

EI-914

JOSEPHINE RICUPERO MILANO
BIRTH DATE: JANUARY 2, 1934
INTERVIEW DATE: JULY 29, 1997
RUNNING TIME: 41:21
INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.
RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME
INTERVIEW LOCATION: ROTTERDAM, NEW YORK
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 10/1997
TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

ITALY, 1937
AGE 3
SHIP NAME NOT RECORDED

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mrs. Milano is the sister of Carmella Martin, EI-913. 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, 8/14/1997.

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, July 29, 1997. I'm in Rotterdam, New York, and I'm here with Mrs. Josephine Ricup . . . I need to read it.

MILANO: Ricupero.

SIGRIST: Thank you. Ricupero Milano.

MILANO: Correct.

SIGRIST: Great. And Mrs. Milano came from Italy in December of 1937. She was about three years old at that time. And because of her sister's eye problem, they ended up at Ellis Island for a period of time. And I should say I just interviewed her sister, Carmella Martin, just a moment, we just finished a few minutes ago. Anyway, thank you very much for having me. I should say, for the sake of the tape, that we may hear a rather distressed pit bull that's whining across the street, one of the neighbor's dogs. Mrs. Milano, can we begin by you giving me your birth

date?

MILANO: 1/2/34.

SIGRIST: (he laughs) That's right. That's how it looks on paper.
January 2, 1934.

MILANO: That's so I don't forget.

SIGRIST: What do you know about the circumstances around your birth, like what happened the day of your birth or, if you know anything, if Mom ever told you, or Dad ever told you, or somebody in the family ever told you about it.

MILANO: No, but I do have a book, and I haven't read it. My daughter bought me a book on what happened on the date of my birth.

SIGRIST: No, but I mean what do you know about what happened in your family that day, if anything. Maybe you don't know.

MILANO: Outside of my birth, what else could be important.

SIGRIST: Where were you born?

MILANO: Locri, Reggio, Calabria.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Locri?

MILANO: L-O-C-R-I.

SIGRIST: And what do you know about that particular town?

MILANO: It's up in the mountain, uh, overlooking, Locri is overlooking all of Calabria. You could look out of your house and see all of Calabria. You could see the ocean. This is miles away, and it looks like a postcard, a picture postcard.

SIGRIST: Do you have any firsthand recollections of being there?

MILANO: No.

SIGRIST: Or little glimpses of memories.

MILANO: Uh, only what I've been told, that my mother would go down to, down to the ocean to wash the clothes. And I remember sitting at the edge. It was not sand, it was more like pebbles, soft pebbles. Now, I'm not sure if that's something I remember, or something that has been told to me, and I feel I remember. Outside of that, I don't remember too much.

SIGRIST: Well, let's talk about your parents. Let's start with your father. What was his name?

MILANO: Francesco.

SIGRIST: Francesco. And what do you know about his background, if anything?

MILANO: Uh, he was a mason.

SIGRIST: And you're talking about like a bricklayer.

MILANO: A bricklayer. Yes, yes. I believe he built the house that we live in in Italy. And from what I understand, it was a beautiful home. We were back, Carmella and I were back there a couple of years back. All that was there was the cellar.

SIGRIST: Carmella, your sister.

MILANO: Right. That's all that was left was the foundation with the old stove in there. I guess we were the first ones to have a real stove, and it's still there. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you know anything about his growing up, his childhood, or stories he would tell about . . .

MILANO: No, only because after we'd lost contact with each other . . .

SIGRIST: And that happened in the United States.

MILANO: He spoke, right. He spoke mostly Italian. He did speak English, but not to us too much. We didn't stay together, so he didn't talk too much about his childhood. I know he was in the navy, the Italian navy, and he brought, he came to the United States because of the war breaking out, beginning to hit Italy, and he wanted to get us out of there safe and sound. That's the reason we came.

SIGRIST: Do you know where he was living when you were in Italy, what city in America was he in?

MILANO: Albany, Albany. I'm not sure if he was living with friends. (she sighs) I know shortly after we got here he bought a house on Hamilton Street.

SIGRIST: Hamilton Street.

MILANO: Right, a two-family house. And, uh, that's where he stayed, actually, until his death about five years ago. I'm not even sure of what year he died.

SIGRIST: But fairly recently.

