

EI-995

ALBA RENZULLI ALLARD

BIRTHDATE: OCTOBER 11, 1916

INTERVIEW DATE: APRIL 24, 1998

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 81

RUNNING TIME: 44:00

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

INTERVIEW LOCATION: SOUTHPORT, CONNECTICUT

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

ITALY, 1923

AGE: 6

SHIP: DANTE ALIGHIERI

PORT:

RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: Today is April 24th, 1998 and I'm here in Southport, Connecticut at the home of Alba Allard, who came from Italy when she was six, approaching seven years of age in 1923 on the Dante Alighieri. The family started out in Argentina, then went to Italy and then to America. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I would like to start here asking you, Mrs. Allard, what your birth date is.

ALLARD: Well, I grew up knowing my birthday was October 11, 1916. However, when my mother was eight-nine, almost ninety years old, she said, "Alba, I can't keep a secret no longer. You were not born October 11. You were born October 8, but your father, we were so busy in Argentina. He was a musician. He didn't go to the city hall until the 11th, so he said you were born the 11th." I said, "Oh, mom, but I'm going to stick to October 11th." Then I took out my birth thing from Argentina and it says here that I was born in Argentina October 20th. But I don't go by October 20th, I go by October 11. I can't have three birthdays in each year, otherwise I would now be two hundred and fifty-nine.

LEVINE: Right. [Laughs] Okay, and—and how about if you could say the name you were born with and the consequent names that—

ALLARD: Okay. At the time I was born, my mother gave me these names. Alba Benilda Carmela Renzulli. That was my last name. When I was confirmed here in Connecticut, I took the name Ann, because we're asked to take a name. So my name became Alba Benilda Carmela Ann Renzulli Allard. Well, my children thought that was such a riot that they thought nobody had so many names, so they jumped. They and their friends in the neighborhood jumped my name. Alba Carmela Benilda Ann Renzulli Allard Out. [Laughs]

LEVINE: That's wonderful. Okay, and now your mother's name?

ALLARD: My mother's name was Angelina Giliberti and then she married a Mr. Renzulli.

LEVINE: Okay.

ALLARD: Who was my father.

LEVINE: And how do you spell Giliberti?

ALLARD: G-I-L-I-B-E-R-T-I.

LEVINE: Okay. And your father, his name?

ALLARD: My father was Lidizio Amerigo Renzulli. He was a musician in Argentina.

LEVINE: Wow. How do you spell Redizio?

ALLARD: L-I, L-I-D-I-Z-I-O.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, do you have any memories of Argentina? How—how long were you actually there?

ALLARD: I was only two.

LEVINE: I see.

ALLARD: Yeah, and my mother told a story about when we left Argentina after my father died. She was there in a strange country with a Spanish nurse. My brother and I were born. I was two and my brother was about one. She decided at that time she'd go back home to Italy to her father, my grandfather. So I don't remember Italy. I only

remember the stories mom told us about our trip to Italy, which was absolutely eventful. It was during the war.

LEVINE: UH-hmm.

ALLARD: World War I, and she said every once in awhile they would be asked to grab and go down below because of submarine scares. My grandfather was waiting for us in Naples. However, we were rerouted to Genoa, while he was waiting for us in Naples. So when we got to Genoa, mama had to take a train to Naples where my grandfather would be waiting for us. Soldiers were coming back from the tren—trenches. She said that the soldiers were very nice to her. She had two small children and one of the soldiers kept me on his lap all the way. When we got to Naples, I was filled with lice from the trenches, which of course was well taken care of because we lived in a very nice place in Italy. My grandfather was a land owner.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ALLARD: And he had condidina [PH] working for him.

LEVINE: Say?

ALLARD: Condidina.

LEVINE: Which is?

ALLARD: Like the peasants who were working for him.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ALLARD: So we were well taken care of.

LEVINE: Well, how was it that your mother and father went to Argentina?

