

KECK-167

JOSEPHINE STRANO COSTANZO

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INTERVIEWER: DEBBIE DANE

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SICILY (BORN U.S.), 1923

AGE 6

PASSAGE ON "THE PRESIDENT WILSON" (U.S. TO SICILY)

POSSIBLE PASSAGE ON "THE PATRIA" (SICILY TO U.S.)

DANE: This is Debby Dane and I'm speaking with Mrs. Josephine Strano Costanzo on Monday, February 3, 1986. We're beginning the interview at 2:10. We're about to interview Mrs. Costanzo about her immigration experience from Italy in 1923, she was six years old and this is Interview Number 167. Mrs. Costanzo, yours is an interesting story because you were actually born here, could you tell me about how your father ended up coming over here the first time.

COSTANZO: He married in June 6, 1912 and he had decided before he married that he was coming to America. At the same time he came, he and my mother came to America, they accompanied my mother's sister too. So that all three came at the same time. And my father decided he would stay. They went to work in the Lawrence mills both.

DANE: What did they do there?

COSTANZO: My father was a comber and my mother was a twister, in the
twisting room.

DANE: Do you know what that means?

COSTANZO: Yes, they twist the yarns into bobbins.

DANE: And the comber?

COSTANZO: My father would comb the raw wool into great big fluffs.

DANE: Had he done that at all?

COSTANZO: No, it was something he learned here.

DANE: Where did they come from in Italy. I guess we didn't
establish that.

COSTANZO: They came from the village of Santa Maria La Scala, in the
province of Catania.

DANE: In Sicily?

COSTANZO: In Sicily.

DANE: And why did he, got married and came over to this country
and brought his wife, the motivation, was there no work in
Italy?

COSTANZO: That's right. A better life, they looked forward to a better life
which was, even though they were paid so meagerly, it was much better than what they were
doing there and both of them working was a big help. In Italy there were no jobs for women.
None.

DANE: Was it unusual for your mother to work in the mentality
of--

COSTANZO: Yes it was unusual. In fact people that heard about it,
in uh, back in the village, didn't like the idea of the women
working. But they, my mother felt she was doing no different from
all the other women so she decided she was going to work. Make some
money and go back.

DANE: Was that the idea--

COSTANZO: Yes.

DANE: That you would go back.

COSTANZO: Yes, yes.

DANE: And you were born here, so family developed.

COSTANZO: Four of us were born here, yes.

DANE: When you were growing up as an American citizen, since you
were American born, would your parents talk about Italy to you
and describe what life was--

COSTANZO: No, I wasn't aware of all this because parents then never
let children know what was going on in their minds in those
days. I wasn't aware of this, I was just aware of a lot of packing,
I was ny, almost six at the time. A lot of packing and my favorite
statue of a child with a, swallowing a cherry and holding another
basket of cherries was being left behind. I questioned that. So I
said, "Why are we leaving this?" She said, "We're going to give it
to the lady downstairs because we can't take it on the boat." Well

then it started all to come into my mind clearly, on the boat and where we are going. There are my questions and that's how I found out we were going to a different country.

DANE: What did they tell you?

COSTANZO: "Well, we're going to see your grandmother and we're going to see your grandfather, with whom you never met. And we're going to have a lemon grove there and we're going to do a lot of nice things, right? And you're going to have fun because we're right on the ocean." Which I did, I did have fun when I got there. But do you want to know before that, our experiences on board ship?

DANE: Uh-huh.

COSTANZO: Well, we left on, in August I think it was, I don't remember the dates exactly. And we went aboard Wilson [sic, President Wilson] it was, the name of the ship was the Wilson [sic, President Wilson] and one of those really, uh, backward ones. The way they fed the people was, each had a great big dish like, it was a basin, really a tin basin and from that they'd give you a great big quantity of food and from that then each member of the family served the rest of them in their tin dishes. And we knew it was mealtime when we heard a great big ding. All the dishes came out, all the clatter, that was mealtime (she laughs).

DANE: Did you have to get in line and wait or was--

COSTANZO: Those who, yes, our parents had to wait, get in line with
the big bowl, and while we waited at those great big long
tables just like they have in jails, you see in jails.

DANE: And what about, this was on their way back to Italy?

COSTANZO: Well this was on, going to, yes, going to, yes on the way
back.

DANE: (She laughs.) Going to Italy, that's right. And where
would you sleep, did you have cabins--

COSTANZO: Yes we had cabins, upper berths, lower berths, yes.

DANE: Did you like being on the ship?

COSTANZO: No, because all I saw was sky and water. I did not like
that, there was nothing to see, just sky and water for 14
days.

DANE: You were probably an energetic young person.

COSTANZO: Yes, I wanted to see more than sky and water and there was
nothing to see but the same people everyday, same dining
facilities and sky and water. That's all.

DANE: Would you play, did you have toys or any entertainment?

COSTANZO: No, we didn't have much of any, no entertainment, no. When
coming back, there was more entertainment.

DANE: When you left, were you sad, you'd made friends here?

COSTANZO: No, really no. I hadn't made many friends.

DANE: Did you speak Italian, or were you--

COSTANZO: Only Italian, I hadn't gone to school yet.

DANE: Then you arrived in Sicily or did you go to Naples and then--

COSTANZO: Well we arrived at Naples and from Naples then we took the
train to Sicily.

DANE: Uh-huh, was there indeed a lemon farm?

COSTANZO: A lemon grove? Yes.

