

KECK-35

ANNA CASABURI IENNACO MENICHINI

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GUMB: This is Dana Gumb, and I'm speaking with Mrs. Anna Menichini on the 19th day of September, 1985. We're beginning this interview at 10:28 and we're about to interview Mrs. Menichini about her immigration experience from Italy in the year 1919. Okay, Mrs. Menichini, we'll begin with the question of where and when were you born?

MENICHINI: I was born in Naples, Italy, March 1, 1911.

GUMB: What was it like in Italy?

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MENICHINI: Well, as I remembered, as a little girl, it was pleasant and, uh, we had no hardships. You know, those things, my mother was a widow but, uh, we had no hardship. There was, there were times when we did have hardship, however, when the war came, 1917 it started. So then we had a little hardship. It was hard to get food, hard to get milk.

GUMB: Well, what kind, were you living in a village?

MENICHINI: Yes, I was in a little village. It was beautiful. Underneath the mountains. Every building in that neighborhood was a little on a hilltop and the way to my apartment, where we lived, we had to go up a great bug, uh, how would you say, they looked like steps. It was a hill, but it had steps to go up there. It was beautiful. And then, at the head of this hill, it was something like a chapel with a big cross on it, it, rather, and we children played in there a lot. And way up above the mountaintop was another cross, a real religious village. It was catholic.

GUMB: You mentioned your mother was widowed?

MENICHINI: Yes.

GUMB: What happened to your father?

MENICHINI: My father died, I wasn't even born yet when my father died. He went on a hunting trip, he came back, and he thought, he had a bad headache, did not want to eat or anything, so my mother says, "Oh, lie down and you'll feel better." He never got better. They got a doctor and everything. He died almost from the evening to the next morning, he died. I don't know what could have happened. The doctor said he had no fever or anything. He was amazed and bewildered himself because it's a small

community and they do their best, and when the best is not good they feel embarrassed.

GUMB: So, um, why did your mother decide to come here?

MENICHINI: Oh, my mother, uh, well, my mother was a widow for more than eight years and then a man came to Italy from American, he was also widowed and, um, he wanted to marry a woman to take back to America, so he met my mother. You know, it was arranged by friends, you know, to meet, and I met this man, he was rather nice, you know. (she laughs) At the time they were silk handkerchiefs, like the women wore to tie on their heads, I couldn't take my eyes off that silk handkerchief. It was so fascinating. And then my mother married him and he came here, to America, and he sent for us, and he sent for my mother, my brother and I also had an aunt who lived with my mother. She was an orphan. She was about eighteen. She had no one, so my mother asked my father would he take her, too. He said, "Of course." And we came here, we came to my aunt, who lived in Lincoln Center, and she had a family of her own, she had three children. There was five of them and there was four of us. We were a lot of people there. And my father did not get an apartment. He said it was hard for him to get an apartment because he did not go with his wife, you know, that has, it was suspicious to them. So he couldn't get one till he came, and then my mother went along with him and he got a nice place. We went down to the Lower East Side then.

GUMB: Your stepfather or father?

MENICHINI: Stepfather.

GUMB: Right, right, officially. Uh --.

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MENICHINI: We only called him "Dad," my brother and I, we were so young, we were so used to calling him "Pop." (she laughs)

GUMB: He was American?

MENICHINI: Well, he was an Italian.

GUMB: But, uh, was he born in --.

MENICHINI: No, but he was not born here either. He became a citizen later on. My mother became a citizen later on, and I also became a citizen, I'm a naturalized citizen, too.

GUMB: Well, how was that arrangement made?

MENICHINI: The arrangement for my mother to marry?

GUMB: To marry him. What --.

MENICHINI: Through friends, of another little town, evidently.

GUMB: They would communicate with him in America?

MENICHINI: I really couldn't say. All I know is that they were from another town which was a nice town, they called it Cava di Salerno, also a part of Salerno. Naples is also a part of Salerno, you know?

GUMB: What was the name of the town you came from?

MENICHINI: San Giorgio. You know, San Giorgio spaghetti? They had a macaroni company. I remember it from way back, when I was a little child. It could

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be the same one, the children carrying on. Not the same dads and granddads.

