

EI-967

JOSEPHINE CALLERI

BIRTHDATE: MAY 10, 1913

INTERVIEW DATE: OCTOBER 15, 1997

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 84

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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ALGERIA, 1913

AGE: 4 MONTHS

SHIP:

PORT:

RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: Today is October 15th, 1997 and I'm here in the Ellis Island Oral History Studio with Josephine Calleri, who was J—born Josephine Barile.

CALLERI: Barile.

LEVINE: Barile, and came through Ellis Island when she was only four months of age in 1913 from Algeria. At the time of this interview, Mrs. Calleri is 84 years of age and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Okay. If we could start at the beginning and if you would say the name you were born with and your birth date.

CALLERI: My name is—my full name is Josephine Michelene [PH] Calleri. My father was en route to this country at the time I was born, so that my mother named me Josephine after St. Joseph to protect him on his journey, and Michelene after my father, whose name was Michael. So that's my full name.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And y—you were—you were born B-A-R-I-L-E.

CALLERI: Right.

LEVINE: That was your last—

CALLERI: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And let's see. So you were born May 10th, 1913. And where in Algeria were you?

CALLERI: Constantine, Algeria, which is a full day's journey from Algiers—train—train journey from Algiers.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, do you know how it happened that your mother and father were living in Constantine?

CALLERI: Yes, my father's family had migrated to Algeria. And then he was on a visit to Sicily when he met my mother, who was much younger than he was. And my mother had been orphaned at about age three and had been reared by her older brothers and sisters. She was sort of shifted around from household to household. And by the time she was 18 years old she had become a little bit fed up with this being shifted around. And when she met my father, he was a handsome, red haired, blue eyed gentleman, and so they formed a—a friendship and fell in love and so they decided to marry. But my uncle, Joseph, who was one of the uncles—one of the brothers who had brought her up, objected to the fact that he was quite a few years older. Actually, he—the way it's been told to me, he was twice her age, which would have made him 36.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: And he objected to their getting married but—so they decided to elope and they married and went to Algeria via Tripoli.

LEVINE: Hmm.

CALLERI: And then he—how they ended up in Constantine, I'm really not sure. But he—he was in business with another man who did all of the bookkeeping. And their business was mining granite from a mountainside—

LEVINE: Hmm.

CALLERI: —and selling it for building blocks and bridges and that sort of thing. It was large mines. And they employed native or Arabic-speaking laborers. And our home was a home that was built up against the side

of a mountain and we—we lived in that. And it was 20 miles from Constantine. We were in the boon—boondocks, you might say. And they—we were 20 miles from Constantine and when they had to travel to the city, to the bank or anything, they would go with a furry—with a—a surrey with a fringe on top.

LEVINE: Hmm.

CALLERI: Because years and years later in San Jose, when we were in California and my older sister, who's just 10 years older than I—she was 10 years old when we arrived here at—through Ellis Island, we went to San Juan Bautista, which is a very interesting old, old town. And it's a California State historical section.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: And when we went through this one big livery barn and we saw this—all kinds of wagons and coaches, and she pointed to this one and said, "That's the kind of wagon we had in Algeria." [chuckles]

LEVINE: Oh. [chuckles]

CALLERI: She remembered it distinctly.

LEVINE: Yeah.

CALLERI: So they lived there then. They lived in Algeria and Constantine almost 20 years. But the—of course, they had the children. They had a number of children. My mother had several infant deaths but there were seven surviving children at the time around 1913. But before that, my father suffered a very severe illness and had to be hospitalized. And while he was hospitalized his partner absconded with all the capital from the bank.

LEVINE: Hmm.

CALLERI: So when he recovered and came back they were back in their home there at the—at the mountain. And he tried to continue his work but he really—he didn't have enough capital. He couldn't—he managed for a while to pay the la—the laborers and so on. But he finally had to give it up. And in fact, my mom—my mother remembered my—and they talked about it, you know, around the fire—around the stove at—in Jamestown, New York where we ended up. She remembered that one time when this surrey with the fringe on top—my sister and my mother went to Jamest—went to Constantine. And she carried a pistol on her hip because there were possibilities of bandits. And one of the times when

they were—she was looking out the window from the farmhouse or the mountain house, and this was when they were starting to have problems with the laborers because he was running out of money. And they were threatening my father and she—my mother looked out the window and saw them threatening my father. And she shot out the window to frighten—she didn't shoot to hit anybody.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: But she shot up in the air to frighten them and subdue them. And it was after that my father decided he had to give it up, so they moved into Constantine and then my dad got work where he had to go because he—his—he did mining with the granite. And so he had to get work out in the field. And while he was gone, my mother worked in a convent kitchen in Constantine and the older children helped take care of the younger children. Of course, I wasn't born yet. And she—she eked out more money by—she had this oven. It was not an outdoor oven. It was in the house but it was this oven that she kept going all that time, and people brought their risen bread and she baked it for them. And they paid her for doing that service. And then the older—some of the older children, notably, Vincent and Arcelia [PH], they were about 13 and 9, that age, they earned a little money by going to the Jewish quarter on the Sabbath Day and lighting the stoves, turning on the stoves for the—for the Jewish people who were orthodox and were forbidden to do any labor at all on the—their Sabbath Day. So they went around lighting everybody's stoves and they earned a few pennies that way.

LEVINE: Oh. Before we continue, let me ask you a—a little background here. Was your father's family from Sicily as well?

