

**EI-942**

**JOSEPH DELISSIO**

**BIRTHDATE: SEPTEMBER 22, 1901**

**INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 19, 1997**

**AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 95**

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**INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.**

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**ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: JONATHAN**

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**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:**

**BORN U.S., RETURNED FROM ITALY, 1907**

**AGE: 6**

**SHIP:**

**PORT: NAPLES**

**RESIDENCES:**

- **THE US: BRADFORD, PENNSYLVANIA**
- **ITALY: CASSANO**

LEVINE: Let's see, today is September the 19<sup>th</sup>.

DELISSIO: I think so.

LEVINE: 1997, and I'm here in Lincoln Park at the Lincoln Park Intermediate Care Center.

DELISSIO: That's right.

LEVINE: With Mr. Joseph, Giuseppe, right?

DELISSIO: Yeah, that's it.

LEVINE: Delissio.

DELISSIO: Yeah.

LEVINE: And Mr. Delissio was born in the United States in Bradford, Pennsylvania.

DELISSIO: Correct.

LEVINE: But then he returned with his mother and his, and his younger sister.

DELISSIO: No, she wasn't born then.

LEVINE: She wasn't born, so you just returned with your mother.

DELISSIO: With my mother because she, she was pregnant.

LEVINE: Okay.

DELISSIO: But she was considered an American citizen.

LEVINE: I see.

DELISSIO: Because my dad was a citizen.

LEVINE: I see, so the whole family became citizens under your dad's citizenship.

DELISSIO: Right.

LEVINE: And, and so, Mr. Delissio will talk more about why the family went back, but just to say, that then, in September 1907, Mr. Delissio, his mother, and his younger sister came back to the United States and came through Ellis Island.

DELISSIO: Correct.

LEVINE: At the time of this interview, Mr. Delissio is ninety-five and will be ninety-six next week.

DELISSIO: Correct.

LEVINE: And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Okay, Mr. Delissio, if you would start by saying your birth date. Birth date.

DELISSIO: My birthday was September 22, 1901.

LEVINE: Okay, and the town you were born in.

DELISSIO: Well, I was born here, I wasn't born out in Europe.

LEVINE: Okay, you were born in Bradford, Pennsylvania, right?

DELISSIO: Bradford, yeah, that's where my dad was living.

LEVINE: Okay, now maybe if we could, what, what was your father's name?

DELISSIO: John.

LEVINE: John. Okay now, your father came here

DELISSIO: As a man, a young man. He was only about, I would say about seventeen or eighteen years old.

LEVINE: And was he, was he married to your mother at that time?

DELISSIO: No. See, when he came here as a young man, the first thing he did he was looking for, for, for work, and there he met my mother's first brother. That's how they, the, the marriage came into being, so he became very close friends with my dad, who was single at the time, and he said that, that he had a sister in Europe and that he would send for her and then when she came here, he would, he would marry

LEVINE: I see.

DELISSIO: And that's how it started.

LEVINE: That's how it happened. Now what, did your father, when your father came to this country, did he settle in Bradford, Pennsylvania?

DELISSIO: Yeah.

LEVINE: And why did he choose, why did he come in the beginning? Do

you know?

DELISSIO: Well, he came here because life wasn't what he wanted in Europe at the time, he was having a lot of problems with his father and brothers. My grandfather, that's it, my father's dad, he had a great olive plantation, all kinds of olives. It was a big plantation, and he wanted him to work there, and he didn't want to do that, so the two had a little argument, and he left his father and everybody else and he came in this country, not knowing where he was going to go, who he was going to meet, and anything (?), thing that was (?) taking place.

LEVINE: Oh, I see.

DELISSIO: And there, he met my mother's oldest brother.

LEVINE: Well, why did he happen to go to Bradford, Pennsylvania, do you know?

DELISSIO: Well, he was going there because he, he was looking for job, to work. And

LEVINE: Did he know, did he know anybody there beforehand?

DELISSIO: He didn't know, he didn't know nobody. It was all through a connection of presentation. I meet you, and then from, from you, I meet somebody else, and there they became really close with my mother's first brother, so that's where he, then, through the, through his presentation with him, he says, "I have a sister, which I can send for, and there you can sit down and, and have a life of your own (?)." So that's what, how it started.

LEVINE: And what was that brother's name? Your mother's brother?

DELISSIO: My name. I, I was named after him.

LEVINE: Joseph?

DELISSIO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Giuseppe.

DELISSIO: Giuseppe.

LEVINE: And what was your father doing for work when he was in Bradford?

DELISSIO: Well, he, he wasn't doing anything because he was only a young man, and it was hard for him to get a job. They wouldn't employ anybody that was under a certain age limit, so that was it. But, through my mother's first brother that the, they became very close with each other, that's how then he established himself to stay in Bradford, but he was only there for a short span of time, and, and I was only about, I would say about two or three years old at the time.

LEVINE: You mean when you, when you

DELISSIO: When I went back with my mother.

LEVINE: Well, let's just, so what was your mother's name?

DELISSIO: Maria, Maria.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

DELISSIO: CIERI, C-I-E-R-I.

LEVINE: Okay, and so your mother, so your mother's first brother sent for her.

