

EI-907

ANTHONY CAETANO

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL SIGRIST

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TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: ELIZABETH ORCUTT

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RESIDENCES:

- **PORTUGAL: RUIVA VILLA**
- **US: FRESNO, CA;**

SIGRIST: Good afternoon, this is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Friday, July 11, 1997. I'm at the Ellis Island Recording Studio with Peter Ham, running the equipment. And I am here with Mr. Anthony August Caetano. Mr. Caetano came from Portugal in 1930. He came alone, and he was ten years old at that time. May we begin by you giving me your birth date please?

CAETANO: My birth date is February the 28th, 1920.

SIGRIST: And can you say for me your name, as it was when you were born?

CAETANO: My name was Antonio Au-- Augusto Mendes Caetano.

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SIGRIST: Can you spell Mendes, please?

CAETANO: M-E-N-D-E--[pause] D-E-S. M-N-E-- M-E-N-D-E-S.

SIGRIST: And is that hyphenated, is that connected to Caetano, or...?

CAETANO: No, no.

SIGRIST: Two separate?

CAETANO: They're two different family names.

SIGRIST: Okay. Can you tell me if you were named after anyone in your family?

CAETANO: Uh, I might have been, but I'm not sure. (laughs)

SIGRIST: Okay. What town in Portugal were you born?

CAETANO: I was born in a little town in Portugal in the middle of Portugal -- by a, by a mountain there they called Serra – Serra de Estrella.

SIGRIST: Oh my goodness!

CAETANO: Which is in the middle of Portugal. And it's a little villa called, Villa Ruiva, Portugal.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Ruiva for me [Laughing]?

CAETANO: R-U-I-V-A, Ruiva, and then Villa, V-I-L-L-A.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about, about your early childhood and growing up in Portugal?

CAETANO: Well, I – I grew up in Portugal until I was ten years old. Before I came to The United States.

SIGRIST: What are some of the memories you have of being a child in Portugal?

CAETANO: I was -- I was born -- my, my, my Dad had moved to, already emigrated to -- to The United States. Which left my Mother pregnant. And I was born in the - that little town when he was already in The United States as an immigrant --

SIGRIST: What was --

CAETANO: ...emigrant. So, I -- I remembered I'd -- I played with my Grandfather in -- the fields and...

SIGRIST: Do you know, um, what did your Father do for a living in Portugal before he left?

CAETANO: Well my -- my Dad was a laborer.

SIGRIST: He was a laborer?

CAETANO: Yes.

SIGRIST: And what was his name?

CAETANO: Arthur Mendes Caetano.

SIGRIST: And can you tell me a little bit about his personality?

CAETANO: He was, he was an outgoing person. He'd -- he played music, accordion. And he -- we had great -- . When I came to The United States we had great, great parties with people. You know, we used to w-- they did a lot at artwork and they'd get together with the neighbors and have parties and so forth. And I remember picnics and so forth.

SIGRIST: Did you ever see your Father before you got to the United States?

CAETANO: No, I did not because I wasn't born yet. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: What did you think when you first came to The United States and you saw your Father for the first time? What did you think?

CAETANO: Well when I first came to my -- to the United States with my Dad, my Mother immigrated ahead of me. I was supposed to come with my Mother -- my-- . But somebody else, I guess they -- they knew the -- the people that -- they bribed them or something. They -- and I was left in the town by myself. So finally, I finally came. My Mother came by herself to my Dad in -- in California, in Fresno. And I -- I was left behind with my Grandfather. And finally, I finally got on the quota. And they put me on the -- on the ship by myself.

SIGRIST: How long were you alone with your Grandfather...before you left?

CAETANO: I would say about -- about a year and a half.

SIGRIST: Oh, a long time!

CAETANO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What, first of all, what was your Mother's name?

CAETANO: My Mother's name was Beatriz De-Lemos.

SIGRIST: Can you spell De-Lemos?

CAETANO: L-E-M-O-S.

SIGRIST: De-Lemos?

CAETANO: De-Lemos.

SIGRIST: So is that D-I-L-E-M-N-O-S?

CAETANO: D, it's a D-E,

SIGRIST: D-E.

