

KECK-006

JOSEPHINE SAITTA GERMI

BIRTH DATE: 1898

INTERVIEW DATE: JANUARY 24, 1985

RUNNING TIME: 41:00

INTERVIEWER: DEBRA ALLEE

RECORDING ENGINEER: SKIP PIZZI

INTERVIEW LOCATION: BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

TRANSCRIPT ORIGINALLY PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 1986

TRANSCRIPT RECONCEIVED BY: NANCY VEGA, 6/1995

TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

SICILY, 1906 and 1912

AGE 8 (first trip) and AGE 14 (second trip)

NAMES OF THE SHIPS NOT RECALLED

ALLEE: This is Debra Allee. I'm speaking with Josephine Germi on Thursday, January 24, 1985. We're beginning the interview at about 10:15 and we're about to interview Josephine Germi about her experience in immigrating from Italy in two years, in 1906 and in 1912. Why don't we start in Italy and tell me a little about when you were born.

GERMI: I was born in 1898. Came in United States when I was eight years old.

ALLEE: Uh-huh.

GERMI: I went back in Italy when I was eleven years old. I came back when I was fourteen.

GERMI: Can you tell me the first time, uh, what it was like when you were a little girl in Italy and tell me a little about that and how it was that you came to come the first time.

GERMI: Well, I came from Italy because all my brothers and sisters were all here. I only had, I was me, my father, and a stepmother. So my brothers wanted me here and my sisters. After I come here, one sister went back. She was married. She went back to Italy. And I was living, the other sister got married, and I lived with her in Jersey, north New Jersey. Then, after three years I went back to Italy when my father, he didn't want to leave me here. Then when I was there my sister didn't want me there. She was saying, "I don't want you to stay here. I want you to go to United States. Over there you, you go to a show, your brothers take you out." And she wouldn't let me stay there. She wrote to my brothers, "Take her back." And I came back, I was thirteen years old. Then when I was about fifteen I went to work. Those days you didn't work for seventeen years old, at fifteen I was working. I learned how to hem stitch, and then after that I learned, after the first World War I learned

how to work on the machine, they used to call it, see I can't remember the name of the machine, overlock machine, I was working an overlock machine. And that's all I can remember. After the war I got engaged to a young man and I got married when I was in my twenties. That's all I can remember.

ALLEE: Um . . .

GERMI: You want to know about Ellis Island, right?

ALLEE: Let's start, though, uh, back in Italy and coming over. Can you tell me what your father did. Well, let's, tell me the town where you were from.

GERMI: I was living in Montolebre. I come from Palermo, the city. And my father was old, he wasn't working. My brothers used to send money to support us. That's why my sister said, "You go back there." And when you're aged fifteen you went to work over here, fifteen we go to work. And I came back. When I was fifteen I started to make my own living. What else?

ALLEE: When you first, the first time you came, you came with your father and your . . .

GERMI: My father and my brother. I can show you the picture

there, take that picture over there, Susan.

ALLEE: Oh, just your father and your brother. Ah, where, you came on a boat.

GERMI: On a boat. We were sixteen days on a boat.

ALLEE: Can you tell me a little bit about where you, where the boat left from?

GERMI: From Palermo.

ALLEE: And what it was like on the boat.

GERMI: Oh, it was terrible. The first time, I tell you, the people were sitting on the floor. A lot of people, they used to walk around, they were full of bugs. And my father used to take me from one end to the other. We had little chairs, my brother and I. And he used to bring us all around the boat. But when I came back my head was full of nits and bugs. Terrible.

ALLEE: You were in steerage in the, in the third class passage?

GERMI: There was only first and third, that's all.

ALLEE: Was everybody Italian on the boat?

GERMI: No, I don't think so. I think there were Austrians, they used to call them Austrians.

ALLEE: But you didn't know what language they were speaking?

GERMI: No, I don't know. We were some Italians, some Austrians, and then I don't know what else they were.

ALLEE: Were you excited to come to America?

GERMI: Who?

