

KECK-158

JOHN TITONE

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SICILY, 1920 and 1923

AGE 9 (first trip)

PASSAGE ON "THE GIUSEPPE VERDI"

APPEL: This is Willa Appel and I'm speaking with John Titone on Thursday, February 6th, 1986. We're beginning the interview at 3:20 in the afternoon and we're going to talk about, uh, may I call you John? About your immigration experience from Italy that took place in both 1920 and 1923. Uh, maybe we could begin by your telling me about where you were born, the town in which you were born.

TITONE: Well I was born in Castelvetrano, the province of Trapani, which is a seaport in the Mediterranean. We left Castelvetrano in 1920 by train--

APPEL: Is this, who left? Who?

TITONE: My mother, my two sisters and I left, went to Palermo by train, then by taxi we went to the port to pick up the steamer to come to America.

APPEL: Okay, I think we'll backtrack a little bit if you don't mind. Uh, and if you could tell me why, at least this part of your family, why did they decide to go the United States?

TITONE: Well, my mother had five brothers and one, one sister.

She had one brother and a sister living in America in Brooklyn, New York. And, uh, I was a little baby and my father came to America. He would write to my mother and tell her to come to America. But she was so close to her parents that she would not leave, leave Sicily to come to her husband. So he came back, tried to convince my mother, nothing doing.

APPEL: About what time, what year was that?

TITONE: Well, that goes back to 1910. I was born in 1912 so that was the last seed that he planted, and I was born in 1912, so that must have been about 1911. So then he came here and was living in Kansas City, Kansas. And about two years later he came back to Sicily with diabetes. In

those days there was no insulin, there was no cure, so he lived two years and died, and I remember nice things about him because I was his pet, you know, little baby. So after my father died in Sicily, I had a brother older than I, he took all the, cultivated the land, hired people to work the land, that way we could eat. And, uh, we couldn't, we couldn't make ends meet, so--this after World War Two we're talking about.

APPEL: World War One.

TITONE: World War One. Right. World War One. And, uh, just about 1920., well we put on a quota and finally we got our visa and we came, well we left Castelvetrano and went to Palermo by train. From Palermo we, by taxi from the station we went to the seaport to the Palermo port there and we got on, we got on the ship by the name of Giuseppe Verdi and came to America, landed in, the, what is that, uh, the bay, the New York Bay?

APPEL: Ah, I guess it's New York Harbor.

TITONE: New York Harbor. That's before we got to the pier. See we landed in a harbor, then some people, they were very sick would be put in quarantine, they would be put on a different boat, and us who had to go

through Ellis Island would be put like on a ferry boat and then they take us to Ellis Island there where the slaughter began.

APPEL: Well, before we get to Ellis Island, because I know you have a lot to say about that, can you, do you remember much about the passage on the boat or how you felt about leaving your home town?

TITONE: Uh, at that age I didn't miss nothing. To me it was an adventure. I was going someplace, never thought in my mind that I was going to come back or go here, there and anywhere. Everything was new to me and as I got it, either I enjoyed it or hated it. If my mother hit me I hated it. If I, they petted me or kissed me I liked it, you know?

APPEL: Do you remember the ship? So you remember--

TITONE: Giuseppe Verdi.

APPEL: Do you remember what it was like, where did you sleep?

TITONE: Yes, we slept, we were in third class. It was little, it, we slept below deck, I would say at least on flight down, approximately twelve, fifteen steps. The beds were upper and lower, the mattresses were burlap bags full of

hay. If you happened to turn the wrong way one of the hay's would prick you, you know? They would itch. And, uh, it was very uncomfortable

APPEL: What did you eat?

TITONE: We ate processed food, you know? It wasn't, uh, freshly cooked or anything. They would just dump cans full of stuff, whatever and then would serve it.

APPEL: There was a dining room where you ate?

TITONE: Uh, yes, there was a place where we ate. Dining room, yeah, yeah, I'll tell you why. Uh, before we could go to the dining room they would have someone on the ship with a bell in their hand and they would swing it. (Speaks to someone off-mike--that's alright, I'm not going to walk.) And they would swing it and one day, I'll never forget, I was in such a hurry that I ran to go and eat and I didn't see that bell coming and I got hit right on the chin. And that didn't stop me, I was gonna go and eat. But it hurt, and I was hurt very bad. And the reason why I say that we had these long tables it, the sea, the ocean was stormy, they would have ropes from one end of the table to the other with openings for the glass and opening for the dish so that when the ship would go from side to side, you

know, a ship goes from side to side, and then it goes down and comes up again and goes side to side. And that's the way we sat down and eat.