CAETANO: Hyphenated,

SIGRIST: Okay.

CAETANO: ...and then Lemos.

SIGRIST: Lemos. And, um, tell me a little bit about your Mother's personality?

CAETANO: Oh, she was a nice person.

SIGRIST: Yeah?

CAETANO: Everybody liked her, and she liked everybody. And they -- there always a great time.

SIGRIST: What were some of the things your Mother enjoyed doing in life, that gave her a great deal of pleasure?

CAETANO: Well, my Mother used to, she used to crochet. I remember a lot of good, nice pieces of crochet. And they'd -- they'd get together with -- with the women. And have parties at night and get together. And -- and I used to sneak in there and watch them! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Did she ever try to teach you to do anything?

CAETANO: Well, no. Just the regular, regular house chores and stuff like that.

SIGRIST: Did you have a certain chore when you were growing up in Portugal that was yours? That you were responsible for?

CAETANO: No one in Portugal; I don't remember. I used to -- I remember I used to play, you know. That's about it.

SIGRIST: Now you lived with your Grandfather after your Mother left,

CAETANO: Right.

SIGRIST: Whose father was he? Your Mother's father,

CAETANO: My, my Mother's father.

SIGRIST: Your Mother's father.

CAETANO: My Grandfather.

SIGRIST: Describe your Grandfather for me.

CAETANO: Oh, he was a great man. He'd – he spoke French. He used to speak French. And he had a great moustache. He was a sheepherder, and used to sell sheep. He'd buy, buy some sheep down the street. And then he'd go half a mile with the sheep and then he'd sell them again for more money! So he was a smart man. I remember him that way.

SIGRIST: Did you ever help with the sheep at all? A story that you can remember...

CAETANO: I'd, I'd help a little bit. Maybe, just a little bit. Not too much.

SIGRIST: What was your favorite thing to do with your Grandfather?

CAETANO: Oh, my – my Grandfather was great. He was -- he'd drink a couple of glasses of wine, right. And he'd send me to the store. And I'd go get him the wine, a bottle of wine for him. They'd give it to me because – I'd, I'd give it to him. But by the time I'd get home, I'd have a little sip of it and I'd have a little – little missing in the bottle. And my Mother -- at that time, she used to give me hell because I used to sip on the wine. And my Grandfather would say, "Oh, leave him alone. We'll get some more wine. What's the difference, he's alright." So.

SIGRIST: Now was there a Grandmother that went with Grandfather?

CAETANO: Ah, no. My grandmother -- right, I never did know my grandmother. She was, she died a little before I was born.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me the house that you lived in with your Grandfather?

CAETANO: I believe we had about, about three-bed-- three rooms. One bedroom, and a kitchen, and another small room.

SIGRIST: And what was the house made out of?

CAETANO: The houses were made out of stone. Very nicely put together. Made out of blocks.

SIGRIST: And what kind of a roof did you have on the house?

CAETANO: Some roofs, they had – they had some kind of a shingles on top. I think they was kind of tiles, stuff like that or...

SIGRIST: And do you remember any of the furniture in the house?

CAETANO: The furniture was, I remember just like old beds. I – I really don't remember that much, you know, but.

SIGRIST: You're doing a good job!

CAETANO: They were -- they were small. They were nice beds, you know, nice bedding.

SIGRIST: What kind of food did people eat in Portugal at that time? Like on a daily basis, what kind of food did you eat?

CAETANO: We had, we had a lot of vegetables. We'd -- we'd – we had -- my Dad, my Grandfather had land, and they grew vegetables. They grew corn and

cucumbers. And they had, they had olive trees. And so we ate good. I mean, and they -- we had meats. We had -- we had like sheep and goats and stuff like that and sometimes birds.

SIGRIST: Who did the cooking?

CAETANO: My, my Mother did the cooking.

SIGRIST: What was your favorite food as a child?

CAETANO: My favorite food? I think it was made out of milk. Something like -- like a -
- they make it out of milk like a pudding and stuff like that. It's kind of sweet. And -- and cheese. We made a lot of cheeses.

SIGRIST: Made your own cheese?

CAETANO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you describe how you did that?