DELISSIO: Right.

LEVINE: She came.

DELISSIO: Sure.

LEVINE: She met your father.

DELISSIO: Right, and in a short span of time, then married.

LEVINE: Okay.

DELISSIO: And, course, I was born, and then at the time I, she got sick, I was about three years old, and the, the doctor that was taking care of her says, "You will never get better in this country because the air is not, the, the air that your body can maneuver with," so that's how we then, I was three going on four at the time when we went back to the old country. But I didn't know any body. I couldn't talk, and, so it was pretty tough. And, she was only there about a year or so. Of course, my sister was conceived in this country, that's my fa, she just passed away this past January.

LEVINE: And her name?

DELISSIO: Geraldine.

LEVINE: Geraldine.

DELISSIO: Yeah.

LEVINE: So your mother went back to Italy when she was pregnant with Geraldine?

DELISSIO: Yeah, and she was conceived here. Yeah, when, when, when she went to Italy with me, I was, I was only about two or three years old.

LEVINE: Right.

DELISSIO: And at that time, you know, they used to do a lot of (?), where they used to kidnap his children and stuff like that, and it, it was kind of dangerous, so when she went back to the old country the doctor said, "Make a belt of some kind" or whatever. In those days, they didn't have actual belts. They had those cloth be, belts, yeah, so that's what she did, and so I was tail, tail highling with her. Wherever she went, she had to take me because she wouldn't leave me with nobody 'cause it was kind of dangerous.

LEVINE: Maybe you can talk about that what, what was going on with the, with, what word did you use to describe

DELISSIO: Well, they used to, where they used to see these young children, you know, either by themselves or whatever, they, they used to pick 'em up, and, and they used to sell 'em. They used to sell the children.

LEVINE: In, in Italy or here or both?

DELISSIO: Well, both places, wherever they could maneuver a sale, yeah, and so when I came here, I, my, my mother was always, always cautious that I was never left alone because of like those conditions around, and so that was it.

LEVINE: So where did you stay when you and your mother went back to Italy?

DELISSIO: Well, she had her father and mother and brothers, but my mother was the only daughter of the, of the tribe, but there was a lot of brothers, and, and so they all living there, and that's the home they still maintain, so she went there. They had accommodations for her. Oh, in those days, they used to have first ground floor where they used to have animals, where they used to raise animals and stuff like that, and so forth.

(KNOCKING)

LEVINE: We're pausing here. Okay, we're resuming here. So they have the animals on the first floor and then what

DELISSIO: They used to have apartments upstairs.

LEVINE: So were there several apartments in the house?

DELISSIO: Oh yeah because was quite a few brothers. She had a lot of brothers.

LEVINE: And, and can you remember that? Can you remember that house?

DELISSIO: Oh yeah sure, I remember quite, when I went to Europe to visit my son who was living in Switzerland, I went to the town to see it because I, I just faintly remember that it was a two story building. Down below, she used to have the chickens right over there and stuff like that and then on the second floor they use to live there. Yeah.

LEVINE: And this was in the town of Cassano?

DELISSIO: Cassano, yeah.

LEVINE: And that's C-A-S-S-A-N-O?

DELISSIO: N-O. Right.

LEVINE: And what was the house made out of? Do you remember?

DELISSIO: Cement situation, yeah.

LEVINE: And the town, did it have stores? Can you remember the streets in the town?

DELISSIO: No, there was no, just people that, that were there, were born there, you know, that's all.

LEVINE: Did you see the olive groves? The olive groves?

DELISSIO: No, no, my mother, she never got along with the, her in-laws. He,

he was, they never got together as a family. But that was it, but she remembers it, but she used to go there quite often.

LEVINE: What memories do you have of Cassano as a little boy?

DELISSIO: Well, I couldn't remember very, very much because I didn't know where I was going or who, who I was going. I knew that was my, my mother, that's about it, but I never met my uncles for she had quite a few brothers. And when she came back again that, that, that she was married, they, they used to always come and, and stay with us.

LEVINE: So do you remember some of those uncles?

DELISSIO: Oh, sure.

LEVINE: What, what do you remember? What kinds of

DELISSIO: Well, they were ordinary build, workers.

LEVINE: And how were they with you?

DELISSIO: Okay, I dunno, no, no, oh they had, I was the first, first born in the family. Yeah, they used to, whenever they used to come, they used to come for certain length of time. In those days, if you came here for more than a year, then you were considered an American citizen and stuff like that, but they never stayed here. They only came to visit with the sister, for she was the only sister, and she had four or five brothers.

LEVINE: So they would come to the United States, visit her, and go back?

DELISSIO: Then they used to go back. They used to stay here for probably a few months at a time, and then they, they used to fly back on home.

LEVINE: What about your, your grandparents, do you remember them from being a little boy? Your mother's

DELISSIO: Yeah, no, the only one that I could remember was her father.

LEVINE: What do you remember about him?

DELISSIO: Well, the usual parent of that type. They used to take care of the, the, the children while the mother and the father used to go to work. They used to work on the farms, cultivate the, the ground, and raise the crops, and from there they used to live. Because the, the, when the mother died, they were, well, I would say, of age, how old they were, I don't remember that. I know that they were, these particular brothers, because one of the brothers every season he used to come over and see his sister from Europe, from here stayed here for a little while, then they used to go back home.

