

KECK-82/LEHAN

KECK-82

MARGARET LEHAN

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ITALY, 1911

AGE 6

PASSAGE ON "THE PRINZESS IRENE"

DALLETT: My name is Nancy Dallett, and I'm speaking with Margaret Lehan on Thursday, November 14, 1985. We are beginning this interview at 5:05 PM, and we are about to interview Mrs. Lehan about her immigration experience from Italy in 1911. This is the beginning of side one of interview number 082. Can you, uh, take me back to the beginning of your story and tell me where and when you were born.

LEHAN: Well, I was born in Italy, October the 6th, 1904.

DALLETT: And where in Italy was that?

LEHAN: In a little town of Laurenzana, Potenza.

DALLETT: Okay. I might ask you later to help me spell that,
but . . .

LEHAN: Well, sure. She's better at that.

DALLETT: Okay. Tell me about your family as a child.

LEHAN: Well, my family. I adored my mother. I loved my
father, but he was very stern, very strict, and I
didn't always get along with him because I was more
broad-minded than he was.

DALLETT: Did you have brothers and sisters?

LEHAN: I had, well, we had a brother at the very end, but we
had sisters. We were eight sisters. And I had two
brothers that died and one lived through.

DALLETT: And what did your father do in Italy?

LEHAN: Well, my father, the thing I remember about my father
is what little time he spent with us in Italy. But in
New York he either ran a fruit stand store, or he shoe
shined, and he also worked in, at the bar, as a
bartender in Brooklyn, New York. And that . . .

DALLETT: Do you remember, do you remember anything, or much about life in Italy as a little girl?

LEHAN: Oh, I remember as a little girl it was very quaint living and the most impressive thing that my mother raised wheat. And we used to go out in the fields and it was, I remember, the most beautiful sight, when they would harvest it, and in the moonlight. And also I r mostly that the bells at the church would ring about five o'clock and we, all the children in the little town, would all march in back of the priest and go and say prayers. I remember that. And I also remember the funerals that they would have. They would carry the casket from the home to the church. And I remember the homes, they were brick, of course, and they all had fire escapes and, go up a lot of little steps. Particularly one, when a woman was there, and she showed me how to make a knot and thread a needle. And I'd sit in the corner all day long and knot all day with her. And I had beautiful dolls, beautiful dolls. I had an uncle that traveled, and I was named after him. And every time he came home he brought me a doll. And when my mother told me that we

were going to go to America, I was heartbroken to leave my dolls. So I decided that I would leave one to each of the little girls that I used to play with. I left them all there to them.

DALLETT: Did you know other people who had come to this country? Your uncles had come to this country.

LEHAN: No, my uncle, he was one who took care of people like they wanted to come to America and he would go to Naples and make all the arrangements. And this was the traveling he did. No, we, um, my father, of course, always, was back and forth. He made five trips.

DALLETT: Tell me about that. Why was he traveling back and forth?

LEHAN: Well, my father came from what they call middle class people, which you don't have rich people, you have low and middle. And both my mother and father were in the middle class. If you were in the middle class you married a middle class. So my father was, he had just one sister. Now, his father was the largest property owner in that town and he never worked. And he just

rode a horse. And when he was eighteen he made his first trip to America and took out his citizen papers.

DALLETT: I'm sorry, is this your grandfather or your father?

LEHAN: My father.

DALLETT: Your father, okay.

LEHAN: My father.

DALLETT: Okay. When he was eighteen.

LEHAN: He was eighteen and was, became a citizen then. And then, um, when he was twenty-six, I believe, he went back to Italy and he fell in love with my mother. And mother was only seventeen, I believe. There was a fourteen-year, fifteen-year gap. And, uh, and he married her, on one condition, that he would never bring her back to America.

DALLETT: Who did he promise that to?

LEHAN: He promised that to my grandmother and grandfather.

DALLETT: Your mother's parents.

