

EI-934

JENNIE (VINCENZA) GRAZIANO GUDDEMI
BIRTH DATE: JULY 22, 1910
INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 10, 1997
RUNNING TIME: 45:06
INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.
RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME
INTERVIEW LOCATION: WOODCREST CENTER
NEW MILFORD, NEW JERSEY
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 2/1998
TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

SICILY, 1926
AGE 16
SHIP NAME RECALLED AS "THE VESUVIO"

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: A vacuum cleaner can be heard in the background of this recording. 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, 10/7/1997.

SIGRIST: Good morning. My name is Paul Sigrist.

GUDDEMI: And my name is Jennie Guddemi.

SIGRIST: It's nice to meet you, Jennie. I'm from the National Park Service at Ellis Island. Today is Wednesday, September 10th.

GUDDEMI: Right.

SIGRIST: 1997.

GUDDEMI: Right.

SIGRIST: Right. And I'm at the Woodcrest Center, and this is New Milford, New Jersey, I believe.

GUDDEMI: Right, right.

SIGRIST: And, um, Jennie came from Sicily in 1926 when she was sixteen.

GUDDEMI: I was sixteen, right.

SIGRIST: Now, Jennie, can we begin by you giving me your birth date?

GUDDEMI: I'm born July 26th, 1910.

SIGRIST: And where in . . .

GUDDEMI: 22nd, not 26th. 22nd.

SIGRIST: July 22, 1910.

GUDDEMI: '10, right.

SIGRIST: And where in Sicily were you born?

GUDDEMI: In the South of Sicily. My home town name is Santa Ninfa.

SIGRIST: Santa . . .

GUDDEMI: Ninfa.

SIGRIST: Ninfa. Can you spell that?

GUDDEMI: Sure. N-I-N-F-A. N-I-N-F-A.

SIGRIST: N-I-N-F-A.

GUDDEMI: Right.

SIGRIST: Okay. And you said that's in the south of Sicily.

GUDDEMI: In the south, right.

SIGRIST: I see. And what was your name when you were born?

GUDDEMI: Ah, my name when I was born was Vincenza.

SIGRIST: Vincenza. And what was your maiden name?

GUDDEMI: My maiden name is Graziano.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

GUDDEMI: G-R-A-Z-I-A-N-O.

SIGRIST: G-R-A-G-I-A-N-O.

GUDDEMI: Z, no G, Z. Z-I-A-N-O.

SIGRIST: Gragiano?

GUDDEMI: Graziano. No Gragiano, Graziano.

SIGRIST: Okay. Um, G-R-A . . .

GUDDEMI: Z-I-A-N-O.

SIGRIST: Okay, okay. And, um, did your mother or your father ever tell you a story about the day you were born?

GUDDEMI: No. My mother died when I was three years old, my father died when I was five.

SIGRIST: So you were young when both your parents died.

GUDDEMI: Yeah, I was very young. Yes. I don't remember my mother for nothing. My mother's name was Maria.

SIGRIST: Maria.

GUDDEMI: And my father's name was Pietro.

SIGRIST: Pierre?

GUDDEMI: Pietro.

SIGRIST: Oh, Pietro. Do you remember what your mother's maiden name was?

GUDDEMI: My mother's maiden name was Corcso.

SIGRIST: Corcso?

GUDDEMI: Corcso, yes.

SIGRIST: C-O-R . . .

GUDDEMI: C-O-R-C-S-O.

SIGRIST: Okay, Corcso. Well, who, who raised you?

GUDDEMI: My aunt, my father's sister.

SIGRIST: Your father's sister.

GUDDEMI: Her name was Eleanore Graziano.

SIGRIST: And tell me what you remember about your, your father's sister.
How do you remember your aunt?

GUDDEMI: She was a wonderful person. She was very good. My mother left
three girls. I was the youngest. My two brothers, they were in
this country. My older brother became like a father to the whole
family. His name was Onofrio Graziano.

SIGRIST: Adolfo?

GUDDEMI: Onofrio.

SIGRIST: Oh, Onofrio.

GUDDEMI: Onofrio Graziano.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Can you name all your brothers and sisters for me?