ALLARD: Yes. My mother lived in Italy. My father may have a long time ago lived in Italy, but he'd gone to Argentina. So when he came back to Italy to visit, he met my mother who was about going on eighteen and I guess they courted.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ALLARD: With my grandfather's eagle eye always on them, and decided to get married and he took her back. She wasn't even nineteen years old.

LEVINE: So they were the only part of either family that—

ALLARD: That was it. That was it.

LEVINE: Who—uh-huh.

ALLARD: Went down. He took her back because that's where his business was, which was musician.

LEVINE: What—what did he play?

ALLARD: Well, I never could understand. Mama said everything. So I really don't know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ALLARD: Then he died when I was about two. Now, what did he die of? In those days everything was heart, but who knows. I mean, they really didn't know so "Mama, why did he die? What did he die of?" "Oh, heart." Okay, but in those days that's probably as much as they could understand.

LEVINE: Right. Is there anything else about the Argentina time which you can't personally remember, but anything about the family—

ALLARD: Well, mama enjoyed it. Mama enjoyed it. She said they had a nice place to live. She had a Spanish nurse and she learned a little Spanish. I was much too young. So—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, and how about your brother, what is—

ALLARD: My brother was about one, so he doesn't remember even any more than I do. He died May 20th of this year.

LEVINE: Oh.

ALLARD: But we went to Italy with my grandfather and it was during the polio epidemic. My brother got polio. For—at the beginning he was paralyzed all the way. Then my grandfather, who had some means, was able to get help and care and he became paralyzed from the waist down. Then my grandfather took my mother, me, my aunt, my brother to a beach in Italy and they went through the Sister Kenny treatment. So he was not paralyzed, but his legs were like this and he was always—so—

LEVINE: Oh. Do you remember any more about the Sister Kenny treatment?

ALLARD: Well, I think they buried him in sand and I don't know what else they did, but it was that time when Sister Kenny's treatment was the thing and my grandfather had gotten, you know, the best doctors he could. So these—this was the last resort. Took him to Kasamichi [PH], they said, mama said—that must be some great big beach area. I wouldn't remember and one of the—what I know they did was bury Dietz in the hot sand every single day for whatever. Isn't that interesting?

LEVINE: Yes. Yeah. His name was Dietz?

ALLARD: Yeah, Lidizio, like—

LEVINE: Oh, Lidizio.

ALLARD: Yeah, but we called him Dietz.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Wow.

ALLARD: So when we came to America, there was a question. They were very careful at Ellis Island about everyone being in good health, but since we were being—well, my uncle had—was of means. He had some means. He had a—they had started—my uncle had started with a pushcart on Mulberry Street, but when we came to Italy, he had a doll factory. So he had—what do you say? He sort of—well—

LEVINE: Was the doll factory here or is it--

ALLARD: In Brooklyn.

LEVINE: In Brooklyn. Uh-huh.

ALLARD: Yeah.

LEVINE: So he had become a manufacturer, I guess.

ALLARD: That's right. So you know, we were not going to be a burden on anyone in the country so there was no question about Dietz with his disability, whatever it was, getting in.

LEVINE: Now, what—what was your grandfather's name?

ALLARD: In Italian. [unclear – crackling sound]

LEVINE: And, um—and did—did you have a grandmother?

ALLARD: My grandmother—that's when we came to Italy. When my grandmother, who was Cecelia, died. After my grandmother died, my grandfather said, "Well, we'll all go to America," with his son. Two sons he had here. "We'll go to America and I'll be with my sons and we can all get together."

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So the two sons had come to America. They were the—

ALLARD: Earlier.

LEVINE: They were the part of the family that was already here.

ALLARD: Yes, they were my mother's brothers. They had come to America with an aunt, and as I said, they had a pushcart on Mulberry Street until they—I don't know how they did it, but they managed to start this doll and toy factory in New York and—and they had their own home in Brooklyn. 1122 42nd Street, Fort Hamilton Parkway, and so we came to stay with them.

LEVINE: Wow. Hmm. So, do you have any memories of Italy?

