

EI-881

ALFREDO [PH] PETRELLA

BIRTHDATE: OCTOBER 14, 1904

INTERVIEW DATE: AUGUST 15, 1995

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL SIGRIST

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ITALY, 1921

AGE: 16

SHIP: PRESIDENT WILSON

PORT: NAPLES

RESIDENCES:

SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday, May 15th, 1995. I'm in Cliffside Park, New Jersey. And I'm here with Mr. Alfredo Onaveo [PH] Petrella.

PETRELLA: That's right.

SIGRIST: Mr. Petrella came from Italy in 1921. He was 16 years old at that time and he was held at Ellis Island from February to May of 1921. We're in Mr. Petrella's living room and with us also is Mrs. Petrella, who may interject some information as we go along. Mr. Petrella, can we begin by you giving me your birth date?

PETRELLA: The 10—the 14, October, 1904.

SIGRIST: So the 14th of October, 1904.

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PETRELLA: Right.

SIGRIST: Right. And where were you born?

PETRELLA: In Italy.

SIGRIST: Where in Italy?

PETRELLA: Ripabotti.

SIGRIST: Oh, my goodness. Where in Italy is that?

PETRELLA: That's province Combabasso [PH].

SIGRIST: Is that the south of Italy?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: That's in the south of Italy.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you spell the name of the town?

PETRELLA: Ri—R-I-P-A-B-O-T-T-I.

SIGRIST: Great. Say it one more time for me.

PETRELLA: R-I—

SIGRIST: No, just say the name. Don't spell it. Just say it.

PETRELLA: Ripabotti [PH].

SIGRIST: Yeah. Mrs. Petrella, that's okay. We'll do that later. You can come sit down.

MRS. PETRELLA: Well—well, you want to spell it good later on—

SIGRIST: Okay. Good. I'll write that down. Where did your family come from? Did your father come from that town?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What about your mother?

PETRELLA: Same thing.

SIGRIST: Same thing.

PETRELLA: Same town.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

PETRELLA: Same villa, small village.

SIGRIST: It's a small village. Can you describe for me in words what the village looked like?

PETRELLA: Right, that's the—the—right on the mountain.

SIGRIST: On the mountain.

PETRELLA: And then we got—and we got [unclear].

SIGRIST: Okay.

MRS. PETRELLA: [unclear] Combabasso.

SIGRIST: Yes.

MRS. PETRELLA: You should say Combabasso.

PETRELLA: [chuckles]

SIGRIST: No, he did say Combabasso.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: I—I should say for the sake of the tape that—that Mrs. Petrella is—is getting us the correct spelling of the name. But that's okay. We can do this when we're done.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: The—the village is up in the mountains.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What—what—

PETRELLA: If—

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SIGRIST: What did the village look like?

PETRELLA: Like country, you know, small, very small village, about 15 to 16 townspeople. That's all.

SIGRIST: What did the houses look like?

PETRELLA: Beautiful. I had a house there, [unclear] house.

SIGRIST: Three story?

PETRELLA: Three story house with—downstairs we had a shop with my father, a blacksmith.

SIGRIST: Your father was a blacksmith.

PETRELLA: Blacksmith. And we still there—I still there till 1921.

SIGRIST: I see. What was the house made out of?

PETRELLA: It's like stone, all stone all around.

SIGRIST: Where did the stone come from?

PETRELLA: From the mountain.

SIGRIST: I see. So it was local stone.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. What kind of a roof—a roof did your—

PETRELLA: Roof is like clay—you know, the clay.

SIGRIST: Clay—tiles.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Clay tiles.

PETRELLA: That's right.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. How did you light the inside of your house?

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PETRELLA: Very easy. Very good. I had—I had the nice balcony in the front with the flowers all around there. You looked at the mountain nice.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. How many rooms were in the house?

PETRELLA: That's one, two, three, four room.

SIGRIST: Four rooms.

PETRELLA: A kitchen, dining room and two bedrooms.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the kitchen for me?

PETRELLA: Oh, the kitchen was beautiful. You had it right—right in the corner there with logs, with a chain to put a kettle, you know.

SIGRIST: A chain for a kettle.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

PETRELLA: And then with—all around with, like a—like a fence, you know.

SIGRIST: A fence around—

PETRELLA: Like a i—iron—iron.

SIGRIST: That would be around where you cooked—

PETRELLA: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: —the food.

PETRELLA: That's right.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And what kind of furniture did you have in your house?

PETRELLA: Oh, not much furniture. Not much—

SIGRIST: What do—what do you remember in the house for furniture?

PETRELLA: For—at—in the kitchen at the table with the four chair and then with the dining room with the long table. That's all.

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SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

PETRELLA: And bedroom with big bedrooms [unclear].

SIGRIST: Were there any businesses other than your father's blacksmith business in this village?

PETRELLA: Yeah, we had—have a store—we had the store there with enamel. You know, we [unclear] to sell all the time kettle [unclear].

SIGRIST: Oh, enameled, like, cooking—

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —things that were enameled.

PETRELLA: All—all—all the things for cooking. Nothing el—we had the big store there.

SIGRIST: Excuse me. We're going to pause [tape off/on]—we're going to resume. We were talking about your house.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about your father's blacksmith business.

PETRELLA: We used to make tools for farmers. You know, like a shovel. All—all tools for the [unclear]. We had the axe for chopping wood. You know, that's all.

SIGRIST: Did—

PETRELLA: And we used to make locks, you know, for doors.

SIGRIST: Locks?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Did you used to help your father?

PETRELLA: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes?

PETRELLA: Huh.

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SIGRIST: How old were you when you first started to help him?

PETRELLA: Oh, I was at—we used to go to school at about seven years. And then we used to go to the—to the—the shop. And then we used to break the coal.

SIGRIST: Break the coal?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: The coal that would heat up—

PETRELLA: Yeah, the—they used to break—[unclear] come loose. They used to break with [unclear] to put it in the furnace to make a fire.

SIGRIST: The coal came in big pieces.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And your job was to break it up.

PETRELLA: Yeah, that's right.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the first thing your father taught you how to do in the blacksmith shop?

PETRELLA: Oh, at least it's—they tell these—a lot of things I used to do this. You shouldn't do that. You know. The—the father always is behind you. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Did anyone ever get hurt?

PETRELLA: Oh, no.

SIGRIST: No.

PETRELLA: No.

SIGRIST: Everyone was careful.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah. What was your father's name?

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PETRELLA: Michael.