LEHAN: Right. My mother and father. And the reason for that

was that when mother was, she was five months old, when she came to America with her mother and father and d. And, at the age of three, she was kidnapped on Second Avenue and was, they found her about a month after, and the couple, the woman that took her was a very wealthy woman and wanted to adopt my mother or pay anything for the adoption. But my grandmother and grandfather insisted on, no way. They took her, and my grandfather shipped my grandmother, my mother and her brother back to Italy. And he swore that she would never come to a.

DALLETT: Wow. Was he moving to this country at that point, when they came here?

LEHAN: My grandfather remained in America until, well, my mother was fifteen, sixteen years old when she, first time she saw her father, from three years to sixteen. So there's that gap there.

DALLETT: Was that when your grandfather came back to Italy?

LEHAN: Yes. He returned back to Italy, and then my father made a trip to Italy and wanted to marry my mother. And that was the promise he made. So that's the

reason why my father kept coming to America. He came here and worked and he'd send the money to my mother to help her maintain the business that they were running. They ran wheat, they raised all the wheat for the whole town, and they made cheese. They had sheeps, lots of 'em.

DALLETT: But your parents got married knowing that your father was going to come and work in America and only visit in Italy, no intention of her coming to live in America.

LEHAN: No, no intention at that time. Because my father, perhaps, thought that one time he would settle back in Italy. But he never did, never did. So he made five trips, five children. Every time he went he left one. And then my mother, my grandmother, was getting old, and she thought it was best that they would break the promise and come to America, with the intention of only being here six years. A round trip ticket. 'Cos when we came here in America, well, things didn't go as well as my father thought. It was much harder for my mother and father to raise a family here than it was for them in Italy. Because in Italy they were

considered wealthy. My mother had a better home in Italy than she ever had here in America. She missed that very much.

DALLETT: How old were you when, uh, your parents decided to break that promise with your grandmother and . . .

LEHAN: I was going on seven years old. That's when we came here.

DALLETT: Okay. So tell me what that was like. Uh, did your grandmother come with you, or did you say goodbye to her there?

LEHAN: Oh, no. My grandmother was heartbroken. And when we left, my grandmother came over to see us, to say goodbye to us. We all cried. And . . .
(she is moved)

DALLETT: You didn't want to come at that pint.

LEHAN: It took us all night. (she is moved) We left about three-thirty in the morning, pitch dark, in a wagon. We all sat close together and we, horse and buggy.
(she laughs) Of course, and we went all night and all next day to get to Naples. And then we stayed at

a hotel, and my father got things in order for the sailing. My youngest sister took sick and I remember my father took us to a movie. It was the first movie that we had seen and it was an act about snakes. And then when we got on the ship . . .

DALLETT: This is in Naples.

LEHAN: In Naples.

DALLETT: Was this the first time you had been to Naples?

LEHAN: The first time we had been to Naples. And, of course, there it was a lot different than the little town. There was plenty of, you know, activity, which we weren't used to that. In the little towns it's very quiet and everybody knows one another. But Naples is a big thing. And that was our first experience.

DALLETT: Did you bring some special things from home, any one of those dolls did you save to bring?

LEHAN: No. I left them all to, because I wanted to give every one of my little girlfriends. I remember I had one particular doll, she was dressed as a nun. I worshipped her the most.

DALLETT: But you didn't bring her with you.

LEHAN: No, I didn't.

DALLETT: Did you bring anything at all from home?

LEHAN: No, because we had to bring, my mother had her trunk just chuck full of stuff, all our clothes. And, uh, and a lot of food that my grandmother liked, cheese and, and, uh, all kinds of cheese, you know, that she wanted my mother to have, and sausage and, so she made sure that her daughter had plenty to eat.

DALLETT: And when you left home you were coming with the impression that you would come for six years.

LEHAN: For six years was all the agreement that my father had made.

DALLETT: Okay.

LEHAN: But then things didn't work that way because things got hard for my father. He found it a lot harder to raise his family in New York than he did in Italy.

DALLETT: Right.

