

NPS-28/ANGELA ROSSI

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ANGELA CARLOZZI ROSSI

INTERVIEW DATE: NOVEMBER 7, 1973

RUNNING TIME: 1:07:45

INTERVIEWER: MARGO NASH

RECORDER ENGINEER: UNKNOWN

INTERVIEW LOCATION: WEEHAWKEN, NJ

TRANSCRIPT ORIGINALLY PREPARED BY: CHARLENE KEYLOR, 1/1979

TRANSCRIPT RECONCEIVED BY: CHICK LEMONICK, 4/1995

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: STACEY B. MENAKER, 5/1995

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE ITALIAN WELFARE LEAGUE
1934 TO CIRCA 1953

NASH: Today is November 7, 1973. I am visiting in the home
of
Mrs. Angela Carlozzi, who for twenty years was Executive Secretary of the Italian
Welfare League and for the last twenty years was the
Secretary-Treasurer of the Welfare Photo Studio and she is
going to tell us about her experiences working in the
Immigration field and particularly what Ellis Island was like.
So let's begin. Mrs. Rossi, how did you get into the
immigration line?

ROSSI: Well, I was working with the Society to Protect Children
in Philadelphia and was anxious to get back to New York and
I heard about this opening at the Italian Welfare League and
I made application and was taken on. And may I correct a
statement that you made. I was with the organization

thirty-eight years and just twenty years with the Welfare Photo Studio. When I first came to the Italian Welfare League, I didn't realize that it dealt with immigration and with naturalization. I had never even held a naturalization paper in my hand. And then I had to learn from scratch everything that came in with the naturalization work.

NASH: Were your parents immigrants?

ROSSI: My parents were immigrants, yes, but I was born in New York City so that I myself was an American, native-born citizen.

My parents were of Italian background, were Italians, as a matter of fact, and they came to the United States and were married here and then I came along with my brothers and sisters and that's how I got in with the work. I had done settlement house work and the work with the Society to Protect Children from Cruelty, and then I got into the Italian Welfare League.

NASH: What year was that?

ROSSI: That was in 1934. I became Executive Secretary of the Italian Welfare League.

NASH: What did the Italian Welfare League do?

ROSSI: Well, at that time we were working with Italian immigrants who had gotten into difficulty with the Immigration authorities. Some had come, it was past the time of 1924 when whoever came into the United States had to have with them some sort of a document showing that they had come in legally. Many of them didn't know that this was possible and many of them came in illegally, and when they were picked up, whether they had a wife and whether they had one, two, three, or six children, they were deported, and the head of the Immigration Office at Ellis Island where we had our own little office, asked us if we would do something about these people in straightening them out prior to deportation because they didn't know what to do with the families after the husband and the working part of the family had been deported. And that is how we were started working with the wife and children.

NASH: Does that mean that the families were also about to be deported?

ROSSI: The families were also about to be deported, but if they didn't want to go back, they weren't forced back so that they stayed here. Some of them were U.S. citizens, some were U.S. born citizens and they didn't want to go back to Italy.

NASH: In other words, these people had come from Italy. Some of them had been originally U.S. citizens, then they came back

with their husbands...

ROSSI: No. They had not been originally U.S. citizens. They were either U.S. born, which made them citizens, or they became citizens, now I am getting my dates twisted because they could become citizens on their own in the '20s sometime, but they didn't want to go back to Italy because a lot of them didn't know anyone in Italy, didn't know any of the families, and they were going back to a strange country. The husband knew Italy, but the wife didn't know Italy, had never been there.

So they hesitated about going back. And we then tried in every manner and every way to get them to remain here by taking it up with the Immigration authorities, working on forms and on documents and getting different things ready for the Immigration Service to process.

NASH: So many of these many were broken families then, the husband having already gone back?

ROSSI: Many of them were from broken families if they didn't go back, and if they couldn't stay here. Of course, not everybody could stay here so if they couldn't stay here they were broken families and so then we tried in every which way, and it was close to 1939 when we had that terrific crisis of unemployment and if the men were taken away from the family, the wife

couldn't find any work to do.

NASH: You mean 1929.

ROSSI: '29, well, it was in that area, you know, because it continued for a good many years, and so we tried to help them as much as we could in straightening themselves out. If there were certain forms that had to be filled in, we filled them in. And as we were bilingual, it was very easy for us to do it for the family who didn't speak English.

NASH: There must have been an awful lot of dialects of Italian. Could you always communicate?

ROSSI: Yes, but you get used to it after a while. You know, you get used to the Sicilian and the Barraza and the North of Italy and the South of Italy, and it gets to you. You talk so much with them that you get to know them.

NASH: What other kinds of services did you provide for them besides legal?

ROSSI: Well, we tried to get jobs for the wife, we tried to get relief because there was relief in those days, and we would tell the Relief Department that there was no way for these people to work and they would have

to get some help. And they were U.S. citizens. Those who were U.S. citizens, we insisted that something be given them. So they helped a great deal and we worked hard in those days. It was very difficult too, to work with them because a lot of them didn't know, now, for instance, a very well dressed woman comes over to me and says, "I need four tires for my car." I said, "Well, I wish I had a car that I could use four tires too." And she thought I was being facetious, but I said, "This is not for cars, this is for food. These people have no food to eat." Well, she said, "I was born in the United States." I said, "So was I." I said, "I was born in the United States, but you try to get yourself a job and work to take care of your car and take care of the tires and so on." And we gave them advice, both in English and Italian, and after a while they got to know that we were not out to do things against them. We were there to help them, not to scalp them, so to speak, and so they listened to us and they would come to us voluntarily.