GUMB: How do you spell Giorgio? Can you spell it?

MENICHINI: G-I-O-R-G-I-O

GUMB: That sounds right.

MENICHINI: Yes. San Giorgio. San Giorgio was a real name in that little town. It had a little church, it had a little circle. The circle is where everybody meets when you have like a little demonstration or meeting, you know? It was a very small town. They had a little school, maybe one room, you know. And also had a *cantina* where the men used to go and drink their wine. (she laughs) Play cards.

GUMB: What's a *cantina*?

MENICHINI: It's like a bar. They didn't call it a bar then. And Spanish people didn't call it cantinas. Same thing.

GUMB: Just for me.

MENICHINI: For men, yeah.

GUMB: So, uh, your --.

MENICHINI: My mother had a little store. My father had a little business of dry goods. He sold laces and ribbons and shoes, perhaps, not too many shoes. He carried everything. Years ago they used to go around with a wagon with their merchandise, my mother said, and then they used to come back to

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the store. When they came back to the store he would have his supper, or whatever, and then relax till the next day. But they started out early. So when my dad died my mother had the store, but she couldn't make a go of it. Too many people expected favors, favoritism. How much can you make, you know, can you make a living if you're going to give everybody things for the wholesale price instead of the retail price, right? So, she had to give it up after a while.

GUMB: So she convinced your father, your stepfather, to, to, uh, take the family to America?

MENICHINI: Oh, no. That was the arrangement. It was arranged that after she would marry him he would take us here.

GUMB: Oh, I see.

MENICHINI: He couldn't get her here if she wasn't his wife.

GUMB: Oh, I see. Did they, did they meet?

MENICHINI: They married. They married in Italy

GUMB: They married in Italy. So they met in Italy.

MENICHINI: Yes.

GUMB: I see. And then they, then they, part of the arrangement was that they come here together.

MENICHINI: Yes. I don't know how many months it was, but it was quite a while. And I remember when my mother got married. She was dressed so beautiful.

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They went to church, and then they took off for a little trip somewhere, in a horse and buggy, you know? Like the coaches and they have in Central Park. I'll never forget it. I was watching my mother go away. (she laughs) Oh, it was sad. My brother and I were watching Mama go away. But it's better that way than what happens nowadays, I think, huh? Kids are broken hearted nowadays when they see the parents go.

GUMB: So, uh, it was part of the arrangement that you go to the marriage?

MENICHINI: Yes, yes.

GUMB: Was that discussed with you at all? You know, with the children?

MENICHINI: No, no. We were too young and too naïve then. Children nowadays are too clever. Eight years old they know everything about life, practically. (she laughs) I have a granddaughter that age, and she's so wise.

GUMB: So there wasn't any kind of family discussion about whether we'd want to go to America or anything like that?

MENICHINI: Us children, you mean?

GUMB: With the children or anything like that?

MENICHINI: Oh, no. No. It was arranged that he would send, you have to, you had to make an application for four people. Mama, the two children, and her sister, which was my Aunt Rae. She's still living. She's ninety-two years old. She's the one that spent parts of that evening in Ellis Island. In fact, we slept there, all of us. And I was robbed. They brought us a chocolate or something, and my mama says, "Don't eat it now." She figured early in the morning, we're hungry, we'll have it. When I woke up in the

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morning I pit my hand underneath the pillow. There was no chocolate. We were so disappointed. You know how kids are.

GUMB: Who, who gave --.

MENICHINI: Who gave it to me? I really don't know. I think it might have been given to us children because it was, uh , Christmas Eve. They could have given it to us. Because I don't remember Mama stopping anywhere to buy anything. But we did have a chocolate. We were so happy. Oh, God. You know, we don't get candy every day there. I'm glad I had this handkerchief here.

GUMB: So, um, what are you, do you remember being upset about leaving, or having any kind of sad feelings about leaving?

MENICHINI: I was too young to realize anything like that, but I when we took off for Naples and our friends from the little town, they took, they saw us off in the early train, early morning train. They all wore scarves or something to keep warm. And there was my steps, boom, boom. (she laughs). And I really enjoyed my trip. I wasn't sick. My brother was sick all the time. Now I'm sick and he's okay. He's got a boat and I can't go near one. Can't even go around the Manhattan Island on a boat, really. I got sick.

