

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

ELLIS ISLAND ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Josephine Gazieri Calloway
Interviewer: Judith Hartman
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MS. HARTMAN: This is Judith Hartman and I'm speaking with Josephine Gazieri Calloway on Tuesday, June 17, 1986. We're beginning this interview at 12:45 p.m. We're about to interview Josephine about her immigration experience from Italy in 1922.

I'd like to begin at the beginning. When and where were you born, and what was life like in Italy.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Well, life in Italy was beautiful, because I was surrounded with as much love as I needed, even though I had no parents nearby. And I went to school, in grammar and highschool, in Italy.

MS. HARTMAN: Where?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Comiso, Comiso. Province of Ragusa. That's the province, you know.

MS. HARTMAN: In Sicily.

MRS. CALLOWAY: In Sicily. Now, we were with grandma, crowded in very small quarters--

MS. HARTMAN: We? Your brother and yourself?

MRS. CALLOWAY: My brother and myself and my cousin. She's here in this country now, too. And I was a leader of the three; I was the oldest. And I saw to it that everybody went to school at the right time, and went to highschool and everything else. So, I went to highschool, I went to--

MS. HARTMAN: All in Italy?

MRS. CALLOWAY: All in Italy. I never went to school in this country. Never saw the schools in this country. I don't sit in a classroom in this country.

MS. HARTMAN: My goodness, you should walk over to the school and--

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yes, so, that's what did happen.

MS. HARTMAN: Well, did you live in a rural setting, or a town, or--

MRS. CALLOWAY: No, it was a town. Comiso is quite a nice little clean town. But it was a town. And people--you have to be there and understand the environment to know. There's plenty of loving [. . .] things and we were very--so, my mother and father was worried because she's left us at the mercy of my grandmother and my grandfather--

MS. HARTMAN: Maybe we should explain that. Your parents were already in America--

MRS. CALLOWAY: In America.

MS. HARTMAN: Do you remember the year?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yes, I think my mother must have gotten to America in, I think, in 1917, or--just before the war. Because we were supposed to come back, they were sending for us, but we couldn't make the trip because of the condition. I couldn't, you understand? But that was, when the war broke out, that was the end of transportation. So, my father came to get us in 1921.

MS. HARTMAN: Now, before we get to that point, what did you father--where did they come, when they came ahead of you, your parents?

MRS. CALLOWAY: They [. . .] visit some acquaintance they had made in Europe, and the first stop, I think, was Syracuse, New York.

MS. HARTMAN: And did your father continue with his building?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah. He was a construction man. And my mother did this [tailoring], as well, you know, as she was trained by. And, then after that, quite some time passed, then we were able to get to America.

MS. HARTMAN: Did you hear from them while they were here?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Oh yes, we wrote, sure, we wrote constantly.

MS. HARTMAN: Even though the war was in the war, the letters got through.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah.

MS. HARTMAN: What did they tell you, what were you starting to think America was about when you heard from your parents?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Well, something that we couldn't even visualize, because I--even our knowledge, in Europe, it was limited, it was just [nothing]. There was a lot of knowledgeable people there, but the equipment that homes were not adequate to that knowledge, do you understand? But that's the way it starts. That's how the ball starts rolling.

MS. HARTMAN: So were you anxious to be rejoined with your parents in this new place?

MRS. CALLOWAY: No. As a matter of fact, I wrote them a letter, when I was about fifteen years old, that I asked them not to beg for me to come to America yet. I wanted to get my degree first. I had to go to school first, and finish my schooling before I came, so I wrote that letter, my father got an emergency passport, and he came to Italy. He knocked at our door, it must have been around eleven-thirty at night. But, I guess the train or whatever it was was late. And he knocked at the door, and I was studying, my--I was studying Latin and Greek in those days, and he says to me, he knocked at the door, I said, "Who's there?" He says, "A friend." I said, "Well, what's your name?" He said, "Never mind my name!" So with the two suitcases he had, he pushed the door open and I started screaming and I woke up the whole neighborhood. And, my grandma says, "Don't worry, that's your father, I recognized his voice."

See, I don't remember him anymore.

MS. HARTMAN: He left when you were quite young.

MS. HARTMAN: I don't remember him anymore. So, when he got there, naturally, he took us to different quarters where you take your passport and everything else--

MS. HARTMAN: But was it your letter that prompted him?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yes. Because you see, had I been after sixteen, he couldn't claim me.

MS. HARTMAN: Ah, you would have been on your own.

MRS. CALLOWAY: You understand? He couldn't claim me. So, it had to be that time or nothing. So, that's what happened.

MS. HARTMAN: It was important--

MRS. CALLOWAY: It was important for him to have his family together. He wanted to have his family together. And that was the whole thing. So when we came to America, we came out--

MS. HARTMAN: Did much time elapse, the time between the time he got there and the time you all turned around and came back?

MS. HARTMAN: No, transportation [for him coming back] must have been about a month and a half or two months, you know. But when I got-- when we came to America, I immediately--I was---he headquarters in Rome said, "You're going on your own, you may not make it through," because of me.

MS. HARTMAN: Why was that?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Because of glaucoma.

MS. HARTMAN: They recognized it before you left?

MRS. CALLOWAY: They recognized it on the boat. And they notified the boat. You understand?

MS. HARTMAN: And they had no way of treating it on the boat?

MRS. CALLOWAY: No, but I was isolated. I had to be in a special cabin with no one else with me.

MS. HARTMAN: Oh my goodness. Even on the boat.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah, yeah. I had the privilege for food, they would bring it to me, but I could not come out. Only at night, when people are not no longer on the deck.