GUDDEMI: Yeah. My oldest sister's name was Marguerita. My second sister
was Frances. And I was the youngest, and my name is Vincenza.

SIGRIST: And then Onofrio was your oldest brother.

GUDDEMI: My oldest brother.

SIGRIST: And what was the other brother's name?

GUDDEMI: John.

SIGRIST: John. Giovanni.

GUDDEMI: Giovanni, right.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Um, so your, the three sisters, you and your two sisters, lived with your aunt.

GUDDEMI: With my aunt, my father's sister.

SIGRIST: Right.

GUDDEMI: She was single. She never got married. Both sisters, they were both together, and took the children together in the house and took care of us.

SIGRIST: And you said she never married.

GUDDEMI: No, both the sisters are both single.

SIGRIST: Both sisters were single. Can you describe for me the house that you lived in?

GUDDEMI: There was one room on the first floor, and there was one room, when you were inside, there was a bed, in one corner, the corner was his bed, which my uncle used to sleep in this one. He had a big bed. And then in the front the babies was in the bed, which my aunt and my uncle would sleep there. And there was another room on the second floor which was two beds. My sick sister stayed in the bed, my second sister and I, we sleep in the one bed together. We used to hug each other so we didn't fall off the bed, because there was no sides in the bed, and we used to hug to each other we don't fall off the bed.

SIGRIST: So you had to hug each other to stay on.

GUDDEMI: To stay on the bed, yes.

SIGRIST: Well, what, when you say a bed, what kind of a mattress did the beds have at that time?

GUDDEMI: Oh, they was just regular, regular mattress, regular, nothing, nothing fancy.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any other furniture in the house?

GUDDEMI: Uh, this big furniture, (Italian). It was a little island in the sea, with a couple of (?). I remember I used to climb up to the bench to go up, to go to the top. And on top this piece was loose. So I took out the piece, and inside there was one book,

one very big book. And I read in the first page, my grandfather was a very educated man. And each son that was born to him, he used to write down the date, the day, the hours, the year, everything. And on top was, he did this way. (Italian) my son Winston. That was my father's brother. And there was the day, the date, I don't remember the day or the date, exactly. And then was my uncle, my father's name, was Peter Graziano, Pietro Graziano, in Italiano, they called him. My poor father. He was driving those things from the town to the country with the wagon, because they didn't have no cars at those times. They used to all send the wagon. The horse got wild and started to run. The woman in the wagon started screaming, "We're gonna die! We're gonna die!" My father was a very courageous man. He jumped in front of the horses to stop the horses. The horses stopped after they killed him. My father was killed by the horses.

SIGRIST: That's how he died.

GUDDMI: That's why he died, yes.

SIGRIST: Do you have any memories yourself of your father?

GUDDMI: No, no, no memories. I don't remember, I don't think I remember.

Those days when anybody die in the street they're not allowed to take to the house and pay respects. They got to take it straight to the cemetery. And my aunt and my uncle, my father's sister

and my father's brother, they took us to the cemetery to say
goodbye to my father. I remember I was the youngest. They sit
me on their lap. And I call my father, "Papa, Papa, (Italian)."

(she is moved)

SIGRIST: When you lived with your father's sister, your aunt, did she have
a job outside of the home?

GUDDEMI: No, no, no, no. She was the housekeeper. She was a very good
person. My father's sister was a wonderful, wonderful person.
But she didn't have no job outside, on the outside. In olden
time, there was no such thing. She used to have, house, take
care of the house, take care of us. She was a very good person.

SIGRIST: That's what women did in this town, they only worked in the
house.

GUDDEMI: They worked in the house. She used to make homemade, once a
week, homemade bread, and we used to make fresh pasta every day.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how she made pasta?

GUDDEMI: I used to make it, I used to put the flour on top of the board,
and I used to put the circle in the center with my finger, I put
water, and then I mix them up until it was cut, was not too soft,
not too hard. Just nice to work it out and make it nice and
smooth, and they used to make it. My aunts used to make it like

a roll, one roll. And they used to put it on top of the bed with a tablecloth to rise. They can rise it, and then they can bake it in time to raise it, two times bigger than when we make them.

