

KECK-008

FELICE TALDONE

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AGE 18

PASSAGE ON "THE CONTE ROSSO"

APPEL: This is Willa Appel, and I'm speaking with Felice Taldone on Friday, January 25, 1985. We're starting the interview at 12:45, and we're about to talk with Mr. Felice Taldone, who came from Italy in 1924. Okay, Felice, you were, let's start with where you were born and what year you were born in.

TALDONE: I was born in the province of Bari, uh, a town named Giovinazzo, in 1906, January 8th. And naturally I grew up to about seventeen years old, and my mother (?). I lost my father in this country. I want to come here, to see where my was buried.

APPEL: What was life like, what was it like in Giovinazzo?

TALDONE: Uh, in Giovinazzo, in a way it wasn't that bad for us because we had something to live on. We had property and we lived on, on the crop that we used to make; olives, almonds and vegetables for ourselves, which we used to sell wholesale to other salespeople. And that was our living, and we used to cultivate our own ground, used to hire men to support all these work that had to be done, and what we could do ourselves we did ourselves. Naturally, it wasn't a good thing for me for sure because I was grown older as a young boy and my mother said, "Why stay here and work so hard on your property? Sometimes we don't get no crop." And what happens, you gotta wait till the following year. We're always in the same boat. You can't advance of anything. You're young. Your father died. I'm married and you go over there and see what you could do, maybe pick up where your father left off. So I came here, I left Naples October 12, 1924. And I got here October the, uh, 24, 28, somewhere around there, I don't remember exactly, but it was before November. So naturally, when I came here with the intention of my mother had a brother that was here when my father was here, and he lived a certain spot in Brooklyn. My mother corresponded with her brother and my uncle

lived on 47, Brooklyn. So I came with that intention on a boat, that's where I headed, that direction, that, that was okay with immigration. Immigration, uh, I was okay. They permit to come here because Italy was allowed I think two thousand people at the time a year, per year, to go to the United States. So I was selected on a quota to come out and I lucky, I came out, so that was intention, come here and advance life for it's maybe better, maybe worse, but I had to try. So I tried, I left Naples then and I got here October late, and, oh, before that, on the ship now, I'm making telegram to my uncle that I'm coming, and come pick me up. There was no such thing as 47, Brooklyn. Not a telegram, nothing. Not a telegram, nothing. So finally, I was legally accepted to come to this country, I could never go back unless I don't want to stay here. So naturally, when I got to the Ellis Island, we got off, for me, it was in a dream, I don't know what it was. I see these nuns because they had to leave me there, see if I wouldn't have stayed here, I wouldn't find my uncle. For my uncle I stay here. So it was like a dream with these nuns, stay, stayed two days, I think, or three. Not recall the right amount of days. You ate and slept there, wait

for somebody to pick me up. Somehow, there was no way. Now, before I left Italy, one uncle of mine, he was here before, he want to come again. He said, "Tell y brother to call me, I want to come back there again." He gave me an envelope to see an agent in, on Grand Street, Brooklyn, to make papers and tell my brother, my uncle said, "Tell my brother that here's the address, go to this agent, and you come here." So before they say, "You want to go to Italy, or you want to stay here." Somehow I put my hand in my pocket, that my uncle in Italy said, "Go there with this envelope, this is the address of the agency there, and see what he, they could do." And that letter says, "So, so on Mott Street, no, Grand Street, so-so." Somehow the military authority looked up the names and they called this man. This man said, "Sure, I knew your, I knew his father, uh, I know his uncle. I'll contact, come pick me up." Sure enough, this man call my uncle, he says, "Hey, your nephew is here, your sister's son, you better go and get him, he's there three days." So finally, I was crying, of course, and in fact another boy was crying like me, and he couldn't get off, he said, "I'm gonna go home." He go back home. But I stay, so finally the nuns treat me,

oh, yes, before I explain that, from in the, in the Ellis Island, what do you call that island . . .

APPEL: Ellis Island?

TALDONE: Ellis Island. I left my mother, you cry for your mother all the time, so I wrote a letter to my mother from in the Ellis Island. Told my mother that I got off, I got a job, I was in Ellis Island crying. And it make my mother strong . . .

APPEL: You didn't want to make her worry.