DANE: Would you describe--

COSTANZO: The lemon grove was the reason that made them decide to go
then to Sicily is because as soon as they had purchased that
lemon grove not long after, there had been 40 days of rain, 40
consecutive days of rain and so there was a landslide and that, we
lost half of the trees, the lemon trees. We managed, when we got
there, we managed to salvage 40 trees and we terraced it all, no, it
wasn't terraced it was just sloping before. Then, but now it was all
terraced and on each terrace was a row of lemon trees.

DANE: This was your father's, your grandfather's property?

COSTANZO: No. My father's.

DANE: He bought it--

COSTANZO: Yes, with the money that he had earned here in America.

DANE: And you lived in a house that was--

COSTANZO: Built by grandfather and my father, for my father. The two
of them built it for my father. Yes, in Europe the parents
give their sons a home when they get married.

DANE: Was it difficult to buy property at that time?

COSTANZO: Yes, yes because there was nothing much to, well, you could
work and earn money but it was just what you could sell from
the, from your gardens. Fruit, and most everybody had their own
fruit and they still do.

DANE: So the dream was to come back and establish his life in
Italy with a lemon grove?

COSTANZO: A grove and then he bought a store, he owned a grocery store and, uh,
he used to go into town once or twice a week, into the main city, which was Catania, to buy
his merchandise, his foods, they were foods, staples and, uh, everyday, or no, twice a week I
think it was, he used to go but if he needed something more, if he ran out of something then
he made another trip which was about 18 miles from the village.

DANE: He'd go in a horse wagon?

COSTANZO: Yes, he had a mule, yes.

DANE: Your mother, was she working now?

COSTANZO: She was in the store all the time. She took care of the
store and us children. Of course, we children used to go to,
uh, into different houses, my aunt's, my grandmother's, we had a
ball. We weren't closed in like we were in the city of Lawrence.

DANE: Do you remember, I mean do you recall what it was like when
you got off, you said, "This is where I'm going to live." Did
you, was it a big surprise, was it as nice as you thought?

COSTANZO: No, I, uh, it was, I was all wonders. My eyes just wanted
to take everything in at one time. Everything was wonderful
for me, all that lovely fruit to eat, all that lovely ocean to play
in, all that freedom (she laughs).

DANE: On the phone you were describing it as a, uh, that it was
like a fairyland, was it--

COSTANZO: It was to me, because I was a youngster, little did I know,
later I learned that it was hard eking out a living. But a
young child sees only fun and nothing else.

DANE: Would you and your sisters go down and play in the water?

COSTANZO: Yes, yes, we used to play in the water. I used to follow
my grandmother all the way up those steep, steep gardens of
hers. She used to, used to be, it is, it slopes right from the
ocean, the land slopes way up high on one half of the village and my
grandmother had everything growing there, grapes, figs, plums,
everything you could think of and I used to follow her all the way up
to the top and tasting this and tasting that, she'd give me tidbits
if everything that grew. I had a nice time with my grandmother.

DANE: Would she put things up, can them and um--

COSTANZO: No, she sold. That was the way she, they lived. She sold
her, whatever she grew. Also she used to, well I don't know
what they call it here when they sublet orange groves, they take care
of it and then sell the fruit, you know, they pay the owner of the
properties that much and then they sold the fruit for whatever price
they wanted.

DANE: They'd lease the land?

COSTANZO: They's lease, our family, that's what they did. But not every year. If, some years they wouldn't do it and some years they would. It wasn't a contract signed for so many years.

DANE: In your house in Italy, was there indoor plumbing and running water?

COSTANZO: No, there was no indoor plumbing, no where in the village yet. It was after or just before World War II that they got all that.

DANE: Was that a contrast for you? Did you, was there--

COSTANZO: yes it was, but I didn't mind too much because a youngster doesn't care. We had just the regular out, uh, beyond, outside of our porch we had a little room where that was our outhouse.

DANE: What other differences do you remember from your life in Lawrence and then your life in Italy?

COSTANZO: Well like I said, life was, in Italy I could go wherever I wanted, up and down the streets, near the waterfront, whereas at home I slept indoors because, or whatever little yard we had and that was the big difference for me.

DANE: And the story of how you ended up coming back, you told me that--

COSTANZO: Yes that was, uh, the decision to come back was because my father went on his trips to, uh, city, used to have to stop and show his wares at every town he came by and every town, at every town he'd have to pay a tax or duty. That's what they probably called it. So there were about four or five towns from the village to Catania and he was disgusted with that, so he pulled up in front of the store one day, dropped his reins right clear to the ground, he says, "I'm going to America, if you come alright and if you don't come its alright too." So my mother took three days to decide and she followed him.

DANE: Did they consult, I'm sure they didn't consult with you, but were you aware that this was--

COSTANZO: No.

DANE: --going on? How did they tell you that, "We're going to leave?"

COSTANZO: They just announced, "We're going to America." And that's it, we just follow, we don't question.

DANE: Did you like that decision or were you sad?

COSTANZO: Well it didn't matter to me at the time, its, I suppose I was, maybe I have forgotten, but I suppose that I was a little sad to see, leave everybody. I had all my aunts, cousins, everybody was there.

DANE: What did you take with you, do you remember the packing that went--

COSTANZO: No. We didn't take any, uh, much of much with us. We left the house intact, we left the store intact in the care of my aunt. Whatever she wanted to do with it she did with it, we got nothing from it. And we left the lemon grove in the care of my grandfather and my two uncles who were single and for ten years we

didn't get one cent from any of these things. We just, my father didn't want to fight, so after ten years my father sold the grove. The house he gave to the family because the family was living in the upstairs rooms, lower rooms.

DANE: So he thought he was just tired of paying the taxes and just felt it wasn't fair and so--

COSTANZO: Yes, no, that's right.