SIGRIST: Michael. Say it in Italian.

PETRELLA: Michele.

SIGRIST: Michele.

PETRELLA: Michele—

SIGRIST: And—

PETRELLA: [unclear].

SIGRIST: I'm sorry. Go ahead.

PETRELLA: M-I-C-H-E-L-E.

SIGRIST: Michele.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what his personality was like?

PETRELLA: Oh, he was stout, very stout. He had the muscle, you know, like this.

SIGRIST: Big muscles.

PETRELLA: Oh, yeah. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: You're gesturing, like, eight inches across.

PETRELLA: [laughs] Yeah.

SIGRIST: And—and what was his—what was his—his personality like? What was he like as a person?

PETRELLA: Very, very kind, gentle person.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

PETRELLA: He used to help everybody.

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SIGRIST: Do—can you tell me a—can you give me a story about a time when he helped somebody that you can think of? Like, how would he help people?

PETRELLA: Well, you know, sometime they used to go to—they get the water from the fountain.

SIGRIST: Get wa—water from the fountain.

PETRELLA: And I used to car—have like a copper—you know, I used to bring copper. And sometime, the girl there fall down. The cup smashed up. And they used bring that into the shop and my father would fix.

SIGRIST: So the—the—what they were carrying the water in was made out of copper?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: That—that's what you're saying.

PETRELLA: They used to [unclear]—

SIGRIST: [unclear].

PETRELLA: Yeah. [laughs]

SIGRIST: [unclear] head, yeah, and carry it on their head, yeah. [chuckles]

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What did your father enjoy doing with his family?

PETRELLA: Oh, was very, very kind. The only thing he—he had my mother sick for a long, long time with asthma.

SIGRIST: Your mother was in—had asthma?

PETRELLA: Asthma.

SIGRIST: Had asthma.

PETRELLA: [unclear], yeah. And used to go up and down because the—from the first floor, used to go second floor to help her out. See? And then, in 1930, my father used to be—he used to

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make—you know, take—take out—take out the [unclear], the wheat.

SIGRIST: Cut wheat.

PETRELLA: Cut the wheat. He used to make [unclear] around.

SIGRIST: Yes, a scythe.

PETRELLA: He used to call my father, see. See? And he used to go down the basement. We—we didn't have the—the place to sharp those thing. He used to go down to the—to my—my comparte [PH]. You called him a comparte. He used to have a—a morina [PH]. You know, morina, what the wheat—

MRS. PETRELLA: They sharpened—sharpened tools.

SIGRIST: Sharpening—sharpening the tools.

PETRELLA: Yeah. They go—he went down there and he got the top on the step and he died.

SIGRIST: So your father died in 1930.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Very suddenly.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. You said your mother was sick with asthma.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: First of all, tell me what your mother's name was.

PETRELLA: My mother—name was Congatina Iarecci.

SIGRIST: Can you spell her first name for me?

PETRELLA: S—

MRS. PETRELLA: No, C.

SIGRIST: C.

MRS. PETRELLA: [unclear] Congatina.

PETRELLA: Yeah, S—C—

SIGRIST: C.

PETRELLA: —O-N-D—O, [unclear]—T-T-N-I.

SIGRIST: Say her name one more time. Consa—don't spell it. Just say it.

PETRELLA: Conchatina [PH].

SIGRIST: Conchatina.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes. I keep doing that [unclear]. [laughter] Saying these names. [chuckles] Conchatina.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name before she was married?

PETRELLA: Name was Iarecci.

SIGRIST: Y—can you spell that?

PETRELLA: I-A-R-E-C-C—

MRS. PETRELLA: [unclear]?

PETRELLA: I-A-R-E-C-C-I.

SIGRIST: Say it one time slowly. Don't spell it; just say it.

PETRELLA: I—

SIGRIST: No, just say the name.

PETRELLA: Iarecci.

SIGRIST: Iarecci.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

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SIGRIST: Uh-huh. What do you remember about your mother when you were a little boy?

PETRELLA: Not much.

SIGRIST: What—

PETRELLA: I was—I was—I was only seven years old.

SIGRIST: When—what happened when you were seven?

PETRELLA: She died.

SIGRIST: Oh, she died?

PETRELLA: She died, yeah.

SIGRIST: She died when you were seven. Did she die from the asthma?

PETRELLA: Well, the complication. She died with pneumonia but she—she had [unclear]. She had asthma. She died.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how your parents met?

PETRELLA: No, this I can't tell you. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Do you remember what year they married?

PETRELLA: No, [unclear]—

SIGRIST: How many children did they have?

PETRELLA: Oh, they had five.

SIGRIST: Five.

PETRELLA: And one died—six.

SIGRIST: Six but one died.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you name everybody?

PETRELLA: Well, the first was Camillo. [PH]

SIGRIST: Camillo.

PETRELLA: And then was Adinina. [PH]

SIGRIST: Say that again?

PETRELLA: Adinina.

SIGRIST: Adinina?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Adinina.

PETRELLA: And then Maria. Then myself and then Onaveo.

SIGRIST: Like your middle name, Onaveo?

MRS. PETRELLA: You forgot one.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

MRS. PETRELLA: Forgot one.

PETRELLA: Who?

MRS. PETRELLA: Camile.

PETRELLA: Camillo. I told first.

MRS. PETRELLA: Did you say Camile?

PETRELLA: Yeah, Camillo. I told him the first.

SIGRIST: Is that—is that a boy or a girl?

MRS. PETRELLA: It's a boy.

SIGRIST: Cam—Camillo? It's an O—

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —at the end.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

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SIGRIST: So it was—it was a boy, two girls, a boy (you), and then a—
another boy.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: A young boy.

PETRELLA: Yeah, three boy—

SIGRIST: Onaveo would be—

PETRELLA: Three boy, two girls.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And—and you said one died.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you know what the name—

PETRELLA: Annie.

SIGRIST: Annie?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And tell me—

PETRELLA: Anni—Annina [PH].

SIGRIST: Annina.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And how old was—was that child when—

PETRELLA: Oh, was about two years—two and a half year—

SIGRIST: Two. Do you remember that happening?

PETRELLA: Oh, no.

SIGRIST: No.

PETRELLA: Because she was—she—she's born before me. [chuckles]

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SIGRIST: I see. [chuckles] Do you have any memories of your mother before she died?

PETRELLA: Oh, she—sh—she's the [unclear] bed. She used to call me near the bed and then, you know, she used to have a little glass of wine. And she used to give to me a small glass of wine. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Who took care of you after your mother died?