And my sister, she was good to bake, to make the oven, because they didn't have no electricity, no nothing, to make the oven at, she used to put with the wood. She used to cut away with this thing, called the (Italian). And they cut the wood into small piece to start the fire. And then when they started, the fire was started, I used to put the big piece, and we used to cook on top of there.

SIGRIST: And then how would you serve it?

GUDDEMI: Maybe just, like pretty, we'd make it like pretty, with about this much big.

SIGRIST: That's like two feet around.

GUDDEMI: Yeah. And we used to put the, the spaghetti there, whatever that was, (Italian). My sister was good to cut it. I never was good for it. My sister used to go over there with the big knife. She'd go tic-tic-tic-tic and she used to cut it, the dough, very thin. When you used to make it for soup, could make split peas or lentil soup, and they used to make it like that, in the soup she'd put it. They have this bread, oh, it's about this much big. And we used to put it in the soup, in the bottom of the

plate, and we used to eat it like that, with a spoon.

SIGRIST: So the bread held the soup?

GUDDMI: No, the dish held the soup.

SIGRIST: The dish, I see.

GUDDMI: Not the bread.

SIGRIST: And you ate the bread with the soup. I see. What about meat?
Did you ever eat any meat in Sicily?

GUDDMI: No, not much meat, not much meat. Very little meat. Not much
meat. Very little. Very, very little meat.

SIGRIST: Did you have any animals that you kept.

GUDDMI: We used to have a chicken. We used to have a chicken coop.

SIGRIST: A chicken coop. And . . .

GUDDMI: And I remember we used to buy the eggs and put in the chicken
soup, and the chicken was laying on the top of the, the egg.
Then the little baby chick was coming out to the egg. It was so
cute. When they went out the chicken, it would make its way out
of the egg. And like it was yesterday, it was so cute, I used to
love to watch them, the little chicken come out to the egg. And
we used to feed them with the, I used to give a little

breadcrumb, and a little seed, until they get big.

SIGRIST: And then what would happen when they get big?

GUDDEMI: We used to put them aside, and they know they got inside, they used to do inside whatever they would, and then we used to call them pee-pee-pee-pee-pee, and they used to come back into the house and go back into the chicken coop. They were so cute.

SIGRIST: So you even let them come into the house.

GUDDEMI: Yeah, let them come into the house.

SIGRIST: Ha-ha.

GUDDEMI: In the little chicken coop, and they know just the way they got to go. Just like human being, they used to know just where they got to go, to the rest of the chicken coop. And they used to fool, when the babe. My uncle, everything, they used to always, I used to live with my uncle and my aunt. And then my uncle stayed in the country. And he used to make his own grain. And they used to put, when there was grain enough they used to cut it, bring it to this press, and these horses, they go round and round the thing, and the seed comes out, out of this big, and then with these things, it was round, a round thing. And they used to put the, the things there, and they used to shake it and shake, and the grain would stay on the top, and all this juice

comes out in the bottom.

SIGRIST: You're saying grain, right?

GUDDMI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Right, grain. So they're shaking the grain through.

GUDDMI: And the grain stayed on the top, and all the soil used to come out from the bottom.

SIGRIST: And what did they do with the grain?

GUDDMI: They used to go, they used to go to this place with the machine, they used to shake them, and they used to ground, and then they used to have these great, big things. They used to have that, with three legs, used to put these great big things in the center, and they used to shake them. All the soil used to come out, but the grain would stay inside. And then we used to wash them, and there was these things. They used to call me, I can bring it. We used to make, out of straw. We used to put them inside, in the sidewalk, and put the grain next to the wash to dry them up. After dry them up, we used to put them into the machine to ground, and then this other thing. They used to call them the (Italian). And we used to shake them, and the soil used to come out from the bottom, and the grain would stay inside.

SIGRIST: This sounds like a lot of work.

GUDDEMI: Yeah, it was a lot of work, yeah. It was a lot of work, yeah.
It was.

SIGRIST: Tell me about, um, since we're talking about food, tell me about
what you would eat for a special occasion.

GUDDEMI: Oh, I really didn't know what's the special occasion.

SIGRIST: What about for a holiday?