ALLEE: Were you excited to be coming to America?

GERMI: Of course, all my family was all here.

ALLEE: Had your family written, or had you heard about America?

GERMI: Oh, yeah, they used to write all the time. They used to send us money to live on, my father and I, the stepmother. And that's, I mean, they were really good to me.

ALLEE: Did you have an idea what American, America was like when you were back in Italy and hadn't been there yet?

GERMI: No, I mean I didn't know anything about it.

ALLEE: Did you have like a picture in your mind of what it might be like?

GERMI: No.

ALLEE: Uh, so when, why don't you tell us about when you got to Ellis Island.

GERMI: Ellis Island?

GERMI: When you finally landed after sixteen days.

ALLEE: I tell you, there were all lots of people. All I saw, cause I was a little girl, my father had a boil right here ( she gestures ) and, poor man, he wouldn't say nothing, he was afraid that they would keep him there, you know. ( she coughs ) So the poor man was suffering until my brothers came and they took us out. As soon as we got home they have a doctor to cut that boil on him.

ALLEE: How long were you on Ellis Island the first time?

GERMI: Oh, the same day we go on the same day we went out. We have to wait for somebody to pick us up.

ALLEE: And you said they examined your eyes?

GERMI: Yeah, they examined your eyes. They do it in Italy and they do it here, too.

ALLEE: And if your eyes were okay . . .

GERMI: No, they don't let you out.

ALLEE: I see. All right. So you spent one day and then your, your relatives picked you up, your brothers.

GERMI: As soon as we got to Ellis Island then they come to pick, you stay a while until they come and they gotta check you out, and then we went out and we went home. And I went to 29th Street. That's for the first time. ( voice off mike )

GERMI: No, the first time I came to 29th Street between Second and Third. The second time I went straight to Jersey because I was living with my sister, yeah.

ALLEE: When you lived on 29th Street, uh, did you go to school, and . . .

GERMI: Yes, I started school. I went to, 29th Street, 28th Street, there was a Catholic school. I can't remember the name. I went there for a while and then I went to Jersey. I went to school in Jersey, a public school.

Then I went back to Italy.

ALLEE: Why did your father go back to Italy?

GERMI: Well, my father, he didn't like it here.

ALLEE: Was there anything in particular he didn't like?

GERMI: He liked his wine in Italy. Over here he didn't like the wine. He says over here they make it with the broom. ( she laughs ) Yeah, he didn't like his wine here, so he wanted to go back. He didn't want stay here. The second time he stayed a year or so and then he went back again. He wouldn't stay here, he didn't like it.

ALLEE: How did you feel about going back when you were going to go back?

GERMI: Well, I don't know myself how I felt. When I was there I liked it there, didn't want to come back. My sister was the one who sent me back. She said, "I don't want you to stay here. You go United States, you have your brothers, they take you out. Here what do you do? Sit at home, sit in front of the door?" Wouldn't let me stay here. That's how I came back.

ALLEE: She thought you would have a better life here.

GERMI: Better life here than over there, yeah.

ALLEE: Do you think so now?

GERMI: I guess so. Who did I have over there? One married sister. I wasn't living with her. I was living with the stepmother and my father, yeah, so it was better here than over there, of course.

ALLEE: And you came back when you were fourteen . . .

GERMI: Fourteen years old.

ALLEE: And you came with a brother.

GERMI: I came with my father and then my father went back. He stayed here about a year and then he went back.

ALLEE: This boat trip, was it different from the first?

GERMI: Oh, yeah, it was better than the first trip, yeah. It was much better.

ALLEE: Uh, were you still third class passenger? Were you still in the third class?

GERMI: Yeah, but we all sit on deck. Everybody sits on deck.

It's only when we got to sleep.

GERMI: And there were no bugs this time?

GERMI: No, no, there were better. It was much better. The people were nicer, and whenever it was bad weather we had, we knew someone who used to bring me food down there, because my father never let me eat that food. The first time we ate it, my brother and I, we threw up. ( she laughs ) No, my father used to buy our food. So this young man, whenever the weather was bad, he would let my father walk on deck, he used to bring me food downstairs to eat.

