

EI-882

ROSEMARY MARTINO PETRELLA

BIRTH DATE: SEPTEMBER 24, 1911

INTERVIEW DATE: MAY 15, 1997

RUNNING TIME: 38:35

INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME

INTERVIEW LOCATION: CLIFFSIDE PARK, NEW JERSEY

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 3/1999

TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

BORN IN CANADA OF ITALIAN PARENTS IN 1911

RELOCATED TO THE UNITED STATES IN 1964

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mrs. Petrella is the wife of Alfredo Petrella, Interview EI-881. Funding for this transcript, one of many interviews conducted with Italian and Sicilian women, was generously provided by interviewee Elda Del Bino Willitts, EI-8. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of Oral History, 1/28/1999.

SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday, May 15, 1997. I'm in Cliffside Park, New Jersey, and I'm here with Mrs. Rosemary Martino Petrella. Mrs. Petrella was born in Montreal, Canada. Her parents had come from Italy. And she didn't come through Ellis Island, but I think that she can offer us very unique and important information about the Italian population in Canada. I've never had the pleasure of interviewing anybody who could tell me about that, so I'm looking

forward to this. Let me also say that Mrs. Petrella is the wife of Alfredo Petrella who we just interviewed, just finished a few minutes ago, and Mr. Petrella is also in the room with us, and he may interject at some point. ( they laugh ) So, anyway, Mrs. Petrella, can we begin by you giving me your birth date.

PETRELLA: 24 September 1911.

SIGRIST: September 24, 1911. We know that you were born in Montreal. Do you know anything about the day you were born?

PETRELLA: Oh, no. ( she laughs ) I wish I did. I don't.

SIGRIST: Your mother or father never told you anything about that.

PETRELLA: No, no.

SIGRIST: Okay. Well, why don't we start with you telling me a little bit about your parents and how they ended up in Montreal. First of all, what was your father's name?

PETRELLA: Uh, Archangel, you know, Archangel? Archangel,

Archangel.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

PETRELLA: Oh, I . . . ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Archangel. Well, we'll look it up.

PETRELLA: Archangel, Archangel.

SIGRIST: Was it Archangelo, or . . .

PETRELLA: Archangelo.

SIGRIST: Archangelo.

PETRELLA: Archangelo Martino.

SIGRIST: And where in Italy was he born?

PETRELLA: The same place we were.

SIGRIST: Well, could you say that on tape for me?

MR. PETRELLA: Ripabatone[ph].

PETRELLA: Ripabatone[ph].

SIGRIST: We have to pretend, in a way, that we didn't do the interview with Mr. Petrella. ( they laugh )

PETRELLA: Ripabatone[ph], yes.

SIGRIST: So this was part of Campabasso[ph]?

PETRELLA: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: And say the name of the town one more time?

PETRELLA: Ripabatone[ph], Campabasso[ph].

SIGRIST: Okay, great. And, um, what did your father do in Italy for a profession?

PETRELLA: I think he used to work in the shoes, he used to make shoes.

SIGRIST: He used to make shoes in his town.

PETRELLA: And when he came in the States he was making, I've got the little wooden form for the children, wooden form, that he made shoes for the children. But he died very young. He was only thirty-three years old.

SIGRIST: When . . .

PETRELLA: Of an accident.

SIGRIST: When your father came to the United States, where did he go first?

PETRELLA: To, uh, Rhode Island.

SIGRIST: He went to Rhode Island first. That's interesting.  
Why did he go to Rhode Island?

PETRELLA: Well, his mother and sister and brothers, they were all there. They stayed there for a while, and just a little bit before my oldest sister was born, the grandmother wanted to go to Montreal, so everybody went to Montreal. That's how it happened that we went to Montreal.

SIGRIST: Do you know what year your father came to the United States?

PETRELLA: Well, he was naturalized in 1904.

SIGRIST: So he would have been here for some time, then, before that.

PETRELLA: Some time. In 1909 he naturalized, because he has to wait five years, but in 1904 he was naturalized American.

SIGRIST: I see. And then when did they go to Montreal?

PETRELLA: Oh, I don't know the year but they didn't stay long in the States. My grandmother didn't want to stay.

So they were two sisters and a brother. They all came to Montreal, they all lived on the same street.

( they laugh )

SIGRIST: Do you know anything else about your father's life in Italy?

PETRELLA: No.

SIGRIST: Anything about his family background, or anything like that?

PETRELLA: I know that he was a cousin of my stepfather. My mother married a cousin of my father. And all the rest of my brothers and sisters, they are stepbrother and stepsisters, you know?

SIGRIST: Had your mother remarried in Italy?

PETRELLA: No, no.

SIGRIST: That was here.

PETRELLA: Here, yes.