APPEL: What time of year was the crossing?

TITONE: This, particular, in the 1920's, it must have been winter.

It had to be winter because we were stuck when we got to New York in the harbor with the snow and ice.

APPEL: Did anybody get seasick?

TITONE: Oh yeah, lots of people, usually the ones that don't get seasick is the very young and the very old. The others. especially if you over-eat, you go right on the side of the boat. Uh, worse yet than the Atlantic Ocean was the crossing between Palermo and Naples. That's where everybody gets seasick even the young and olds. They have, the way I understand it, cross currents and that ship really takes a beating. The first thing in the morning when your crossing from Palermo to Naples, the first thing they give you is lemon juice or black coffee. Supposed to help you from your nausea. So then in Palermo before you can go to the ship, they, you are medically examined right at the base of the ship.

APPEL: Right on the pier?

TITONE: On the pier. And then, when you get to Naples to get on the big ship that bring you here, also you get medically examined and injections for vaccination whether you like it or not. You'll find that most of us here in America, you only get one vaccination, we have three or four or five because that serum, whatever they give you and all, gets into you and you get all those big marks. So when I did get into Ellis Island my mother and two sisters were all detained because of me.

APPEL: So when you, you went over, I know you've mentioned it but
I'm just trying to remember, you went with your
mother, your two sisters--

TITONE: My two sisters, aboard ship--

APPEL: But not your older brother.

TITONE: No. He had come by himself.

APPEL: So he was already here.

TITONE: He was already here. He already, our relatives had to put
up a bond to show that they could take care of him,

they didn't want, they didn't want you to become a public ward. They don't, you know, they're very careful about that. If there's no one that's responsible for you, then they're not going to let you in. So when, uh, finally, here I am in Ellis Island, they found this ring worm in my head and they leave you there. Now, while I was there, you know, some people hated Ellis Island, I, I, couldn't hate it. Even though they kept me there, I wasn't mistreated. But some of these people that had lice in their heads and their bodies the, whoever the authorities who were in charge, they would even give you a bath with kerosene to get, kill all the lice, get you good and clean. It's terrible, listen, that's the loss, and that's the people that really hated what was going on.

APPEL: Do you remember arriving in the Harbor, do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

TITONE: Oh yes, oh yes. And then stay in the Harbor because of the snow and ice that we couldn't get close enough where the ferries would come and take us to Ellis Island.

APPEL: Now you were saying before, you were describing what it

was like, uh, that you, there was snow and ice and you looked out the windows--

TITONE: That was after three days of laying in the Harbor there and the sirens always working and the bells ringing to keep other ships away from us because, snow and fog, you know, you can't see where anybody else is. We enjoyed it, you know, us kids, oh, we were running around aboard ship. Running here, there, and everywhere. One night I had a toothache and so here it is in the middle of the night and I run upstairs to go to the hospital for a doctor. So here you, all the doors going below deck were watched by guards. They didn't want, you know, nobody to go down, or nobody to come up. They could steal, you know, they were very careful. And when I got up there this guy grabbed me, I didn't know, so, "Where you going?" I said, "I got a toothache." He says, "Here." He took one of his guinea stingers, you know, those Italian cigars, you know what I'm talking about? That's a crooked cigar that nobody, New York has seen that. And he broke a piece off, he says, "Put that on the tooth and chew on it." The ache went away. So, you know, but I, I wasn't allowed to go on deck and during the night so, down again. And then we knew we got to Ellis Island all of us, bar none, you know, we were all examined. For everything. Clothes off, everything, they examined you thoroughly.

APPEL: With, for many people that was a very frightening

experience.

TITONE: It is. It is. Not only, not only what you go through, but the language itself, you got a barrier. And, uh, even though they have interpreters, it's not the same. See, uh, if you ever visit Sicily, you go from one town to another, ten miles away, they have a dialect of their own. So, you know, here you come to America, you're strange. You know, for a kid of my age I could care less, so what? I don't care, you know? And then even when they detain me there, I didn't care either. But when they detained me there after a few months, my sisters were allowed to enter because my relatives had put up bond.