CALLERI: Yes.

LEVINE: And were th—was there a Sicilian community in Constantine that you're aware of during that time?

CALLERI: No, I don't know. His family were there and my mother lost complete touch with them after my father died. See, we were only here three years and she—she didn't continue the—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, that—

CALLERI: —the relationship with the grandpar—with her in-laws in—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CALLERI: —in Constantine.

LEVINE: Your father's partner, was he also a Sicilian or was he A—Arabic? Do you have any idea?

CALLERI: I—I have no idea. They never—I don't think it would have been Arabic. He was probably another Sicilian or maybe a Frenchman—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: —because my mother learned to speak both French and Arabic—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: —in—in Con—in Algeria.

LEVINE: Algeria, yeah. Okay. I was just curious about the—

CALLERI: Yeah.

LEVINE: —the migration of people—

CALLERI: Yeah.

LEVINE: —from Sicily to Algeria at that point.

CALLERI: Yes, that—well, and this was long before Mussolini—because, you know, when Mussolini went, I think a lot of Italians moved over there. But this was before him.

LEVINE: Right.

CALLERI: Many years before him so that didn't account for it. I don't know. They never—my mother never did say.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CALLERI: Yeah.

LEVINE: So when—y—so your father came first.

CALLERI: Yes. Well, you want me to tell you how that happened?

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: While he was away, it—it's really a true story. I mean, might have been coincidence but it's—it's exactly as my mother told us. She went to a

fortuneteller or a palmster or whatever. And this person said that she was going to be get—getting a letter from far away. And you know, in—in a few weeks, she did get a letter from far away. And it was from her brother, Joseph, who had in the meantime migrated to Jamestown, New York. Her letter was from Jamestown. And in this letter he said, “I have been dreaming about you so much lately that I’ve been getting concerned. Write and tell me what is going on with you.” Well, my mother was illiterate. She couldn’t write. She could speak three languages but she couldn’t write. So she—then there were scribes, you know, who wrote letters for people. It’s—

LEVINE: Oh. If you can say anything about that, that’s interesting.

CALLERI: Yes. She went to a—a—a person who, that’s how they earned their living. They wrote letters for the people who couldn’t write their own. And so she, through the scribe, wrote to my Uncle Joe that a—all of the circumstances on how they were now really, well, getting along but that was all. And she was not too satisfied with her husband being gone so much of the time. So she received another reply and Uncle Joe said, “Why don’t you all come here? It’s wonderful here in Jamestown, New York. Why don’t you come here?” So the next time my father came home between jobs, she bombarded him with this s—letter and told her a—told him about her uncle, Joe, and he was now reconciled to the fact that they had married. And—

LEVINE: He was the one who had objected?

CALLERI: He is the—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CALLERI: He was the one who had objected. Yeah. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CALLERI: Because she—she was pretty mischievous as a young girl and she didn’t always get along with all their sister-in-laws.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CALLERI: In fact, she told a story about one time she put an a—a—a snake in her sister-in-law’s bed. [laughter] So—

LEVINE: Do you know why your Uncle Joe, went to Jamestown?

CALLERI: They never did say. I don't know how they did. Their—they were a whole family. It wasn't only my Uncle Joe. There was my Uncle Tony, and three sisters. Three of my s—my aunts, Josephine, Aunt Libby and Aunt Ida. They were all in Jamestown, New York then.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: And their children.

LEVINE: And your father at this point, he was going out, as you said, into the field.

CALLERI: Right.

LEVINE: So what? He was—

CALLERI: To the mining country.

LEVINE: —mining granite?

CALLERI: He was still mining granite. That was—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CALLERI: —his field. I mean, he perhaps was in a managerial position. He wasn't doing the—the laboring. But—because he hadn't done it at his own mine. He had been managing the laborers. However, she told him about all this and he really didn't want to do it. He was—as I say, he was twice her age. He wasn't that adventurous. He had been a man of importance there in that area because he had been a businessman and had—had done very well until his partner ran away with all the money. And so he—he really wasn't interested in going. So he finally agreed to go by himself. And at—at the same time also, she was expecting me. So he said, "Well, I'll go and look over the situation and if it's okay then I'll send for you." So he went. He arrived in Jamestown and he wasn't finding any work, nothing in his field, especially. And you know, historically, we know about the prejudice that existed against immigrants, especially the immigrants from Southern Europe.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: And Jamestown, New York was primarily settled by Swedish people. Of course, they were immigrants too but—and they had run up against their prejudices too. But apparently, they had been there long enough to have established themselves. And so my father wasn't happy. He didn't like it and he wanted to go back. He felt there were more prospects for him to succeed there in Constantine, that he might still have a chance to

recoup and get a more per—well, even if he had to go out in the field, he was—he was working in a respectable job. Nothing—nothing was offered to him except maybe gardening, which he wasn't a gardener.
[chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: And he missed his family. He was a very loving father and he missed his family and he wanted to go back. Well, my mother decided she wanted to see for herself. So she talked it over with her mother-in-law. And my mother-in-law said, "Well, if you're determined to go, leave the three boys with me, Ernest, Vincent and Tony, and just take the girls and the baby. And then, later, you can send for the three boys." But my mother said, "Oh, no. I'm—we're going to—altogether. I'm not leaving my boys." So she—somehow or other, she got some money together. I don't know. I got the impression that she still had some of the equipment from the mining. And so she sold everything she had and raised enough funds to make arrangements. And she got—went through the quota process and if they still had—if they had the quota then. I'm not sure. She never mentioned that. But she prepared to come.