ALLARD: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Where in Italy was the family?

ALLARD: We were in this little village called San Miguel, which was—well, let's see. South of Naples. It was a village with a—well, a plaza and a church in the middle. Yes, I do remember being sent to get cheese. I remember a lot of—

LEVINE: Why don't you mention any little anecdotes of things that come to your mind.

ALLARD: Oh, okay. Okay. My grandfather had lots of land and he would ride his horse with the dog following him to oversee the land, and one day that dog bit me and he went around and bit a few other of the people in the village. In those days, I guess they knew enough to test because then I went through the Louie Pasteur treatment with injections every other day on my side. So the dog might have been—become rabid or something. But they knew enough to treat that. So my grandfather made sure everybody was treated with that Louie Pasteur treatment. And I was about, well, five going on six. I remember it. When he bit me, I was kneeling on a chair like this in the house and he came right over and bit my leg. And then he rushed out the dog. So, yes, I remember that.

LEVINE: Was—

ALLARD: I remember—

LEVINE: Excuse me. Was San Miguel a little town?

ALLARD: San Miguel.

LEVINE: San Miguel.

ALLARD: Yes, yes, it was a little village, which was probably—what can I say? South of Naples. It was not far from the coast, the west coast of Italy. What else? Salerno.

LEVINE: Oh.

ALLARD: Not far from Salerno, yes.

LEVINE: So it—it was—did it have a lot of shops and that kind of thing?

ALLARD: There was a village square. I remember one of the village square and one of the—my mother's cousins owned the coffee—café, and my grandfather would go ever say, sit outside, play cards. But—and across from that café was the church. It was sort of a gathering place in the middle of the village. I don't remember a lot of shops. I remember the café. I remember the church.

LEVINE: Could you describe your grandfather from what he was like there?

ALLARD: My grandfather was the handsomest old man you ever saw with his white goatee and his white hair, and he was called Dom Libidinal—Dom Libidada Giliberti by the people who worked for him. He was quite a personage in that little village. When we came to America, people who had come earlier came to visit my grandfather and they'd almost bend down to him. Well educated. He—[phone rings] Excuse me.

LEVINE: We're going to pause here. [tape off/on] Continuing.

ALLARD: Well educated, apparently. He whistled all the arias. He reminded me in his looks of George Bernard Shaw with the white hair and white [unclear].

LEVINE: Oh.

ALLARD: When we came to America and he was with us, of course, he said, "In no time I'm going to learn the language." He was sixty-five years old when we arrived. He died when he was ninety and all he could say in English was "No!" [Laughs] Because people all catered to him, he never had to learn English.

LEVINE: Wow. Yeah. I'm sorry, I kind of interrupted you before, when you were going to recall any happenings or any events or any anecdotes about life before you left Italy.

ALLARD: Well, I told you about the dog bite.

LEVINE: Right.

ALLARD: Okay. I remember being sent to get some cheese some place and walking down a lot of steps. I don't think that was notable, but I do remember in going for that cheese that I walked by a house, maybe a two-story house and a man had his head out the window yelling and yelling. When I went to mama back home I said, "Mama, there was a man up there shouting." She said, "Alba, that's the priest. Every once in awhile he goes out of his mind. The family take him and put him in that house alone until he gets himself better." Isn't that amazing?

LEVINE: Yes. Yes.

ALLARD: Isn't that amazing?

LEVINE: And that the whole town would be aware of it. Yeah.

ALLARD: That's right, and it was perfectly all right. He was not dangerous. They just knew when to put him aside and it was the priest.

LEVINE: Funny.

ALLARD: So I do remember that.

LEVINE: Do you remember any religious events? Were you a Catholic family?

ALLARD: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: And were you a religious family?

ALLARD: Oh, yes. We went to this very nice church all the time.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Do you remember anything from a child's point of view of ceremonies or rituals around birth or death or marriage or—

ALLARD: No.