CAETANO: They made cheese out of -- from -- from the goats, and a little bit of the cows.

SIGRIST: What religion were you?

CAETANO: Catholic.

SIGRIST: Catholic. And did you, how did you worship? How did you practice your religion at home?

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CAETANO: Well, we didn't. We actually didn't practice at home but we went to church every, every Sunday. And everybody get together. I – I -- especially on a Sunday. Every -- I remember everybody used to dress up a little bit, you know. Put their nice, little clothes on and...

SIGRIST: Do you remember any prayers in Portuguese that you can say on tape? A prayer that you learned as a child in Portuguese?

CAETANO: I know how to say them in American! [Both laugh] But I've forgotten in Portuguese.

SIGRIST: Okay, okay.

CAETANO: And I did have, I did have three grades of – of Portuguese school.

SIGRIST: That was going to be my next question; did you go to school in Portugal?

CAETANO: Yeah. I had three, four grades.

SIGRIST: Yup. Tell me what you remember about going to school as a boy. What, what sticks out in your mind about that experience?

CAETANO: Well, I remember the schoolhouse. And we had kind of high chair -- high benches. And the teacher, and he had a little stick. And if you kind of didn't pay attention a little bit, he'd whack you a little bit on the -- on the -- on your ear or on your shoulder, something like that. Or, or the palm of the hand a little bit if you're a little more, little more severe.

SIGRIST: Did that ever happen to you?

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CAETANO: No, not to me. But it happened to the other guys! I was pretty good!
[Laughing]

SIGRIST: Ah ha. Could your Mother read and write?

CAETANO: My Mother did not, my Mother could not write too much. But when she came to this country, she went to night school. And she learned how to, how to read. And she was a good reader. And she knew how to write her name, and everything else.

SIGRIST: So she really didn't learn 'til she got here?

CAETANO: But my Dad went to, did. But my Mother just knew a little bit in Portuguese, not too much.

SIGRIST: Right. What about your Grandfather? Could he read and write?

CAETANO: My Grandfather? I don't believe he did. He wasn't too much on it, but he was a very smart man.

SIGRIST: Smart guy?

CAETANO: Yeah. He might have went to school, but I don't remember. But he was pretty smart in math.

SIGRIST: Um, now you said your Father had been a laborer in Portugal. And he left for America when your Mother was pregnant with you. Is that correct?

CAETANO: Right, right.

SIGRIST: Where did he go when he came to America?

CAETANO: He came to...He had a brother. His brother was already here in Fresno, in a ranch.

SIGRIST: In California?

CAETANO: In a farm -- ranch, vineyard. So he -- he -- he joined his brother in Fresno and they both bought acreage, a vineyard in Fresno. So they were raising -- they raised raisins for drying. So they -- they worked at the ranch, farm there. Right.

SIGRIST: And what, how did your Mother support you while your Father was in America? I know you're living with your Grandfather.

CAETANO: Well, how did my Mother support?

SIGRIST: Yeah. Did she, did she get a job in Portugal -- I guess is what I'm asking.

CAETANO: It wasn't really a job. They had land, and they'd -- they'd work the land. And my, my -- my Grandfather used to help my Mother quite a bit. And my Dad used to send a little bit of money once in awhile from America. Not too much, but...

SIGRIST: What he could spare?

CAETANO: What he could spare, of course. There wasn't too in them days. I don't think they were making a dollar a day! A day, or three dollars a day that time. I don't know, I forgot.

SIGRIST: When you were a little boy in Portugal, how did you picture America? How did you think about America? What did you know about it?

CAETANO: Well, people used to talk about America. And some people used to say, 'Well, don't go,' or 'Go,' or not to go. But I already had relatives, and my Dad and mother were already in America. So I kind of didn't realize all what it would be. But I envisioned something strange, you know.

SIGRIST: When your Mother, do you remember what the day that your Mother left for America?

CAETANO: I don't remember the, really, the month now or the day.

SIGRIST: But I was, I was wondering not, not that so much, as I was wondering if you remember saying goodbye to your Mother?

CAETANO: Oh, I remember! Yes, I remember!

SIGRIST: What do you remember?