NASH: These people weren't on Ellis Island, is that right?

ROSSI: No, no, no, no, they were people who lived in the city and they came to us for advice because they didn't know what to do, and many times we ourselves didn't know what to do. We had to scout around ourselves to find out what could be done with these people.

NASH: What about Ellis Island? What other kinds of services did you provide for the people on Ellis Island?

ROSSI: The people on Ellis Island, naturally, they were incarcerated there. They needed clothing, they needed shaving material, they needed dental toothpaste, and little things like that, and we were told that we could supply them with that. Now that money had to come from us because they weren't working and they didn't have it and many times the family didn't have it so that we did the best we could with what we had to give it to them.

NASH: And what about the food? Did they eat...

ROSSI: Oh, the food was supplied by the government.

NASH: And did they like the food on Ellis Island?

ROSSI: No, I think more was thrown out than was eaten. Then after a while they got used to that food and ate.

NASH: Did they ever get any Italian food?

ROSSI: Well, sometimes they had an Italian chef and he managed to cook Italian food, but that wasn't important because really we used to see the food going in on the ferry. The food going in on the ferry was beautiful, beefs, great big legs of beef, fresh vegetables, and so on. What they did between that time and when they served it, we don't know because it looked terrible

when it was there. We workers were not supposed to eat any of that food, we just bought our sandwiches or whatever they had there for us, you know, but we had to buy our own food in the cafeteria there.

NASH: How often did you go out to Ellis Island and how long was your day?

ROSSI: Well, the day was, you had to get there and make the ferry because if you missed the ferry you had to wait a whole hour, see, because the ferry just traveled every hour. And, cause, it made a round-trip and by the time it got to the Ellis Island, it was ready to come back again and this other one was ready to go out so that my very first day at Ellis Island I missed the boat. So they laughed at me because they said, "Well, you sure missed the boat that time."

NASH: Do you remember your first impressions, the first day you went to Ellis Island?

ROSSI: Yes. Well, see, I had been used to crowds and I had been used to that type of person because I did settlement house work and children's work and so I wasn't so horribly impressed except that I wanted to do as much as I could for them to see them get out and especially if they had nothing because it's amazing how many times there was nothing wrong with the family, with the man, but some very ambitious immigration man, you know, just wanted to make

a name for himself and they would just give the wrong information and the fellow didn't get out.

NASH: Were you able sometimes to clear those things up?

ROSSI: Oh, yes. During the war, when we had thousands of people on the Island, after December 7th, the FBI, how they did it I don't know, it's really a marvel, they went out and scouted around and picked up Italians, Germans, and Japanese and brought them to Ellis Island and they slept in these great big dorms with double beds, you know.

NASH: They were separated, weren't they, according to nationality?

ROSSI: Sometimes. Sometimes they weren't, but most of the times they were. But they had a man there who used to do the sweeping around in the dorm, and one of the men said to me, "Why don't you do something for that man?" I said, "Well, what did he do?" We were not supposed to do anything about their cases. We were not supposed to touch their cases. We could take care of their physical needs, you know, clothing, shoes, even extra food if they wanted it.

NASH: You mean this special group, this group that had been rounded up during the war? Is that what you mean?

ROSSI: Yes.

NASH: Those people's cases?

ROSSI: Anybody, anybody there because they took them out of the prisons and put them on Ellis Island to deport them.

NASH: Were all these people from prisons?

ROSSI: No, no, no, they weren't all from prison, but there were some who had been in prison. They didn't know how to get rid of them, but this was an opportunity for them to get rid of them. But I said, "Well, I don't know whether I can do anything for him." So I went over to talk to him and I said, "Why are you here? What brought you into this place?" He said, "I lost my Alien Registration Card and I came here to report it about six months before." And he said, "They just told me to wait and they would call me and they would see that I got out." So I went to the head of the Immigration office and I said, "Don't you check your cases?" and he said, "Why?" I said, "You have a man in there who's been here six months," and I said, "All he did was to come here, obey the law by coming and telling you he had lost his Alien Registration

Card." He said, "Where is he?" So I said, "He is up there."

So we got him. This man had a big ball of lead findings that they had in the cigarettes, remember they used to wrap cigarettes, maybe you don't remember, you are too young, but they used to wrap the cigarette packages in lead, the inside, to keep them fresh. Well, he used to sweep. He would take this lead and he made a ball and he almost missed the ferry because the inspector said to me, "Would you take him home?"

Do you know where his relatives live?" I said, "Yes, I spoke to his relatives and they are ready to take him home. They have been wondering what happened to him because all his clothing and all his furniture was taken out of the house where he lived." So I told him what station to get off at the subway and I told them to meet him at that station so that I wouldn't have to, you know, accompany him to the station. It was way up in the Bronx. And I said, "Well, what are you doing with all that lead?" He says, "I am working for the war effort."