APPEL: So, I'm just trying to reconstruct this, you arrived in Ellis Island and they found that you had some ring worm on your head.

TITONE: On my head.

APPEL: So, did they put you in a, in an infirmary?

TITONE: Yeah. They had a section where it was wards, hospitals, and, uh, everybody who was detained would be sleeping in these wards. Maybe twenty beds, I don't remember but it was plenty of beds.

APPEL: And were you there alone? Was your mother with you?

TITONE: Well, she was in the women's ward. Because she was detained, she couldn't go in without me, because I'm a minor. So, uh, finally when, uh, my relatives put up bond for my sisters to enter the country, then they decide that we had to go back. Cure the disease, then they go back on the quota. And finally when there's the opening that we're next then we came back here.

APPEL: And you spent, uh, a hundred days, you said, on Ellis Island.

TITONE: Three months and ten days.

APPEL: What was that like?

TITONE: It was, uh, beautiful. It was, uh, from what I was accustomed to, to that, it was beautiful.

APPEL: In what ways?

TITONE: The food was good. We could have ice cream every day, which I never had in Sicily. I could have a glass of milk whereas in Sicily

the only time I could have milk is when the man came through with the cow and they milked it right in front of you. Sometimes, uh, we didn't even have a glass and they would just squirt it right into your mouth. So, you know, there was a difference. Yeah, everything was handy. Whereas over there, where I was born, everything was the hard way. So, uh, I made myself available to help out in the kitchen. Uh, I could go out into the library, get a cart, put books of all nationalities, go to the hospital, and people would take whatever book they could read. Uh, we could play outside, outdoors. We played ball. If the ball wound up in the ocean, in the water, we would just dive off the pier there in Ellis Island, and we'd get the ball, and then there was a ladder, you could climb up and get back there. So we played ball. Played tennis. They had tennis rackets. You hit it back and forth. We didn't know what that, what it was about, but we did it. And the food was good, the library was good. Everything was cleaned once a week. You could go to the movies. It was a long walk, but we went to the movies. It was right there on Ellis Island. Who the hell could go to the movies, once a week, in Sicily, you know?

APPEL: And when you talk about we, did you go with your mother, did you go with--

TITONE: Come again, please?

APPEL: When you talk about that we would go to the movies, were you--

TITONE: No, no, no, not, my mother would still be in the women's ward. They would, if they go to the movies they would come from their side of the Island and we would come from the other side. When I say we, I mean we the men, the male, the male species would be coming from their, you know.

APPEL: Were you lonely, or worried that you were separated from your family?

TITONE: No, because I still saw my mother. Because even though they were in the female, the, the female wards, you still were allowed like, I'd take the books, you know? I'd just go there and say, "Hi mom." You know, sisters, you know. But there was no, no, uh, no hardship there whatsoever. The only hardship was that we had to go back. That was the only hardship.

APPEL: And were there other small children?

TITONE: Oh yeah we have all ages. When we, when I was in the hospital where I was there was younger than I and, uh, older.

APPEL: Were , dew, were they people who spoke your dialect of Sicilian?

TITONE: Some of them. Some of them. The others, Americanized, you know, American people we, you know, did the best we could to understand each other. But it was tough. So what, who cared, you know?

APPEL: So you were there from winter through a time when you could go, it was warm enough to jump in the water.

TITONE: Yeah, yeah. Well it was, uh, nice days, you know. When it rained, it rained. We wouldn't be out playing. Well you could go to the library because everything was indoors.

APPEL: And during this time they were trying to cure the ring worm?

TITONE: No. The reason why I was detained there was not because they were trying to cure me, they were plea, pleading, die, is that what it is? You know, back and forth. My, my relatives want us to come in. But the government says nothing doing. You get sick over there and you're going to get cured over there. So it took them three months and ten days to finally decide that, get back. Now--

APPEL: And it was at that time that your relatives put up the bond so that your sisters could stay?

TITONE: No. They were, they were, uh, they got off the Island in about two months before, you know, before I had to go back. Because the bond was all right, they were in good health but my mother, since I was a minor, she had to be kept there with me. Go back with me

APPEL: Uh, I'm curious as to how she felt about the detention.