ALLEE: What kind of food did you get on the boat?

GERMI: I'm telling you they give you food, I don't know what it was but I know we threw up, my brother and I, and then my father used to buy us spaghettis, things like that, 'cause they sell it on the boat.

ALLEE: Oh, I see. And when you came through Ellis Island the second time did it seem the same as the first time or . . .

GERMI: No, it was, I think it was a little better. My father, there were two men. They were talking to each

other. They didn't know that I understood. They said, "Could this girl be that man's old man's daughter?" So I turned around and I said, "He is my father." ( she laughs ) So they, when they heard that they pushed my father away and they come and talk to me. "Who, who did I have here, or what was I gonna do?" I says, "I have four brothers in the United States and a married sister." ( a telephone rings in the background ) So this way they knew what I was gonna do. "Yes," I says. "I have four brothers and I have a married sister, so. They let me alone." But they want to know because my father looks old, you know. They didn't think he was my father, you know. ( she laughs ) Take the picture over there of Grandpa, did you show them. ( pointing to picture ) That's my first, this is when we went back. It was Thanksgiving. We went back to Italy. I was eleven years old. See, this is my brother, we came the first time, him. And my father and I.

ALLEE: This one's your father?

GERMI: Yeah, that's my father. This is my oldest brother, the second, the third, and him, and after I was born. But there's two sisters in between the brothers.

ALLEE: Nice looking man.

GERMI: Yeah.

SUSAN: Her father was very old, much and, also she came over without her mother so she, about sleeping accommodations and things like that.

GERMI: I never had a mother. My mother died when I was, after a week I was born. And I had, was a nurse like a woman was taking care of me, nursing me for fifteen months. Then my sisters took over. 'Cause one was fourteen, one was twelve, they took over. That's all I can remember.

ALLEE: Did you ever stay overnight at Ellis Island?

GERMI: No, no. They take, take you out as long as you have people that come and take you, you go out, yeah.

ALLEE: And the second time you met your brothers and went straight to New Jersey.

GERMI: Yeah, I went to Jersey. The second time was this young, that brother, the, the one with the moustache, he came to take us, and we went to Jersey. He was living in Jersey. With my sister, my brother, and I.

We were living with my sister.

ALLEE: Do you remember the town in New Jersey?

GERMI: In Newark, New Jersey.

ALLEE: Newark.

GERMI: Newark, yeah. We lived on Monroe Street. I remember the street, too.

ALLEE: And you went to public school there?

GERMI: I went to public school. I don't remember the name of the public school. It wasn't far from the house. It was on Lafayette Street, but I don't remember what street, Congress, something like that.

ALLEE: And then when you were fifteen you left school to go to work.

GERMI: I went to work, yes. I was fifteen years old. I started work on hem stitching and I learned. All the girls used to go to work at that time. As long as they were in the fourth grade, everybody went to work.

ALLEE: And where did you work at the hem stitching? Did you work in Newark?

GERMI: In Newark, yeah, in Newark. I don't remember the street I was working in. I remember we used to walk. I don't remember really the street, but I used to work in. There were all shops there, so there was shops where they made brassieres, handkerchiefs, all that kind, it was all shops. And I was working for a German. They were German people. Grouppers they used to call them.

ALLEE: Grouppers.

GERMI: Grouppers.

ALLEE: They called them Grouppers because they were German?

GERMI: No, that's a name, Groupper. That was a name, Groupper. I worked for them, maybe about four, five years. Then when I got married I didn't go to work any more. And I had the first child, and that's all.

ALLEE: How long, um, how long were the hours that you had to work?

GERMI: Oh, we used to start quarter after seven too, uh, six.

ALLEE: Five days?

GERMI: That's right. Five days and a half day on a Saturday,

up to one o'clock. And what were we making? Peanuts.  
Eight dollars. That's all we were making.

