

KM-043

PAULINE SCIACCOTTA SESSO

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INTERVIEWER: KATE MOORE

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 11/1994

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SICILY, 1905

AGE 4

SHIP NAME NOT RECALLED

MOORE: Good afternoon. This is Kate Moore for the National Park Service. Today is the 27th of April, 1994, and I'm in Highland Park, Illinois, at the home of Pauline Sesso, who came from Sicily in 1904 or 1905 when she was four years old. Why don't you begin by giving us your full name and date of birth, please?

SESSO: My name is Pauline Sciacotta Sesso. I was born June 2, 1901.

MOORE: Could you spell your maiden name, please?

SESSO: Yes. S-C-I-A-C-C-O-T-T-A.

MOORE: Thank you. And where were you born?

SESSO: I was born in Sicily, Castelvetro, Sicily.

MOORE: Could you spell your town's name, please? Oh, we can get it later, then, okay. We'll get that later. Okay. What size town was that?

SESSO: I don't know.

MOORE: All right. You left so young. Do you remember anything, do you ever see any pictures of how it looked like, the town?

SESSO: No.

MOORE: What was your father's name?

SESSO: My father's name was Nicholas Sciacotta.

MOORE: All right. And what was his occupation?

SESSO: Labor.

MOORE: Labor. What kind of labor was he? Farm labor?

SESSO: Farm, more than likely a farm.

MOORE: What did he look like?

SESSO: Uh, he was tall, had a moustache, handlebars.
And . . .

MOORE: Hair color?

SESSO: Brown hair and brown eyes. And that's about all I
could remember of him.

MOORE: And what about his personality and temperament. How
would you describe it?

SESSO: Oh, I thought he was a pleasant man, a good family
man.

MOORE: Is there a story about your father that you associate
with your childhood?

SESSO: No, I cannot remember any.

MOORE: What about your mother's name?

SESSO: My mother's name was Geltrude Campana.

MOORE: Can you spell that at all?

SESSO: Yes. G . . . The last name or the first?

MOORE: First, both.

SESSO: G-E-L-T-R-U-D-E. And Campana, C-A-M-P-A-N-A.

MOORE: Okay. And what was her occupation, if any?

SESSO: Housewife.

MOORE: What did she look like, your mother?

SESSO: She was short, very pleasant, and the sweetest thing on earth for me.

MOORE: And what about her hair color and eyes?

SESSO: Brown. Brown hair, and brown eyes.

MOORE: And what were her chores around the house? What did she do at home, as a housewife?

SESSO: Made bread, cooked our meals, did our washing and laundry and ironing.

MOORE: So you didn't have hired help at home.

SESSO: No.

MOORE: Your mother did everything.

SESSO: Yes.

MOORE: And is there a story about your mother? You think she's sweet, that you associate with her and your

childhood?

SESSO: The only story I could associate with her was that she would go out on several occasions, she'd go out in the afternoon and would be gone for about an hour. When she'd come back, she'd sit on a chair and cry. And she always complained that she had something wrong with her shoulder. "I have a pain on my shoulder," she would say.

MOORE: And do you know why she was crying? Because of the pain?

SESSO: That's what she would say to me. Now, I don't know really what the cause.

MOORE: Do you, how many brothers and sisters, did you have brothers and sisters?

SESSO: Yes. I have, I had three brothers and one sister.

MOORE: Could you name them?

SESSO: They have all deceased. My oldest brother's name was Jasper. My second brother was Anthony, and my third brother was Frank, and my sister, Anna.

MOORE: Where did you fit in in the family order?

SESSO: Uh, fourth.

MOORE: You were fourth.

SESSO: Yes.

MOORE: And how much older were the other children than you?

SESSO: Uh, my oldest brother was born 19, 1890. My second brother was born 1893. My third brother was born 1895. I was born 1890, no, 1901. My sister was born 1906.

MOORE: Do you remember at all about your house back in Italy?
Did they tell you anything about it?

SESSO: No, no.

MOORE: Do you remember anything about your grandparents?

SESSO: No.

MOORE: What about religious life? What was it like back in Italy, do you know?

SESSO: We were Catholic, we are Catholics, and that's about all I could tell you.

MOORE: Do you know why your family decided to come to the

United States?

SESSO: Naturally to improve themselves.

MOORE: And did your family know someone in America before coming?