GUDDEMI: We used to, we used to have a chicken, we used to kill the
chicken. We'd wash them off. We used to wash them off with salt
in the water outside until the skin was nice and white, then we
used to cut them in the center and take all the inside, except
the liver. We used to use the chicken liver, it was very tasty,
very good. And all the things, we used to get the inside, we
used to throw them in the garbage pile. And then we used to make
the bread. We used to put this in top, with this board.

SIGRIST: Yes.

GUDDEMI: About this wide.

SIGRIST: That's right. I think you described this for us.

GUDDEMI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah, yeah. So bread was really important.

GUDDEMI: My sister, she used to be good at making bread.

SIGRIST: Did you ever help your sister make bread?

GUDDEMI: I was too busy to make bread, but she used to be good to make bread.

SIGRIST: She did it all the time.

GUDDEMI: She did it all the time, and she used to make the fresh pasta every day.

SIGRIST: Well, what was your chore around the house? What were you responsible for doing?

GUDDEMI: I was, I liked to sew. I used to make all my dresses, my sister's dresses.

SIGRIST: Who taught you how to sew?

GUDDEMI: My aunt.

SIGRIST: And is there something that you remember today that you made back then?

GUDDEMI: I used to like to do embroidery work, very, very fine embroidery work. I used to have a cousin, she'd teach me. She used to make

very fine embroidery work. I used to make very fine embroidery work.

SIGRIST: And what would you embroider onto? What were you decorating with the embroidery?

GUDDEMI: It was a design. It was marked with the, it was all a design. And then we used to follow the design. And they gave us embroidery thread, and we used to have this stitch, we used to put the goods in the stitch. And then we used to put with nail. First we used to put a couple of stitch, like in basting. And then after over there, embroidery thread, used to make this, and used to put the design.

SIGRIST: And was this on the clothes that you wore?

GUDDEMI: No, no, no, no. Not in the clothes.

SIGRIST: Where would that be?

GUDDEMI: They used to make it, they used to have the bed in those days, and you receive the sheets. They put the one with the embroidery on top, and the two on the center to make the bed look centered.

SIGRIST: I understand. Tell me a little bit about when you were a little girl in Sicily, did you go to school?

GUDDEMI: I did go up to the third, to the third grade, yes.

SIGRIST: To the third grade.

GUDDEMI: I wanted to go so much, I was too busy. I wanted to go so much, finish all the grammar school, but I couldn't finish because I had a bug in my head.

SIGRIST: A bug?

GUDDEMI: Yeah. And, uh, in fact, to come in this country, my brother had to take a special patience, because whenever those things in your head, they lay eggs, you know. In this country see somebody, they get some kind of cream. They put cream onto my head, and it used to kill all the bugs. But the egg, they stay in the hair, and that won't come off until you cut the hair off. In fact, I was left back three times before I came in this country, and my brother had to get a special kind made to let me come in this country. Because my sister come every day to shave. Her head was clean. But mine, it wasn't, because my sister never touched my head. I used to have hair there. My sister hair long up to her waist. And it was parted there in the center. I used to make one braid on one side, and one braid on the other side. But my hair never grow so long. I used to make my, I had long, I went to the (Italian), we called them. That's the dressmaker, and I went to her, and she teach you how to make a dress. I used to make my dress and my sister's dresses. I become a very good

dressmaker. I used to make my coats, my dresses. My brother open up a coat factory. My brother was a tailor. And he open up a coat factory, and I learn how to make coats.

SIGRIST: Was that here in America?

GUDDEMI: No, in the . . . It was in this country, yes.

SIGRIST: That was later.

GUDDEMI: In the, in Pittsburgh.

SIGRIST: Is there a dress . . .

GUDDEMI: No, in Brooklyn, it was in Brooklyn. In Brooklyn.

SIGRIST: When you were still in Sicily, was there a dress that you remember making?

GUDDEMI: No. I couldn't make it, because I was too young to make a dress. I didn't know how.

SIGRIST: I see. That came later on then, yeah. But you said that you had bugs in your hair.

GUDDEMI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How did you wear your hair back then? What color was your hair?

GUDDEMI: My hair was dark brown.

SIGRIST: Dark brown. And how long was it?

GUDDEMI: My hair never grow too long. It was up to my neck, covering the back of my neck, that's all. My sister, she had hair long up to her waist. And they used to call my sister every morning, and I make it, I used to part my hair, and my sister would stand at the back. I used to make one in the back, and one on the side, and one braid on the other side.