I went back to the immigration inspector, the chief, and I said, "Well, if you have anybody better than that man, you'll have to show him to me because," I said, "Here is this man carrying around this load of lead for the war effort and doesn't feel one bit of resentment against the government for keeping him there six months. He thought that's where he had to stay."

We didn't disillusion him because we didn't want to get him

upset." But he finally got out and he went to the relatives up in the Bronx, but I have never forgotten it. He could hardly walk. He was carrying this big lump of lead. And we had a lot of cases of that type, you know, little human interest stories that we had. My chief wonders where this girl, her mother had sent her here to, the mother was a U.S. citizen, and she had sent the daughter back here to the United States to relatives. Now the relatives didn't want her. The relatives lived in Binghamton. They didn't want her and they said, "No, we can't take her. They notified us too late and we can't make arrangements." However, the cousin of this girl was a paraplegic. His wife was pushing him in a wheelchair, so I said, "Are you the cousin of this girl?" He said, "Yes, and I am so sorry for her, we'll take her." I said, "Are you sure you will be able to take care of her?" He said, "Yes, call up the Bulova Watch people because they have trained me to take care, you know, fix watches and I am making a good salary." So I called up the Bulova Watch and they gave him very good reference and I said to the girl, "Now, however, listen, if you want to go back to Italy, you can't stay in Italy more than a year. You must stay less than a year if you want to come back on that same visa. If you stay over a year then you're out of luck, you have to start all over again." So...

NASH: What year was this?

ROSSI: Oh, I don't remember, in the '30s, early '40s, it was after the war. And I had called Catholic charities in Binghamton and they didn't know anything about immigration so they said I was crazy because this girl was born in Italy so she was not a citizen. She was through her mother, you see, but they didn't know it. I said, "Well, that's alright, I'll work it out." There's no sense arguing it out with them. And one day I get a call from the cousin saying, "You know, Dolores is going back to Italy. Will you see that she has a nice place on the ship and keep her with nice people on the ship," because, you know, they were afraid of anything happening to her. I said, "Yes, I'll take care of her." So I put her on the ship early in the morning and got this woman to room with her and I said, "This woman goes as far as Naples, you take care of her, then her relatives will come and meet her and so on." So she said okay, she would do that. Well, about less than a year afterwards I hear through the grapevine that Dolores was back in the United States. So I said, "Where is she?" You know, they told me where she was. I said, "How did you get back, Dolores?" She said, "I married my cousin." Now this was the law. She couldn't send for her mother. She was too young, she was under eighteen, so she couldn't send for her mother. But under eighteen, being married, she was able to send

for her husband. I don't know why. That was the law and so she had to follow the law. Well, I said, "Well, that's fine." I said, "Now find yourself a job." She found herself a job in a bakery. She spoke English, she had learned to speak English, and one day she called me up and she said, Miss Carlozzi, did you read what happened to me?"

I said, "Dolores, you didn't get arrested for doing something wrong?"

"No, no, no." So I said, "Well, what happened?" She said, "I won the second prize on the Irish sweepstake." I said, "You did?" She said, "Yes. And my husband and I are going back to Italy." Somebody had advised them to take the money and go back and live in Italy.

And so she went back to live in Italy and while she was there she had a baby so I sent her a little silver spoon, you know, and then her mother came. Her mother came then. Her citizenship was okay and she came, and I said, "Tell me", just for curiosity sake, I don't care what she made, what she didn't make. I said, "How much money did Dolores get in with her second part of the..." She said,

"Fifty-six thousand dollars." But she never sent one penny to the League. I was disappointed in that because we had done so much for her. She had been left stranded on the streets, and if we hadn't taken care of her, you know, it would have been pretty bad for her.

But those are the human interest stories. We helped them in filling out their immigration forms. If they needed to file for citizenship, we filled in the citizenship form. If they needed to change from one form to another, we helped them because they didn't read or speak

English so we would help them fill in those forms. We had the war brides during the war. They used to come and we interpreted for the war brides, and they came and we told them what was necessary for them to come. They had to have five hundred dollars which would assure the government that in case the young man didn't marry the girl, then that five hundred dollars was used as their fare back to Italy. And a lot little things happened, you know. Some were funny, some were sad, some were really very humorous, you know, so many things happened.

NASH: What is a humorous one?

ROSSI: Oh, well, we had one little girl who the boyfriend was supposed to meet her on her way to New York he married somebody else in Chicago. So his uncle and aunt used to come and see this little girl at Ellis Island every two weeks, I would say. So I thought how nice that they come and keep her company, you know, because it really was sad.

NASH: She was waiting there to go back. Is that it?

ROSSI: She had to go back, yes, see, because she wasn't being married.

NASH: She was waiting for the ship.

ROSSI: Yes. She was waiting until the documents were all fixed up. The ship they always had. But it was the documents that had to be fixed up, but one day I was on the ship helping to interpret for the people that were just coming over and I heard, "Señora, señora," and I thought, oh boy, that's a familiar voice and I turned around and I look at her, I said, "Maria, what are doing here?" She says, "I married the uncle." And I came, I am here now with a visa because the uncle was a U.S. citizen so he worked it so she got her visa to come to the United States. I wonder sometimes how she is. She was cute. She was a cute youngster. Some of them were terrible. One of them was, there were quite a number that married Japanese. You know that...