GUMB: Was that steerage? Do you know if that was what it was called?

MENICHINI: It took a long time. It took us about twenty days. So it must have been what you said, steerage, or whatever.

GUMB: It was in the bottom part of the boat.

MENICHINI: Oh, I was down in the bottom. Oh, was I down the bottom, so many steps to go through.

GUMB: Uh, and there was just one big space?

MENICHINI: Were the beds were, you mean?

GUMB: Where the beds were?

MENICHINI: Well, there was beds all over. That's what, and, looked like a lot of gates, a lot of metal, whatever it was it was, it was metal, you know. Like, no walls, but there were separations, gates. Because I remember an awful lot of metal down there.

GUMB: And they had linen for the beds?

MENICHINI: Oh, yes. Well, they didn't have that much linen that I recall. How much linen can you have? You're up on the, the top there. Maybe just a spread, I don't know.

GUMB: Do you remember anything about the food, on the voyage?

MENICHINI: The food? The food wasn't bad. It's those people that could eat, they would eat, but those that were sick, so they couldn't even have the food. There was some times when they made food that, none of us liked the smell of it. You know, certain food, you don't like the smell of, although it might be good when you eat it. But some people used to get upset and get more sicker. (she laughs)

GUMB: Did you meet anybody on the boat?

MENICHINI: Oh, we made a lot of friends, yes. In fact, Mama got off the boat, she had so many friends that she had to write to, that she had to touch with. I doubt whether she got in touch with anyone. She saw, who when u

north, who went up to the south, who went east, who went west, she say, "How could you keep track of them?" I mean, they weren't, she was just friendly on the boat, they weren't friends from the old country. Only one of them came here, the sister of the girl I spoke about with the lemon. She's here. She's here. And she has, she had about fiver children, three or four girls and one boy. So when her daughters got big, she took one of them to Europe. She was supposed to meet a doctor there, you know? She's an office person. She worked in the office. And her mother had great expectations for her, so she took her to Europe. She had to meet a doctor in Europe. So what happens, she met a doctor abroad, and she was telling him what happened, why she was going to Italy, and he says, "Why do you have to go there? I'm here. Take me." He was also a doctor. So they had a shipboard romance. Wasn't that beautiful. And they're married. They have three children, more than three children probably. And by now they have grandchildren.

GUMB: On the vessel, did you travel in a group or did you --?

MENICHINI: Oh, there was the first class, second class, we were the third class.

GUMB: I mean, in the, was there a group from the village? That was traveling together?

MENICHINI: It was just your family. That's all

GUMB: It was your mother, brother --.

MENICHINI: My Aunt Rae.

GUMB: Your brother Andre, and your aunt, did you say?

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MENICHINI: Aunt Rae. That's Aunt Rae.

GUMB: That's Italian for Aunt?

MENICHINI: Aunt Rae.

GUMB: Oh, okay. How is that spelled?

MENICHINI: Oh, her name is Rachel. We call her Rae for short. Aunt Rae.

GUMB: Oh, oh. Aunt Rae. Oh, I see.

MENICHINI: Oh, I can't pronounce my words too well.

GUMB: Okay. I'm just not hearing so well. That's the problem. What kind of, what did you take? Out of curiosity, what would be the, the thing that you would bring on a voyage like this to a new country?

MENICHINI: Oh, what we brought? We brought, we didn't pack too many, too much luggage. I think the mostly, that I remember, there was very little things, we did not have much to take with us. At that time that we came to America it was winter and we only had summer clothes, you know, because it was warm there. But my mother and aunt, they were making uniforms for the soldiers in Italy. They were working, both of them, sewing on uniforms. So, out of some fabric they made us capes, from soldier wool. And we, both of us, came to America, with those little capes and everybody used to look at us. (she laughs) We looked like we came from outer space, I guess. Anyway, we went to 67th Street. There was a lot of Irish people there. They didn't like us Italians so much. And they were teasing my brother. So one time there was ice on the floor and they start throwing ice and they hit my brother in the head and he started to cry. After all, it hurt. So I went over and I said, "Hey, hey." I didn't speak

anything. I lept saying, "Hey, hey,:" and my cousin came running after me, she says, " Don't go to them. They're bad boys. Don't bother with them." I was about to fight for my brother. I loved him. We got along well together. He's still here. He's in California. He's a few years older than I am.