LEVINE: Now, that means that your father's family was also living—

CALLERI: Yes.

LEVINE: —in Constantine.

CALLERI: His family, his mother—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CALLERI: I don't know. She didn't—mentioned his father but his mother was there and he had brothers and sisters.

LEVINE: I see. Uh-huh.

CALLERI: But we never heard too much about them after we came here and my father died.

LEVINE: So your mother—h—can you remember leaving Constantine or leaving w—

CALLERI: No, I was too much an infant.

LEVINE: Oh, you were too young, of course.

CALLERI: But I remember everything they told me because—

LEVINE: Well, whatever you remember.

CALLERI: —we talked about it all the time.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. That they said. Yeah.

CALLERI: For instance, my sister, Arcelia, would say that it was a day's journey by train to Algeria. And before they left Constantine, my—my mother made delicious bread and she did it when we were in Jamestown—I mean, delicious bread and cheese. She made these big forms of cheese, these big, round forms of cheese, which were similar to Parmesan and—

LEVINE: Hmm.

CALLERI: —and very—Monterey Jack—

LEVINE: Oh.

CALLERI: —and that kind of cheese.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CALLERI: And she would cure it and she'd rub it. She'd make the cheese and put it in the forms and squeeze it until all the water was squeezed out. And then she would wrap it in muslin and store it. And every so often she'd open up the muslin wrappings and rub it with salt and c—coarsely ground pepper—

LEVINE: Hmm.

CALLERI: —and rub it all thoroughly and wrap it up again until it was—of course, we could use it anytime as a softer cheese. But she usually kept it for a harder cheese and grating cheese.

LEVINE: Grating, uh-huh.

CALLERI: And so she made several forms of the cheese. She baked a lot of bread, like the Italian panatone [PH] that had the raisins and—raisins and butter in it so that it had keeping qualities. And she packed the cheeses and the bread in wicker hampers. She also had some trunks of clothing. One of the trunks disappeared when they got to Ellis Island. That never was—landed. She—and it—it was one of the trunks that had a lot of their bedding and blankets and so on. And because she had

heard enough stories of immigrants that told her the kind of food they would get, and of course they came steerage just like everybody else, and so—but she was prepared that way, that the—her family could eat bread and cheese and they could keep—keep healthy for the duration of the voyage. And they could get milk on board and if there were fruits available.

LEVINE: So the—were there seven of y—seven children?

CALLERI: And I was the eighth. I was the infant.

LEVINE: And you were the eighth child and your mother—

CALLERI: I was the infant.

LEVINE: —traveling.

CALLERI: Uh-huh. Right.

LEVINE: Yeah.

CALLERI: Well, she—s made a good deal. She had a really lucky break in Algiers at the port while they were waiting to be in—relo—you know, get on the ship, this young French couple were there right near them. And they got to talking and this young man—apparently, they were—they had no children. They were newly wed, I assumed. And my mother made a deal with this young man. He may not have been—he may have been older than the girl. Anyway, he would take the—two of the older boys, the two older boys when they were separated. See, during the day they could go together in the steerage but at night they were—the men were—and boys were segregated from the women and girls. And so—and—and my mother would look after his wife, which was really great for her because she had somebody else to help her to look after the little ones. And another thing she had done—I forgot to mention it—she knew about the segregation deal so the youngest boy, who was about six, six or seven years old, she had him grow his hair long. He had long, curly black hair and was a pretty boy and dressed him in dresses, and he hated it. He was at the age where he hated it. But that way, she could keep him with her. And anyway, the two older boys—the three boys were—when they left, they were left in—in Frenchy-type clothing. They wore shorts because it was warm there. It was September but it was warm. They had shorts and socks that came up to their knees and these shirt tops with collars and those round straw [unclear], sort of. That's—that's what they were wearing, except for Tony. He was in girl's clothes.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

CALLERI: But Vincent and Ernest had these very French looking outfits.

LEVINE: Did they got them in Algeria? Is that where they had g—

CALLERI: Oh, yes. Well, you see, Algeria was a French—

LEVINE: French.

CALLERI: —protectorate.

LEVINE: Right. Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: That's why they all spoke French. All my brothers and sisters spoke French. I wasn't talking yet. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And how your mother and father? What were they speaking at home?

CALLERI: Italian.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: But my mother spoke French and—and she communicated with the French nuns where she worked and the French people. She did a lot of the communication. My father wasn't much of a linguist—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: —even though he'd been longer in Algeria than she was.

LEVINE: How about the religious aspect of your family when they were in Algeria?

CALLERI: They were Catholic. Oh, yes. They were all given, you know, saints' names and Catholics. I was named after St. Joseph. I don't remember—our sister, Arcelia—one of my sisters was Arcelia. One was Rose. Vincent had a sort of Frenchy-sounding name. He was called Vincent Anton.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: And there was Ernest.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: He was probably Ernesto or Ernest. And then the youngest boy was Anthony. Antonio.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: So that—they were all names after—as a—you know, the Catholics—I don't know if they do it anymore but the Catholics always had a French saint's name.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. Did your family tell you anything about the voyage?

CALLERI: Yes, the—they—they talked about, well, Vincent and then Arcelia were the most adventurous. And they managed to sneak up—sneak away from the steerage up into the second class. And they managed to get around a lot of the ship.