PETRELLA: My sister, my old sister.

SIGRIST: That's—

PETRELLA: Adinina.

SIGRIST: Adinina.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Tell me a little bit about—about your father's life after your mother died? How did his life change when she died?

PETRELLA: Well, she was, you know—she was—work hard. She took [unclear] on. [unclear]—one of time, used to come to see all the—what we do—were doing upstairs. She said [several words unclear].

SIGRIST: I see. Did you go to school in Italy?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How old were you when you started school?

PETRELLA: Seven years.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. What do you remember about going to school?

PETRELLA: Oh, very, very little. [laughs] We—I stood there till the fifth class.

SIGRIST: Fifth grade?

PETRELLA: And then—

SIGRIST: Fifth class.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Do you remember the kinds of things they taught you when you went to school in Italy? What did you learn in school? What did they teach you?

PETRELLA: Oh, I—grammatic, mathematic and nor—[unclear] things, problems, story. Used to re—read a story. That's all.

SIGRIST: Was the school part of the local church or was it—

PETRELLA: No, no. No—no, the church.

SIGRIST: It was like a public school.

PETRELLA: That—that's a government—

SIGRIST: Government school.

PETRELLA: —school.

SIGRIST: I see. What religion were you?

PETRELLA: Religion?

SIGRIST: Yes.

PETRELLA: Catholic.

SIGRIST: You were Catholics?

PETRELLA: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: How did you practice your religion at home?

PETRELLA: We used to go after—at three o'clock, used to finish school, used to go to church. I learned the—the Catholic—the priests. Used to be every day there.

SIGRIST: And then what about at home? Did you do—did you do anything at home for your religion? Like, did you pray at home or—

PETRELLA: Oh, used—used to pray in the morning, at night, when you get up in the bed and when we go to bed.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the prayers that you said in the morning—

PETRELLA: Well, the—

SIGRIST: In Italian?

PETRELLA: [sentence unclear].

SIGRIST: Can you say it for me in Italian? Slowly on—

PETRELLA: [speaking Italian].

SIGRIST: Do—do the Gloria Patri for me on tape, if you can.

PETRELLA: Gloria Patri [speaking Italian]. Amen.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

PETRELLA: [chuckles]

SIGRIST: How did you celebrate holidays?

PETRELLA: Oh, holiday, used to get all the family together, you know. We enjoy.

SIGRIST: Describe Christmas for me. How did you do—how did you—

PETRELLA: Oh—

SIGRIST: —celebrate Christmas in Italy?

PETRELLA: Chr—Christmas, we used to have a good, good time. All the family together. We used to have a—my uncle—altogether. We used to enjoy together there.

SIGRIST: Were there special foods that you ate at Christmas time?

PETRELLA: No, the—we used to [unclear], used to have a turkey. We used to have a—before—the day before Christmas, used to have spaghetti with fish. And then, next day, we used to have a big meal, [unclear] with macaroni.

SIGRIST: You said that you had turkey. Was that in Italy or was in America?

PETRELLA: In Italy.

SIGRIST: In Italy?

PETRELLA: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: You had turkey in—

PETRELLA: Oh, yeah. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Oh, really?

PETRELLA: [unclear].

SIGRIST: What other kinds of foods did you eat in Italy? Like, what—what would be your normal meal in Italy?

PETRELLA: Normal meal, that's vegetable.

SIGRIST: Vegetable.

PETRELLA: A chicoria [PH]. You know chic—chicory?

SIGRIST: Chicory?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes, uh-huh.

PETRELLA: Chicoria [unclear] the vegetable. Beans. We used to have a—a lot of beans.

SIGRIST: Beans.

PETRELLA: Yeah. All the vegetable.

SIGRIST: Where did the vegetables come from?

PETRELLA: From the farmer. Oh, we used to have a farmer there. We used to buy—the end of the year, used to buy big bags, beans for the whole winter. Yeah?

SIGRIST: I see. So they would be like dried?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

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SIGRIST: Be dry beans—

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —and things like that. Yeah. What was the first—you said that you worked for your father in the blacksmith shop.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Was that really the first job that you had?

PETRELLA: That's all.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Can you tell me some of the other duties that you had in the blacksmith shop? You talked about breaking up the coal to make it smaller.

PETRELLA: Coal. I—

SIGRIST: What else were—

PETRELLA: I—I used to—used to—we had a [unclear], used to be the—they poured the iron in the fire. Then they put 'em [unclear] on the top of the table. I used to hit 'em with a hammer.

SIGRIST: Oh.

PETRELLA: I used to help.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. You're—you're—you're gesturing.

PETRELLA: Yeah. [laughs]

SIGRIST: Hitting—hitting the iron that's in the fire.

PETRELLA: [chuckles] Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you have to wear something special when you worked?

PETRELLA: Used to have a apron.

SIGRIST: An apron?

PETRELLA: But not with—say, with a [several words unclear].

MRS. PETRELLA: Like animal skin—

SIGRIST: Like an an—like leather?

PETRELLA: Leather. That's it, leather.

SIGRIST: Or animal skin, uh-huh.

PETRELLA: Right, right.

MRS. PETRELLA: And glasses on your eyes?

PETRELLA: And—no, we had [unclear]. No, no. No, that's—

MRS. PETRELLA: [unclear].

PETRELLA: No. But used to have a special [unclear].

MRS. PETRELLA: I saw [unclear] glasses.

SIGRIST: Before you left Italy did you ever have another job—

PETRELLA: No.

SIGRIST: —that wasn't with your father?

PETRELLA: No.

SIGRIST: So you worked with your dad the whole time—

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —you were in Italy.

PETRELLA: And when I left [unclear].

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about World War I and your life during the First World War, 1914, 1915, 1916? Did your life change at all because of the First World War?

PETRELLA: No, it didn't change much.

SIGRIST: No?

PETRELLA: No, was the normal life.

SIGRIST: Did you have any relatives who had to serve in the war?

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PETRELLA: I had my cousin. He used to have—he used to be a soldier who tel—tel—telegraphs. You know tel—

SIGRIST: Oh, right. He could do—

PETRELLA: The tapping.

SIGRIST: The telegrapher.

PETRELLA: Yeah. And then from there they put—they put him in [unclear], my cousin.

SIGRIST: Your cousin. But you had no—

PETRELLA: No, no, no.

SIGRIST: Did you have grandparents in this town?

PETRELLA: No.

SIGRIST: No.