SESSO: No. I don't know whether they knew someone or not.

MOORE: How did they get here?

SESSO: My father came here first, and after a certain length of time that he was here a year, probably, or so, my mother and my three brothers were supposed to come together. But when we got to the seaport, we had to go through a physical, and my oldest brother was kept back on account of having an infection in his eye, but he came also during the same summer that we came. He came later.

MOORE: So this was an examination that happened before you got on the boat.

SESSO: Yes.

MOORE: All right. Now, do you remember your parents talking about whose idea it was to come to the United States? Were your parents unanimous, or . . .

SESSO: No, it was my father's idea that we should come here.

MOORE: And how did your mother feel about it?

SESSO: I presume she agreed about him.

MOORE: What did your parents know about the United States before they came here? How informed were they?

SESSO: I don't know.

MOORE: So your father came first.

SESSO: Yes.

MOORE: And where did he go?

SESSO: Chicago.

MOORE: Chicago. Do you know how he raised the funds to come? How did he get his ticket, his boat ticket, do you know that?

SESSO: No. All I know is, at that time all you had to have was money enough to buy a ticket and come. You didn't have to have anybody sponsoring you.

MOORE: And when he came to Chicago, where did he stay and what work did he find?

SESSO: He stayed with some friends in Chicago.

MOORE: That he already had, back in Italy.

SESSO: Yes, yes.

MOORE: He did know someone.

SESSO: I didn't, I don't know whether he knew them back home or not.

MOORE: Oh, I see. And what work did he do?

SESSO: What work did he do?

MOORE: Yeah. When he came here, did he find work?

SESSO: I presume labor, I don't know, I wasn't here.

MOORE: You were small then. You were so small, but do you remember anything about before the boat trip here?

SESSO: Before the boat trip?

MOORE: What's your first memory in Italy? Do you remember anything?

SESSO: No. I have no memory of Italy at all.

MOORE: All right. Do you have any memory of the boat?

SESSO: Yes. Of the boat (she laughs) I have incidents, just little things here and there. We, my mother and my two brothers and I had two berths that we slept on. My two brothers slept on the upper berth, my mother and I on the lower berth. Being summer my brother, one of my brothers got sick overnight, and he put his head out and he heaved. Well, my head happened to be out, and oh! You can imagine what the rest of that was.

MOORE: No wonder you remember. (they laugh)

SESSO: I also remember on the boat my mother would go for the meal. We did not go to a dining room, but she would go for the meal and she would bring it back. Now, my mother and I and two brothers, we were four. Evidently there must have been another group that came along with us. Not along with us, but were close to us there. And my mother would share this meal with this other family, and Mother would go one day and the other woman would go the next day. They alternated. When we were through with our meal, my mother would scrape the dishes and wash them. Whatever was left over, she would throw overboard. And I remember these

big huge fish, whales probably, or I don't know what they were. They were jumping up in the air trying to catch the food that my mother would throw over. And when we got to New York, my mother lost a spoon that was evidently in a, I think, I should have said that when we got on the boat I think they gave my mother a sack with enough utensils and dishes for her group. We were four, so she had a supply of four. And when we got to New York one spoon was missing, and Mother looked high and low until she found that spoon. Because, evidently, they had to take them back, take the dishes back.

MOORE: And that's what you remember?

SESSO: That I could remember. And then I remember getting to Ellis Island. When we got there they put a tag on us, a name and our destination. And all the people that were destined to go to Chicago were put in one room, or in one section. People that were going to California in another section. People that were going to Detroit, say, in another section. When the train came, then all those that were supposed to go to Chicago would go on one train, New York would go, or, uh, California would go on another train, Detroit

would go on another train. And at Ellis Island, no, then from there we went to New York City.

MOORE: Wait a minute. Do you remember having a doctor look at you on Ellis Island?

SESSO: Yes. The doctor looked at me, and he looked at my eyes, he looked in my ears and he looked in my throat, and he looked at my vaccination that I had, three great, big scars on my arm. He looked at that, and he listened to my chest for TB. And if you had TB, you were deported. They didn't want you here. And . . .

MOORE: Do you remember, what do you remember of the smells and sights? Do you remember anything of that, like was it crowded there?

SESSO: Oh, yes. At Ellis Island, yes, that was very, very crowded.

MOORE: So actually your first memories in your life are on the boat and Ellis Island.