MILANO: Oh, it's been about five years, I would say.

SIGRIST: What about your mother? What was her name?

MILANO: Concetta Cinnani Ricupero.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Concetta?

MILANO: C-O-N-C-E-T-T-A.

SIGRIST: And then her maiden name?

MILANO: C-I-N-N-A.

SIGRIST: What do you know about, about her background and her upbringing?

MILANO: Only what I've been told, that she really, the marriage, I believe, was arranged.

SIGRIST: And we should say that she died when you were quite young, too.

MILANO: I was four years old when she died.

SIGRIST: Right, right. So I should . . .

MILANO: The only thing that I was told, I recall, that the marriage was arranged. She didn't actually want to marry my father. She was very young. She died when she was twenty-nine. She had four of us. (she sighs) She didn't want to come to America. She didn't want to leave her family. But because my father was here and the war was breaking out in Italy, she did come along.

SIGRIST: What family did she have that you know of in Italy?

MILANO: She had her mother and father, my grandparents. We had, uh, she had thirteen or fourteen brothers and sisters. I never thought to take the picture out. Uh, they have since all scattered. Some are in Canada. Some are in Italy still. One was in Australia, who died a few years ago.

SIGRIST: So she grew up in a very large family.

MILANO: Oh, yes, yes. I think she was the oldest of about thirteen or fourteen.

SIGRIST: Wow.

MILANO: Now, I say thirteen, I think her mother and father just took a boy in as their own because he had no one. And they took him in and raised him as their own. So I'm not sure if it was thirteen or fourteen children.

SIGRIST: Do you have any firsthand remembrances of your mother, because you were four when she died. Do you have any, or little glimpses of memory?

MILANO: Not really, not really. I'm sorry to say that. I really wish I could remember.

SIGRIST: You were very young.

MILANO: Right. But I really have no recollection of her.

SIGRIST: What, what do you know, if anything, about what life was like in Italy? What stories have you heard, and I know you've been back to see the actual place . . .

MILANO: My cousins, my uncles, yes, um . . .

SIGRIST: Just to get a feel for the type of life that your mother was leading.

MILANO: It was a hard life. Like I say, we had to go down to the ocean to wash the clothes. Now, if we were living in Locri, that was quite a distance. That was a long distance. And, uh, there were no cars then, so we had to walk. And if I was walking at that

age, she probably carried me most of the way. And it was all quite a steep hill.

SIGRIST: Did they have animals?

MILANO: Oh, yes. Everyone had their pigs and their goats and their donkeys. They traveled mostly by donkey. Their chickens, their fig trees. Uh, I believe my father, my mother owned olive groves because, uh, my father had to sell them, and we had to sign off so that he could sell them.

SIGRIST: He sold them once you were all here?

MILANO: Quite a bit later on. When I was, I would say, fourteen or fifteen, we all had to sign a piece of paper so that he could sell the olive groves.

SIGRIST: Well, that's interesting. How do you think your mother got those olive groves in the first place?

MILANO: Probably from my grandparents. They probably belonged to my grandparents. And I understand it was quite an extensive piece of land. But, uh, my father . . .

SIGRIST: Where does your memory kick in? What's the first thing you remember in your life, your earliest memory, or a little glimpse of memory.

MILANO: Okay. My, not much of family. My earliest recollection was when I went to St. Vincent's Home For Girls.

SIGRIST: And how old were you then?

MILANO: I was four.

SIGRIST: Tell, just tell me briefly how that happened, what happened up to that point that would have brought you to the . . .

MILANO: My mother, it was my younger sister's Christening, and my mother evidently had a heart attack. We were taken to this girls' home. My sister Theresa, who was five at the time . . .

SIGRIST: She was born in Italy.

MILANO: Yes, she was five. So we were taken to this girls' home, and we were young, the only language we spoke was Italian, and here's all these people around us speaking a language that we didn't know, and I wet my pants. That is the first thing I remember, going to this home for girls, and I wet my pants. And I knew I was trained. It was just such a shock. But we did have this one nun there, a wonderful nun. She spoke Italian. So she helped us with that transition of the Italian to English. And naturally when you don't have anyone speaking your language, you have to learn the other language, and fast.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about that process? How did you do it?