LEVINE: Which brother was that, do you remember?

DELISSIO: He was the oldest of the family. Yeah.

LEVINE: So, well, wait a minute, it was h, wasn't it the first brother that was in Bradford, Pennsylvania, who

DELISSIO: Yeah, well, he died. After a certain length of time he got sick from what, I don't know, and passed on. So that was it, so my dad then was, was sort of a stranded. He had nobody else that they could

bank on, you know, for help, and that's how they became very, very close friends, and that's how, through that, they, they sent for my mother.

LEVINE: I see.

DELISSIO: Who was a young girl because when her mother died, says "I'm going to le, I, I won't stay with you too long." The sickness was just getting right after that year, and she couldn't take it, and she could only live the certain span of time, and then she told her, says, "You have to take care of your brothers." And the, the youngest of the family, at the time when, when the mother passed on was, must have been about two or three years old.

LEVINE: Oh.

DELISSIO: So she had, she had to raise, not only the oldest brothers, but then the baby that the mother had left with her, and so that was it.

LEVINE: So she raised that baby, and, and, and it wasn't until later that

DELISSIO: She became married.

LEVINE: Yeah, I see. Well, what was it like for your mother when she went back, when she was pregnant, and she went back to Cassano?

DELISSIO: Right.

LEVINE: Did she get medical care or did she get the air she needed?

DELISSIO: Well, there they, they had what they called a family doctor,

community doctor. That's who, they depended on for him. And they, they, they did a good job, they, they helped her, and then of course and we came back to the country where my dad was in Bradford.

LEVINE: Now what other things can you remember about Cassano during those years when you and your mother were back there?

DELISSIO: Well.

LEVINE: Did you go to school or anything? You were maybe too young.

DELISSIO: No, I was too young.

LEVINE: Did you, did you know how to speak Italian?

DELISSIO: Oh yeah, a lot, they, they teach you right from birth. (?) You know, they used to talk to you in Italian, they didn't talk to you in English 'cause they, they, they, they couldn't do it.

LEVINE: So is Italian your first language?

DELISSIO: Yes. I used to, at the age of, well I would say three and four years old, I use to read and write in Italian.

LEVINE: Wow. And, and do you remember what you did for fun when you were a little boy back in Italy?

DELISSIO: Well, not much of anything because all the people there, they were all grown up. You probably were there, maybe the only child with that family, but they take care of you. I, I, I remember my

grandfather, but not my grandmother.

LEVINE: Can you remember going any place with your grandfather or anything that you may have done together?

DELISSIO: Well, he used to stay, well, he was quite on in years, and he used to live with my mother at the time, for she was the one that was, that was taking care of the family. All the others, they're, they had to go out and either earn their daily bread and whatever they were working for. But the family was always closely knitted

LEVINE: Was your gran, can you describe your grandfather's temperament? What kind of grandfather was he?

DELISSIO: Well, the usual grant, temperament that, that they used to drink a lot because their only beverage was wine. They used to raise their own grape and then they used to make wine. That's how we lived.

LEVINE: Do you remember any foods that you ate when you were there?

DELISSIO: Well, I imagine that, that (?) pinpoint that this is what we used to eat there. They used to prepare anything. That's all prepared, not, nothing that were purchased.

LEVINE: So did people have their own gardens? Is that what

DELISSIO: They used to have, well you see, the town that they came from, Cassano, is way up in the mountains. You could never raise anything there because it was all mountainous. There wasn't dirt at all, so then whatever they would try to raise, it didn't take things around, so they couldn't, so they had to go out and buy, you know,

from the stores that they had in the neighborhood, but they were mostly friends anyway, so some lady found out that the, the family had lost the mother or a father or whatever it was, they always congregated together and tried to help out as much as they could.

LEVINE: Was there such a thing as a market day? A day when the farmers would bring what they grew and people would

DELISSIO: No, well they, they probably had to go to Naples.

LEVINE: Oh.

DELISSIO: That's, that was the closes city to them.

LEVINE: And do you remember the birth of your sister?

DELISSIO: Well, I, I, I sure do remember that she was, I, I was the oldest at the time when, when she was born, and I, I was, I was quite about five or six years old.

LEVINE: Did your mother have a mid-wife or do you remember if there was a mid-wife who assisted her or how

DELISSIO: Well, nobody had a doctor there. They all had a mid-wife they used to depend upon, that's, that's who took care of her.

LEVINE: So how long after your sister's birth did, did you and your mother and your sister come back?

DELISSIO: Yeah we came, well, short, short while after that. We didn't stay there too long, for she didn't want to stay there and, and leave her

husband here all by himself.

LEVINE: I see, so, did you, do you remember how you felt about leaving Cassano, coming back here?

DELISSIO: Well, you know, you're only young person. What, what feeling could you have?

LEVINE: You didn't have really friends there (?) family.

DELISSIO: No, no, there was, no. No.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything your mother brought with her to America by any chance?

DELISSIO: (laughs) Yeah, she brought herself and me and, and my sister.