DANE: Mmm, because it sounds as if you had a pretty good arrangement.

COSTANZO: That's right, sure but he just couldn't stand to stop at every town, show his wares and pay so much on each product.

DANE: Then it was time to go. Do you remember leaving the town that day.

COSTANZO: Yes, I remember taking the train and it was dark by the time we got to uh, Naples. And my mother showed me a great big red glare in the sky and she said, "That's the mountain." Which to me meant nothing, I hadn't studied it, now had I been in school I might have heard something about it. But that's the mountain that uh, sends out

fire is the way she put it.

DANE: That's Mt. Vesuvius.

COSTANZO: It was Mt. Vesuvius, yes. Also we passed close to Mt. Etna.
We saw Mt. Etna too.

DANE: And you got on the boat again. You had remembered the first
trip.

COSTANZO: Yes, got back on the boat, yes.

DANE: Do you remember the name of that boat?

COSTANZO: Huh, yes I do remember the boat, the name of that boat I
think the second time we boarded a boat I think coming back we
came, we left, we didn't leave from Naples. I think we left from
Palermo and it was Mt. Etna that she showed us as I recall now, we
left from Palermo.

DANE: Uh-huh, that would make more sense. Was it an exciting thing for you
to get back on a big boat or were you--

COSTANZO: Yes, we liked the different things that we did together,
yes, it was nice and the boat was very nice, the Patricia,
[possibly the Patria], P-A-T-R-C-I-A [possibly the Patria]. It was a
nice boat, there was beautiful service in the dining room commons.
It was very nice, the food was good.

DANE: Did you travel third class or second class, did you go down
into the hold of the boat?

COSTANZO: Yes, third class.

DANE: Uh-huh, and did you have cabins on that boat or--

COSTANZO: Yes, yes we had cabins, lower deck and upper decks, yes.

DANE: And the food on this one?

COSTANZO: It was good, very good, we enjoyed it. The service, the
tables were set beautifully, far different, in nine months
time, its just uh, I suppose just the type of ship you take, or what
was sailing at that particular time you wanted to set sail.

DANE: Did you remember having to go, well you the children, the

four of you were American citizens, um, go through any physical exams?

COSTANZO: Oh yes, yes when we came back here it was very strict and they gave, they scratched our arms, they gave us three, they cut three times into our arms for the vaccination with something that looked like those pen and ink pens, points, you know, and boy that, they became infected and we had great big quarter-sized scabs on our arms and my mother used to go down to the dispensary, she would want us to go down to the dispensary, so she'd take us into the ladies rooms and she'd pull those scabs and dressings off and we had to keep quiet lest they hear us. So, we did all our crying quietly.

DANE: Where was this?

COSTANZO: This was on Ellis Island when we got back.

DANE: On Ellis Island.

COSTANZO: Yes, just, you know as you're coming back, they do that to you, just as you're entering the Island they did that at the time.

DANE: And would your mother, she was afraid that it would get infected and--

COSTANZO: Yes, and then we'd have to be delayed if they took us down to the dispensary or the hospital whatever it was called and she didn't want to be delayed by any vaccination.

DANE: And did you understand what she was doing--

COSTANZO: Oh yeah, we knew what she was doing, she, she told us, that she didn't want, she, if they found out that we had these, uh, sores on our arms that they would hold us there for a long period of time so we didn't want to stay there a long period of time. But we still had to stay 18 days, in that time they healed.

DANE: Yeah, let's get you to the Island. Um, did you get sick on the ship coming over? It was a pretty easy voyage?

COSTANZO: No, no it wasn't but I didn't, we didn't get sick. There was only one day that was rough, the dining room was empty and I knew there was trouble on the ship, not many people were eating.

DANE: Did it make you nervous?

COSTANZO: No, but I questioned how sick, how you feel sick that you
didn't want to eat. There were walnuts there, we kids used to
eat everything that we wanted at the time. When nobody is in the
dining room everything that's there is for anybody that wants it.

DANE: What other things did they serve, walnuts?

COSTANZO: Oh, there were all kinds of goodies, food, regular food and
also nuts and fruit, everything. There were big, the
macaronis with the spaghetti sauce and everything that we ate in
general.

DANE: Would they serve you on this voyage coming back at a table?

COSTANZO: They served us, yes, at a table coming back with nice linens,
nicely set tables.

DANE: How much clothing did you bring with you, were there lots
of trunks and suitcases or was it pretty much just the clothes
on your back, coming over?

COSTANZO: No we had, uh, two trunks I think there were, two. We had

trunks going and coming back, yes. We were five children and my father and mother were seven, we needed a lot of things and certainly they didn't have enough, any money now to start buying anew so they had to take whatever they had.

DANE: Did she bring her linens, things like that?

COSTANZO: Yes.

DANE: And blankets and--

COSTANZO: Well whatever she had taken I suppose she took right back.

In only nine months we couldn't have used up a whole lot.
(She laugh.)

DANE: Then you came into New York Harbor--

COSTANZO: Yes.

DANE: --and I asked, we talked about this before the tape was running, but do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

COSTANZO: Yes, that's when everybody flew to the side of the ship that was

facing the Statue of Liberty and I wondered, I asked my mother. "What's going on?" She said, "There's the Statue there," she said. So I looked at the Statue, it was insignificant to me, I knew nothing about it at the time.

DANE: Has it come to mean anything in particular--

COSTANZO: Oh sure, now it has, sure, I made a concerted effort to go
up to it when I, the first time I went to New York City, took
a boat, went right up to it, yes. Right in it.