LEVINE: Did they talk about that?

CALLERI: Yeah, they did. They—they said—but they didn't say too much but, other than they did get up there and they saw how the other people were doing. [chuckles] Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: And then when they arrived at Ellis Island and they were being processed through, they put my mother in a bench with all the little ones. And where they—as it showed in the film, there were all these tables with the food and everything. Well, they didn't try to go over there. They just sat in this one bench and Vincent and Arcelia went over to the tables and they took portable food with them and took it back to the other ones.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: They—they took—and the mention in the film about the bananas, they talked about that. They said that they couldn't imagine what they were and they were squeezing them. And they tried to bite them and the skins didn't taste good. And then somebody showed them how to eat the bananas. So they enjoyed the fruit from the—those tables and the buns. They didn't really go into anything more. They—want me to go on? [chuckles]

LEVINE: No—yeah, fine. Go ahead.

CALLERI: They—when they left Ellis Island then to go to the train, my mother had her—exchanged her French francs for American dollars and money. So she was prepared to buy her tickets at the train station. And while she

was there buying her tickets, this lady with three children from Sicily was there. And she hadn't—I—I saw in the registry, in that registration place—you know, part of the museum where peo—where there was a place for people to exchange their currency. But apparently, it got past her. She didn't do it. And so she still had her Sis—her Italian lire. And—and she kept pushing her Italian lire to the ticket seller, ticket agent. And he would push it back. So then my mother explained to—apparently, he could understand French.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: She explained to him in French what the problem was. And he said, "But I can't"—he told her, "I can't take her money. She has to change it somewhere." So my mother explained to the lady what was wrong. And she said to her, "Where are you going?" And this lady and her three children were going to Pennsylvania, which is on the border near where we were going to Jamestown, New York. Jamestown, New York was very close to that corner of Pennsylvania, the western corner of Pennsylvania. And so my mother loaned her the money. They exchanged addresses and, later on, this person sent—repaid her. She got paid back. And maybe they were on the same train for a while. I don't know. They didn't comment about that.

LEVINE: Hmm.

CALLERI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Did they remain friends? Do you have any sense of that?

CALLERI: No idea.

LEVINE: Huh.

CALLERI: No idea.

LEVINE: How interesting.

CALLERI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Huh.

CALLERI: They might have for a short time and then, with the stress of rearing their own children, it probably stopped. But she never did mention that. Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, it seemed—it seems as though your mother had—had friendly encounters during the entire—

CALLERI: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: —trip.

CALLERI: She did. Yeah, she was—I'm a lot like her. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Are you? Uh-huh.

CALLERI: [laughs] Um—

LEVINE: Te—yeah, why don't you say what your mother was like a—as—

CALLERI: Well, she was—

LEVINE: —when you were a little girl.

CALLERI: She—she had the same—as I mentioned in the film, she had the same distrust of authority, of government authority, growing up as she grew up in Sicily where there was friction, you know, between author—the government, whatever. She really didn't trust police or government figures. She grew up with this distrust. And so she had to get used to that here, that it wasn't the same. It wasn't the same here at all, that you could get cooperation. Of course, she was fortunate. There were those crooked people that met a lot of the innocents—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: —innocent immigrants. But my mother was very fortunate in that with her eight children, that she arrived in—she arri—they arrived in Jamestown, New York and my father wasn't aware that they had come. He may not have gotten her letter. I'm not quite sure why. But a cousin was a taxi driver or something. Th—they didn't have taxis then but probably ported—portaged people from the train station or groceries or whatever in—to the neighborhood. And when this lady with her eight children came off the train and the two little boys were—three little boys now—she—I guess somehow, I don't know whether she did change Tony over yet or not, whether she had time to do that. But sh—the two little boys were in their shorts, their French shorts, their French-looking outfits and their little boater hats. And this man—his name was Bonpilio [PH] (I forget his first name) and he—when he saw her and she told him who she was, he said, "Oh, I'll take you to him." [chuckles] So she—he loaded everybody in his wagon and took them to where my father was. [chuckles] He was amazed and he was stuck. He couldn't go back.

And he really didn't—he—he was delighted to see everybody and, actually, they had one more child, a girl, in this country, the only one who was born in this country. And she died shortly after he did.

LEVINE: Oh.

CALLERI: She had the flu—the flu epidemic and they may have been what—what did him. But he was—he'd never liked it here. He had been a man of subsus—substance there and here he was a lowly immigrant. And he never liked it. He wasn't happy here. However, he made the best of it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: So—

LEVINE: Could you mention something about that flu epidem—epidemic? Was it an epidemic at that point?

CALLERI: Well, you know, that was during the First World War when that flu epidemic slept—swept through the world. People were dying in Europe and people were dying in the United States. And they were wearing masks. It was the same all across the United States. In—in San Francisco, people were going around with masks. This flu epidemic was a very virulent type.

LEVINE: Can—

CALLERI: And it killed a lot of people.

LEVINE: Do you—from your own personal experience with your—with your youngest—what—d—

CALLERI: My youngest sister, S—

LEVINE: Sister.

CALLERI: Her name was Salvatrese [PH].

LEVINE: Salvatrese. And your father—

CALLERI: He—he was ill quite a long time, actually, and it seemed like he kept lingering. And finally, he—he just went. My family were all there with him, the older ones, you know, when he—when he died. But that's the only thing I can figure out that it was.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: My mother never actually said. And the same way with Salvatrese. She—she died very suddenly. She was only three.