SIGRIST: I see. Um . . .

GUDDEMI: When we came in this country, my brother had a beauty parlor, a barber shop and a beauty parlor. He cut my sister's hair, and he put in his window, just the way it was, with the braids.

SIGRIST: You mean cut her braid off?

GUDDEMI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And he put the braid in the window.

GUDDEMI: In the window, yeah. But my hair never got so long. In the old, it was cut, it used to go in the back of my neck, that's all.

SIGRIST: When you were a little girl in Sicily, what religion were you?

GUDDEMI: I was Catholic.

SIGRIST: Catholic. And what do you remember about how you practiced your religion at home?

GUDDEMI: Well, every night we'd say a prayer.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of those prayers?

GUDDEMI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you say one in Italian for me?

GUDDEMI: Yeah. It goes like this. I sleep in this bed, with Mary next to me. (she prays in Italian) I used to say that every night, every night. And then when it was finished, my aunt used to say (Italian).

SIGRIST: Thank you for saying that. You've remembered that for a long time.

GUDDEMI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: (he laughs) When you were a little girl, what did you know about America?

GUDDEMI: Nothing. Nothing at all.

SIGRIST: How did you think about America when you were still in Sicily?

GUDDEMI: I was thinking that in this country the people, they're picking

off a banana tree. And everybody was thinking the same way. Because my brother, he was in this country, my older brother, and they had two aunts. My father's sister, she was single, both sisters living together, both sleep in the same bed, and they took our three little girls there in the house and take care of us. My father's sister, and my father's brother. They were two wonderful persons.

SIGRIST: And they both never married.

GUDDEMI: They're both single.

SIGRIST: And they lived together.

GUDDEMI: They both sleep in the same bed. And maybe this house, one room on the first floor which was the maid's room, dining room, and the one corner was the kitchen.

SIGRIST: Why did you want to come to America?

GUDDEMI: Because my brother was here, and he wanted me to come over here.

SIGRIST: Was this Onofrio that was here?

GUDDEMI: Onofrio Graziano, yes.

SIGRIST: He was here in America.

GUDDEMI: He was here, yeah.

SIGRIST: Where was he living in America?

GUDDMI: He was living in Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

SIGRIST: Was he, was he sending money back to the family, or . . .

GUDDMI: All the time. All the time. He used to take care, in fact, I had two aunts. My father's sister, which she lived with us, but my mother's sister, she thought she could do better. She used to go look for a couple with no children to give us away.

SIGRIST: Your mother's sister, you're saying?

GUDDMI: My mother's sister, yeah.

SIGRIST: Your mother's sister, uh-huh.

GUDDMI: And I still remember it like it was yesterday. She used to come to the door and tell my aunt, "I've got a couple of (?), my niece." My aunt, she was taking care of me every day, and I take her to (?). And we used to ask the (?), also we just, "Come and see, Esther is here." And we used to play every day. Every night, every night, before we'd go to sleep.

SIGRIST: Right, what you just did.

GUDDMI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about getting ready to leave Sicily? What did you have to do before you could leave Sicily?

GUDDMI: My brother did all the thing, he did all the paper, everything. For me, he did, my brother was a very bright man, my older brother.

SIGRIST: This is the brother that you said before sort of became the father for your family.

GUDDMI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Well . . .

GUDDMI: His name was Onofrio Graziano.

SIGRIST: Before you left Sicily, did you have to have a medical physical?

GUDDMI: Oh, yes. In fact, I was left over two times because I had those things in my head, those eggs in my head. Because my head was clean, but when you got the egg, when you got those things, they lay eggs in your hair. And those, they don't come off.

SIGRIST: That's right. We call them lice in America.

GUDDMI: It's called (Italian).

SIGRIST: What is the word?

GUDDEMI: (Italian)

SIGRIST: Yes, in Italian.

GUDDEMI: In Italian, yeah. In fact, on account of those things I was left three times, I was left back three times before I came in this country. And when one of us came in this country, we went straight to Pittsburgh.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: Well, wait, don't tell me yet. Let's get you to America first. What did you pack to take with you when you left Sicily?