MS. HARTMAN: Let's go back a little bit. Let's find out, first, where you left from. Do you remember?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Naples.

MS. HARTMAN: You left from Naples. And did your brother come with you?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yes.

MS. HARTMAN: And your cousin?

MRS. CALLOWAY: No, my brother.

MS. HARTMAN: Your father, and your brother, and yourself.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yes.

MS. HARTMAN: And do you remember what you brought with you, what was important for you to bring?

MRS. CALLOWAY: It was in such a short time; just what you had on you, your books--I took my books with me, and that was all. There was nothing to take, because he had a visa that he had to take care of, [come in in time] so it was, you know, that's what happened.

MS. HARTMAN: Okay. So had you ever been on a boat before, was this--

MRS. CALLOWAY: No, I had never been on a boat; I was on a boat when I was three months old.

MS. HARTMAN: But, if you didn't really want to go, and if he was there to see you go, how did you feel about all this?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Well, once I saw my father, things changed. I was

sorry that I had to give up school, but that was it.

MS. HARTMAN: Did he promise you that you could continue--

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah, but I couldn't continue, because the condition of my eyes, it would aggravate the situation that much more. And I was a whole year in Ellis Island to be cured for that situation. And we had, in those years, that year was, Dr. Grossman was my doctor.

MS. HARTMAN: On Ellis Island.

MRS. CALLOWAY: On Ellis Island. The headquarters, Dr. [Hettrick] was the main person that took care of the hospital wing. You understand? And, Dr. [Kimmel]. And they became very dear friends of mine; they came to visit me when I was discharged, like to be with old time friends. So, I don't know what it was about me, but they--

MS. HARTMAN: Well, you were there for so long. All right, let's talk about your voyage over. What was it like on that ship? It must have been limited.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Well, I don't--there was to get out after nine o'clock that people turned in, and I could go out there, on the deck, because they were afraid. because the boat would have been--

MS. HARTMAN: Why did they even let you get on the boat, then, I wonder?

MRS. CALLOWAY: I don't know, my father manipulated that situation, yeah. But, don't forget that the--we were there, it was about nine months--see, they were afraid the boat would have been stuck on the docks; it could not discharge anybody, you understand? And they would have been in [. . .] So, it was important for them to confine me, and don't have that kind of a risk.

MS. HARTMAN: So where was your father when you were confined?

MRS. CALLOWAY: He was in the room with me.

MS. HARTMAN: Oh, he stayed with you.

MRS. CALLOWAY: He stayed with me.

MS. HARTMAN: And your brother?

MRS. CALLOWAY: And my brother. My brother was younger than me.

MS. HARTMAN: But you didn't travel in steerage?

MRS. CALLOWAY: No, no. He had a joint cabin for my father and my brother. And I was alone.

MS. HARTMAN: So you weren't aware of there being steerage passengers or--

MRS. CALLOWAY: No, no, we didn't--we were told that later, see. So when I got into Ellis Island, naturally, all--every boat comes in in that one quarter, and they discharge them according where. If they don't--if they need to have paper credit and all that, then they go on Third Island. I was on First Island, where the hospital wing was.

MS. HARTMAN: What did it look like to you? I mean, you must have seen it from a the boat first.

MRS. CALLOWAY: No, I didn't see the Ellis Island from the boat, no. You just saw the big--the Statue of Liberty on the boat.

MS. HARTMAN: Tell me about seeing the Statue of Liberty.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Oh, that was exciting.

MS. HARTMAN: Did you know that you would see it?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yes. I was allowed to see. I was isolated, but I was allowed to see it.

MS. HARTMAN: That was exciting?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Oh! It was exciting!

MS. HARTMAN: Did you understand?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yes, very exciting, and I was very happy to be part of it. And that was all.

MS. HARTMAN: What did the other people do?

MRS. CALLOWAY: They, they stayed on deck rain or shine, regardless what happened, just so they could look at the Statue of Liberty and wave and all that. So when my mother came to meet us at the boat, my father was able to get out. But, my brother and I, [eye]. We had to go to headquarters.

MS. HARTMAN: Did you know what was going on? Did you even know there was something wrong with your eye?

MRS. CALLOWAY: I did know, I did know. But I didn't anticipate it to be the grave case of contagious, it was highly contagious, do you understand what I mean? So, but my brother was cleared, somehow, in a week, he was able to come home.

MS. HARTMAN: He stayed with you for a week on Ellis Island?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Well, not with me, but in the men's wing, yeah. Yeah, but I was there a year less one week, let's say about eleven months.

MS. HARTMAN: And you didn't speak any English?

MRS. CALLOWAY: No English at all. Absolutely no English. But the only thing I had in my favor, I had been going to highschool. In Europe, you don't choose the program you want in school. They give you the program. You're in highschool, they got the rules, this is what you take. So there, I had to have Latin, I had to have Greek, I had to have you know, all of these things helped me, phonetically, even to people that tried to communicate with me later, I was somewhat able to help them, reassure them a little bit, even though I was only fifteen, but I was able to do those things very well. And what was very amazing was you had no idea how many tragedies were in Ellis Island. People jumping out of their windows, [the taking to] two children go down the water because they had nothing to go back to, and desolation--

MS. HARTMAN: And they were being deported.

MRS. CALLOWAY: They were being deported. So that was the whole thing, it was very, very, very tragic. You see?

MS. HARTMAN: Well, I'm curious, it seems strange to me, that they didn't turn you around--send you back to Italy, although--

MRS. CALLOWAY: Oh, they did--they tried.