LEHAN: But we kept on. We stayed here. We never decided to go back, although my mother missed it. And one thing my mother was afraid, like we stayed in the dark until my father came home to light the gas, you know, the gas lights. It was the only way we had then. And we had just three rooms, and the only furniture we had there was, uh, uh, two beds, one, one room, my mother had a bed and a day bed, and in the kitchen there was a day bed, and there was one little bedroom which my mother had for herself, a bed and a bureau, and there was always a crib there because they had a baby every year, or every eighteen months.

DALLETT: So tell me what it was like when you got on the ship, then, in Naples.

LEHAN: When we got on the ship, when we got on Naples.

DALLETT: What was the name of the ship?

LEHAN: The Gina, wasn't it? Reg, Prinzess Irene. Yeah. It was an old tug, let me put it that way. But it was the best my father could do. And, uh, my father stayed on the lower deck, and we stayed in the middle. I remember that. And the food was terrible. We

weren't used to that. We hardly ate. One sister, she was sick when she got on there, and she was the only one who wasn't sick all through the trip. My mother said, "My God, if she dies, they'll throw her overboard." But she survived and wasn't seasick at all. The rest of us were terribly, terribly seasick. There was a nun that was there, and she stayed with my mother. 'Cause we didn't know then, but my mother was pregnant. But the nun knew, so she stayed close to my mother. And she was with us all the time. Now, all the time we were on that ship, we didn't eat much. But my mother would wait until the sailboats would come along in the morning, and they would have oranges and fruits like that, so she would buy plenty of that, and that we really enjoyed, and that kept us alive, really.

DALLETT: Do you remember what kind of sleeping accommodations there were on the boat?

LEHAN: Sleeping accommodation, I think half the time we were so seasick that it didn't matter where we slept, really, to say the truth. I really don't remember. But I know my father was at the lower deck.

DALLETT: How many decks were there?

LEHAN: Three, well, the upper deck was when we used to go up there, to look out, you know, and just hang around, and then there was a middle deck. And then there was a lower deck where they had all the baggage, but I think most of the men slept down there. The closest I can remember. The sailors were nice. They used to talk to my mother a lot. They were very friendly. But, uh, outside of that there was nothing. Just heaving up all day and night. But outside of that, that was all the activity there was on a ship until my mother dressed us up in the morning that we thought we were going to land. My mother had made us new dresses. My kid sister and myself. I had a navy blue sailor dress with the anchors on them and all with the collar. And my sister had a tan little dress with lace around her collar. And we were all dressed up when, all of a sudden, we heard this great big noise crash up and down, sideways, and we all started clapping, the men started whistling, the women started singing. We thought that we were landing. And all of a sudden, the electric light bulbs came down, the windows opened, and the waves poured in there. And we

knew there was something wrong. The next thing, we saw the sailors, their faces were green, and hammers in their hands, and they just were running all directions trying to nail the windows from stopping the waves, but they couldn't. And my father was on the lower deck They were getting drenched also. And they all came up in their underdrawers to escape the water.

DALLETT: What had happened?

LEHAN: It happened, it was in the morning.

DALLETT: What was it that happened that all the water was . . .

LEHAN: Oh, oh, well, the boat sunk, it hit sand, they told us. It hit the sand bar. That's what I remember now. And, uh, that was it. And then it made more noise. It went on deeper. And then we knew we were in trouble. People that were whistling and crying, they were laughing and singing and whistling, they were all crying, and I remember all the mothers were just grabbing their little ones and holding on for dear life. Then the next word we got saying that they couldn't help us, that a ship had come in their rescue

but it couldn't help us at all. Because if they got near our ship it would sink more. So they told us that we probably wouldn't have any food or anything and whether we were going to be rescued remained to be seen. Of course, that was sad. And the what we did then was we all went on the upper deck. We were crowded there like sardines, as close as we could. And then the sailors made a chain with the rope on both sides and they decided that, let's save all the children first and put one elderly person in each sailboat to watch over the little ones.

DALLETT: In the little lifeboats . . .

LEHAN: Little lifeboats. Yeah. That's what came near us. And the sailors took it hand by hand and we went all the way down and every time a woman went down or a kid they'd be screaming because you were, be separated from your family.

DALLETT: Were you separated from your mother?