TALDONE: So, anyway, my uncle came pick me up, and I remember in the dark somewhere, Wall Street, or somewhere downtown, we went down a hole, what was it, the subway. Went down to the subway for me it was in heaven. I don't know, because it was good one way. I was in America, and the other way I was crying. So we go to the subway, and I went to his house. I got to his house, so my uncle had two uncles there. My uncle said, "Feli, now you're all right, you're here, we're here." Okay, the first night, went to sleep, and he had no room. He had a little room there but he had no blankets, for temporarily, because he wasn't warned that I was coming. He didn't know. And believe it or

not, he, he had horses, and I'm telling you the story just the way, how tough it was, this uncle of mine wasn't that rich then, he had no blankets temporarily for that night. He put the horse that he, the blanket they put on horse at night, he had two horse and wagon that, uh, stunk, excuse my expression, that blanket. Couldn't sleep. Well, the next day he went and bought a blanket, bought me another suit. I had a suit but he bought another suit. And I started to get along. Now from then on, things weren't easy. My uncle was an ice man. And he said, "Come here, come on, help me, naturally I got no job, I got nobody to go, I need help for the ice, deliver ice, I couldn't speak English, just deliver there, go. So what happened now, I didn't like ice, to be ice man, he wanted to give me a route for nothing, I said I don't want nothing. I'm young, I want do something on my own. So finally, I got a hold of some plaster contractors, and went to him, said I want to learn the trade. He said, "All right." I said, he said, "All right." So I got my tools, bought tools, my uncle gave me a few dollars, bought tools, and got on the job, got on the job. And instead of make, teach me how to plaster, he makes me shovel sand, sift sand, because at the time

the sand for plaster didn't come sift. We had to sift ourselves through screen wire sheet, and you sifted, and you sift. One day, two days, three days, I said, "Mr. John, I don't like this. I don't want to get paid. If I want to get paid, I could get paid and be a laborer. I want to learn to plaster." "Yes, yes, yes, yes." Still the same. I don't want nothing. I figure my uncle's gonna feed me. And somehow, some day I'll pay him back. Finally three, four days I, he say, "All right. Take your tools, go to work." For three months, without getting paid nothing on my own. So I'm lucky my uncle fed me till I got on my feet. And that's how I learned how to plaster. After that, learned how to plaster, things were still rough. Of course, you're still young, you're not a mechanic exactly. After three months for nothing at all, he gives me six dollars a day. That wasn't bad. And then on about three, four months later, I left that job, this is a true story, left that job and went to another boss because work was for them, too much for them during the summer, and they need new helpers, they need new plasterers. I got another job, and this is the God's truth. Got another job with another guy, says come with me, I'll take you to different boss,

get more money. Got that job, got fourteen dollars a day. Got three days, the guy hadn't, the boss didn't have no chance to see how good you were working, as long as the work was done. Thought it was my partner used to do the work. So finally he come, and he sees me work, he says, "Come here, young fellow. Get off."

I got off. Now make three pay, I work three days. He said, "I don't want to have nothing to do with the union." I didn't even belong to the union. He thought I belong to the union. Nothing to do with the union. "Here's forty-two dollars, goodbye." I got off, "Goodbye." Well, I go plaster because I still don't know after a couple of months. I went back to same guy that I left off, didn't want to pay me, you know, tell him I developed little more, in three days.

I developed so much, have no idea. So I deserve more. Instead of six, uh, for nothing, he gave me six or seven dollars and (?). I left, then he said, "Okay, if you have a union card, you work, I see what I can do on the price because you're not a mechanic."

Finally, I started to get a little better, and he gives me I think seven or eight or ten dollars a day, still under wage. But I didn't care, all I wanted, to be a plasterer.

APPEL: Felice, if we can just, before we talk about your experiences in America, if we can go back, and talk a little bit about . . .

TALDONE: Ellis Island

APPEL: . . . and going to Ellis Island, and how you got through . . .

TALDONE: Oh.

APPEL: . . . and decided to go.

TALDONE: Okay. This . . .

APPEL: Let's go back a few steps . . .

TALDONE: Right.

APPEL: Now, you said that your father had gone to Ellis Island. He had come to America, rather, before you . . .

TALDONE: Right. My father came here probably, I don't know exactly because he died in 1909 and he was here a couple of times. Uh, must have been here 1903, '04. Then he died 1909. And I was lost because I couldn't find nobody when I came here, was the worst part of it

because I wanted to get married, I wanted my own wife,
couldn't find . . .

APPEL: So you decided, your father died in 1909.

TALDONE: Right.

APPEL: And then you decided around 1924 . . .

TALDONE: Right. Nineteen years later, when I came here . . .

APPEL: A few years later, you decided to come here.

TALDONE: That's right. When I came here, right.

APPEL: And you were saying that you decided to come because
farming was so difficult?

TALDONE: Right, right. Farming was difficult, difficult to
live. And I was young. I just want to see what
America is, for the first place. My father was here,
I want to see where my father put his footstep.

