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TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEW WITH

Galileo DiSabatino

727 N. Union St.

Wilmington, Delaware

Interview by

Francis J. Fierro

Transcribed by

Irene H. Long

Now Mr. DiSabatino.....

What does this? Grab hold this?

No, you can just leave it down there because it picks up the sound.

Oh, oh, oh.

Where were you born, Mr. DiSabatino?

In Sant' Omero, Provincia Terramo, Italia.

Italia, fine. Where was a Sant' Omero located?

Abruzzi, in the central Italy.

In central part of Italy. Was this on....?

Central part of Italy.

Was this on the Adriatic side of Italy?

Adriatic side.

O.K. ...a...did you go to school while you were a young man in Italy, a young boy.

Well, yes, I started a go a for one year or so to Asile Infantile.

Asile Infantile?

Asile Infantile. It's a equivalent as a...a...a kindergarten.

To kindergarten. How old were you when you started?

Well, that four years old.

You were four years old.

In Asile Infantile.

And how many years did you go to this

One year.

One year. In other words when you were five years old, you finished.

That's right

And what a, what ahow old were you when you started the regular grammar school, the elementary school?

It's five, five.

At five years old, you started regular elementary school. How many years did you go to the elementary school?

Well, uh,..... when I start there was a three grades: first, second, and third.... I don't remember exactly. It took me.....say a five years.

It took you five years to complete the a.....

To complete the course.

Right, the course, the elementary school course?

Yeh.

What would you say that was equivalent to in American terms?

Uh, the way I can understand here, what they call them, junior high school.

In other words those three years of schooling which took you five years was equivalent to junior high school here?

That's right.

In other words from elementary to junior high school, it was equivalent to that in other words?

In my opinion.

Equivalent to about eight years of schooling here?

That's right.

Did you go to any other school after you completed.....

After completed there just have them a open three more class: fourth, fifth - three more a grade.

Then they started fourth, fifth, and sixth grade?

Sixth grade.

And how long did it take you to complete those three a grades.

All I can say I remember I quit school entire when I was a...thirteen or fourteen.

When you were thirteen or fourteen, you completed all the schooling.

Completed.

That was available at that time.

Six, six years.

What a, a sort of things did you study in school, do you remember?

Well, a, I went a to that school, you know, Used to, used to study common things a....

Reading and writing?

Reading and writing.

Uh, history?

Learn, learn more or less learn read and write.

Uh huh.

But after the a third a grade we started the fourth, five and six. Then we start studying geography a, a grammar All these high....a little more high class.

Right, in other words you were studying the history of the country?

Uh, the world.

The history of the world, the whole world not just Italy.

No, not just Italy.

I see. And they taught you Italian, is that so?

Oh, certainly.

In other words, they taught you the.....a...

Certainly.

The Tuscan dialect?

Well, a.....

Tus-can-o?

A...a....regular Italiano.

Regular Italian, I see. In other words....

We can(?) no dialect.

No dialect, right. O.K. now while you were going to school were you also learning a trade?

A....a....when I was going in the last couple years - two, three years of my school - my father and my two older brothers they went to work as bricklayer.

So your father and your two older brothers were stone masons and bricklayers?

That's right. They're stone mason, bricklayer. They went to work on tunnel go from Italy to Switzerland. Quarter of mile long (?) They stay for about four years or so.

For four years they were working on this tunnel from Italy to Switzerland?

Yeh, that's right.

Were they away from home this whole four years?

Yeh, yeh they were away from home.

Did they ever come home and visit during that time?

Yeh, maybe a every six months.

About every six months they would come home?

That's all, once a year.

Yes.

Yeh, they come down to stay maybe week then go back.

Eh, so that time I have an uncle shoemaker, my mother line.

On your mother's side you had an uncle who was a shoe-

maker?

Mother's side I have uncle shoemaker. Eh, that time it was pretty strict, you know, they don't like to see us a go around town.

They didn't like to see you leave the town. They kept you around?

No, go with gang this and that. So they keep us to shop, shoe shop.

They kept you in the shoe shop?

And we start to a learn that trade.

And you learned shoemaking as a trade.

So.....

In other words you learned not only to repair shoes but also how to make them from scratch?

Make them. Make them.

You were making shoes.

Ye^h, certainly, certainly. That time eh.....they no buy no shoes on the market.

You didn't buy them already made, you had them made to order.

No - that's right.

I see. How large, how big a town was Sant' Omero? Was it a city or a town?

Eh, well, it's town but eh, the, the territory was pretty big.

It covered a large area?

It covered a large terri - area. A....I want say as a, a..... Sant' Omero.....it was quite a far belong a Sant' Omero a...a well, that's a same twelve mile in circumference ground.

It covered about a twelve mile area?

Twelve mile area, all around.

About what was the population, do you have any idea?

The population? Oh.... Sant' Omero most be 'bout a they talk about it that time twelve - fifteen thousand.

Twelve or fifteen thousand people.

Yeh, but city itself where I used to live there was no twelve - 'bout three, four thousand.

Three or four thousand in the city itself.