LEVINE: Hmm.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

LEVINE: Okay. We're continuing after a pause. So y—you were saying that your—well, wait. You were saying that your father really never was happy that he had come.

CALLERI: No. He didn't like it. He had difficulties with languages, to begin with. And he—my older brothers and sisters started working in the woolen mills. Jamestown was furn—was very famous, is still, for its woolen mills and furniture mac—manufacturing. Those were the two chief industries in Jamestown. And they made—there was an ironworks that made wonderful doors for cathedrals in Europe.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: That was—Jamestown was noted for that at one time. I don't know whether they still do it, and also for their furniture making and the woolen mills. And the woolen mills finally moved south, as so many of the industries did, you know, in later years.

LEVINE: Hmm.

CALLERI: But at the time, my older sisters, and I think my brother, Ernest—they were underage; they weren't supposed to but they went to work in the woolen mills using cousins' work permits to lie about their age. And for instance, my sister, Arcelia, was only about—she was 10 when I was born so if this was maybe—she was maybe only about 11 or 12 when she started working in a woolen mill. And the other cousins—you see, all of the Swi—all of the Sicilian cousins were here. They had already come here. My cousin—

LEVINE: They was on your mother's side.

CALLERI: My mother's cousins.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: My mother's brothers and sisters—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: —and their children.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: And so they—they sort of—for instance, Arcelia—Rose, too, went to work in the mills, the older one. She was the oldest. But when Arcelia was pretty little, only 11, and she had a head of really curly hair, very pretty little girl, and they—the older cousins would hide her when the inspectors came through. They would just push her behind a machine or something. And they helped her get going and she was a very bright girl, very intelligent person all her life. And so she—she worked in the woolen mill and Vincent did and Ernest. And Rose did. They all worked. And my h—my father—they had to go to work early in the morning when it was quite dark. And my father would walk them to the trolley and see them on the trolley. And they'd go to work and work all day. And then he'd walk and meet them when they came home, because it was a long workday.

LEVINE: Hmm.

CALLERI: And he'd walk them home. And he wasn't happy that way. He—he had envisioned his family [chuckles] being dependent on him.

LEVINE: Hmm.

CALLERI: Not he being dependent on them. And so he was really bitterly unhappy here. He—he didn't like it for that reason. He had always been the provider and he didn't like being dependent on his family. My mother didn't go to work but she stayed home and kept the family going—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: —with—

LEVINE: How did your mother like being here?

CALLERI: Well, she—she actually liked it. She—she liked being with her family, whom she hadn't seen in so many—she hadn't always got along with them but now that she was older, she did. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: And I think she liked it. Yeah, especially after he lost his business. When he lost his business and she had to work in—in the town and work in the—in the kitchens of the convent and—and rent out space in her ovens—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: —it was a different story. And of course, she was a lot younger than he was. So she was more adventurous.

LEVINE: And you say your father died three years after he was here?

CALLERI: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CALLERI: Well, I was three years old when he died.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CALLERI: So it might have been just a little bit longer than three years. Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Hmm, hmm.

CALLERI: He was a very kind and loving husband and father. He used to—I don't remember that much about him because I was only three, but my sisters always talked about how he would walk them to work when they were going to work. And whenever they had to go to the stores or anything, he would walk them and they liked having him go with them because he would break down and buy them candy. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CALLERI: My mother was a little tougher. She kept close eye on the finances.

LEVINE: I see.

CALLERI: Yeah.

LEVINE: And how about the community of Jamestown? Is there anything that you, when you think of your growing up years there—anything about that community that you recall or—

CALLERI: Well, it was—

LEVINE: —the immigrant—were—were you part of a—an enclave of people—

CALLERI: Of immigrant—yeah, Italian—Sicilian, Italian immigrants. And we went to the parish church and the parish school until after—of course, my father died when I was three. And later on, when we were—I might have been five or six years old—well, my oldest two sisters married quite young. They were quite young. Rose and Arcelia were married. Arcelia married a World War I veteran, Italian veteran of the war. And I don't know whether Charlie was ever in the war or anything but Rose married my brother-in-law, Charlie Ferrino [PH] and—and Arcelia married Joseph Palermo. And they—they lived close by and was always a very close family. And the rest of us just grew up. [chuckles]

LEVINE: [chuckles] And I suppose you learned English very naturally—

CALLERI: Yes.

LEVINE: —growing up there.

CALLERI: Yes. When we—well, one of the stories that is very dear to my heart—it really happened—when Arcelia was still in school, before she started working and my mother had errands to do or something, Ar—Arcelia had to take care of me. And so she was in school. But then sometimes she missed school because she was taking care of me. So they were having a picnic one day, the school, a school picnic. And so the principal said to her—she said—Arcelia said she couldn't go. And so the principal said to her, "Well, bring your little sister." So I was still about—a little baby. And so she—she took me and I was in the principal's office until they went to the—they went to a farmyard. They went on this picnic and it was on a farmyard. And when the principal said—I was sleeping and the principal settled me under a tree on a blanket and stuff. And I fell asleep and so Arcelia could go around and have some fun. And then I started crying and the farmer's wife came and looked after me until it was time to go back to school and take me home. [chuckles] So this was—it was a small town and these things were possible in those days. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-huh.

CALLERI: Yeah.

LEVINE: So do you have fond memories of Jamestown?

CALLERI: Oh, yes. I—it was a good town to grow up in.

