

EI-889

LEON DEL GIUDICE

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RESIDENCES:

SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Saturday, May 24th, 1997. I'm in Wethersfield, Connecticut with Mr. Leon Del Giudice. Mr. Del Giudice came from Italy in 1921. He was a little older than three at that time. And for the sake of the tape, I may say that you may hear lawn mowers in the background. We're in a very nice suburban neighborhood and there are lots of people mowing their lawn today.

DEL GIUDICE: [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Mr. Del Giudice, can we begin by you giving me your birth date, please?

DEL GIUDICE: September 24th, 1917.

SIGRIST: And where were you born?

DEL GIUDICE: Rome, Italy.

SIGRIST: And do you know anything about the circumstances of your birth or what happened on that day that you were born? Anything like that?

DEL GIUDICE: Well, the day I was born [clears throat], it—my mother nearly passed away and I—I found out many years later that I was one of a pair of twins. My twin died. But my mother used to work at her dad's farm and they were in South America for a while. Then he sold the farm and so forth, and by the time they got back he was a little over 11. And that's where I grew up, in that part of the country in Rome. I came here when I was about four and I remember—

SIGRIST: Well, wait. Let's not—let's not get ahead of ourselves here.

DEL GIUDICE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: You started talking about your mother. What was her name?

DEL GIUDICE: Francesca.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Francesca, please?

DEL GIUDICE: F-R-A-N-C-E-S-C-A.

SIGRIST: And her maiden name, please.

DEL GIUDICE: Giovannucci. G-I-O-V-A-N-N-U-C-C-I.

SIGRIST: Thank you. C—you started telling me a little bit about her background. Can you tell me a little more about her family background?

DEL GIUDICE: Well, my father had a—a shoe—a shoe shop, a shoemaker shop where they made shoes. He had a business here too for a number of years when I was a young ma—a young boy. And my mother's family were farmers. I think he raised cattle and cows, something like that. And my mother was always inclined to—loved to work outside. And I remember when I was a young man she and my dad used to work outside and I'd pitch in and help 'em. It was kind of heavy work but that was it.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever talk about her childhood at all?

DEL GIUDICE: She did, off and on, about the wonderful times she's had with her father and mother, how they were very strict with her and how she was sort of the boss over—I don't know how many sisters—two or

three other sisters. And she had i—implanted in her mind to be a lady at all times and et cetera, et cetera. And she did the same thing to her three daughters, believe me.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about the family going to South America and how old your mother was at that time?

DEL GIUDICE: Well, I think her mother was about 18 or 19 when—

SIGRIST: Your mother was 18 or 19.

DEL GIUDICE: No, my grandmother.

SIGRIST: Oh, her mother.

DEL GIUDICE: When they first went to South America. Then my mother was around—around 11 when she—they moved from there back to Italy, you see. I don't know too much about—now, my grandmother on my father's side, she practically—I understand she practically raised me. She was very strict.

SIGRIST: Okay, let's stay with your mother's side—

DEL GIUDICE: Yes.

SIGRIST: —[chuckles] for a minute.

DEL GIUDICE: And I—well, let's say I was babied quite wonderfully well all my young life.

SIGRIST: Where was your mother born? Was she born in Italy or in South America?

DEL GIUDICE: She was born in Italy.

SIGRIST: Born in Italy.

DEL GIUDICE: Brought up in South America.

SIGRIST: Do you know how old she was when they went to South America?

DEL GIUDICE: Oh, I think about two or three years old; I'm not too sure.

SIGRIST: But young.

DEL GIUDICE: She was still a baby.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

DEL GIUDICE: Yes.

SIGRIST: And what did they do in South America?

DEL GIUDICE: Well, raised cows horses and so forth. Anything to do with animals, they did it. They raise it. And my grandfather was quite adept at that. He loved his work but it was taking hold of him. It was running him down. So they went back to Italy.

SIGRIST: Where in South America did they go?

DEL GIUDICE: Brazil.

SIGRIST: They were in Brazil.

DEL GIUDICE: [chuckles] My mother used to always tell people, "I'm a Braziliense," meaning, "I'm Brazilian."

SIGRIST: [chuckles] Can you spell that, please?

DEL GIUDICE: B-R-A-Z-I-L-I-E-S-E.

SIGRIST: That's Brazilian in Italian.

DEL GIUDICE: Braziliense.

SIGRIST: Ah. So you said your mother was about 11 years old—

DEL GIUDICE: Uh-hmm.

SIGRIST: —you think, when she went back to England.

DEL GIUDICE: Uh-hmm.

SIGRIST: And did they go to Rome? Where did they settle?

DEL GIUDICE: Well, she ended up in what they call Pratola Peligna—P-R-A-T-O-L-A P-E-L-I-G-N-A. They say—if you're there they call you Pratolano [PH]. And she stayed there for a few years; I don't know how long. But this is stuff I heard through my—

SIGRIST: Right, I understand.

DEL GIUDICE: —growing years. But she was always involved in farming and so forth.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

DEL GIUDICE: Cassiodoro.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

DEL GIUDICE: C-A-S-S-I-O-D-O-R-O. In Italian, it means gold chest. [laughter]

SIGRIST: Do you know why he was named that or—

DEL GIUDICE: He was the eldest of, I think, s—seven brothers, I think. He was the shortest, five foot, three. They're all six feet or more. We had an Uncle Phil live with us a number of years when I was a boy. He was about six foot, seven or eight. I can still picture him, my father giving him the dickens. He's standing there like a little boy with his head down and across his shoulders. He'd take it.