LEVINE: And do you remember the farewells, do you remember leaving, do you remember the people saying goodbye?

DELISSIO: Oh yeah, a lot of them, they didn't want us to go back, but they were mostly brothers, and, and, and some of them were married, they had their own family, and, you know, they became very close relationship.

LEVINE: So your father's family was from Cassano too.

DELISSIO: No, no, he wasn't. He was from another town adjoining that. The name, the name of the town was Monte Mirano

LEVINE: Monte

DELISSIO: Mirano

LEVINE: Mirano

DELISSIO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay.

DELISSIO: That's the town that my father came from.

LEVINE: So when you, when, did, where did you, how did you leave Cassano? Did you leave in a wagon or how did you get to the port? Do you remember?

DELISSIO: Well, for a few pennies, they used to put you on a train.

LEVINE: Oh, okay, and what port did you leave from? Do you know what port you left from?

DELISSIO: You, you mean to come here in the coun-, Naples.

LEVINE: Naples, I see. Did you stay in Naples at all before you left do you remember?

DELISSIO: No.

LEVINE: No. So, so the ship left from Naples, and do you remember the voyage at all?

DELISSIO: Faintly, faintly because somehow or other the transportation was

not as pleasant as it should be, and you always had to hide things, whatever you did there, from the authorities because otherwise, they would, they would not give you the permission to, to leave the country.

LEVINE: I see, so do you know, do you know anything about like the papers that you needed and did you have

DELISSIO: What do you, what papers?

LEVINE: Well, did, well, first of all you needed a ticket, and

DELISSIO: Oh, well they, they loaded us the passenger place. They used to handle that sort of thing.

LEVINE: Okay.

DELISSIO: And if you were within the quota, you were alright. If you were not in the quota, then you had to stay, couldn't leave the country.

LEVINE: Was it a crowded ship?

DELISSIO: Well, there was quite a few people traveling, but I don't know what their business was. I never got into that.

LEVINE: Were you in steerage? Were you in the bottom of the ship with the, like a dormitory?

DELISSIO: Yeah, that's what it was. Anybody that had money they were on the top of the ship. The others had to go down below. Yeah.

LEVINE: Were there other children, do you remember?

DELISSIO: Who?

LEVINE: Other children on the voyage?

DELISSIO: Well, how can you remember those things because your mother always had you tied up to her.

LEVINE: Oh right, right. Okay, so do you remember when the ship came into the New York harbor?

DELISSIO: Yes, that I remember.

LEVINE: What was that like? What did you see?

DELISSIO: Well, it's just like a, a row of sheeps being driven in through a country which is, is a strange land to you because you, you don't know those things. You're only, when I left I was only about three, three years old, and I, and I remember faintly that we got on a ship, and your mother was always, she had you tied to her dress because in those days they used to pick up children like I said and there wasn't a happy leaving nor or gaining

LEVINE: Was Cassano a, a sheep? Did, were sheep raised in Cassano?

DELISSIO: Well, they all raised there, there, they, you maybe you might have a flock of, if you have, see they never had e, everything combined. The land was one place, the house was into another place, so it, in the morning when they used to get up, they used to go to the, to work the, the ground to raise the crops and stuff like that.

LEVINE: I see. So, did you see the Statue of Liberty? Do you remember that at all?

DELISSIO: Oh yeah, you mean when we came? Sure, oh yeah, oh we landed there. Sure.

LEVINE: And did people know what it was? Did people respond?

DELISSIO: Well, you, you could see the, the Statue. Naturally, you find out that the, that it was a donation by France, and, and they put it there so, but something new to us because you come from the farming districts.

LEVINE: So when did you see your father then, when you got, the ship got into the harbor, and then, was your father there?

DELISSIO: Well, no because we were designated to go to a certain town and there he was waiting for us.

LEVINE: I see. Well tell about Ellis Island. What was your experience there?

DELISSIO: Well, it's a strange thing because it's, it's, it's nothing more than a, a piece of land with a donation onto it a Statue that was given to the United States by France.

LEVINE: Well, you, you were, apparently you had some problem with your eye. Why don't you tell about that.

DELISSIO: I still have.

LEVINE: But what happened at Ellis Island in regard to your eye?

DELISSIO: They, well, when I went there, they wouldn't let me go in because at that time they were having some kind of a disease floating around, and they were very, very cautious of who could go in and who couldn't go in, and my mother wouldn't never leave me alone because she didn't want it, says, "He's my son, I'm gonna hold on to him." And she used to fight tooth and nail with all those authorities, and all they could do was always have arguments with her, but she says, "See I'm staying here if I have to stay here, and if I have to go, I'll go to my husband," and that's how she come back.

LEVINE: Now what was the problem with your eye? What, what eye problem do you still have?

DELISSIO: It, it's, you see, at times it's gets all blood shot. At other times, it clears up very well, so there's nothing to be done until I came here, and there, they, they wanted me to go to an operation, and I, I didn't want to do it, so I let, as long as I can see out of it, I'm gonna stay, let it stay the way it is, that's why.

LEVINE: So they must have had to ascertain that it wasn't contagious.

DELISSIO: No.

LEVINE: That's why

DELISSIO: They had to.