LEVINE: Yeah?

CALLERI: It was mainly—as I say, mainly Swedish and Sicilian but there were other—you know, other groups. There was one French-speaking family. And my mother used to have to—all—she'd visit. They'd visit back and forth and u—they used to have a ball talking French to each other.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CALLERI: That was the only one—French-speaking families. There was only Negro family. Their names were Jackson and they were a very nice family. And I didn't really know them personally but I met the children in the school.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CALLERI: In fact, one year when I was in high school, we had to do an anthology or some kind of literature thing. So I did an anthology of Negro poetry, which was very rare [chuckles] in those days.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: And it—it was—it did well.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: I mean, the—I got a good grade on it. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CALLERI: But I always ha—I—I—I loved to read. I was a great reader and I had read about the mistreatment of the Negro people and their slavery and then the prejudice that they faced. And when I saw this nice family there in Jamestown, I—they had my sympathy. And that's why I did—I researched it and then did the anthology of Negro poetry and was friends with them as much as I could be.

LEVINE: Hmm.

CALLERI: So—

LEVINE: How about social clubs within the Italian community? Were there such things at the time?

CALLERI: Yes, they were mostly family groups. I can remember what fun we had when there was a wedding, for instance. And everybody would go. There were lots of social groups and then some connected with the—with the church. One incident that occurred early on—very early on—

because when we first went there, we went to live with my Uncle Joseph, and we were really on sufferance there because his wife [chuckles] wasn't too happy with having this crowd of children move in on her. And then they finally—my father—I really don't remember whether he died before—I don't think so. I think my mother was able to arrange to buy a house and she was just making interest payments. They—my mother and father bought this house and she was making—they were just paying the interest. In those days, you got by with that. You just paid the interest and then if you defaulted, then you lost the house. So we had moved into this place on Water Street in Jamestown. And that—it was right next door to my s—my Aunt Josephine and my Aunt Ida. And there was another aunt. Who was it? I can't think right now. But anyway, there were three sisters. So we lived right next door or right in that little enclave, and we went to St. James Church and went to the church there—to the school there. And it was all very fine but my—my father just wasn't happy there and then he didn't—as I say, he didn't live long.

LEVINE: So you went to a Catholic school? St. James?

CALLERI: Until the—until the fourth grade.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: By this time, my sister, Arcelia, had married the World War I veteran, Joseph Palermo. And he wanted to be—go on a farm. He wanted a farm. He wanted to buy a farm and my sister didn't want to go out on a farm. She didn't want to leave the family. And so my mother agreed—she was an adventurous soul.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: And she agreed to go in partnership with Joe and buy a farm together and then we'd all move out there, and we'd all li—live together on this farm. And they bought this—it really was a lovely place. It was called Kimble Stand [PH] and it was a lovely old house. It was a historic place, a beautiful big barn. And the barn was so neat. The floors were like hardwood floors. They were like polished floors. We used to play in there.

LEVINE: What kind of a farm was it?

CALLERI: A—a dairy farm. Mostly dairy but there—they also had—they planted things. But what happened was—so then when we moved to the farm I started going to this one-room school. The three of us, my sister—see, there were three of the younger ones, Annette, Mary and me.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: And we were just, what, two years apart, each of us. And so we went to this one-room schoolhouse. And we lived in this house in this farm together but there was friction between Joe and my mother. And my older brothers—Ernest wouldn't come out there at all. He refused. He was working in the woolen mills and he refused to go onto the farm. He refused to have anything to do with it and I guess he lived with relatives in Jamestown. And Vincent and—and Tony, of course, moved with us and they tried to do—they were old enough that they could work with—with—on the farm with the cows and so on.

LEVINE: Where was the farm?

CALLERI: It was about, oh, 15 miles from Jamestown. It wasn't very far.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: The nearest little village was Gerry. G-E-R-R-Y. And Annette, Mary and I, Tony—I think Tony had—s—see, the older ones, as I said, started working in the mills.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: And that's why—and they still went into town and worked in the mills. Well, Sarah was married now and so was Rose. They were both married when they were about 16, 17 years old. And so Ernest stayed in town because he worked in the mills. And Vincent and Tony were helping to run the farm and—with Joe. But the—my mother and Joe just didn't get along. And after a year or two, Joe pulled out and he got himself a farm about 20 miles further out from Jamestown, he and—he and Arcelia. They had two children now, went out there.

LEVINE: So then did y—did your family remain on the farm for a while?

CALLERI: We—we remained on the farm for quite a few years. But finally, there was a—a terrible accident. The house burned down somehow or other. I can—it was really a nice house and we had a cute little dog. [chuckles] He would—in the morning when he would get impatient, he would pick up a piece of firewood in his mouth and take it into my mother's bed—bedside and drop it with a thump to wake her up. [chuckles] And she'd wake up and get up and start the fire in the stove and—and get us all up. And then the school bus picked us up. After we—after we finished with the grade school, the country school, then the school bus would pick us

up and take us into Jamestown to the Jamestown schools, junior high school.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And then, did—wh—after you completed your schooling, what did you do?