SESSO: Yes, yes.

MOORE: So . . .

SESSO: But like I say, I don't remember the full trip. I can

remember . . .

MOORE: Flashes, yeah.

SESSO: Uh-huh.

MOORE: What about in Ellis Island, do you remember, do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

SESSO: No. That did not make an impression on me at the time.

MOORE: Do you remember anything new you never saw before at Ellis Island? Different people?

SESSO: No.

MOORE: What about the food?

SESSO: I just remembered, let's see, how should I say it now? Food? No. I remember, now, I don't know whether it was at Ellis Island or in New York, that is, in the city of New York when we got on the train. Seeing the longest loaf of bread in my life. (Ms. Moore laughs) Mother would bake bread at home but (she laughs) her bread was oh, say, about ten inches long, probably a foot long. But this was a long loaf of bread. Today I think it must have been French bread, a French

loaf. But to me it was the longest loaf of bread that I had seen in my whole life. (she laughs)

MOORE: Do you remember being at all frightened to be sent back?

SESSO: Do what?

MOORE: Were you ever scared that they would send you back? Did they talk about that? Did your brother say . . .

SESSO: No, no, my, no, not, my two brothers and my mother and I, no. We didn't fear going back.

MOORE: And how long were you at Ellis Island? What was the time?

SESSO: Oh, I don't think we were in long in Ellis Island any more than about a day.

MOORE: All right. And do you remember taking, how did you get from the boat to Ellis Island? Do you remember getting to Ellis Island?

SESSO: They, on a smaller boat.

MOORE: You remember the smaller boat.

SESSO: Yes, yes, yeah.

MOORE: And when you got into Ellis Island, what did it look like as you entered?

SESSO: It looked to me like a great, big train station. And there you were put in line, and your, you went through a physical again, and that's where you were separated, then. Chicago people, New York people, or Detroit people.

MOORE: Were you ever taken from your mother for any reason and separated from your mother?

SESSO: No.

MOORE: So when you went for the physical examination . . .

SESSO: Mother was with me, yes.

MOORE: All right. So, did you eat on the island? You don't remember any food.

SESSO: No, that I don't remember.

MOORE: All right. Now, you said you were going to Chicago. So you went through, you were going . . .

SESSO: Yes, through customs and into Chicago then. We were put on the train.

MOORE: And do you remember that train trip?

SESSO: Yes. There we were given another loaf of bread.
(Ms. Moore laughs) The biggest, longest loaf of
bread that I had seen in my life. (they laugh)

MOORE: Okay, so that was the train trip. Now, do you
remember anything more about the train?

SESSO: On the train then we were, we were given a bag, a huge
shopping bag, and this shopping bag was this loaf of
bread, one or two loaves of bread, I don't remember,
because it took us two days to get to Chicago, two
days and one night, I think. And we were given a
piece of salami and, oh, about eight apples, I think,
and that was supposed to last you from New York to
Chicago.

MOORE: And who gave you that? Do you know? Who gave you
that bag of food?

SESSO: I think we were given that right at the entrance as we
were getting onto the, onto the train.

MOORE: Go back a little bit. I forgot to ask you one thing.
You said your brother was sick. That was one of your

first memories, right?

SESSO: Yes, yes.

MOORE: Was the boat trip rough? Do you remember anything about the waves and . . .

SESSO: All I could remember is these big fish jumping up.

MOORE: That's a lot of memories for a four-year-old, actually. All right. So you're on the train. I just wanted to ask about your trip. You're on the train, and you're going to Chicago, and you got this bag of food. What else do you remember now?

SESSO: From then all I remember is meeting my father in Chicago.

MOORE: And what was that like?

SESSO: Well, it was very pleasant to meet him again. I don't know how long we had been separated, I mean, how many months or a year, whatever it was, that we were separated. That I don't remember.

MOORE: And when you saw him, where did you go from there, then?

SESSO: Then he took us to these friends that he was staying with, and then from there we went to a flat, or an apartment that my father had rented for us.

MOORE: Now, did your parents speak any English before coming here?

SESSO: No, no.

MOORE: And did you or the children have any English?

SESSO: No, no.

MOORE: All right. Now, when you went to this flat, do you remember the address of that flat?

SESSO: The address, I think the address of that flat is in Chicago. Are you acquainted with Chicago?