SIGRIST: I see.

PETRELLA: I've got only an older sister, but she died now. We were two, two children with my, my father. My mother

remarried this cousin, and she had six children with the other father.

SIGRIST: So this is, this is the man who died when he was thirty-three. That's your true father.

PETRELLA: Thirty-three, yeah.

SIGRIST: And then your mother remarried.

PETRELLA: Yes. He died of an accident, you know?

SIGRIST: He died in the United States?

PETRELLA: Yes.

SIGRIST: What did he die of? What kind of an accident?

PETRELLA: Oh, I don't know. They had a fire in the factory, you know, and he must have fallen from the steps. You know, he went to the, to the hospital, and they operated on him, but he needed a transfusion, and then, at that time, they didn't, they didn't do any transfusions, so he died.

SIGRIST: This is in Montreal?

PETRELLA: No, that's, that's in, uh, Rhode Island.

SIGRIST: In Rhode Island. Oh, I see. I see. So he got in Rhode Island.

PETRELLA: And that was a real accident, I tell you. I was only two years old.

SIGRIST: Do you know what kind of factory it was that he was working in?

PETRELLA: It was a big factory of shoes, shoe factory.

SIGRIST: Shoe factory. So when he came to the United States, he was doing shoes.

PETRELLA: Yeah, he was working, he was making patterns, you know, how do you say? Uh, forms, forms and, he used to cut the, the . . .

SIGRIST: The leather?

PETRELLA: The leather. He used to cut the leather, you know? In Montreal, you know, before I married, I still had all the forms my father had. They're all there, about a dozen of them, you know?

SIGRIST: When you say forms, are you talking about the wooden . . .

PETRELLA: Wooden forms, with the handle on the end. Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: With the little shape. Uh-huh.

PETRELLA: I still have all that as a souvenir, you know? And they still have it in the basement. They don't throw it away. ( they laugh )

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

PETRELLA: Uh, Annemarie.

SIGRIST: Annemarie.

PETRELLA: Annamaria.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

PETRELLA: Petrella.

SIGRIST: Petrella. That's right, you said that you were cousins. Right, um, you and Mr. Petrella. So she was Annamaria Petrella.

PETRELLA: Petrella.

SIGRIST: What do you know about her life in Italy before she came?

PETRELLA: Well, she was an orphan of mother and father, and

her, his father and mother took care of her.

MR. PETRELLA: My mother used to take care.

PETRELLA: Took care of her, you know? So, then she met, uh, my father in the States. He came to the States, and he sent for my mother, and they, she went, she came over here and got married.

SIGRIST: Can you describe your mother's personality for me?

PETRELLA: Oh, I don't, she was very shy. I never saw a woman so shy like that. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you describe, is there a story about her being shy? Or, I mean, can you elaborate a little more on that?

PETRELLA: Well, I don't know. She brought us up very strict, you know? Not the youngest one, but me and my sister, you know, oh, she was very strict. The other brother and sister, they were brought up modern, you know, the way they do now, and she was very insulted. ( she laughs ) Well, you see, two of them are teachers, you know? So they, they had to do like the other friends do, you know, they had to go to meetings, you know, and parties. They couldn't miss

all that. So it's true. The girls today, they have to do like their friends do, you know? They don't do nothing wrong. But they have to enjoy themselves. We were always in the house. We never went anywhere. So it's very sad, you know?

SIGRIST: We said, when I did the introduction to the tape, that you were born in Montreal, but actually were you born in Rhode Island?

PETRELLA: No, no, in Montreal.

SIGRIST: You were born in Montreal.

PETRELLA: In Montreal.

SIGRIST: But you said that your father died in, in Rhode Island.

PETRELLA: Yes. But that's where we were. That's where he was with his sister and brothers and everyone, but then they all came to Montreal.

SIGRIST: And you were definitely born in Montreal.

PETRELLA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Okay. Um, so, anyway, your family is in Montreal.

PETRELLA: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Okay. Can you talk a little bit about, you mentioned an older sister. She died since, but what was her name?

PETRELLA: Angelina.

SIGRIST: Angelina.

PETRELLA: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: And then you had six, six step . . .

PETRELLA: Six brothers and sisters. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Right, right, from the second marriage.

PETRELLA: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Can you, can you tell me where you lived in Montreal?

PETRELLA: I lived in, uh, Denormanville, near Bobienne[ph], between Bobienne[ph] Bershas[ph].

SIGRIST: Bobi . . .