MS. HARTMAN: They tried.

MRS. CALLOWAY: They tried, very much so. And, my father was not informed that he had to have a thousand dollar bond for me to be in Ellis Island. Because of--under the cure. And all of a sudden I was on line, and I thought the line, for me, was that I was going home. Instead, one man says to his wife, he says, "This is the first time I've seen a person going back to Europe and laughing about it. She's not even worried." She says, "I'm not going to Europe!" And so then in my language, I says, "I'm going to America." She said, "No you're not, you're going right back to Italy." So the boat was--so I was being deported. So, the Red Cross naturally was nearby, and she came to me, and says, "Don't worry." So she called my mother and my father. And they had to be there before five o'clock with a thousand dollar bond. And they didn't have no way to do it. All the people on the street, in Paterson, contributed.

MS. HARTMAN: You're kidding.

MRS. CALLOWAY: On loan, to make the thousand dollar bond.

MS. HARTMAN: My goodness.

MRS. CALLOWAY: So I was able to stay there.

MS. HARTMAN: They literally had to ask strangers for the money to help you--

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yes. Well, they all knew that there was such a-- you see, came like an [. . .] on the street, you understand? They never thought this--it didn't happen very often. But I was one of them. So,

they gave the money, they made the deposit for the--from--

MS. HARTMAN: So that you could stay in the hospital.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yes.

MS. HARTMAN: And be cured.

MRS. CALLOWAY: It was a bond. And, I stayed in the hospital and I was cured. But I, because I could speak more than one language, I was able to help the immigrants that--they didn't know nothing; you just push them like flies [. . .] But--

MS. HARTMAN: These were people from all over.

MRS. CALLOWAY: All over the world. All over the world.

MS. HARTMAN: Were there lots of Italians though, that you could speak--

MRS. CALLOWAY: No, no. Not one Italian. The Italian immigration was closed in that period.

MS. HARTMAN: How do you like that!

MRS. CALLOWAY: There was no Italian immigrants that I could contact.

MS. HARTMAN: And if you had come at any other time--

MRS. CALLOWAY: Probably. Or, I would have been in contact with them. But [. . .] we had them from Russia, from Poland, from everywhere, they were not in our immediate [board] unless they had eye trouble. My wing was just for eye condition.

MS. HARTMAN: And you were confined to that wing.

MRS. CALLOWAY: That wing, yes. We were eighteen, we were eighteen beds in there.

MS. HARTMAN: Can you remember, before you get into the hospital part of your stay, can you remember other parts of Ellis Island and what it looked like to you as a young girl?

MRS. CALLOWAY: To me, it looked like a mob gathering into one great big hall. Because the room was big. And--

MS. HARTMAN: Had you been in a big building like that before?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Not--no, not in those little towns, you know, they just--if you went to Rome, if you went to--they do have those things, even then. But I was from a small town, and that was it. But, so, then they just take you there and take your clothes off and give you clothes that belong to the hospital. So you have identification, you can't run away. Because you number, you have everything on you. You understand? So, nobody tried to run away. We got nowhere to go.

MS. HARTMAN: So, physically, you were able to move around but your eye was your main problem.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yes, yes. That's all. But I--we had a guard with a gun, in the front of the building and in the back of the building. So we made no attempts of running away.

MS. HARTMAN: Okay. Now tell me, what was it like, did you have to have daily treatments, hourly treatments?

MRS. CALLOWAY: No, daily, daily treatments. Daily treatments. And the important part, in glaucoma, it was not to walk, to go to the office of the doctor. Stay stable, because it creates too much heat on the lids, and it delays the cure, if any, you understand what I mean?

MS. HARTMAN: Did you have it explained to you, what was going to happen?

MRS. CALLOWAY: No--I didn't even remember our friends! I didn't even know where my mother looked like!

MS. HARTMAN: I mean, once they got the bond, and paid the bond, and you were going to stay, did they know why? Or explain to you why you had to stay?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah. They were explained. Yeah, yeah, they knew

that, they knew that. They knew that from the book, because--

MS. HARTMAN: Did they know how long?

MRS. CALLOWAY: No, they didn't anticipate that much. But they didn't know from the book; the book couldn't never discharge any of the patients--any of the customers.

MS. HARTMAN: Well, how did it feel to be left alone--

MRS. CALLOWAY: My brother and I, we were together then. We only stayed a week. But, then, my mother was allowed to visit once a week.

MS. HARTMAN: Oh, so that must have helped you.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah, but that took a time, and I didn't even recognize her when she did visit, when I identified her, because in that mob you couldn't identify her, so she came to the ward. Which is almost a mile long, before you get to the wing, you understand? But it was really--I felt bad, but in my own mind, I says, "Well, this must be God's will, because I'm going to get better, before time," you understand? I had that, you know, feeling about it. I--it was hard for me to get used to the different foods and the different things.

MS. HARTMAN: Well, tell me about the food. How different was it?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Well, it was a lot of the American creams and all of that. In Italy, they don't do that, they're vegetarians most of the time, and it's a different, a different tone of life. I would say it's more rustic, but it's a very knowledgeable people. My grandmother was a dressmaker too. So, very knowledgeable people, but, different environment. And when you're young, you adapt. When you're older, it's much worse. And that was the whole bit.

MS. HARTMAN: You must have gotten used to it in a year.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Oh, I got used to it very shortly, because people were, they were very interested to know more about Europe, and even though I didn't speak the language, because of the other languages that I knew, the doctor would say, "Speak to me in Latin," and, it's not an [. . .] language, you know, you've got to be a real somebody. But I made myself understood, let's put it that way.