MOORE: Well, now we are a bit, we've been in Chicago, but whereabouts was it?

SESSO: It was off of Racine Avenue in Chicago, and it was south, let me get my directions straight now. Harrison runs east and west, so we were south of Harrison and east of Racine. I think there's a small street there called Hope, H-O-P-E. I think that's where we were.

MOORE: Do you remember anything about that first apartment?

SESSO: About the first what?

MOORE: The first place that you went to in Chicago, the apartment, to live? Do you remember anything about that?

SESSO: No. It was just, we had what they called, today what they called a garden apartment, first floor.

MOORE: You had a garden.

SESSO: Uh-huh.

MOORE: And how big was the apartment?

SESSO: Uh, I think we had two bedrooms and a living room and a kitchen.

MOORE: And did, how was it heated, that apartment?

SESSO: How was the heating?

MOORE: Yeah. Well, how did they heat it?

SESSO: With coal.

MOORE: With coal.

SESSO: A stove.

MOORE: How about lighting? What type of lighting did it have?

SESSO: Well, what kind of light did we have? A kerosene lamp.

MOORE: And what about plumbing? Was there plumbing?

SESSO: I don't remember an outhouse, so we must have had a toilet in the house. But, now, the water at the sink, I remember having a countertop next to the sink that was made of wood, and on that countertop there was attached a pump. You'd pump it, and the water would come out. We didn't have regular faucets like we have today.

MOORE: So you think, you presume there was indoor plumbing then, in terms of the toilet facilities.

SESSO: Yeah, it was indoor.

MOORE: Okay. So when you went there did your . . .

SESSO: When I went where?

MOORE: To Chicago. When you got to Chicago, you were a

child, your father was working at that point, was he?

SESSO: Yes.

MOORE: And what job, do you know?

SESSO: No.

MOORE: Okay. Did your mother go to work?

SESSO: No.

MOORE: And did you, did your brothers go to school immediately?

SESSO: I was four, so my next brother would have been five years older. That would make him nine, nine or ten, so he must have gone to school. My next brother was three years older. That would have made him thirteen, fourteen years old. And at fourteen you're not obliged, you were not obliged to go to school then. Today it's sixteen. Okay. My brother Frank went to school here. My brother Tony, I don't recall whether he went to school or not.

MOORE: Um . . .

SESSO: But he could read the newspaper.

MOORE: In English.

SESSO: In English.

MOORE: Eventually.

SESSO: Yes.

MOORE: Back to your house, I forgot to ask you about the neighborhood. Were you in an immigrant neighborhood? Where did you, that neighborhood that you describe, were there other foreigners?

SESSO: I presume so. I really don't know. I don't recall.

MOORE: How long did you live at that residence?

SESSO: I don't remember.

MOORE: That's okay. Now, you went to school, you were four years old, so the following year you had to go to school. No? You didn't?

SESSO: I didn't go to school until 19, 1908.

MOORE: So did you go to kindergarten?

SESSO: No. Didn't go to kindergarten, didn't go to first grade, second grade. I went into third grade.

MOORE: Wow. Do you remember learning English?

SESSO: Uh, not very much.

MOORE: So you picked it up by playing with children?

SESSO: I picked up a little bit by playing with other youngsters, but I was not in school until I was in third grade.

MOORE: And when you went to third grade, did you speak English well enough to keep up?

SESSO: Yes, yes.

MOORE: And do you remember any of your fellow students or your teachers in your first school?

SESSO: I should remember her. I, Delbenco[ph], I think was her name, Miss Delbenco[ph], my third grade teacher. She punished me, so I should remember her.

MOORE: Punished you for what?

SESSO: She had said she wanted nobody to chew gum in the classroom, and if she caught anybody with chewing gum she'd, you'd have to come to the front of the class, put the gum on your nose and just sit there, stand

there until she told you to go back to your seat. Being one of the oldest in the class, I was appointed as a monitor while she was out of the room. So one day one of the girls brought a stick of gum to school, and outside I said to her, "Give me half. Let me have a piece of it." She wouldn't give it to me, so in school she was chewing this gum. So for revenge I called her to the front of the class, and I told her to put that gum on her nose, and she did, she obeyed me, and it was summertime. The windows were open, the wind was blowing, our hair was long. All the girls' hair was long. She started to cry and rub her face, and before we knew it she had hair caught on that gum.