TITONE: I couldn't say. I couldn't say because she died, uh, about eight, ten years ago. Sixty seven. That's all. Yeah, hell, yeah. It's almost twenty years. Yeah. Yeah. Because she died in New York in, uh, I had seen her in September and I think she died in November, I didn't even go back for the funeral. Uh, my other older sister she is also dead so she could have gave me a lot of information. My other sister, who still lives in Comack, New York, she could tell me quite a bit but, uh, I don't, I don't think she could have helped, you know, what I went through because they were in a different ward anyway.

APPEL: Did you have, during this time, did you have certain ideas of what America was going to be like?

TITONE: No, no. Uh, I, I had hopes because my sisters would tell me, you know, in Sicily we, we, you can't even get a piece of candy, never mind the, you know, uh, maybe you get it once a year. But, uh, they would say to me, "Oh, when you get here you're going to have a wrist-watch, you're going to have earring, you're going to have candy, you're gonna," you know, that was hopes. I didn't, you know, I didn't know That I was going to get them but I had hopes of getting it. But, uh, see my, my position was different. I was minor, I was a child, I didn't have to worry about a child. All I was looking forward to maybe go to school, uh, and education and then what, so what, so I got an education, I didn't know what the meaning was. Because, what do they say, "Ignorance is bliss." And, uh, in those Sicilian towns, you know, where illiteracy is rampant, you know? You, I, I went to school two years, I was fortunate enough that my family could afford it. But a lot of people go through life all the time, no education. Never knowing uh, George Washington, who he is? You Know? A horse, what's a horse? We knew if you called them a cavallo. It's a horse. But if you happen to come across a word, you know, different meaning, we don't know from nothing.

APPEL: So you, it, it sounds like that your experience on Ellis Island during that period, confirms the ideas that your sisters had given you about America and that there would be plenty of food.

TITONE: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, right. The only thing is that, uh, here I am detained, I didn't have, well I had freedom on the Island but I didn't know where, not to get off, buy what I like or do what I like. I had to do what everybody else did.

APPEL: Do you remember the return trip? When you took the ship back to Italy.

TITONE: Oh yeah. Oh, this is exciting. We were five days at sea and someone hollered, "Man overboard!" As soon as that holler went out, the ship stops, makes a complete turn around. So that way, instead of the man who went overboard being pulled in by the propellers, the front part of the ship, no he was on, it was the right side, the front part of the ships turns around this way so that when the ship comes around and he's still in the water it would push him away from the propellers. It took two hours, twelve sailors and a lifeboat with one officer, he had a gun in case of sharks. Two hours, they got him. That man swam for his life. The first thing they did when they got him in the lifeboat, they turned him upside down to get as much water out of him as possible. We're watching this binoculars on the ship. And they brought him back, put him in a padded cell. Everyday they, two officers, well, two guards would take him for a walk around the ship because those ships are big, you know. That was his

daily exercise.

APPEL: Had he jumped over?

TITONE: Oh yeah he had man overboard. He was in that ocean for two hours.

APPEL: No but, I'm wondering why he was in a padded cell. That he had jumped over himself.

TITONE: Yeah, yeah, he was, yeah he was mentally, uh, mentally affected. And, uh, everyday, I knew, because you used to see him, these two guards would take him around the ship to walk and he was stark. We had running water on the ship and you have salt water and fresh water. Fresh water for drinking, salt water to wash your hands in and all that. And he would only drink salt water. He wouldn't drink that fresh water. When we hit Naples, they handed him over to the authorities. Whatever happened to him, I don't know. Because then again, we had to take the other boat, you know, you get off that big boat and you go, go to the other boat and that'll take you from Naples to Palermo and then we got a hospital. We had some, uh, friends, very good friends in Palermo and, uh, they let me, no, I went back to my hometown with my mother and then the doctor in my hometown suggests that we go back to Palermo. The only doctor that could cure the

ring worm would be in Palermo.

APPEL: And how did you fell about returning?

TITONE: At my age it didn't matter. I didn't care, I was having a good time.

APPEL: And when you returned and saw your friends.

TITONE: Yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah, then, uh, you tell them that whatever questions they ask, like your doing, I'd go ahead and answer them. You know, it was marvelous. I went back and I was back again working as a carpenter building wagons. So, you know, that didn't bother me at all, at that age you don't mind nothing. This is marvelous, you know, it's like, uh, you know, in New York you go to Coney Island. Your having a good time. Here I come to America, beautiful. Nighttime, you want a beautiful site, cross the Atlantic, I, you know, on a boat in the nighttime in the dark. Go at the tail end of the ship and watch that moon shining in the water and as the water's moving around all, everything is twinkling, you know, like a sparkle. It's beautiful.