GUDDEMI: Well, we didn't have much to take, really. A couple of underwear, underdresses. We didn't have much dresses, because I was dressed in black from three years old until I was sixteen. I came in this country dressed in black. When my brother, he met me, he came in the back of the boat, and he hug and he kissed me. I was his little sister. In fact, when I was in Italy, I returned my father sister, which (?). But my mother's sister, she had two sons and two daughters, which they were with the family. She could take her (?), but she didn't want to bother. She made her family, and she didn't want to bother with nobody. And she used to go look all over the town for a couple with no

children to give us away.

SIGRIST: Yes, you told me that, yes. Do you remember saying goodbye to your father's sister before you left Sicily?

GUDDEMI: I think she was dead. She died.

SIGRIST: She had already died.

GUDDEMI: The old lady was dead, yeah.

SIGRIST: How old were you when she died?

GUDDEMI: I was three when my mother died, I was five when my aunt died, and I was seven when my father died. My poor father died with an accident. He was driving these people from the town to the, to the country to cut the grapes.

SIGRIST: That's right. You told me this already, yeah. Um, uh, do you remember getting on the ship to come to America?

GUDDEMI: Well, I told you, I was left back two times because I got, on account of those things on my head.

SIGRIST: But when you finally were able to go, where did you go to get on the ship?

GUDDEMI: We went to Palermo. From Palermo we had to take it from my home town that's named Santa Ninfa, to Palermo. From Palermo we went

to go to Naples.

SIGRIST: You went up to Naples. Do you remember anything about that trip, going up to Naples? Does anything stick out in your mind?

GUDDEMI: No, because we were in the train. We came with the train. We went up in the train, and we came to Naples.

SIGRIST: Were you traveling alone?

GUDDEMI: With my sister.

SIGRIST: Which sister was that?

GUDDEMI: My second sister.

SIGRIST: Who was?

GUDDEMI: Her name was Frances. Frances.

SIGRIST: Frances. And she was coming to America with you?

GUDDEMI: Yeah. She came to America. And she was kind of sorry, she was not to bride, and the fellow (?). And that I come, I come with my sister. I came mother and daughter. I was working when I come in this country. First I went to Pittsburgh.

SIGRIST: Okay, wait. Let me, do you remember the name of the boat that you came on?

GUDDMI: I think it was Vesuvio, something like that?

SIGRIST: The Vesuvius?

GUDDMI: Vesuvio.

SIGRIST: Vesuvio, like the volcano. Um, what can you tell me about being on the ship? What sticks out in your mind about that?

GUDDMI: I really don't remember exactly.

SIGRIST: Do you remember where you slept on the ship?

GUDDMI: In this cabin. There was a bed, and my sister and I, we put to sleep in the same bed. I got to reach out I don't fall off of the bed, because there was no side on the side of the bed.

SIGRIST: That's when you were sleeping in Sicily.

GUDDMI: Yeah. When we was going away on the boat, we both sleep together.

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

GUDDMI: Seven days.

SIGRIST: Seven days.

GUDDMI: Seven days, yes.

SIGRIST: Did you get seasick?

GUDDEMI: Well, a little bit. Not, I don't remember exactly, but I think I got seasick a little bit, yeah.

SIGRIST: Does anything else stick out in your mind about being on the ship?

GUDDEMI: No. Of course, some of the people, they didn't want to have nothing to do with my sister and I because we had those things in the head, those . . .

SIGRIST: The bugs.

GUDDEMI: No bugs. They was the egg, the egg in the head.

SIGRIST: The eggs.

GUDDEMI: And preferred they stay from us. And the people, they don't associate. I had this friend, her name was Vincentina, like my name, and we become a very good friend. And this egg (?) and she started (?) on my shoulder. And one day I was walking around, and she was a very good friend of mine. She make me the (?). I walk together, and she see those that was walking under my handkerchief. She says, "Oh, you got bug in your hair? I don't want to be your friend no more." She dropped me, and she walk away from me.

SIGRIST: How did you feel when that happened?

GUDDMI: I feel very bad about it, very, very bad about it. I was almost crying.

SIGRIST: Well, let's go back to the boat. Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when the ship came into New York?

GUDDMI: Yes.

SIGRIST: Did you know what that was?