(they laugh) It was on her, Miss Delbenco[ph] came in. There I was at her desk, and this girl was in front of the desk with all this hair caught in the gum. So, there was no other way to get that girl to look decent was except to cut the hair and get the gum off. Well, of course, that was terrible. The girl had to have her hair cut. In those days it was terrible. So for punishment, she put me in the corner, so I can't forget her name.

MOORE: Well, did you ever experience any prejudice from being

a foreigner as a child in this country?

SESSO: Was I ever . . .

MOORE: Did anybody ever hold that against you, for being an immigrant?

SESSO: No, no.

MOORE: They never called you any names or anything?

SESSO: No.

MOORE: What about your religious life here?

SESSO: My religious life wasn't really worth much until I grew up a little bit more.

MOORE: Did your parents attend Mass?

SESSO: No, my mother passed away at childbirth in 1908. See, we came here in 1904 or 1905, my mother passed away in 1908. My sister was born 1906, and she passed away 1908 at childbirth at Presbyterian, down at Presbyterian Hospital in Chicago. And no, we were not very religious people. We didn't know where the church was, and we were not very religious people.

MOORE: About your mother's death, how did that change the

family? Who took care of the children then when your mother died?

SESSO: My mother passed away at childbirth. My sister was twenty-seven months. I was seven years old. And that same year, the following year, my mother passed away in December. In February my father decided to go out west, so he said to my two older brothers, "Here are two sisters, your two sisters." I was seven and my sister was twenty-seven months. "You take care of them." And he went out west.

MOORE: Where out west, do you know?

SESSO: Yes, he went to Tacoma, Washington.

MOORE: And why did he go?

SESSO: Because he couldn't find a job here in Chicago, not knowing the language. And at that time they had agencies where if you wanted to work they would hire you. And you had to pay them, I guess a certain percentage of what you made for the first month or the first couple of months. And they would ship you out. They had the work for you.

MOORE: Why didn't he want to take you with him, all of you?

SESSO: Well, he was a man, no wife. What was he going to do with the children?

MOORE: So, in fact, you lost both parents . . .

SESSO: Yes.

MOORE: At home, very quickly.

SESSO: Yes. We didn't see him for about five years. He never wrote to us, never sent us a penny.

MOORE: How did you exist?

SESSO: My two brothers then. One of them was fifteen, and the other was eighteen. And the one who was fifteen, as soon as he turned sixteen he got married. So we lived with him. And the following year the other one got married, and so we all lived together.

MOORE: And how was that for you growing up?

SESSO: Well, that wasn't bad. I had somebody.

MOORE: Now, then who took care of the baby, your youngest sister? Did you help with that?

SESSO: My younger sister, my sister, five years younger than

I am, and I were taken to Mary Jane Nursery,
(correcting herself) Mary Crane Nursery in Chicago.
And they paid, my brothers would pay one penny a day
for me, for taking care of me, and two cents for my
sister. And they would take us there in the morning,
and then they would go to work and pick us up after
work.

MOORE: And do you remember much about the nursery?

SESSO: Uh, no. Well, when we got there, they would change
our clothes and put us on, put us in a smock, so we
would be all in uniform, like. And they would give us
breakfast in the morning, and they would give us lunch
at noon and then a snack in the afternoon. And then
my brothers would pick us up.

MOORE: What language do you speak at home amongst your
brothers and your younger sister?

SESSO: A dialect, Sicilian, an Italian dialect.

MOORE: And did you ever then pass that on to your children,
the same language?

SESSO: No, not my children.

MOORE: Okay. Now . . .

SESSO: Although today I teach it.

MOORE: You teach this dialect today?

SESSO: No, I teach the Italian.

MOORE: You teach Italian today?

SESSO: Yeah. I have taught it, I should say. I don't teach any more.

MOORE: How would you say that your brothers and your younger sister and yourself adjusted to life in the United States? Did any of you have problems?

SESSO: No, none of us had any problems.

MOORE: Did you ever want to return to Sicily, anyone in your family?

SESSO: No, I never had that desire because my mother was an adopted child, originally. And due to the fact . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SESSO: I never had the desire of going back because I

understand my mother was taken from an orphanage. And due to the fact that I was so young when we came here, and I was only seven-and-a-half when our mother passed away and my father, having left us, there was nobody at home to correspond with the people back in Europe.