LEVINE: They had to keep you for awhile.

DELISSIO: Right, right. Yeah, at that time they were having quite big problems, people being sick and stuff like that and then

LEVINE: Trachoma was a, was a big eye problem that people had.

DELISSIO: Yeah, that's right

LEVINE: I see, so, so once they figured out that you were

DELISSIO: I was born here. They couldn't, they couldn't hold me out of here. I was an American born.

LEVINE: Well, were you treated nicely at Ellis Island, do you remember anything about your treatment at Ellis Island?

DELISSIO: Oh yes, they used to treat you just as a, a ordinary person of a, but I was born here. You couldn't hold me out.

LEVINE: They released you and your mother and your sister, and

DELISSIO: Became, we, well we had di, direct passport to come directly to my dad.

LEVINE: And that was in Bradford?

DELISSIO: Right.

LEVINE: I see. Do you remember when you came back here, any things that struck you as new and different that you couldn't

DELISSIO: Well, they know, that's a, it's a mountainous town. There isn't anything that, that, that spectacular that you can remember definitely. I know that they used to work in those mines. My dad worked there, they used to work in the underground mines.

LEVINE: Were they coal mines or were they some other kind of mines?

DELISSIO: Some other kind of mines. That's how he made his living. Of course, he's born, you know, he, he was born here, he was an American and

LEVINE: Well, he came here as a young man.

DELISSIO: Man.

LEVINE: Yeah.

DELISSIO: Yeah, and the first thing out of the box was that he became very close to my mother's first brother, that's how the relationship started and

LEVINE: Tell, tell me a little bit about Bradford. Were, were there other people from Italy also had immigrated to Bradford?

DELISSIO: No, no, other than my, my uncle, that's all

LEVINE: Were there other nationalities, were there people from other countries there?

DELISSIO: No, just the natives, people that lived there for a long time or maybe were born there.

LEVINE: And how about going to school and learning English, what was that like for you?

DELISSIO: Well, it was kind of tough until my mother, through a, a relationship, met this woman, she was a school teacher, and, and she asked her if we, we pay her some money that were, but in those days a few pennies, they went a long, long way, and that's how I got my education.

LEVINE: So. We're resuming here. So, you went to school, and you were probably the only child that didn't know English in your class.

DELISSIO: Well, as a youngsters, you be, you pick up things very, very easily, but you're playing with them and everything else, no, I had no problem whatsoever at all.

LEVINE: And how about your mother and father, did they continue to speak Italian at home?

DELISSIO: Yeah.

LEVINE: So you actually probably learned English before

DELISSIO: Oh yes, I, I, I did a lot of it because they, they depended upon me as one of their first born that whatever that had to be done, they used to take me so then I use to translate it to them.

LEVINE: Can you remember any of the, any of the, of the times when you had to go and speak?

DELISSIO: Oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah.

LEVINE: Like for what purpose would you do that?

DELISSIO: Well for instance, I used to always go down to the town hall and say that I'm here, that I, I don't want any kind of alms or an, anything, I want that my dad is provided with employment, and that's how he used to ma, manage around and, and whatever he did, he was all through his efforts. Yeah.

LEVINE: So besides working in the mines, what else did he do?

DELISSIO: Well after that, then he, he got more or less involved in farming. He got a job as a, working on a farm, raising crops.

LEVINE: And then did you stay in school? How long, how far along did you stay before you stopped going to school?

DELISSIO: Oh, I never stopped going to, not going to school. If I wasn't going to school, my mother used to have a, a private tutor. Yeah. Well, at the age of th, four years old, I used to read and write Italian fluently, I still do.

LEVINE: So you must have been a good student?

DELISSIO: Well, in those days you had to do it in order to provide your self with a good living. Otherwise, you would be landing some other place with, with not very convincing. No, I had no problem, had no problem.

LEVINE: Can you remember any attitudes that your mother and father had

like ways they wanted to instill in you so that you would be the kind of person that they wanted you to be?

DELISSIO: Yeah, they wanted me to, to proceed in a (?) which I, I had no rhyme or reason of going into it, but they wanted it that way because they, they, they used to monitor the whole thing themselves. They'll make sure that you went to school, and that the, the reports from the, the teacher or whoever was instructing you, get the report from them whether I was doing good, whether I was doing bad or what. No, I had no, no problem at all. My mother and father never had any problem. They depended upon me in lots of ways.

LEVINE: And how about your sister, did they want her to go on

DELISSIO: Well you see how it is sometimes, things happen when you don't want 'em to happen. See my dad never expected that she was going to be born (?). It was more or less a surprise to, to him and all of that. Course then I was at least, at that time, I was about five or six years old, and whatever they wanted to be done, I, I, I had to be there all the in order to translate it to these people cause at that time, they, they didn't talk a, a second language. If you didn't know how to talk, you, you were doomed, unless you had somebody to help you.

LEVINE: So you took on a lot of responsibility for a little boy.

DELISSIO: Oh yes, I, I, well, like this, if you follow the, the Italian tradition, you find that the, the first born is always the one that gets the brunt of, of everything. And you better be on the ball, make sure everything goes right, otherwise they gonna blame you for whatever go wrong

or take, come out of it.