MS. HARTMAN: So were the other people that were in the hospital ward with you, were they all young?

MRS. CALLOWAY: No, they were very old people. And there was one old, poor old woman, they found out that she had sick nails on the feet, they took the nails off. She was eighty-nine years old. That was a little bit too cruel. She was so close to the door. They shouldn't have done that, but they did.

MS. HARTMAN: Why would they do that?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Because they considered that contagious.

MS. HARTMAN: Well, I guess they didn't know a whole lot, compared to medicine now.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah. That's what it is. That's the whole thing.

MS. HARTMAN: But you mentioned, in your letter, that you would counsel or befriend some of the people and make their lives easier.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Oh yes, yes, I did, I did that very well. On the left of my bed, there was--I don't know whether she applied for this or not--[Adoni Zoska] was her name, and she was around my age. We tried to communicate. She spoke only Polish. And I spoke Italian. But youth has a way of finding the door open. That's the whole thing about it. And then, some of them were Armenian, German, I had no knowledge of those languages.

MS. HARTMAN: Or, for that matter, that part of the world.

MRS. CALLOWAY: That part of the world.

MS. HARTMAN: Quite an education.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Quite an education. But not in Italian in sight.

I never saw an Italian all the time I was in Ellis Island.

MS. HARTMAN: How about black people? Were there black people--

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yes, I was so--no, not in the wards, but they must have isolated them, because there was quite a few of them. They was--

MS. HARTMAN: Immigrants?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Immigrants. But they came from Africa, they came from I don't know. But they were immigrants. The Islands, mostly the Islands. And I says, "I didn't know there were black people in the world." See, I'd never seen, that's what it was. But I get along beautiful with--

MS. HARTMAN: Did you start learning English?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Very fast. But I attribute that to my knowledge of consulting in the dictionary and different languages and all that. The transition wasn't so difficult for me. But for some, they never did learn a word.

MS. HARTMAN: So, it sounds like you did not want to sit still. You would rather--if you had to be there, you were going to make yourself useful and learn.

MRS. CALLOWAY: And the doctors, they were on the staff. Not only on my ward, but to that wing of the [. . .] they had all kinds of disease there, they would come in and talk to me, and write to me in Latin, and then translate the word, and see if they--see, they was trying to teach-- in that day, we had no teachers. But they usually always had teachers, to educate the immigrants in the hospital. But there were no teachers for some reason or other. But, my background, academically in school, helped me to go forward and be friendly. I was never shy, because I was accustomed to meet people at all times, you understand what I mean?

MS. HARTMAN: Did you help the nurses and things, or--

MRS. CALLOWAY: No, we weren't allowed, no. But [. . .] set the tables, they had three big tables to accommodate.

MS. HARTMAN: You must have seen lots and lots of people come and go.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Come and go, plenty.

MS. HARTMAN: Did that give you a strange feeling?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yes. Well, the biggest feeling was my brother, he was on the lower level, and we were on the second story of another building. In those days, they sold--in the Depression days, you must have heard people talk about those great big apples for five cents, and he wanted, he was calling me out from the yard, "Josephine, Josephine!" Finally I heard his voice, and I answered him. And he came with that big apple and he wanted to put it through the bars, but it wouldn't go through! That was really a pathetic sight. And he didn't have a knife so he couldn't cut it.

MS. HARTMAN: Did he have it all?

MRS. CALLOWAY: He had it all! So, God bless him he was a wonderful kid.

MS. HARTMAN: Did he ever come to visit you when you were there for so long?

MRS. CALLOWAY: No, he--young people were not allowed, because they were not sure that I had been cured, so the contagiousness was too vivid, and they wouldn't do anything about it.

MS. HARTMAN: What--you were going to start to tell me about the treatments. What were the actual treatments like for children?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Well, they used to use silver nitrate and blue stone. They used to rub the lids--turn the lids inside out, and burn. But, when they did that, your face, your mouth, your nose, [extend] tended to stick out--you looked like a little pig for a while, for a few

hours, you know, the tears. You know, I had scars from the tears for at least five years.

MS. HARTMAN: Down your cheeks.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah, the tears of the stone--see, there was a chemical in there, it would stain my face, you know.

MS. HARTMAN: Every day?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Every day. Every day, the doctor came in the morning and the afternoon. We had the treatments--beautiful--Dr. Grossman was our doctor there, and the doctor [Hector] was in charge of the wing and Dr. [Kimmel] was also another very good doctor. And they all came and visited me, over and over again. When I came home. And I don't think they bothered with any other patients. But I don't know why they came to me!

MS. HARTMAN: Did you ever despair of leaving Ellis Island? Did you think you might not leave--

MRS. CALLOWAY: No, no. Well, I thought that sooner or later I would be deported, because they said it's incurable. But, they found a cure for, and when they did discharge me, I had to go to--up, way up in the building, it was the biggest building in Ellis Island, and they were fifteen doctors and put the okay and sign that I was qualified to be discharged. So, when he says to me, he said, "Well, you can go now," I said, "All right." He says, "Well, you're the first person being discharged and you don't say 'thank you.'" I said, "I'm not discharged." He said, "Yes you are." And this was on a Friday. I could not leave Ellis Island on Friday, I could not leave on Saturday, and I could not leave on Sunday. They didn't make paperwork for that time, you see. And I was discharged on Monday.

MS. HARTMAN: Did you wait all weekend?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yes, so, they threw me a party. All the doctors got together, and threw a party on Ward 18. That's the ward I was in, for all there. I was the only patient leaving.