PETRELLA: No grandparent.

SIGRIST: Not—not your mother’s parents or your father’s parents?

PETRELLA: No, no, no.

SIGRIST: Did your father remarry?

PETRELLA: No.

SIGRIST: No.

PETRELLA: No. He say, “One wi—” [chuckles] “one wife plenty.” [laughter]

SIGRIST: Were you closest to one of your brothers and—or sisters? You know, were you—

PETRELLA: Yeah, we used to—very, very close.

SIGRIST: But was there one that you were particularly close to?

PETRELLA: [unclear] for me was all—all equal with everyone.

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SIGRIST: Well, what would the family do for fun?

PETRELLA: Oh, nothing else there. You can never have fun. [laughs]

SIGRIST: No fun.

PETRELLA: No fun. [laughs]

SIGRIST: [chuckles] No fun in Italy.

PETRELLA: No fun.

SIGRIST: Were there games that you played as a child?

PETRELLA: No, never play—

SIGRIST: Nothing, really.

PETRELLA: No game there.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh, okay. Well, tell me. When you were growing up in Italy, what did you know about America?

PETRELLA: Oh, I [unclear] America. I came there to Ellis Island—

SIGRIST: But before you came to America, when you were still a kid in Italy, what did you know about America?

PETRELLA: Oh, well, that—

SIGRIST: How did you figure out America?

PETRELLA: I had—my uncle had been in Montreal for so many years, he used to tell—he owned a store. He used to tell me about the fight. [chuckles] You know, the boxing.

SIGRIST: Oh, the boxing.

PETRELLA: [laughs]

SIGRIST: Oh, I see. Uh-huh. Who's—

PETRELLA: We—we [unclear] in Italy, we never used to hear about boxing. That—as—he used to tell all the story because he was working bigger blacksmith shop there in Canada. And he used to tell all the story about Montreal.

SIGRIST: Do you—which—you said he's your uncle. Which side of the family was he?

PETRELLA: It's—it's brother to my father [unclear].

SIGRIST: So your father's brother.

PETRELLA: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: And he's a blacksmith also?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes. And he's a blacksmith in Montreal.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you know when he went to Montreal?

PETRELLA: Oh, he—he went about three time. He wanted to come back. He wanted to come back but I don't remember [unclear].

SIGRIST: I see. But he'd been there for quite some time.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So you sort of have this idea about, you know, North America—

PETRELLA: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Boxing and—why did you want to come to the United States?

PETRELLA: I wanted to come to go to school. But that was to get [unclear] the work. But I—but I—my sister called me, says, "You got to come here and learn school first and then you go to work."

SIGRIST: Was your sister already here?

PETRELLA: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Oh, she—which sister was that?

PETRELLA: Adinina.

SIGRIST: And—and where was she in the United States?

PETRELLA: In Montreal.

SIGRIST: She was in Montreal also.

PETRELLA: Montreal, yeah.

SIGRIST: I see. And how old was she when she came over?

PETRELLA: Sixteen.

SIGRIST: She was 16. And did she go right to Montreal?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes. What—what did she do when she first got here?

PETRELLA: Oh, she went to work in the clothing manufacture. You know, sewing.

SIGRIST: Sewing.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And how long had she been here before you got here?

PETRELLA: Oh, she came in 1915 and I came 1921.

SIGRIST: Oh, so she'd been here a few years then.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah. How did your father feel about you going to the United States?

PETRELLA: Oh, well, my father didn't want me—he wanted to keep us there. But you know how self—[chuckles] we had to come out.

SIGRIST: Yeah. So you really wanted to come—

PETRELLA: Yeah. [laughs]

SIGRIST: It sounds like, yeah. [chuckles]

PETRELLA: Uh-huh.

MRS. PETRELLA: [unclear].

PETRELLA: Yeah.

MRS. PETRELLA: [unclear].

PETRELLA: I—

MRS. PETRELLA: [unclear]—

PETRELLA: I had the brother, Camillo, there too.

SIGRIST: Oh, that's your oldest brother.

PETRELLA: And he used to work in Vigar's [PH] Ship. You know Vigar's?

SIGRIST: Vigar's.

PETRELLA: Vigar. It's V—like—like engineer. They used to make—used to make a plan and then make the—the pieces.

SIGRIST: Used to make a plan and then make—

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And yet, for what—what was he making? What—

PETRELLA: You know, the shipyard.

SIGRIST: Ship. Ships. He worked in the ship industry.

PETRELLA: Yeah, Vigar's.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

PETRELLA: [sentence unclear]. Then they closed that.

SIGRIST: When did he come to America?

PETRELLA: He come to America in 19—19—1904.

SIGRIST: 19—oh, so he had been here quite a long time.

PETRELLA: Yeah, yeah.

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SIGRIST: Do you know how many years—like—like do—do you remember when he was born? What year he was born?

PETRELLA: Oh, he was born the 15th January, 1900.

SIGRIST: He was born in 1900?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And you were born in 1904.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: But you said that he came to the United States in 1904.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: But he'd only be four years old.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: If he were born in 1900.

PETRELLA: 1890—18—

SIGRIST: 1890. Okay. [chuckles]

PETRELLA: 1890. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: That makes sense. So he was actually a young man—

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —when he came to the United States.

PETRELLA: 1890.

SIGRIST: Well, can you tell me what you remember about getting ready to leave Italy? What did you have to do before you left Italy?

PETRELLA: I have to do. [chuckles] I—I was think for the future.

SIGRIST: But—but what did you have to do in order to leave? What—what—what did—what paperwork did you have to get or—

PETRELLA: A passport.

SIGRIST: Yes, how did you get your passport?

PETRELLA: From the mungible [PH] there.

SIGRIST: The municipal—in your town?

PETRELLA: Yeah, my town.

SIGRIST: In your town—

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —you could do that?

PETRELLA: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And what about—what about medical examinations?

PETRELLA: Oh, I pass examination there, the [unclear].

SIGRIST: Yeah, vaccinations.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Pointing to your arm.

PETRELLA: Yeah. You—you can't leave if you don't got this paper.

SIGRIST: I see. They—they made you [unclear] vaccination.

PETRELLA: Right. Oh—oh, yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: And what did you pack to take to America?

PETRELLA: Pack? Pack?

SIGRIST: Yeah, what did you—what did you—

PETRELLA: I bring my clothes; that's all. [laughs]

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

PETRELLA: I had nothing to bring yet.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you carried your clothes in?