So I really don't know who these people are that adopted my mother back in Europe. So we had no connections. I didn't know how to write, and my brothers were young. My oldest brother would correspond with somebody back there once in a while, but I never knew who it was.

MOORE: So when your mom died, did your brothers take care of everything? Did they make up for it a little bit for you, I mean, you were the youngest one. I mean, how was that, your adjustment then? You said you didn't go to school until you were in the third grade. Is that why?

SESSO: Well, I was seven when my mother died, and I was not in school yet. So the following year, that made me eight, and so they had to put me in third grade.

MOORE: Did your brothers ever want to go back?

SESSO: No.

MOORE: And what jobs did your brothers get?

SESSO: My oldest brother was a barber, and my second brother worked as a bellhop, I think you would call him, at the Blackstone Hotel in Chicago. And my third brother, my father took with him out to the west coast.

MOORE: Was he, did he ever come back and stay with you?

SESSO: Yes. My youngest brother left here in 1908, 1909, and came back in 1933 for the World's Fair in Chicago.

MOORE: So basically he didn't come back all those years at all?

SESSO: No.

MOORE: So who were you closest to in your family, do you think?

SESSO: My two brothers.

MOORE: Your two older brothers.

SESSO: And my sister. Now, after my two brothers died, after my two brothers married, then they separated us two girls. One went to live with one brother, and one

went to live with the other brother.

MOORE: And did they stay in these jobs most of their lives?

SESSO: They stayed, yes, yes.

MOORE: And, okay. Now, they all spoke English, though.

SESSO: Yes, yes. My youngest brother worked for the Great Northern Railroad.

MOORE: And when your father came back after five years, did he stay here then?

SESSO: Nope. He came here and he told my brothers he had intentions of getting married again, and he wanted a young girl, so he went back to Europe and he married a young girl.

MOORE: So your father did go back?

SESSO: To Europe, yes, to Sicily.

MOORE: To live?

SESSO: Yes, yes.

MOORE: So actually he came to the States and worked for maybe six, seven years? More than that?

SESSO: Oh, no, more than that. Well, wait a minute. Mother died in 1908, and he left here 1912. I'll take it back, 1912. Just before the First World War started, my father went back. And he remarried and has a family of five children with his second wife.

MOORE: So he came here what year? 1900?

SESSO: We came in 1904 or '05, and he must have been here a couple of years before we did.

MOORE: So his stay in the States was a little over ten years, you would say.

SESSO: Yes, yes.

MOORE: And during that time do you think he made money enough to go back to Italy to start over or . . .

SESSO: I imagine he must have, because he went back and you had to have money to buy your ticket. You didn't have to have anybody to sponsor you or anything, but.

MOORE: Did he stay in contact with you?

SESSO: No.

MOORE: So basically he went off, after you were seven-and-a-

half years old, he went out west, had a profession, then went back to Italy to start his life over again.

SESSO: Yes.

MOORE: Are you in contact with any of those people there?

SESSO: I am in contact with my youngest brother from his second wife, who is now living in Chicago. He's married and has two lovely sons. Yes, I am in contact with him.

MOORE: Did your father ever talk about why he wanted to go back to Italy?

SESSO: No. He wasn't here long enough to talk about it. He was here about a couple of weeks or so, and then he went back.

MOORE: Describe your life, then. All right, you lived with your brothers, and what happened after that? Tell me a bit about the course of your life.

SESSO: Well, what could I say? I lived with my sister-in-law and my brother, and my sister-in-law was very generous with us, very kind. She had a family of her own then. She raised nine children.

MOORE: Was she Italian?

SESSO: Yes.

MOORE: Was she born here?

SESSO: No, she was born over there.

MOORE: Did your brother speak Italian to her at home, the dialect?

SESSO: Yes, oh, yes. We had to speak the dialect at home. She forbid us to speak English because she said she couldn't understand the language, and she wanted to know what we were talking about. She says, "I don't know whether you're talking about me, and I can't defend myself. Speak English, uh, speak Italian," she said, her dialect.

MOORE: And was she warm to you?

SESSO: Yes, she was very kind to us, both me and my sister.

MOORE: What about family, what was your favorite holiday? What were holidays like, or religious days like, in your family?

SESSO: We didn't have, we didn't do much celebrating. First

it was just another day. I never knew what a birthday cake was until after I got married.