GUMB: Okay. So you probably weren't involved in it as a child, but do you remember ever hearing how much the voyage cost, or --.

MENICHINI: No, I don't. Would you know? Would you know? I mean, in the history books?

GIUMB: You could probably get some idea.

MENICHINI: I had no idea. It couldn't have been too much, my father wouldn't be able to afford it if it was too much. He wasn't a rich man. If he was, he would have had his own apartment before we came there. But his wife died of tuberculosis. So I think he was glad to get out of the apartment.

GUMB: I tink you said he was, he was in this country waiting for you to come over.

MENICHINI: Yes, yes.

GUMB: Right, okay. So, after the voyage was over, do you remember what you first saw approaching New York?

MENICHINI: Ah, well, of course. We saw the Statue of Liberty, and my mother says there it is, you see, that's the Statue of Liberty, and my mother says, "There is it, you see, that's the Statue of Liberty, you know. La Statue di

liberta.” That’s in Italian. Oh, we were so happy. It was lit up. I think it was lit up, I’m not sure. I think it was.

GUMB: Could you spell that Italian name form, the Italian expression for --.

MENICHINI: Oh, sure. L-A and another word, Status, with an A at the end, Status, D is another word, D-I, Liberta, like Liberty , only with an A. Okay? (she laughs) Oh, I was so happy to hear that and see it. It was real nice.. And what impressed me the next day, when I was taken to my aunt’s house, was the elevated lines, the bridges that were so lit up. The buildings, I couldn’t believe all those lights. Ou know, we didn’t have that. We used to get into the house when it got dark and there we stayed till the next morning.

GUMB: No electricity?

MENICHINI: No, of course not. We had, we had, um, we had, what do you call them, now, I forget? Like glass and you put it on top of the light? Kerosene lamps, that’s right. That’s what they had. And we had no steam. When it was cold, there were times when it got cold, we had some sort of form of basin, it had, around the basin was like a ledge tht you could rest your feet on it, and they used to bring coal in there. We used to keep warm by putting our feet on it.

GUMB: So, uh --.

MENICHINI: And we cooked, um, excuse me, on a , what do they call it, a Herz, that’s what we cooked on, with wood, and we made good meals. We had no worry about food. (she laughs)

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GUMB: To get back to coming into New York Harbor, as the vessel was coming into th harbor, do you remember anything about where it docked, or .

MENICHINI: Oh, it must have been down the Hudson River, I imagine. No other place. The Hudson River in Manhattan, because we were right by the Statue, I mean, that's where we docked.

GUMB: Do you remember anything about how you got to Ellis Island from there, from the pier?

MENICHINI: Strange as it seems, looks like we just stepped aboard something, we must have been very near the boat, because I don't remember going on a little, you know, like a little rowboat, or anything like that. Maybe they moved the boat. I don't know. Seems to me we just walked across it.

GUMB: Okay.

MENICHINI: Like a plank. I'm not sure.

GUMB: So you arrived at Ellis Island, um .

MENICHINI: Yes.

GUMB: Do you remember the first thing that happened there? What was the first procedure?

MENICHINI: Well, the first thing that happened, we walked into the Ellis Island, it was such a gloomy place. I couldn't get over it, you know. And me, my mother held me by the hand, my aunt held my brother, and we walked. They showed us where we'd sleep, on those metal bunk beds, till the next day. The next day was beautiful, sunny like this room, and there were big tables with white tablecloths, it was a Christmas morning

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breakfast. It was really beautiful. They had lovely food on the table, and there were a lot of people. Evidently, we weren't the only ones that got stuck somehow or another. There were other people. The place was filled. Maybe it was from other boats, I'm not sure, but there were.

GUMB: So you arrived there, when did you arrive there?