MILANO: It's just something you had to do. Like I say, this nun made the transition easier. She would take us aside and talk to us in Italian and translate it for us so we could understand a little bit that we going on. And I think being a young age, you learn faster. I couldn't do it now.

SIGRIST: Do you remember some of the first words or ideas that you, that kind of clicked in to help you?

MILANO: No. All I think was fear, being taken away from my mother, my father. Even my younger sister, the two of us. Carm stayed home

for a while.

SIGRIST: We should say that Carmella's the oldest.

MILANO: Carmella's the oldest.

SIGRIST: She was, she was eight when you arrived in this country.

MILANO: Right. She stayed home with my father for quite some time. My sister that was just three months old, she went to a home for babies, uh, St. Catherine, in Albany. They took care of infants.

SIGRIST: And what was the name of that sister?

MILANO: Annemarie.

SIGRIST: Annemarie. And she was born in this country, right?

MILANO: She was born in July of '39, and my mother died in September of '39. So she was born to the, she went to St., no, St. Catherine's Home For Babies. And she stayed there until she was five. Then she came in St. Vincent's. You had to be five in order to go to St. Vincent's. Even though I was only four, my sister Theresa was five, so they didn't want to separate us, so the two of us went to St. Vincent's. And Carm, she came to St. Vincent's later on because of, uh, brutality, can I say? Abuse?

SIGRIST: She was still living with your dad.

MILANO: Yes, abuse. Uh . . .

SIGRIST: Did he have a hard time after your mother died?

MILANO: Yes, I'm sure he did. He drank heavy, and being a parent myself, I can almost understand it. Uh, like he said, he used to say one

minute he's got a house full of people, his children, all his friends. The next day he's alone, no children, no one. And that's got to be hard for a man. I did go through something similar. My husband died as the result of an auto accident when my children were young. I did not turn into an alcoholic. So that part of the scene, I can understand. You have to deal with things as they come to you. You don't indulge in alcohol. You don't mistreat your children because of it. So I can understand how he felt, and yet I've been through the same situation. But you don't abuse your children for it. You don't shut them out.

SIGRIST: What memories of your dad do you have? You know, when you were young and at St. Vincent's, what kind of interaction did you have with him?

MILANO: Well, for a long time we had no interaction. We didn't even know we had a parent. A friend of ours would come up, or a friend of my mother's would come up and ask if our father had visited us. We didn't even know we had a father living, because he didn't come up for a long time. Uh, then the one time, he got very drunk. He came up and started pushing the nuns around, wanted to get us out of there. They hid us because he was drunk.

SIGRIST: Hid you?

MILANO: Hid us in another room so that he couldn't get to us because he was so drunk, and very forceful. After that we started going home on a Sunday. He would sleep while we were home, and just give us money to go to the movies. He said that he had to work two jobs, so he needed to sleep. Which was fine, we had . . .

SIGRIST: Was that true? Was he working two jobs?

MILANO: Probably.

SIGRIST: He was doing masonry work?

MILANO: Right. But, uh, so he would sleep, we would eat dinner, then he would give us money to go to a movie, and he would go to sleep. We'd come back from the movie, kiss him goodbye. I can remember crying that I didn't want to go back to St. Vincent's, that I wanted to stay home with him, and he would just shut me out. Not realizing St. Vincent's was the best place I could have been at that time.

SIGRIST: My question would be to you why didn't you want to go back to St. Vincent's Hospital and that environment? What were you thinking?

MILANO: Because I wanted to be home with my father. The home was beautiful.

SIGRIST: St. Vincent's?

MILANO: Yes. The nuns treated us with care. We had three meals a day. Uh, we went hiking, we went rollerskating. We had a huge yard. Everything we wanted. More than we would have had at home. They were kind. They listened to you. Uh . . .

SIGRIST: You mentioned one sister who had been so good at teaching you English.

MILANO: Oh, Sister Mary.

SIGRIST: Sister Mary. What other ways did the nuns try to help children who had come from difficult families to cope with this very different kind of environment? I mean, it's like a big orphanage.

MILANO: Well, I don't remember anyone else coming from another country that did not speak the language. I think we were the only ones, that I can remember, that couldn't speak English.

SIGRIST: So that was one way she helped, by helping.

MILANO: Yes.

SIGRIST: But what were some of the other ways that the nuns tried to make you or the other children comfortable in those surroundings, in that environment. Because that must be very frightening for a child to be put in a situation like that.