GUDDMI: No. In Italy they was talking about the, everybody was talking about the Statue of Liberty. That's what I know about it, because everybody was talking about it.

SIGRIST: So you recognized it when you saw it.

GUDDMI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And did you have to go to Ellis Island before you were released?

GUDDMI: I don't think so. No, I don't remember that. First I went to Brooklyn.

SIGRIST: Your brother met you.

GUDDMI: My brother met me at the boat.

SIGRIST: And he took you to Brooklyn?

GUDDMI: And he took me to Pittsburgh. He was living in Pittsburgh.

SIGRIST: Oh, he took you to Pittsburgh instead.

GUDDMI: Yeah. But my sister-in-law, she grow up with a mother and a father, and her mother sent her to school to be a dressmaker, and she didn't realize that there were two young girls growing up with my uncle with no mother and no father. And she (?) me, by she's talking to (?), and I'd like to live there. I had another brother who was living in California. I wrote to my brother, I told him that I don't want to stay in Pittsburgh. He came, he took, he went to Brooklyn first, and there he rent an apartment across over there, they stay with those six-family house, two apartment on each floor. And in the apartment, I (?) with two more pisan. And when I first get off of the boat, he took me there, my sister and I, he took me there. We became very good friends. There was two people. It was brother and sister, single, like I live, and they live together.

SIGRIST: What did you, when you first got to America, what things did you see that were different than what you had been used to?

GUDDMI: I thought it was heaven. I thought I was going to go to heaven. Everything was beautiful over here. Everything was beautiful. There's no other country like America. When I get off of the

boat and my brother make (?) on the boat, go and see my brother, he hugged and kissed me, and he wouldn't let me go. He was such a good brother, my older brother. He became like a father to the whole family. But I was the youngest, and I had two aunts. My father's sister, we lived with her. But my mother's sister, she thought she could do better.

SIGRIST: When you left, when your brother met you and, do you remember the first night that you spent in America?

GUDDEMI: No, I don't remember that.

SIGRIST: Okay. Did you get a job when you first came to America?

GUDDEMI: No. I think in Pittsburgh there was no industry that a young girl could go to work. That's what I was going to say. I had another brother, he was living in California. I wrote to my brother and told him I didn't want to stay in Pittsburgh. I wanted to go to New York City. I know (?). So he took a cab, he took my sister and I to New, to Brooklyn. And in Brooklyn he rented an apartment across the hall from two more pisan, which became a good friend. And a little later (?) Dress Shop, I went to work there, and I become a good dressmaker. And just make my sister, my dress, and my sister's dress, too. And my brother opened up a coat factory, and I went to work with my brother, and I learned to make coats. I used to make my coats and my sister's

coats, too. Because my sister was not too ambitious to learn. She was a good housekeeper. She was good to make homemade bread. She used to make very beautiful homemade bread, delicious bread, but she was no good to sew. But I learned to become a good dressmaker.

SIGRIST: How did you learn English?

GUDDEMI: I learned English because when I came in this country my brother told me, "You better forget about the language," they used to call it talking Italy. "This is America, and they speak English over here." And he teach me how to speak English.

SIGRIST: How? How did he teach you to speak English? Do you remember?

GUDDEMI: Uh, he told me that they were, what the words mean, the words that we're saying.

SIGRIST: Do you remember some of the first words that you learned?

GUDDEMI: No, I don't. He used to say to me, the (?), we call it (?) in Italian. What do they call this here? (?)

SIGRIST: So he would, like, point to something and say, "This is what it is in Italian, and this is what it is in English."

GUDDEMI: Yes, right, right.

SIGRIST: Do you remember ever trying to speak English and making a mistake?

GUDDEMI: I used to make a lot of mistakes here, because I never did go to school in this country.

SIGRIST: Could your brother speak English?

GUDDEMI: Oh, yeah. My brother was a very bright man. He speak English very good.

SIGRIST: Did you miss Sicily when you were here in America?

GUDDEMI: No, not much, because it was a very miserable life there. No, I didn't miss Italy for nothing. To me this country was like heaven, that I go to heaven. I love this country since I came here, as soon as I get off the boat. Like I say, first I went to Pittsburgh. But my sister-in-law, she was tricking my sister and I just like two dumbbell, like that. So I had another brother that was in California.