PETRELLA: We lived there, my father, my own father started the basement. He came from Rhode Island, because they had bought a lot here, and it was going from one

place to another before the house was built, you know? He made the cellar, you know, and he died. So this, my father, my stepfather came from Europe, you know? And he said, "Well, I'll help you build your house." And then he married his wife. ( she laughs ) But that was quite a while back, you know? And, uh, he, he went to the City Hall, and he paid for the lot, and, uh, the cellar that he made, you know, and he finished the house. Then he married my mother, and then I had brothers and sisters, you know?

SIGRIST: So your father . . .

PETRELLA: It's, it's really something, you know, honestly.

SIGRIST: It's complicated. So your father was going back and forth from Montreal to, uh . . .

PETRELLA: To Rhode Island, to build the house, you know?

SIGRIST: But he's building the house in Montreal.

PETRELLA: Yeah. There was only three houses in that street.

SIGRIST: On that street. What was the name of the street?

PETRELLA: Uh, Denormanville.

SIGRIST: Denormanville. Can you spell that?

PETRELLA: D-E-N-O-R-M-A-N-V-I-L-L-E.

SIGRIST: Thank you. What part of Montreal was that?

PETRELLA: North.

SIGRIST: Was that an Italian neighborhood at that time?

PETRELLA: No, no.

MR. PETRELLA: No, no.

PETRELLA: They were all French.

SIGRIST: They were French.

PETRELLA: All French. No, they were English, boy, my father had the houses, they were English. They moved so fast when the French came in, you would have seen some of these, assumed like somebody had shot them or something, you know? They don't get along, the English and the French.

SIGRIST: Yeah. I just want to fix your microphone here.  
( disturbance to the microphone ) There you go.  
That's better. Try that. ( disturbance to the

microphone )

PETRELLA: I think that's better, yes. ( disturbance to the microphone ) It's okay.

SIGRIST: There we go. Um, so your father, he built the foundation of the house, then he was killed in the fire. And then this man who would eventually become your stepfather finished building the house. Montreal

PETRELLA: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: What was the stepfather's name?

PETRELLA: The same, Martino.

SIGRIST: Martino. What was his first name?

PETRELLA: Luigi.

SIGRIST: Luigi Martino. And do you remember your mother's remarriage? Do you, how old were you?

PETRELLA: I was only two-and-a-half. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Oh, so she married soon after your father died.

PETRELLA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: This was a cousin, you said, or your father's?

PETRELLA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Okay. Um, what's your earliest memory? I mean, the first thing you remember as a person. What . . .

PETRELLA: I remember I was around five years old. I used to go to the English school. Yeah. I liked to go to English school. Then we had to pay for, because we weren't, uh, we didn't go to the Protestant school, church, so we had to pay each two dollar and fifty a month, so we were four going to that church, that would be ten dollars. So I said, and my mother said, "We can't afford ten dollars a month." She said, "That's our rent." ( she laughs ) So we tried to find a place, we couldn't find a place. We went to the Italian school, we didn't want to go to Italian school. Oh, we had such a hard time, you know? So after that we went to a French school, but I didn't like it. I liked the English school. I went till I, uh, till the sixth grade, but then I, I got mixed up, going with, because in the French school you had to go the morning in Italian, the afternoon in, in French. So I got all mixed up. I left the English, I went to French, and Italian. Oh! So I got a

little bit of each. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Could your mother read and write?

PETRELLA: Yes, she could.

SIGRIST: She could.

PETRELLA: Not, uh, she could write Italian, but I can't write Italian. I can write it, but it's not, I can't spell it, spell it good. I could read it, too, but I'm not good in Italian. I cannot read the French and English. Now I'm trying to catch a little Spanish. I like Spanish.

SIGRIST: How important was it for Italians who lived in Montreal to speak French?

PETRELLA: We lived with French. The children, they were all talking French. My mother, too. She caught the, my father learned the French. ( she laughs ) It's funny.

SIGRIST: This being your stepfather that you're talking about.

PETRELLA: Yes. And he talks French good, too, you know?

SIGRIST: According to Mr. Petrella.

PETRELLA: Yeah. He learned French, too, you know? That's nice. It's very nice.

SIGRIST: Yes. Um, can you tell me a little bit about, you lived in the house that the stepfather finished?

PETRELLA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the house for me?

PETRELLA: It's just a five-room house, and then my father built another flat on top because we were quite a few children. He made it longer, and another flat on top, you know? So we lived there, that's still there. My youngest brother lives there now with his wife.

SIGRIST: Did, you said you were only the third house on the block.

PETRELLA: Yes.

SIGRIST: You know, that . . .

PETRELLA: There was three houses. In the whole block there was no, no street. It was all glass. No street. We didn't see a car there.

MR. PETRELLA: Like a country house.

SIGRIST: Like a country house.

PETRELLA: Yes.

SIGRIST: It's probably not country any more, but . . .