MENICHINI: Christmas Eve. It was the 24th, in the evening, and we couldn't get out. So we got out the next morning, he came for us.

GUMB: So he came Christmas Day, or--.

MENICHINI: Yeah, my uncle, and he came to get us. Christmas Day.

GUMB: Christmas Day. Okay. Do you remember what sort of, uh, medical examination there were, do you remember anything about that?

MENICHINI: Oh, everything. You know, they looked at your heart, they looked the eyes, mostly, the eyes. They're afraid you bring, oh, some kinds of disease, I guess, because they were afraid. My mother and my aunt, they were so afraid not to pass the inspection. And when they said my eyes were good, oh, my aunt kissed me and my mother hugged me. They were so happy. Otherwise, they wouldn't leave without me. They wouldn't leave me behind. It would be terrible for everybody, all around.

GUMB: Did the examination hurt?

MENICHINI: No, no. I had, had a little problem with my eye. I used to tear, and then as my tears came down, I got an infection on my cheek, so I had to have a medication, so, you know, I don't know what the disease it was, after all

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I did get an infection from it. That's what it was, I guess. They were afraid of that infection.

GUMB: Do you remember what, how long those exams took?

MENICHINI: Oh, no, it wasn't long. We went in the morning, and by noon they were, we were out. Yeah.

GUMB: Did they have female doctors do the examination?

MENICHINI: Oh, no, they had all men doctors, all men. I never saw a female. We never saw many females in America, either, till the last twenty-five years, I imagine. What do you think?

GUMB: Yeah, I think you're right.

MENICHINI: I think so.

GUMB: So, after the medical examinations do you remember what else happened? You know, were there other questions?

MENICHINI: No, no. No other questions. We got aboard. Some of us had a good trip. Some of us had a miserable trip. My aunt always had headaches. My mother was okay. My mother and I were always by the rail looking out. And we saw that rock, oh, my mother called out that rock, you know, when you leave Italy, you have to pass the rock of, what is it, Gibraltar? She pointed that out to us. It was so gorgeous. Just the way you see it in pictures. But I saw it magnified. I was close to it. That was gorgeous. I can't forget that either. I would like to go back just to see that. It was like a castle, you know. It formed like a building in the middle of the ocean.

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GUMB: So, uh, you had to be detained for that one night, you had to sleep on Ellis?

MENICHINI: Yes, yes.

GUMB: Do you remember, have any idea of where on the island you were taken?

MENICHINI: No, no, we didn't know.

GUMB: Or who took you, I mean, what sort of officials, any memory of that?

MENICHINI: No, I can't remember that. Isn't that strange? The whole little trip was like a dream that never happened. I don't know about how we got there, like, I don't know which way, maybe I was sleeping, we were kids, you know how it is.

GUMB: Any memories of the room where you slept in? Was it one big room?

MENICHINI: One big room, it was, in Ellis Island. Yeah, just like the boats were down the hold. Oh, God. (she laughs) It was not a place with a roof. What the, after all, we were happy to have it and not be left in the street.

GUMB: It was bunk beds?

MENICHINI: Bunk beds. Yes. Bunk beds. There weren't many sheets. I don't remember sheets. But there were covers to keep us warm, I remember that much.

GUMB: Do you remember anybody trying to help you or, you know, getting any advice, or --.

MENICHINI: No, no. They saw that it was a mistake. They thought no one came for us. But my father, my stepfather, was there. But, when they call out the names, evidently they pronounced his name a little different, and he did not understand it, and did not hear himself called. So he went away, said, "You weren't there." What a terrible mistake that was.

GUMB: What was his name?

MENICHINI: His first and second name is Chrisenzo, was his first name, Casaburi was his second name. And when we started school, his nieces took us to be enrolled, and she gave his name, so we went under the name Casaburi in the very low grades. In fact, I went through school with that name. Then, after, when we started to go to business, I changed to my father's name because my stepfather did not adopt us so I had the right to use my father's name, Iennaco, I-E-N-N-A-C-O, Iennaco.

GUMB: Could you spell Casaburi, too?

MENICHINI: C-A-S-A-B-U-R-I.