DANE: Is it more important to you--

COSTANZO: Oh yes, now it is and plus I see the beauty of the work,
now.

DANE: So, we get you past the Statue of Liberty and you had to
go to Ellis Island.

COSTANZO: Yes.

DANE: You got off the boat--

COSTANZO: From the boat, then they put you in launches, you get to

Ellis Island in those smaller boats.

DANE: Uh-huh, describe that day in as much detail as you possibly can.

COSTANZO: Well, all I could remember was crowds of people, people crying, people sad, uh, it seemed that the day wasn't going to, that people weren't ever going to go away, there were so many people and everything was at sixes and sevens and I was tired mentally, tired. So that was when we got out three scratches on our arms and then I see my mother fussing and my father fussing and we understood nothing, they never really talked with us. I had an older sister too there that was almost ten now. None of this was said to us, none of what was going on, so we followed then we were brought, the women were brought to one room and the men in another room and so my mother had charge of all five children because we were all girls. And she did nothing but grumble, that's all I remember is my mother grumbling. And I made really concerted efforts not to anger her in any way. I just used to walk wide circles around her so that I knew she was, she used to really get angry at the slightest, uh, bit of what should I say, anything that bothered her, she's go, get very, very angry and it showed. So, I was very careful. I was very careful in not even letting her know that I enjoyed those two graham crackers and milk that they gave us at night.

DANE: Oh, tell me that story.

COSTANZO: (She laughs.) She was so angry, and I was, as a child, you

don't know if what you do even displeases them, they're so upset or they're so nervous. But when I saw that wagon with the graham crackers and milk coming around, I'd make sure I'd go far away from my parents so that I could enjoy those two crackers and not let them know that I was enjoying it (she laughs). Isn't that crazy? But they were so always burnt up that one was, didn't know which way to go. Should we favor them or should we, should we, uh, express our feeling. We were tired, really, we were intimidated I would say.

DANE: When your mother was grumbling, was she, what was she talking about?

I know she was cranky and probably nervous but was she talking about going back to Italy?

COSTANZO: No, she used to say, "Its your father's fault, all this wouldn't have happened" and that was about the only thing that I understood but she was very touchy. Now one of the women, I don't know, you call them social workers or what, they saw that they wanted to occupy the women, so she brought some yarn goods for my mother to keep occupied with so and I heard her grumbling, she said, "Can't she see I have five children all around me that I need help in taking care of let alone sewing to keep me occupied." And that was another day that she really burst out. Then another time she was angry with these colored people, there were some black people, today they want to be colored, called black, these two black women saw my mother having a hard time with five children clung to her so they said, "We'll take, we'll take one child." They let my mother understand because my mother didn't know any English yet. They let he understand, "We'll take one child", she says, "You take

care of these others." So she took my sister, one who's next to me, she's two years younger than me and they took her to their cubicle and they, I think they were entertaining her. Anyway, when my mother had sent the youngest to bed and we were all getting ready for bed, then she went over to take her daughter, there she saw that daughter sitting down by one of the cots, while the two women were pulling up each other's nightgowns and slapping each other on their rear ends. Well, that hit my mother wrong--ha--when she came back she was furious and I wondered why, well she explained, that's one thing she explained to me (she laughs).

DANE: And did she go on and on?

COSTANZO: Oh gosh, she, then she, from then on we weren't allowed to
move from her side. She didn't want any of to see, to be seen
with people doing those things.

DANE: How long were you on the Island?

COSTANZO: Eighteen days.

DANE: Eighteen days. Explain, describe as if you were a TV camera, which
you did for me, some on the phone, where you slept.

COSTANZO: Yes. On the upper cots there were two cots on each side
of our cubicle and I always managed to sleep on the upper

cots. And you could go, that was like, have you seen the old-fashioned chicken cages and chicken stores where they're long, well this was the whole length of the room and, but they were open, open at the top, there was no, nothing on the top, just the walls and the cots, were all those springs, four-inch square springs like the old-fashioned springs and you could see clear through the end of the room, you could see through the other side to the other people, nobody had any privacy. You dressed and undressed there. Or if you went into the ladies rooms.

DANE: And were you in a rather large room or was it--

COSTANZO: Large, it was a large room. Yes, I remember the black people were on that side and there were more on that side, a long, long room.

DANE: And there would be these partitions of chicken wire?

COSTANZO: That's it. Just cages, like separate. You see they were separate. And that's was a, a hall, then there were the other bunch of cages or cubicles. But all attached, all attached, nothing that separates you and me or the next cubicle. They were all attached. When you left, you left from the opening, just the opening.

DANE: And were there mattresses on the--cots?

COSTANZO: Cots, yes.

DANE: Would you stay in one with your mother and sisters?

COSTANZO: Yes.

DANE: So you were able to stay together?

COSTANZO: Uh-huh, all six of us.

DANE: And explain, you referred to it, but the very first night, did the woman come around with the graham crackers and milk?

COSTANZO: Yes, but not in our cots, that was in the recreation room, which was just a large room where you talked. There were benches. Before that night, about 6:00, they'd be by with the two graham crackers and milk. I thought it was about 6:00 anyway because it was still daylight.

DANE: And everyone, they would pass them out like a--

COSTANZO: Yes, anybody who wanted, approached the wagon and get a graham crackers and milk. And like I said, I used to enjoy them, I used to look forward to them but I made sure my mother didn't, uh, see me enjoy them. I'm sure she would have, she wouldn't have said anything, it was my childish mind that made me think that I was, uh, doing something that she didn't like.

DANE: Uh-huh, and during this time, were you able to see your father?