CAETANO: Oh, yeah. I remember because they took me with her to Lisbon to, for her to get a--, and we had relatives in Lisbon, Portugal, the capital. And she was to get a shi-- get on the ship there. And I stayed there a week with her. And then she left, and she left me with friends.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how you felt when she left?

CAETANO: Oh, I cried a little bit, of course. But she said I would join her pretty quick, which I did.

SIGRIST: She um, now where did, when she went to America, where did she go?

CAETANO: She went to my Dad, in Fresno.

SIGRIST: And what did she do when she got there?

CAETANO: She just was a housewife. You know, at the farm, at the ranch.

SIGRIST: I was wondering if she was expected to work on the ranch.

CAETANO: She probably helped out-, which I wasn't there until I came later.

SIGRIST: Well tell me what you remember about getting ready to leave Portugal. What do you remember about, just before you left, what you had to do to get ready to leave?

CAETANO: Well, I don't remember too much. They took me down to the, to the ship, and put me on the ship.

SIGRIST: Do you remember having to go to a doctor before you left?

CAETANO: Yeah, yeah. Yes, and I was in—they -- I did. And I remember now a little bit. And I was in good shape, you know. So I was okay to come.

SIGRIST: Yeah?

CAETANO: I was very, very healthy.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you took with you when you left Portugal? What did you pack to take with you to America?

CAETANO: I packed a lunch! They gave me a lunch! And when I got to the ship, you know,

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SIGRIST: What about clothes or personal objects? Did you take anything with you?

CAETANO: No, I didn't, I didn't. I don't remember. I might've had a couple, a little bit of -- a couple of dollars or something. You know in that, at that time. But I don't remember too much. Just that I remember my clothes.

SIGRIST: Now who took you to get to the ship?

CAETANO: I had cousins in, in Lisbon,

SIGRIST: Now do,

CAETANO: ...that put me on the ship.

SIGRIST: Now do you remember saying goodbye to your Grandfather before you left?

CAETANO: Oh yes, yes. See I left at; I left my Grandfather...He didn't come to Lisbon to the ship, but he -- I left him at home there.

SIGRIST: How did your Grandfather feel about you going to America?

CAETANO: Well, of course they cry. I remember they cried quite a bit.

SIGRIST: Tell me what the name of the ship was.

CAETANO: I remember it was a S.S. *Patria*. P-A-T-R-I-A, or something like that.

SIGRIST: And what does a little ten-year-old boy think we he sees a big ship like that?

CAETANO: Oh, it was great. It was kind of, you know, awesome. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: You said you were by yourself. Was there somebody who was sort of looking out for you, or?

CAETANO: Well, I was by myself. But they had, I had a note on me. Where I was going to come to in The United States.

SIGRIST: What do you mean, a note on you? Like in your pocket?

CAETANO: Yes. They had,

SIGRIST: That you're pointing to your pocket.

CAETANO: Yeah. That I was going go, I was coming to The United States. And some friends -- cousins of ours that lived in Rhode Island, Providence --they were to pick me up here in Ellis Island. So they, I spent about three days in, I mean, three hours in the Island here. And they examined me. I suppose for lice, or whatever. Or other diseases, if there was any at all. But I guess I was okay. And my relatives from Rhode Island came (they were my, on my Mother's side relatives) they came and picked me up and they took me to Rhode Island. And I stayed with them for about a month before I went to California.

SIGRIST: That's a lot for a little boy! [Laughs]

CAETANO: Yeah!

SIGRIST: To go around!

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CAETANO: I remember they picked me up, and they put me on a car. And I hadn't driven on, or ridden on a car, in a car for, that was probably the first time. And I was kind of, you know, amazed.

SIGRIST: Let me just back track a little. Tell me what you remember about being on the ship. What happened on the ship?

CAETANO: It was crowded. And we did have some bad weather – weather. Pretty rough.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what time of the year it was that you were travelling?

CAETANO: It could have been around December or January, or something. I don't know, I forget now. I'd have to look up in my, in the passport and --

SIGRIST: Where did you sleep on the ship?

CAETANO: We had some kind of a little bunk, you know, to sleep on.

SIGRIST: Were there other people in the room?