NASH: How did that come about?

ROSSI: "Go for Broke", that movie, ah, you mustn't miss it. This was the most decorated Japanese group in the American Army, and they all came, they were all volunteers because they couldn't be drafted because they were enemy alien, some of them. Some of them were U.S. born, you know, but they joined the U.S. Army, and it is really funny. If you ever see it advertised, "Go for Broke", don't miss it. And this girl, these several girls came, but this one girl came and the men said to me, "Would you question that girl? She sounds very strange."

NASH: Where was this?

ROSSI: On Ellis Island. So I said, "What are you doing? When did you get here?" So she said, "Oh, a couple of days ago," and she was crying. She said, "My boyfriend didn't come." I said, "Who is your boyfriend?" And she mentioned some Japanese. I said, "Are you sure you came for a Japanese?" I knew she hadn't, you know, because she had come for someone else, but she had dropped him and she was going to marry this Japanese who had maybe a little bit more money than the other one did, so I said, "Oh, well behave yourself and you'll get out of here." You know, and she said, "Oh," and she started crying, and I said, "Now look, if you act like that you are going to end up in Ward 13," which was the mental ward. So she said, "Oh, no, no, no, not me." I said, "Well, that's what will happen to you." But one day I go there, she was in Ward 12.

NASH: What is that?

ROSSI: Oh, it was a ward, you know.

NASH: Mental?

ROSSI: No, it was in the hospital they had there. They had

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a hospital for TB and sick and so on, so I said, "You didn't get your 13, but you got very close. You got to 12." So she said she tried to commit suicide. They had a very high railing.

You know, she tried to jump that railing onto the floor below for no reason at all because she was happy there. It was only that she wanted to get out. So I said, "So that's what you tried to do." I said, "You'd better not do it again because they will send you back home." So she said she would behave herself. Well, in the meantime her boyfriend came and all these Japanese with plenty of money came to put up her five hundred dollar bond. She must have had about six thousand dollars in bonds for her. And she left then and she got married and they went out to Hawaii because most of them were from Hawaii and Manila, you know. They were not from Japan.

END SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

NASH: How did all these Italian girls meet these Japanese men?

ROSSI: Their Army was in Italy, you see, the Army was in Italy and they were fighting in Italy even though they were Japanese, you see. And it was very interesting to, gee this takes me

back to so many things that happened during the war. Then we helped when the Andrea Doria was rammed and went down. We worked round the clock for these girls, and one of my girls that I was supposed to put on a train and send to San Francisco, she died. She was drowned in the fracas, you know, that they had. And when you think, I don't know how many people they had on board, and only fifty died. I say only, even those fifty were a lot, but I say in comparison, just those fifty died, and they really treated them beautifully because I took some of them to Macy's because the Red Cross gave us money, not money, sales slips.

NASH: Vouchers?

ROSSI: Vouchers, so that they could buy things at Macy's.

And they bought them and, you know, when they got to the girdle department, the girl says, don't pay for these, we have decided to pay for them for you.

NASH: Macy's?

ROSSI: The girls worked at Macy's. They were paying for them.

NASH: Did the people stay at Ellis Island, the people from

the Andrea Doria, no?

ROSSI: Yes, a good many of them stayed at Ellis Island. The men, some of them had to go to the hospital because some of them were really hurt.

NASH: Was the hospital at Ellis Island opened at that time?

ROSSI: No, there was the Saint Vincent's, was close here, and different hospitals they went to. But some man, the husband of one of my board members, had a beautiful Italian suit. You know, real Italian, you could see that it was Italian. So I didn't know, the sizes are different in Europe, so I said, "I'm going to bring a suit this afternoon. You just try on the trousers and see if it fits you." He came out of the bedroom where he had tried it on and he said, "It fits me to perfection, to perfection." He was so proud to have an Italian suit, you know, I said, "How does the jacket fit? Does the jacket fit you?" "Wonderful. wonderful. Señora, you must have a wonderful eye for size," he said, "because it was exactly my size."

NASH: This was donated to this survivor?

ROSSI: It was all donated material. Some Jewish firm sent us I don't know how many hundreds of house dresses, and we just the American Red Cross didn't want us to do it, but I said, to hell with the American Red

Cross. Pardon me, my British. I said, "They are going to get it," because, you know, they had nothing. They had lost everything. Everything was at the bottom of the ocean. So we sent, we gave them that. And now, there were two other young men that had come into the hospital on Ellis Island and when they came in they had men's cloth flannel bathrobes and pajamas and then a tin cup tied to the side of their pajamas. I said, "What are you doing here?" He said, "We have been sick. We have had an operation." And anyone who'd had, according to the law, I have forgotten now what the name of the law was...

NASH: Are we still on the Andrea Doria? These are still people from the Andrea Doria?