COSTANZO: Yes, they used to come in daytime, and yes they used to get together in the, in the room, that social room where we could all get together, that's sort of a, social room, I would say, a recreation room. With long benches, anybody who wanted to sit, anybody wanted to talk or knit or whatever.

DANE: What were you delayed for?

COSTANZO: We were delayed because the immigration laws had changed in 1923, that only citizens were allowed to enter the U.S. And so my father did not know that and when we got to New York they said, "Non-citizens cannot enter. Only the citizens." My father

said, "No, we either all enter or we all go back." So they said. "We'll write to Washington and see what they have to say." They did. So we waited, day after day. Every night, I think about every night, there would be someone who called out names and those were called, I suppose they were given permission to enter, I would say. When on the 18th day my father's name was called, he was relaxing on one of the benches in this fashion. Soon he heard his name, he jumped up, way up in the air and my, he called to my mother and oh we're leaving, then the scurrying began and then we remember taking a train to Boston and back to Lawrence.

DANE: This is the end of side one, Josephine Costanzo, Interview Number 167, its 2:40.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

DANE: This is the beginning of side two, Josephine Costanzo, Interview Number 167, its 2:40. We're still on Ellis Island and, uh, two things that you had mentioned earlier, one had to do with the food. Did you, if you can tell me what you guys ate in the morning and then at night.

COSTANZO: Well, what I remember mostly is the rice in the morning,
boiled rice with milk and cinnamon and I used to like that.
And, but during the rest of the meals I'm not too, uh, I don't recall
too well. But, on Sundays we were served jello and boy when that, we
were called in to eat you would see people scrambling in all
directions, they were grabbing their jello and somebody else's jello
so that we never once in that 18 days tasted that jello. Well, by
the time mother got us, herded us children to the table and all that,
the people had already done the grabbing and so she used to tell us,
"Its not good for you anyway, there's sugar in that, its not good."
But we liked the color, it was the color of that blouse, (she laughs)
we wanted it, we never tasted it.

DANE: Never once?

COSTANZO: Never once in 18 days, which was about three Sundays, is
about all, not quite even.

DANE: And all these people, were most of them Italians?

COSTANZO: No, all nationalities. Right, why we had those blacks if
you recall.

DANE: Was it strange for you to hear these different languages being spoken?

COSTANZO: Yes, but I didn't listen much, my mother kept us so close to her, we had hardly any chance except when I used to sneak-off with those graham crackers, to really, uh, hear anybody else talk. My mother kept us very close to her.

DANE: And psychologically, I mean you were a tiny girl, but 16 to 18 days to stay in and, ah, not knowing, would your mother talk about that, about the feeling of--

COSTANZO: Yes, she was all, all, very frustrated and she didn't know how to keep us occupied really and, uh, she used to tell us, "Maybe tomorrow we leave, maybe tomorrow," or something, it was always a tomorrow that we looked forward to, until 18 tomorrows.

DANE: And she was looking forward to going back to Lawrence or would she--

COSTANZO: No she really wasn't, she was, she was hoping that we'd all be sent back to Italy. But you couldn't do that, we were four American citizens. But if my father decided then we would all go

back, yes.

DANE: Did she cry when she was on the Island?

COSTANZO: Oh she cried, sure she did. She did a lot of crying when she decided she was coming to America.

DANE: Do you think she would just as soon stayed--

COSTANZO: Yes, because she could of, uh, she could really got a good living out of what we had. But she had to depend on this one and that one. And she wasn't sure that she would be treated right or in other words that she would, that they would be honest with her. Remember she said, "have five daughters." You know, in those days they, uh, a daughter was expensive to marry off. Today they don't care but in those days she thought of, "How was I going to take care of these five daughters? The business and the lemon grove would give me a good living if I was helped in the right direction." But as it was, she turned out to be right, her suspicions were right because they didn't send us one cent from the store, nor another cent from the lemon grove in ten years. Either the lemons had, uh, the, what they call, lice or they were, they had a bad year or there was always an excuse. But when we tried to sell the lemon grove, mu uncle said,

wouldn't hear of it. We wanted to sell it to a New Jersey man who asked for it. And my uncle wouldn't hear of it, "How come after all these years I've taken care of it?" Well, we wanted to tell him we haven't seen one cent profit. In fact they used to ask for money to fix certain things. How did they ever dare? But my father used to let it go in one ear and out the other. So finally, when we want to sell that lemon grove, "How dare you sell that lemon grove that we've taken care of for ten years?" We could tell them exactly why but, well in the end we sold it, well, "Then I'll buy it." But he took two thousand lire off the price. But my mother said, "Well, its my brother." And so my father said, "Well, since its your brother, give it to him for less. But remember for ten years that same lemon grove hasn't given them penny's, uh, earnings and now they want." (She laughs.)

DANE: Did your mother, when it was time to go and you guys were gathered up and ready to go up to Lawrence, you did return to Lawrence?

COSTANZO: Yes we did.

DANE: Did you, did she work again?

COSTANZO: Yes, immediately. Now they had to get themselves out of debt because my father's money ran out after 18 days on Ellis Island and there someone who had befriended him from Chicago, lent him \$300, I think it was. So now my father was in debt. So the sooner they got to work the better. Which they did.

DANE: Back in the mills?

COSTANZO: Yes, back in the mills.

DANE: Did you go to school?

COSTANZO: Yes, the following September we went back, we went to school for the first time.

DANE: How did you like school?

COSTANZO: I liked it, very much. I was very interested in school, I liked it.

DANE: Is that where, how did you learn English?

