remember?

DANTE: Oh, we all liked it here. This was great, it was, no other country was like this.

LEVINE: So, um, let's see. So you went to school, and then, uh, did you, how far did you go, and then what did you do after you left school?

DANTE: In this country?

LEVINE: Yeah.

DANTE: Well, I only went to the eighth grade, because, like, when they, um, I went in this special class, and then, um, then they put me in third grade, the year after. Or, so then I really went up to the eighth grade. I was almost sixteen. And, um, I went to work in a tailor shop. My parents says, "You want to continue going to school?" And I said, "Oh, my cousins," I says, "they're, um, my relatives, they are making more money in the tailor shop than they were in an office." So, which was not the right thinking at the time. I realize that now today, but at the time I said, "Oh, I can make more money in a tailor shop." But, um . . .

LEVINE: Were you good at sewing?

DANTE: Yes. Well, I learned it. I was sewing at home. My mother was making dolls' dresses at home before she went to work, when my sister was born and she was

small. And, um, now I'm going backwards now.

LEVINE: Well, that's okay. So your mother will, do you know if your mother was doing something they called homework? She would get it from a factory?

DANTE: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: And then she could work on it at home?

DANTE: Yes, yeah. And she also, the first year that we were here, second year, uh, we went to pick strawberries, and then the farm, and I went with my mother. And, uh, picked strawberries with her. And, uh, then after that they, she picked up this work making dolls' dresses. She bought a machine, a sewing machine, and, uh, made dolls' dresses to earn some money.

LEVINE: And how about, did you . . .

DANTE: And then my sister was born in 19, um, well, a year later. A year later my sister was born, in 1937. Celanina[ph]. Three minutes before twelve, in 1937, uh, New Year's Eve, she was born. And, uh, so my mother was home, and we made, uh, and I helped her with the sewing, whatever I could help. She would run the machine. But then after I started to learn, too,

so I . . .

LEVINE: And did you like working in the tailor shop?

DANTE: Well, at the time it was good. If I had to do it over again, I would not do it, because it was hard work. We worked in, um, we did men's, um, coats, Crawford coats, and I worked for DeAngelis and Company.

LEVINE: Were there a lot of people working?

DANTE: East Newark, yeah. There was a lot of, it was a big company. And my mother went to work, too, doing hand sewing in a woman's suits, ladies suits. And it was, uh, the lining was done by hand, and she did that. That was all specialized work, like, you know?

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, was this with the, Crawford, is that what you said? Crawford?

DANTE: Uh, no. She was with a different company. I can't think of the company now, you know. But, um, well, we made Crawford clothing, coats, but hers was different. It was the woman's line, yeah.

LEVINE: I see. Now, do you think that a lot of the people who were working in the tailor shop that you were in, were

they people who had also immigrated to this country?  
Do you have a sense of that?

DANTE: Some, not everybody, some. Yeah, some, not everybody,  
yeah.

LEVINE: Well, like, in Millbourne[ph], were there a lot of  
immigrant families?

DANTE: Oh, yes, yes. There was a lot from, um, our town,  
yeah, a lot.

LEVINE: Oh, is that right?

DANTE: A lot, yeah. A lot came after, a lot. A lot of  
people came after. We were some of the first ones,  
you know.

LEVINE: Were there other ethnic groups besides Italian that  
you recall? Were there other groups that were coming  
to this country and settling in Millbourne[ph]?

DANTE: No. At the time I only, you know, mostly Italian,  
because that's who we stuck with, you know, we  
associated with. So.

LEVINE: Were there, um, do you recall like any social clubs,  
Italian clubs, like that your mother and father, uh,

you know, went to, uh, either dances or had . . .

DANTE: At that time they didn't go anywhere except work, and visited, we visited, we would visit always with the family. Um, or other kids that were here. Then my cousins came over in 1939, and we were always together with them. We were always together. And we visit our different relatives, and that was, that's when we went out. We went out to a wedding. That was about the only time. We never went out to a restaurant and eat. Well, a few times, a couple of times my uncle took us to Newark and we went to a restaurant.

LEVINE: Now, did your mother continue, like, to cook the way she had cooked in . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Okay. So you were saying that, um, your mother, um, only had a fireplace.

DANTE: Right.

LEVINE: In Italy.

DANTE: Yeah, in Italy, yeah, so one pot cooking. Over here

was, started to be a little different, you know? So.

LEVINE: But she probably could shop for Italian food in the neighborhood, and that kind of thing.

DANTE: Yeah. But basically it was a lot of pasta with greens, like escarole and that kind of stuff, you know? Making, buying flour and making her own pasta, like. But I remember getting, well, the bread from the baker and, uh, the milk man would come to the door, and we'd have that, you know?

LEVINE: Yeah. Okay. Now, um, let's see. Uh, when you think about it, when you think about coming here as an eight-year-old, do you think that made a difference in the kind of person you became? I mean, the fact that you, you know, you started out in a different country, then you had to learn a new language, and your family came here. I mean, do you think . . .