ALLEE: Eight dollars for the week.

GERMI: That's all, eight dollars, seven dollars. Then after  
the First World War then we were making twelve,  
thirteen, fourteen dollars. But the First World War  
then we graduated and making more money.

ALLEE: That's when you learned to operate that machine?

GERMI: I learned when I was fifteen how to run the machine.  
I was working on the machine all along. Then we had  
overlock machine. I learned that one, too. That was  
new.

ALLEE: What is it?

GERMI: On handkerchiefs, too, but see, the machine overlocked  
and you just do it with your hands like that, see, it  
went around. The other ones was hem stitch and you  
had to push it under the machine and make the corners.  
All, all the girls I knew, that's the kind of job we  
were doing at that time. Then I learned how to sew on  
dresses and later on, on blouses, dresses.

ALLEE: And then you, do you want something to drink?

GERMI: What, no, no, I couldn't drink anyway.

ALLEE: You sound fine.

GERMI: See, I put my teeth on and they stick.

ALLEE: Oh, it sounds fine, I wouldn't know.

GERMI: Yeah.

ALLEE: Uh, how did you meet your husband?

GERMI: How did I meet him? He came from Detroit. And he was living across the street from me. That's how I met him. We come from the same town. See, the people across the street they were from my town. And he was living with a cousin, and that's how I met him. We kept company eight months and then we got married.

ALLEE: Had he come through Ellis Island, too, and gone to Detroit?

GERMI: He must have, of course, he must have come from Ellis Island, everybody came from Ellis Island. But, see, he had his father and mother here. When he came back the mother went back. When the mother and, when he

came to the United States the, the mother went back cause she had a sick daughter, and she went back to Italy and he remained with the father. I know all that cause she used to tell me.

ALLEE: And, um, did you then stay living in Newark after you were married?

GERMI: Yeah, well, not long. I stayed in Newark, I had a, my daughter was born there. I came to the city, I was, she was about six months. And my husband's people all lived there. And that's where I lived. We had a, I was living on First Avenue between 63rd and 64th and the Avenue. And I lived there quite a while until we came, my daughter upstairs, she's now almost sixty. When she was born then, the second child, I didn't have the second child until she was, my oldest daughter was about four-and-a-half. And when she was born we moved here to Brooklyn. My husband, uh, got into business, you know. First he had a fruit store. Then after he left the fruit store and he was doing trucking, trucking business. That's all. Then after he got sick he didn't work any more. And I was working.

ALLEE: And did you go back to working as . . .

GERMI: Yeah, when my husband was sick I went to work on dresses. First I worked at home on blouses. Then my, uh, neighbor says to me, "Why should you kill yourself here working on blouses? Come, they need operators. Come to New York." And I used to go to work on 38th Street and 8th Avenue. Yeah. I worked there a long time. Then my children all got big, they were working. And then I retired.

ALLEE: Do you like retiring?

GERMI: Yeah, and I went to live and then we were living in Long Island, my husband and I. We had a little house on Long Island. I lived there eight years and then I came back here.

ALLEE: And you've been living here since then.

GERMI: Yeah, I'm living here since I came from Long Island, about fourteen, fourteen, fifteen years I'm living here now.

ALLEE: Did you ever go back to Italy after?

GERMI: No, no.

ALLEE: Did you, uh, hear from your relatives over here?

GERMI: No, well, all I have there is my, my sister's boy, and a daughter, that's all. Because another daughter is over here in Rockville Center. But over there there's just a brother and a sister in Italy, that's all. I have nobody else.

ALLEE: Did you ever think you might want to go back?

GERMI: No, no, I don't care to go back. I have nobody there. Who have I got? Even my husband has nobody. He only has one sister there, too. Everybody is dead. His mother, his father, they're all dead. My father died a long time ago. Grandpa died when I was living here, on, uh, 80th Street up the block. That's when I had the four children when my father died. He was ninety-three years old when he died. Yeah, yeah. He was strong. He used to like his wine. ( she laughs ) That's how. He wasn't a drunk or . . .