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PETRELLA: I—clothes, my shirt, sweater, underwear. Oh, [unclear] ties.

SIGRIST: And what did you put—

PETRELLA: Shoes.

SIGRIST: —into? What did you—

PETRELLA: And—and I had \$40. I put in the ba—the bag there. I didn't put in pocket.

SIGRIST: You—

PETRELLA: I took \$40. I put it in the—and they take away everything. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Was that \$40 in American money or—

PETRELLA: Yeah, American.

SIGRIST: —Italian?

PETRELLA: American money.

SIGRIST: And you mentioned you brought shoes. Did you—where did you get the shoes from?

PETRELLA: In the store there.

SIGRIST: So you bought a pair of shoes.

PETRELLA: They got a store. Yeah.

SIGRIST: I see. Did you—what—was there some kind of a—a dinner or some—

PETRELLA: No, no, no, no.

SIGRIST: Before you left?

PETRELLA: No, no, no. Nothing [unclear].

SIGRIST: Do you remember saying goodbye to your father?

PETRELLA: No. Don't remember it. [chuckles]

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SIGRIST: Okay. [chuckles] Where did you have to go to get on the ship?

PETRELLA: Napoli.

SIGRIST: And how did you get to Naples?

PETRELLA: W—with a train.

SIGRIST: And what sticks out in your mind about that train ride to Naples?

PETRELLA: Oh, very—we stayed there about three days. Beautiful there. Near Vesuvius, you know. It was [chuckles]—

SIGRIST: That's right. Vesuvius. Sure. Pompeii.

PETRELLA: Yeah. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: What—had you been on a train before?

PETRELLA: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes, okay.

PETRELLA: A lot of time.

SIGRIST: Okay.

PETRELLA: Plenty of time on the train.

SIGRIST: What happened in Naples before you got on the ship?

PETRELLA: Oh, nothing. We stayed there three days and then we left.

SIGRIST: You—you—you say “we.” Are you traveling with other people?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Who are you traveling with?

PETRELLA: My—my uncle too—took me there, to Naples.

SIGRIST: Your uncle.

PETRELLA: We [unclear] together and then he go back and I went—

SIGRIST: And this is a different uncle.

PETRELLA: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: But is also another—

PETRELLA: Actually—

SIGRIST: —brother of your father?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: I see. So your father had a few brothers.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Okay. [chuckles] You said you were in Naples three days.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Where did you stay in Naples?

PETRELLA: [unclear].

SIGRIST: Did you have to undergo any other kind of examinations when you were in Naples?

PETRELLA: No, no.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you thought when you saw the ship.

PETRELLA: Oh, boy. I had big—[chuckles] big [unclear]. I had a—a girl with—a [unclear]. She used to be the [unclear] the ship. And I used to be the top. And used to be sick all the time. I used to go there and bring a cup of coffee, cheer her up. [unclear]—

SIGRIST: What was the name of the ship?

PETRELLA: President Wilson.

SIGRIST: President Wilson.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And so you're sort of taking care of this—

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PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —young lady.

PETRELLA: That's right.

SIGRIST: Where was she from?

PETRELLA: Same—same town.

SIGRIST: Same town.

PETRELLA: Ripabotti.

SIGRIST: I see. Can you describe for me where you slept on the ship?

PETRELLA: We slept right on—right in the basement.

SIGRIST: In the basement of the ship?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And d—can you describe what the room looked like [unclear]?

PETRELLA: No room. It was all one length with beds.

SIGRIST: A big room then, yes.

PETRELLA: [unclear], like this one here. And then there was beds.

SIGRIST: How many people slept in that room?

PETRELLA: Oh, about 15.

SIGRIST: Fifteen?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

SIGRIST: And how long was the—the voyage?

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PETRELLA: Oh, it was about—we left there the 15th and we—we arrived the first of February.

SIGRIST: So this is January. You're—

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —traveling in January.

PETRELLA: January 15 to the first of February.

SIGRIST: Do you remember—do you remember being fed on the ship?

PETRELLA: Oh, u—used to be—used to be lot of things, salad, fruit salad, potato salad. Used to—you get a l—lot of—

MRS. PETRELLA: They were fed good. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Did you—[chuckles] did you see any—any food on the ship that you had never seen before? [unclear].

PETRELLA: No, I see everything.

SIGRIST: You saw it.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Okay. Were there any storms along the way?

PETRELLA: Well, the—the [unclear] ocean was [unclear]—

SIGRIST: What do you remember about that?

PETRELLA: Used to be [unclear] wavy. [laughs]

SIGRIST: You're going up and down with your arms.

PETRELLA: Yeah. [laughter] But I didn't get—I didn't get sick.

SIGRIST: You didn't get sick.

PETRELLA: No, no, no.

SIGRIST: Just your—your lady friend. [chuckles]

PETRELLA: Yes, my lady—I used to help her [unclear]. [laughter]

SIGRIST: Do you remember when the ship came into New York?

PETRELLA: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: What happened?

PETRELLA: The first thing I see, I see the Liberty—

MRS. PETRELLA: The Statue—

PETRELLA: And then we—we get up to there and, myself, they take me there and says, “You got to go back to Italy.” [unclear] why and says, “You can’t go to work in—you’re—you’re not the age to—to work in—in America.”

SIGRIST: Where did they tell you this?

PETRELLA: At Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: At Ellis Island. They took you to Ellis Island.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And they told you that you’re too young to work in the United States.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How did you feel when they said that?

PETRELLA: Oh, I was very, very, very disappointed. And then my uncle came from—from New York to see me.

MRS. PETRELLA: [unclear].

PETRELLA: St. Joe’s.

MRS. PETRELLA: [unclear].

PETRELLA: No, no. St. Joe’s. He came to see me. He says, “We try to—to take you out.” They taking me out.

SIGRIST: But—but you were there a long time before that.

PETRELLA: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: You told me, before we started, you were there from February until May.

PETRELLA: May.

SIGRIST: Held at Ellis Island. Tell me what you remember about—

PETRELLA: I remember I was, soon I [unclear] there. They used to tell me to take everything off. I—I got to get in the shower.

SIGRIST: Take all your clothes off.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

PETRELLA: I stood there. I stood there about one hour without anything. I was shivering. And then used to put [unclear], coal oil—

MRS. PETRELLA: Coal oil.

PETRELLA: —coal oil in my hair.

SIGRIST: Corn oil?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

MRS. PETRELLA: Coal oil. Coal oil.

SIGRIST: Corn?