SIGRIST: [chuckles] What do you know about your father's background and his upbringing?

DEL GIUDICE: Yes, he—he hated war very much. He—he disliked it. After all, in all, he spent 10 years, 11 months and 15 days in two services, the war in Tripoli and World War I. And he come out—well, he had quite a few medals.

SIGRIST: Can you talk at all about his experiences? Things that he might have related to that happened to him?

DEL GIUDICE: Well, he was—he traveled a lot. He knew eight languages fluently. I heard the word dummkoff [PH] so many times I thought it was my name, because I knew Latin and—and Italian, of course, and English. And he said, "Lee, learn a couple. It'll come in handy in your work." And I said, "Oh, Papa. I don't have time." "Dummkoff!" And he'd walk away. I wish he were alive to call me dummkoff now.

SIGRIST: Can you talk about his experiences during World War I, specifically?

DEL GIUDICE: He was quite a hero, I understand. I'm not saying this to make him look good but he was. He was the—he had a man of—a mind of his own. He—he—he didn't want to see people suffer and if he could help them, he did. He did that all the time I was alive, and

since he was alive. He had more friends and, to tell you the truth, when he passed away there were two lines around the front of the church, St. Anthony's Church here in Hartford, triple line all the way around—around the back of the church to the other side, a block away, and then the other door, the same thing. There must have been a couple of thousand people there trying to get in.

SIGRIST: Well, what about World War I, specifically? Do you remember him relating any of his experiences to you?

DEL GIUDICE: I think he didn't do too much of that. The war in Tripoli, he did because he always said something about how he hated the Arabs. And I remember one time an Arab come over to him to ask him for a cigar or something. And while my father was reaching for it, in back, he had a knife. He was going to do it and he killed him right on the spot. And he said that that war, he had a lot of—a lot of things to remember about. [clears throat] Well, then the World War I, of course, he—I think he was a lieutenant or something. And he claimed how so many of his dear friends got killed and he—he said—he shut out a lot of the things that happened because they were so unpleasant.

SIGRIST: Can you talk about your father's personality?

DEL GIUDICE: He was a wonderful man. He was five foot, three but you'd—you'd think he was six or seven foot. He was—he—he had a basic understanding of life. He told me many times. He says, "Son." [clears throat] When I was 16 years old he said, "Son." He says, "Listen to me." I says, "Yes, Pop." I always say Pop instead of Papa. He said, "As you grow and become older, year by year, if you can't do something to your fellow man to make him feel good or help him, I won't like it. You have to be a good boy. Will you promise me you'll do this for me?" And I says, "Yes, Pop." Well, [chuckles] when I was 21 he said, "Remember what I told you when—when you were 16, son?" I says, "Yes, Pop." He says, "You sure?" I says, "Yes." He says, "In addition to what I said, if you don't behave right to your fellow man and, if I'm dead, I'll come out of my grave and haunt the hell out of you." [laughter] I never forgot that.

SIGRIST: What were some of the things that you remember when you were growing up that your father enjoyed doing for himself?

DEL GIUDICE: Well—

SIGRIST: In his own spare time. How did he—

DEL GIUDICE: He had so many friends. He had a shoemaker shop. He used to make—he had a shoemaker shop right across Hartford Hospital. And the place is—it's shut out now. And he used to make shoes for defective feet. Back in the old country—

SIGRIST: For what kind of feet?

DEL GIUDICE: Defective feet.

SIGRIST: Oh, defective feet.

DEL GIUDICE: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

DEL GIUDICE: And in Italy, I think they had a factory to do the same thing. In fact, the first few years I was married my father took me around shopping and he'd say, "This company was your grandfather's company. It's a—a new name now." But he had a shoemaker shop and I helped him.

SIGRIST: Well, what did he like to do for himself, for his own—for his own enjoyment and—

DEL GIUDICE: Organizations, friends, meetings.

SIGRIST: What kinds of organizations did he belong to?

DEL GIUDICE: Usually had to do with World War I. He would call them the Amigi del leguela mondela. [PH] Friends from World War I. [clears throat]

SIGRIST: Can you say the—the Italian slowly one more time? Spell it if you can.

DEL GIUDICE: No. Amigi del leguela mondela. Numero uno. [PH] World War I. He enjoyed friends. I remember [clears throat] once every couple of weeks—he used to make six barrels of wine every year. And I—I helped him make 'em too. He'd go around buying grapes by the half a ton of this and a half a ton of that here in East Hartford.

SIGRIST: Here in East Hartford, Connecticut [unclear]—

DEL GIUDICE: East Hartford, Connecticut, yes. [clears throat] And I would be with him. [clears throat] He would get a box, taste a grape here and a

grape there and say, "Give me a half a ton of this and a half a ton of that." Well, I used to be the crusher and I helped him make six barrels every year. We only drank—the family, with friends, only drank about a barrel. Whenever you came to see Pop, you never walked out to at least a quart or a half a gallon or a gallon of wine, he'd give you as a gift. That's how we—why he made that many gallons of wine every year, in case—

SIGRIST: Can you actually talk about the process of how your father made wine?

DEL GIUDICE: [clears throat] Yes.

SIGRIST: He bought the grapes.

DEL GIUDICE: He bought the grapes.