ALLEE: No, I understand.

GERMI: But, on the table when he ate he had to have his glass of wine, yeah, he loved his wine.

SUSAN: You did, too, when you were younger. I remember you

drinking when you were younger.

ALLEE: Oh, years back, I don't even, I got so much medicine who can drink wine? A little glass of wine, I used to buy half a gallon and I used to put it back at the window. No ore. I haven't touched anything for years now. I'm sick. Since before you had your little girl, remember? I came out on the 11th. She was born the 12th. Then I had been sick in the hospital. I'd been going in and out the hospital. Then I fell, there was another thing. I broke my hip.

ALLEE: Well, you walk very well.

GERMI: Two years ago, uh, I broke my hip. In February it's gonna be two years. Otherwise I would be walking pretty good. But my hip, I can't walk any more. I was operated on and that's my life. Sit here, look at television, eat. ( she laughs ) She ( referring to her maid ) does everything and I only sit here and look at television, that's all.

ALLEE: When you were making your life here, I don't know how to phrase the questions, you felt through, still, very Italian, too. American and Italian, both.

GERMI: Yeah, yeah.

ALLEE: That's what it sounds like.

GERMI: Yeah.

ALLEE: Um, I didn't do that question well. Uh, is there anything else? We have two more questions. Um, when you went back to Italy from the time you were eleven to fourteen, in Montolebre, did you go to school there, too?

GERMI: No, I didn't go to school. I tell you the truth, I used to go to a woman's house, home, she was teaching me how to write and read in Italian. But I didn't go to school, I was a big girl, I didn't want to go to school with the children. So I had a woman ( she coughs ), we used to pay her so much a week, and I used to go to her house, it was in the same block, and she used to teach me how to write and read, yeah.

ALLEE: Did you also do some work there?

GERMI: No, no, no work. There's no work there for, that's why I came back here. My sister says, "What are you gonna do here? Over there, you goin' the United States, you work and you support yourself, you know."

I didn't need anybody to give me anything. That's all. No work in Italy.

ALLEE: What did the, uh, was it that there was no work for women in Italy?

GERMI: No work for women, no, all the women are home. Nobody goes to work. All they do is crochet and knit, that's all. Sit in front of the door. That's all they do in my town, I don't know other towns.

ALLEE: And what did the men do in your town?

GERMI: Well, they used to go to work. They had a job to work. Some of them used to work on their own properties. The country places, you know, they used to go, they used to plant, and make things for the year, that's what they used to do. Who was a carpenter? Who was a mason? They all had different jobs, yeah. But, uh, the people that had property ( she coughs ), lots of property, they used to have men working for them and they used to go, too. That's all they did.

ALLEE: And, but, when you went back, you liked it?

GERMI: Yeah, I liked it. I didn't want to come back. I used

to sit in the house. I didn't like, I used to have men at night serenade me in back of the door.

( she laughs ) They used to come with the music and my father used to go out and look. ( she laughs ) He used to join them. ( she laughs ) I used to sleep upstairs and my father used to come out and join the people that they were singing and playing.

( she laughs ) Yeah, it was nice. I got used to living there, you know. But, uh, I had a lot of men going up and down, you know. So, ( she laughs ) I used to, as soon as I used to see somebody coming I used to go in the house. ( she clears her throat ) That's how I lived in Italy. You don't go to a show in those towns. You don't go no place. Just the mass and home. Or if, or if you're going to the countryside, you know, with other women, you go and pick things like bags of figs, things on the trees, that's all. That's the only things we did. ( she clears her throat ) Nothing else. You sew, you knit, you crochet, that's all. Then, I don't know other towns, that was my town. It was a small town. ( she drinks ) I get so dry.

ALLEE: I think it's the heat, too, in the apartment.

GERMI: No, I get, no, it's my, uh, breathin', 'cause I have asthma and I can't talk too much. I get very tired.

ALLEE: Relax.

GERMI: See all the medicine I got?