MS. HARTMAN: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty from Ellis Island?

MRS. CALLOWAY: From the back. Not from the front. Because Ellis Island's right behind. But I never saw the face of--until the--

MS. HARTMAN: Would you spend lots of time looking out at the harbor and at New York? What did that look like?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Oh! It was amazing, because we had never seen-- and then they used to give us a warning. One day there was a fleet of seals, there must have been a thousand seals on the [wall; water] and they all called us out to the window to see the seals. It was interesting. There were knowledgeable people, very nice people, and they were wonderful. I cried those days, but then I laughed later, because they were wonderful to us. Anybody says anything else, they're just rotten, that's all I could tell you.

MS. HARTMAN: Were you ever entertained when you were on Ellis Island? We've heard stories of people going to a hall and being entertained.

MRS. CALLOWAY: This affected mostly people on First Island.

MS. HARTMAN: People that were not ill.

MRS. CALLOWAY: They stayed away from us. They weren't allowed too much. Some people, sometimes they had to have a robe on to visit. The might have exaggerated, but there was a great fear for glaucoma. A great fear. So it--

MS. HARTMAN: A lot of people were turned back then--

MRS. CALLOWAY: Oh, plenty. My--I was one of the lucky ones, because my father, he said "She is minor; I can't strand her. She's

gotta stay." See, had it been another six months, he wouldn't have been able to touch me. You understand? So that's how--

MS. HARTMAN: So are you glad he came to--

MRS. CALLOWAY: I'm very glad. I'm very glad now. Yes, I am. I was sorry to leave my grandparents. They were wonderful people. But, I never saw them again.

MS. HARTMAN: What about, upon leaving Ellis Island, now, did you have a little bit of knowledge of English?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yes, I spoke English well.

MS. HARTMAN: You did, when you left Ellis Island?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah, but I attribute it to the background of languages that I was studying for, and the transition wasn't as difficult as it would be for somebody that didn't take up the different languages.

MS. HARTMAN: Was your family now, the whole time you were in Ellis Island, were they in New York City?

MRS. CALLOWAY: No. No. By that time, they had already come up to Paterson, Paterson, New Jersey. And they were, my mother had a store on Market Street in New Jersey.

MS. HARTMAN: So she was always able to make some money--

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah, the both of them. Both of them. And when I came home, because of the time of the bond, that everybody donated but they get repaid, my father was grateful to have it, but he repaid them all. And, the street was closed, because I was coming home.

MS. HARTMAN: Oh, my goodness!

MRS. CALLOWAY: They got together with--I asked them, "What's going on? Is there a feast?"

MS. HARTMAN: You didn't know--

MRS. CALLOWAY: No, I didn't know them! So, "What is this, a feast?" They [normally] have a feast for Saint Joseph's and John, whatever it is, they get together. But I had no idea. "They're waiting for you." And that's what it was.

MS. HARTMAN: What did you come home to that--did your family have a house of their own?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah, they had a--no, they just had a little, little store, and in back of the store she had two beds for the family, and that was it. Plain people. But, the lot of [strong mind] and very aggressive, that's all I could say to you.

MS. HARTMAN: This is the end of side one of interview number 193.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

MS. HARTMAN: Side two of tape one of interview number 193 with Josephine Gazieri Calloway.

So, they had a big celebration for you.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yes.

MS. HARTMAN: You must have been overwhelmed.

MRS. CALLOWAY: I didn't know what happened, [. . .] those people.

MS. HARTMAN: What kind of neighborhood was it? Was it largely Italian, or--

MRS. CALLOWAY: Mostly Italian. You see, you find it necessary to be near people of your own language, because they were not people that knew the other languages. So, the only way they could manipulate was just one another, and have the stores, groceries and all that, nearby, and--

MS. HARTMAN: They were all Italian.

MRS. CALLOWAY: All Italian. And there were some very high-class Italian, that you have to step down a notch when they [. . .]

MS. HARTMAN: Sure. So was it wonderful to be reunited with our

family.

MRS. CALLOWAY: It was, but I always had a certain kind of sadness. To me, my grandmother was my mother. You understand what I mean. She was a very, very, very, very special person, my grandmother.

MS. HARTMAN: And were there lots of children in this neighborhood? Did you make friends quickly?

MRS. CALLOWAY: I didn't have time. I went to school, I went to high school, and also I'd--I was pushing my brother to go to school and make sure that he get a start. You know, I--

MS. HARTMAN: You were busy.

MRS. CALLOWAY: I was busy, and I believed in education. That was the first thing I wanted to do in life. I don't think I was very bright, but I tried my best.

MS. HARTMAN: So you did go to school when you got out of Ellis Island? Or--

MRS. CALLOWAY: No, I didn't.

MS. HARTMAN: Was that your brother did.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yes.

MS. HARTMAN: What did you do?

MRS. CALLOWAY: My mother was a [. . .] and a dress designer, and she did the work manually, because I wasn't allowed to do too much handwork.

MS. HARTMAN: Oh, because of your eyes.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Because of my eyes, and I did the selling. Immediately, I was [. . .] selling.

MS. HARTMAN: You were in front of the store.

MRS. CALLOWAY: In front of the store, and she was in back.