PETRELLA: The first car we saw, we all ran in the house and opened the blind and see what it was that was coming down the street, you know? And it was a car, the first car we saw. Imagine, that's a long time ago.

SIGRIST: Sure. Tell me a little bit about how when you were a little girl how Italian children got along with the French children.

PETRELLA: Well, they had to get along. There were nobody else. There was only the French. And there were big families, and very, very poor. They used to come to our house, and they used to ask my mother for bread and cheese in Italian. They listened what we asked, you know, and they repeat what we said, and they said, "Give me some bread and cheese," in Italian. And my mother used to feed those children. There were a lot of children, you know? She had fourteen kids. So that's, I remember that. And we got along

well with all the children. We had to go to school with them, you know? So we got along, we got along with everybody.

SIGRIST: Well, what about the adults? What about French adults in Montreal? How did they interact with the Italians . . .

PETRELLA: They didn't like the Italians.

SIGRIST: They didn't. Can you talk a little bit about that?

PETRELLA: I don't know. I know that my father, when we were finishing the house, he tried to work a little bit in the house, and the lady across the street, she called the house, the apartment, and the detective came home and said, "You're not allowed to work after seven, you have to pay so much a fine, you know?" He had to pay a fine because he worked after seven. She had, the only one she had a telephone. We had a dog. She called the man, and we had to pay for the license for the dog. They were like that. They were so mean, you know? We wouldn't have done a thing like that to them, but they, they were like that, you know? I can't believe it, you know? So my mother said, "I can't, we were so good to them, the children, we feed

them, they come here, we can't chase them out. We feed them. And they do these things to us." You know?

SIGRIST: You mentioned the, going to school. What religion were you?

PETRELLA: I was Catholic.

SIGRIST: You were Catholic.

PETRELLA: Only the Protestant school. That's why we had to leave, because we had to go to the Protestant church on Sunday. We had to go to Sunday school. So go, we had to leave there, and we had to go to that Protestant church. My mother said no. I said, "We can't do that. We have to go to our church, you know, because if you go there and start to learn the Protestant ways, then you leave your religion." You know? So we had to leave, we, we cried. We liked the English school. We liked it very much.

SIGRIST: So where did you finally end up going to church?

PETRELLA: Well, we went to the St. Ambrose, they build a church . . .

SIGRIST: St. Ambrose?

PETRELLA: Ambrose, right on the corner of our street they build a church. Isn't that funny? It's still there.

SIGRIST: Now, was this primarily for Italians, this church?

PETRELLA: No, for everybody.

SIGRIST: For everybody.

PETRELLA: Every Catholic.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what language the services were conducted in.

PETRELLA: All in French.

SIGRIST: In French.

PETRELLA: All French, all French. Now it's ninety percent French.

SIGRIST: Even in the 1920's, which is roughly what we're talking about.

PETRELLA: Like our Italian church, where we go, you can ask my husband. They took a French priest and they say a mass in French and the rest in Italian. You see how

nice they are, the Italian. They wouldn't do that in the French church, but we, we did it. We got a French priest, and he says the mass in French for the French people.

SIGRIST: Okay. So as you were growing up, you attended services in French.

PETRELLA: In French. We had to.

SIGRIST: How, what were some of the ways that your family held on to their Italian customs? Like what kinds of ways did your mother, um, carry over some of the things that she did in Italy to her life in Montreal?

PETRELLA: I can't explain to you. She just did. She just told us what to do, what not to do, and then when we got the age that we understood, they did what they thought was best, you know? What can you do. Sometimes you have to change a bit. You know, you can't . . .

SIGRIST: You mentioned before that you were very strictly brought up.

PETRELLA: Yes.

SIGRIST: And you weren't allowed to leave the house.

PETRELLA: No. When they got to the, to the age of, you can't stop them, you know? So what can you do? The mother can sit here. Sometimes they went out, and they came home late, and she sits on the sofa and wait till they come home. You know how it is? She was like that.

SIGRIST: I'm wondering what were some of the other rules that you had to follow. What were some of the things that you were taught to do and taught not to do when you were growing up.

PETRELLA: Well, when I was growing up Alfred, he was my cousin, I had to bring my brother with me, or my sister. Not my sisters, they weren't alone with boys. My mother didn't . . .

SIGRIST: These are your stepsisters, who were . . .

PETRELLA: She didn't like it, but she had to do it, or else they wouldn't go out.

SIGRIST: Well, and you said that the stepchildren were brought up in a more liberal way.

PETRELLA: Well, what can you do? They had to change. What we, I don't mind that, uh, they can, my brother said, "I'm not going out with you any more." He said, we were so mad. Oh! ( she laughs ) He was after us, after me, you know?

SIGRIST: What about businesses in Montreal? Were there Italian businesses run by Italians for Italians?