GERMI: Wow.

ALLEE: Three of these, three of them, like that, but some of them are six a day. Six, twelve. And then the others, too, like that. I have a lot of medicine there.

ALLEE: I have asthma, too. I get asthma, also.

GERMI: You get it? That's bad, that's bad. I have asthma, I have one for the night and I have three a day for this, here. ( she clears her throat ) At night I could take three a day, the doctor wants me to, but I only take one when I go to bed. I don't take three. ( she clears her throat )

ALLEE: Susan tells me when you first came to Brooklyn, when you first came to Brooklyn, it was not like this, it was not built up.

GERMI: No, no, it was a lot of empty lots when I came to

Brooklyn. See, even in this block, these houses weren't here. All these houses weren't here. It was just the old ones, those big houses. ( she clears her throat ) Apartment house, and I lived up there between the, that was my house. And I don't remember the number. That was the second house from New Utrecht. I had a four-family house. We lived there when we came to Brooklyn. First I lived in an apartment, 83rd Street, then my husband, we had a country place, we sold that and we bought the house here in 8, 80th Street. That's where we lived until ( she clears her throat ) we sold that. We went to 19th Avenue. This was always around here.

ALLEE: And it was not built up. There were lots of empty lots?

GERMI: Over here they were all empty. They were just the old houses. This was new. The mother and her mother and her aunt, they bought this new, these were new houses.

ALLEE: Do you remember what year that was, about what year that was?

GERMI: What year? Twenty-two years ago. And then when I was, I came from the country. No, I used to come and

go. They were building the other houses, next to these four houses. I remember we had a little dog, Nellie. She used to go, she wouldn't go in the back, she had to go over there and pass water over there, in the empty lot. She wouldn't come outside, she wouldn't, unless you had to bring her outside here on the dirt. That's all I can remember. ( she clears her throat )

ALLEE: You said you had a country place?

GERMI: Yeah, Long Island.

SUSAN: Jersey, also.

GERMI: You remember that was Cherokee Avenue where I was living, and Mooney Pond on the other side. We had like eighty-five feet, a house and one hundred and twenty-five feet going to the other side of the Mooney Pond. And we lived there about eight years. But we had the place more than eight years though. 'Cause they were little. ( referring to her grandchildren )

ALLEE: And when you were always living around here, um, what was it you liked about this particular area?

GERMI: Well, my children live here, I lived up there, my

children were always like to live around here.

SUSAN: When you were younger, and . . .

GERMI: When I was younger I had children, I used to go to work, Granpa was sick. And I was living there, up that nurse, the four family house. I went to work. And your mother was still going to school and Auntie Norma was going to school. Then when they all started work I retired, yeah.

SUSAN: No, but when you moved to this neighborhood, what was the community like? Were there basically Italian people?

GERMI: It was a lot of Italian people, I mean, we settled here. 'Cause Uncle Busty was living on Bay 16th. That's how we got here. You, you don't remember Uncle Busty, do you? He lived on, he was the first one who bought that house there. Then my oldest brother bought here on 81st Street, between 17 and 16. So we all settled here. That's why I was here.

ALLEE: And there were a lot of Italians here?

GERMI: Yeah, a lot of Italians.

ALLEE: Were there other kinds of people here, too?

GERMI: Oh, yeah, you'll find Germans, you'll find all kind of people. I remember I lived on 81st Street, right across the street, there were Italians, down further there were Germans. And then along side of me there were Irish. All different people, yeah. I remember there used to be a moving man there, right on 81st Street. Now it's all built, all new homes there. He had a lot of lots. He had empty, he had trucks, you know, he used to do moving man. They had a lot of property there. It's all built. And right after him there was another Italian man that was a chicken market. It's all built, all new homes. I remember I used to go and buy my chickens there. ( she laughs )  
That's a long time ago. I'm too old now.

ALLEE: And you became a citizen?