MS. HARTMAN: It sounds like you've always been good with people.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Oh, yes. I have very good communication with people. And I want to tell you, yesterday, bride send me, from--she was married the day before, and she send, with her mother, a great big tray of cookies and all of that for me to have, and to thank me for what I did for her. Because I'm not a bad--very nice person on the floor. I'll tell you why. If a girl has no knowledge and judgment how to dress, and she wants a certain gown that doesn't look well on her, I won't sell it. Forget it, go someplace else. If you cannot look good with your hard earned dollar, don't bother me, go someplace else. And you know, you feel like strangling me, but later they realize that I was with them, not against them. You understand? Now, there's too much pushing business going on, without mercy. These people work hard for their dollar. [Think something up.]

MS. HARTMAN: Okay. So let's get back to life in Paterson. When you were in Ellis Island, you were fifteen, so you were about sixteen--

MRS. CALLOWAY: I had my sixteenth birthday in Ellis Island. All the doctors came for the birthday.

MS. HARTMAN: And they celebrated--

MRS. CALLOWAY: They celebrated my birthday.

MS. HARTMAN: You must have been there also for some other holidays. Were you there for Christmas?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yes, yes.

MS. HARTMAN: And did they give you special--

MRS. CALLOWAY: I was there eleven and a half months.

MS. HARTMAN: You were there for everything.

MRS. CALLOWAY: For everything.

MS. HARTMAN: Fourth of July.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Fourth of July, everything.

MS. HARTMAN: What kind of things happened for those--

MRS. CALLOWAY: Fourth of July, didn't--see, we had to have nurses on the floor. At all times. First of all, they're to observe whether we did exchange handkerchiefs, or we did all of those things there, you know.

MS. HARTMAN: Make sure your contact--

MRS. CALLOWAY: Contact was limited.

MS. HARTMAN: Were these Red Cross nurses that you're talking about?

MRS. CALLOWAY: I don't know if they were Red Cross, but they were part of the complex there. The Red Cross nurses would visit with the individuals to see if they could communicate, to see if they could be-- that wasn't their job. [. . .] But they were fantastic people. Then I --when we met my mother in Ellis Island, she came to visit for the first time. My father came to get us; my mother was in America, and she came to visit us, and my brother was standing next to me, and he said, "Josephine, do you think that's mama?" See, he's two years younger than me, and I really lost visual feeling. I couldn't visualize her anymore. So, but my brother said, "I think that's mama. I think that's mama." So, he went to her, he went to her, and I had to run after him because I was afraid he would get lost, because there were hundreds of people in there.

And, so, the nurse said--some Red Cross were working. "Stay; I'll let you know. But I didn't understand what it meant, "I'll let you know," but I know that she meant for us to stay put. And then, she approached my mother, and they said, "What is your name?" Naturally they had the names written here, and she had my names, our names, so that's how we met.

MS. HARTMAN: Oh, so your brother did pick her out of a crowd.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah, yeah.

MS. HARTMAN: That must have been a happy reunion.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Happy and emotional. Very emotional, it was very, very--so, that's life.

MS. HARTMAN: What about the other occasions on Ellis Island, do you remember Christmas, for instance?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Oh yes. The doctors and the nurses would always bring in festivity items, describe to us what they were, and very often we give them money to buy for us things for the holidays, you understand?

MS. HARTMAN: Did you have a Santa Claus, for instance?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yes, they did.

MS. HARTMAN: Had you ever seen anything like that?

MRS. CALLOWAY: No, never, and you know what I was very impressed by? I had never seen snow. I had never seen snow. And the head doctor, Dr. [Hettrick], that day, he said, he gave us clothes, coats from the soldiers and all that, and we went out in the yard, naturally we had four guards, and we made a snowman. You know? It had many, many beautiful memories, as well as there were sad. But then, when you live [. . .] you cannot approach anybody, things grow so much bigger. But, I was able to communicate in a very short time. I did--I did--God was with me, I tell you.

MS. HARTMAN: Tell me, did your family maintain sort of Italian things in your life or were you quickly becoming so Americanized that--

MS. HARTMAN: No, my mother--see, they were [recovering, my parents] from being in Egypt and Cairo and Alexandria, and then Italy was not so far back for a certain element, you understand what I mean. They were considered a little higher up, because they were worldly, see, and it wasn't so hard for them to get adjusted, and my mother was very fast on the track and so was my father. They were beautiful, beautiful people. Beautiful people, so.

MS. HARTMAN: Do you remember things that were new to you, like hot dogs, ice cream--

MRS. CALLOWAY: I never knew that, yeah, I never knew that. Ice cream in Italian is called "gelati."

MS. HARTMAN: That you had had.

MRS. CALLOWAY: That I knew, yeah.

MS. HARTMAN: What are some of the American things that were brand new, do you remember?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah, some of the food, I found it very difficult to get used to it. I would leave the plate full and I would try. And they would take the time--"Try. You like it." And, that's human. People don't have to do those things, but you got to be a Mediterranean to do those things, and they did them. And so I got used to the food quite well. You know, necessity is quite a--I couldn't go down to the store and buy, so I made the best of it.

MS. HARTMAN: At this time, at being sixteen years old, it's not the same sixteen year olds that we have now. You were much older, I would imagine. You more like a young adult.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah, a young adult--and very naive. A lot of, you know, I was a bookworm, if you know what I mean.

MS. HARTMAN: You'd been isolated from other children.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah, because, but we had different--very little in common with some of the people in that--four or five people maybe I communicate, but the others, I didn't. But it was a different environment, but I--well, I was amazed to see people with knowledge and all of that to take the time and take the young kids out to do this, to do that, to sort of break the monotony. Because if we didn't dare to leave the platform of our steps, because there was a soldier would be on duty, at all times.

MS. HARTMAN: Where? Oh, at Ellis Island--

MRS. CALLOWAY: At Ellis Island. We didn't dare to navigate anywhere. We had to stay in our room.