LEHAN: Yes. Everybody was separated. My mother couldn't come with us, or any of my older sisters. So we, the nun was in our little sailboat and she watched over us

until we got to this other new, we called it a new ship because it looked so beautiful compared to our tug. And when we got in there, of course, everything was different. But the most thing that hit me was the silverware that was there. That, I couldn't, I kept looking and looking and I said to my sister, "What do you know? We've got nice forks and knives to eat with here." And then . . .

DALLETT: How long was it that, uh, it took them to rescue you?

LEHAN: I think almost a day. The whole day before they rescued. But everybody was saved. And then we just sailed that day and, as I said, then we saw all these beautiful lights and everything. We thought they were stars. We were all dressed for two days waiting to land, with our new dresses on. And then when we got off . . .

DALLETT: Did you see the Statue of Liberty at that point, when you came in?

LEHAN: Yes. My mother . . .

DALLETT: Was it nighttime or daytime?

LEHAN: No, it was daytime, daytime, it was daytime.

DALLETT: Had your father told you that you would see that?

LEHAN: Right. Oh, yes. He would point everything out to us. My father was very good. Like, whenever he came back to visit us in Italy he'd always bring little books for us. And we'd sit around the fireplace and he would say, "Dog, cat," you know. He was very good in that way, you know, and he used to tell us stories. Particularly he told us the story about that they were working on an airplane. Of course, we thought my father was crazy, of something that was going to fly up in the air, you know. But that was the one way he entertained us, you know, for the time he was with us. And I r the last time he came before we left Italy. It was almost midnight and, um, he was anxious to see my younger sister because he had left my mother pregnant at that last trip and he wondered. And he ignored me, I remember. And he didn't think that I belonged there, really. But I remember my mother went and picked my little sister up from bed and brought her in the kitchen. All the neighbors came in wondering if he had brought news for them from the

people in America, you know. It was just about midnight, and my mother had taken an egg and put it in the ashes in the fireplace to softboil it so he could have something to eat. I remember that.

DALLETT: Tell me what it was like that when, uh, let's see. You've come through the harbor and now you're, you're coming into Ellis Island itself.

LEHAN: Well, that, as I said, I don't remember too much of that, because of all the confusion and all the sadness we had we didn't know whether we'd ever land, you know. But I remember when we got in New York I was frightened to death. Both my sister and I were just frightened because we had never been in a place where there were that many people, and they really looked peculiar to us, and I guess we looked peculiar to them. But . . .

DALLETT: How did they look peculiar? What . . .

LEHAN: Well, I don't know. It was very confusing to us why so many people, with hats on and everything else, you know. Makeup on their face, you know. It was really, uh, we were frightened more than anything else. And the first banana we had we didn't dare eat it. We

threw it in the gutter.

DALLETT: Who was it that gave you that banana?

LEHAN: Well, we went in New Rochelle. We had, my mother had relatives there and we had an aunt. And, uh, we went there. And I believe my mother and the rest of the family stayed with them, and the two youngest ones, which was myself and my kid sister, we went to my aunt's. And she owned an apartment house in New Rochelle. And we stayed with her all summer until it was time for us to go home and go to school. But we stayed at, our first visit in New Rochelle was this cousin. And he ran a big food store. And he gave us all a banana and he told us to eat it, it was good. But we didn't. And he says, "Peel it." Well, we peeled it when we got outside. We took one bite and we threw it in the gutter. But after that my mother bought bananas every day. (she laughs)

DALLETT: Do you remember anything at all about Ellis Island? The examinations, did you have to go through a physical there?

LEHAN: Well, I remember getting all lined up and my father,

the passport. I remember that.

DALLETT: He had to show passports for all of you?

LEHAN: Yes. He had to show the passport.

DALLETT: Was he speaking English by now?