APPEL: Where he had, uh . . .

TALDONE: In fact, I walked where he walked. Mulberry Street,
Essex Street, uh, Canal Street, because all Italians
then, no matter from where, they all land on Mulberry
Street, and Essex Street, and Delancey Street, so far.

APPEL: Did you . . .

TALDONE: So I went to walk to, in the same place, and every step I put there, I used to say I bet my father stepped here, too.

APPEL: Did you know other young people from Giovinazzo who were going to America at that time?

TALDONE: I came alone.

APPEL: You were alone.

TALDONE: All alone, no other friends because uh, was on quota, not everybody could go, couldn't get friends together, get a pass and, we all go in a group. I came as a, as on quota to whatever, two thousand people a year from Italy. They were allowed to come to enter this country by legal permission, government with government. And I was the lucky one to come out.

APPEL: How did you get the money to go? How did you . . .

TALDONE: Well . . .

APPEL: . . . make the arrangements to go?

TALDONE: Well, the money we didn't have. We didn't have that

much, but we had money. We didn't have to borrow, because was good enough. But, was tough then to borrow. If you don't get no crop next year, you're down. And my mother had, uh, eight, nine children then. And naturally you gotta worry for the next day or next year. But somehow we didn't have it that rough, but was rough enough, when you have a family. And then again, when I got here, I was telling you, at Ellis Island, for three days on that island, I slept there, I ate there for three days with the nun, crying, and I couldn't find my way out until I got that envelope out of my pocket, with the address of this man, that he was here.

APPEL: Well, before you got to Ellis Island, you left from the Port of Naples.

TALDONE: Right. Port of Naples, right.

APPEL: And could you tell me a little bit about what it was like to travel across the ocean, or to come to Ellis Island.

TALDONE: Oh, very good, that remind me of something. Talk about cross the ocean. I left Naples, Naples, 19. October 12, for sure. Now at that time, the ship was

named Conte Rosso. There were two ships, Conte Rosso and Conte Verde. Rosso and Verde, green and red. Now, other time, you had to go and get your food from the kitchen, a line like soldiers. That was number one. Number two, now, naturally you want to go to bed, you excuse my expression, and what happens, you go to bathroom in the back of the ship. There was no toilet seat to sit on, no toilet bowl. There was little hold on the deck there and you stay with your pants down. One wave smack the back of the ship and all the water and all the balance I lost, I'm going (?) about five yards away. Really, this is the God's truth. I never want to forget that. Was scary, I don't mean maybe. There was nowhere to hold. Just the whole back of the ship, four, five holes. You just hold yourself on your leg, and put your pants down. The waves were ocean waves, you know, smack underneath. Not only got wet, big waves went like this, pants went like this, flying off. And that was tough. And the most tough, the food wasn't that good.

APPEL: What did you eat?

TALDONE: Uh, minestrone, they call minestrone. Eh, steak may be doggie meat, I don't know what it was. Believe me,

an axe wouldn't even cut it. And finally, you don't care about those things. All you want is to go to America.

APPEL: Where did you sleep?

TALDONE: To my uncle.

APPEL: No, no. Oh, the ship, where did you sleep?

TALDONE: Oh, in the cabin. There were four, four to, four, four people. One down, one up, one down, one up, both sides. But small cabin, very small.

APPEL: Did you sleep in hammocks, or actually . . .

TALDONE: Actually, a bed.

APPEL: Actually, a bed.

TALDONE: Two sticks, eh, iron with hammock, hammock, right, that's right. Right, that you could swing, right. One up, one down. The down one there was no swing, you were steady stay. You had one you could swing if you want.

APPEL: And were you on top or on bottom?

TALDONE: I was on top. I don't want to be on the bottom, and

there was another guy didn't say nothing, and I was on top. We were all young too, all very young, in fact.

But the food, it was bad. And the trip, forget about it. Lucky thing that I had been on the water before I, because Giovinazzo is on the water, I been night time on the water in the boats, because one of the, uh, fish men had a boat. We knew him, my father know him very well, and he said take, send your son with me and he come fishing, too, we split what profit there is with the helpers. So I don't go for the profit, I wanted to be a sailor instead of being a soldier. So, in order to be a sailor you gotta have a certain book that you, you got all the experience to travel on the boat, to travel at sea. Don't need any help, on any ship, any way. You be a sailor, so . . .

APPEL: So that meant that . . .

TALDONE: That's when you get big, see. You, yeah, you . . .

APPEL: So that meant that being on the ship was not really such a new experience.