LEVINE: Or church or—

ALLARD: I don't even remember what we did when my grandmother died.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ALLARD: I don't know—

LEVINE: Do you remember her at all?

ALLARD: Very vaguely. Vaguely.

LEVINE: What would—what's—is there anything that comes to your mind when you think about her at all?

ALLARD: Just a very pleasant rather stout woman. That's all I remember.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ALLARD: But made a very nice home for us, my mother and my brother, myself, my grandfather and he had two—and my mother had two sisters there. Two other sisters. One left before we left and she went to Vancouver.

LEVINE: Oh.

ALLARD: And was married and the other sister stayed there when we left. She married after we had come to America.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ALLARD: My grandfather had left the property to her and her future husband, the land.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ALLARD: And he was supposed to be sending us—sending my grandfather some products from the lands. Every once in awhile I think we got a provolone or a hunk of salami. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Did you have extended family, cousins, aunts, uncles?

ALLARD: Here?

LEVINE: No, in—in Italy when you were there?

ALLARD: Cousins, yes. Yes, yes, I remember a cousin of mine called Nina would come under the window and call every day, “Alba!” and we would play. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ALLARD: And I—

LEVINE: Did you go to school there at all?

ALLARD: Ah, no. The first time I went to school was in Brooklyn.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, do you remember preparing to leave?

ALLARD: I don’t know whether they let us in on a lot of that. I really don’t, but I do remember the boat. I do remember the boat ride. I do remember that we were quite comfortable. I do remember looking down, as I said. I remember that very clearly, that the people down below in steerage were sitting on the steps with their dishes eating, but we were, you know, comfortable. I do remember that.

LEVINE: So you were probably traveling—

ALLARD: Like tourist class—not top, top class, but—

LEVINE: Second or third?

ALLARD: Yes, whatever. Beyond steerage and probably there was a better class up there, but I didn’t know that.

LEVINE: And did you have—did you go to—do you remember the accommodations that you had? Or do you remember going to a dining room or anything like that?

ALLARD: Yes, we went to a dining room. That’s why I was so shocked when I saw people sitting on the stairs eating. Sitting on whatever they were.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Uh-hmm. And do you remember any events during the passage that happened aboard ship?

ALLARD: No. No.

LEVINE: And how about coming into the New York Harbor, were you aware of that?

ALLARD: Oh, that I remember. Standing at the railing and being so excited. I was so excited. It was America. I was so excited and thinking, "This is great. This is going to be the greatest thing that ever could happen." I remember that and then I remember getting off the boat and sitting on the bench in Ellis Island and we passed right through and we were on this bench in Ellis Island waiting, all of us. My grandfather, my mother, myself, my brother, and then seeing my uncle come, whom I did not know when I was in Italy. Seeing him come and he just came right up to us and we gathered our things and went right out to his house in Brooklyn. I thought, "This is marvelous." Soon as we got there, my aunt gave us eggnog. Milk, coffee with an egg and I think it was bagels, and I thought, "This has got to be heaven."

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ALLARD: I remember that so clearly.

LEVINE: Do you remember getting there? Do you remember how you go to Brooklyn?

ALLARD: I think we took those subway trains because my grandfather—my uncle was not a driver.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ALLARD: So we must have.

LEVINE: Right.

ALLARD: Everything was so strange.

LEVINE: What were the things that struck you in the first days or weeks that you can recall? Were there any—

ALLARD: Yes, the homes were different from what we had in Italy. I remember that because this was a very nice two-family home. One uncle lived downstairs and the other uncle lived upstairs and the one that had come for us was the one who lived upstairs. Yes, I remember very distinctly that it was different because my grandfather's house had a big stone arch and the Giliberti name on it with the date like 1019 or

something, you know, and it was—everything was like done in the kitchen. So I remember there's a dining room here, a separate room to eat, but in my grandfather's house with the big table, everything was kitchen. I don't remember anything else about it. Going downstairs in the courtyard where there were chickens. None of that was the case in Brooklyn. So I do remember those things.