SIGRIST: What k—do you know what kind of grapes he was particularly [unclear]—

DEL GIUDICE: Well, the—he—he had his own Italian name to 'em. I never wanted to cotton to it because then I'd become too involved and I'd have to work harder for him. [chuckles] But he had different kinds and there'd be white grapes and red grapes. Sometime, he'd mix 'em. And I used to go downstairs and these barrels, he had—he would—I would help him take the rings loose and take the bottom out of a barrel and tighten it again and use them for—for, oh—the grapes would age and so forth. And they would rise. I'd go down every night with a long pole and a little thing at the end of it and push it down. And I'd come up about half—half drunk nearly every night. He'd have between eight and twelve barrels of those; he had raised on a stand, you see. And then he would draw off and fill up the barrels. And then he'd squeeze the grapes with a—with a—with a press that he had made himself. And I would help him do that. And he'd stop every so often, take some of the grape—take the top off, you know, the—you—the wood that keep the—to do the work with. And he'd light a match and if it lit, it burned, fine. If it didn't, he'd squeeze it again. He'd really squeeze 'em dry. He was a wonderful man in that and [clears throat] I'll never for—he was such—so big-hearted.

SIGRIST: Then how would he bottle them? I mean, how would he bottle the—bottle the wine?

DEL GIUDICE: Gallons and quarts.

SIGRIST: In glass—glass bottles?

DEL GIUDICE: Glass bottles in quarts. And I had to go down there once in a while and take the bottles and turn them a quarter turn until they'd be pretty clear. I learned quite a lot about wines and—

SIGRIST: Do you know where he learned had to do this?

DEL GIUDICE: His father. His father had barrels and barrels of this stuff. He used to entertain quite heavily, especially when he became the mayor of the town. [clears throat] Now, my father—[chuckles] it's a funny thing how he picked up all these languages. It wasn't—the war was nearly breaking out, certain parts of the world. He'd just skedaddle and go. And my grandfather always said he would—he always felt insulted that his son didn't want to go to war, et cetera, et cetera. But in the process, this is how he picked up all these languages. He'd go to Germany. He were—he was brought back in irons, arrested in disgrace because he was the mayor's son and he ran away, didn't want to go in the service. And my father says, "I don't want to get killed." You know, [chuckles] I could see that. And this is how he picked up all these languages. He's very adept at it. And he told me many times, "Why don't you learn a new one?" I said, "No, Pop. I don't want to." He said—that's when he would call me dummkoff. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: What was the name of the town that your grandfather was the mayor?

DEL GIUDICE: Rome.

SIGRIST: Your—your grandfather was the mayor—

DEL GIUDICE: Yes.

SIGRIST: —of Rome.

DEL GIUDICE: Mayor of Rome, yes.

SIGRIST: And what was your grandfather's name?

DEL GIUDICE: Ah, oh. It's been so long.

SIGRIST: Well, that's all right. Maybe it'll come to you as we're talking.

DEL GIUDICE: The Italian version, I can't think of it. I always called him Grandfather, Grandpa. I think it was Giovanni.

SIGRIST: Why did—why did your family want to come to the United States—

DEL GIUDICE: Well—

SIGRIST: —in 1921? How did that all happen?

DEL GIUDICE: Well, my license plate is LEE21. I came here in 1921. My dad came here in 1920, first. Then he sent for my mother and my sister and myself.

SIGRIST: Why did your father want to come to the United States?

DEL GIUDICE: He wanted to come here because he heard so many good things about it. And this is how he started his first business here as a—as a shoemaker—not—not shoemaker repair only, but making shoes for defective feet. And I learned quite a lot from him then. I used at the—after school, I used to go to the shop and help him. [clears throat]

SIGRIST: But in 1920, when your father came to the United States, did he have family over here?

DEL GIUDICE: My mother. [clears throat] No. No, I'm sorry.

SIGRIST: Before he came, in 1920?

DEL GIUDICE: He came alone. He came alone; I think with a member of the family. I don't know what it was. Then—

SIGRIST: Well, were there other relatives already in the United States?

DEL GIUDICE: There were al—yes, I think there were a couple of relatives here, and my mother and my sister and I came in—in '21. [clears throat]

SIGRIST: And when your father came in 1920, where did he live?

DEL GIUDICE: The Front Street area of Hartford.

SIGRIST: Front Street. And can you talk—

DEL GIUDICE: That was call—

SIGRIST: —a little bit about the neighborhood? You're smiling when you—

DEL GIUDICE: They call that Little Italy.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

DEL GIUDICE: It—since the new roads and new areas there have been built up, it's the Franklin Avenue now. It's called Little Italy in a way. And I remember it was a wonderful time of—of life, my life, because it—there'd be a lot of these little pushcarts, all these Italian people selling fruits and vegetables and so forth. And I used to get involved in that. And I'd always come home with bags and bags full of pears and things because I helped them do this or that, you know. That was quite a lot of fun.

SIGRIST: Do you have any firsthand recollections of living in Rome? You were just—just three. But I mean, do you have any—do you have any—

DEL GIUDICE: No.

SIGRIST: —vague memories?

DEL GIUDICE: I don't, except that I was home most of the time. My uncles were there and I remember one time my uncle put me on piggyback. And he slipped and fell. I fell and I bumped my head quite a lot. But it didn't affect me at all. And I heard my mother clearly say, "You will never see your—you will never pick him up again or do that because I don't trust you." Et cetera, et cetera. But I had aunts galore, grandmothers. They were lovely people.

SIGRIST: What's your first first-hand memory of—of the immigration experience?

DEL GIUDICE: Well, the S.S. America was the ship I was on. I told you how I—I saw that when we first married, my wife. I used to—

SIGRIST: You told me that before the tape was—

DEL GIUDICE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes, right.