TALDONE: Wasn't that bad. Wasn't that bad. Except that toilet bowl. That was bad.

APPEL: Sorry, I didn't hear you.

TALDONE: Except that bathroom.

APPEL: Oh, the bathroom.

TALDONE: That was too much.

APPEL: How long was the passage?

TALDONE: How long what?

APPEL: How long did it take to get to America?

TALDONE: Yes, I left October the 12th. I must, uh, it took fourteen days, three, uh, thirteen or fourteen days. After was the 23rd. Had to be more. Thirteen days. ON the fourteenth day, we got off. That's when I land in Ellis Island. That's when . . .

APPEL: Do you have any memories of your first impressions when you saw Ellis Island?

TALDONE: When I first impression, when I got there, tell you the God's truth, you in a dream. It's like in heaven. You don't know what it is. You so happy that in America and yet the, no one to take you. That was scary, happy, scared. Very happy, scared, frightened.

And I didn't care because was determined I want to be here. But otherwise, and the nuns, they took care of me so nice like I was their brother, their son, and I don't know. And what I ate, I don't even know what I ate, if I ate or not.

APPEL: Do you remember where you stayed on Ellis Island?
Where you slept?

TALDONE: Well, it wasn't at the island, but seems like a little convent (?) nuns there, I really don't know. If I go there now probably I remember. Never went there to see what it look like. We were there to see the Statue of Liberty but I never knew to see what, where they took me off the ship. I landed this little convent on the island.

APPEL: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

TALDONE: Yeah. We went, go ahead.

APPEL: When you . . .

TALDONE: No, no.

APPEL: When you first arrived.

TALDONE: When I first arrived, all I remember, from the ship,

the lights that I saw on the bridges at nighttime, was early in the night. We couldn't come to port from Ellis Island, before Ellis Island. Actually those lights you see from the bridges, whatever, they were beautiful. Were so beautiful, I didn't know where to go after I got there. Really, was bad, till you got there. After you get off and you get, uh, what do you call, established where you gotta go, then there is beautiful country, it is, still is. But for that time, was awfully bad, scary. Because you don't have no mother no more, you're taken off from the mother and father. You're traveling on your own. You don't know that much, seventeen years old, seventeen, eighteen, you're a child. You don't know nothing. And that's all I could remember. And the nuns, I can still see those winged hats they used to carry. "Felice, Felice." They spoke Italian, too. I got to eat, or sleep, and that's all I remember. It wasn't that good, was just frightened, but determined not to go back to Italy.

APPEL: Why were you so determined not to go back to Italy?

TALDONE: Because you hear so much, you used to hear so much in Italy, you make money, and it's a free country, you

find everything, and, uh, you can make a fortune if you want to work. If you want to really work you make . . .

APPEL: To help your mother.

TALDONE: Huh?

APPEL: Your main thing was, you wanted to come here so your mother could be well off. You helped her . . .

TALDONE: No, well, that's well off, if you make well off. Otherwise . . .

MRS. TALDONE: Her second husband . . .

TALDONE: Right, but everybody got intention. My intention was to come see my father . . .

MRS. TALDONE: You also want to take care of your mother.

TALDONE: Yes, of course you want to take care of your mother, every child wants to take care of their parents. No doubt about it.

MRS. TALDONE: Because I know he used to say that all the time.

TALDONE: Oh, that's a different, so in the meantime, when I got here I start to work, but the main thing is what you

go through before you put your foot on this land. Before you establish where you gotta go. It's an awful thing. For anybody who was never off their home, underneath the mother's skirt.

APPEL: Felice, if I can ask you another question.

TALDONE: Sure.

APPEL: When you decided to come to America, you said that your mother had been corresponding to her brother who was here.

TALDONE: Right.

TALDONE: Did she write a letter to say that you were coming? Do you recall?

TALDONE: She didn't. She had the address only. She had just the address. They didn't keep correspondence, because the two brothers, she had two brothers. Two of them didn't read and write. That's another problem why there was no correspondence.

APPEL: Uh-huh.

TALDONE: And I only remember when she, when my mother got a mail from my father, from my, my yeah, my father and

my uncles. 47th. That must be a number, but just a number, 47, Brooklyn. That must be the number of house. Not, or even street. That's all she, well, that's all she gave me, that's how I came here. Surprised that immigration people, just 47, Brooklyn.

They don't know either, they let it go. You know, they just let the pass g. Okay, the passport, because it was legally accepted by quota, to come here. They couldn't say no.

APPEL: And when you got to Ellis Island you, did you expect your uncle to be there?