MRS. PETRELLA: Coal, coal.

SIGRIST: Coal. Coal oil.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

MRS. PETRELLA: Like a dis—

PETRELLA: Yeah.

MRS. PETRELLA: —disinfectant.

SIGRIST: Oh, I see what you're saying. Uh-huh.

PETRELLA: Used to—used to put on my head here and wash my head.

MRS. PETRELLA: He had bugs.

SIGRIST: Right.

PETRELLA: And then the next day I had a fever. Fever was near—they took me to the hospital.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about being in the hospital?

PETRELLA: Oh, I—I was dizzy. I didn't have—didn't have nobody. I was—a fever there. They put 'em in the—the room with three men. Two die. [unclear] myself [unclear]. They thought I was dying too. And the next day I had the pleurisy from—

SIGRIST: Pleurisy.

PETRELLA: —from pneumonia. Pleurisy with—with pus.

SIGRIST: Pus.

PETRELLA: And they cut me two—two ribs here.

SIGRIST: Cut—you're pointing to your left side.

PETRELLA: Yeah. Yes, I—I kind of got a hole here. Want to see?

SIGRIST: Well, no. [laughter] That's okay. I'll take your word for it. So—so they operated on you.

PETRELLA: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

PETRELLA: Was—they're very good. Good. There was soldier doctors.

SIGRIST: Huh.

PETRELLA: You know, a military soldier, that doctors. But they were good. The nurse was b—not beautiful but they gave you—they cheer up. And then my brother from Montreal came to see me and he stood one month with me. My brother-in-law with my sister.

SIGRIST: Right.

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PETRELLA: And I stood there till the—May.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything else about being in the hospital at Ellis Island? For instance, do you remember—can you describe the room that you were in?

PETRELLA: Oh, was a very long room. That's why I want to go there to see again. How could I get there? Now, nobody take me in.

SIGRIST: Can—can you describe it for me what it looked like? You said it was a long room.

PETRELLA: Long room.

SIGRIST: What else was in the room?

PETRELLA: Oh, was a bed. There was a balcony in the front. You know, when you get a little better, they put you, the—the balcony there with the chair.

SIGRIST: And—and what did the balcony look over onto?

PETRELLA: Oh, it [unclear]—see, the Liberty. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: See out into the harbor.

PETRELLA: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, was there any kind of entertainment offered to the people in the hospital? You said the nurses were very cheerful.

PETRELLA: No, no, no. The only thing these—they gave ice cream. They used to give a lot of candy and this. They used to—

SIGRIST: Of course, you're only 16 years old. How did you feel? How—how did you—

PETRELLA: Oh, I was very ill.

SIGRIST: Very ill.

PETRELLA: Yeah, [unclear]. I thought I was—my—I was finished. I was so depressed. You have no idea. I was crying every day. I was crying.

SIGRIST: What—you mentioned having to be showered before this happened when you first got there. You remembered—

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —being showered. Did they do any other kind of examinations on you?

PETRELLA: No.

SIGRIST: No.

PETRELLA: Yeah, the examination they gave me [unclear] to—when—when they took me upstairs [unclear].

SIGRIST: What about being fed at Ellis Island? Do you remember where you got your food or—

PETRELLA: Oh, well. They give you a lot—a lot of things. My [unclear] remembered it. They used to give you—the food was good.

SIGRIST: But nothing sticks out in your mind—

PETRELLA: No, no.

SIGRIST: —as being important. When you started to get better, were you allowed to go outside of the hospital ward?

PETRELLA: No. I never—I stayed there till—was three months right in that room. I used to sit on the balcony there. And then the—the f— [clears throat] the first of May, my brother-in-law came and took me to Montreal.

SIGRIST: When your brother-in-law came before to visit you—

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —you were still in the hospital. Where was he allowed to see you?

PETRELLA: Oh, he—he used to—anytime.

SIGRIST: But—but did he come up to the hospital ward? They let him into the ward?

PETRELLA: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: I see. Okay.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah. All right. So you were there a long time.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember—do you remember them telling you you could leave?

PETRELLA: No. I don't remember.

SIGRIST: But the brother-in-law [unclear]—

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And where did he take you?

PETRELLA: Montreal.

SIGRIST: He took you to Montreal. Do you remember anything about the trip to Montreal?

PETRELLA: No, I don't remember. Put 'em in the train there. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: It's a long train ride.

PETRELLA: Yeah, yeah. [unclear] the—the 24 of May, I [unclear] there.

SIGRIST: The 24 of May.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So you left Italy in the middle of January.

PETRELLA: And [chuckles]—

SIGRIST: And by the time you get to Montreal it's the end of May.

PETRELLA: I—I'm—[several words unclear]. [laughter]

SIGRIST: When—when you were in the hospital at Ellis Island, were you allowed to—to write letters or have any communication?

PETRELLA: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you write to your father?

PETRELLA: No, no.

SIGRIST: No.

PETRELLA: Didn't write to nobody.

SIGRIST: I see.

PETRELLA: My father was so mad. He says when—when I reach Montreal he—he wrote me a letter. I want you should come back right away. I don't want you there. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: He really did not want you to go.

PETRELLA: No.

SIGRIST: No. All right. So you get—you get to your sister's house in Montreal.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember where she lived in Montreal?

PETRELLA: Oh, was Clark Street.

SIGRIST: Clark Street?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And can you remember what it felt like to see your sister? It's been a long time since you've seen her.

PETRELLA: Oh, yeah. Not—not so long. It was the 15 to 21, six years.

SIGRIST: Six years. Did she look different to you in any way?

PETRELLA: No. A little fat. [chuckles] She was—

SIGRIST: Just a little fat. [laughter] I'm sure she would have appreciated you're [chuckles] saying that. Do you remember the first night that you stayed overnight there? Did you stay with them—

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —that first night?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what happened that first night?

PETRELLA: Oh, well, I was—I was happy. I was happy to be there and sleep good, eat good. I stayed [unclear]. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: How long did you stay with them?

PETRELLA: Oh, till—till I got married.

SIGRIST: Oh, so you lived with them for a long time.

PETRELLA: Yeah, till 19—1934.

SIGRIST: 1934.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me about getting your first job in the United States.

PETRELLA: I stayed—

SIGRIST: Well, actually, you're—you're not in the United States. You're in Canada but—

PETRELLA: Canada. M—My brother-in-law, he was a presser, clothing presser manufacturer. And he teach me how to press so I had [several words unclear]. And then I went to work in a shop, a press.