ROSSI: Yes, this is the Andrea Doria. Well, anyone who was on that ship, or what other ship went down. I think the Andrea Doria didn't go down. Well, any way, the ship that went down. I have forgotten. You know, you hear so many things. So, and I said, "Well, where are your clothes?" He said, "They sent us from England like this, and they said we were supposed to go home like this, just in flannel pajamas and a coat, you know, flannel coat." And we were collecting clothing for the victims of the...

NASH: What was the tin cup for?

ROSSI: I don't know. Don't ask me. I guess when they wanted a drink they had to use the tin cup. But I went to the woman who had charge

of the clothing and I said, "Do you have two sets of suits? Well, he is like this, you know, and like that," and tried to describe because I didn't know the sizes. So about a week later I went back to Ellis Island and I went there and these two men came up to me, "Oh, good morning Señora, how are you?" I said, "Fine." I said, "Who are you?" He said, "We are the two men that had the flannel pajamas," and he said, "These suits fit us perfectly." When they got back to Italy they wrote me and told me how wonderful they were. All these little things that come back. The regular routine was filling in the forms and giving them information about the forms and giving them, if they needed information on citizenship, we gave it to them. If they needed instructions on how to answer the questions on citizenship, we had a list in Italian, the organization. Now, I am only talking about Italians because all the other organizations had their own nationality.

NASH: Did you share a room or you had your own?

ROSSI: Well, we had a great big room, you know, and I had a desk at one end of the room and then the Jewish people had a desk in the front and then the German people had another desk. Everybody had a desk, you know, but big enough. We weren't crowded.

NASH: How did you all get along together, the different organizations?

ROSSI: Oh, the British and the English were fighting all the time.

NASH: The British and the English?

ROSSI: The British and the Irish were fighting all the time. And I would say to the Irish girl, "Just shrug your shoulders, just say alright, but don't listen to her," you know. You get the little jealousies, you know, in the room. We had them here too until now one of them is gone and so there is a little more quiet. But I never bothered. I never quarreled with anybody. I would tell them off.

NASH: What did they quarrel about?

ROSSI: Nothing, nothing actually. Really nothing. Who had the pencil and who was going to hold it and who was going to push it. Oh, it really was something, you know, over nothing they would just do that.

NASH: Did occasionally did, lets' say the Jewish representative ever have any dealings with an Italian?

ROSSI: Yes, we used to interpret for them because they had...

NASH: For who, the Jews?

ROSSI: The Jewish people because they had the Jewish group in Italy in a concentration camp. Well, when they were removed and were sent to the United States, they didn't speak English and they didn't speak Jewish or Yiddish, and the girl that spoke Yiddish...

NASH: These were Italian Jews in other words?

ROSSI: No, no, no, they were German Jews, Hungarian Jews. They were Jews that were in the group. And she would come, "Carlozzi, you want to come and help me interpret?" "Okay, what is it," you know, and I would go and interpret and tell them what they needed and what they should do and so on, but really I enjoyed my work very much. I hated like the devil to leave because it was one of the things that I enjoyed very much, no matter how hard we worked. Sometimes on the pier my feet used to be swollen from walking up and down on the pier, but I'd go home, put them in hot water, and the next morning I'd be ready to get started all over again.

NASH: You say you went out on the boats. Did you ever go out to Rosebank, to the quarantine station?

ROSSI: No, no, no. We didn't. Well, you know why, because you had to go over in a rope ladder. I didn't want yo go up on a rope ladder. Not any of them wore trousers in those days. You wore skirts. If the wind

blew and everything that you had was shown, but I didn't go, but they didn't permit it either. They didn't like it because it was a little dangerous. A rope ladder swinging and if it was breezy. But we waited until they got to the pier.

NASH: At Ellis Island.

ROSSI: No.

NASH: At the Battery?

ROSSI: No, not at the Battery. Right here in 50th Street.

They had their ships docked in 50th Street. Once they docked at 48th Street, then they docked at 50th Street, and now they have torn down 50th Street and I don't know where they are banking.

NASH: So what would happen is that Immigration officials and whoever would go on the ship when the docked there and then maybe from there people would be sent back to Ellis Island?

ROSSI: They weren't sent back to Ellis Island. At first they were all gathered and placed on Ellis Island. Their passports were taken away from them. They were placed on Ellis Island.

But then...

NASH: Till what year was that roughly?

ROSSI: Oh, I would say until about ten or twelve years ago.

The ship got too crowded and then what they did was to take their passports and say, "On such and such day and such and such a date you call at the Immigration Office for your passport." So they had to go to the Immigration Office to get their passport.

NASH: This was after they were detaining people. They sort of got away from that.

ROSSI: Yes, well that was a detaining thing too. You know, they were being detained, but not...

NASH: But not in custody.

ROSSI: But not in custody of the Immigration. They didn't have room enough because they were at 20 West Broadway and they had a small space up there for people that they had to keep in custody.

NASH: I have heard a lot of rumors about suicides at Ellis Island. You mentioned one. Did you know of others? You mentioned an attempted

one.

ROSSI: No. I'll tell you what, you see, we were close to the Jersey shore. A lot of people didn't know that was the worst part of the water. The water just ran along swiftly. One girl said to me one time, "Why don't you give me a yellow paper. Then I can get off, not the Island, but the hospital. And you know, I'll have the yellow paper and they will see the yellow paper and they will let me off." And I said, "What are all the others going to do while you are getting off?" I said, "I'm the one that has to bare the brunt, not you."