LEVINE: Hmm. Now, your uncles, who—who you first went to stay with, they had come earlier with an aunt of theirs?

ALLARD: Yes. Yes, with my—

LEVINE: Now, was she around?

ALLARD: My grandfather's sister.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. Was she around at the time—by the time you came?

ALLARD: No, when we arrived, no. I never got to meet her.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Uh-hmm. Now, had your uncles married?

ALLARD: Yes.

LEVINE: Both of them?

ALLARD: They had both been married, right.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ALLARD: And as a matter of fact, the one who lived downstairs had just had a—a daughter, baby girl who happens to be a couple years younger than I am. And the one upstairs had two children already.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, had they married Italian—

ALLARD: Ladies, yes.

LEVINE: Immigrants or born here, do you remember?

ALLARD: Well, they met them in New York City. Immigrants? I'm—I am sure. I-I am sure that their parents had come from Italy.

LEVINE: But they themselves?

ALLARD: I think not.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ALLARD: I think not.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And so did—did the—did you and your mother and brother and grandfather stay with that uncle for a period of time?

ALLARD: Yes. We—we lived with—we stayed for a period of time, months I think it was, with the uncle who lived downstairs who only had the one child, so he had a little more room. And I started school immediately, I'll never forget.

LEVINE: Yeah, tell about school.

ALLARD: I'll never forget going to school. Not knowing a word of English, but couldn't wait to learn it all. So here I am in the first grade. So one day I guess I was able to read these little Tom and Dick books, whatever it was, and the teacher gave me a book to take home. When I got home to Brooklyn and rang the doorbell and my mother opened it, I said, "Look!" I was so delighted I had a book. I was delighted. Went to school the next day and put the book on the desk and suddenly—I didn't know what she was talking about—a teacher seemed to be scolding me and scolding me and took the book away and I couldn't imagine what I had done. I couldn't imagine, and she gave me a book—the binding was broken, pages were loose. When I went home that day I said, "Ma, look. The poor—" The book dropped out of my hand and papers fell out. Never knew why until much later. I was supposed to have covered that book. How the hell did I know.

LEVINE: Oh.

ALLARD: You were supposed to take a book home and cover it. Never have occurred to me. So I mean that—I couldn't imagine what I had done wrong, but anyhow, I wasn't there long. I moved right up to second grade. Then by the time we came here to Southport, I went through Pequot School, which is right down the road, through the eight grades in six years, not having learned, known, a word of English. Not being able to go to your parents for help. Not having bilingual education. In six years I had completed the eight grades. I started teaching. I was nineteen in September when I started teaching. Loved—loved—loved teaching. Became an English teacher, director of English, K through 12 in Westport. Spoke in many cities in this country for the National Council of Teachers of English. Spoke at

their convention in San Francisco, in Los Vegas, in Chicago, in Washington, DC and in New Orleans.

LEVINE: Wow, isn't that wonderful.

ALLARD: Because I loved it all so much. I remember standing and saluting to the flag and I think I was probably the loudest one saying it, and yet I loved Italy.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ALLARD: But this was all so wonderful.

LEVINE: Do you—what was it like—I assume that you picked up English more quickly than your mother and—

ALLARD: Oh, yes, yes. When we came to Southport because my mother had met—friends in Southport introduced my mother to my stepfather. When we lived in Southport in this lovely house by the harbor, Pequot School was across the street. We couldn't wait to get mama to go to night school, which she did. Yes! She was fine. She learned English with her nice, sweet accent. My grandfather, "No!" That's it. If the phone rang and we weren't home, he'd pick it up and say, "No!"

LEVINE: Well, did he come to Southport with your mother?

ALLARD: Oh, absolutely. He came with us and lived with us all—

LEVINE: All the time.

ALLARD: Oh, yeah. He was the gentleman kind. He had his own bedroom in this house on Main Street and he never got up in the morning unless we brought him his demitasse of coffee. Then he would get up. So whether we were going to school or going to work—[coughs]—or had an appointment, grandpa had to get his coffee first. But he was great.