LEVINE: Were your parents strict, would you say?

DELISSIO: You mean strict? No, well, in a way, as a, raising a family.

LEVINE: In what ways would you say they were strict?

DELISSIO: Well, they, they weren't domineering. They wouldn't say that here, you gotta do this, this and this. No, they, they left it up to you, but they want to make sure that you live the right thing. Yeah.

LEVINE: W, did they continue with any Italian traditions when they were in this country, did they carry on any traditions?

DELISSIO: Well, they had to. At the time when they came here or at least when, when my mother came here, they were dealing with people of, of, of different face, they were dealing with the Indians at that time.

LEVINE: Really?

DELISSIO: And, if you became friendly with them, you were with them. If you didn't, then you were be an outcast, and that, that was it. And, and if you couldn't make a living out of it, then you had to look around elsewhere. They, they used to leave, they didn't stay in Bradford too long.

LEVINE: Oh, where did they go from there?

DELISSIO: Well, then they came, my, my dad he had a, he went all over. As a

young man, you can, my mother used to stay, stay at home, raise the family, and then he used to come back and stay awhile, and then he used to go back where he was working.

LEVINE: So would he be working raising crops, is that the kind of thing

DELISSIO: Well, whatever work he could get.

LEVINE: I see.

DELISSIO: Whatever was available for him. They didn't pay like they, they say what I want to be, "I want to be this, I want to do that." Whatever was there is there, and, and if you want to do it, okay, if you didn't, then it was your problem.

LEVINE: I see, so, so you, did you stay in Pennsylvania or did you move to New Jersey at some point?

DELISSIO: No, we didn't, we only stayed back in Pennsylvania. We, after my mom come back, my sister was, my sister was then, although she was conceived in this country, my mother, I think she was about two or three months pregnant when we went, and so, not only did she have to take care of herself but she had to take care of her family.

LEVINE: Well, do you feel like the fact that you were in Italy when you were a little boy and then you came back here and really had your whole life here

DELISSIO: Yeah, what, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you, do you feel like that experience made a difference in the kind of person you are?

DELISSIO: No, not really because, as a young person, things just knit with each other. If I hadn't made, made friends, well there were friends when I come back. So, you didn't have anything wrong there.

LEVINE: Well, how, do you think the fact of your taking on so much responsibility because you could speak English.

DELISSIO: Well, that, that's the, that's the, the whole thing because then, they become more or less bound to you because they depend upon you. If they needed somebody to talk to, you had to be there in order to. I used to go down to the town hall and, and talk with the different people, you know, auth, authority. I say, "Here, my dad is here, not that he wants anything from you people, but he wants a job. He wants to earn a living."

LEVINE: How old would you have been when you were doing that?

DELISSIO: I was about five or six years old. Yeah.

LEVINE: So then when, after you left school, what kind of work did you find to do?

DELISSIO: Well, I went to law school, which I should never do it because it wasn't a field for me. But, you know, these European people, they like to see a professional person in, in their home. But I, I shouldn't have done that. I should have followed my own trend and do what I wanted to do, and that was it.

LEVINE: What did you want to do?

DELISSIO: Well, I, I wanted, of course I wanted to grow up with a, with a knowledge of a, of a different language besides the Italian language. I, I still have people, sometimes they come, they say, "Can you translate this letter for me?" I say, "Yeah, sures." I do that, or if they want you to write something, I'll, I still (?) write in Italian. I have no problem there at all.

LEVINE: So, in other words, you might have wanted to do something where you used the Italian language and the English language, something like that?

DELISSIO: Yeah, that's right, that's right. Well because at that time, in order for you, if you did come to stay in a particular town, you had to know how to talk cause most of them were neither Italian or whatever it may be. But we never had any problem whatsoever. I, I know that I, I, I did it for quite some time, you wanted a letter written Italian or something like that, I (?) and then I used to charge maybe five or ten dollars to do it.

LEVINE: Now, how did the Depression in the 30s, how did the Depression in this country affect you and your family?

DELISSIO: It was bad, very, very bad. We don't know how we didn't, we didn't go crazy. We survived, but we don't know how we did it, but we did it. It, it was bad.

LEVINE: So was your father out of work then?

DELISSIO: Oh, sure, everybody was out of work, not only him.

LEVINE: Yeah.

DELISSIO: Everybody.

LEVINE: And of course you would have been, you would have been of working age by then also.

DELISSIO: Yeah, sure. And sometimes they had to depend upon whatever I did, I could bring in at the house.

LEVINE: And what did you do? What kinds of jobs did you do during the Depression?

DELISSIO: Well, secretarial work or something like that. Very little manual work because, in the first place, I wasn't born with that attitude. I was more or less like a, how would you say, a frail person, would you?

LEVINE: You're going to work with your mind more than your back. How about your sister? Did your family treat your sister differently is, because she was a girl, as far as what they expected of her?

DELISSIO: Well, they, they, they treat them as a human being, that's all, that's a, that's a daughter or a, or a son. No, no.

LEVINE: But did they expect her, for example, to go into law or anything like that?

DELISSIO: No, no, no. Not them, no. With me, they did, yeah.