GERMI: Yes, my husband first became a citizen. ( she clears her throat ) He was in business, he had to be in. After that, I went too. I don't know, you people don't know. The people that weren't citizens, they had to go and register. Every year they had to go and register. So I didn't like that idea because I was

here so long. So I went and I got my citizen papers.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

ALLEE: Beginning of side two, interview with Josephine Germi.

I was asking, what did you have to do to become a citizen?

GERMI: Become a citizen? Well, it wasn't too hard for me because I had been here a long time. They just go, they ask you questions, and then all you do is raise up your hand and you're a citizen. lot of people in the room. Everybody lift up their hands, and they made you become a citizen, that's all. A lot of people have to go through a lot, not before a year, they can't become citizens. But I got, uh, right away. I went there, they asked me questions, I knew the questions, I had been to school. They asked me questions about school. All I had to do is raise my hand and I was a citizen. That's all.

ALLEE: Did they want to know if you could read and write?

GERMI: Oh, yes, yes, they had, you have to know everything. All the questions they ask you, you have to know how

to answer them, if you don't know how.

ALLEE: Were they questions about American history, those kinds of things?

GERMI: No, no, but they ask you questions if you went to school, how long you're here and all those questions, so you have to know how to answer them. It was easy for me. It wasn't too hard.

ALLEE: Were you glad to be a citizen?

GERMI: Yeah. Well, I never thought of becoming a citizen. I could have, but being that my husband was a citizen, then I went, too. And through my husband I got it right away. I didn't have to wait a whole year, yeah.  
( she clears her throat )

ALLEE: There was one thing I forgot to ask. Uh, when you, when you first came here, or even the second time, uh, did you see the Statue of Liberty?

GERMI: Oh, yes, oh, of course, it's right there, everybody sees that. Even when you go to Staten Island you could see the Statue of Liberty.

ALLEE: Oh, yes, but when you first saw it did you have any

thoughts about it?

GERMI: No.

ALLEE: Did you know what it was?

GERMI: Well, you know what they say, it's the Statue of Liberty, they tell you, the people tell you what that is, you know. So, you know, you just look and that's all.

ALLEE: Did you remember what you were thinking when you first saw the harbor of the whole city with the Statue of Liberty in it?

GERMI: No, I didn't think of anything. I was just going with my brother, my father, that's all. You know, especially a little girl, you don't know, eight years old, you don't think of anything. You just follow them.

ALLEE: And when you came, when you were fourteen, did you have any kind of feelings that time, since you'd been here before when you came into the harbor?

GERMI: Well, I was happy to come back. I had all my friends. I had gone and left my friends. Yeah, they were all

happy to see me again, you know, yeah.

SUSAN: Tell them what it was like sleeping on the ship when you came over.

GERMI: Oh, the ship, we used to sleep one bottom and one on the top, you know. I always slept on the top 'cause the people throw up on the boat. It's horrible. So I used to climb and i used to sit or sleep always on top. So the people always used to say to me, "You're a climber." So I says, "Well, I have to, I don't want nobody to throw up on me." And it was, it wasn't so clean, you know. The first time was terrible. Even the bathrooms were terrible.

SUSAN: What about the fact that someone was supposed to take care of you. Tell them about that. Because your father slept separately.

GERMI: Once, that was when I was eight years old, I, I was throwing up, you know, my brother and I, we threw up all the time. So one night my father took me down with him with the men. We had clothes on. I was a little girl. And I slept with my father. Just one night, that's all.

ALLEE: And the rest of the time you were by yourself?

GERMI: By myself. See we had, supposed to, one woman was supposed to take care of me. My father knew this woman. But we never saw her. She must have been sick all the time. And my father never saw her.

ALLEE: So you were by yourself.

GERMI: 'Cause on the boat everybody gets sick. They threw up and, I don't know who she was, but my husband, my father never saw her.

ALLEE: So you slept by yourself.

GERMI: All by myself, yeah, everybody sleeps one here, one up and one down.

ALLEE: But you were not in the same room with your father and brother. You were in a different room.

GERMI: No, no, there was a different section.