LEVINE: And how did your brother fare? Oh, maybe you could talk a little more about what happened in regard to your brother when you were being examined at Ellis Island. Do you remember that at all?

ALLARD: All I remember was that they just talked to my grandfather in some way. Of course, we didn't know—I didn't know what they were saying. I guess it was all done, and grandpa couldn't have understood English.

LEVINE: They had translators, also.

ALLARD: He had papers. Yes, and he must have had papers, and all I know—remember is that they guided us right to this first bench. That's all I remember, so there was no—none of this, you know, sorting us out and putting somebody here and somebody there.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ALLARD: I do remember people crying because they were put somewhere else, but it didn't mean anything to me. I didn't know why.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ALLARD: And we weren't sitting there very long until my uncle came. So—

LEVINE: Now, how did your brother fare, as far as going to school and—

ALLARD: Oh, fine. Fine. He had this handicap but he never used a cane. He was too proud. His legs were thin and he walked—you know, one foot was twisted like, you know, but quite, quite artistic. Very artistic. He—well, we got out of elementary school. He got out of high school and then he went to live in Brooklyn for awhile while he was going to art school but he messed that up because he wasn't ready to do that alone, and came back home. That's—yeah, if you'll just turn that off, I'll show you one of his prints.

LEVINE: Okay, we're going to stop here for a—

[END OF SIDE A]
[BEGIN SIDE B]

LEVINE: I just want to make a point before we resume here that Mrs. Allard has just given me a print of a large mural that her brother did of the Southport Harbor and I'm going to enter this into the Ellis Island collection. And it is signed and that will be a welcome addition. I thank you.

ALLARD: Okay.

LEVINE: Okay, so let's see. We're talking about school and you finished school and went onto teacher's—

ALLARD: Yeah.

LEVINE: To college.

ALLARD: Yes.

LEVINE: And an English teacher.

ALLARD: Yes.

LEVINE: When you look back on it now and you said before that you think of—you are Italian and you're also Italian. How do you think about those two aspects of who you are? I—do you have a—a way that you've sort of reconciled or do you—

ALLARD: I'm very proud of the Italian culture because we—we were a very—we were a large family. After my mother was married to my stepfather, there were about eleven of us living there because he had three children. He had lost his wife. She had two. She had lost her husband. They had five. Together they had three more, and then my grandfather was with us all the time. So we kept up with the Italian culture a great deal.

LEVINE: How did you—what were the things about the Italian culture that you wanted to maintain and did maintain?

ALLARD: Visits from people all the time.

LEVINE: People from Italy or people from—

ALLARD: Yeah, people who had come who had known my grandfather in Italy, who lived in the area. The fact that my sister and I took piano lessons and we played the piano and my mother and my uncle, when they visited us from Brooklyn would sing some of these Italian songs. The fact that my grandfather whistled all the arias so that I was, you know, very interested in that. The Italian cooking my mother did, like meals every day. Lunch meals. Soup and all that stuff for lunch and then dinner meals, and her organization, since there were so many of us children. Each mealtime one of—one of the girls cleared the table, one did the dishes, another wiped and another swept the floor. We swept the floor every other minute, it seems and she had it organized so upstairs—it was a large house. On Fridays the upstairs was cleaned and downs—then Saturday the downstairs and my mother with her almost white glove inspection would go over the mantels. “Did you do these?” You know, that kind of thing. Yes, so very—I love the Italian culture. I loved everything I've learned about it but I loved everything that the United State was allowing me to do.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Uh-hmm. Yeah. Do you think your life would have been a lot different, had you stayed in Italy?

ALLARD: Would it have been a lot different? You know, I did—we did visit Italy twice. I went once with my husband and another time with my daughter and grandson and we visited the places where I lived. Would it have been different? I don't know. I—I—I don't know.

LEVINE: You probably would have been educated, it would seem.