CAETANO: Oh, it was pretty crowded. Yeah, it was pretty crowded.

SIGRIST: Do you remember being up on deck of the ship?

CAETANO: Not too much. A couple times, but not, -- we had to be escorted on the — on top because it was – it was pretty r-- we had rough weather.

SIGRIST: Did you get sick?

CAETANO: No, I didn't. I don't remember that I got sick. I d don't think I did, but.

SIGRIST: Do you remember where they fed you on the ship?

CAETANO: Yeah. They -- I remember a little bit. They'd come around and feed you. They, you know, gave you a little bit. Once in a while they fed. But you had to use some of yours too, you know. Some of the food, but they kind of helped you a little bit. Not too much.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how long the ship took to get to New York?

CAETANO: I don't. I think it took probably about a month.

SIGRIST: Think it was a month?

CAETANO: I think it was about a month.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing The Statue of Liberty when the ship got to New York?

CAETANO: Yes, I do. I remember -- I remember seeing that. And I remember seeing -- I remember the building and The Statue, you know, as we came in to the building.

SIGRIST: You're talking about Ellis Island?

CAETANO: Yeah, when I came in, I...

SIGRIST: When now, when you said that when the ship came in, they brought you to Ellis Island to be picked up by the relatives from Rhode Island.

CAETANO: Right.

SIGRIST: You said they examined you. Does anything else stick out in your mind about being at Ellis Island?

CAETANO: Well, all the people being -- they were all sitting down in kind of benches. And I was pretty lucky. And they were all kind of sweaty, and tired, and everything else. Waiting, waiting in line to, to get out. And I remember that I went through it pretty, pretty fast. And when I did, and there was, as soon as I got outside, the cousins from Rhode Island they were contacting the authorities, I think. It looks like it to me right now. That's the way it was. And they gave me to them and I, I got on, on the automobile with them, they took me to... Providence.

SIGRIST: Can I ask, you know, you're a little boy; you're all by yourself. This is a big trip that you're going on. How, how did you feel inside about all of this? I mean, what kinds of emotions did it create in you, about being this little boy alone on a ship?

CAETANO: Well, I, I would, they told me to be brave so I think I was pretty brave. And I was pretty a little cocky, you know, so. And then went from Rhode Island, I went, I went to California. I went by myself again!

SIGRIST: You said you were in Cal-, I mean, Rhode Island for a month.

CAETANO: For about a month, and they put me on a train! With another note and, and cheese and bread and uh, to take with me on the, on the trip, on the, on the train. So I think I might've took about, what about a week to go on the train. It seems to me it was about a week or so.

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SIGRIST: What, what were some of the new things in America that you saw that you had never seen before? Either in Rhode Island or on the train going to California?

CAETANO: Well, I hadn't seen so many cars, you know. There were a lot of cars.

SIGRIST: Automobiles?

CAETANO: Automobiles on the street. And I hadn't seen Santa Claus, and I got to see Santa Claus for the first time in Rhode Island. And it snowed! I remember the snow in Providence.

SIGRIST: So you must have been in America before December, or before Christmas anyway?

CAETANO: That's why I say I think it was around Christmas. Around December or, you know.

SIGRIST: Can you just tell me a, quickly about, about what life was like with these cousins? You know, for that one month, what was your life like?

CAETANO: Oh, they, they – they treated me real good.

SIGRIST: Had you ever,

CAETANO: They took, they took-,

SIGRIST: ...seen them before?

CAETANO: No, I hadn't seen them. My Dad knew them, you know. They were the Venturas, in Rhode Island. Their last name were Ventura. And they took

me to the shows. They had, where they had acting to show, you know, performances of acting. They -- I think they also had family actors in the show, and they took me to them. They showed me Santa Claus for the first time.

SIGRIST: Did they give you a Christmas present that you remember?

CAETANO: I think so. Yeah, I did. Yeah, I got a, yeah. I think, yeah, I remember a little bit. They got me a little present.

SIGRIST: You go across country on the train. Tell me about seeing your parents once you got to California. How did you feel when you saw your parents?

CAETANO: Oh, it was wonderful. I, when I got there, I found I had a new sister!