DANTE: Well, we, we definitely, um, became we were much better here, because we had more things. We had a better life working. We worked hard, my parents worked hard, and so did I, and from the time I was sixteen years old, in fact, I, I started working before I got my papers, before I was sixteen. But

then, then I got my papers, and I lied a little bit about my papers. I sent for them, but I didn't get them yet. So before you know it it was September and I became sixteen, so I was able to stay there.

LEVINE: This was in the tailor shop.

DANTE: Yeah, this was in, um, uh, MacGregor's. My first job was MacGregor's Shirt Factory in Elizabeth, and my cousin and I went to get a job there. And, um, I stayed there for, I don't know, a few months, then I became sixteen, and after that I went to look for a better job, and I went where they make coats, in East Newark. Harrison? And, um, and that's where I worked for eleven years until, uh, until I got married, and . . .

LEVINE: Wow. And how did you meet your husband?

DANTE: My husband came, um, well, it was a blind date.  
( they laugh ) My cousin lived with us for a few months until, uh, their house was being built, and, uh, her, uh, her aunt and, uh, my husband's, um, aunt, they were, uh, with her godmother, and they were coming to see my cousin that was living with us. And we, they said that he was, they were waiting for the

bus and my husband came by with his brother and, um, and picked them up and took them to my house. That was their excuse. But when they were there a while I realized that they had this all planned. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So, uh, you, so then when you got married, uh, what's your husband's name, first?

DANTE: Patsy.

LEVINE: Patsy. Uh-huh. And, uh, when you got married, then, did you stay, uh, were you living in Millbourne[ph] when you met him?

DANTE: No, in Hillside.

LEVINE: In Hillside.

DANTE: In Hillside. We had moved to Hillside. My parents bought a home, and after, in 1941 we moved to Hillside, my father got a job in, I think I mentioned, that Hatfield Wire and Cable?

LEVINE: Uh-huh. I don't think the tape was on.

DANTE: And, um, so we, um, and that's, that's where we lived.

LEVINE: In Hillside.

DANTE: Yeah, in Hillside.

LEVINE: And then when you did get . . .

DANTE: We bought a two-family home there. For five thousand dollars, my parents bought a house. So that helped him a little bit, because they didn't make too much money. So the rent . . .

LEVINE: Oh, a rental.

DANTE: Yeah, the rent, the house, they rented one floor, and they were able to, uh, so that helped. Then my mother started working. Well, my mother started working while we were still in Millbourne[ph], and, um, my sister went to the, uh, day care center, and, uh, I had to pick her up after school and take her home. We also had boarders. My mother took in boarders, the ones that their wives were in Italy, and they were here by themselves. So, um, and we, um, they helped out, too.

LEVINE: Now, with the boarders, were they, was your mother cooking dinners for them?

DANTE: Yes. I remember ten years old I was cooking dinners. My mother went to work, and, and, uh, I had to, you

know, start dinners.

LEVINE: Wow.

DANTE: Yeah.

LEVINE: What was it like having the boarders? Were there, how many were there, usually, in the house?

DANTE: Uh, two. Two. I think at one point three, but two mostly. Yeah. Well, you have to cook for them. Well, we cooked for everybody, and everybody ate together, and I guess they chipped in with the paying of the meals.

LEVINE: And, like, how about their laundry and all that? Was that something that they did themselves?

DANTE: No, no.

LEVINE: Or did you do that, too, or . . .

DANTE: My, yeah, my mother would do that. Yeah, my mother would do that. Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

DANTE: Yeah.

LEVINE: So were these boarders people that you actually knew?

DANTE: Yes, yeah, yeah. They were, uh, from the town, from the same town, they were, yeah.

LEVINE: So then in Hillside it was also a community that had a lot of people from your town in your community.

DANTE: Right, yeah.

LEVINE: I see.

DANTE: Oh, Hillside?

LEVINE: Yeah.

DANTE: No, now this was in Millbourne[ph].

LEVINE: Oh, this was in Millbourne[ph].

DANTE: In Millbourne[ph], yeah. Hillside, then, my mother went to work.

LEVINE: I see, and . . .

DANTE: My mother went to work in the tailor shop, and I was working in a tailor shop, too. That's when I started working. I went to Millbourne[ph] school when we were in Millbourne[ph], but when I got to Hillside I went

to work.

LEVINE: Now, in Hillside, was there an Italian community, too?

Do you remember?

DANTE: Some. I don't remember just what nationality there was. Not as much, no.

LEVINE: Not as much in Millbourne[ph]. Uh-huh.

DANTE: No.

LEVINE: So the family kind of moved away . . .

DANTE: Yes, yes, yes.

LEVINE: The same people that had been in New York. Uh-huh.  
Okay, so

DANTE: But we would travel by bus to visit. We would travel all the time. Sunday was a visiting day. Either they came to us, or we went to them, you know, to see them.

LEVINE: Um, how do you think about yourself now? Do you think, like, do you think of yourself as more Italian, or more American?

DANTE: No, I . . .

LEVINE: How do you . . .