GUMB: Uh, right. You mentioned the Christmas Eve dinner that was served to you?

MENICHINI: No, it wasn't a dinner. No. We, we had our last meal, I think, at lunchtime.

GUMB: Christmas Day?

MENICHINI: No, Christmas Eve Day.

GUMB: Christmas Eve.

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MENICHINI: Because then, no one called for us, and we remained there, but there was no supper ready for anybody at that time.

GUMB: End of tape one, side one.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

GUMB: Tape one, side two. Uh, Mrs. Menichini, uh--.

MENICHINI: Yes?

GUMB: If you could, uh, you were talking about the marriage of your mother and stepfather and --.

MENICHINI: Yes.

GUMB: Just how much of it do you think was a practical kind of arrangement?

MENICHINI: Well, I'll tell you one thing, he was a nice man, and we children took to him right away so I thought, I would say, it was practice. Practical. She liked him enough, I imagine. Otherwise she would never have married him, regardless, children or not. She was a beautiful woman. She would have waited. So he was, uh, convenient, let's say convenient, all right?

GUMB: As far as what your mother was interested in doing --.

MENICHINI: What Mama? Mama was working all the time. She had the two little children. She had to work to support us. Um, they don't make such a

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living out there. The only living they make there is by, my aunt had a machine that made stockings, a stocking machine. So she was busy making a few *liras* there. And Mama used to sew a blouse or a skirt or something, but they didn't pay there. They gave, they swapped, food, other merchandise. It was a small town, and it was a long time ago. (she laughs) And they didn't, I understand that it's up to date in Italy now, it's more modern in every way. Maybe there were hardships here, too, I'm not so sure, I didn't live here then.

GUMB: So, um --.

MENICHINI: It wasn't just a convenient, there was (she laughs) some love, dear Lord. (she laughs) Mmm.

GUMB: So, uh, do you remember anything about, going back to Ellis Island, do you remember anything about how you were informed that your father was there and your stepfather was there?

MENICHINI: Oh, I heard my mother say, oh, no one came for us, no one came for us and then when they spoke to the officials on the way up the steps they said your name was called but nobody was there to take you. Like I said, they must have mispronounced his name that they did not recognize it. They had called our names but no one claimed us.

GUMB: Did that official have a uniform, do you remember?

MENICHINI: Well, yes, yes, they did.

GUMB: Do you remember anything about the uniform?

MENICHINI: No, just captain hats, and all that.

GUMB: How did your mother feel when she got that message?

MENICHINI: Oh, they were upset. Oh, you have no idea. It was Christmas Eve, you know. But, we didn't hear them, you know? They had a tendency to keep worries away from us children. They would never burden us. They would go hush, hush, you know, between the two sisters. They would never let us know, if we were in some kind of jam. That was beautiful of them, because we never, like, we never know the hardship, because they never talked about it. (she laughs) They were, you know, they just spoke very discreet about those things.

GUMB: You mentioned the steps, the officials were talking, do you remember what, just how --.

MENICHINI: The steps. Well, you know, the steps going up from, um, from the, I call it the hold, because it was the last floor down. And they looked like fire escape steps. That's all I can remember. Everything looked like fire escape down that hold.

GUMB: This was, uh, after all the examinations and everything?

MENICHINI: This was where we had to stay at the time that we traveled, throughout, we slept down there, we went up and down to the other floors. But that was our suite.

GUMB: This is while you were waiting for your father?

MENICHINI: No, when we were traveling.

GUMB: Oh, back on the boat, you mean?

MENICHINI: Yes, the hold. They called it the hold. Bottom of the boat, they called the hold.

GUMB: Oh, of the boat.

MENICHINI: Yes. That's why, they called it the hold. It seemed to me we were down the hold. That's the last part, down the pit there.

GUMB: Okay. You mentioned Ellis Island was a gloomy place.

MENICHINI: Yes. It was gloomy, yeah.

GUMB: What do you mean by that? What do you --.

MENICHINI: It seemed like a big, big, large place that you walked into, high ceilings, and it seems to me it had dark walls and not enough windows, evidently, because it was gloomy.