MILANO: Yes. Uh, they would get us in groups and talk to us and tell us stories, like a mother would. They would give you a hug when you needed it. Uh, they would give you a treat when you did something nice. For instance, this one nun, Sister Rosemarie, you do something, you do this little job for me, I'll get a nice treat for you. Well, the treat would be bread with butter and a lot of sugar. (she laughs) Which was a treat for us. Or an apple. Uh, or some kind of fruit. But, uh, no, they tried to take the mother's place, but . . . (she sighs) A mother is a mother.

SIGRIST: In terms of being an immigrant child, once you learned English, how conscious were you of the fact that you had actually been born in another country?

MILANO: It didn't really seem to make a difference. Once we learned the language, we were just part of the group. And I really don't remember how difficult it was to learn that language. All I know was that we picked it up eventually, and now I've lost the

Italian language.

SIGRIST: Did you know that you still had relatives in Italy?

MILANO: Not at that time.

SIGRIST: Not at that time.

MILANO: Um, I knew we had relatives in Canada, but I didn't know how they were associated. Like this one, my Uncle Tony, he used to come down and see my father once in a while. I knew he was my uncle, but I didn't know, a relative, but I didn't know how. I didn't realize this is my mother's brother. I never knew that. Uh, he would come down. But they spoke Italian, and by then I wasn't speaking Italian.

SIGRIST: What did your father speak to you when you saw him?

MILANO: This is your uncle.

SIGRIST: No, but I'm saying when you did see your father, was he, did he speak to you in Italian or in English?

MILANO: Most of the time it was yelling.

SIGRIST: In what language?

MILANO: Italian, Italian. We knew it was yelling and swearing, but he didn't talk much. He never talked much about life, what he went through. It wasn't till after I got married and had children of my own that he would mention one day I had the whole family here, the next day I've got no one. But, uh . . .

SIGRIST: Did he ever mention to you, when you were still children, that he was going to take you back to Italy?

MILANO: No.

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

MILANO: He did go back, quite often. Uh . . .

SIGRIST: And what did he do when he went back? I mean, was it just . . .

MILANO: He had a house he stayed at, his own house. Uh, like I say, he went back the one time to sell the property that we had acquired from my mother. (she sighs) When Carm got married, he went back there the same time and got married the same time. He married my stepmother, which she was a wonderful woman, a wonderful woman. Had he married her sooner, life would have been different.

SIGRIST: How old were you when he remarried?

MILANO: (she sighs) Let's see. Fourteen, fifteen?

SIGRIST: Oh, you were still, you know, a girl.

MILANO: Yeah. Fifteen. Well, I got married at seventeen.

SIGRIST: Did he meet this woman in Italy?

MILANO: Yes. I believe it was a distant cousin, so he knew her from years before, and she had never been married. She was thirty-seven or thirty-nine when they married, and she had never been married.

SIGRIST: Did he bring her to the United States?

MILANO: Yes.

SIGRIST: What was your reaction to her?

MILANO: (she pauses) I think resentment. Not because he married her. Different things that she did bothered me. Like she would go outside on the steps, and on the stairways going down to the first floor, she would go out there and spit. That bothered me. Uh, if I had anything nice, it would be packaged up and sent to Italy. You know, at that age, I was babysitting, buying my own clothes. Next thing I knew, I didn't have it. It would be gone to Italy. I didn't need it, was the word that she said.

SIGRIST: Well, now, how, were you living with them at that time?

MILANO: Yes.

SIGRIST: How long were you at St. Vincent's?

MILANO: Well, we went, when I was four we got out, let me see. How old would you be in eighth grade? Seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth.

SIGRIST: Uh, twelve?

MILANO: Twelve.

SIGRIST: Thirteen?