LEHAN: My father spoke English, yeah. He spoke English. My father had a rough time when he was in New York, when he first got there. As a matter of fact, all foreigners did. And he worked in the, in a, um, a factory. I believe it must have been cotton or something, because he used a cotton picker or something. And, uh, of course, they kept calling him "ginny." And you daren't go out at night. So one day he decided to get even with them because they were jumping on him all the time, and he finally, where he was rooming, he, uh, took the poker of the stove, made it good and sharp, and he went to work the next day and he was going to get even with them. And he stuck it in his leg pants. And when he was working he evidently forgot about it and it came out. And when he came out the guy working next to him, he says, "Look, the ginny has got a poker in his pants." So

when they were getting ready to, after five o'clock, to go home, they were going to jump on him, and the boss decided to make a ring and fight it out, take their best man. My father won the fight, and from that day on, he became a boxer, an amateur boxer for a while. And he became one of the gag. And he had no fear after that. And he hung around mostly in the democratic party. He spent all his time there. And in the police department. Then they used to call him Rockefeller.

DALLETT: Why was that?

LEHAN: Well, I don't know why. I guess he was a good spender, and he got along with everybody and he knew everybody then. Because he got along with most anybody. And, uh, then after that, I remember, when we were in New York, the only place we found them is in, uh, I think was the Fourth Street. Between Fourth and Fifth there was a democratic clubhouse and in, with eight, seven kids, or eight kids, seven kids in the house, my father didn't have patience. He used to hang around in the clubhouse. Either that or in the movie house. And when my mother had all the dinner

all ready she'd send either me or my kid sister. Well, the both of us were always together. We'd go either in the movie house, if we didn't find him there, we'd find him, he'd fall asleep in the movie house, and tell him dinner was ready. (she laughs) And he'd come home. But, that was my father. But he worked, you know, he worked every day. There was no if and buts about it.

DALLETT: And you, did you get enrolled in public school when you came here?

LEHAN: No. No way. My mother made me go to Catholic school, when it was in church morning and night. She believed that they were more disciplined and we obeyed. And, of course, if, if you didn't, if you disobeyed your mother you go to hell, so we were frightened to death about that. And, uh, she always made us go. My, my mother didn't go to church, but she made sure we went to church every Sunday.

DALLETT: Was there, had you moved into, uh, a neighborhood that had an Italian community?

LEHAN: Oh, God, plenty of kids. Plenty of kids. The storks

came from the roof, or it came from heaven. They were all Italians, front apartment, rear apartment. And, God, everybody had a large family and we had lots of good times playing in the back, between the back to apartments. It has a backyard. And, uh, the organ used to come around every day and we'd follow that. And, God, how I loved dancing. And I followed that organ everywhere with the monkey. We, uh, had very few toys, and we had the, Bern, I think his name's Bernstein, he owned the apartment. He used to come around with a cane and a derby and spats, and he'd blow the whistle. And all the kids in that apartment, there would be about fifty, seventy-five of them, we'd all run out and he'd give us two pennies each. (she laughs) A big thing. And we had one little boy there that was crippled. And we all had to wait until he'd come out. And he'd be at the head of the line. And, of course, we'd all run, a candy store used to be right in front of there and we'd spent our two pennies. But that, we waited for him once a month. But we, we didn't need toys. We, we had so many children, we used to jump rope and hop and skip and my mother always told us not to go down to Chinatown or go to the parks.

DALLETT: Why? What happened down in Chinatown?

LEHAN: Well, because Chinatown, the Chinamens would chop you up, you know, and you didn't come home any more. Or don't go in the park, or like that. There was a park near us. But we went there and my mother spent most of her time home. When she used to go shopping she always, never left us home. She'd have my sister and I, one on each side. She never, always was with us. that was one thing about my mother. She, she was a good, good person.

DALLETT: So when you moved here and started getting accustomed to, to life in this country, did it seem really different than Italy?

LEHAN: Oh, well, yeah. The reason we moved here in Hartford was because my mother was sick all the time and my oldest sister married a fellow from here. Now, that was a matchmake from the time they were born. His folks were property owners.

DALLETT: In Italy.

LEHAN: In Italy, and when my sister was born, the match was

made that he would marry my sister because my family was property owners. So when we came to America, my sister was only, I believe, eighteen years old, this fellow had already been in Hartford. He had come to America a good many years before that, and he heard that my sister was in America. My sister had never laid eyes on him, or he had laid eyes on her, only in the cradle. And, uh . . .