LEVINE: And what would you say was the high point of your life?

DELISSIO: Well, (?), there isn't any particular one attribute. I know everything in general was, that I was, I was born, and, and I developed into something which meant a lot to me in the future, so.

LEVINE: And what would you, can you think of what might have been the low point in your life?

DELISSIO: Well, was many, many of those things because working conditions they were not good, they were not good at all. And if you had a job, you ought to cherish it because, if you lost a job, you lost a, a great deal of things in your life, you know?

LEVINE: Do you, can you think of what has given you satisfaction that you've done or

DELISSIO: Well, whatever I did, I did it with, with good intentions that I was going to develop into something worthwhile. But to, to satisfy your parents, you know, you do what they want you to do, which was the wrong attitude, and it didn't develop into anything worthwhile for me, they want you to do what they want you to do, that's, that's not good, 'cause then they, they depend upon your life for everything, and it

LEVINE: Do you think you were different with your children than your parents were with you or do you think

DELISSIO: Oh, yeah, big, big difference. You see when you're born in a family where the only language they, they said know, alright they spoke a little broken English, but nothing of any, of any kind of importance,

they always depended upon you, either they, I was the first born child, and they depended a lot on me. And, I had, I had to go practically many, many places with my father, make sure that he would get employment or they, that they treat him right and stuff like that.

LEVINE: Can you think of ways that you were with your children?

DELISSIO: Well, a whole lot of difference. With our children, as they, as they, they were with us, with them it was that they had to raise you and make sure that your, you did the things right because out of that, they would, you know, I wouldn't say they gonna live upon it

LEVINE: But they benefit from it.

DELISSIO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, how did you meet your wife?

DELISSIO: Well, that's, that's something that's pretty hard to explain. It's mostly your family ties, you know.

LEVINE: Oh.

DELISSIO: Your family met them, and you have a grown up daughter and (?) so they make a marriage.

LEVINE: I see, and what, what was your wife's name?

DELISSIO: Anna.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

DELISSIO: Bonavita.

LEVINE: How would you spell that?

DELISSIO: B-O-N-A-V-I-T-A.

LEVINE: And how many children did you have?

DELISSIO: Just the, my son, my son.

LEVINE: And what is his name?

DELISSIO: John.

LEVINE: So, let's see, well, is there any, now, do, you went to visit Ellis Island with your niece, is that what you said?

DELISSIO: Yeah, late, not too long ago, about a couple years ago.

LEVINE: And that's how I happened to come to interview because you sent in this questionnaire.

DELISSIO: Right, right.

LEVINE: What, how did you feel when you, when you went to Ellis Island and you saw Ellis Island?

DELISSIO: Well, you know, it's, it's a different attitude of, I would say, future life or what, I don't know quite how to bring it out. But

LEVINE: Did it bring back any memories?

DELISSIO: Now?

LEVINE: Yeah.

DELISSIO: Oh, I could remember going there as a young man. I went there a number of times, I didn't go there only just once.

LEVINE: Oh, but did it bring back the memories of when you came through there, when you were about six years old?

DELISSIO: Oh sure, definitely, I definitely, I, but now, since then, the, the island itself or the community, I would call it, it brings back memories when I was a young boy to go there and, and visit and (?) sometimes, and now I, I, I understand they put up a, a brick wall, brick or (?) whatever, and there you can see the, there your name, your father and mother, and if you had any brothers and sisters, they have a (?)

LEVINE: Well, you're talking about the Wall of Honor, I think, and that, actually it, it, it's a donation, in other words, people can put names on that wall.

DELISSIO: Wall, yeah.

LEVINE: And it's, it's a stainless steel wall, and it's in the backdrop (?)

DELISSIO: In other words, whatever I did now, myself, if my grandchildren come or want to go to the, I brought them sev, several times, you

know, to see the, the

LEVINE: Did you personally put your name on that wall, do you know?

DELISSIO: Myself?

LEVINE: Yeah, did you have your name put on that wall?

DELISSIO: Oh yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, okay, because it, you have to have done it, in other words, it doesn't go on automatically.

DELISSIO: No, no, no, no.

LEVINE: Yeah. But now your family, your grandchildren, their children, whoever, will be able to go to the Ellis Island Museum

DELISSIO: Right.

LEVINE: Oral history library and hear your tape

DELISSIO: That's right.

LEVINE: Of you telling about coming here

DELISSIO: That's right, that's right.

LEVINE: Your whole story.

DELISSIO: I know what you're trying to tell me.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, is there anything else that maybe we haven't covered that's relevant to, you know, your being born here, going back to Italy with your mother, spending a few years there, coming back again and living out your life here.

DELISSIO: Yeah.

LEVINE: How about World War II, were you involved in that in any way?

DELISSIO: No, as a matter of fact, I missed World War I by a, a couple of months.

LEVINE: You were too young?

DELISSIO: Yeah. If I, if it had continued on, I would have had my part. But as it was, everything was settled, and everything else was okay. Then, of course, the Second World War, I was too old. So there, I had a, I took many, many things for the government, I worked for the government.

LEVINE: Oh, you did?

DELISSIO: Yeah.

LEVINE: What, what did you do?