APPEL: So, to you, it was just terrific because it was lots of excitement--

TITONE: Right. It was not only excitement, but it was a betterment. Uh, it was too bad that I, well, then, after, you know, after I got back, I, well, I miss my sisters, I miss my brother and, and the relatives over here, even though I didn't get off, get off Ellis Island, they came, they were allowed to come and see me, you know. And, uh, they spoke beautiful, they gave me money, you know. And things, you know, so everything was good for me. And Ellis Island itself, I must admit it was great place to be. If everybody hates it, I, I couldn't hate it outside of, you know, I had to go back, but outside of that, that's my fault, or it was the authorities' fault to let me come in. But you want to hear something? The, the Italian government, whoever made me come to America sick, they had to pay for all the expenses.

APPEL: For your return.

TITONE: For my return. Plus, I was working for a carpenter shop, part-time after school making twenty, uh, twenty cents a week. They figure all those weeks, they had to pay for those, twenty cents a week. My mother, even though she was a housewife, well she did crocheting which, let's say was worth so much. She made my socks, she knitted them. She mad my clothes, she made my shoes. That was worth so much, so they gave us that money, too.

APPEL: The Italian government paid you when you came back?

TITONE: I don't know whether it was the, the ship company, the medical department, I don't know who did it, but they had to pay us.

APPEL: So, even, they paid for your return trip--

TITONE: Right.

APPEL: And then they paid your wages--

TITONE: Whatever I would be earning. And whatever my mother could be earning. So I, I, I can't complain, can I? I was treated, I, I, real good, nobody tried to rob me or anything. To me it was a God send, you know, lot of these things, who knows? I was sick so it was my fault why should somebody else pay for it? But since it was their fault for letting me come through, they had to pay for everything going back.

APPEL: And then what happened? Because you did return to America in 1923.

TITONE: Well, when I came here was Giuseppe Verdi, when I went back, I went back with Dante Alighieri. Which was a sister ship.

APPEL: And do you remember much about the preparations for that or, or how that was arranged?

TITONE: What do you mean, for that?

APPEL: Well, do you remember even how, for example, how you felt about leaving at that point, three years later. Were you anxious to go to America?

TITONE: In the meantime I had to go to Palermo, and I lived there two and a half years to get rid of the ring worm. I remember that they, it was german doctor, it was a german doctor--

APPEL: Okay, this is the end of side one on the interview with John Titone.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

APPEL: This is the beginning of the second side of the interview with John Titone. You were saying that you spent two and a half years in Palermo.

TITONE: I Palermo, to cure the disease. The doctor was a German doctor, they put me in a great big hall, white hall. They covered my body, all of my body with lead, so I would, I didn't know what they were doing, but now that I know that lead is to stop x-ray from penetrating your body, so they must have given me x-ray treatments to get that disease out of my head. Twenty days later, after the treatment, all my hair came off, completely bald like Yul Brynner, and then, I went back to my hometown, Castelvetro, and my hair all grew back. In the meantime, we had, my mother and I were put back on a quotas list and then when the time came, we came back to America. Which was October 23, 1923.

APPEL: How did you get the money to come back?

TITONE: Well, we had the money from the other trip. You know, then we weren't that bad off, you know, even though during World War One we almost starved to death. But, uh, nothing to eat. We had land but that land, whatever it produced was for the government, for the soldiers. So even that, but we weren't that badly off. Then our relatives in America

would be glad to help us. And in the meantime, my sisters were here working, my brother was here working. None of the three of them ever got married until we came back. So whatever they earned, they pooled it together, and help us out. So, once I went back to my hometown, and the porter came, and well, the same procedure again. Come to America. The only thing, this time it wasn't an Italian Liner, it was a French Liner. They called it, I can't think of the name. But anyway--

APPEL: It left from Naples?