DALLETT: Okay. We have to just turn the tape over. That is the end of side one of interview number 082.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

DALLETT: This is the beginning of side two of interview number 082. So he hadn't laid eyes on your sister since the cradle.

DALLETT: My sister, all those years. But my mother and father decided that she was much too young. The fact that my mother had got married young, she didn't want her children to get married that young. And my father told him to go back to Hartford. That's when my sister was at least twenty, that if she wasn't married

to anyone else and he still wanted her, and he wasn't married to anyone else, that he could come and see her again. And that's what happened. When my sister was twenty, he called on her and then they got married. And, of course, he brought his bride to Hartford, 'cos this is where he was. So then my mother was sick quite a bit and the doctor told my father that if she was more out in the open air that it would help her. And that's when my father decided to come back and live here in Hartford. He got a job at the Underwood Typewriter. And we moved, we lived in an apartment on Park Street. And then my father bought a little home and I was then fourteen . . .

DALLETT: Had there been a match made for you when you were a child, too?

LEHAN: Oh, heavens no. My father never made any matchmaking for us. That was one thing. If we bought a fellow home, my father said to me, "You brought him here, you must want him." He never interfered. That was one thing, he was broad-minded, I must say. (she laughs) But, uh, I went to work when I was fourteen because it was hard for my father and mother to get

along, and I went to work in Fox's.

DALLETT: Which is what? What is Fox's?

LEHAN: Fox's Department Store. And, uh, I was there until I was fifteen-and-a-half. And then the hours were so different that my other sisters were working in the Underwood with my father. And they were home, all, five o'clock. And I worked in the department store which, work there was six o'clock, Saturday up till nine o'clock, and then by the time I got home my mother used to have to heat my meals for me and I found it kind of awkward, because my mother had to do that. So I decided to quit and earn more money. And I went to work in the Underwood then, where I was under my father's eyes. He watched me pretty close. 'Cause I was different from my sister. I just wanted to go. (she laughs) And I would put makeup on my face and my father used to say, "Go and wash it off." You know. Oh, I worked in the cosmetic department, naturally I'd use it. And I was more on the outgoing. I just wanted to dance. I didn't believe in being tied down. And, of course, if you was a fellow, you could go out, you could keep your pay, but as a girl,

no ways. You had to turn it in and you couldn't do what you wanted. And I disagreed with my father in a lot, a lot of ways. Because my mother always shielded me. I went dancing, I used to take my sister with me, and my mother would unlock the door at night so my father wouldn't hear us. She would turn the clocks back so he wouldn't know what time we got home. And she'd come in at night, sometimes we'd have our clothes on yet, and my sister would say, "We'd better get in bed before Ma comes, she won't know what time we come in.," And my mother used to come in and she'd stroke my hair. She loved my hair and, uh, she'd make sure we were covered, you know, and got in bed, and then she'd go to sleep. But before that I know she wouldn't sleep. And I remember one night my father decided to follow us to see whether we were telling him the truth. And we turned around and we saw him. A fog came along and I said to my sister, "That's going to save us. He won't be able to see us." That's because we would tell my father, you know, we'd be going to a girl's house or something where we were going dancing. (she laughs) He lost us in, he lost us. He didn't catch us. But, uh, as he got older and, uh, I fought for my younger sisters, and the

first time my sister was going with a fellow, you had to take your younger sister with you. And my sister Mary that's in the convalescent home now, she was courting and I had to go with her. So I said, "Heck, the next one it'll be me. I'm not going to take anybody with me." So I went to bat. And one day he wanted to take her to the circus and I said to my mother, "I'm not going to be here." And I got, made sure my kid sister wasn't around. And I says, "He'll ask my mother to go." I says to my mother, "Don't you go." So finally my father, my brother-in-law then was, wasn't my brother-in-law, he asked my father if he could take my sister to the circus. He says, "Yes, if you can take Margaret." He called me Maggie. "If he can take Maggie with you." And I spoke up, and I said, "No, I'm not going with them." I says, "If you don't trust her with him, why do you trust her to get married to him?" And he giggled. He thought that was funny. But when my father giggled it meant business. But I didn't care.