PETRELLA: Now yes.

SIGRIST: When you were growing up.

PETRELLA: Not, there was a few, not, very rare. There was a, the street of Papino[ph], they call it, Papino[ph], there was a few Italian stores. The used to go out there, the people, you know, and buy, they used to buy the cheese or whatever they wanted, you know, Italian, uh, grocery. But now there is a lot of Italian stores. A lot of people by, going by there, you know?

SIGRIST: But I'm primarily interested in when you were growing up.

PETRELLA: Oh . . .

SIGRIST: You said there were a few . . .

PETRELLA: Well, a lot of, they carried a few things, too, you know, in the store, because we sell it, you know? Everybody like, like now they, everybody makes a pizza. So they buy what they put in the pizza. Every store has it. So they are, every store has, even the big stores, you know, the chain stores, they all have the Italian . . .

SIGRIST: But, let's go back to your own growing up.

PETRELLA: Oh, me, no.

SIGRIST: What about, um, was there a section of town in Montreal that was the Italian section?

PETRELLA: Well, that's near the church.

SIGRIST: Which was sort of ended up being where you ended up living.

PETRELLA: No, I, we lived where we were born there, in that street, you know, where we lived, the house . . .

SIGRIST: But you said they built the church on the corner.

PETRELLA: Yeah. That's French, French.

SIGRIST: French, I see.

PETRELLA: Where we lived, you know, there still is a house.

SIGRIST: But there was an Italian church in Montreal? No.

PETRELLA: Yeah, there was, but very far away. Not near our place. It still is there. That's where my sister went and teach, to teach you. They teach French, English and Italian, with my two sisters.

SIGRIST: How would your family celebrate Christmas?

PETRELLA: The same as everybody.

SIGRIST: When you were growing up.

PETRELLA: The same as everybody. The same thing . . .

SIGRIST: Well, can you describe for me what that is? What did you do?

PETRELLA: Well, they used to put the stocking up, you know, and my mother used to put only nuts or candy or fruit, because we were too many, you know? She couldn't put anything fancy. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: What about food? Were there special Italian foods that she made?

PETRELLA: Oh, yeah. She made a lot of, a lot of pastry, we used to make, you know, for, we used to make. I used to make a lot. I enjoyed making the Christmas food, you know? And, uh . . .

SIGRIST: Is there something that you make as an adult for Christmas that you learned from your mother?

PETRELLA: Oh, I learned everything from my mother.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me what your favorite thing to make, that you learned from your mother.

PETRELLA: Well, I used to make parale.

SIGRIST: Teral[ph]?

PETRELLA: Parale, you know the . . .

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

PETRELLA: They're round, and you boil them, and then you cut this, and then you put it in the oven. You don't know them.

SIGRIST: What is the name again?

PETRELLA: Parale.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

PETRELLA: P-A-R-A-L-E.

SIGRIST: Is this like a dumpling?

PETRELLA: No, it's a big, big doughnut.

SIGRIST: Oh, a big doughnut.

PETRELLA: A big doughnut.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And you learned this. Your mother taught you.

PETRELLA: Oh, yeah, but that's hard to make. I don't make them any more, because you need a, we had the wooden stove, and they come high like that. This stove is no good for that, you know? You can't cook in the, my mother used to make so many things, you know?

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever go back to Italy for any reason?

PETRELLA: She didn't have anybody in Italy.

SIGRIST: That's right. Her parents were dead.

PETRELLA: Yeah. She had a sister in, uh, where, and, uh . . .  
( she addresses Mr. Petrella in Italian )

MR. PETRELLA: Uh, Pittsburgh.

PETRELLA: No.

MR. PETRELLA: Pittsburgh.

SIGRIST: Pittsburgh? You had a sister in Pittsburgh?

PETRELLA: No, where Rose lives now.

MR. PETRELLA: Before she came she used to live in Pittsburgh.

PETRELLA: Yeah, well, her sister. She was tall and blonde, her sister. My mother wasn't very tall, and she was, she didn't have black hair. Nobody had black hair in our family. It's funny, eh? Nobody had black hair. I have a sister, Regina, she had white hair. We used to call her the goat.

SIGRIST: She was one of the stepsisters?

PETRELLA: Yeah, yeah. My father was blonde. And, uh, she used to cry, you know? She didn't want to go to school. She said, "The children call me 'the goat.'" ( they laugh ) That's funny, eh?

SIGRIST: When you were a young lady, like, what was the first job? Did you ever get a job when you were young?

PETRELLA: No, I never worked.

SIGRIST: You never worked.

PETRELLA: My father never sent us to work when we were young.

SIGRIST: Just the women, or the boys, too?

PETRELLA: No, the boys, they went to school, and then they found something to work, and then they continued to study, you know?