DELISSIO: Well, in, bringing people together, explain to them as to what certain things mean, and whether they have cherished them or not, I used to bring out the, the countries together, yeah.

LEVINE: Were, were the, were the people Italian people that you were bring

DELISSIO: The people were Italian (?), and they want to become American citizens.

LEVINE: Ah, I see. Was, was that satisfying to you to do that?

DELISSIO: Oh yeah, yes, that, well, it meant, meant lot of help, not only to the country, but it meant a lot to the people themselves. Yeah. Because, you know, sometimes they come into a country and they're, you're stranded, you don't know what you want to do, how you're going to do it, whom you're going to meet, all those things they had to, be all hashed out, and, and if they work out to your benefit, you're okay. If they don't, then you better change the, your trend of life completely.

LEVINE: So would you work with people who had newly arrived to (?)

DELISSIO: Some of them, some of them newly arrived, some who had relatives here, and, yeah.

LEVINE: And where was this where you worked with them, where?

DELISSIO: What, what do you mean where?

LEVINE: Where were you when you did that? It, were you in New Jersey or

DELISSIO: Yeah, in New Jersey. New Jersey. But they depended upon the person that familiar because lot of 'em are strangers, and, and they need that, that kind of help.

LEVINE: Now how is this time in your life, while you're in your old age period? How, how is that for you?

DELISSIO: Oh well it is, I, I, I don't feel any change whatsoever. I feel that you cannot live in life, if you want to live a good life, you've got to do what's right with the people, and when you do that, then you're, you're that much ahead of yourself and you have no problem whatsoever. I never had any problem. If I can help you, I would help you. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you think your life would be very different if you had stayed in Italy, if you hadn't come back to this country?

DELISSIO: Well, I don't know what would happen because, after all, I'm an American born. There's, there's no trend there. (?) trend because my parents come from there. That's the only difference, but other than that, there's no change.

LEVINE: Okay, is there anything else you'd like to say before we close? I think we've covered

DELISSIO: Well, I don't know what else to I could tell you. Life has been, it hasn't been a bed of roses by no means, but it's up to the individual to do what is right with the people and when you do that, you're a hundred percent ahead of, of your game. If you don't, then, might as well get out of it right away and that way you don't harm yourself and you don't harm the people you're going to do it for. I had no problem with (?) whatsoever. As a matter of fact, when my dad gave up working in, in the coal mines where he was working at the time, and he came towards the east, my mother and my dad, they both became very close friend, she used to, she was a professor of

languages in Barcelona, and she, through that, I started to pick up a little bit of Spanish here, a little bit of Italian there, and, and I man, maneuvered, then (?) they, they became so depended upon you that they never leave you. If they had to have something done, they want to come over and, and see you, talk to you first before they make any kind of commitment. Life has, has been very, very good to me, as well as I have been to the nation itself. Yeah. Course, you know, you're, you're leaving, well, now, my, my dad, like I said, his parents, well, more so his father, his father was very, very, very mean to his children, and before he would get more tied in with him and get in trouble, he left, he left the country completely. He, he, he just jumped the ship where it was going to take him nobody knew other than himself, that he was taking, "I'm going somewhere." So when he came here, he came into Pennsylvania, and, and, and through friendship and things like that that you meet, you build a family life. Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, your life would have been a lot different if your father hadn't

DELISSIO: Well

LEVINE: Left on a ship and came to this country.

DELISSIO: Well, it, well it hadn't really never changed anyway from very beginning. I was always close to my family, but, like I said, they want you to do things their way and become a dictator like that to a family is no good, it's not good. Leave him alone, let them live their own life, let them do what they want to do in life. But no, they had to do what they want you to do, which is not, not good. Not good. But things end, they worked out alright, so it's, we had no problem there.

LEVINE: Well, it sounds like you've had a good life and you were helping people and

DELISSIO: I, well, I, I, I had no bad situation or you, you had those pick on you things, happens all the time, but my mother and father, they were always good to us, we behaved ourselves, we didn't do anything out of the ordinary which would bring disgrace to them, so it was, that was a, that's a, that's a long way situation. But all in all, we're, we're all happy, and happy to, to know that, that I got, that we had parents that, that helped us and made sure that, that we followed the trend of life the way it should.

LEVINE: Okay.

DELISSIO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, I want to thank you very much for a very interesting

DELISSIO: Oh, sure, you're welcome, at any time at all, if you feel that you need some more information, just call me up or do something and

LEVINE: Oh, well, thank you.

DELISSIO: We can sit down, and, and you've got the chart there.

LEVINE: I do, and, and if you ever want to visit Ellis Island, I'd be happy to show you around.

DELISSIO: Yeah, oh, you, you, you, you're stationed there?

EI-942/DELISSIO

LEVINE: That's where I'm stationed, yeah. Okay, I've been speaking with Joseph Delissio who came back to the United States, having been born here, in 1907 when he was six years of age. He came with his mother and his baby sister. And at the time of this interview, Mr. Delissio is one week short of ninety-six

DELISSIO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Years of age. And we are here in Lincoln Park, New Jersey, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm signing off.

DELISSIO: Okay, (?).

LEVINE: Thank you.

DELISSIO: Yeah.