MOORE: And what about Christmas?

SESSO: Uh, Christmas, well, Christmas was more of a celebrated holiday, but not to the extent that we celebrate it today.

MOORE: What did you do when you lived with your brother and his wife, your sister-in-law, what did you do when you were younger for entertainment? What kinds of games did you play?

SESSO: Oh, we would play jacks, hopscotch, marbles once in a while. That's about the extent. Rope!

MOORE: And rope.

SESSO: Jump the rope. That's about the extent of it.

MOORE: And did you have any other children to play with who were Italian, then?

SESSO: That were Italian? Well, usually if you're an Italian you go into an Italian neighborhood. You don't go into an Irish or a German neighborhood. So we were sort of clannish, like.

MOORE: Now, did you live in an Italian neighborhood?

SESSO: Yes.

MOORE: And what neighborhood was that?

SESSO: Well, I could describe it to the location, but I couldn't tell you.

MOORE: Tell me the location of the Italian neighborhood, and what year was this you're talking about, what years are you talking about?

SESSO: Oh, we're talking about 1910, 1911, 1910.

MOORE: And where were the Italian neighborhoods at that time? Where was that?

SESSO: Okay. That was between Racine and, Racine on the west, and Halstead on the east. Van Buren on the north, and Polk Street on the south.

MOORE: And what was it like living in an Italian neighborhood in 1910?

SESSO: Well, you could understand each other. The children didn't know the English language, and . . .

MOORE: What about food?

SESSO: The food was almost the same that you have every day,
so.

MOORE: Was there a church in that neighborhood?

SESSO: Yes, there was a church, Our Lady of Pompeii.

MOORE: And did you ever attend?

SESSO: Yes, I would attend on Sundays only.

MOORE: Sunday school?

SESSO: No. I went to a public school.

MOORE: But did you go to Sunday school at church?

SESSO: No, no. I didn't go to Sunday school. No. I just
went to the Mass. Uh-huh.

MOORE: Were you taught by your parents any prayers every day?
Did you say prayers before you went to bed?

SESSO: Uh, yes. Mother did teach me a few prayers before she
passed away.

MOORE: And what prayers? Do you remember any of them?

SESSO: Oh, yes. I remember the Our Father and the Hail Mary.

MOORE: And those are two of the basic ones that you said.
And do you have, when you say your family came here did they, what did they bring with them from Italy in terms of belongings? What did they pack? Do you have anything left?

SESSO: Do I have anything left? Yes, I do. I have a pair of shams, I think you'd call them, they are pillow covers, with crocheted around the edge. I still hang on to them in memory of my mother's belongings.

MOORE: And do you know what else they brought with them? You were real small.

SESSO: No, I don't. I don't recall whatever else Mother brought along.

MOORE: No. Okay. So you went to the public school in an Italian neighborhood, and you got along with your neighbors?

SESSO: Oh, yes. We never had any quarrels. We never had any trouble.

MOORE: Did you have block parties?

SESSO: No.

MOORE: Okay. So you went to the public school. And then what happened? We got you up to just about ten years old now. So what went on after that?

SESSO: Well, I graduated from grammar school and went into high school and, for which I consider myself quite lucky. And after I graduated high school I had my choice, either going on to college and become a schoolteacher, or take a test at the county building in Chicago, the Board of Education, and teaching in the rural district for two years and get my certificate that way. Well, by that time I was eighteen, nineteen years old, I decided to teach in the rural district. I taught for two years, got my degree . . .

MOORE: What level did you teach? What grade?

SESSO: Uh, grammar school, the elementary school. And then my husband came along, and we fell in love with each other, I married, and I only taught the one year before I got married.

MOORE: Now, let's go back to high school. Did you go to a

public high school or a Catholic high school?

SESSO: Public.

MOORE: All right.

SESSO: No, wait a minute. I'll take it back. Catholic high school. St. Mary's.

MOORE: You went to St. Mary's. Now, why did you go to the Catholic school then? (there is a disturbance with the microphone) It's just the microphone.

SESSO: Oh, I'm sorry.

MOORE: No, that's all right. Why did you go to, you went to public school first, and then you went to St. Mary's. Why did you . . .

SESSO: I don't know. My brothers send me there.

MOORE: And do you remember anything about the high school, about the nuns who taught you?

SESSO: Well, it's just a Catholic high school.