DALLETT: Could you have gotten away with that if you had done that in Italy, do you think? Was it different?

LEHAN: Who, me, get married in Italy?

DALLETT: If you had tried to stand up to your father in Italy, was it different to you?

LEHAN: Oh, my God, oh, well, I don't know, you see, I was so young. But it's the same over there. The same over there now. Oh, yeah. No, no. A woman is nothing. Not in the little towns. You go to Rome, the woman's like here, or Naples. A woman has no say, no way. If you were out talking to somebody, you keep quiet. You stand in back of the man. That would have never done with me, because I think I had woman's lib when I was eight. Well, anyhow, that was as far as, uh, I get. So, finally, after that, my sister decided, she went along with her husband. So after that my father, since he was getting older and, uh, my sister had no trouble of going out or whoever they want, and when my husband came I always used to have the fellows. I was never without a man, and I have to say that. I always had a fellow.

DALLETT: Did you marry a man from Italy?

LEHAN: I married an Irishman. He was an Irish descendent.

But I didn't marry an Italian. Rest assured for that, I wouldn't. Because I was afraid he'd be like my father. No way. No. I wouldn't get along with an Italian. And, uh, I married a real broad-minder like myself and we got along wonderful. I go around with a gentleman now. He's eighty-nine years old. He's just great. He's just A-number-one. I went with one before him, and he's in the convalescent home for seven, eight years now. I gave him a room here with me, and I would never do it again, and he got sick on me and he's been there. And I had decided I would never, never get mangled with another man. But along comes this old gentleman from California, believe it or not. He had lunch with me at the Senior Center, sat at my table, and I guess chemicals just worked both ways. We couldn't stop ourselves. And we've been going ever since. I see him every day. He lives in his apartment and I live in my home here. I've never slept in his apartment.

DALLETT: Have you ever gone back to Italy?

LEHAN: I did. Ten years ago I went with this gentleman that's in the convalescent home. But he was a real

Italian like my father. He was born here in America, raised in Italy, and come back here in America, but he was brought up as a real Italian. He was so jealous. I couldn't look at anybody. But I had a good time with him. We danced, we won prizes and dinner dance, clubs. He took me everywhere.

DALLETT: So, when you were back in Italy, could you imagine how different your life might have been had you stayed there, or . . .

LEHAN: Had I stayed there? Well, I was slated to marry a lawyer. I don't know how the guy was, or had never seen him.

DALLETT: So there was an arrangement for you to marry someone.

LEHAN: Yes, there was an arrangement for me, but I never knew him, and I don't know whether he, he just saw me in the cradle, but that was the deal. But, uh, my life, I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. Having a mind like I have, as far as I can remember way back, I don't know whether I would really get along in Italy because then their ideas were in the way, after the war, has changed an awful lot. I must say, the

woman's in, in Rome, they're worse than the ones over here, you know. They're very broad-minded and I think they had to during the war, because the mothers had to tell the daughters to go out. It's the only way they got their bread. And when I went there, my God, in the little town, I saw little redheads, little blondes, I know they didn't belong there, you know. But they all, the elderly people were still primitive. They still wore black dresses, black stockings, and you couldn't change them. And when I was there five, six weeks, they cried when I left, because the younger people had me talk to their mother to see if I couldn't get them to take the black dresses off. And on a Sunday you'd look out the window. They sort of marched, and their prayers, every Sunday and they'd walk to the church. You'd think it was a funeral. You couldn't change them. But the young people have changed. They have changed.

DALLETT: When did you, uh, become a citizen?

LEHAN: Oh, well, I was always a citizen because my father was a citizen before I was born. But my two oldest sisters, the fact then the law was, if you married a

non-citizen then you lost your citizenship. It was what your husband was. And they had lost that. And my father was very disappointed in that. But they got their citizen papers after. But I didn't have to. Because when I got married, you were what you were yourself, and the fact that before I, when I was born, my father was already an American citizen, so that made me a citizen, even though I was born in Italy. So I didn't have any problem there.