NASH: What yellow paper is that?

ROSSI: It was a paper that would permit her to get off the Island. You know, it was no paper at all because it wasn't a legal form. So then I said no and she said, "Well, I'm going to swim." I said, "They'll find you in a couple of days in the water." Sure enough.

NASH: They did?

ROSSI: I said, "That is very treacherous water. Don't go near it. Stay away from it. You'll get out. They'll let you out, but don't go near the water because it is treacherous."

NASH: It seems like they have had those kinds of experiences over the years at Ellis Island, you would think that they would let people know that was the case.

ROSSI: Oh, sure. They had signs, they had gates. They had gates, but these people were daring. They'd climb over the gates, "oh, just that little space." I wouldn't doubt if the space was twice the width of this room, but the water was just so rough that they couldn't swim it. But in my time they didn't have that many. I would remember maybe at the most, just the most, four or five. Now if they committed suicide on the pier, in the room, that I wouldn't know, but I know that they didn't commit suicide anymore from those waters. See, and the Consul came out to tell them because the Consul had to pay for their burial. So the Consul would come out and swear to them that they mustn't go near the water and so on and so on, but it didn't do any good. So you see, nobody listens to what is told them.

NASH: Well, you say, what was the unique situation of the Italians let's say, at Ellis Island? Did they have any special problems that were unique to them or a special way of acting that, let's say some other group might not act the same way?

ROSSI: No. The Italians were very, how shall I say, kind and slow. The Germans were very aggressive. So they never moved the Germans. They always moved the Italians. I said, "Sure, good, good. I'm glad."

NASH: What do you mean move?

ROSSI: Move if they needed the space. You know, they would move these, I says, "I'm glad." Because the Germans fight for their place. The Italians say, "You want me to move from there, okay. I'll pack off and off I go."

NASH: I heard they used to have baseball games. Do you know anything about that?

ROSSI: Yes, they used to have baseball games with some of the immigration inspectors, so when my inspector went on vacation I was the only girl there. I says, "I can't play baseball. I don't know what it is all about." So we laughed about it. They said, "We don't want you. We want somebody who plays baseball." No, they played games. They had a covered roof, you know, a wire-covered roof, and they played games with them. They used to entertain themselves.

NASH: How?

ROSSI: Mandolin, guitar playing, singing, doing things of that sort. But, oh there are so many things.

NASH: Did anybody have babies on Ellis Island?

ROSSI: Yes, the German women.

NASH: German?

ROSSI: During the war, during the war because they wouldn't leave their husbands, so they had a certain section where they had the German women and their husbands. I don't know how...

END SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

NASH: So there were many babies born at Ellis Island?

ROSSI: Not too many, not too many babies, but they had a number of babies, but most of the things were forms, forms, forms, forms, hearings with the Immigration Officers, so that they would know exactly why, if they were to be deported, why they were going to be deported, why the husbands were going to be deported. It was something that they took as part of their

living, the life on Ellis Island.

NASH: How did the staff treat the detained people?

ROSSI: Very nicely. The staff was very nice. Some of the lawyers would come to me and say, "Do you see how he treated her?" I said, "How did he treat her?" "He treated her with kid gloves." I said, "How do you expect them to treat her? If she asks for a certain something and he gives her the answer, that's all she needs." But, you know, some felt that they should kowtow to these people on the Island. I never did. They were human beings like you and me, you know. If I could help them, I helped them. If I couldn't help them, I would say, "Well, I'll have to refer you to someone else." I didn't know everything. I admitted it. That's what a lot of these lawyers wouldn't admit, that they didn't know what they had to do and the next step. But I would admit it and say, "No, you don't do that, but you see this inspector and he will tell you what is next, what the next step is."

NASH: What about the hospital? How much time would people spend there?

ROSSI: The hospital only spent as much time as was needed

there. They didn't overstay.

NASH: Did they get much treatment at the hospital?

ROSSI: Oh, whatever it was that they needed treatment. I had a man that had TB and I finally had him sent out to Los Angeles because he had TB and that was the only place where he could get some treatment.

NASH: Was he going to be deported?

ROSSI: No, he didn't get deported. He found a wife there, they married and they straightened themselves out.

NASH: But they sent him to Los Angeles at the time thinking that he was going to be deported?

ROSSI: No, I had him sent out to Los Angeles because that was the place for him. Why should a tubercular man stay in with a crowd with all these other people when they had a place for him.

NASH: In other words, this was a man who was going to be admitted to the United States?

ROSSI: Well, we don't know. See, you don't know until you

go into the case and study the case.

NASH: But he was being held because he had tuberculosis?

ROSSI: He was helped because he was tubercular and they were going to see what could be done because sending him back to Italy didn't do much good and keeping him here did something far less for him. You see, they would give him pills and a glass of water and that was his medicine, and at the hospital, but we had him sent out at the hospital and then he stayed there and then I heard afterwards that he was a very fine architect and I heard afterwards that he met a woman who was also tubercular, so it was fine, you know, and they met and married and left that place. You know, when you don't hear from these people, it means everything is going well. When you start getting letters of complaint, then you know that something went wrong and they are calling on you for help.