TALDONE: I, of course, I expect, but my uncle didn't know nothing. I expect my uncle, I had two uncles, and an aunt. And my mother says two. But nobody knew nothing because they didn't keep correspondence that often. After my father died here for probably, was finished the correspondence between the family. So naturally was rough for me to find out how to get there if it wasn't for one other uncle from Italy give me that envelope to go see, to recommend somebody, to make papers for him to come here. I gave 'em the envelope, this was the one that knew my father, knew my family, from Giovinazzo, was named Tony DiMateri.

And he had an office, uh, like for people in Italy used to send money and then if they pay him back, used to send things for us, correspondence, word from Italy, over here. And he knew my father, knew my family very well. So, but otherwise that was it.

APPEL: So you were on Ellis Island for two or three days.

TALDONE: Three days, yeah.

APPEL: And during that time you said the nuns were helping.

TALDONE: They had to feed me because I don't know where to go, couldn't talk English, don't know anything.

APPEL: And the immigration authorities, did they help you? Did they . . .

TALDONE: No, no. Was up to, the hands of the nuns. The immigration authorities have nothing to do, once you put a foot on land, they have nothing else to do. It's up to, where you landed, the immigration papers that you have. Either you go back to Italy or you find who's going to take you. But somebody had to take you. Go back, yes. But I learned, uh, prob-, I don't know, that I don't know if I say I wanted to get off, "Where you goin'?" Another young man like me, he

went back to Italy, he started to cry like I cried, he said, "I'll go back," and back home he went. Because his parents weren't there, his relatives rather. Not parents, his relatives weren't there to receive him, that's all. Have anything else to remember . . .

APPEL: Well, I'd like to know whether your ideas of what America was like were really like what you discovered America to be like.

TALDONE: It's out of this world, I mean, Giovanazzo's not a small town, but no comparison when you land in New York, you land in heaven. That's a land for everybody and everything.

APPEL: Did anything in particular really strike you . . .

TALDONE: Yeah.

APPEL: . . . as special?

TALDONE: Yeah. What struck me nice, a lot of young girls, a lot of young boys, Coney Island, trolley car, with a running board, you hop on it. If the conductor come and get the nickel, you get off before he gets the nickel. (she laughs) It's the truth.

APPEL: Well, that's very interesting.

TALDONE: Very true.

APPEL: Thank you for talking to us.

TALDONE: And the, really loved Coney Island. Start to work, start to feel nice, my family, my parents over here, my uncles, thought they would lead me better. And then I started going to dance halls, and I loved dance, and I kept dancing. Dancing, I danced my head off till I got married at thirty-two-and-a-half. I wasn't thirty-three. Loved dance. I still do.

APPEL: Well, that's, that's very interesting.

TALDONE: Yeah.

APPEL: Very interesting to hear about someone how . . .

TALDONE: Well, most important thing . . .

APPEL: . . . experienced.

TALDONE: Go see where my father go walk, was best thing for me. I married to her yet, and I said, "Let's go see where my father is." The whole page, Gioseppe Taldone, 1909, December 27. Not even, I didn't find my father,

but turn the page, and all the whole book was empty. There was no people dead at the time in Calvary. Now, it's full up. It's all full. It is bad to hear, but what you gonna do. But this country is a beautiful country. This country is opportunity for anybody that want it. They want to take it, they take it. In fact, I got married with her, start to work, pay the rent, raise the nine children, one by one, he's the last one. And, uh, always (?), that's why I praise this country. There's a chance for anybody, there's opportunity for anyone to make a dollar if they go after. They don't go after, the charity, no, then nobody. You starve to death because you worry that they not give me nothing. You gotta earn it. You earn, it's there. For everybody, not one. And it was there fore me, too. You earn, it's there. For everybody, not one. And it was there for me, too. I dug and dug, dug so much, uh, I feel for my uncle, he was the ice man. He want to be the ice man, be the ice man. "I give you the route . . ." I don't want it. I was meant another trade, I'm young, I want to learn. Something I'll find for the rest of my life. In fact, up till today I still find that is good. I still could use if I want. I teach all my children

what to do, and I did. Then I became a contractor, and these children can say nothing, give 'em a summer home, bought them boats, bikes, you name it, they had everything. Bought a house in the city, then bought a house in the country, built a new one there. All these children. There was nothing missing. Seven boys and two girls we have. Nobody could say anything. I gave all. Alone, alone. No one to give me the glass of water. I mean glass of water, if you die, you die. No one.

APPEL: This is the end of the first side of the tape.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

APPEL: This is the beginning of side two of the interview with Felice Taldone. You were just remembering a little bit more about the passage, the ship travel coming to America. You were saying that it was very rough.