ALLARD: I—I no doubt would have been educated because you left San Miguel after the whatever—third or fourth grade, so I'm told, and then you went to Salerno or Naples or some place else to another school. So I probably would have done that, but would I have felt as fulfilled? I don't know.

LEVINE: Hmm.

ALLARD: I really don't know.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well—

ALLARD: I think my life would have been a little more confined.

LEVINE: You certainly wouldn't have married a French-Irish man.

ALLARD: No, no, I would not have. That's true. That's true.

LEVINE: What did—

ALLARD: Probably I should have married an Italian, I don't know.

LEVINE: Was that a big issue with your family, that you were not marrying an Italian?

ALLARD: No. No, no, no, no. There were so many of us in the family, I don't think anybody—as my grandfather said, "Nobody marries an Italian? I can't talk to anyone?" [Laughs]

LEVINE: Now, that means you—you did understand Italian?

ALLARD: Italian? Of course. Yeah, of course. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Uh-hmm, yeah.

ALLARD: And I've kept up with my Italian.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you think, having immigrated here—I mean you were not quite seven, but do you think it made a difference in who you became or your personality—

ALLARD: Oh, I think so. I definitely think so. I don't think I would have been so anxious to do everything, if I had just been given it. Been born here and, you know, this was something that to me was a whole big adventure right from the very beginning. So I had to do things.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Uh-hmm. Yeah. And how about now, now that you're retired and your children are grown, how is this period of life for you?

ALLARD: Well, I'll tell you, now that I'm retired and my children have grown—the two children I had each had three children. I have now four great grandchildren and my grand—my father—my husband, excuse me. My husband died in '85. I'm alone. I am secretary to the Westport Sons of Italy. I am—I was—I had been a president of the United—University of Bridgeport Italian Scholarship Committee. I—and then Delta Kappa Gamma. I am on the retirement commission for the police and firemen in the town of Fairfield. I'm a commissioner. What else do I do? I'm doing everything.

LEVINE: Busy, yeah.

ALLARD: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: And how is it? Is it—I mean—

ALLARD: I love it. I love it. I—my calendar's filled.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ALLARD: And I lie in bed soon as I wake up and say, "Now, wait a minute. Today is Friday. What's going on? Oh, yeah. I know." You know, I have a meeting. Saturday I go to the symphony. So—

LEVINE: Life is full.

ALLARD: Oh, absolutely. Now I'm getting so, at my age—excuse me, I'm eighty-one. You just want to be a couch potato and that's what I'd like—I think, like to be doing. I get so tired, I want to be a couch potato for a change. [Laughs]

LEVINE: I doubt it. I can't imagine that.

ALLARD: Eighty-one.

LEVINE: Yeah, well, you look wonderful.

ALLARD: I taught for forty-one years. Oh.

LEVINE: Yeah, and I—I'm kind of jumping here, but you—how did you meet your husband?

ALLARD: Lived in Southport. He lived in Southport. We went to Roger Ludlow High School. We took [unclear] in those days to the high school. He sat with me.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ALLARD: So it was one of those things.

LEVINE: And what was his first name?

ALLARD: Edward. Edwardo.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Is there anything else, any particular—I mean you came here—well, you—how did the Depression affect your family in particular?

ALLARD: Oh, okay. Yeah, that's a good question because it was during the Depression I was going to college, but I was commuting to New Haven, which is now Southern Connecticut. At that time it was New Haven Normal School and I was commuting. There were eleven of us in the family, as you know, but my grandfather—my father—my stepfather has his own barber shop, so I do remember that we didn't lack for food. The table was groaning all the time. The wintertime I knitted my own mittens, walked from the railroad station in New Haven to school and I was probably the only one with mittens. I let a friend of mine wear my mittens because it was a Depression time.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ALLARD: And just the fact that I could go to college during the Depression time, even though tuition was like a ten dollars a semester, but it was ten dollars a month taking the train, was something not everybody else did that had graduated from high school when I did in 1933.

LEVINE: Was education something taking for granted in your family that you would have?