CALLERI: Well, I became—I was friends with a—another girl in high school. And she had become very friendly with one of her teachers. I was friendly with my teachers too but I didn't—I didn't confide in them too much. But however, Jenny did. She—she talked to this lady who—whose name was French, Miss French. And Miss French—and Jenny's family were better off than we were. There was a possibility for her to go to college. Well, I never did think I could go. But Jen—Miss French said to—to Jenny, "You know, if your father can afford to send you, you can find a home where you can live and work for your room and board and go to the state college," which was in Albany—Albany, New York. And so Jenny was all fired up with enthusiasm and told me about it. And I said, "Oh, I don't think I can do that. My mother can't even send me there." But another one of my instructors—I was telling her about it and she said, well, she was a member of the—this educational society. It escapes my name—my mind right now. But at any rate, she said, "Well, we can lend you the money to go and then if you can work for your r—room and board, and then after you graduate you can pay us." So I went home all fired with enthusiasm and told my mother about it. And she didn't like the idea of my going so far away, because it's about 400—450 miles from Jamestown. It's across the whole state—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: —from Jamestown to—Albany is on the Hudson River and Jamestown is on the very western—

LEVINE: Western, uh-huh.

CALLERI: —corner of Ja—of New York. And she didn't want me to go to. But I went ahead and sent in my application and I was expected right aw—accepted right away because my—my grades were always good. And you know, I received my acceptance—I—I only found this out lately, very lately. My oldest—my older sister, Annette, told me this. She—she didn't know I hadn't realized it. My brother, Vincent, got the letter with my acceptance from Albany State and he showed it to my mother, and she said, "I don't want her to go." So he hid the letter. And Annette—he had it—he had a car by this time, one of those old Model T's. And Annette was helping him wash his car and she saw the letter in the glove compartment. She brought it in to me and she said, "Jo, you've been accepted to the college." And I said, "How is that possible?" She said, "I

found it in the glove compartment.” So I really—I—I got mad ab—
[chuckles] about his trickery.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: And so I wrote in my acceptance and—and Agnes Eckberg [PH]—that’s
the teacher who loaned—through the—this group—I can’t think of
[chuckles] their name.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CALLERI: Loaned—they loaned me the money and I sent in my application and I
worked that summer and saved a little money and bought a few clothes.
And my two s—siblings, who are closest to me in age, Annette and
Mary, they—they were working in the mills by this time. And they bought
clothing for me on the timeshare—you know, time program so that we
got together a suitcase of clothing for me to go to Albany, New York.
And Jenny and I set off gaily on the train [chuckles], a long day’s trip.
And we were just so green. We didn’t know anything!

LEVINE: What was it like to—you were, I guess, the first in your family. Uh-huh.

CALLERI: The first in my family to go away to college, yeah. They were all kind of
awed by it, glad for me to go. And if—if—if Annette had ever told me
that Vincent had hidden that letter, I had forgotten it in the excitement of
everything. And—

LEVINE: You must have really wanted to go.

CALLERI: Oh, yes. I did want to.

LEVINE: I mean, to go against your mother and to—

CALLERI: Yeah, well—

LEVINE: —just make sure you got there.

CALLERI: I didn’t like to oppose her but I did want to go. I still had long hair,
couldn’t cut my hair, you know, because that wasn’t p—it wasn’t done
[chuckles]—

LEVINE: What—

CALLERI: —in Italian families.

LEVINE: What were some of the other things that, once you got away in—i—in college, that—

CALLERI: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: —your—your sort of family background h—had—

CALLERI: Yeah.

LEVINE: —to be adjusted?

CALLERI: Well, I had read enough. I had—I was an inveterate reader and I read and read and read a lot of stuff, so that helped me to adjust. On the train going to Albany, we were so fortunate. Jenny spoke fairly loudly. She had a rather loud voice. And so she was saying, “I wonder where we’re going to stay tonight. I wonder what we’re go”—because we had no idea where we—where we were going. We just knew we were going to Albany. And these other ladies—these other girls were sitting behind us and they heard us and they were aghast. They introduced themselves. They were juniors and seniors at Albany State. And they said, “Don’t you know where you’re going to be staying?” We said, “No, we’ll find someplace.” They said, “Well, that isn’t going to be so easy.” So they took us under their wings. They were Catholic girls and they lived in Newman Hall, which was run by the—

LEVINE: Hmm.

CALLERI: —for the Catholic ladies. And they said, “Well, it’s early. They’re—some of the upperclassmen will not have arrived yet. So I think we can find you a room for a night or two and we’ll help you find”—because we said, “We’re going to look for a place to work for our room and board.” So these two girls took us under their wings. I still communicate with Gertrude.

LEVINE: Oh, wow. [chuckles]

CALLERI: And she lives in Roches—she lives in Auburn, New York. And I still am communicating with her and some of the other gir—some of the gir—my college classmates that we—some were high school classmates of mine. And we met there again in Albany. Anyway—

LEVINE: Could you say something about the ways you changed in the—w—were you there for four years?

CALLERI: Oh, yes. Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Ways that you changed over that time?

CALLERI: Well, I learned a lot, of course. I still was quite naïve when I graduated. I—but right away, these two—I wanted to tell you, these girls found us a place to live. Within two days, they found us a place to live. And I moved in with this one family who had one child about seven or eight years old, and I lived with them the whole four years that I went to school.

LEVINE: Hmm.

CALLERI: We became firm friends.

LEVINE: Hmm.

CALLERI: And so—and Jenny moved in with a family but she didn't stay with the same family. And some of the other girls from Jamestown were doing the same thing. They were working for their room and—living—you know, boarding.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: Working for their room and board. But they didn't all—any of them stay with the same family, as I did. They made firm friends with the people they lived with and had very good relationships with them, but I was the only one with st—who stayed with the same family for the four years.