NASH: At the hospital at Ellis Island, I understand one of the most important sections of the hospital was the psychiatric ward, they were the busiest?

ROSSI: Well, it wasn't the important section, but they had a psychiatric ward.

NASH: The famous Ward 13?

ROSSI: Yes. They had a psychiatric ward because sometimes these people just, you know how people are, they lose their heads and before you know it they are jumping off the railing and getting hurt. But that wasn't too important. It was important, but not terribly important. Everything was important at the hospital when anyone was sick, you know. This tubercular man, you know, when he says, "I'm going to die here because I don't get anything to eat." Well now, the chef happened to be Italian for the group so I would say, "When I come in on Tuesdays and Thursdays, you let me find a nice big bottle of chicken broth," because it was cheap, chicken was cheap at that time, "And great big pieces of white chicken so I can give it to this man and he can eat it because he can't eat anything you cook in the hospital." They would do it for me. You see, those are the little things that you did for them. Somebody else would say, "Oh, why be bothered. They don't like the food they have here, let them go home."

NASH: So what was the last year that you worked at Ellis Island?

ROSSI: Well, I would have to look up that year because...

NASH: It closed around '54. Were you there at that time?

ROSSI: Oh, yes, '54 I was there. It closed, but that didn't mean under lock and key because we still went back and forth to the Island because all the offices were on the Island and we still went in and spoke to the Immigration inspectors. We got a lot of help from the Immigration inspectors. They were always very pleasant.

NASH: Were there many Italians later at that period and later period?

ROSSI: At one time there were quite a number of Italians. I'll never forget this boy. He had been on one of the ships and he was, I don't know whether he was from Texas, but he spoke with a Texas drawl.

NASH: He spoke Italian with a Texas drawl?

ROSSI: Italian with a Texas drawl. And I listened to him with my eyes and mouth wide open. I said, "You are Italian?" He said, "Yes. I come from Canada, but I speak you know, with." So I said, "Boy, you certainly speak with a Texas drawl." And everybody was laughing because they all knew about it. I was the last one to find out, and they said that he had tried to come in and remain in the country. Well, he couldn't do it, he didn't have any papers, and so they found that he had this Texas drawl and they kept him there until they straightened him out.

NASH: Where did he wind up?

ROSSI: Well, I guess he wound up in the United States after he got through. You see, we didn't, everybody thought that we took care of all the Italians. We never could possibly take care of all the Italians. There were hundreds on Ellis Island, and if you went in and started talking to each one of them, you would never get through. So we didn't have that. We had special cases that either the Immigration Officers referred us to or relatives referred them to us or they came on their own. They heard about us and they would come. But we didn't speak to everybody because it was impossible, we couldn't do it.

NASH: What about the Church's role?

ROSSI: Well, the Church had a section where they had a revolving altar. They had the Jewish, the Catholic, and the Protestant, and whenever there was a service they just revolved the altar.

NASH: Did the Church provide much social service?

ROSSI: No. We did. We would ask them for, at Christmas time

we would ask them for funds to help the boys that were on Ellis Island, until the Jews said, "No, we won't." And they were right. You see, it never had entered our minds, they said, "But we are Jewish, why should we help you at Christmas time when that is Christian holiday?"

NASH: Unless you helped them on Jewish holiday.

ROSSI: Well, we helped them. No, we didn't do anything for them, but we could see their point, you know, that they were right. Why should we help them on their Jewish holidays when it was not a Jewish holiday. It was just a holiday that they had. And sometimes if we had gifts, they used to accept the gifts. We always tried to have gifts for them.

NASH: You mean for the...

ROSSI: All the Italians, yes, men and women. We never had too many women. The Germans had a lot of women. See, as I said, the German women followed the men, you see but the Italians, they didn't. Now '54, they didn't close the Island, but they didn't send people to the Island, they would send them to their, with their passports to their Consuls. And so, go pick your papers up at such and such a place, you know, at such and such a date. And they would pick them up right there, you know, because nobody wants to travel without a passport, especially the Jews because they had trouble with not having passports, but they weren't any worse than anybody else. The Germans, oh.

Well, I mean, they were aggressive, the Germans were, and you couldn't do anything for them because they always knew better than you, you know, and they tried so hard, one man tried to commit suicide and it was terrible. They pulled him out of Ellis Island.

NASH: In the water? How did he try?

ROSSI: Well, they had four men. He was in the center and these four men were alongside of him and he walked alone and they put him on the ship. They had a ship right away, quick, and they put him on the ship and sent him off.

NASH: How did he try to commit suicide?

ROSSI: Well, if he got away from these people that were guarding him and jumped into the river, because you had to pass the river there. Let me see, there were someone else, the Italian people, no the Italian people didn't do much on suicide, but they had...

NASH: Maybe among the non-Catholic peoples. Were they more apt to commit suicide? I mean somebody from say Northern Europe?