MILANO: Eleven or twelve, my father took us home. We were home for about a year and, uh, we were visiting friends, my sisters and I, we were just walking. I forget what we were doing. We came home, my father had locked the door and would not let us in. And this was seven, eight o'clock in the evening. It's not like we were out gallivanting. My younger sister with us, she was five years younger than me. If I was twelve she was what, seven? Uh, he locked the door and would not let us in. A neighbor took us in. The next day we went back to Catholic Charities, and we went

back to St. Vincent's, stayed there for a couple of years, and then they found out my father went to Italy. My father used to claim he was a pauper, so he was not paying for us to be in St. Vincent's. Catholic Charities was footing the bill. They found out he went to Italy, wanted to know where all this money was, found out he had money, took the money away, because we'd been in St. Vincent's all our lives, and he never paid a dime. And then we had to go home again, because he wasn't going to pay. So we went home again when I was in, let me think now. Eighth grade I was home, because I was going to St. Anthony's school then. So I was home eighth grade, and then we went back in. I went through two years of high school, I believe, in St. Vincent's. Then I went home again. That's when they said we had to go home. I met my husband. I've known my husband. His sisters were in the home with me.

SIGRIST: Oh, so you met, you met . . .

MILANO: So I knew my husband from his sisters. They were at the home with me. Uh, I went home. I saw his sisters one day, and they told me that he was in the army and would love to get letters from different people. So I wrote to him. He wrote back. When he came home he came to see me. We started dating. When I was sixteen he gave me my diamond. A sixteen-year-old getting a diamond! Quit school, went to work to save for our wedding, which was the following year.

SIGRIST: Now, his name obviously was Milano.

MILANO: Phil.

SIGRIST: Where was he born? In the United States, or Italy?

MILANO: He was born here. Uh, his father was born in Italy.

SIGRIST: I see.

MILANO: But he was born here.

SIGRIST: His first name was Phil.

MILANO: Phil. Okay? We saved for our wedding. That's what I say, I quit school to save for our wedding, which we paid for ourselves. We went to the store to get the drinks, even, and my father out-fumbled him. I never had a wedding cake. We had cookies. Never had a reception. I just had the wedding that my husband and I paid for. We had drinks at the house, and my stepmother gave us, brought us cookies, Italian cookies. I tried to understand my father, so I would go and see him once in a while, and I would force Carm to go see him. I can understand how she would feel, how she felt when she went down. I'm sure she told you what she went through.

SIGRIST: She had a difficult time.

MILANO: Yes, yes. And it was hard for her to go down and visit him, and make like she enjoyed him. But, then again, I figured he is our father, and he did go through a difficult time, and just wasn't strong enough to do the right thing.

SIGRIST: You know, being, because you were so young when you came, so I'm sort of assuming you kind of Americanized fairly quickly.

MILANO: Right.

SIGRIST: On top of whatever emotional conflicts that were with your dad, how about, how did you feel about having a father who was an

immigrant on top of all of this, you know? Was there any kind of embarrassment or, or . . .

MILANO: Oh, no, no.

SIGRIST: Of that side of it.

MILANO: No. We lived in an area, it was all Italian. So just like, everybody was Italian, you know. That whole community was Italian. Everybody must be Italian. No, that . . .

SIGRIST: So that wasn't ever . . .

MILANO: No, no.

SIGRIST: Anything you thought about.

MILANO: No.

SIGRIST: You said that your husband's father was born in Italy.

MILANO: Right.

SIGRIST: Was he alive when you married?

MILANO: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: How did he feel about his son, if you know, how he felt about his son marrying someone who had been born in Italy?

MILANO: I don't think it bothered him. I think the only . . .

SIGRIST: He might actually have been very happy about it.

MILANO: Right. I think the only thing that bothered him was that we were so young. I had, let me see, we got married in June. I turned seventeen in January, my husband had just turned nineteen in May.

So here I was seventeen and nineteen. I think that's the only thing that bothered him. But as far as marrying an immigrant, no, I don't think it bothered him at all.

SIGRIST: Did you, as you were growing up, and even when you were first married, did you, did you even think of yourself as being an immigrant? Was that something that even crossed your mind?

MILANO: No. No, I was American. I spoke the language. Uh, I wish I could speak Italian now, but I didn't think of myself as being different. I was just one of the group. They never made you feel different. You were a part of their family. And the nuns were like that. I mean, now if they give you a hug they'll probably be arrested. But they thought nothing of giving you a hug when you're feeling down.

SIGRIST: You mentioned one of the nuns could speak Italian. Were there any other foreign or nuns there, Irish nuns, or . . .

MILANO: Oh, not that I know of. I don't even know if Sister Mary was foreign born.

SIGRIST: But she could speak Italian?