DEL GIUDICE: Now, I—while I was there, the people were so—they're all such wonderful people. And I used to like to—they used to ask me to do little things for them. I was a little—little child, you know. And I remember one little old lady saying, "Why don't you go to the [unclear] there"—I think, in Italian—"the [unclear] and get me a cup of wine?" So that's what I did. I crossed over and on the way back

the ship was rocking a little bit. I was near the gate. And I went overboard. And you know, I didn't swallow a drop and I still had that cup in my hand when they took me up. [chuckles] I'll never forget that.

SIGRIST: Uh-hmm.

DEL GIUDICE: And I remember that very, very ex—explicitly. It was a wonderful trip, really. And—

SIGRIST: Did your parents ever talk about—I'm sorry. Was your father with you or you went to meet your father? I'm just confused on that point.

DEL GIUDICE: No, we met—went to meet my father. My mother—

SIGRIST: Your father stayed in America and then your mother and you and—

DEL GIUDICE: My sister.

SIGRIST: What was your sister's name?

DEL GIUDICE: Tolma—T-O-L-M-A.

SIGRIST: And is she older or younger than you?

DEL GIUDICE: She's 18 months younger than I am.

SIGRIST: She's younger.

DEL GIUDICE: She's about my wife's age.

SIGRIST: Oh, so your mo—so your mother's got two little kids—

DEL GIUDICE: [clears throat] Yes—

SIGRIST: —with her [chuckles] during this. Did your mother ever tell you any of her experiences while she was on the ship?

DEL GIUDICE: She'd talk about her father, who was a farmer, of course.

SIGRIST: No, I mean when she was on the ship. Any of her experiences coming to America. Things that you might not have remembered but—

DEL GIUDICE: Well, she would be speaking to some ladies and I'd be listening. She says, "Lee, you're not going to hear any of this. Go out. Be a good boy now and"—you know, and not to hear the ladies talking. Of course, I don't know what they were saying but I can just imagine. But I was all over the ship and I was very friendly. Everyone was so friendly to me. I don't know if I was an ugly boy, maybe or something, that they liked my looks. [chuckles] But I—I enjoyed it tremendously.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever tell you about how she felt about leaving Italy?

DEL GIUDICE: Well, it was a matter of feeling how she left Brazil where she was practically brought up in, the small town that she was in and farming and all that. And I don't think she ever got over it because one—I remember since I was a boy here she was always digging something, planting something. And I remember one time when she had one of the most beautiful rose gardens that any—anyone could ever think of, my wife and I would—would go to see her. And about a half a block away we could smell her roses. She—and she gave that garden to my wife.

SIGRIST: But how did she feel about having to leave her family in Italy and come to the United States? Did she ever tell you?

DEL GIUDICE: Well, I think by that time they're all gone.

SIGRIST: I see.

DEL GIUDICE: Yeah. She had one sister and I think one brother. They're all—both dead. And her—her—her feelings about going back was like any other person that came from the Old Country. They miss this and that. But then they forgot about it because they become so involved in their life here that they—it sort of offset it, and which is the right thing to do, I think.

SIGRIST: Do you have any memories of the ship coming into New York—

DEL GIUDICE: No.

SIGRIST: —and what happened? Wh—where does your memory come back in—

DEL GIUDICE: Well, when I went overboard I remember walking around. One lady grabbed me and hugged me, say something in Italian. And my sister too. Maybe we were a couple of good-looking kids; I don't

know. But it seemed like everybody just adored us. And I'll say one thing. We were taught. I was taught to be manly and my sister was taught to be very, very feminine and to—sweet. The people were nice to us. And this is the way we were brought up, really.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing your father—

DEL GIUDICE: [clears throat]

SIGRIST: —when you arrived in New York?

DEL GIUDICE: All I remember is when we went to New York we got off the ship. Some friend of my father was waiting for us and then my father came and, oh, what a reunion that was! Everybody cried. And before you know it, we were on board a beat-up old car. I think it was an old Ford or something and we were brought back to Hartford. And that's where we stayed and that's where I grew up practically until I became a teenager.

SIGRIST: Well, talk about growing up in Hartford and—and—d—did you live on Front Street?

DEL GIUDICE: Yes, Front Street.

SIGRIST: Do you know the address? The first place?

DEL GIUDICE: No, I don't. We lived—from Front Street, then we went to Woodward Street where I was a—a teenager then and grew up till about 15 or 16.

SIGRIST: How long did you live on Front Street?

DEL GIUDICE: Oh, gosh. I can't remember. Up until I became a teenager, I think. No, about 12 or—12 or so.

SIGRIST: Did you live in the same—

DEL GIUDICE: In the same house, yes, a t—

SIGRIST: It was a house that you—

DEL GIUDICE: It was a tenement. It was a tenement.

SIGRIST: Can you describe it for me?

DEL GIUDICE: It was on the third floor. I remember that.

SIGRIST: Is this an apartment you're talking about?

DEL GIUDICE: Like a tenement, yeah.

SIGRIST: A tenement.

DEL GIUDICE: I think it was a six-room tenement. And I remember that I got good strong legs going up and down. There weren't any elevators in those days. And I was friendly with the—the little girls and the little boys in the same neighborhood in the same—in the same area. And I enjoyed my growing up in that part of the country. And everywhere I went, I remember down in the first floor there was a—a sort of a club. And they sold tobacco and cigars and so forth. And [chuckles] I remember they used to throw away some old packages of cigarettes, Camels especially. I remember very explicitly. And I used to pick them up. They—they were supposed to be rotted, no good. I'd go around selling them for five cents or a dime to—to older boys around there. Then when my mother and father found out, I got punished for it because, et cetera and et cetera. But the area was always something to do.