APPEL: Well, the water was very, very rough and the ships are very small. Of course, now the ships are so big. When there's waves, the ships, before one leaves, a wave, the other one is on. But before you're on top

of one wave, going up and down like loop-do-loop, Coney Island loop-do-loop, and everybody's throwing up. And I mean throwing up. I was used to the ocean and still my stomach reached the back and didn't want to go up no more, because I had part of the, it's like acid, uh, on top of the waters, agida . . .

APPEL: (?)

TALDONE: Yeah, and want to throw up. So finally, but was rough, was rough. I don't think I ate as good as you think, no. as much as I loved water, but the water I was in in Govenatzo in the Mediterranean, (?0 sea we have in Giovanazzo. It ain't the same waters as the Atlantic Ocean. When we passed Gibraltar it got dark, say, where are we? Thought it was closing in, such a big size, this, and the ship goes through, just two ship fit, one goes, one comes. And then the two ships, when they meet one another, one goes, one comes. One comes from Italy, one goes to Italy. They meet and they blow the horn (makes horn sound). That's the . . .

APPEL: Were you friendly with any of the other people who were travelling?

TALDONE: No, no. Was all strangers. There is no friends from the same town because this is a, by the time the immigration was very tight. Now, I don't know now, it's probably just as tight, but being that we're American citizen now, seems like we're all friends. Believe me, that's what it is. In fact, we go, went to Italy, my wife, she was born here, they thought she was born here, all friends. So many years later's different. But that time, was rough.

APPEL: Do you remember what you felt when you first saw land when you arrived?

TALDONE: The thrill I can't express. When you put your foot on the Ellis Island, even Ellis Island, though I was crying because I had nobody to pick me up. But the thrill you were there and the impression when I saw the lights at nighttime, very early morning that we got, couldn't go on land. (he coughs) Excuse me. Until it gets a little lighter. Those lights on the bridge you see from far away, oh, are beautiful. I didn't know how hard I was gonna work after, but was beautiful.

APPEL: Did you think you would go back to Italy?

TALDONE: Any time, but not to stay.

APPEL: You knew you had come to America for good?

TALDONE: Oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah, I came here to really, no intentions to go back. Not because, I'll go back, millions of times, because you can't, can never forget your native land. We didn't have it rough in my house, believe me, because we were self-supported. We lived on our own property. We don't work for nobody, we used to hire people to work for us, to pick the crop. Olives or almonds. To cultivate the ground we had people, we had mules, or cow, to plow the ground around the trees. Then we used to have a man to grate around the trees because the plow don't do the whole thing around the trees. Used to hire men, and when we picked the olives we used to have big tanks of oil. If we didn't get the price we used to save because we didn't need the dollar right there. Thank God my stepfather and my family had credit, had property. Once you got property you got credit. They give any amount of money to pay later when you sell your oil. So if you don't pay, they take your property away. That's how that goes. And, but it's rough. It was rough.

APPEL: Did any of your other brothers or sisters come to America?

TALDONE: No.

APPEL: Or were you the only one?

TALDONE: I'm the only one because, as I said before, my family wasn't in bad shape. I want to come here because I heard so much about America. Lot of people used to come here, earn some money, go back to Italy, which my father came here twice. He came to this country and left his property and his wife, that's my mother. Used to hire the people to take care of her. He, was first time, bought another piece of property, as much as he had. And then he came back again. Second time, didn't succeed, so that was that. But at the same time I'm trying to say we didn't have it hard, but if you don't pick up a day, what do you call, a salary every week, every week you work for next year. And next year the crop burns out, you in a mess. You gotta live on credit because you got property, otherwise you starved. You could get credit, could get the money. Or you sell a piece of property, which my mother did when my father died. She sold a piece

of property. Because there was no one to support.
And, uh, but we still had more.

APPEL: You said your father died in 1909.

TALDONE: Right.

APPEL: When did your mother remarry?

TALDONE: Oh, I was six years old. I was born in 1906. I was six years old. In 1909 I was three years old, but then my mother married later on. And she had many more children. Married to a nice man, a beautiful man. There is no difference between father, no father, didn't know my father. And he used to say, in fact, my mother said to me, she didn't want to get married. But happened to be somebody in the family on her sister's side that his wife died and my mother said, "I don't want to get married because I don't want my children being mistreated. So she married and she said that when she met this, that father of mine, I was six years old. He sat down to mother's house and we were running around. She said I ran on to my stepfather, that was going to be my father. On his legs, I went, I took to him like as if I knew him. Didn't know any other father. And she said, said if

you, if I didn't do that, my mother wouldn't have married, she was scared to marry again. That's what she told me, the God's truth. And he happened to be a very good man he carried the family, and he had property also.