MILANO: She spoke fluent Italian.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

MILANO: Maybe her parents, but she, she was a godsend.

SIGRIST: How do you think that experience, those years at St. Vincent's, how do you think that has affected you life?

MILANO: I think . . .

SIGRIST: In good ways or bad ways.

MILANO: I think it was a good experience. They brought us up well. Of course, even being brought up well, you can go astray. But, uh, they made you strong. Well, I think with each heartache, you become stronger. Each little problem in life makes you that much stronger.

SIGRIST: Fluffy wants to be on tape, too. (referring to the dog barking in the background on the tape)

MILANO: Right.

SIGRIST: Was there a point in your life, in your adult life, where you became more aware of your Italian background, or was there a point in your life where that became more important to you? In some ways it doesn't seem like it was even anything you even thought about.

MILANO: No, I really didn't.

SIGRIST: Right. But was there a point later on, maybe, you know, when you were having your kids, or whatever, that you suddenly become more conscious of that?

MILANO: I think when my uncle came from Italy, my father's brother.

SIGRIST: When was that?

MILANO: 1956. That's when I was in the hospital having my son.

SIGRIST: Was that your first child?

MILANO: No, that's my second child.

SIGRIST: Name your children for me.

MILANO: My daughter Linda, she was born in 1952. I was married in '51, by the way. She was born in 1952, my son Phil was born in 1956, and my son Pete was born in 1961.

SIGRIST: So it was, the middle child was . . .

MILANO: Phil was the middle child, and that's when my uncle came to America.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: And what about him had an effect on you?

MILANO: Knowing that I had family, outside of my father. And he was a good man.

SIGRIST: The uncle was.

MILANO: Yes. My father and he were like day and night. He was a good man, raised nine children, and he was good to his children.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

MILANO: Joe.

SIGRIST: Joe.

MILANO: Giuseppe.

SIGRIST: Giuseppe. And tell me what seemed foreign about him, or what, what was unusual about him that clicked inside of you, if anything.

MILANO: He just seemed so kind, gentle, loving. I could tell, well, his family didn't come over till later on, and I helped him get his

house in order for them. And there's another family that didn't speak a word of English. And I helped make the transition for them. They would come to my house, and I should have picked up the language then, but instead they picked up our language. I would show them different things, and they would tell me in Italian, and I would tell them in English. And, uh, eventually they did go to school and learn the language. But, uh, they would come to me if they needed help, because we were so close. We were only about a block apart. And it was just so different having, seeing them together, and the way our life had been. My uncle was just a sweetheart. We used to be up there almost every Sunday, visiting with them, and he just loved having us. Up until he died, in fact, we would be there every Sunday. Our children made First Communions together, went to school together.

SIGRIST: Do you think that having been an immigrant yourself, do you think that gave you a certain sympathy for these people?

MILANO: An understanding.

SIGRIST: An understanding.

MILANO: Right, yes. Sympathy, no. Uh, because by that time they had a nice life in Italy.

SIGRIST: Maybe empathy is a better word, an understanding.

MILANO: Right, an understanding. Right.

SIGRIST: Right.

MILANO: But they did fabulous here, fabulous.

SIGRIST: When was the first time that you thought you might like to go to

Italy?

MILANO: When I got married, I thought some day my husband and I would go.

SIGRIST: And what was it that you wanted to see?

MILANO: Where we lived. Uh . . .

SIGRIST: And why did you want to see where you had lived?

MILANO: Because I had been told it was such a beautiful home. And my father had built it, and that it was really a beautiful home. Well, as it turned out, it wasn't there.

SIGRIST: Well, the foundation was.

MILANO: The foundation was still there.

SIGRIST: And the stove. (they laugh)

MILANO: So it must have been a strong building.

SIGRIST: Well, when you went to Italy for the first time, what year was that?

MILANO: Oh, my goodness. It's got to be about five years ago.

SIGRIST: So fairly recently. I mean, not that long ago.

MILANO: Right. Well, we just met our, we just found our family. Did she tell you how we went to Italy?

SIGRIST: Carmella?

MILANO: Yes.

SIGRIST: Just tell me briefly.