SIGRIST: But can you describe the apartment for me?

DEL GIUDICE: [clears throat]

SIGRIST: What it looked like on the inside.

DEL GIUDICE: Oh, it's a brick building, third floor.

SIGRIST: How many rooms did you have?

DEL GIUDICE: Six rooms.

SIGRIST: How was the apartment lit?

DEL GIUDICE: Electricity. Not oil. [chuckles] And it was a nice area. They—in those days, Front Street area was considered Little Italy at the time.

SIGRIST: Was there a bathroom in the apartment?

DEL GIUDICE: Oh, yes. There was a bathroom in the apartment.

SIGRIST: Running water?

DEL GIUDICE: Yes. In fact, there was—my father and mother had a—a bathroom put in there. But there was—on that floor, the bathroom—the people—all people went to. And my mother and dad didn't like that so they called a plumber and they put in the bathroom and it cost them quite a bit of money, I think, in those days.

SIGRIST: Do you have any memories of that process of—of the installation of the bathroom in the apartment?

DEL GIUDICE: Yes, my mother and dad says, "Get out of the way. Let the man work. Mind your own business and go over there and be a good boy," and all that. I couldn't—I used to watch but not too long. And they thought maybe I would cause them to make a mistake or something; I don't know what—plumbing, I guess it was.

SIGRIST: Where did you sleep in the apartment?

DEL GIUDICE: I slept in a—a room by myself. I remember when I first came to that country, my—my mother and dad used to have me in the corner of their bedroom. And the slightest provocation, my mother'd get right up and come to me. She was such a wonderful mother. [clears throat] And she catered to me like a—I'd never heard of a mother being that way. She was only a little bit of a thing, about five foot tall. [clears throat] But, you know, after I grew up Mom used to like to go shopping. In those days, we had G. Fox and Brown Thompson's, Steigert [PH] and Y. Smith [PH], place like that. And I remember when I was a boy I used to love to comb her—and brush her hair for her. She had her hair down to her knees. And whenever—she had a three-way mirror and I would brush and comb her—I used to love to—she'd talk to me, you know, like a wonderful mother and tell me what I should—should do and, you know, all little things that I should know. And I remember taking her shopping. I used to always say, "Mom, give me your arm. If you'd hang onto my arm." I'd take her shopping and she'd have—when she'd go shopping, in order that she could put on the—she always wore straw hats. She would have a toup [PH] on each side of her head so she could put a straw hat on. And she didn't wear a hat; she'd have one big toup in back of her head. You know, the old fashioned way.

SIGRIST: Toup? Are you talking about a hairpiece when you say a toup?

DEL GIUDICE: No.

SIGRIST: A bun.

DEL GIUDICE: A bun. A—all rolled up into a bun.

SIGRIST: I see.

DEL GIUDICE: Yeah. Well, [clears throat]—

SIGRIST: So she wore two buns on each side if she had the hat on.

DEL GIUDICE: On top her head, yes.

SIGRIST: I see.

DEL GIUDICE: So it'd be a little less. But I remember—at that time I was going to school and all that, and once in a while [chuckles] a friend of mine would say, "Hey, Lee. Who was that good looking broad I saw you with?" You know, and they—I said, "Describe her." I—"That—that's my mother." You know, she was so—she was so youthful, so—so beautiful. She never wore makeup. Her cheeks were sort of—little rosy. And her hair was even—she died at 74. She didn't have a white hair in her head. And she act so—she was a beautiful lady.

SIGRIST: What language did you speak in the house?

DEL GIUDICE: Italian.

SIGRIST: And can you talk about if your parents attempted to learn English?

DEL GIUDICE: They did through sons and daughters and various friends. My mother—I was the only one of six children that could understand Brazilian, the Brazilian language.

SIGRIST: But it's just you and your sister.

DEL GIUDICE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: That—your sister's the only—who were the other children coming from?

DEL GIUDICE: Well, the—Rocky. He's dead now. Margaret is alive.

SIGRIST: Were they born in the United States?

DEL GIUDICE: Yeah, they were born in the United States.

SIGRIST: So four children were born in the United States?

DEL GIUDICE: Yes.

SIGRIST: Rocky, Margaret—

DEL GIUDICE: Rocky, Margaret and Mary.

SIGRIST: Mary?

DEL GIUDICE: No, I'm sorry. Rocky, Margaret and—and Bobby.

SIGRIST: Bobby.

DEL GIUDICE: Bobby. We were three boys and three girls.

SIGRIST: So there were six.

DEL GIUDICE: Josephine. I'm sorry. Josephine was my favorite sister.

SIGRIST: All right. Let's name all the children. Leon. That's you.

DEL GIUDICE: Yeah. Mary.

SIGRIST: Then your sister who was born in Italy.

DEL GIUDICE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: That was Mary?

DEL GIUDICE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Okay. And—

DEL GIUDICE: Josephine is next.

SIGRIST: Josephine.

DEL GIUDICE: Margaret.

SIGRIST: Margaret.

DEL GIUDICE: Rocky.

SIGRIST: Rocky.

DEL GIUDICE: And Bobby.

SIGRIST: Bobby. Okay.

DEL GIUDICE: Roberto. Actually, his name was Umberto [PH]. He was named after King Umberto, something like that.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. But only you and Mary were actually born in Europe?

DEL GIUDICE: Yes.