COSTANZO: Well, we used to say -A- in the daytime and at night we got

Italian lessons, at the same time we got Italian private lessons and pronounced -ah- for -A-. So, we really had to go to learn because now my mother wanted to correspond to Italy for, with all her holdings, about her holdings. And uh, she was illiterate. My father was illiterate. It was. it fell on us to do the corresponding. So in a short time we had to learn to write at least the beginner's Italian so that we could make ourselves understood in those letters.

DANE: Who would teach you the Italian?

COSTANZO: There was a woman on the second floor who used, who was a, who knew Italian and she used to tutor us at night. So in the daytime, -A-B-C- and in English, and at night, -ah-bee-see-.

DANE: Was it frustrating for you and--

COSTANZO: Not for me, for my sister, my mother had two of us learn. For my sister it was, for me I found it easy.

DANE: Would the kids ever make fun of you not speaking English at school during the day?

COSTANZO: No, there were more of the same, so we did not feel too bad.

There were a few others like us so we didn't feel too bad.
But, boy did we make a considered effort to learn so that we could be
like the rest.

DANE: Did you ever, heard of the expression "greenhorn"?

COSTANZO: No, not then, no because there were a lot of them then, from every
country, so now it probably is, you hear that word more but everybody was from, every uh,
country of Europe and other nations in fact.

DANE: Did you have, uh, go around with mostly Italian kids in the
neighborhood?

COSTANZO: No, no. No, we were all mixed. There were Lithuanian,
Polish, we had some Jewish too in Lawrence.

DANE: Did your mother learn how to speak English?

COSTANZO: Broken English? Yes, like my husband does.

DANE: And your father?

COSTANZO: Too. Broken English but they made themselves understood.

In fact, uh, Judge Mahoney of Lawrence said, "I don't know how you do it." He said to my father, he used to go buy his fish down at the pier and he used to do a great many things, he was, he was very handy too, very handy man.

DANE: And when you were growing up, were you aware of the fact

that, uh, that your parents, I find that this is often the case, that your parents speak Italian to you but you were speaking English during the day. Did you--

COSTANZO: No, we used to, in our house, in our case, we used to speak, English, uh, Italian to my parents too. But my father was anxious for us to learn the English language. He used to say, "Don't speak Italian, speak English." My father was anxious for us to learn. But my mother wanted the easy way out, she didn't mind, (she laughs) if we spoke Italian.

DANE: Were there any customs that were particularly Italian that were celebrated over in Italy that you brought with you?

COSTANZO: Yes, the Carnival. On Shrove Tuesday, that was an all-day affair there. All day. And these people, these finely dressed ladies were parading up and down the waterfront, into stores

and out. They looked elegant, imagine, elegantly dressed, lady's garments, lady's big hats, laces, lace shawls, laces. You can imagine my surprise when one of these ladies was in my grandmother's house and took off the clothes. It turned out to be my uncle (she laughs). I was shocked, no end, I didn't get over it for days. I kept at my mother, "How come he dressed like that?" So she'd explain, "We dress up like that because it's Carnival Day, its like uh, New Orleans, uh, Carnival, uh, Mardi Gras."

DANE: Mardi Gras!

COSTANZO: Exactly, all day long, that goes on all day long, dressed in all different kinds of costumes.

DANE: Was there special food that you'd eat?

COSTANZO: Yes, they had special foods. But, uh, my mother was too busy in the store and I wasn't, they were lucky that she put something together for us or I would eat at my aunt's or at my grandmother's. My aunt was, you know, she had just enough for her family so when she saw had either me and my sister and she, she wouldn't have enough macaroni so she put another kind of macaroni mixed in, two kinds of macaroni and I thought that was great.

Actually she did it because she had extra people and so she tried to stretch it out a little bit more.

DANE: Did you celebrate Shrove Tuesday here, in this country?

COSTANZO: At first they occasionally did but not in that fashion like in Italy, no. We just had special things like sausage usually used the night before, that sausage, that pork sausage is supposed to be rich, you know, so that the following 40 days was going to be lean for us.

DANE: Would your mother cook this prepared food the same way as she did in Italy? Do you remember if there was, if you were eating the same kind of food if in your diet changed?

COSTANZO: Yes, yes, yes. We still today, in our house, we still do, yes.

DANE: But what are some of the--

COSTANZO: We use a lot of greens, with, dressed with olive oil instead of butter. All our greens, cauliflower and broccoli all with olive oil. And they still do that, because the four times I've been to Italy, they still eat the same things, they still

eat their lentils with rice like we do here, only I would add about three ounces of ground beef in ours but they don't there. Yes, we eat very much like it, lots of broiled fish which they, of course, that being, they're being on the waterfront, there's plenty of fish. Very much the same way.

DANE: And as much pasta? Is pasta a Sicilian thing or is that--

COSTANZO: Well, the pasta is daily there, they have it daily, yes.

And then they have something else besides the pasta. They have the pasta, the main dish, like that would be with lentils and they'll have something like, uh, fried squid or, uh, something else or stuffed eggplant, another dish besides the main pasta dish.

DANE: And growing up, you went to school, did your father want you to continue all the way through high school or did he think that you should get out into the working force?

COSTANZO: No, my father wanted me to go on to high school, it was my mother who wanted me at home. She made, had us quit because where she was working, she needed help at home. And so, we girls had to do the housework and all the things that needed being done at home. Then my father opened, after two years that we were in America, my father opened up a business which after my mother would get

through with the mill, would give him a hand in the business. So we girls were given more of the house, uh, chores to do.

DANE: What was the business?

COSTANZO: It was a fish market.

DANE: Down on--

COSTANZO: In Lawrence.