MS. HARTMAN: Was it hard to get used to being away from Ellis Island in a sense that now you were someplace where you could go wherever you wanted to.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah, I know. But I was home, I was home I believe two, three years that I didn't have the feeling I was home on leave, that I had to go back. That's the feeling I had, for the longest time. So, my mother says, "You don't have to go back, you stay home with us."

MS. HARTMAN: Did you have to continue treatments with your eyes at all?

MRS. CALLOWAY: No, no. They said to me, the doctors came to visit me here. In a social manner, but they came to visit me just the same. And they said, "If you ever need--" and they gave me the number. Grossman lived in Brooklyn. Dr. Grossman. Dr. [Kimmel] lived in New York, and Dr. [Hetrick] he was there, but then he moved to--he was in the west coast.

MS. HARTMAN: So, did you always work in your mother's millinery store?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yes, and I became a milliner, more than I could handle, no other type, because milliner's stitches could be big.

MS. HARTMAN: Oh, bigger than--

MRS. CALLOWAY: But if it's something tedious, in a smaller stitching, that I couldn't handle, you know, my eyes. The doctor said, "Forget reading! Promise me you won't read for a couple years. Don't read too much because you can't afford to strain your eyes."

MS. HARTMAN: How did you keep [. . .] It was your passion?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Well, selling hats and selling this was larger volume, I could handle, you understand, but for me to read or write--I never went to school in this country. And I, I [. . .] and reading, but in my own fashion.

MS. HARTMAN: How was your brother's experiences in school? Did you--you watched him go through that whole process.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Oh yeah. He liked it, but then he went to school, he came to America, he did special exams and he went to, he even went to [La Mar] University in Canada. And that's where he got his medical degree from. But he was a bookworm as well. He won the--he said you get nothing out of it, the pot, if you don't put it in. So you got to do something, let's get going. They gave us a start; let's do the rest. So, my father had that kind of thinking too, so they were poor, knowledgeable people that didn't have two pennies to rub together, but they always made room for themselves because their knowledge gave them [living]. That's all. That's all I could say about my parents.

MS. HARTMAN: And, how did you become a Calloway?

MRS. CALLOWAY: I got married, believe it or not, in 1961.

MS. HARTMAN: Oh, my goodness.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Because my mother wouldn't allow me to get married. "You don't need to get married. Stay single and enjoy life. Stay with me. I had you away from me a long time." And, that was wrong, but that was a very poor thing to do, so--

MS. HARTMAN: But you could meet people at your age, even though you lived at home and worked--

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah, but not to go out on dates or things like that. That was not permitted. Not in our environment. Forget it. So, what do you want to do, fight with them? So, you accept that--there it was. As bright as they were, there were certain limitations, mentally, to face the new approach. And they didn't do it. So, anyway, they meant well, that's all they knew.

MS. HARTMAN: But they were able to live a good life here, it sounds like.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Oh, they did, yes. My father built all of these houses on this street.

MS. HARTMAN: My goodness! He did! Every day, you get to see--

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah, this is a big house, this is a big house, it's [. . .]

MS. HARTMAN: Did he build this one?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah, sure.

MS. HARTMAN: My goodness.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah, so they were not so off, they were hard-working people. That's all they were. They earned enough money, they came to have a few pennies in their pockets, and that was it.

MS. HARTMAN: And so, does this area--it must look a lot different than it did way back--

MRS. CALLOWAY: Oh, sure. My father built all of these--it was rural, it was just road. No homes, no nothing. But my father bought the piece of property in those days, but then he didn't have enough--if my father would have had the money, he would have been a multi-millionaire, with the knowledge he had. But--he was--knowledgeable more than anything else.

MS. HARTMAN: Why don't you tell us the story about Egypt? That's a good one. Uh, they left Italy--

MRS. CALLOWAY: They left Italy in the middle of the night. They left--no, they left Italy to go to Egypt, but because there was an ad in

our local paper that they wanted someone that was knowledgeable for building construction, and my father answered the ad, and he went, and my mother was expecting me, and she wasn't gonna travel with that condition. So, three--four months later, she joined my father, and we were there. So he had a room, but you know--

MS. HARTMAN: Where was this, in Cairo?

MRS. CALLOWAY: In Cairo, Cairo, Cairo. And that's where my brother was born, Anthony, he was--

MS. HARTMAN: Do you remember anything about it? It must have been very different from Italy.

MRS. CALLOWAY: I do. It was very different. But you know what they did there--you went to work eight o'clock in the morning, you went home at eleven-thirty, and you went back at five o'clock. You had that three hours. And you never walked the streets without a veil. Navy chiffon, or black chiffon, because the glare of the stones alone would blind you, would dry your eyes.

MS. HARTMAN: Really? You would wear a veil?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah, well, they used to wear [lacone] hats, large [lacone] brim, and then my mother would drape a long piece of chiffon that would come up to here, because the glare of the stones would injure your eyes, you understand? But the natives got more used to it; it was a different environment, you understand? And that was it, so.

MS. HARTMAN: But you had to leave--

MRS. CALLOWAY: We had to leave Egypt, yeah, we had to leave Egypt because my father showed them off at what they didn't know. And they resented him. And they were out to get him. So, when this happened, my father said, "Let's get out of here, let's leave the clothes, the furniture, nothing, just take the things to put on," and he must have had a freighter boat--

MS. HARTMAN: A freighter boat--

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah, a freighter boat, and that's where we all went. In the middle of the night. And we got to, to, I think we went to [Katania], with the boat.