ROSSI: No, no, no. It all depends on how they feel at the time. You know, now they may be the most rational person that you meet, then

all of a sudden something snaps and he tries to run away from the Coast Guard. See, the Coast Guard was guarding these people, and they tried to keep them as closely as possible. I had a man one time and I thought he was one of the men on the ship, you know, that he worked on the ship. His language. I mustn't talk. It was awful. I will tell you privately. It was awful, you know. So I said to him, "Come here." You know, I am very imperious, you know, "Come her you." So he came and I said, "What are you, a guard on the ship?" He said, "No, I'm the husband of one of the brides that came in." "Oh, you are a husband. Who is this woman?" "This is my mother," and a little old lady, white, you know. "She is your mother-in-law?" I took my paper and I said, "Sign here." He signed here. I said, "Now you take her," because his language was terrible. He learned all the worse words in Italian that he could think of. But I enjoyed it. I really had lots of fun. It made you feel, you know, that you were really doing something for them. Now is there anything else?

NASH: Did anybody ever receive like special treatment at Ellis Island, a Count, an Italian Count or some royalty or important people?

ROSSI: Oh, yes, yes. Even I helped Toscanini, I helped, you know. They did. Well, they knew Toscanini, they knew a lot of these, Pinza, they knew these people, and it was jealousy on the part of one of the singers, you know, that told stories on not Toscanini, but Pinza, but when they were severe, boy were they were severe.

NASH: You mean the special people? Who? Oh, you mean the authorities?

ROSSI: The authorities were very severe. I remember, I think they must have had a, I only saw him from the outside because I was too busy running from one place to another. This woman that was, this German woman who used the skin of people, you know, in Germany and oh, all these people around her, all wanting to see her. I said, "I don't want to see her. Anybody who would do a thing like that doesn't deserve to be even looked at." But they had people that went in and talked to her. And you know who the worse are. The lawyers.

NASH: You mean the hardest?

ROSSI: The lawyers. They have to know every little detail and, you know, because it may help them in their own case sometime.

NASH: What kind of special treatment did people get? Like what were the ways they made life easier for them?

ROSSI: Oh, no, no, no, they stayed on the Island and maybe they left a week before they were supposed to.

NASH: Did anybody ever get a special room or something like that?

ROSSI: We didn't have any special rooms. It was all one room.

NASH: I heard this rumor once about an apartment, that a Spanish nobleman had an apartment for a short time.

ROSSI: This is news to me unless they put it up on their own. I don't know. I don't know of any. But then you hear so many stories. You can't keep up with any of the stories.

NASH: Were you there when Fritz Coon was deported, Fritz Coon, the American Fuhrer?

ROSSI: I was there when a lot of them were deported because they had quite a number of people that were deported. I don't remember much on names. I don't stick to names, you know. I say, who is he? Oh Fitz Coon, oh yeah and I would walk away, that's all. It wouldn't do me any good, you know.

NASH: I understand sometimes that, you know, for example, the Nazis, they still in there among themselves would sort of observe some kind

of political, you know...

ROSSI: I wouldn't doubt it, I wouldn't doubt it, but let me tell you. All the Jewish people had Kosher food. You see, they had a Kosher cook which I thought was very nice, and they all ate the Kosher food because it was cooked by the Kosher cook. And where but in America would that happen? Whenever a thing like that happens, I say, "Where but in America," you know. Because they stuck it out and gave them the food and made it pleasant for them.

NASH: I understand that, well someone said that they were a little easier, or maybe very much easier on the Jews who came during the war or before the war. They made their immigration a little easier.

ROSSI: No. Listen, when they came in, they had three or four fur coats on their arm, crying, "Get rid of Hitler, get rid of Hitler and I will go back to Germany." Barrels of beautiful china and cameras all over. Even the baby had cameras strung all over. "Get rid of Hitler, get rid of Hitler. We'll go back to Germany, we want to go back to Germany." So how could they treat them well? I said, "Those bums. They want us to fight for them." Now they wouldn't go back and stay there and fight. There were a lot of poor people that suffered because they had no place to go. They had to stay there and they did everything even to sweep the grounds and practically lick the grounds with their tongue to keep them clean. But they did that because they were Jews and they were forced to do it.

NASH: You are talking about in Germany?

ROSSI: In Germany, yes. But I'll never forget this woman with three or four fur coats all over this arm, you know, and these babies, and even the Immigration men were a little bit surprised because they said they shouldn't receive any other special treatment. I said they are just like anybody else.

NASH: There must have been the exception though among the Jews. I mean to come in looking like that with the fur coats and all.

ROSSI: Oh, you are coming off the piers, coming off the piers we saw them. If I hadn't seen them, I would have said, ah, the stories they tell, you know. Not like the story of the Spanish nobleman, I can't tell you anything about it because I didn't see any Spanish nobleman. But actresses by the dozen. You know...

NASH: Like who?

ROSSI: Oh, you name them.

NASH: I don't know, Marlene Dietrich?

ROSSI: Yes, Marlene Dietrich.

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NASH: You saw her? She came through Ellis Island?

ROSSI: Yes. Well, if their documents aren't correct.

NASH: Were her documents correct?

ROSSI: Well, I guess they fixed them up, you know.

NASH: You saw her where, on the pier in Manhattan?

ROSSI: Yeah, in Manhattan, yeah. (interview ends abruptly)

END OF INTERVIEW