SIGRIST: What was your stepfather's attitude about education for women?

PETRELLA: He was for it, but they didn't want to. The girls did, the two girls did. Regina, too. She talked five language, Regina. She was good. She was working for international aviation. She was really, she had a mind, she reads whole page, and then she'll go around, then she'll come back and read it all to you, and she wouldn't forget it.

SIGRIST: Do you think that your stepfather treated you and your older sister any differently than the other kids?

PETRELLA: No, no. That's what my sister said, my stepsister.

She said, "My father's really good to you." You know? He was real good.

SIGRIST: And you felt that yourself.

PETRELLA: Oh, yeah. He married us and give us a good, nice wedding, the both of us, you know?

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever talk about her first husband to you?

PETRELLA: No. Not, uh, no, because she was well married, you know, and she had a lot of children. That would insult my father, you know, so, what can you do.

SIGRIST: Well, let me, let me ask you a couple of the same questions that I asked Mr. Petrella a few minutes ago. Uh, tell me the day that you met Mr. Petrella, your husband.

PETRELLA: Oh, I, he used to come to my house all the time.  
( they laugh )

MR. PETRELLA: The first day I came to Canada . . .

SIGRIST: The first day he came to Canada . . .

PETRELLA: And then he was, he was on sick leave, and he was

coming from his sister's, quite a way. The first time he walked from his sister to my mother it was like a holiday for him. I remember the way that I came all by myself.

MR. PETRELLA: I used to go there and then get, uh . . .

PETRELLA: Goat's milk.

MR. PETRELLA: Goat's milk.

PETRELLA: That's ninety percent cream.

SIGRIST: Where did you get the goat's milk?

PETRELLA: We had the goat for my brother, was dying, and the doctor said, "You have to have some goat milk for that boy, or else he'll die?"

SIGRIST: Is this one, this is one of your stepbrothers?

PETRELLA: Yes.

SIGRIST: What was he dying of?

PETRELLA: Oh, I don't know. He, they didn't, uh, he wasn't growing very well, and there was something wrong, you know?

SIGRIST: How old was he?

PETRELLA: Oh, he was three or four years old. He was young yet.

SIGRIST: And you got a goat?

PETRELLA: We got a goat. And guess who was keeping it? ( she laughs ) They were all afraid. They ran all away, and I had to, I liked the animals, you know? And I had to mind the goat. And then they called me the goat lady. ( she laughs ) That's when we had trouble with my sisters. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Did your goat have a name?

PETRELLA: No.

SIGRIST: No.

PETRELLA: No. I could have killed him. Oh! ( they laugh )

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a story about the goat.

PETRELLA: Oh, yes. We used to go away quite far and tie them on a tree or something, you know? They, she used to break the rope and go to the neighbors' and scratch all the apple trees, and my father had to pay, I

remember once he had to pay fifteen dollars for an apple tree.

SIGRIST: So you had a yard around your house, then?

PETRELLA: We had a yard, but she'd go far away, some other people's houses, you know? And, uh, she'd step on my feet, and she hurt me, you know? I said to my mother, "I'm going to kill that goat someday. I'm going to do it." ( she laughs ) So they got rid of it. After my brother was better, they got rid of it.

SIGRIST: Oh, so your brother got better.

PETRELLA: Yes. And then we had more milk that we needed, and the postman had twins, and the little children needed good milk, and he bought it. A small bottle, a dollar. At that time a dollar was a lot of money, you know? So then those little boys got well, and Royal Victoria Hospital came and got the milk for the hospital. It's funny, eh? I didn't know that milk was such a good medicine.

SIGRIST: Very rich. Did your mother ever make cheese from the goat's milk?

PETRELLA: Oh, yes, oh!

SIGRIST: How did she, can you describe for me how she made the cheese?

PETRELLA: I don't know. A man came to our house. He's a Sicilian. He come from Sicily. He was about . . .

SIGRIST: You were living in Montreal.

PETRELLA: Yeah. He was this high.

SIGRIST: About three feet high. He was little.

PETRELLA: Not five feet. He got on the chair, and he had a white apron. I remember that. And he made the cheese, you know? And, oh!

SIGRIST: Do you know how he did it? Did you ever watch him?

PETRELLA: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me how he did it?

PETRELLA: Well, he put, he put the water and boiled, and then he put the milk, milk and water, because not only milk. And then he went and buys the junket that he put in.

SIGRIST: Junket, yes.

PETRELLA: And then he wait. When you start to boil, you close the gas, you know? And then all the cheese comes on top, you know? And you take a wooden paddle and see at the side if it's come all up. You know, after a while, you know, it goes right down, and comes this thick, the cheese.