MS. HARTMAN: And they left you and your brother with your grandmother, and they went to the United States.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah, they had to, they had to. They had nothing, all the relatives pitched in whatever they had, just to buy the fare--

MS. HARTMAN: And at that time, people thought it was a great idea to go to America--

MRS. CALLOWAY: Well, naturally. It was a dream of the world. It was the dream--

MS. HARTMAN: Streets of gold?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah--no, but my father didn't believe in those things, but my father said that "It's an opportunity, let's take advantage. Let's go." And they went.

MS. HARTMAN: And how did they end up in Syracuse?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Because a brother-in-law had been in America a few months before, and he was, you see, you had to have somebody, in those days, that provided a claim.

MS. HARTMAN: Would sponsor you, sort of.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Sponsor you, yeah. So my uncle was there, from a friend of his--from a relative of his, they have been there before. So he produced the claim for my mother and my father. See, and that's what it was.

MS. HARTMAN: Did you become a citizen, do you remember becoming a citizen?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Oh, yes. As soon as I came to America, and I went

to--I think it was in [. . .] it's not too far away; it'll come to me.

MS. HARTMAN: But your parents must have become citizens.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Oh, yes, they were citizens. They wouldn't have had the privilege, even to claim us, they wouldn't have had the privilege, see? So, [. . .] Thank God for all the humanitarian service that was rendered to us, for which we are very grateful.

MS. HARTMAN: Sounds like you were a very lucky lady.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yes, I was. So was my brother.

MS. HARTMAN: Well, your parents were very bold, to come--

MRS. CALLOWAY: [. . .] This city was so limited, in space, and knowledge, and all that, he says, "What am I doing here? I know much more than this, so why am I staying here for? I vegetate here! Let me get out of here," that's what he--so, they were good, hard-working people. They didn't want nothing for nothing, but they worked very hard, and they did what they could. So that's the way the story was. So, and then we, he built four houses and we moved from one house to another and then he finally built this big house.

MS. HARTMAN: So you all lived here.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah, my mother and father and I were--I got married after my father died, you know, because of my mother.

MS. HARTMAN: So this was your mother's dress shop as well.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah. Well, no, we were downtown Paterson. We had a store in Paterson from one street to the other. From Market Street to another street. Right through. And we had fifteen people working for us, because--but, we couldn't stay there long, because the city changed quickly; the people would come in and take their dresses out for the next day, they were mugged, they were things, so we went to the police department, "You got to give us permission to work from the house, because I cannot continue the store downtown." That's how we started to build the big house, and--

MS. HARTMAN: This is the house your father built.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Yeah, all of these houses. From the [. . .] down, all of them, he built. So, he was a wonderful person, not very talkative, quiet, very--my mother was more outward, you know, but my father, he was interested in drawings, this, you know, making the sketches for--

MS. HARTMAN: Drafting?

MRS. CALLOWAY: Drafting. That was his--and they were wonderful, wonderful people.

MS. HARTMAN: Did they seem to have a good life--and you had a good life.

MRS. CALLOWAY: I had a good life. My parents were beautiful people, and knowledgeable. And they steered me right. But my mother didn't want me married. "Didn't have to get married--stay with me! I was without you long enough, that's enough!"

MS. HARTMAN: Do you think she was trying to protect you from something, or--

MRS. CALLOWAY: I think she was, she became possessive. Yeah, she wanted me to be--and when I did get married, I stayed with her too. With my husband. But she didn't like him. And he was a very handsome guy, he was an Irish fellow, he was a very handsome guy. But, to her, he wasn't Italian. You understand what I mean? Your custom, it stays with you. But I dropped a lot of it.

MS. HARTMAN: I don't have anymore questions to ask you, but it's been wonderful talking to you. Is there anything more you want to tell me? I have a feeling you're a very patriotic American.

MRS. CALLOWAY: I am. And yesterday, when I went to that class, I

asked the professor, I said before, if you want me here in this room, the first thing you gotta promise me, that you all sing with me, "God Bless America." And the teachers all looked--there were four classes, united in the hallway. I didn't know if they were going to throw me out or they appreciated it, but I don't care. I did what I thought--

MS. HARTMAN: Did they?

MRS. CALLOWAY: And they all did, and they all asked me questions, they all wanted to know where I came from, why do you feel so strong about America. I said, "Don't you ever forget it. And don't you ever allow anybody to say anything against America. It's the best part of the world. And always remember that. Be sure you do." And so naturally they all applauded, and that was very nice.

MS. HARTMAN: They must have loved having you talk--

MRS. CALLOWAY: I really think they did, but I was scared stiff, I didn't know what the heck I was gonna find.

MS. HARTMAN: You could probably do it again. All you need to do is ask them.

MRS. CALLOWAY: Well, now, it would have been easier, but it was very important, I said, "There's no other part in the world that any of us could brag about that's as good as America." We have our faults, we all do, but America is only one.

MS. HARTMAN: Have you ever wanted to go back to Italy?

MRS. CALLOWAY: I never did go back, because, you know, when you have a small pack business, a lot depends on you, you can't pick yourself up and go, because you leave other people in trouble. And the money wasn't there, the money wasn't there, so that was the whole thing. It was beautiful, and I'm grateful to have had the pleasure of being in America. What doctors would give a damn, you know, to show us snow, to show this, and play with us? There are things you don't forget. You don't forget. They were beautiful things. And I was very grateful for what they did for me.

MS. HARTMAN: This is the end of interview number 193 with Josephine Calloway.