MILANO: Okay. My uncle, now, my mother's brother, who lives in Australia, went to Canada to see his brothers and sisters that are living there. He had a neighbor in Italy that moved here to Albany. He called the neighbor, said he would love to visit with them and see if he could locate his sister's children. She asked him what the name was, and he told her Ricupero. Well, there's no way they would have known us, except they knew my brother, Ricupero. They knew us, but they didn't know our married names, okay, so they could never have gotten hold of us, but they knew my brother. They called my brother and told him that my uncle was coming to visit them and would like to find us. That's what happened. They came down, we met, I brought them up here. My aunt and uncle from Canada were here. And ever since then, we've been to Italy, we've been to Australia. We go to Canada every year.

SIGRIST: Do you remember that first time you went to Italy and you were actually there, like looking at the foundation of this house. Do you remember if you, what you felt when you were there, if anything?

MILANO: (she sighs) I don't remember feeling any, anything different. I don't remember being there, even. Not, I was there at that time. I don't remember being there when I was little. And, like I say, we must have walked for miles to get to the ocean, or I was probably carried, but I don't remember anything about it.

SIGRIST: So when you were actually there, there was no great emotional connection to what you were looking at?

MILANO: No, no. I believe there was for Carm, but not for me.

SIGRIST: How do you think your life would have been different if your family had stayed in Italy?

MILANO: Oh, different? Well, the war was going on. And yet most of my aunts and uncles lived through it, that are still there. I have two uncles and aunts that are there, well, uncles, and married aunts. They lived through the war. Uh, but you never know. I have no idea what my life would be like.

SIGRIST: That's a hard question.

MILANO: Right.

SIGRIST: I know.

MILANO: I'd be working the farm, I'm sure, because my cousins do. They have huge farms. They work the farms. They have their pigs that they slaughter every year, and they have their donkeys. They have the cars now, too, though. So I think the donkey is just a figure, or maybe just to get around the farm itself. And my uncles seemed to have a nice life. Now, my one uncle lives right in Calabria. That's near the ocean. You can walk to the ocean from his house. Where we were, we were up in the mountains. My uncle there had a beautiful home. It was all marble. He had, I guess they didn't have running water.

SIGRIST: When you were a kid.

MILANO: Right. Now they've got beautiful spring water, and all they want.

SIGRIST: What part of your personality do you think is Italian? What part of Josephine Milano is truly Italian, what part of you?

MILANO: The farm. I love gardening. I love getting my hands in the dirt. Uh, I'd rather be out there than in here cleaning. I think that part of me, and the strength. The strength I have, I think, is Italian.

SIGRIST: Strength? What kind of strength do you mean? Emotional strength, or . . .

MILANO: I think emotional.

SIGRIST: I mean, you're not talking about physical strength?

MILANO: Well, that, too. I have physical strength. But I think that's because of what I've done. But emotional strength, I think, is my Italian heritage. As I say, I lost my mother, went into a home, lost my husband. Anyone else would become an alcoholic or a druggie. I think my emotional strength kept me from all that. I raised my children. My children today will call me on father's day. "Happy Father's Day, Mom." I received a gift and a card from my daughter. "Happy Father's Day, Mom." Because from the time my youngest was five, I raised them alone. And that's where I can't distinguish between me and my father, why he couldn't do the same. Is it different for a man? I had to work. Carm was old enough where she probably could have handled, not Ann. She couldn't handle Ann. She was only a baby. But she could have looked after us during the day.

SIGRIST: What did you do in your life that you're the most proud of?

MILANO: Raised three nice children, three wonderful children.

SIGRIST: That would be the answer. (they laugh)

MILANO: They're all doing well. They're married, they've given me seven

grandchildren. Outside of that, you know, I keep a nice yard, halfway decent house. (they laugh) Livable. Uh, no, I'm very proud of my three children.

SIGRIST: Great.

MILANO: And I think they're my best asset.

SIGRIST: Well, I hope they enjoy hearing that when you get the tape.

MILANO: I hope so, too.

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

MILANO: Thank you.

SIGRIST: You did a great job. You answered all my questions. And, uh . . .

MILANO: I know I was a little vague, but . . .

SIGRIST: No, I think you gave us a very interesting perspective of what it was like to be a very young immigrant child thrown into rather difficult circumstances, and how a person copes. I think it's a good interview.

MILANO: Thank you.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Josephine Milano on Tuesday, July 29, 1997, in Rotterdam, New York. Thank you very much.