APPEL: So you . . .

TALDONE: So when came here really to change, uh, change not only trade, luck. Everyone who comes from America used to say "the money, you find money over there." I came to find lucky, I didn't find nothing. Otherwise I was gonna say its the truth. Then I find out that you gotta dig. If you don't work, if you work, it's a beautiful country. Nobody's gonna give you nothing unless you earn it.

APPEL: It sounds like one of the main reasons you came was the spirit of adventure.

TALDONE: The spirit of, different country, yes. Because I have a young life, different future. Whereas money was, uh, growing up, was too well known in Italy that's America, America.

APPEL: Wasn't it difficult to leave your family behind?

TALDONE: Well, of course. When you're young, that young, seventeen years old, eighteen, still a baby. I mean, you leave your mother, you cry. You gotta cry. I cry now that she's dead. And I went three times in Italy. Once without her, twice, no, twice or three times. Yeah, three times. In 1931 I went the first time. 1976 and 1977.

TALDONE: '66 and '77?

APPEL: '76, yeah. And I still like this country, I like Italy, where I come from, Govenatzo, is not a bad town. Really, we have everything. But not what we got here. That's for sure. And I don't care what part of the world they come from, they cannot change this country for any others. If you want to work, there's work for everybody. They can't tell me there's no work. You want to work, you find it. Believe me, there is. When I came here, uh, know nothing, I didn't want to be ice man, even went to whitewash cellar. My uncle said somebody, a customer of his, wants to whitewash his collar. I didn't know that whitewash cellar, never whitewash cellar before. You work, that's work. And if you want to work, it's no disgrace. Disgrace when you steal, you rob. No,

never stole a nickel from nobody. I earned it. And thank God, got me all the health I needed. I had it and I still have it. I don't feel nothing, she could tell me, never sick in a day, no. And my sons could tell you, too. Vinny, you're not gonna grow much taller. You're pretty tall now.

APPEL: (?)

TALDONE: Sit down. I'm just afraid you're gonna get tired!

MRS. TALDONE: I was gonna take the other chair but he didn't want it, want to.

TALDONE: Okay. You look good. Miss you.

SOUND ENGINEER: Okay, say that again, okay?

TALDONE: I got it rough when I got to Naples because in Naples I didn't know where the, heck, excuse me, the expression (?) to go, where to find the Port. I happened to find another one that my mother gave me the address, said go, Mr. So-and-so's got a hotel, so-and-so certain place. I don't know, I mean, how many keys I touched, I got there. Then they direct me where to go and not to go. Finally, I got there.

APPEL: How did you get to Naples?

TALDONE: Went by train. By train go to Naples. But to find the, where the ship is, the port, I didn't know, they had to take me. But how to get there. Somehow when you ask for certain name, they had a hotel there, and he had a son and he said, "Oh, I'll take you there." And he took me there. And no objection because was free to come here legally. I had no fear. But was scared, in fact they used to say, "They'll steal your clothes, they'll steal our jacket, they'll steal your wallet." I had always my hands in my pocket.

APPEL: Did you have any money with you when you came . . .

TALDONE: Yeah, yeah, not much, but enough. Enough. Cause Italian money, you come here, you don't need it anyway. I sent it back when I came here, yeah. I became really broke now.

APPEL: And how long were you in Naples before you got on board the ship?

TALDONE: Uh, I stayed overnight, overnight. My mother took me to Naples, she was pregnant. And I got her in 19, the 24, 25th, 27th, two days later she went back to

Govenatzo, she gave birth to my brother. My mother came like this to follow me to, she help herself in Naples, so we made it. (he laughs)

APPEL: And you spent one night in the hotel with your mother?

TALDONE: Yeah, with my mother. Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's how we got there. Was scary, was scary, frightened. It's a dream.

APPEL: What did your mother think of your coming to America?

TALDONE: Oh, well, I send money. Every month I used to send money, every month I send money, and never left her without it. Whether she needed or not, she said to me my stepfather, as soon as I got here, my uncle came in handy then. Soon as I got here, my uncle loaned me money and sent to my mother, which I wrote from Ellis Island to my mother that I got a job, six dollars a day. I had nothing, to give courage to my mother. So when I got here my uncle loaned me a thousand liras, I don't know what it was, I think it was fifty-four dollars, for a thousand lira, now you get fifteen hundred for one dollar. Then you need fifty-four dollars for one thousand lira. So he gave me a thousand lira and I send my mother said one, my

stepfather received the first money, he cried like a baby.