SIGRIST: That's about eight inches.

PETRELLA: It's beautiful, you know? He used to make, oh, it was so good.

SIGRIST: Well, you watched him very carefully, didn't you?

PETRELLA: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. My niece does it. She does cheese at home. She does ricotta cheese. You know ricotta cream cheese?

SIGRIST: We kind of got sidetracked from you meeting your husband to milking the goat. ( he laughs )

PETRELLA: Alfred, do you feel hungry? ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: So, uh, what year did you marry?

PETRELLA: 1934.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the date?

PETRELLA: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: What is it?

PETRELLA: The fifteenth . . .

SIGRIST: Of?

PETRELLA: October.

SIGRIST: The 15th of October.

MR. PETRELLA: My birthday was the 14th, and the 15th . . .

PETRELLA: And it was on a Sunday, and we couldn't get married on his birthday, so we married the Monday, on the 15th.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what you wore?

PETRELLA: I wore a . . .

MR. PETRELLA: Veil, you got the veil.

PETRELLA: The veil, and a white dress, beautiful.

SIGRIST: How long was the dress?

PETRELLA: A long dress, to the floor.

MR. PETRELLA: Oh, it was a long one.

SIGRIST: And did you have a honeymoon?

PETRELLA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Where did you go?

PETRELLA: I went to Quebec, St. Ann, the shrub, uh, shrine. And, uh, my sister was the maid of honor, my older sister, with her husband. It was nice.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about when you and Mr. Petrella moved to the United States in 1964, as he told us in the interview that we just finished. How did you feel about leaving Montreal?

PETRELLA: Oh, I enjoyed it. I loved the, I don't know, because I think I had the genes from my father that he loved the States, and when he moved with his family he was very blue. My mother said that my father didn't want to leave. He loved the place. He had a garden. He had to leave the red tomatoes, and all the garden there. He had to leave all that and move. He said he's very disappointed. My mother used to tell me

that. I think I carried that, that I loved garden, and I loved the States. It's funny, eh? Sometimes they say it's not true, but it's true.

SIGRIST: So when you were making the plans to leave, you were happy about this?

PETRELLA: Well, my mother was very sick. She was dying.

SIGRIST: Yes.

PETRELLA: I said, "I can't leave now." I said, "I'll never see my mother alive again," I said. I just couldn't do. You see, we lost my father, you know, and, uh, I said . . .

SIGRIST: Your step father, or your real father?

PETRELLA: My real father died.

SIGRIST: Your real father died.

PETRELLA: I was very young.

SIGRIST: Right.

PETRELLA: I didn't know my father, you know?

SIGRIST: Right.

PETRELLA: So we were more for my mother, you know, especially when you don't have a father. So, I had a stepfather, but we were always very cool, you know? We wouldn't run to him and grab him or something like that. We never did that. It's funny, eh? It's not because we didn't like our stepfather, but it was always something that he wasn't our father. So we stayed a little bit, and a little bit longer, you know. Just a little while my mother died. Alfred said, "You had a premonition that your mother was going to die." I said, "Yes." I said, "That's why I didn't want to go." She was a good mother, you know?

SIGRIST: When, when you and your husband made your new life in the United States, was life any different for you?

PETRELLA: No. Well, when we came we went to . . .

MR. PETRELLA: Jackson Height.

SIGRIST: Jackson Heights.

PETRELLA: To my sister-in-law. My, yeah. His brother's wife.

SIGRIST: But I'm wondering if life in the United States was different somehow than it had been in your country.

PETRELLA: No, I'm a funny person. I get along with everybody. I love everybody. I don't care what kind of nationality. I went, living in Jackson Heights, and there were Greeks. I got along so fine with the Greeks. Then there were, uh, where the other house we went, what was the nationality?

MR. PETRELLA: Uh, Greek.

PETRELLA: No, no, the one that we left, we sold the house.

SIGRIST: Well, you're very adaptable.

PETRELLA: I love everybody. I don't care. I don't ask them what nationality they are. I like them, that's all.

SIGRIST: Did you ever want to go back to Italy?

PETRELLA: No, no.

SIGRIST: Did you ever go back?

PETRELLA: No.

SIGRIST: To see where your parents were from?

PETRELLA: My brother and sister, everybody went back. Me and Alfred were the only ones who didn't go back.

SIGRIST: Why didn't you want to go?

PETRELLA: Oh, I didn't want to go. I don't like to travel by airplane. If I could go by train, I would go. I can't go by train.

SIGRIST: You can't do that.

PETRELLA: I said to Alfred, "I'm going to go to Alaska, and go to Russia," and then I couldn't go. I said, "I don't have to get the plane." I said, "Oh, now we're too old." ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Well, I guess the last couple of questions I want to ask you, I want to, to find out, can you still say any French? Did you learn like a prayer in French, or . . .