SIGRIST: Could you just exp—explain for me what a presser does.

PETRELLA: Oh, no. We did that.

SIGRIST: With an iron.

PETRELLA: With an iron, yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

PETRELLA: And then from there, I've been a—I've been a foreman. I was a foreman.

SIGRIST: A foreman?

PETRELLA: Yeah, up to about two years. I've been a presser and then I've been a foreman.

SIGRIST: So you became a foreman in that same—

PETRELLA: Yeah, in—at the—

SIGRIST: Was this a factory?

PETRELLA: —the shop. The manufacturer was Jack Victor [PH] and Son.

SIGRIST: Jack Victor?

PETRELLA: And Son.

SIGRIST: And Son. Jack Victor and Son.

PETRELLA: I worked there 52 years.

SIGRIST: Oh, wow.

MRS. PETRELLA: He was talking [unclear]. [laughter] He did.

SIGRIST: Were there—because there were other—there were Jewish immigrants?

PETRELLA: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: In the—oh, that's interesting.

PETRELLA: In 1964, I came to the United States.

SIGRIST: Isn't that funny? And you got stuck at Ellis Island in the United States.

PETRELLA: [laughs] Yeah.

SIGRIST: [several words unclear] got back there.

PETRELLA: And I had a job in the United States very, very—I had—I had the boss there. He treated me like—the first—I came—

SIGRIST: He treated you well? Is that what you're saying?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: He treated you—

PETRELLA: I came here in 1964 in October. And Christmas, he gave me \$500 bonus. I [unclear] later I worked there for eight years in New York.

SIGRIST: [unclear]

PETRELLA: And the shop—the name of the shop was Rosmond [PH] and Sherr.

SIGRIST: Rosmond and Sherr?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: S-H-E-R-R?

PETRELLA: [unclear]. Yeah, 23rd Street.

SIGRIST: Twenty-third Street. All right. Well, before we get you to America—

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Let's get you back to Montreal—

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —for a bit. You said it was your brother-in-law who got you the job as the presser.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for—is this a factory or what—

PETRELLA: Factory, factory.

SIGRIST: And what are they making?

PETRELLA: Only—only coats.

SIGRIST: Coats.

PETRELLA: Coats.

SIGRIST: Coat—men's coats?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Women's coats? Men's coats. And so they're actually making the—the coats there. And then is the pressing part of the finishing the coat?

PETRELLA: Yeah, the finish.

SIGRIST: I see. And tell me, who else worked in that factory? Were there other immigrants who worked in that factory?

PETRELLA: Oh, was all the kind, was the French. There was—not—[unclear] Italian [unclear]. German, Greeks all together.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Does—does one of your—one of the people that you worked with stick out in your mind for some reason? Someone who was—for some reason, made an impression on you?

PETRELLA: No, I don't think—

SIGRIST: No?

PETRELLA: No.

MRS. PETRELLA: He liked everyone.

PETRELLA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Well, h—what were your hours?

PETRELLA: Hours. I used to start at seven in the morning till six o'clock at night.

SIGRIST: And what did you get paid?

PETRELLA: Paid—paid by—by coat, how many coats. So much—used to get 50 cents a coat.

MRS. PETRELLA: Oh, my.

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SIGRIST: So that's—so that's doing piecework.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Really.

PETRELLA: Piecework.

SIGRIST: Wow, 50 cents a coat. How many—on a good day, how many coats could you do?

PETRELLA: Oh, was about 20, 25 a day.

SIGRIST: And what about—were the workers unionized in this factory?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes.

PETRELLA: Was Amalgamated Clothing Worker of America.

SIGRIST: Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me about how you joined that union?

PETRELLA: Oh, well, the—oh, see, every shop there, they got the—a chairman.

SIGRIST: A chairman, for the union?

PETRELLA: From the—you get in there, your name, and you got to belong to the union. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: I see. Do you remember, were there meetings? Did—did the union members meet?

PETRELLA: Yeah, ev—every Friday night we had a meeting in the office. All the shops had to be called there and who got complaint, who got—who wants a raise, you know. Everybody got differences.

SIGRIST: Did—h—how did the managers, the foremen and the owner of the factory—how did they get along with the unions?

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PETRELLA: Well, once in a while they have meetings. They have arguments. See, this—this, you got to have more money, this you got to have less money. You know.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

PETRELLA: Got to [unclear] together.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Tell me how you learned English.

PETRELLA: I went to night school.

SIGRIST: You went to night school in Montreal.

PETRELLA: Yeah, every Friday night.

SIGRIST: Every Friday night, and so when did you start doing that?

PETRELLA: Oh, soon—soon I get a little better, see? Because when I reach Montreal I was under doctor care yet. I used to go there every—every week to—to change my—I—I used to have pus yet. They change. And then I used to go to school every Friday night.

SIGRIST: Of course, you had gone through so much—

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —at Ellis Island.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Of course, you had wanted to come to the Uni—to North America to get an education. You had wanted to go to school.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what night school was? How—how did they—

PETRELLA: Was—was a—just like day school. The only thing they—they [unclear] all the [unclear] immigrants.

MRS. PETRELLA: Oh—

SIGRIST: Used to have what?

PETRELLA: Immigrants.

SIGRIST: Oh, immigrants, yes.

PETRELLA: Yeah, only immigrants. You have to have—oh, we had to have about 50, 60 people there.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how they taught you English?

PETRELLA: They—first, they tell you the words in Italian and then they give you the—the—this—this. You got to pronounce it this way. You [unclear]. [laughter]

SIGRIST: And who—do you remember who the teachers were or—

PETRELLA: No, I don't remember.

SIGRIST: —anything about them?

PETRELLA: I don't remember teacher.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the first word in English that you learned?

PETRELLA: Yes. [laughs]

SIGRIST: Yes. [laughs] That's a good word.

PETRELLA: Yes and no. [laughs]

SIGRIST: Do you remember when you are just learning English? Do you remember a—a story about making a mistake speaking the language?

PETRELLA: You see, the—the teachers, they say, "You got to [unclear] better than this." [laughter] You—you—you got to—you—you probably say it in Italian. The word [unclear] altogether. In English, you get only half. You understand me?

SIGRIST: Only half?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Oh, I see what you're saying. Uh-huh.

PETRELLA: That's—

SIGRIST: Can you give me an example of an Italian word and an English word, how that works?

PETRELLA: Like you say father.

SIGRIST: Father.

PETRELLA: Now, Italians say padre. See, there's big difference.