SIGRIST: Did you, um, did you get married in the United States?

GUDDEMI: Yes, I got married in the United States, yes.

SIGRIST: How long after you got here did you get married?

GUDDEMI: Well, I came in this country when I was sixteen, and I got

married when I was in thirty.

SIGRIST: When you were thirty?

GUDDEMI: Yeah. I had a very good husband.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

GUDDEMI: Sammy Guddemi.

SIGRIST: Sam Guddemi. And where was he from?

GUDDEMI: He came from the same town that I come.

SIGRIST: From the same town in Sicily.

GUDDEMI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How did you meet Sam?

GUDDEMI: It was a good friend of my brother, and (?) they used to have this club. All the pisan, they used to go, they used to call the (?) club.

SIGRIST: When you say pisan, you're meaning other people from Sicily?

GUDDEMI: The same town, from the same town.

SIGRIST: From the same town, even? Uh-huh.

GUDDEMI: Yeah. And my brother in the (?), he used to come home and bring

his friend home with him. And I used to make coffee, and always make a couple of cakes, and that's where I met my husband, through my brother. (she coughs) When I first laid eyes on him, I knew he belonged to me, and nobody could take him away from me. We got married. (she coughs) Excuse me.

SIGRIST: Take your time.

GUDDEMI: And we had a good life together, a beautiful, beautiful life. He treated me like I was queen, and I treat him like he was a king.

SIGRIST: How many children did you have?

GUDDEMI: Only one son.

SIGRIST: And what is his name?

GUDDEMI: Joseph.

SIGRIST: Joseph.

GUDDEMI: A good son. I got a picture there.

SIGRIST: Did you ever go back to Sicily to visit?

GUDDEMI: Every honeymoon my husband took me to Italy, yes. After we got married, we took a trip to Italy. My aunt used to have a beauty parlor and used to make good, and they would give the money to take a trip to Italy. We went to my home town.

SIGRIST: How did it feel to go to your home town?

GUDDEMI: Good. It's wonderful.

SIGRIST: Did it look different to you at all?

GUDDEMI: One thing I remember, when I was there, and I was an orphan with nobody, nobody wanted me. But when I went with my husband, everybody says, "You stay with me, you stay with me, you stay with me." Everybody wants me. But I don't stay with nobody over there. I was there with one cousin, which she was good to me when I need her. She used to come every day, comb my hair, see if I need anything. And her name was Marguerita Graziano.

SIGRIST: So when you went over there everyone kind of made a fuss over you?

GUDDEMI: Yeah. Everybody wanted me to stay with them.

SIGRIST: Yes?

GUDDEMI: But I don't stay with nobody, except with this cousin that she was good to me when I was there.

SIGRIST: Did you become a United States citizen?

GUDDEMI: Oh, yes, I did. My brother, he would take care of those things, and then became, I make a citizen, but the only thing I (?). But

somebody stole all my paper, my citizenship paper. Everybody take, took everything in the package, it's empty there. You see my passport there, my birth certificate, everything, all the papers used to be there, and somebody took everything out. In this place these people, they be digging, digging. I had a pair of pajamas, and they (?) in the drawer.

SIGRIST: You're talking about here in the nursing home.

GUDDEMI: In this room.

SIGRIST: When, when, um, when you think of yourself in terms of your nationality, do you think of yourself as being Sicilian or as an American, or how do you think of yourself?

GUDDEMI: How I think of myself? I love this country. I know everything was different in this country, and I like the way they live in this country better than in my home town. And they, I learn to love this country. There was no other city like America. This is the best country in the whole world.

SIGRIST: Good. Well, Mrs. Guddemi, that's a good place for us to end, I think.

GUDDEMI: That's the way I feel. The best country in the whole world.

SIGRIST: I want to thank you very much for letting me ask you these

questions. I appreciate you letting me . . .

GUDDEMI: It's my pleasure.

SIGRIST: It was fun. You have a great memory. You did a good job. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Jenny Guddemi on Wednesday, September 10, 1997.

GUDDEMI: Right.

SIGRIST: At the Woodcrest Center in New Milford, New Jersey. Thank you very much.