DANE: Oh in Lawrence. So he was working in the mill and had a--

COSTANZO: Yes, they used to shift. Then after he quit the mill entirely, because he didn't, oh yes they used to help each other. He used to work nights, you see, and my mother used to work days so that they used to shift around (she laughs). I tell you they worked hard. Then my father quit and eventually he wanted, he insisted my mother quit. My mother did not want to quit the mills, she didn't want to stay all day in the store being in fish market, you know, you're always handling water. She didn't like that. But she eventually did and they both continued in the store until I think it was 1945, when they closed up the business after the war, it was hard getting fish in Boston simple because it, uh, then it became, I, uh, how should I put it, the waterfront was a little corrupt. And my father had to know certain people or treat certain people right so that he would get the

choice fish for his market, my father always sold the choice fish. He used to buy off the small boats like my husband's, so that he could get the freshest fish possible. And so you had to make deals in order to get that fish. He says, "Who needs it? My children are all married, I don't need to do that." So he retired, but after he closed the store, he couldn't see himself idle so he went back to work in the Arlington Mills of Lawrence.

DANE: He went back into the mills?

COSTANZO: In the combing room.

DANE: Wow.

COSTANZO: And he worked 'til he was 72, if not later, I'm not sure.

DANE: Even though he'd had a store and probably could retire,
he--

COSTANZO: Yeah, that's why Judge Mahoney said, "I don't know how you
do it." (She laughs.)

DANE: What was the name of the fish store?

COSTANZO: Regular Fish Market.

DANE: Regular?

COSTANZO: Yes, just Regular Fish Market because he was regularly fresh.

DANE: And did you work in the store, or you--

COSTANZO: Only at Christmas time when it was very busy. We all had to work in the store when it was very busy because in those days, the day before Christmas, you know, the vigil, everybody ate fish. Now we don't care anymore but--

DANE: That's right and every Friday--

COSTANZO: And Fridays too. Thursday nights, the night-school teachers, because we lived on the same street as the high school, and the evening school class teachers all came down to get their fresh fish on their way home from school to be ready for the next day.

DANE: Was it a profitable business?

COSTANZO: Yes.

DANE: Was it unusual within the Italian family structure, because
it sounds like your mother didn't have to work financially
after the store opened, was it unusual for her to continue working
and not staying in the home?

COSTANZO: Well, everybody did work. Everybody worked and my mother
always said, "With five girls I need, I'm gonna need a lot of
money when they grow up." And that's the reason why she continued to
work. Also, my father needed, my father couldn't handle the store
alone, somebody had to be there while he was in Boston getting his
supplies. So, he would have to pay somebody. He said, "If I have to
pay somebody, its not going to pay me enough, its not going to profit
me enough." So he used to have my mother there, he wanted my mother
to quit working so she could stay there while he went to Boston to
get his fish. He used to have to close the store if my mother
wouldn't leave work, if my mother wasn't there to take over he would
have to close the store twice a week.

DANE: That's not good business.

COSTANZO: That's not good.

DANE: So you did not finish high school?

COSTANZO: No I didn't.

DANE: And at what age did you get married?

COSTANZO: Twenty-two.

DANE: The gap in between, you stayed at home?

COSTANZO: Yes. Stayed at home, did all the housework. If they felt like having dinner together, my mother and father, then I would go down to the store, they would both have dinner together at home. But we'd prepare it first. "When its finished, you come down to the store so we could come up to eat." My father always managed to have the store either close above the store, the house above the store or across the street or not too far from the store, he always managed to have his house or apartment so that we could have the meals nice and warm.

DANE: It sounds, getting near to the end here, like a very successful story, coming from Italy, opportunity was there but he thought more opportunity would be waiting for him here. Get a store, worked in the mills but was able to get out and have his

own business, have property. Do you look at America as someone that's had greater opportunity?

COSTANZO: Well sure, every time you hear one of these people, you see them on television, they say, "This is the land of opportunity." It is so understandable to me because I saw how, what they mean. I saw it in my own house, I would, how it happened that you became, we didn't become rich and wealthy but we got out of that poverty of the village.

DANE: Do you wish that you, at any time when you were a kid or even these days that you had stayed in Italy and Sicily and--

COSTANZO: No, I don't, I don't think so because it was really very backward yet. I told you the story of when one day, well we just step, coming down from my, my father's house was on a, at an angle, there was a small alley here and a main street here. And I was coming down the steps when uh, where my uncle lives now, I heard voices just above, four houses up the street, I heard people shouting! Everybody was calling their sons, their daughters and I was alarmed a bit and I couldn't understand what was going on. So, instead of going out to the street I stayed on the step and waited and waited and looked around and what was the trouble, a car was

coming down the street! So everybody called their kids in so that they wouldn't get run over. They couldn't possibly speed down those narrow streets, I don't know why they were so alarmed. And I had seen so many hundreds of cars here in America that I couldn't see why they were getting so alarmed at that one. I didn't understand the fact that uh, and I didn't even take notice of the fact that you only see one, once in a blue moon there, in the village. This was 63 years ago (they laugh). The chickens didn't have to worry, the chickens as soon as they heard the noise, they flew in every direction. But I didn't know which direction to take because I didn't know what the story was, it was later explained that that's because the car was coming down and people were afraid that the children would get run over.

DANE: Do you remember what they called the car, the word?

COSTANZO: Machina, yeah, machina.

DANE: Machina, because of the, I had talked to another Italian man and they had some name for it, um--

COSTANZO: Oh, maybe the brand name, Fiat.

DANE: No, I think its something like, "motor without horses" or " vehicle without horses" or some sort of more colloquial word.