GUMB: This was one big room?

MENICHINI: Yeah. And probably the windows were high. Probably. Because, uh, you know, when you go into a place that's lit up nice with windows you're impressed right away that it's a nice, airy room. And there it wasn't. Of course, it could be also that it was the part of the day when it was sundown and, you know, that had, they did not have lights on, maybe. I can't tell you, but it looked gloomy. In fact, I saw a picture of the, that building, and it didn't look any better in the picture. It still looked gloomy. So I guess it's not such a pretty place. What are they doing with it now?

GUMB: They're going to make it into a museum.

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MENICHINI: That would be better.

GUMB: Okay, Uh, so about what time was it that you finally met up with your father, do you remember, on Christmas Day?

MENICHINI: Oh, they came for us. My uncle came with my stepfather, they came to Ellis Island, and they, we got together. We were so happy. There was so much commotion about how it happened and all that.

GUMB: Okay. So, um, do you remember how you got from Ellis Island to the mainland with your father?

MENICHINI: Um, I don't know. Maybe it was, I don't think it was a bus. I really have no, no idea how we got there. It's funny.

GUMB: Okay. How about, do you remember, I guess you talked a little bit about your first impressions of New York.

MENICHINI: Oh, yes. Well, that was when, my stepfather then, he used to take me to see his sister, and his sister lived down the Lower east part of Manhattan, the lower east part. She lived on Forsythe Street, near Division. That was a beautiful shopping district at the time. My mother had gorgeous hats there, and my mother looked stunning in them. And we lived on Eldridge, which was on the other side. Our back windows faced my aunt, another aunt that lived in America. We used to wave to each other, or holler out sometimes to one another.

GUMB: You mentioned you first went to West 67th Street?

MENICHINI: Yes. We lived there for a while until my stepfather and mother, they both went out together to look for an apartment. That's what they found. They found two rooms for four people. (she laughs) The kitchen was big, it was a big kitchen. There was a little bed that opened out, twin, you know, twin beds, they open, some kinds of a bed that they open up, you know? And, um, a table, hairs, there was a stove in the house, coal stove, small range, gas range, and a sink, and a tub. That was the luxuries. And a bedroom for my mother and dad.

GUMB: In those first days in America, do you remember some of the problems in adjusting to the new country?

MENICHINI: Uh, we children had no problems whatsoever. We played with the rest of the children and everything. I started school. I was going to school. I didn't speak so well. The children laughed at me. Instead of saying, "Santa Claus" I said "Santie Claus," so they all laughed. Ahh, I was so embarrassed. But that's all right. I was a good sport. I forgot about it.

GUMB: Did it take you long to learn English?

MENICHINI: No, I don't think so. No. Children have no problem learning. It's the older people. They don't go out. Like my mother never went downstairs. My stepfather would buy everything and bring it up to her. In fact, we lived near Delancey Street, and years ago Delancey Street ha, oh, my God, pushcarts and they were all over downtown Manhattan, pushcarts, and my father used to go and get my shoes from the pushcarts. He just looked at my feet and he thought he knew the size. (she laughs) One time he came home with Cuban heels, ladies opera. I said to my mother, "I won't wear those, those are ladies' shoes." "Oh," she says, "don't be silly. Put them on once, let him see you wearing it. Otherwise he won't buy you others." Which was true, because then he came back one time

with a pair of patent leather baby janes [sic] they called them. Oh, we kids were all crazy about baby janes [sic], patent leather. So, they were a little small, but I didn't care. I wore them till I got a bad foot from them, with pain and everything. It was so tight, but I didn't want to give them up. I ran with them. It hurt. I knew it hurt. (she laughs)

GUMB: Do you remember any customs from Italy that were brought over, you know, that you continued to observe in this country?

MENICHINI: Well, there was similar, well, we went to church there, and we went to church. In fact, the church was not far. On 67th Street there was a church just a few doors down. And when we, when I went to that church the first time I had knee socks, a blue summer dress and a little jacket. No, I had my cape but, you know, it opens up so all your clothes show. A cape is not as warm as a coat. So there was a nun there, she was telling my cousin, oh, how come she's dressed like this? It's cold. So my cousin told her I had just come over from Italy and I wasn't properly dressed, but they would get me things, eventually I would get my winter clothes.