SIGRIST: And the others were born here.

DEL GIUDICE: We were—we were the greenhorns.

SIGRIST: [chuckles] Do you remember any of your brothers or sisters being born?

DEL GIUDICE: Yes, I do.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about that?

DEL GIUDICE: Well, not them—not too much but my mother had two sets of twins. And my sister, Jo—I called her Jo-Jo—she was named after one of the twins. The I—the last two twins. And she named the twins after various members of the family. I remember them very clearly because I loved them very dearly. I was a little boy then but those little babies were really wonderful. But then, somehow or other, my mother didn't have any more twins. But I found out later, my 21st birthday, that I was one of a pair of twins.

SIGRIST: That's right. You told us—

DEL GIUDICE: I didn't know that all this time. I was flabbergasted. Now, I can understand why I had so much attention from my mother and dad.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

SIGRIST: Can you tell me about how you learned English?

DEL GIUDICE: Well, the boys—people, kids I played with and so forth. Then I went to the old Brown School. I started there at kindergarten. I was about eight years old. [chuckles] I felt so out of place. I was a big boy and I was in kindergarten.

SIGRIST: Why so late? Why—why did they start you so late?

DEL GIUDICE: Well, my father had a—he used to have a—an instructor teach me Italian and—like a teacher. And he—I was—had to go to school sort of at home. Then when I started going to school, then he stopped because he said I knew enough Italian to get along and get about, you know, with the other Italian gentry. But the Brown School was a wonderful school. I remember so many things, good things about it.

SIGRIST: Can you talk about going to school a little bit?

DEL GIUDICE: Yes.

SIGRIST: The early years, especially.

DEL GIUDICE: In those days, [chuckles] I had to suffer quite a bit because there was another Jewish lad. He and I were the only non—let's say—I think he came from overseas too. I don't remember exactly where but he and I were very good friends. And you hear the word "dago, wop, guinea," and all that, you know. We would fight. Oh, we fought all the time to protect ourselves. And some of these people that we fought with became our very dear friends in later life. Isn't that a funny thing? And that's how we got in—indoctrinated into some of the—this was the—the—not the south end but the east side of town where they're mostly all foreign, so to speak. But—

SIGRIST: As a child, how did that make you feel when—when—when the kids were making fun of you?

DEL GIUDICE: Well, I felt that—very proud that I was able to be an American. And they didn't act like Americans. I used to tell them. I says, "I act more like an American than you do. You calling me guinea wop." I said, "Don't you know that Columbus discovered this country?" My father told me. He said, "You get—don't fight," he says. Tell that and that'll sort of ease—ease them off. And it did. It did sort of ease them off. And when I'd say that, then they'd just walk away in disgust. [chuckles] But I used that as sort of a off-setting thing—

SIGRIST: What about your parents? Did they—in their early years here in the United States, did they experience any kind of prejudice because they were—they were foreign born or—

DEL GIUDICE: No, no.

SIGRIST: —didn't speak English well or—

DEL GIUDICE: They—they—they settled right there. After my mother got here, they settled right there in what we call Little Italy to—in those days. And they had no—no trouble there at all. In fact, they—my mother and dad enjoyed life very much. He was very active. He belonged to this organization. He started so many clubs and so forth. And I remember I used to go to the club, the Knights—sort of like the Knights of Columbus and so forth. I used to go with him and so forth. And I—many a—many a time I was told to give a speech in Italian. And he would write out a sort of a thing and I—he would correct a little bit and I would give these speeches. I never dreamed in my life that I'd go from one club to another giving speeches in Italian about different subjects, you see. And this is how I learned to love talking to people.

SIGRIST: Did your parents ever have friends that you remember that were not Italian?

DEL GIUDICE: [clears throat]

SIGRIST: Did they ever have any—n—early on?

DEL GIUDICE: The only ones is one—the people, the—the men that my dad worked with. He was with the street department. He retired from there. Then he became the foreman.

SIGRIST: I thought he was working in shoes in America? Didn't he—when he—

DEL GIUDICE: After he closed shop. He got rid of the shop. Then he worked with the street department and that's where he retired from.

SIGRIST: I see.

DEL GIUDICE: Yeah. Shoes was in my very early age. But [clears throat] I think—I don't know what reason, why he quit, but I think it—my mother used to say that he used to spend too much time in the shop working, working and working. And then he went with the street department, finally became a foreman. And in those days, they pick up these cans, you know, trash and so forth. And they had old horses, funny shaped containers, you know—carriages to throw the—and that's—I remember lots of times that my mother'd say, "Give this bag of sandwiches to your father." You know, and I used to follow him and give 'em to him. And he would eat besides getting his re—regular lunch. My mother certainly took care of her family, my—

SIGRIST: So did your father—when he worked for the street department, was he actually driving the horses that were picking up—

DEL GIUDICE: No, he didn't do any driving.

SIGRIST: What was—what was his job in the street department?

DEL GIUDICE: They had these little—what do you call these two-wheel things?

SIGRIST: Like a little—oh, like a little cart that he pushed?

DEL GIUDICE: Yeah, a—a two-wheel thing. They—they use them even today. And he'd put a barrel or two on it, take it from the front, put it on the curb. And when the wagon went by they'd take it, dump it in and put 'em back out, then have to take the barrels back.

SIGRIST: I see.

DEL GIUDICE: He did that for years until he became a foreman.

SIGRIST: Was there something about America that your mother and father had a difficult time adjusting to?