DALLETT: Okay. I think I've asked you just about everything I need to except, uh, I wanted, just go back to Ellis Island for a moment. Um, I think you were about to tell me something that you remembered about the examination, or the buildings.

LEHAN: Yeah. Well, remember, the only thing I remember that my father had us all lined up and he had his passport. And they examined the passport, and they said, "One, two, three, four, five." And on his passport were five trips. I remember that. And I remember the luggage. I think one, through all the damage that they had, I think there was one that was damaged, of the, and we were a long time getting our luggage.

DALLETT: So you didn't spend the night on Ellis Island.

LEHAN: I don't know, we spent the night on that nice ship.
That's all I remember.

DALLETT: Do you remember anything about when you first came
into the building at all?

LEHAN: Which building?

DALLETT: Ellis Island itself?

LEHAN: No.

DALLETT: You don't remember that?

LEHAN: No. As I said, it was all, that water was so rough
and all the damage around there that, it was terrible.

DALLETT: Anything about the medical examinations? Do you
remember those?

DALLETT: Well, I think we all had to go through it, but none of
us had any problem. We all passed with flying colors.

DALLETT: Do you remember what the examination was, what the
doctors did, or . . .

DALLETT: No. No, I don't remember that. I know they rushed it. They said, "One, two, three, four, five, go." I remember that. We were happy to get out of there, I'll tell you that. But I wouldn't go back to Europe for the world. I wouldn't go back and live there. I remember one time somebody said something to me and I said, "Why would I?" I said, "I've lived here. This is my home town."

DALLETT: How long did it take you to feel that? When did you feel that you were . . .

LEHAN: I felt that way all the time.

DALLETT: Right away.

LEHAN: Because, all the time. Because, in fact, my, I wasn't like an Italian person. I never believed in any of the things that they believed in. I got two wonderful children. I have a son that works for the World Bank. He's in Jamaica. I have a daughter that had the highest honor in newspaper work in Rhode Island, married to the biggest lawyer in Rhode Island. I have four beautiful grandchildren. The League of Nations. They're English, Scotch, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian,

Irish. I wouldn't know what to call my grandchildren.

DALLETT: Um, there's just one other thing I wanted to ask you and that is do you have any of the original papers?

LEHAN: The only one I have is my, uh, birth certificate that my mother . . . That's the only thing I have.

DALLETT: None of the passports or visa, anything like that?

LEHAN: Heaven, no. They'd be so old they'd fall apart. Who's got the passports.

DALLETT: Ship ticket, anything like that?

LEHAN: No. My mother left all her furniture there, and that had to, they, my uncle took that after. But they had it in storage all those years hoping my mother would go back. But she never went back. Never, never went back to see her mother again.

DALLETT: Okay. I think that's all I need to ask, unless there's anything you want to add.

LEHAN: No, I think I've covered all my life.

DALLETT: Good. Okay. Thank you.

LEHAN: I've had a wonderful, I'm very grateful for America.
And I'm sure my children are.

DALLETT: Good.

LEHAN: I've lived in this home from the time I've got
married. I have no complaints. I've done very, very
well for the little girl and my husband used to say,
"You were born in Italy, you were sent directly here,
in that boat, to me." And he was, his ancestors were
born in Ireland. His father and mother were the
oldest Hartford residents. And his grandmother came
here in a sailboat and I don't know how many days it
took from Ireland.

DALLETT: So he didn't have to go through any of the experiences
that you went through.

LEHAN: No. And, uh, my father-in-law was born right here
too, both of them. And his folks, uh, came here when
they had the potato famine. That's when they escaped
from there. And he always says there was a little
Spanish in him. (she laughs) He looked like a real
old Irishman.

DALLETT: Okay. Thank you very much.

LEHAN: You're welcome.

DALLETT: That is the end of side two, and the end of interview number 082 with Margaret Lehan.