COSTANZO: Well, uh, no, well I, over here we'd call it a "Horseless carriage" really, maybe that's what they are referring to, but that's the only name I know for "machina".

DANE: And then finally, I'm sort of, its the same question rephrased in a different way. If you would describe what it means as a person of Italian decent, to be an American, does it, do you have any thoughts on that, that you think are different because of your experience?

COSTANZO: No, when I've been going back there and I see how much liberty those young people have there, now that is, they have, I think, as much freedom as we do here. They can, they are spending as easily as we're spending here. Now this is in Sicily, it isn't even, you know uh, upper Italy. They're spending well, their homes are well-furnished, so they are going, they are working, the women are working there now so apparently it is very close to here. I see they are enjoying a lot of benefits maybe they don't have as many clothes, that I would say, they don't have as many clothes, we change so often in a day. But they don't--

DANE: So now its pretty much, its not as different as--

COSTANZO: No, no really.

DANE: Okay, can you think of anything, any other stories or any other impressions, any other thoughts about coming over or, that we haven't talked about, stories that you tell your grandchildren, used to tell your kids?

COSTANZO: Well, all I used to, what I miss is my grandmother's, uh, she had a soffet, as they call it, like a, it was a big shelf. Now there's a name for that and I've forgotten it and you go up by way of ladder but she had all the goodies. She had dried prunes, dried figs and all kinds of goodies up there and all the nuts because they had them on their property. I miss, I used to miss that (she laughs).

DANE: Would you ever dream about Italy when you got over here?

COSTANZO: No, no.

DANE: Did you see your grandmother again?

COSTANZO: No, never did. We, uh, from 1923, the first time we went there was in '72. No, I only saw two uncles and their wives.

None of my mother's sisters because they were dead. Just two brothers.

DANE: And you mom, did she settle in, was she glad after awhile that she, that you'd come over the second time or did she always, her whole life sort of say--

COSTANZO: Well, she always talked about Italy, she always talked about that beautiful country of hers and then she, my mother had an invalid daughter one with a heart condition and she went to see this Dr. Dearborne and when he asked my mother what part of Italy she came from and she told him and he said, "How could you leave such a beautiful country?" And it is beautiful, that's one thing, you can, its the air is different, you feel it in the air. If you have an awareness of things around you, the first thing I felt was the beautiful air and that lovely sunshine and blue sky and, for months it doesn't rain, for months the sun is shining. Only this last time that I was there, from October, September 10 to October 10, was there dark skies, I saw dark sky. And when there's the dark sky is when you're near the water. Its all dark, one color, ocean and sky, terrible. That's the only time and it was for three days, was it in this last time (husband agrees off-mike). But the three times I went before that I stayed, once I stayed five weeks and other time four weeks, always beautiful sunshine, I could never imagine the village anything but sunny and beautiful sunshine.

DANE: Do you wonder what made your father pick up and leave, really, he had

a farm, he had a business, he had a family, relatives. It wasn't as though he had real hardship like what forced most people to come?

COSTANZO: No, no, no, but my father was, I think he was a little bit like me. He was the type that wanted more experience and not even get them there. You got to imagine that he was one of the first Italian families, now in 1918 he owned a car, 1918, not many people did. He played, he bought himself an accordion and taught himself the accordion. Now those are the things he wouldn't be able to do in Italy, you see this was when he first came here, the first time he came here he did all that in the first ten years that he was married plus put away some money, of course, with my mother's efforts, put away some money to be able to buy those properties in Italy. And so he found, he could do more, he had more challenges here than there were there. All he needed was the problem of the duty he had to pay in between one city and the other, one town and the other and that was what broke the camel's back I guess. That's what made him decide he's coming to America. Not only, I don't think it was alone, that duty that he had to pay alone, I think he liked life here better. Which I don't blame him, at the time, life here was much better. Life here was much better, in those days, sure.

DANE: Because of--

COSTANZO: Because it was a modern country, because it gave people hope for work, there was work if you wanted to work. There was lots going on here, it was build, growing, growing, growing, where everything was at a standstill over there. Now as I see back, you know, everything was at a standstill, in fact when I, we went in '72 it was more because he had to see his brother there than I to visit my cousins and aunts. And I really wasn't enthused about going, in fact my sisters, uh, sister-in-law says, "You are, I hear you are going to Europe." I said, "Yes." She said, "You don't sound enthused about it." I says, "Well, I'm really don't know what I'll find there, remember I left out-houses there," I said. Well, when I got there and I found all my uncles, those beautiful, big bathrooms with the, not only the toilet bowl, the three pieces, they have four pieces there, they have the--

DANE: Bidets?

COSTANZO: --Bidets, exactly. That's what they have. And beautiful
tile, beautiful and Spanish tile on the kitchen floors. Gosh.

DANE: So things have changed.

COSTANZO: Of course, there are still some older people who don't have
their homes, there are. They still have the old type of,
uh, tile on the floor because like here some older people

don't want to do any of the, uh, fixing. So, I was happily surprised when I saw those beautiful things, gosh, I was shocked, I really liked it then.

DANE: When you were little, did people talk about America as a place with, that the streets are paved in gold and big opportunity and you'll get rich quick?

COSTANZO: Yes, my uncles used to talk, "How did you people come here from that, all that," you know, what they say about America. What could we say, we kids. Only what went on between my mother and her brothers and her parents I suppose but I never did question what they, how they reacted to my mother's going back.

DANE: I think that's about it. Can you think of, I think I've touched on everything that I could think of.

COSTANZO: Uh, I guess so.

DANE: This is the end of side two, Josephine Costanzo, Interview Number 167 and its 3:10.