GUMB: Did you feel conspicuous dressed that way?

MENICHINI: No, I didn't, because I didn't know, you know, that there was such a difference in temperature. I didn't know that there was such a difference. I thought everything was like Italy.

GUMB: Okay. How long did it, uh, take before you became a U.S citizen?

MENICHINI: Oh, I became a citizen when I was, after I had my first and only child. I was twenty-seven. I thought, it's about time I became a citizen, my God. You know everybody else said, "Aren't you a citizen yet?" I says, "Yes, I

applied for it, so I have to wait.” You have to wait. You apply, and then you wait until they call you. Yeah. It was nice.

GUMB: Why did you feel motivated at that point?

MENICHINI: Well, being that, where I worked, you know, everybody, you would hear them say my, “Mother just became a citizen,” or this one is going to become a citizen, and then it would come out that I was not a citizen yet and they would say, “Well, how come you’re not?” You know, it’s good to be a citizen, which is true. So I even had my first child, I was still not a citizen.

GUMB: Did you have a problem getting a job not being a citizen?

MENICHINI: Oh, no. At the time I went to work they were looking for, in my line of work that is, uh, we thought we were milliners, my aunt and I, because she made a hat for me, and she thought, she called herself a milliner. (she laughs) so there was an advertisement in the paper for trimmers, so we went downtown to, uh, Broadway and Lafayette, and now, that section years back was all millinery. So, uh, that’s where we landed from the newspaper ad. And while we were looking at that newspaper ad, some manufacturers who were looking for trimmers approached us and said, “Do you want a job? Do you want a job?” And my aunt was frightened, you know? She didn’t know them and she had the paper, she’d rather go where the sign was in the paper, where the ad was. So we went where the ad was. And we hired as milliners, and when that floor lady, they were the managers, you know, when she saw how we worked, so slow we couldn’t even hold a hat, let alone, anyway, the boss was the sweetest thing. I loved him, and I bless his soul now. He says, “Give them a break, ah, all right, give them a break.” So my aunt and I worked, side by side, and you know, we watched the others, how they worked,

and how they handled it, and we got faster. So I think the first week, between the two of us, we earned seven dollars. And by the second week we had about fifteen. So we did pretty good. So the boss saw that we were doing all right. So then they, they got after us, then, that we should join the union because it was a union shop. I was fourteen years old, I was in the union. But believe it or not, I went to work because I had working papers, not because I graduated.

GUMB: You had to work.

MENICHINI: I had to work. All kinds had to work. My brother, too. He looked like such a little boy. He went to work. My aunt had to show him how to get the train to get to 26th Street in Manhattan. They had an ad for an apprentice wanted in a tool and dye company, a little bit of a company. He was nice. My brother also said he was the nicest person. He was German/Jewish, and my brother said he was the nicest person you ever saw. And he had my brother, who was Italian, and you had a Spanish fellow there, about my brother's age, and they used to deliver and do little things that the boss didn't want to do. And, I mean, he couldn't do, he had to do his work. And when they had nothing to do he would show them how to use the lathe and that machine and the other. He taught them. My brother is a tool and dye worker. He became one of the best. He worked for, uh, Sperry's Gyroscope at one time.

GUMB: Do you have any idea what would have happened, or have you ever thought about what would have happened, if you hadn't come to this country?

MENICHINI: Oh, we would have died during the war, during this other war. During this other way, you know, in the '40s. It was very bad then. Because my

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cousin was still there, and they had to run and hide in caves and she got pneumonia and everything, and all that.

GUMB: When you became a citizen, did you have any feelings about closing the door on Italy, I mean?

MENICHINI: Oh, you know, to us children, when we came here, this was our land, and we forgot all about Italy, you know, except that we'd hear from the neighbors, the friends that arrived, and the relatives out of there, a lot of them came after us, too. Some cousins came after we got here. But, I mean, I wasn't attracted to it. To a child, wherever the mother and father takes them they get used to it.

GUMB: End of interview, side two, tape one.