SIGRIST: Yes, yes. Big difference. Were you communicating at all? You said that your father did write you once you got to Montreal.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Because he really wanted you back.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you write back to your father?

PETRELLA: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: And what did you tell him?

PETRELLA: I say, you know—I said that I came here and I'm going to stay here.

SIGRIST: In Montreal, did you ever experience any prejudice against you because you were Italian?

PETRELLA: No.

SIGRIST: No.

PETRELLA: Nothing. But the only thing, the French sometime, you know, but the rest we have just like a—like a family.

SIGRIST: That's right. And you said you worked with so many different kinds of people.

PETRELLA: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Was there something about being in North America that you didn't like? Something that was very hard to get?

PETRELLA: No, I didn't like because the—the jealousy between the French and the—the newcomer. See, was fric—friction.

SIGRIST: Friction.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Right. And yet, Montreal was a big city and has lots of immigrants.

PETRELLA: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah, that's interesting. When did you meet Mrs. Petrella?

PETRELLA: I—the first day I came. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: You met her the very first day you came.

MRS. PETRELLA: He's my cousin.

SIGRIST: He's your cousin. I see. And—and what was it about her that you liked?

PETRELLA: I liked everything. She's—she's—she treat me like—she treat me like a prince. [chuckles]

MRS. PETRELLA: He treats me like a queen.

PETRELLA: [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Well, you can tell me that when I get to you in a minute. Just for the sake of the tape, can you say your—your wife's name and her maiden name for me? Her first name and her maiden name.

PETRELLA: Rose Mary Martino.

SIGRIST: Martino—M-A-R-T-I-N-O.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Martino. And that's Rose Mary? Those are two separate—

MRS. PETRELLA: Yes.

SIGRIST: It's not Rosemarie or Rose—

MRS. PETRELLA: Yeah, Rose Mary.

SIGRIST: Okay. And what year did you get married?

PETRELLA: 1934.

SIGRIST: 1934. And did you have children?

PETRELLA: No chil—

SIGRIST: No children.

PETRELLA: No.

SIGRIST: And tell me why, in 1964, you decided to come to the United States.

PETRELLA: We used to have a—a—a man from the United States came there in our shop, Montreal, to teach how to—how to press the coats in America. I used to—I used to be near him and he says to me—he say, “Why you—why you stay here? Why don’t you come to the United States?” So I made up in my mind I want to come to United States but she don’t want to leave her mother.

SIGRIST: Your wife doesn’t want to leave her mother in Montreal.

PETRELLA: No.

MRS. PETRELLA: My mother was dying, you know?

SIGRIST: Right.

PETRELLA: Then when the mother died she said to me, “Let’s go to the United States.” And we came to the United States.

MRS. PETRELLA: Of course—

PETRELLA: And I went to see this fellow here and this fellow gave me the job.

SIGRIST: And you’re 60, or 59 or 60, depending on when you came to the United States.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So I mean, you're not a young man when you decide to come down.

PETRELLA: No. [laughs] [unclear].

SIGRIST: Where did you go to live when you came down to the United States?

PETRELLA: I went to—to—

MRS. PETRELLA: [unclear].

PETRELLA: [unclear]. No. New York.

MRS. PETRELLA: [unclear].

PETRELLA: No, when we come to New York.

MRS. PETRELLA: Long Island.

PETRELLA: Long—[several words unclear]. [sentence unclear].

MRS. PETRELLA: [unclear].

SIGRIST: But you came down to New York?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: To New York State?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: To Long Island, you're saying? You came—

MRS. PETRELLA: We lived in Long—Long Island four or five years.

PETRELLA: [sentence unclear].

MRS. PETRELLA: [unclear].

PETRELLA: [sentence unclear].

SIGRIST: Well, anyway, you came down [chuckles] and—

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And how was life different in the United States than it had been in Canada?

PETRELLA: Oh, I like it much better.

SIGRIST: Here in the United States rather than Canada?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Why?

PETRELLA: It's big difference.

MRS. PETRELLA: There's a lot of prejudice. Too much.

PETRELLA: Yeah. There, like French and [unclear]—

SIGRIST: Too much friction between the French and the Italians.

PETRELLA: But here, none.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

PETRELLA: Here, you're equal.

SIGRIST: I suspect we'll hear about it when I interview Mrs. Petrella afterwards, huh? Did you ever go back to Italy?

MRS. PETRELLA: No.

PETRELLA: No.

SIGRIST: Did you ever want to?

PETRELLA: No. My father got—he—he begged me when my brother got married here. But then he wanted to go.

SIGRIST: And you said your father died in 1930, I think you said.

PETRELLA: '30, yeah.

SIGRIST: In 1930. So you didn't see your father again?

PETRELLA: No.

SIGRIST: You never saw him again. When you think about yourself, what nationality do you think of yourself as? Do you think of yourself as Italian or Canadian or American? How do you think of yourself?

PETRELLA: I think of Italian.

SIGRIST: As Italian.

PETRELLA: [laughs] Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you become a Canadian citizen?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: You did. Can you tell me a little about—about doing that? What—what the process was to do that?

PETRELLA: Oh, [unclear]. I—I took the paper, [several words unclear]. To cross to America you've got to be—that's all.

SIGRIST: Did you—do you remember what year that was?

PETRELLA: When I got the—

SIGRIST: The Canadian citizenship?

PETRELLA: 1925.

SIGRIST: In 1925. Oh, so you'd been here, you know, four years or so.

PETRELLA: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And then when—

PETRELLA: You got to be five years to get a—but I get [unclear].

SIGRIST: Mm-hmm. And then, so are you still a Canadian citizen anyhow?

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. What did you do in your life that makes you the most proud? When you look back on your life, what are you the most proud of what you've done?

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PETRELLA: Proud—I got—I had a good life. And I had a good trade and I got a good wife. [chuckles] That's what—

SIGRIST: Had all your bases covered. [chuckles]

PETRELLA: [chuckles] Yeah, that's—

MRS. PETRELLA: We never had a [unclear].

PETRELLA: [laughs]

SIGRIST: Yeah, that's—that's saying quite a bit. Well, Mr. Petrella, I want to thank you very much.

PETRELLA: You're—

SIGRIST: I think I've asked all my questions.

PETRELLA: It's very nice to—

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Alfredo Petrella on Thursday, May 15th, 1997, with Mrs. Petrella in attendance here in Cliffside Park, New Jersey. Thank you, sir.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

[END OF INTERVIEW]