DEL GIUDICE: Only the language. My dad didn't find it too difficult. He—he spoke broken English with a—a German accent, a French accent. You know, words and—but he was—he was well understood. But my mother spoke better English than my dad did. I think it's because she had a lot of Italian ladies who were—were here long before she was. And she learned that way. But they were both very popular with—with people.

SIGRIST: You mentioned earlier that they learned their English from their children or from their associates. Was there any kind of formal instruction that they participated in?

DEL GIUDICE: No, no.

SIGRIST: Night school or anything like that?

DEL GIUDICE: No formal instruction. I used to go to night school, besides my regular school, to learn something else. And I didn't pick up any—much more. And then my mother and father used to say, "You don't go out at this time of—this time of the evening unless you're attended by a member of the family." And my father used to say, gee, it was too much for him to be with me, coming and taking me

too. So that's—at—at times, he would have friends of his come in and—and act as my teacher.

SIGRIST: What was the night school that you attended?

DEL GIUDICE: [clears throat] The Brown School.

SIGRIST: But for what? I mean, what were you learning in night school that you couldn't learn doing the day at school?

DEL GIUDICE: Mostly art—regular subjects. More for Americanization, like poetry. I used to love poetry. In fact, I have a book there. I—that I—can I show it to you?

SIGRIST: Well, no. Maybe when we're done.

DEL GIUDICE: Yeah, yeah. I—and I—I used to like to make speeches and so forth. My father used to belong to so many organizations. He'd say, "Here's the subject, son. Give me a speech on"—and I would do it. He'd correct it a little bit and he would do it. And—

SIGRIST: Did your parents become citizens?

DEL GIUDICE: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about that process of what—perhaps how you assisted them to become citizens?

DEL GIUDICE: I didn't assist him. He did it on his own. Now, he had friends who—

SIGRIST: This is your father?

DEL GIUDICE: Yeah. He had friends that taught him quite a few things. They were—they were born in this country, see. And I think he depended a lot—not depended, but he had so many friends that he—he didn't have to ask for anything. They would always be there for him when he needed something. And their own free will. Never—he never asked them. He was very proud of that. He said, "I don't ask anyone for anything. I learn my way myself." But he had very good friends.

SIGRIST: Do you know how old he was when he became a citizen?

DEL GIUDICE: I have no idea. It wasn't—

- SIGRIST: Were you still living in the house or was this long after you were gone?
- DEL GIUDICE: Oh, he became a citizen when we were living in our own home in—in—in East Hartford. See, he had two homes, one in Hartford and one in East Hartford. [clears throat] The one in East Hartford is the one he retired to. That's when we were all grown up and so forth. In fact, after he passed away, I was taking care of his—his business. I was the—what do you call it? Administrator. And I saw that the home went to one of my—one of my nephews. He's living in there now and he's—he bought it.
- SIGRIST: Did your mother become a citizen on her own or—
- DEL GIUDICE: Yes. She be—became a citizen same time that my dad did. They both—
- SIGRIST: Can you talk about her—
- DEL GIUDICE: Well—
- SIGRIST: —attempts at [unclear]?
- DEL GIUDICE: Well, my mother was wonderful in many ways. Because she was in South America where they spoke English off and on, you know, but she spoke the American language like—like an old-timer. My dad spoke with—every time he spoke he would have a little German accent, little French accent, little Italian accent. And everybody thought he was a greenhorn but he wasn't. He—too many languages. But I used to enjoy going out with him.
- SIGRIST: But your mother—your mother's attempt at learning whatever it was she needed to know to become a citizen—
- DEL GIUDICE: Yeah.
- SIGRIST: Did—did you participate in—
- DEL GIUDICE: Yes.
- SIGRIST: —helping her with that process at all?
- DEL GIUDICE: Yes, yes. Once she had to learn what it was all about, I was there to teach 'em, my father and my mother. No, they—they depended on me quite a—quite a few things. And I was proud to do that because they were so eager to learn about certain things. And I

heard my mother say more than once, she says, "Lee, you are not in Rome now. You're a citizen of the United States. Tell me what you should do." I'd have to—[chuckles] she had a flag in the corner. I'd have to—

SIGRIST: And how did you become a citizen?

DEL GIUDICE: I became a citizen when I was in my—just after—I was about 18 or 19, I think it was. And I found out that I wasn't a real American. I had to be a citizenized and all that, so I did.

SIGRIST: And what was the process that you had to go through?

DEL GIUDICE: Oh, the regular process, I guess.

SIGRIST: But what is that? Can you explain that for us on tape?

DEL GIUDICE: Well, learn the creed, I think it was, why I would—I had a—a friend of my dad, who was involved—he was an attorney. And he told me what to do and so forth, and I went along with it and it was no—no problem, really. And I, finally, after I hit high school, I didn't hear any more wop, dago, what have you. [chuckles] That I was quite—quite a different thing altogether.

SIGRIST: Did your parents ever want to go back to Italy, or did they go back to visit or—

DEL GIUDICE: No, they—all the people they loved are gone, Grandfather, my grandfather, grandmother and uncles and aunts and so forth. One time, I—my dad told me, he says, "Lee." He says—this was—I was at Buckley [PH] High. And just before I graduated, he says, "Lee, you're going to go to college. We have all the money put aside for you. You understand?" So I says, "Pop, wh—excuse me. Wh—what do you mean?" See, when I—I didn't do like other boys. After school, I would go mowing lawns, trimming bushes, shoveling snow or—and I give the money to my mother and she put it in a special account. Well, then I did other things. And I found out I had just enough to go through four years at Trinity. But I fooled them. I only had about two years, money for about two years. And I figured—by that time, I earned some more. I didn't want to be, let's say, a problem money-wise for my parents. Well, they were very upset that I wanted to be so in—independent. So I tell them—I said, "Look, Mom, Pop. Look. You saved all that money for me. I—I'll get along all right. Why don't you go to Italy, see some of your friends, some of the members of the family? I'd rather you do that."