DANTE: I consider myself American. From the time I was young I consider myself American. I, I'm very proud to be here. I never wanted to go to Italy, back to Italy. The thing I would miss would be the bathroom. ( she laughs ) And, um, we have all the conveniences. I didn't want to go back to Italy. We have all the convenience, we have, we were fortunate enough to be healthy and be able to work, and so we, you know, worked hard. My parents, my husband and I, we still keep on working. ( she laughs )

LEVINE: Now, how did your mother and father feel? Were they, were they . . .

DANTE: Oh, they loved America, yes. They didn't want to go back either.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

DANTE: Of course, at the time, when they were still living, it wasn't used as much as now, you know. And when they first came it was not, there was no choice of going back.

LEVINE: Right, right. And then, of course, the war broke out.

DANTE: Right, yeah. We just, we really were lucky we made it. Yeah. I remember we were in Millbourne[ph] when, uh, when the war broke out. You know, they used to have the air raids.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about the Second World War, and how it affected your family?

DANTE: Well, because of the, yeah. We were concerned for the loved ones that, uh, yeah. The cousins. Well, actually my, my parents, they, well, my father had a brother there. Well, my mother, too, had brothers and sisters, you know. But, um, that's right. They were very concerned that, what would happen to them. It was very difficult then, yeah.

LEVINE: And, uh, let's see. How about, like, when you look back on your life? What do you feel really satisfied about, that makes you feel like, you know, you, you really either accomplished something, or you feel good about, uh, doing?

DANTE: Well, I feel good. I'm very thankful that I was able to work and take care of my family, and I'm very thankful God was, He gave me the health to keep on

working and, um, and take care of my family.

LEVINE: Now, do you have children?

DANTE: I have, um, three children, but we lost one three years ago.

LEVINE: Oh, I'm sorry.

DANTE: And, um, she was twenty-eight years old. Yeah. She's . . .

LEVINE: And what was her name?

DANTE: Patricia, yeah.

LEVINE: And how about the other two? What are their names?

DANTE: Uh, Maryann, um, and Robert. And then came Patricia. She was the baby. Yeah. So that was a difficult time.

LEVINE: Oh, I bet.

DANTE: I've been very, very thankful for my family and my husband, and very thankful for everything that we have. We, and this was the one sad thing that, you know. We'll never be the same again, you know. But that's, that's part of life. That's part of life,

yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. And how about this part of life for you, this time, when you're, well, you say you're, you're working?

DANTE: Yeah.

LEVINE: You work some of the time?

DANTE: Yeah, I work, um, I've been working, it will be twenty-five years, in the school cafeteria, and, um, I'm still working there. I used to work seven-and-a-half hours, a full day, start at six-thirty and then till, uh, two-thirty. But, um, now I, I'm semiretired, Social Security, so I only work part-time, five hours.

LEVINE: And is that, do you enjoy it?

DANTE: I love it, I love it. It's my therapy. It's my therapy, yeah. I've been working in the same place for the same boss for, it's going to be twenty-five years the first of October, so.

LEVINE: Yeah. Is there anything else in your life that you want to mention that, you know, you've done, or are

doing, or want to do, or . . .

DANTE: I'm really contented to be, uh, at home and as long as everyone is well, my family is well. I like to go out with my husband sometimes. After church on Sunday we, once in a while we go out to, um, for breakfast, and I enjoy doing that. And, uh, we have a home in, uh, Pennsylvania, a mobile home. My husband likes to go hunting with his brothers there, and, uh, we got there once in a while, and we enjoy doing that, in the summertime. And, uh, I enjoy working. You might think that I'm crazy, but I enjoy my job. I just, I enjoy going to work, you know? Only now it gets a little bit harder. As I'm getting older, it's getting a little harder. I get more tired.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

DANTE: But my husband, thank God, he helps me. He vacuums for me once a week, so that's a big help, so, yeah.

LEVINE: Now, you visited Ellis Island.

DANTE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Is that, did that, um, have any particular effect on you, I mean, going there, seeing it again?

DANTE: Well, it was very, very emotional, because when I was there when I was small we went to the Statue of Liberty. Um, it didn't, you know, it didn't pay too much attention. It was beautiful, but it was, um, but now I really was emotional thinking of, um, you know, my dad came through this place. We came through this and, um, I'm very thankful that we, my dad made this decision to come to this country.

LEVINE: Well, that sounds like a good place to end.

DANTE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Unless you have something in particular that maybe we haven't covered, but . . .

DANTE: I can't think of anything, you know, else, so that seems.

LEVINE: Yeah.

DANTE: We're very thankful we're in this country and, uh, I think there should be more respect for other people, and other people's property, because this is what we were brought up with, to respect our elders, other people, love God and, um, and this is how we grew up.

And, um, I think it's the right way. Where now they, some people, they take things for granted, or they're very disrespectful for other people's property, and, it makes it more difficult, it makes it more difficult. You've always got to try to improve yourself. This is what we, was our goal, always to better yourself. So that's, that's how I was brought up.

LEVINE: Wonderful. I've been speaking with Antoinette Dante, who came at eight years old from Italy in 1936. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm signing off.