SIGRIST: Surprise!

CAETANO: Yes, she was little. She was -- I think she was about, what, not even a year old.

SIGRIST: And what was her name?

CAETANO: Rose.

SIGRIST: Rose.

CAETANO: Rose. Call her Rosie! [Laughing]

SIGRIST: Well tell me a little bit, we have a few minutes left, tell me a little bit about once you got to California, what your life was like with your Mom, and Dad, and your sister?

CAETANO: Oh, the whole town come out and greet me at the, at the train station. And my Dad, and that first time I met my Dad. And it was great, you know.

SIGRIST: When you saw your Father for the first time, was he what you expected?

CAETANO: Well, I had seen pictures of him. So I knew what he looked like.

SIGRIST: So that helped a little bit?

CAETANO: Yeah. That helps quite a bit, yeah. But,

SIGRIST: Did they put you in school?

CAETANO: Uh, yes, I went to school. And I -- as soon as I started school, I jumped a couple of grades because I already had, I knew arithmetic and,

SIGRIST: Do you remember what grade they put you in initially?

CAETANO: I think they put me in third grade, or something like that, or. Yeah, third grade. And I finally graduated from grammar school. And I had a little bit of college and trade college.

SIGRIST: Tell me about learning English. When you first got, got to America, how did you learn English?

CAETANO: How did I learn English? [Both laugh] Just like almost everybody does, I guess! I just --

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SIGRIST: But how is that? Describe that to me. How it was that you started picking up the new language.

CAETANO: It was hard because I knew how to speak Portuguese. I didn't know how to speak English at all. But I, and the neighbors used to teach me. The school taught me, so.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what your first words were in English? What were some of the first words that you learned?

CAETANO: Well, they used to teach you how to say, 'mother' and 'father' and 'sister' and...

SIGRIST: Did your Mother and father learn how to speak English?

CAETANO: Yes, they did. They --

SIGRIST: You said your Mother went to, to school?

CAETANO: ...they went to night school. And my Dad also. My Dad spoke good English and my Mother also. After awhile.

SIGRIST: Did any of the other kids in school make fun of you because you weren't American?

CAETANO: Not too much. Not too much. I think, I think I was pretty lucky. I had a bunch of very nice children in school, you know, kids in school.

SIGRIST: Did you miss Portugal? When you first got here?

CAETANO: Not really, not really. But I've been back there a few times already.

SIGRIST: Uh huh. What was the first time you went back to Portugal?

CAETANO: The first time?

SIGRIST: How old were you?

CAETANO: I, I went back; let's see, about ten years ago. Nine years ago.

SIGRIST: That was the first time?

CAETANO: Yeah, first time I've gone

SIGRIST: And how did it make you feel to go back to Portugal? What did you feel like when you got there?

CAETANO: It was alright. It was okay, you know. I saw my cousins and stuff. I spent time with them and I...just two years ago; I went back on a cruise. And I, we stopped in. I stopped in Lisbon.

SIGRIST: Did you ever go back to the town where you were born?

CAETANO: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yes?

CAETANO: Yes. I went back in. The last time I went, I went for two weeks. And right to, where I was, to the house where I was born, and everything else, so.

SIGRIST: Did you become an American citizen?

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CAETANO: Yes, I did! I became an American citizen. I was, I served in the, in the war.

SIGRIST: The Second World War?

CAETANO: I got drafted when I was twenty-one. I went over to Australia, New Guinea, the Philippines, during the World War II. And I became, I was a citizen.

SIGRIST: And how, how do you think of yourself in terms of nationality? Do you think of yourself as Portuguese or American, or how...?

CAETANO: I, I, I do have Italian, also. My Dad was half Portuguese and half Italian. So I have a little Italian in me.

SIGRIST: A little bit of all three, I guess? [Laughing]

CAETANO: Yeah. Portuguese and Italian, so.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Um, well Mr. Caetano, thank you very much for letting me ask you these questions. You did a great job. And we're happy; we just don't find people from Portugal very much.

CAETANO: Thank you very much.

SIGRIST: Great. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Anthony Caetano on Friday, July 11, 1997, at the Ellis Island Recording Studio. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW