

EI-947/TESORIERO

EI-947
MADDALENA TESORIERO
BIRTH DATE: AUGUST 4, 1903
INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 23, 1997
RUNNING TIME: 53:37
INTERVIEWER: MINDY HAPEMAN
RECORDING ENGINEER: PETER HOM
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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 11/1997
TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

SICILY, 1930
AGE 27
PASSAGE ON "THE CONTE GRANDE"

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mrs. Tesoriero's son Peter and daughter Elena Laudati were also present during the recording of this interview. 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, 10/8/1997.

HAPEMAN: Good morning.

TESORIERO: Good morning.

HAPEMAN: This is Mindy Hapeman for the National Park
Service.

I'm a student intern for the Oral History Project
from Skidmore College. Today is September 23,
1997,

and I am here in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn, with
Maddalena Tesoriero.

TESORIERO: Yeah.

HAPEMAN: Who came from Sicily?

TESORIERO: I came from Italy . . .

HAPEMAN: In 1930.

TESORIERO: (?) a little (?) town, Panadea[ph]. (?)
Panadea[ph].

HAPEMAN: Okay, we'll . . . You were twenty-seven years old.

TESORIERO: I was twenty-eight.

HAPEMAN: Twenty-eight, okay.

TESORIERO: Twenty-eight.

HAPEMAN: We are at the home of her daughter, Elena . . .

TESORIERO: My daughter was named Maria Giuseppa.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Um, and Elena will be present for the
interview, as well, Peter, is that correct? Is
that
your name, sir? Okay.

TESORIERO: Now, uh, when I came over here, I left from
Panadea[ph] and went from Napoli. Naples we
got . . .

HAPEMAN: Just a moment. Just a moment, okay?

TESORIERO: Oh, oh, oh.

HAPEMAN: I should say that Paul Sigrist and Peter HOm are
also
present today, and I would also like to say, for
the
sake of the tape, that we are in a residential
area,

giving

and there might be some audible traffic or neighborhood noises that could be heard in the background. Okay. Why don't we begin by you me your full name.

TESORIERO: I give the full name, yes.

HAPEMAN: Will you state it one more time?

TESORIERO: Oh, yeah. Maddalena Tesoriero.

HAPEMAN: Okay. And your date of birth, please?

TESORIERO: The day when I born?

HAPEMAN: Yes, the date of your birth.

TESORIERO: I born, uh, August 4th, 1903.

HAPEMAN: Okay. What is your maiden name?

TESORIERO: My husband?

HAPEMAN: Your maiden name. The name . . .

TESORIERO: I don't got no middle name. Just what I give you.

HAPEMAN: Okay. And what is the name that you had before you were married.

TESORIERO: Same name. (she laughs)

HAPEMAN: Same name. Okay.

TESORIERO: (she laughs) We're cousins.

HAPEMAN: Okay. (they laugh) Could you spell your last name, please?

TESORIERO: Last name?

HAPEMAN: Your last name, yes.

TESORIERO: T-E-S-O-R-I-E-R-O.

HAPEMAN: Okay. And where were you born?

TESORIERO: I born Isara[ph] Panadea[ph], Italy.

HAPEMAN: Could you spell that, please?

you
TESORIERO: I don't know if I can spell so much. Isara[ph],
want me to write, and you copy it? You want me to
write it on a paper? Over here.

HAPEMAN: Okay, yeah. Oh . . .

TESORIERO: Writing is easier for you and it's easier for me.

HAPEMAN: A pen. Okay.

TESORIERO: Of course, this over here, yeah. My, you asked the
name of the town.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Ah. Saluti[ph] . . .

of
:
Panarea[ph], Greetings from Panarea[ph], the name

the island.

HAPEMAN: Panarea[ph].

TESORIERO: Panarea[ph].

HAPEMAN: Panarea[ph].

TESORIERO: Yeah.

HAPEMAN: Okay. And that is an island?

TESORIERO: Island in the Mediterranean.

HAPEMAN: In the Mediterranean.

TESORIERO: In the Mediterranean.

HAPEMAN: And where, um, is it off the coast of Italy?

TESORIERO: This, uh, closer to Sicily.

HAPEMAN: Close to Sicily.

TESORIERO: A woman has a (?) over there. They call it
Mediterraneo. And then they got seven island
there.

HAPEMAN: Seven?

TESORIERO: One island, not only mine. One they call
Somoli[ph],
mine is Panarea[ph]. There's another one they call
Nipoli[ph] that's more bigger than my town, another
one they call Salina[ph], another one they call

know?

Aligol[ph] or Peligol[ph], something like, you

That's all a little smaller. No, no close to
Chiati[ph]. No, it's water around, Mediterranean
water. One is here, one there, one there, all
separate.

HAPEMAN: How many people lived on your island?

TESORIERO: Well, in my time, no more than a thousand people.
Yeah. It was a small town. Now I don't know.

for

HAPEMAN: What was the industry there? What did people do
work?

TESORIERO: People do?

HAPEMAN: For work? For work?

to

things

there,

to

TESORIERO: I tell you the truth, the town, it was a very poor
town. Everybody had a piece of ground, and I used
cultivate, and dig and make the vegetables and
like that. It was, see, at that time, when I was
raising myself from my parents, my father used to
come over here in America. Everybody the same way
from (?). Before we coming on this world, it was a
very poor. You have to do in the ground over
digging and making the food to make a little flour
make the bread, and (disturbance to the

microphone). Pull the potatoes to make more potatoes, that's what it is like. Now, when I was (?) I was a little better, because, like I said, my father was married to my mother, he used to come here. The man used to come in this country to make little money and send it to the family over there.

over

a

to

HAPEMAN: So your parents, your mother and your father, came America?

TESORIERO: No.

HAPEMAN: No.

TESORIERO: My father alone.

HAPEMAN: Just your father.

You

in

you

here

a

TESORIERO: The wife stayed there, look after the children. know, they used to come and live two, three years there, and (?). So the mother stayed here and (?) the family and all that, used to make vegetable, know, it was (?). And after that my father was making a little money. That wasn't working out. Over here it was a (?), too, no. I remember my father used to say working to the dock when it was

ships there. And they used to go every morning, a lot of people, take a line. And you know how they are, the bosses, they pick off the best ones, right?

You come, you come. And (disturbance to the microphone).

HAPEMAN: Yes.

TESORIERO: (disturbance to the microphone) There's no work. They used to make, they used to stand over there for their family. That's the (disturbance to the microphone).

HAPEMAN: What was your father's name?

TESORIERO: My father's name, it was Pietro.

HAPEMAN: Could you spell that, please?

TESORIERO: P, let me write it, please. I don't want to make a mistake. You want to spell it, Peter? You got the name over here?

HAPEMAN: Oh. (voice off mike)

: P-I-E, P-I-E . . .

TESORIERO: Pietro. It's P-I-E . . .

HAPEMAN: Uh-huh.

TESORIERO: T-R-O.

HAPEMAN: Pietro.

TESORIERO: Pietro.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

TESORIERO: I can't spell it now, maybe because I (?) him.

HAPEMAN: How old were you when he left for America?

TESORIERO: When I came in America?

HAPEMAN: When he, when your father went to America?

TESORIERO: My father was so many times over here.

HAPEMAN: Oh. He came back . . .

TESORIERO: I left myself, when I left my town I was twenty-eight. I was married already.

HAPEMAN: Yes.

TESORIERO: Yes.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Can you tell me what your father looked like?

TESORIERO: My father what?

HAPEMAN: What did he look like? Can you describe him in words? Just . . .

TESORIERO: He's over here.

HAPEMAN: Describe him in words.

TESORIERO: (she laughs) He was tall, like my son over there.

HAPEMAN: Oh.

TESORIERO: He was the same looking. The same looking.

HAPEMAN: Really.

TESORIERO: I got a picture, see? (voices off mike)

HAPEMAN: Yes.

TESORIERO: Same looking.

HAPEMAN: Yes.

TESORIERO: Tall like him.

HAPEMAN: Tall? Uh-huh. Okay. And what was, what was his personality like?

TESORIERO: He was nice.

HAPEMAN: He was nice.

TESORIERO: He was nice to the children. He was nice. You know why? He loved children. He had six children with my mother, from the six, they live four. Well, after a while, only one, I live. One by one my brother, he die in '42. My, this sister die '64, another sister

about die in '52. He was married in Boston. He had
four child when she die.

HAPEMAN: What were your brothers and sisters' names?

TESORIERO: My brother was Antonino. Like it was just here,
Tony.

HAPEMAN: Yes.

when TESORIERO: Over there they say Antonino. You can put Tony,
they put it on the regular name. (they laugh)
Angela. Antonino. So my sister, the first sister was

HAPEMAN: Angela.

TESORIERO: So another one was Carmela.

HAPEMAN: Carmela?

TESORIERO: Carmela. And my (disturbance to the microphone).

HAPEMAN: Okay. Could your father read or write?

TESORIERO: Hmm?

HAPEMAN: Could your father read or write?

and TESORIERO: A little bit, because at that time there was (?),
no was school in my town, and there was no school.
They learn a little bit, and when the government in

in

Italy, when they changed over nineteen or twenty years in age, they call to the service, you learn a little bit to the service. But you don't go much the school. You don't know about the school. You learn because they have a good mind and (?) to the service.

HAPEMAN: Okay. What was your mother's name?

TESORIERO: Angela.

HAPEMAN: Angela. Um, what did she do? Did she work at all?

vegetables

TESORIERO: No. She raised the children. I told you, (disturbance to the microphone) we used to cultivate it for the house. Potatoes and

my

and everything to make flour, not too much, and the rest of it we used to leave, because my father was coming over here, make a little money, send it to mother, and my mother used to buy outside where the (?).

HAPEMAN: Okay. Can you describe her personality?

TESORIERO: My mother's pers-- . . .

HAPEMAN: Your mother's personality.

woman.

TESORIERO: Beautiful personality. She was a working hard

children

She love the children, she take care of the
very nice.

HAPEMAN: Could she read or write?

TESORIERO: No.

HAPEMAN: No.

TESORIERO: No school at that time for her. You want to hear?
After, you know, she was a little bigger, she's
smaller sister and smaller brother, that my
mother's
time it was a little bigger, there was no class, no
school and no teachers there. After that, there
were, the government send her for three class,
three
class. I have three class myself. And I used to
go
to school. One baby sister and one baby brother,
the
smallest children from my grandma. So my mother
put
them all, may rest in peace. She writes a letter
to
my father, and she used to go to this sister. I
used
to remember that. And (?) from my husband, I got a
letter from my husband, I got a letter back.
get
Tomorrow, I'm gonna do tomorrow. And she used to
mad. (disturbance to the microphone) got the

That's

letter, he wants me to write. (disturbance to the
microphone) before ever writing the letter.

now

what I mean, what it was at that time. No, no, no,
now no more. Even when I left it was better, and
that's much better yet. I hear from people, they
come and go, yeah.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Tell me about the house that you grew up in,
the house that you grew up in?

TESORIERO: The house?

HAPEMAN: What was it made out of?

TESORIERO: The name of the house? What was it named?

HAPEMAN: What was the house made out of, the material?

was

make

(?).

TESORIERO: From the material? Stone. Over here from bricks,
over there from stone. Stone, cement (disturbance
to the microphone). After I met my husband, he
here sending me the money to build it. I had to
only one room, and after that came over here and
(they laugh) I worked a lot for that room.

HAPEMAN: Did you keep a, did you keep any animals in . . .

TESORIERO: We used to, my mother used to keep one cow.

HAPEMAN: One cow.

TESORIERO: One lamb.

HAPEMAN: One lamb.

TESORIERO: And one nanny goat.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

TESORIERO: The nanny goat we were able to milk. The cow used to make the babies, they used to sell it to butcher. (they laugh) You know, they used to sell the baby, the butcher would buy it, kill them and make the meat. And they used to keep going that way, when they have the baby, no milk. They don't take milk from the cow. They try to make another, another baby, like, you know? And, uh, we had one lamb, my mother, used to raise the lamb. They used to go to the season and carry the lamb once a year. That's why I've got to tell you everything. And after that, you see, my mother . . . (she gestures) Make like a cotton.

HAPEMAN: Cotton, yes.

TESORIERO: You know what? Yeah. Yeah, make like a cotton. And after that, wash them nice and after that knit them.

it's

My mother, she knitted (disturbance to the microphone) to my father, he used to say, "You got to send them here the warm stockings. Over here cold." And my mother put them (disturbance to the microphone) four like this (disturbance to the microphone) stocking. And my daughter must have some, I don't know where she got it, she got them upstairs, maybe. (they laugh) She still got it for remember.

HAPEMAN: Okay. What kind of chores did you do as a child?

TESORIERO: Chores?

you

HAPEMAN: Chores. To help, to help your mother? What did do?

TESORIERO: Yeah, we used to help the mother, yes. We, like I said, we used to (disturbance to the microphone) was a little early for the family, we used to go to pick up the (?). We used to help the parents, see. If that (?) my mother, (?). If it was (?) for her, yeah, yeah. We used to hold for her.

HAPEMAN: What were your favorite foods when you were growing up?

TESORIERO: Well, I was twenty-one years when I got married.

HAPEMAN: Uh-huh. Twenty-one when you got married.

was
TESORIERO: Twenty-one. Was, I was (?) there, I came here, I
twenty-eight, and my husband was here three years,
he
and when I came over here, he was alone over here,
was sending me money to build the house over there,
that room.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

TESORIERO: And after that he become, after citizen, American
citizen, and there was a law who have the citizen
they're
paper, could bring the wife over here because
family, and that's what my husband, he did.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

TESORIERO: Yeah.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

TESORIERO: He bringing me over here, because a citizen, after
citizen paper, yeah.

HAPEMAN: Let's back up a second. I want to ask you what
religion . . .

TESORIERO: Hmm?

HAPEMAN: What religion were you?

TESORIERO: My religion and my husband's religion is Catholic.

HAPEMAN: Uh-huh. Okay. Okay. Do you remember the outbreak of World War One?

TESORIERO: I was young at that time.

HAPEMAN: You were young.

TESORIERO: And I remember.

HAPEMAN: Yes.

TESORIERO: I remember. I remember. (disturbance to the microphone) I was nearly three, only three or a couple of years. And I hear the church bells ringing, boom-boom-boom-boom-boom-boom-boom. And I don't see any people come. (disturbance to the microphone) I remember that (?). (disturbance to the microphone) I remember like now.

to

HAPEMAN: Yes. Oh, that's a nice story. What was your husband's name?

TESORIERO: Gaitano.

HAPEMAN: Can you spell that?

TESORIERO: Come on, spell the name. (she laughs) I couldn't spell. In my school was no spelling, no spelling.

HAPEMAN: No spelling in school.

to

TESORIERO: No, no. In Italy, school no spelling. You've got
say. I don't know your name. You want to believe
me? Three years of class I had, and half the story
in that three years of class, to the eighth grade,
we
have to study everything. After three years, out,
you graduate.

HAPEMAN: Wow.

TESORIERO: It was very strict over there.

HAPEMAN: How did you meet your husband? You were cousins.

TESORIERO: First cousins.

HAPEMAN: First cousins.

TESORIERO: We used to live, like over here across the street.
(she laughs)

HAPEMAN: Yes? You lived across the street?

very

TESORIERO: Yeah. We were still over there. We used to play
around, you know? You know (?). It was a very,

and

(disturbance to the microphone) boy. My cousin

lamb.

myself, my mother one lamb, my aunt had another

We used to go pick up the lamb and go about the
streets. By the streets there was a little grass,

to
the
to

and the animal used to eat the grass, and we used
knitting, you know, crochet. Eh, sit down, watch
lamb, like I said, we used to crochet. My husband,
he was a little (disturbance to the microphone),
rest in peace, come with the lamb, and I go. My
lamb, everyone was surprised, he eat (disturbance
the microphone) my lamb and my cousin's lamb. We
used to get (disturbance to the microphone), and,
"Why you coming here? Are you crazy out of your
mind?" (Ms. Hapeman laughs) Comes down to
destiny, what I have out the (?) .

HAPEMAN: Yes. Describe your wedding.

TESORIERO: Hmm?

HAPEMAN: Describe your wedding to your husband.

TESORIERO: My husband?

HAPEMAN: Your wedding, the day . . .

TESORIERO: My wedding?

HAPEMAN: Yes.

TESORIERO: Yes. It was 1920 . . . '24. And, uh, November
23rd, in the church, 1924.

HAPEMAN: November 23rd?

TESORIERO: Four.

HAPEMAN: 24th. Okay.

TESORIERO: 1924.

HAPEMAN: In a church?

TESORIERO: In a church. You know, we got the (?) three days
before. But the wedding in the church, it was
three
days later. So we don't went all together, since
we
go to church. (she addresses someone in the room
)
You got my wedding picture over here? Yeah.

HAPEMAN: Describe to me what you're wearing.

TESORIERO: That's my wedding picture.

HAPEMAN: What are you wearing in that picture?

TESORIERO: What I, what you see over here. The veil, the
dress,
that's my husband bringing the suit from over here,
over there, and that's, the veil, what I got on
myself, I was coming from here. My husband (?)
over
there.

HAPEMAN: Your veil's from here?

TESORIERO: Yeah.

HAPEMAN: Oh!

TESORIERO: The veil I got from here.

HAPEMAN: Your husband brought that for you.

TESORIERO: Yeah. He was here three years before we got married.

HAPEMAN: Your husband was in the United States.

TESORIERO: He came over there to get married to me, yeah.

HAPEMAN: He was in the United States for three years before you were married.

TESORIERO: Three years. And he come back to get married. And in the summertime he was the age that all the mens, they go in the service. He can't come back! You go in the ends over there, she coming, come on, you know? After two months I was married, he have to go to the service for two years.

HAPEMAN: He went into the Italian service.

TESORIERO: Italian service. It was the law. See, when you was the age of twenty, like I say, we got married. It was the age to go into the service, and they go take him. You come? Now you go to the service.

HAPEMAN: So you had to stay.

TESORIERO: We are coming from America? No, nothing doing.
You're gonna go to the service. And he had a
little
is
trouble before he come back here, because America
supposed to be, like, permission, like, you know,
had
two, three months. He was two years already, he
okay.
a little trouble. After that it was everything
He coming, he coming, yeah. The consul of America
okay,
was Palermo, and the consul from over here says
let him come.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Good, good. (Mrs. Tesoriero laughs) As a
young woman in Italy, how did you imagine America?
What did you think about America?

TESORIERO: I see a lot of things nice. But I don't want to
tell
all of my trouble before I got on my feet and (?).
big
After three days I left Italy from Naples onto a
ship.
ship. My husband was (?). Fell inside on the
They take him to the hospital into the boat.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Do . . .

TESORIERO: And, wait a minute. And they can't operate him on

alive

the ship. The water was rough. They keep him
until he come back in the port over here, American
port. American port, you know, the boat, and maybe
the (?) call the port, because the ambulance and
and he was to the doctor, they take my husband
away to the ambulance, and they take him to the
hospital, and they operated him. But then I wasn't
sure he could live or die, for seventeen days.

all,

right

HAPEMAN: That must have been so . . .

TESORIERO: And I remain to the boat. I did not talk. I was
pregnant from my bigger son four-and-a-half months,
and I have a child three years of age. Know what
is? I cry, I cry. What can I do? You've got to
there. After two days they bring him in on the
island. And then on the island they start asking
many questions, all the documents that was there.
After three days they send me home, because one,
there was a guarantee, his brother. My husband's
brother was a guarantee for him, and for the
family.

it

go

so

family.

brother-

So they gave me permission to go home to my
in-law family. His brother, his big brother.

HAPEMAN: Okay, um . . .

TESORIERO: So from there little by little, thank God, he was better. And for six months, he couldn't work. I used to live with my brother-in-law family, with children and my child and myself and my husband, one family. We used to live on the same floor.

HAPEMAN: That's very interesting. I want to talk a little about your journey on the boat, before we get to time in America. Where did you leave from? Which port did you leave from to come to America?

TESORIERO: Oh, oh, the boat?

HAPEMAN: Yes.

TESORIERO: Conte Grande.

HAPEMAN: Oh. The Conte Grande was the name of the ship.

TESORIERO: The ship, yeah.

HAPEMAN: Okay. And where did you leave from?

TESORIERO: The cabin, no. I, one cabin separate, me and my husband, the child. Every person, every passenger, he got his own cabin, you know, little room.

HAPEMAN: Your own cabin.

TESORIERO: Yes.

HAPEMAN: Yes.

TESORIERO: They call it cabini[ph]. Yeah. I have a bed over there. My husband was in the hospital, and I was with the kids to the cabini[ph]. (she coughs)
You
the
I
pregnancy
eat.
know, when it was time for lunch we used to go on top of the boat. Over there was tables, you know. cannot eat. I had a stomach, you know, the and the water, and about my husband, I couldn't But the child, three years old, he was glad to go upstairs to eat, and I had to go up, and I was feeling sick of my husband dying, and so. That was my life, before I come on this ground.

HAPEMAN: Yes. Okay. (Mrs. Tesoriero coughs) When did you leave?

TESORIERO: When I leave from Italy?

HAPEMAN: Yes.

TESORIERO: I leave in November.

HAPEMAN: You left in November.

TESORIERO: Uh, wait a minute. I leave, you know, I don't remember. November 23, no, November. November, I

came over here in December.

HAPEMAN: December.

TESORIERO: December 20 I came over here.

HAPEMAN: Oh, okay.

TESORIERO: December 20, 19, 1928, I think it was. 1928.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Okay. And how did you feel about leaving?

TESORIERO: From my town?

HAPEMAN: Yes.

TESORIERO: Well, I feel bad, but I like to come in this
country.

bring
Before I was married, (she coughs) my father

my sister over here, and I want to come, too. Then
after that I got married and my husband bring over
here. (she coughs) What else?

HAPEMAN: Okay. What kind of luggage did you bring?

TESORIERO: Huh?

HAPEMAN: What did you pack with you? What luggage?

TESORIERO: Oh, I had a big, a big box. My husband put
everything in there. Not only this, tie it up with
a

me
big cord, you know. They open it, they wanted to

was
my
the
got
think,

open that box. I had to open that box. Open it
easy, but tighten, it was bad. But I went through
life at that time. I was sick, and my husband in
hospital, I don't know if he live or die. Now I
to open this box, I got to tie it again. You know,
they want inspection, to see if I was, you know,
something that don't belong to me. They don't find
nothing. Only my stuff from, I brought over from
Italy, all my, you know, sheet, pillowcase, I
as far as that go.

HAPEMAN: Clothes.

TESORIERO: Anyway, I have a big box. (she coughs)

HAPEMAN: We're going to pause for a moment. We're going to
pause for just a moment so that Peter can flip over
the tape.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

HAPEMAN: Okay. Now, tell me about the dining room on the
ship. Now, I know that you didn't want to eat . .
.

TESORIERO: Oh. It was on top of the boat, you know, big, you

you

know how. The people, it was a big dining room,

it

know, the people, everybody sit down. The same way
they make in parties, waiters, you know, they make

like that.

HAPEMAN: Okay. What kind of foods did they serve?

TESORIERO: What food?

HAPEMAN: Yes.

used

TESORIERO: Tell you the truth, some food, it was like I was

style.

to using, but some food, it was like American

HAPEMAN: American style.

over

TESORIERO: And I was, I used to (?). (she laughs) Cook the
bread. The American, when I was America, I was

there to the oven. The American bread for me was
like a cake.

HAPEMAN: Oh . . .

TESORIERO: Food that I was used to, to this kind of food, no
leave in the stove, I think it's (?). But when you
got hungry, you eat anything, right?

to

HAPEMAN: Right. Did you bring anything special from Italy
America?

TESORIERO: No, no, no. Only . . .

HAPEMAN: Just the essentials.

TESORIERO: Only what I have to the house. No specials. (she
laughs) What it was? (she laughs)

: The bedspread.

TESORIERO: Oh, the bedspreads? Yeah, what you got me now?
You
got them over here? (she laughs) You know,
bedspreads, that was my wedding bedspreads. I knit
them. (she addresses someone in the room) You
got
them over here?

: Yeah. I'll get them later, Ma. I'll show you
later.

HAPEMAN: I'll look forward to seeing that after the
interview.

TESORIERO: Yeah.

HAPEMAN: Okay? I'd like to see that.

TESORIERO: I knitted this to go around the bedspreads, the
my
material, it was a border, to the city, I start in
town. And I made, it was big like this, I put all
the way around the bedspreads, and it was for the
wedding bed. (she laughs) For the wedding bed.
Everybody at that time want a nice bed time.

HAPEMAN: That's very special. You left from Naples?

TESORIERO: No, no. I came from Panadea[ph].

HAPEMAN: Right. Where . . .

TESORIERO: Oh, I mean, for the ship.

HAPEMAN: Yes.

TESORIERO: My, it was an island ship, I take the ship to go to Naples. Naples, I go down, the next day we have to board the other ship that comes over here.

HAPEMAN: Okay. So you took a ship . . .

TESORIERO: Yeah, we boarded the big ship.

HAPEMAN: Okay, so you took a ship from Panadea[ph] to Naples.

TESORIERO: Yeah, to Naples.

HAPEMAN: The big ship.

TESORIERO: Yeah. The big ship that went over here for the passenger, we used to go for examination and all that, go to the ship.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Describe seeing land for the first time.
Tell me what you felt when you saw land.

TESORIERO: Over here? Oh, I like. I used to like it. When I was just a kid, ten years of age, I hear talking

back
and
children
one.
mother,
time

about my father and all, and some girls that was before me over here, they come back, you know, to Italy, back again. They used to like, they come again and tell the other people. I was crazy about coming. My father used to come, taking my sister myself. And I have the changes in mind, you know, I'm thinking my mother are going to take two from my (?) can answer to him. He take the big He says, "You stay here, Mama. I'll take you next time." He convince me to stay there with my and he's taking me the next time. But the next he don't take me. My husband take me. (she laughs)

America

HAPEMAN: When you came to America, was your father in
and your mother was still . . .

TESORIERO: Yeah. My mother never come . . .

HAPEMAN: She never came.

that's

TESORIERO: No. They used to stay three, four years, and
all.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

TESORIERO: And they come back.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

TESORIERO: The last time my father stay five years, he went
back, don't come back no more.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

TESORIERO: He stayed with my mother.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Describe seeing the Statue of Liberty.

TESORIERO: I never go there.

the
HAPEMAN: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty from
ship?

the
go
TESORIERO: I did when I passed by, you know, from the ship,
one that was bringing me over there. But I don't
in. I never go in, no.

HAPEMAN: How did you feel when you saw the statue from the
ship, or did you not see it?

I
TESORIERO: No, I was feeling happy because I was (?) already,
was little already. And when they bring them into
over there, because my husband was sick.

HAPEMAN: Right, you . . .

was

TESORIERO: I didn't know if he live or die. But his brother
the guarantee. After three days, you know, I have
the whole, uh, you know, the (?) from the people
there, what you're doing, where you're gonna live,
and this and that. My brother-in-law was in the
guarantee, they taking care, anything could happen.
He's taking me home. I was free.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Describe your impressions of Ellis Island.
What do you remember about Ellis Island?

TESORIERO: What I remember?

look

HAPEMAN: When you saw it for the first time, what did it
like?

TESORIERO: (she laughs) I see a big, big room.

HAPEMAN: Yes.

TESORIERO: With benches.

HAPEMAN: A big room with benches.

TESORIERO: And sit down from in the morning, sit down in the
morning. No, the first night we went upstairs to
sleep. It was six o'clock in the morning. "Do-do-
do-do, do-do-do-do, do-do-do-do!" Uh-huh. I say,
"What it is now?" (they laugh) So I just, so I
grab, the poor kid's asleep and I run with the

the

clothes and I go down and get dressed the kid. We have to be downstairs on the bench, and they call name each one, you know? (?) like you do now. And my name, you know, with a T, it's the last in the alphabet. I wait all the day. There's is a (?), somebody put food to eat. I don't like the food.

and

I

like

used to take the American bread. For me it was cake. I used to . . . (they laugh) I know why you're laughing. Once in a while was some people, they were passing by with a little basket, just selling the fruit, any fruits there. I had some change, American change, my husband used to bring

it

from here over there, from over there I bring over here, in my pocket. I see the fruit, I can't eat anything on the table. I can't even look at the bread. I said, I don't know talk. I used to pick

it

up, and I used to keep it. The one time (?) with fruit (?) any money, American money, I don't know

the

how

much it was. He used to take the money, and I used to take the fruit. Because I don't know to speak.

I

don't know to speak.

HAPEMAN: Right, right. Describe the medical examination.

TESORIERO: Hmm?

HAPEMAN: Describe the medical examination.

TESORIERO: Everything was all right.

HAPEMAN: It was all right?

you
TESORIERO: Yeah. And I was pregnant, and everything. And,

it's
know, and over there, where I was in the house over there, they read you the papers, but they want to make sure. The doctor says, "Let me see your breast." I says, "For why?" "I want to see if true you're pregnant." He squeezing my nipple, and he sees I was pregnant.

HAPEMAN: How did that, how did you feel about that?

TESORIERO: Well, I think, I feel ashamed before, but, I don't know. I was, what I need to do, I have to do. The little things that, I better do everything right. And they said, "I couldn't come back you in Italy." My husband was sick, and I was, the (?) like I said something else (?). I had to consent.

you?
HAPEMAN: What is the name of the child that you had with

TESORIERO: Maria Giuseppa.

HAPEMAN: And how old was she at the time?

years
TESORIERO: I came over here December 20, and she was three
old in January, it was coming . . .

HAPEMAN: Okay, so she was almost three.

month.
TESORIERO: Three years old, three years, about less of a

HAPEMAN: And what kind of medical exam did she have?

give
TESORIERO: Everybody had medical exam in Naples. Oh, they
a strict . . .

HAPEMAN: In Naples?

TESORIERO: Yeah, Naples, before we, before we boarded the big
ship.

HAPEMAN: Oh.

TESORIERO: Oh, yes. They examine the hair, they (?) the body,
they make us take baths before you go on the ship,
and before we come on the ground over here the same
way it is, they give us strict examination.

HAPEMAN: Okay. At this point, where is your husband?

TESORIERO: Where?

the
HAPEMAN: He's at the hospital? While you're going through
medical examinations . . .

TESORIERO: Over there?

HAPEMAN: Yes.

TESORIERO: He was into the hospital over here.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

TESORIERO: Columbus Hospital. And I was over there to, you know, to the, I was . . .

HAPEMAN: And how long did you have to stay on Ellis Island?

TESORIERO: About three days.

HAPEMAN: Three days.

TESORIERO: Yeah.

HAPEMAN: And then where did you go?

TESORIERO: I go my brother, was the guarantee for the family. He pick me up and take my family, his wife and four children.

HAPEMAN: Where did he live?

TESORIERO: He used to live on Avenue D.

HAPEMAN: Avenue D, here in Brooklyn.

TESORIERO: D, D.

HAPEMAN: D, uh-huh. Okay.

number. TESORIERO: I forgot the name, the number. I forgot the

HAPEMAN: That's okay.

TESORIERO: Avenue D between Nostrand Avenue and Rogers Avenue.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

TESORIERO: Between there.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Where did you sleep at Ellis Island?

TESORIERO: My brother-in-law give to my husband a room. He
had

I a lot of rooms. In the other room, I was (?) when
child. was coming over here, me and my husband and my

HAPEMAN: Okay.

TESORIERO: And I live over there more than six months. After
had six months my husband was a little better, he don't
have no job. You know what he did? Peddle. That
time they used to peddle around to the house. He
a little (?). (?) opened a little store.

HAPEMAN: Okay, okay. Let's see. How were you reunited with
your husband? How long was he in the hospital?

TESORIERO: He was seventeen days.

HAPEMAN: Seventeen days. And then . . .

TESORIERO: They send him home.

HAPEMAN: They send him to the brother-in-law.

TESORIERO: Yeah, they send him to the brother-in-law. Once in
a while he used to go check-up to the doctor.

HAPEMAN: Right, okay.

TESORIERO: Yeah. In New York, it was Columbus Hospital.

HAPEMAN: Columbus Hospital.

TESORIERO: I don't remember the name of the doctor. He was an
Italian doctor.

HAPEMAN: I bet. Where did you go after your husband
recovered?

TESORIERO: My husband was recovered. We went to live in three
rooms in back store.

HAPEMAN: Three rooms . . .

TESORIERO: In front there was a store, an empty store, and in
the back it was little rooms.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

TESORIERO: And we used to live over there for temporary.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

TESORIERO: After that, we moved again, we have the same place again, a little room in the back, front a store.

HAPEMAN: The front is a store.

TESORIERO: But this one, we open a little store, grocery, vegetable, a little delicatessen. A little (Italian), you know?

HAPEMAN: Where was the store?

TESORIERO: The store, it was Avenue Z, 21-15.

HAPEMAN: 21-15 Avenue Z.

TESORIERO: Z, Z.

HAPEMAN: Uh-huh, okay.

TESORIERO: Like over here.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Uh-huh. Okay. So . . .

TESORIERO: And after that, eleven years over there.

HAPEMAN: Eleven years?

used
TESORIERO: Eleven years. My husband, that time it was war,
to work, according the business was small and there
was not much delivery, he used to walk to the
stove.
At that time it was coal stoves. And God bless
him,

used
so
three

rest in peace, you know, he had the strength, he
to shovel coal, because not much haul for running
many house, everybody have a stove, a coal stove.
Everybody used to call him, and he have, thirty-
stoves, and my husband would take care it. Thirty-
three stoves.

HAPEMAN: Twenty-three?

you

TESORIERO: Each house, you know, one stove. And after that,
know, after eleven years we move on Ocean Avenue.

HAPEMAN: Ocean . . .

TESORIERO: Near the church.

HAPEMAN: Near the church.

TESORIERO: Across the street to the church.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

TESORIERO: I was over there forty-seven years.

HAPEMAN: Forty-seven years.

TESORIERO: Yeah.

HAPEMAN: Did you still run the grocery store in the same
location . . .

TESORIERO: I was (?). Before was just fruits and vegetables,
beer, little grocery. After that we started selling
selling soda, delicatessen. We used to say, like I
big say, some vegetable, grocery, it was a little, a
was store (?). I don't say this store today, but it
bigger than the other store that was opened before.

HAPEMAN: Yes. So on Avenue Z it was only fruits and
vegetates.

TESORIERO: Yeah.

HAPEMAN: But on Ocean Avenue . . .

TESORIERO: Just a few grocery, you know, canned food,
tomatoes, canned food.

HAPEMAN: Describe the neighborhood, the neighborhood around
Ocean Avenue where you had the grocery.

TESORIERO: The address, you want to know?

HAPEMAN: The neighborhood. What kind of . . .

TESORIERO: The neighborhood, it was the same neighborhood.

HAPEMAN: The same neighborhood.

TESORIERO: Because it was a block away from one store to the
other, you know? There was Avenue Z, over here was

Ocean Avenue. Anyway . . .

HAPEMAN: What kind of people lived there?

TESORIERO: The same people. They had the same customs. A little more, because I have a little more stove, people used to come, especially there was a church over there, and they used to come in after the church, especially on Sunday when (?). Yeah.

HAPEMAN: Okay, okay. Um, what other kind of businesses were around your grocery store?

TESORIERO: I had, I told you, vegetables . . .

HAPEMAN: No, what other sorts of businesses?

TESORIERO: It was the same as my business, the first and the second. Yeah. But the second, it was more merchandise.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

TESORIERO: The first one, I have no beer, and I have nothing. The second store, on Ocean Avenue, we put beer, we put more grocery, we put more delicatessen.

Because

in the store, there was a more, more (?) like, you know?

HAPEMAN: Were there, were there a lot of Italians in your neighborhood?

TESORIERO: Yeah, real Italian neighborhood. Yeah.

HAPEMAN: Yes?

TESORIERO: Especially on Sunday, they used to go to church,
and
to
on Sunday they're out of the church, and they used
to
come mostly for the delicatessen, you know, ham,
for,
salami, things like that. Because at the store
people.
like, vegetables, you know, I used to go (?)
around
I used to go on the house, I'd say bring them
was,
on the house. I had a nice, I make a living, I
I
I raise my children over there. Forty-seven years
I
was there.

HAPEMAN: Okay. What kind . . .

TESORIERO: Excuse me.

HAPEMAN: Yes?

TESORIERO: You know, I am around Sheepshead Bay sixty-seven
knows
years. I cannot go on the streets. Everybody
my name.

HAPEMAN: Really?

TESORIERO: You ask my children. Ask that boy. If they don't

four

see me because of him, I walk with him, because
years ago I fell, I break my hip, and I can't even
walk alone. Like I say, I use my, my, uh, one side
this, another side is him. In the summertime, the
other was a couple of weeks going again, I fell
again. I fell again. I hurt my finger. Just
tripped, just tripped in the street, in the
sidewalk.

I been falling. You see now how I got it?

HAPEMAN: Yes.

TESORIERO: Two weeks I've been suffering. (?)

HAPEMAN: Yes. Describe putting your children . . .

TESORIERO: Hmm?

HAPEMAN: Describe putting your children into the American
school system.

TESORIERO: Oh, they have all American schools, all American.
Only one was born in Italy.

HAPEMAN: Only one, right.

TESORIERO: And she went to school over here, because she was
three years old when I bring her over here.

HAPEMAN: Right.

TESORIERO: She start in school over here. All went to school.

HAPEMAN: Okay. How did you learn English? (Mrs. Tesoriero laughs) You paid a lot of attention.

You're
went
know
baby
first
got

TESORIERO: I know school, you know . . . (she laughs)
laughing, one time you want to cry, the (?). We
over there where they give the papers, and (?) I
everything. I didn't know everything. (?) After
that I know to answer the questions. It was, my
son was in Korea at that time. And that's the
time, Eisenhower to be President. I said, "We've
to vote for him, maybe it was my son maybe come
home." So when we went to sign on the vote, "You
know such and such a place is this way, you know,
such and such a place?" I didn't know. I couldn't
answer. You got to go to school first. They don't
want to make a vote, and my husband either. He
couldn't vote.

HAPEMAN: Did your husband know some English from his time in
America?

TESORIERO: Oh, yeah, yeah. He was before me over here. Yeah.

HAPEMAN: Yes. Did that help you?

TESORIERO: Yeah, sure. He (?) teacher (?) this, you know.

HAPEMAN: Do you remember your first English word?

TESORIERO: Hello.

HAPEMAN: Hello.

TESORIERO: Goodbye. All right.

HAPEMAN: Yes, all right. (they laugh) Did you experience any kind of persecution because you were born in Italy, any prejudice?

TESORIERO: In Italy?

HAPEMAN: No, in America.

TESORIERO: In America . . .

HAPEMAN: Because you were from . . .

TESORIERO: When I came over here it was, um, President, uh, I know, no Eisenhower. Eisenhower was after. I forgot. I used to remember this a couple of days ago.

HAPEMAN: Probably, um, Roosevelt, during the Depression.

TESORIERO: Maybe it was Roosevelt, yeah.

HAPEMAN: Yes.

TESORIERO: When I came over here, Roosevelt in November, and I come in December.

HAPEMAN: Right.

TESORIERO: Still there was pictures in the street. Yeah,
Roosevelt.

HAPEMAN: You remember seeing the, the posters.

TESORIERO: Yeah, yeah. I was still in the street the
pictures,
yeah.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Do you remember any sort of prejudice, um,
that you experienced?

TESORIERO: After that it was President Eisenhower. It was
President John. It was President, uh, Kennedy.

HAPEMAN: Okay, yeah.

TESORIERO: There was another president, what was called, I
forgot.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

TESORIERO: So many presidents in (?).

HAPEMAN: Yes, there have been a lot.

TESORIERO: You know, I'm sixty-seven years over here.

HAPEMAN: That's right. (they laugh) I have a question
about religious life in America. Where did you,
where did . . .

TESORIERO: I continue my religion.

HAPEMAN: You did continue your religion.

TESORIERO: Yeah, sure. Catholic. Yeah, continued my Catholic
religion, yeah. My kids all baptized, yeah. All
married
one,
I
baptized, all when they got married they were
in a church, a regular marriage. The rest, only
she don't want to get married. A beautiful girl.
don't know if you see. She was over here when you
come here. No. She must have walked out.