TITONE: It left, oh yeah, it left from Naples. And the first place they stopped was in Barcelona, and some of the people left the ship and visited Barcelona, because they had to take on a load of grapes to bring to America. But it was marvelous watching those people, you know, in the port, diving for, you know, we'd throw coins overboard and they'd dive for the coins. And selling, peddling different things from one little boat to another. It was great, it was good experience, just watching the port in Barcelona. And then when we got started again, it was kind of foggy, and I saw the Rock of Gibraltar, as we were sailing through the fog, you know, like subdued like. But I got a glimpse of it anyway. And it looks like Prudential shows it, you know, their insurance policy. And again, a few days out at sea, during the night, they didn't tell us, but the following day they told us that there was a fire. And there was a fire down there,

and one of the priests, he ran down there to help out. Two colored people that worked down there in the hole, shoveling coal into the furnace were burned, because all the stuff that was burned, they, you know, would shovel it outside through the portholes, whatever, and throw it in the ocean, and the priest got burned to death too. So there was three people that died that night, trying to save the ship. And then of course, we continued, came to America, went--

APPEL: You were about twelve years old at this time?

TITONE: No, I was about eleven and a half then. And we got to Ellis Island, the same procedure, and no disease, everything was fine, and we came right through with flying colors, and landed in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Melting pot of all nationalities.

APPEL: Do you remember what it was like to actually arrive in America? What were your recollections?

TITONE: Well, we forgot the first time, when we were stuck in the harbor, when the fog lifted, and the snow stopped, and the ship was able to sail to reach its destination, that the ferries could take us to Ellis Island. It happened during the night, and someday, somehow, somebody woke us up, and we were looking through portholes, and here we see all these red

lights, and green lights, everything is clear, it's beautiful. And we seen these, we don't even know that it is a bridge, because now I know what it was. But in those times, we don't know, all we know is that we see all these lights moving. We couldn't figure out what it was. And now I know that it was elevated trains that went across the bridge, or the subway that went across the bridge, and all the these lights at nighttime, that's why there moving, 'cause the train was moving. But to us, after being stuck there in the harbor for so long and in the middle of the night, watching all these beautiful, colored, you know, red, green, and amber lights, moving around, well, what the hell is this, heaven? You can't figure it out. It was a beautiful sight. And then of course the next day our relatives come in little boats. They come on the side of the ship, and we could lower ropes and bring up a valise with food, you know, different things. And if we had anything, as long as somebody would say, "Okay, let it go down," we let it go down. And that was it. And then the last time, none of this. The ship came in, everything was fine. And then no taxis, no automobiles in those days, we had a subway ride or elevated ride. "Oh my God, what is this?" you know. The only thing I ever saw, in World War one was a motorcycle go by, and nor even an automobile, you know. And then I saw tanks of course, there was a lot of activities.

APPEL: And you moved to Williamsburg?

TITONE: Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

APPEL: And where did your mother settle?

TITONE: Right there.

APPEL: With your sisters and your brother?

TITONE: Right, they already had the, we were living one flight up, there was three story building, ground floor, one flight, two flights. And we had a backyard and then there was a backhouse, and I don't mean toilet, when I say backhouse, I mean a house in back, the yard separated us from them.

APPEL: And did you go to school immediately?

TITONE: Yes, yes, I went to PS 49. And I'll never forget this, I missed a lot of education, but it felt good then, every few months that the principal would come, "Okay John, you go to the next class." They kept skipping me. I was eleven and a half, by the time I was fifteen I was already up in the seventh grade. So they kept skipping me all the time. So today I realized I missed a lot of education.

APPEL: So, you must have learned English very quickly?

TITONE: Yes, but I had a hell of a job. I used to have fights everyday. You know why? First thing I learned was two pronouns, her, he and she. I would call a he, a she, and right away fights. I would call a she, a he, and right away fights. 'cause you know kids, how they were. And I would be fighting. I lived two blocks away from the school, and I would be fighting back and forth, trying to figure out why. I said he, but it was a she. How do I know these things, you know. And little by little I learned the language and all my enemies were my friends, you know. And I must say that the education here in America was so much different than in Italy. Here in America you have recess, the teacher, one of my teachers was a piano player, she knew how to play the piano, and we'd be holding hands, dancing with the girls, you know, it was a lot of fun.

APPEL: And the period when you were fighting because you were making mistakes in English, were people saying you were a greenhorn, that you were a foreigner, or that kind of thing?