LEVINE: Wow.

CALLERI: Yeah.

LEVINE: And what did you study? What was your degree?

CALLERI: I—I took up business education to plan to teach business.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

CALLERI: And I was fortunate enough to get—I owe two things to that. I—my grades were fair—fairly good. I was never—I—I was a good student but I never made honors or anything like that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: And I applied for a position in Cheektowaga, New York, which is a suburb of Buffalo. And the principal there was intrigued by the fact that I was born in Algeria. You know, what little things.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: And my grades were okay but that was the clincher because my very good friend, also from Jamestown and with whom I still—I'm very firm friends. She's visited me in California. I have visited her in Nor—Auburn. We're very good friends. But she also applied there for [unclear]—

LEVINE: For business education?

CALLERI: For business education. And so when I went and I saw the principal, Mr. Roycoff [PH], I think—I really believe that he was so intrigued by the fact that I was born in Algeria that that gave me the edge. I got the job over Evelyn. [laughter]

LEVINE: Well, [chuckles] after—how did you meet your husband and when was that?

CALLERI: Well, he also—the—the school where I started teaching was Pine Hill High School in Cheektowaga, which as I say, is a suburb of Buffalo, and he had worked—my husband had worked for seven years. His father died when he was only 18. And my husband was the oldest of six children. And he felt he had to go right to work out of high school and he got a job with a—a—a—a company that made women's fashion. Not fashions but—well, yes, women's clothing but cotton clothing, that—you know, not—not fancy fashions but just work style clothing. Maybe some were fancy. But at any rate, he went to work there and he worked there for seven years. Well, then his father wasn't one who confided his business to the family and his mother was rather deva—devastated at the death of her husband. And so Bud—his name was Ignatius and all his friends called him Bud. [chuckles] They didn't want to call him Iggy.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: And his friends talked to him about going to college and he said, "Well, I can't do it. I have to support my family." Well, then, after he had been working for tevin—seven years for this company, they—he got a letter from a bank. They got a letter from the bank addressed to his mother. And he read it and they as—they asked her after—after all this time, they wanted her to come in and reactivate her account or tell them what to do, because there was a sum of \$10,000 deposited there. Well, in those days, that was a lot of money.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: And so when—when Bud realized that there was money for her to take care of her and she had her home, which was all paid up, he decided then to go to school. So he went to Buffalo State, which is now a university too. And—but he worked all the time and sometimes he would go to school, like, for a semester. Then he'd take off a semester and work and earn money and save it. And that's how he managed and then so it took him seven years to get his degree.

LEVINE: And how did you meet him?

CALLERI: Because he started teaching in the same school where I was teaching. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Okay. Well, le—and then how many—what was his name? His name was Ignatius?

CALLERI: Ignatius Michael Calleri.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And you had children. What were their names?

CALLERI: We had David Michael Calleri and Ann Maria Calleri.

LEVINE: Okay.

CALLERI: Well, now, she Wheel—Wheeler, Ann Maria Wheeler because she is married and has two children and lives in Grand Rapids. And would you believe she was a teacher too for three years in the San Jose area? Then she married a Navy—a sailor. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CALLERI: She met him during the Vietnam War. He was a—based at Alameda and they were married and moved to Kalamazoo, Michigan. And she went to Kalamazoo. Then by this—then Kevin went back to college, Kalamazoo at Northwe—western Michigan University. And so while he was in college, she enlist—she went back and she took her master's degree in library science. She had taught three years in the San Jose area. I think I mentioned that. And so then she got her master's degree and then, after that, Kevin got to working after he graduated. And so Ann took time off to have her two children, Michael, who is now entered in Northwestern Michigan University in northern—right near Lake Superior. He's just a freshman there, and Gene [PH], who is a junior in the Comstock Park High School. And they did something that my husband and I did. When we moved to California, my husband and I built our own home. We lived in the gara—we built the garage and lived

in the garage and built our home. And when Ann and Kevin decided to move from Kalamazoo to Grand Rapids, they built their own home.

LEVINE: Ah, uh-huh.

CALLERI: As a matter of fact, they even went further [chuckles] than we did. Kevin did all the plumbing and Ann did all the electric wiring. They did the roofing together. They did the inside finishing together.

LEVINE: That's wonderful.

CALLERI: Isn't that great?

LEVINE: That's wonderful.

CALLERI: Yeah.

LEVINE: We have a little less than a minute left so if we could just kind of sum up. How—how does—what meaning does it have to you at this point in time that your family immigrated to this country and came—

CALLERI: Oh—

LEVINE: —through Ellis Island and—

CALLERI: I have been so thankful that my mother had the courage to do it.

LEVINE: Hmm.

CALLERI: Because we've all had a much better life. We—my—my mother's and father's grandchildren have all done very well. I mean, their children did well but I was the only college graduate. Of their grandchildren, many of them are grad—college graduates. Some of them, two or three, are presidents of the companies they work for. One of my mother's—my parents' great grandsons is—is president of this company that produces satellites. He's a graduate of Santa Clara University. And many of them have been very successful and many teachers. We have quite a few teachers in our family.

LEVINE: Family. Well, I want to thank you so much. I've been speaking with Josephine Calleri, a most wonderful interview. And this is Janet Levine. It is October 15, 1997. We're here at Ellis Island in the oral history studio and—

[END OF INTERVIEW]