ALLARD: Yes. Well, I had said from the fourth grade on, “I’m going to be a teacher,” so there’s no way any of them were going to stop me from doing it. Yes, education was something my step father expected all of us to go through, but not the other girls, except—yeah, two other sisters from my mother and father—stepfather’s. Yes, they took education seriously. My other two step sisters, all at those days we didn’t know the term “step” or “half.” We were all sisters. We were all brothers. Anyhow, they were not interested in doing anything after high school. One of my sisters, who’s now living in Naples, Florida, not only became a teacher, she became the assistant superintendent in Wallingford, was well-known in the area.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. How about any political events that happened during the course of your either growing up or adulthood, that had a particular impact on you?

ALLARD: Well, I remember having a picture of Franklin Deleanor Roosevelt in the—my father—my stepfather was a Republican, but my mother’s friends in—in Southport were Democrat. So we all became Democrat. I remember a picture of Franklin Deleanor Roosevelt in the front window of our home. Now, you have to understand, we lived on Main Street in this lovely house. Down the road was the yacht club, where we had, you know—that was like worlds away from us, to tell you the truth, those people, in those days, right. I’m sure they didn’t appreciate that picture of Franklin Deleanor Roosevelt, but I remember that very well. And at one time during the one of the elections, Pequot School was used as a polling placer and since we lived across, ours was one of the—they used our living room as one of those houses where “have you come in to vote yet?” You know, that kind of thing. Of course, and my stepfather being a Republican allowed it all.

LEVINE: [Laughs] Great. And how about particularly heroes, either people that you read about or knew about or—or people you actually knew? Did you ever have anybody that you looked up to or wanted to emulate?

ALLARD: Well, my fourth grade teacher. That’s the one who instilled in me that I wanted to teach.

LEVINE: And do you remember anything else about her or how that was or—

ALLARD: Yes. Yes, yes, I remember. Her name was Mrs. Thompkins. She was wonderful. Fourth grade taught in Pequot. Her son was in my class and every once in awhile I would turn around because he sat

behind me, to give him an answer and she'd say, [taps on table]
"Now," you know, that kind of thing. But anyhow, yes, she was first.

LEVINE: Oh, she encouraged you? I mean, did—

ALLARD: No, no, no.

LEVINE: No.

ALLARD: Because in those days we didn't talk about "What are you going to do when you grow up?" I just knew I was going to be a—then when I began teaching in Fairfield, the principle was Mary Murphy, Miss Murphy. She was straight as a ramrod. All the doors opened up into the auditorium and her office was there. When she walked into the world, the kids would [Gasps] hold their breath and if I happened to be seated, I'd jump up. Anyhow, she made such an impression that the first graders, you know, every day we'd say a prayer, salute to the flag, and when they said, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Goodness and mercy shall follow me." Those poor first graders said, "And the good Miss Murphy shall follow me all the days of my life." [Laughs] The poor kids, "The good Miss Murphy."

LEVINE: [Laughs] Oh, that's cute.

ALLARD: But anyhow, as far as heroes are concerned, [sighs] I don't know.

LEVINE: Well, I mean I guess this teacher was—was definitely one.

ALLARD: Yes. Yes, yes. Yes.

LEVINE: Okay, is there anything else that maybe we haven't covered?

ALLARD: No! Not at all.

LEVINE: I think we've maybe covered more than enough.

ALLARD: No. [Laughing]

LEVINE: But it's all so interesting. I want to thank you very much for a most—

ALLARD: [coughing] You're welcome [unclear].

LEVINE: Interesting interview. I've been speaking with Alba—Alba Allard, who came from Italy, having been born in Argentina, and gone back to Italy with her mother after her father's death, and then in 1923, when she was six years old, she, her mother, her grandfather and her

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brother came to join her uncles in Brooklyn and then months later moved to Southport, Connecticut, where she has lived essentially the rest of her life. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. It's April 24th, 1998 and I'm signing off. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]