MOORE: And you knew you wanted to become a teacher?

SESSO: Yes.

MOORE: And when you went out to a rural area, what area did you go to to teach?

SESSO: I went to Elmwood Park and taught there for two years.

MOORE: And that was rural?

SESSO: Yes.

MOORE: How rural was it, then?

SESSO: Well, it wasn't completely rural. We had first and second in one room, and then it was third and fourth was in the next room, and fifth and sixth. And then seventh and eighth were in another room, so it was four classrooms.

MOORE: So . . .

SESSO: No kindergarten.

MOORE: You taught for one year.

SESSO: Two years.

MOORE: Two years.

SESSO: Uh-huh.

MOORE: Did you get your certificate?

SESSO: My first year I taught was when I was a senior in high school. I taught part time, and I went to school for half a day. And then my second year was my full year of teaching.

MOORE: Were there any other Italian children just coming over who were, that you had to teach?

SESSO: No, no. There wasn't any, not that I could recall offhand.

MOORE: So you taught for the two years, and that meant you got your certificate.

SESSO: Yes. And then my husband came along and . . .

MOORE: Swept you off your feet.

SESSO: And we got married, so I didn't go back to teaching because then the law was that a married woman could not teach. They didn't want any pregnant people, or women, in front of a classroom. So I went back teaching after I was a grandmother, and I taught for thirteen years.

MOORE: Where?

SESSO: At the Catholic school in Highland Park.

MOORE: So you returned to it, you liked it that much. And what about children? Did you have children?

SESSO: I have three, three healthy children, and I'm proud of them.

MOORE: What are their names, and . . .

SESSO: Jasmine is the first. She is now seventy-two years old. And Gertrude is the next. She is seventy-one years old, or will be seventy-one in about a month, a couple of weeks she'll be seventy-one, that one. And my baby is going to be seventy in September.

MOORE: And when you look, tell me also when I'm, you survived your husband then, right?

SESSO: Yes, we got married and had the three children. We raised them. We saw them get married and settled. They each have a home. My baby is a physical ed teacher, a retired physical ed teacher, and we saw their children, so we became grandparents. And we saw their children. My grandchildren's children, so we are great-grandparents.

MOORE: And what did your husband do for a profession?

SESSO: My husband was a truck driver, and he worked at a lumber yard here in Highland Park from 1920 until 1966 when he retired.

MOORE: And he was born in Italy?

SESSO: He was born in Italy also.

MOORE: What part of Italy was he born in?

SESSO: He was born in Calabria, Italy. That's a little bit farther north than where I came from. See, I come from the Sicily, from the island, and he came from the mainland.

MOORE: Do you have any anecdotes, any stories about your husband that you think is typical of him?

SESSO: No, I don't think I could. He was a very good provider, a family man. He caused no trouble. He loved his children. That's about it.

MOORE: When you look back at your life now, and all the things that happened, are you happy that you came to the United States?

SESSO: Yes, indeed I am.

MOORE: And why are you happy?

SESSO: I am happy because I know that if I had been back home I would never have had the opportunity that I have had here.

MOORE: And do you think that your children feel similar?

SESSO: Yes, I think so too.

MOORE: And when you had contact with the people in Italy, do you know what their life is like?

SESSO: No, I have had no contact with none of my family. My husband's family, yes, I have had contact with them.

MOORE: And was your husband happy that he came to this country?

SESSO: Yes, yes.

MOORE: And was his family, too?

SESSO: He was happy, he never returned. He never saw his parents again after he came here. He was only sixteen when he came here, and hearing him talk of what life was back home, I think I'm in a better place than he

was when he was living back home.

MOORE: Do you think your sister and your older brothers also felt like you did, that they're happy?

SESSO: I didn't quite get you?

MOORE: Do you think that the rest of your brothers and sister, your brothers and sister, do you think that they also were happy that they came here?

SESSO: I think so, yes.

MOORE: That's a good place to end. Okay, then. I'd like to thank you on behalf of Ellis Island for helping us, and we'll put as a note at the beginning, we'll type in a note about the year of you coming, the question of the year of you coming, the month of you coming here, in 1904 or 1905.

SESSO: Okay.

MOORE: This is Kate Moore in Highland Park, Illinois on April 27, 1994 with Pauline Sesso for the Ellis Island Oral History Project.