PETRELLA: All my prayers are in French.

SIGRIST: Oh, well, can you say, can you do the Our Father for me in French? ( Mrs. Petrella begins to pray in French ) Slowly, slowly.

PETRELLA: ( she prays in French ) Oh, I'm getting mixed up with the, the Protestant one. ( she prays in French ) I get mixed up because when we go in the church

here they say it in English, and I say the Our Father in English in the church, so I, and when I say my beads here I say it in French.

SIGRIST: Well, I have never had an Italian speak French for me on tape.

PETRELLA: Oh, I always talk French. When I get mad with him, and I talk French, then he understands. ( they laugh )

SIGRIST: What about Italian? Can you say something for me in Italian, maybe a prayer or a song? Do you know a song in Italian that you learned as a little kid, or a poem, a nursery rhyme, in Italian?

PETRELLA: No, not very much. We never talked, uh, things like that.

SIGRIST: The rosary in Italian, maybe?

PETRELLA: ( she pauses, then prays in Italian ) That's the Gloria Padre. ( they laugh )

SIGRIST: Well, that's good.

PETRELLA: I know the prayers, you know, but I got the three languages mixed sometimes.

SIGRIST: And I'll come back in five years and you can do it in Spanish for me. ( they laugh )

PETRELLA: Oh, I will do it in Spanish. I love, I love all the languages, you know?

SIGRIST: How do you think your life would have been different if your parents had never come to the United States? If you had been born in Italy, how would your, how do you think your life would have been different?

PETRELLA: Well, I know a lot of people, right now there's a, my niece-in-law, her mother and father, they're here from Italy, and I just love them. I talk to them. And my little niece, you know, that's her grandmother and grandfather, and she talks a little, just a little bit, her grandmother's here not nearly a month. You have to hear her talk Italian. She got the Italian, I said, "Adelle," I said, "you talk Italian nicely." I said, "You can get your Italian really complete." She said, "Yes, and I'm going to do it." Because she talks English good, you know, now she talks Italian. She said, "I don't want to forget the Italian." She said, "I'm going to learn French." His brother's going to be a doctor this

year. So . . .

SIGRIST: But you, if you had been born in Italy instead of where you were born, do you think your life would have been different somehow?

PETRELLA: I don't think so. I still would have the same idea. I wouldn't change.

SIGRIST: You'd still be you.

PETRELLA: I get along with everybody. I have, like my neighbor upstairs, she doesn't like to have, uh, she's a landlady. She doesn't like to, we're four family that we go to each other's house. But when she was sick, guess who had to go upstairs and give her some coffee, something, you know? I get along, and I don't go in each other's house. I don't like that, you know? Like my friend, she goes to her neighbor's, she opens up the Frigidaire, she takes an egg, and she goes back home. I don't do that. I wouldn't do that for all the world. ( they laugh ) I'm ashamed to do that. But they do that, you know? No. But I like the people, get along. The neighbors that come out, hello, how are you, what are you doing? That's all, I'm neighborly, you know.

But I don't like to go in and bother the people,  
never.

SIGRIST: It's a great attitude to have, if you like people.

PETRELLA: I like people.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

PETRELLA: I've got a Greek woman, she came over the other day.  
I said, "Mrs. Petrella," she said, "I wanted to come  
to your house a long time ago. I wanted to talk to."  
She said, "I haven't seen you all winter." I said,  
"Well, I've been sick all winter." I said, so I  
said, "I'm glad you came over." She came over, she  
sit down, talked a little bit, you know? She just  
lost her husband, you know? We're here twenty,  
twenty-two years. We meet all the time, in the  
church, you know? And then she came back again, she  
came around. I said, "When you feel lonely, you come  
on in." We just say a few words and, you know.

SIGRIST: So, just being friendly.

PETRELLA: That's all. Just being friendly.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Petrella, I want to thank you very much. This

has been very interesting, and I'm glad that you allowed me to interview you, especially about Montreal. That's very interesting information for us.

PETRELLA: Well, all the time that we were waiting for you, I was thinking, "Who am I going to talk to? Is he going to be friendly?" ( they laugh )

SIGRIST: I hope I was friendly. ( he laughs )

PETRELLA: I hope I didn't bother you talking too much.

SIGRIST: No, no, it was great.

PETRELLA: My husband is not a talker.

SIGRIST: Oh, I think he did pretty well.

PETRELLA: Yeah. But I, I talk to him, sometimes he sleeps, he's asleep. ( they laugh )

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Rosemary Petrella on Thursday, May 15, 1997, in Cliffside Park, New Jersey. Thank you very much.

PETRELLA: I thank you, too.