TITONE: You wasn't just a greenhorn, you was a dago, you was a wop, you know. And who the hell knew what it was a dago, what's a wop, what's a guinea? I don't know. Until today, then I find out. Some people

are proud to be called those names but me, I didn't care for them. But I didn't know the difference. They called me a wop, and the others laughed, so I thought it was something bad, so I fight. But we were all mixed, you know, we were Germans, Sicilians, Neapolitans, Polish people, and we got along swell. Don't let the next block come and fight us because we were ready to fight them, you know. Just like today, you got gangs, you got a barrio, or different sections, you know. But in those days, we all stuck together. And then as soon as I reached the sixth grade, they took me to PS 18 because PS 49 only went up to the sixth grade, so then you had to go to the PS 18. And then, well, I never graduated until I retired. When I became sixty five, I graduated my elementary, oh no, wait a minute, wait a minute, I graduated, I graduated from PS 147, which was Isaac S. Remsen Junior High. I graduated from there. Then I went to high school, Textile High School, in Manhattan, on 18th Street, between Seventh and Eighth. And the Dean of that school was Dr. Doolittle, and he'd be walking through the hallways with his hands behind his back. Don't get caught smooching up with anybody because he'd have you. He'd be walking around, looking in every corner, nook, and everywhere, and he'd find you. But it was a nice experience. I was going to school, nights, and working days. And I learned printing, which as far as I'm concerned, is a beautiful trade, and it did a lot of things for me.

APPEL: Well, if you were to think about how this experience of

coming to America changed your life, in what ways do you think it changed your life?

TITONE: It changed my life, it gave me an opportunity, I had a choice. Whereas if I would have stayed in Sicily, maybe I would have grown up to be a carpenter, commercially building wagons, or be a cabinet maker, built furniture, or most likely, I'd be a farmer, to take care of the land that my mother and father had bought when they got married. 'Cause over there in those days was a contract. My daughter, I'll give my daughter so much, and how much are going to give to your son. So they compare so much land from here, from, so what would I have to do, take care of that land? So I probably would have been a farmer, they had no choices. But here in America, I had a choice. I was bumming around with some of the boys, and one of them, finally, didn't want to be part of the gang any longer, so he got himself a job. And what did he do? He got into printing, and for what he said, it attracted my attention, to make me realize that printing was a good trade. I would never know it otherwise, you know. I tried, the first job I ever had was on 23rd Street and Sixth Avenue, in Manhattan. And I started as an errand boy. We used to print all kinds of law forms, you know, for lawyers. And we'd print these law forms, and for different cases, and I would take them and deliver it to this lawyer, that lawyer, the courthouse, whatever. Next job, from there, well, I was a smart guy, you know, I was trying to take out the forelady, I didn't know she was my boss.

So I got fired, a few weeks, then after that I got another job, and another job. But every job that I got as an errand boy was always in printing. So in between making deliveries, I would work in the shop. I finally, one of the foremen said to me, "What department would you like, typesetting or the pressroom?" "Well," I says, "I like the pressroom better." "Cause I hated his guts, otherwise maybe I would have been a typesetter. So I stuck to it, and here 50 years I did my thing very good. I got three sons. Here's a guy with four degrees. I got two other sons. One's got one degree, the other one's got two degrees. So they did all right.

APPEL: Certainly did all right. Well, I think I've covered the questions.

TITONE: Anything else? (Someone speaks off-mike.) I must say at my age I probably didn't know the difference. If it didn't taste good, maybe I would put a little sugar, then it tastes good, right? At my age, it was very hard to evaluate what it was about. All I can tell you is nice things. I enjoyed being in there. It was, you had your showers, you had your baths, you had clean linens, you didn't starve, you know, you was treated fine.

APPEL: Did you have showers back in Sicily, or was that new to you?

TITONE: No, the only time you went bathing in Sicily was when the weather was like California. But you went to the Mediterranean, you go swimming. You would use wash cloths, you know, here and there and everywhere. Your parents would take care of that. But to have showers, oh no. We had, my neighbor across the street from where we lived, they had running water. You know why? They happened to be rich enough to have a tank on the roof of their house, then they had running water. But outside of that, you know, it was a tough life. You'd say Italian people, or Sicilians are accused of being winos. Why not? It was easier to get a glass of wine out of a barrel, a wine barrel than it was to get a glass of water out of the wall, you had to pull it out. So you drink wine instead of water. But then again, there's nothing wrong with drinking wine, unless you go overboard, you know. So, all I could tell you, to me it was an education, it was a recreation. Food-wise, it was fine, the way the people treated me was fine. So I really, no, even though I was in detainment, I enjoyed every bit of it.

APPEL: Well, thanks very much.

TITONE: No, that's okay.

APPEL: That was interesting. This is the end of side two of

the interview with John Titone.