ALLEE: Did you meet any women there, when you were by yourself?

GERMI: There was all women. I talked to them, that's all. And then I had to do everything by myself. And in the

morning, I remember the second time, we had a young man. He had been here. And he used to come and bring me, when the weather was bad, he wouldn't let my father come down. He used to bring me stuff to eat down there, yeah, I remember that.

ALLEE: And, but you were feeling, uh, sick a lot of the time. You were seasick.

GERMI: Yeah, everybody gets seasick. So when you're seasick you can't even go upstairs. Yeah. But this young man used to bring me to eat. He was a very nice young, my father couldn't, 'cause sometimes the boat was so bad the water used to come on deck.

ALLEE: Did he work on the boat or was he another passenger, the young man?

GERMI: He was on the boat with the men. But when the water used to come on deck, my father couldn't make it, he was an old man. So he used to bring me food downstairs to eat, yeah.

SUSAN: Okay, when you came through Ellis Island, did they give you a chance to shower?

GERMI: I would never shower there, I used to see people

shower there. I wouldn't go there. When I would go home, I would shower at home.

SUSAN: But they told people they could if they wanted to.

GERMI: Yeah, you see the people take, they give showers, you go in there you see all women getting undressed to get in the showers. I wouldn't do that. I mean, I went home, I showered, especially the second time. I was fourteen years old. You think I was gonna go there with the women?

SUSAN: But did most of the people?

GERMI: Not American people. No, they were all different nationalities.

SUSAN: No, but did most of the people go through the showers and all that after the journey?

GERMI: Of course, you, the bathroom, you see all the people taking showers. I mean, the men on one side and women on another side. It wasn't like today, the boat and all that, it was different. It was clean, you know.

ALLEE: When you went back to Italy, um, what was, was that, what was the boat ride like then?

GERMI: Well, it wasn't as bad as when I came here the 16 days. Twelve days going and then we got off at Naples. And from Naples, a one-night ride, we went the express, and they used to bring us to Palermo. And then my brother or, not my brother, I had no brother, my, my brother-in-law picked us up from Palermo and took us to the town.

ALLEE: Did they have, uh, in Naples or in Palermo, any people, did you have to sign any papers or answer any questions or anything like that?

GERMI: They just examined you, if your eyes are bad you can't get out, that's all. In Naples we went with the express and there were all soldiers in the boat, all soldiers. We didn't have a place to sleep in. We had to stay on deck. But this young man that was with us he went around, there was another young girl, he went all around talking to the captain or what, and they got a bed for me and otherwise we had to stay on deck, all soldiers. All sleeping on the boat. They were going like that to another town. And that's the only thing I can remember.

ALLEE: When you got back home, were your friends really

interested in America? Did they want you to tell them about it?

GERMI: Where, in Italy?

ALLEE: In Italy.

GERMI: I had one friend, next door. She had a boyfriend here and she wanted to come, but they wouldn't let her come. She was the only daughter and one son that was over here. And this boy here got hurt, and they amputated his leg. And when they came here he went back. And then they were very, they were mother and father, all crying about the son. But I, I saw him here, but he went back to Italy. That's all, there were just a sister and a brother. They wouldn't let her come here. She wanted to. Her boyfriend was here. But then he, when they came here I spoke to the boyfriend. He was going back to get married, yeah.

ALLEE: And he went back and married her?

GERMI: I was here in America and her boyfriend was here. He was going back to Italy to get married. No, he never came back.

SUSAN: Did he marry her?

GERMI: Yeah, he married her. She used to write to me. He married her. They were very happy.

SUSAN: And what year did you get married?

GERMI: What year I got married? 1919. Auntie Rose was born 1920. Anything else?

ALLEE: I don't think so. ( Mrs. Germi laughs ) Can you think of anything else? ( Mrs. Germi laughs ) No, I think this has been very good, very interesting, and it will be very useful to us.

GERMI: Yeah.

ALLEE: This concludes the interview with Josephine Germi. The time is now 11 o'clock AM.