APPEL: It must have really helped them.

TALDONE: Well, no, it's the thrill. That it's only a stepson, and he thought as soon as he got there, he got the money. Of course, my mother gave me four thousand lira too, to come here. I had to pay back. Don't come here just for yourself, after all, she raised you. So I was raised good, carefully. We had everything. The worst part was the trip. I'll never forget that dream, fall on my feet, there was, there was no bathroom, bad. And everybody's crying, lot of, lot of friends, not friends, people that cried, like I did. It's so strange, you're gonna, people saw, never even saw my uncle. He didn't see me. I don't know where he was. Lucky, with that, envelope. I think if I was asked what would you do now, you're all, nobody to pick you up, what would you do, I'd say leave me off in the streets, somebody's gonna pick me up, because I was here legally. I wouldn't go back, not a boy . . .

MRS. TALDONE: I was wondering, would they leave you here?

TALDONE: Oh, yeah, it's up to you. It's up to you.

MRS. TALDONE: Oh, you mean people can come without some
calling?

TALDONE: Mary, I was called. I got whoever it is, was sent the
paper. There was no paper for me, who calls you.
Because I came on a quota. You put your numbers on by
luck, so many, two thousand people a year the country
is allowed to import to this country. Two thousand
from Italy, two thousand from Germany, and they come
legally. They don't need nobody to call. Come on
quotas, right?

MRS. TALDONE: Yeah, I don't know about that.

TALDONE: That's what it is.

MRS. TALDONE: (?)

APPEL: I think it's dependent upon the year you came . . .

TALDONE: Oh, oh . . .

APPEL: There were certain quota laws . . .

TALDONE: Oh . . .

APPEL: For many years, you could just come, and they weren't

checked beforehand in Italy to get their papers in order. Then there were limits on how many . . .

TALDONE: There's something else. Uh, in Italy, could be up to eighteen years old, because after eighteen they stop, for military service. You couldn't come no more. I wasn't eighteen when I came here. I was seventeen past. I'm telling you, that's how it is. So the free way to go was free, but when you come here, you're on your own. They ask, in fact they did ask me, "What are you gonna do, nobody's picking you up." I said, "Oh, I want to get off." But I didn't know where to get off. But still I want to get off. They left me out front there probably, and go before I can get a man to pick me up. To call so I could find my uncle.

MRS. TALDONE: So a taxi could pick you up.

TALDONE: They didn't have to. No, Mary. The law then, they leave you alone. Then, if you start to cry in the street, somebody's gonna pick you up, and gonna put you someplace. They feed you. Free, free meal. That's not a poor country. Over in this country, we feed everybody, and they fed us, anybody. Whoever

needs it, in other words, if you need somebody to feed you. Beautiful country. The best country in the world. And that Ellis Island will never be forgotten for many, many, many years to come. I don't know many millions of people have gone through Ellis Island, that was the only place to go through. Still is, I guess.

APPEL: No, they don't go through Ellis Island any more.

TALDONE: No more?

APPEL: No.

TALDONE: Where they go?

APPEL: Well, they come through on airplanes, mostly . . .

TALDONE: Right! Right! Oh, that was a beautiful spot there.

APPEL: Ellis Island has been abandoned and for many years. It was officially closed in 19 . . .

TALDONE: It's a real landmark now. They're gonna make a museum out of it?

APPEL: They're going to make a museum there.

TALDONE: How big is that island? I haven't seen lately.

APPEL: It's large. I can't tell you the exact size. It's very . . .

TALDONE: In blocks, the length, like? More. More than that. Not even?

APPEL: I'd have to look it up. I'll look it up and I'll tell Vince, and then he can tell you.

TALDONE: Had to be big, because there was a convent in there, too. Nuns.

APPEL: Well, there were a lot of buildings there for the immigrants. There was the Great Hall . . .

TALDONE: That's probably all the buildings on the whole island. That's pretty big.

APPEL: Yeah.

TALDONE: Yeah. Oh . . .

APPEL: Maybe a few miles.

TALDONE: Oh, that's big. Oh, I took my wife there to see the Statue of Liberty later on with some kids. But then we never seen how big the island is or not. Went on the ferry from New York. Right, Mary? How many kids

we had, two, or three.

MRS. TALDONE: Three.

TALDONE: Three.

MRS. TALDONE: I don't know. I don't remember.

TALDONE: Yeah. That steamboat there, was nice. If I was to do over again, I'd do over again. I wasted nothing, nothing. If you got your health, and God gives you both. That I had it, and so far.

APPEL: This is the end of the interview with Felice Taldone.