HAPEMAN: No, yes.

TESORIERO: Only one is just single. And that one is over
here.

HAPEMAN: Tell me the names of your children, all of them.

TESORIERO: My children, I'll tell you once again, the Italian
name is Maria Giuseppa, over here they call her
Mary
used
Jo. The other one was Thomas. Over there they
to call him Gaitano. That's Thomas. And the other
one is Angela.

HAPEMAN: Angela.

TESORIERO: The other one . . .

HAPEMAN: Named after your mother?

TESORIERO: Huh? After my mother. Another one, was Gloria.

HAPEMAN: Gloria.

TESORIERO: Another one is over there, Elena.

HAPEMAN: Elena.

TESORIERO: Elena.

HAPEMAN: Elena.

TESORIERO: She had a (?). Over there we call her Elena.

HAPEMAN: Elena.

they

TESORIERO: It was the name from my city, Adiana[ph] Regina,
call over here. We had to call it the, the,
whatchamacallit they call over here, I don't know.
But, (?). So I put the name, Italy, and (?). Uh,
another one, after that come this one, my father's
name, Peter.

HAPEMAN: Peter, yes.

TESORIERO: After one come another one, I had a miscarriage.
Another one, the last, is Anthony. That was the
last

baby, Anthony.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Did you ever wish that you stayed in Italy?

TESORIERO: To tell you the truth, I never had a wish because I can't, I know I can't go. I had seven children to take care of, and a business. My husband went a couple of times.

HAPEMAN: He did go.

TESORIERO: He went, not because of purely pleasure, he went in order to pay, sell a little property. They wanted to sell it off and put the rest over there, and he went over there for a couple of weeks.

HAPEMAN: But you were glad to be in America, or were you?

TESORIERO: No, he asked me, he stayed the first time only one week, the second time to sell it off, for the property, to pay the sale with the other people, he stays about three weeks to four weeks.

HAPEMAN: Okay, okay. What kind of relationship did you keep with your family in Italy?

TESORIERO: We were so nice. Everybody was like each other, they was respect each other. Yeah.

HAPEMAN: Yes. Did you send them anything from America?

TESORIERO: Well, at that time it was the wartime, I couldn't send anything. Sometime I used to send a little

package, you know, because the war, a little
package

for the kids, you know.

HAPEMAN: What, for the kids?

TESORIERO: That they could use it. But after that I don't
send

no more, I think, because it, can't mail it, it was
the wartime. And after that when it started again
once in a while, you know, I used to stick a couple
of dollars into the mail, you know.

HAPEMAN: A couple of dollars in the mail.

TESORIERO: No correspondence much.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

TESORIERO: A little (?), no correspondence in the Second War,
no, no. You can't write, you can't read, whether

no

one survive over there. But after that it's peace,
we know what's left. I used to send my mother, my
father, after that he don't live long. My mother
live a few years more. I used to remember to send
her something. They was poor people, all the
people,
you know. That's all.

HAPEMAN: Okay. What have you done in your life that you're
most proud of?

TESORIERO: What?

HAPEMAN: What have you done in your life that you're very proud of?

TESORIERO: I told you. Raising my children.

HAPEMAN: Raising your children.

TESORIERO: I raise them healthy, and I raise them honest. My husband's three, the first daughter was set to go out, because (?) when they got it. The first thing, listen. "You're taking my daughter out? Eleven o'clock I want them in the door." He did it, he did it.

HAPEMAN: (she laughs) Very strict.

TESORIERO: He did it.

HAPEMAN: Good.

TESORIERO: Since they got married. The other one, most of them long ago, (?) the fiance, they got married, and I have no more worry because they was married. Only one, she don't want to get married. She was a beautiful looking girl. Now she's a little chubby. (they laugh)

HAPEMAN: Okay.

TESORIERO: So, you know, I tell her the truth. How (?), she had beautiful young boys, but in her mind she wants to be an opera singer. She spends a lot of money for this. But today, you know, you got to have luck on everything. She still study! But no luck to get a place they call, like I say, show. And she went a couple of times and made a show and things like that. Not ever a steady job. She had to work for the city to have a steady job. She work about ten years for the city. Now she retire. She retire this year.

HAPEMAN: What are your feelings about the United States?

TESORIERO: Only happy, because I've always been like, not because I don't know (?), but I know (?). Italy's a nice city, a nice country, but why I coming, and what if somebody has to come on this little island, it was a poor island. You couldn't make a living. Man, like I said, got to leave his family there, they come in here to make a few dollars. They leave the family over there. They can't afford to bring the family

like

over here, because then over here take expensive. They used to live over there, and they sacrifice two, three, four years with my father the least. They sacrifice to make a few extra dollars. They stay there, but they only get down to what he did, see? That's what it was like. The town, it was beautiful. Nice area, nice ocean, clean ocean, big ocean. But not for making a living. Not to make a living.

much.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Well, that's a good place to end the interview. I want to thank you, thank you very

TESORIERO: You finished? I did everything?

HAPEMAN: Yes, everything. Thank you very much for having us over.

TESORIERO: Thank you very much. It was worth it for me to say what I have to say.

HAPEMAN: Well, it was great.

TESORIERO: You're a lovely girl. I wish you lots of luck.

HAPEMAN: Thank you. I enjoyed meeting you very much.

TESORIERO: You're single, or married?

HAPEMAN: I'm single.

TESORIERO: Yeah. I wish you get a nice young boy to love you,
and be a real husband to you.

HAPEMAN: Well, thank you, thank you.

TESORIERO: You've got nice looking, and you can't miss him.

HAPEMAN: Thank you. (she laughs) This is Mindy Hapeman,
signing off with Maddalena Tesoriero.

TESORIERO: Tesoriero.

HAPEMAN: Tesoriero. On September 23, 1997, for the Ellis
Island Oral History Project.