Well, they discussed it. They did. They went back three or four times, spent about a month or so each time.

SIGRIST: Oh, so they did go back?

DEL GIUDICE: They did go back, yes.

SIGRIST: Do—

DEL GIUDICE: And they—they became sort of world travelers after a while.

SIGRIST: The first time they went back, did—did—did either of them ever tell you what it felt like to be back in Italy for them?

DEL GIUDICE: Well, I think the first time, they said that most of the people they knew were gone, mostly killed. See, my—my dad was in war, Tripoli and World War I so—but there were some relatives there. And they had a wonderful time. But they says, “Well, we’re Americans now. We could do things in America that we—that we’re able to do that we couldn’t do when we were in Italy,” you see. And—but they loved to go back there and I think the last time they went there there was no one there that they knew. They’re all—all gone, and mostly cousins.

SIGRIST: Have you ever gone back to Italy?

DEL GIUDICE: Not to see relatives.

SIGRIST: No, but I mean have you ever gone to Italy?

DEL GIUDICE: Oh, yes, yes. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Have you ever gone to see where you were born?

DEL GIUDICE: Yes, I went to Rome.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me what that felt like, if it felt—you know, did you feel an emotional connection to—to going there or not?

DEL GIUDICE: Well, I didn’t know exactly where in Rome—I—I was told when I was a boy. But when I went, I had a—a—a very odd feeling, ‘This is where I was born but I don’t feel like a Roman.’ [chuckles] And thank God. I have a place at 28 Country Club Road, or wherever it was that I would be living. I says no. I just had a different feeling altogether. But it was there, and here’s the best thing. We were there with a group, a few people. And it was a club you belonged

to. And everywhere we went, we went to Rome, the different cities, Venice and so forth. I would act as their interpreter, especially when they went into a shop to buy something. And I was—I saved them quite a bit of money. And here's a funny thing. When we ended up in—I think it was in France, a beautiful hotel there before we come home. And the guy gave us a four-room apartment, the most beautiful apartment I've ever seen. And this is all begotten by the people. They got together and said they wanted to pay me back for being so helpful. Well, we were told not to go anywhere. Pretty soon, we had a party. I think we—they had bought two boxes with 12 bottles in each box, champagne, the whole bit, food and all that. We had a wonderful time.

SIGRIST: Tell me what—in—in the course of your life, what do you think was the greatest advantage for you of having immigrant parents?

DEL GIUDICE: Well, [clears throat] the big advantage was there, being Americanized, becoming an American was a wonderful life too. But being an Italian too, I learned to appreciate things that the average schoolboy or schoolgirl didn't know too much about th—I already knew because my dad told me all about Italy and everything, Columbus, the whole bit. So when I came to learn those things I already knew them. But I saw them in a little different and a little better life because I got a directory from an—an Italian, so to speak. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: When you think of yourself in terms of nationality, how do you think of yourself?

DEL GIUDICE: I feel like a proud American that, regardless of what I've said or done in the past, am proud of one thing. I learned through my parents, my mother-in-law, father-in-law, all the people that I've loved, I learned quite a lot from. I learned that by practicing some of these things that were taught to me by well-meaning friends and members of the family, life is a heck of a lot better than I thought it would be. I found out that what they taught me was true, was right. And it's great. Now, when I was 16—I was 13, I had rheumatoid arthritis, a year in Hartford Hospital, a year in St. Francis, 13 and a half months at Children's [unclear] on Albany Avenue. I had my tonsils out. They said it was an—a—doing something to my system. Well, my father and mother told me, said, "Lee, the good Lord has you live for a reason." I remember that time after the doctor [unclear], he spoke Italian too. He was an Irish fellow, I think he was, a family doctor. After he saw me my heart ready to jump out of my chest. And he went into the next room. They thought they shut the door. It was open a little bit. And he said in Italian—

my father—says, “Mr. Del Giudice. I have bad news for you. I don’t think your son will go out the week. He’ll be gone before that.” Well, I’m still here. And I remember my 16th and 21st birthdays, “Son, if you can’t do any good for your fellow man”—that’s when they told me. And my dad was—he was about five foot, three. But he was small; he was a giant. And every time I said or did something, he would correct me. It got to the point where he wouldn’t correct me hardly at all after he says, “Now, you’re a big boy now. You ought to know what’s right and what’s wrong. If you don’t, “ he said, “you see this, I’ll give it to you.” [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Making a fist. [chuckles]

DEL GIUDICE: Making a fist, yes.

SIGRIST: Well, Mr. Del Giudice, I think that that’s a good place for us to end. We’ve gotten you through your immigration history and through your—your adaptation to America very nicely. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Leon—oh, I never did ask you what the L—what’s your middle name?

DEL GIUDICE: Louis. [PH] I was named after my godfather. [clears throat]

SIGRIST: Louis. Leon—

DEL GIUDICE: Louis.

SIGRIST: —Louis Del Giudice.

DEL GIUDICE: Uh-hmm.

SIGRIST: And today is Saturday, May 24th, 1997. And I’m here in Wethersfield, Connecticut. Thank you very much.

DEL GIUDICE: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]