That's right.

But the entire area covered about twelve thousand.

That's right.

Now, eh, how old were you when you finished your trade?

Well a.....when I was sixteen and a half or something like that. I went around, I ----- . They call them "finanza."

Yes, but you were finished your trade by this time now. You were sixteen and a half.

Yes, I know. I know the work pretty good cause then you get more training by that, but still I could do by myself. So I went around, me, and I work as a shoemaker now and then, too.

Oh, did you? Uh huh.

As well, oh yeh. Then I was cook. Then we went a.... a we been mobilized we go to the front.

But you were a special corps, you say. You were in the "finanza," which was part of the treasury department.

That's right. Part, part of a, a national organization for Italy.

Yes, that was a - belonged to the treasury department, department of Italy though, right?

That's right. Well, uh, a..a...that a this a corps

the...a...a way to control all the contraband, all the a...a...
everything come in Italy or out of Italy after they pay a....

Oh, it was a customs service then.

Well, a, we did a lot of a things which cover a lot
of customs things aand....

Yes, you controlled.....

A police work, police work mainly.

In other words, I understand you controlled the pro-
duction of salt, right?

Everything.

Which was a monopoly.

Production of alcohol.

Production of alcohol, of tobacco.

Tobacco, all those thing. We control all those thing.
And we see if everyone got a license to do so. Everyone the right
thing.

Right, because these were government monopolies.

Government, that's right.

All right. Now before you went into the armed services,
did you ever have occasion to leave the town where you were born?
Did you ever go out of Sant' Omero?

Out of Sant' Omero yes, but no out of country.

No, well, I mean out of the area, out of the immediate
area.

Oh yes, yes.

You traveled to different cities and so forth?

Yeh, I did because ...a...a...because my father and
my two brother like we said, say before they are a bricklayer and
they used to go to work outside the city, maybe three, four, five
mile far. Went out of city.

Yes, yes, you would go with them.

No, but a lot of time I go just a for fun, a lot of time even to take lunch a to them.

Uh huh. In other words you would walk three or four miles to bring their lunch to them.

Oh, more than that. Lot of times more than that.

I see.

Take my lunch to them. Takes me one day going and come back, you know. Take a, a enough a food to last for week. Then on Saturday they come back in town.

I see. A now when you were in the armed services you told me you worked as a shoemaker, a cook, and you did a few other things. And how long were you in the service? You went into the service when? In a 19....a....14?

A....no, no, 19....16.

1916 you went in.

Yes. I stay four years.

You stayed four years and did, did you see any a action in the war?

Oh yes, plenty.

Where was this in northern Germany against Austria or did you also go to Albania?

Oh that's right. There was a sort of procession(?) a column, of Caporetta. There was a great retreat at that time.

Yes.

For Italian troop.

Yes.

As far as Piave.

As far as Piave?

It's a, it's a river and we walk a my company a, my

company, you say my division we walk almost fifty days in that territory from Caporetta - that's a northern Italy.

Yes.

To Ancona.

Oh, Ancona. I see.

Ancona, pretty close to my home town.

I see and this is where the Italian army stopped and a.....

Stopped and a.....re...reorga....reorganize. Then with the help of a English and a American troop we start to push back the German army, and afterward there was victory for ally.

Now after you got out of the army, after World War One ended, what did you do?

I started to be shoemaker in my home town by myself. You went back to your home town and opened your own shop?

Own shop but a.....

How old....

Then I make up a my mind to come in this country.

Is that when you first started to think about coming to the United States after.....

Yes, when I open, open my own shop I find out a is a not much a....profit in anyway.

In other words business was not good.

Well, uh, uh, even if you work every day, all day - all day and every day - you no make enough a to get any way.

Why was this, because Italy was in the middle of a depression then?

Well, a, that's a shoemaker trade. That's a shoemaker trade himself is like that. No matter where you go in

Europe, even this country was bad. No matter shoemaker it's a bad trade no matter which part of the world you go you never get rich with shoemaker trade.

I see.

So I decided to come in this country.

Did you make up this a decision by yourself or did somebody talk to you about coming here?

No, by myself. Everything I did in my life I did on my own.

Well, why did you decide to come to the United States? Why did you think you wanted to come here?

Oh, because a, a, Europe a, everyone a think you can find gold in the street in this country. Everybody got idea to come over. Greeks, they came.

Uh huh.

I think it was best a my ability to come some good.

Uh huh. I see.

Matter of fact I was discharged from army March a 1919 and I come this country same year, 1919 in November. I reach a New York December 9th, 1919.

I see. Now uh, did a you a have any relatives in the United States?

Yeh, plenty.

You had lots of relatives here?

Lots.

Is this one of the things that influenced your wanting to come here?

Well, uh, uh, yes. I mean that's a give me an idea. When you have a relatives...a...a....you come here you think you a in good hands.

Yes. You think you'd be.....

You safe, well....

You think you have somebody to help you and you'd be safe. I see. Were you married before you came here?

Yes.

You, you got married?

Yeh.

That same year before you came here?

Got married soon as I 'came discharged from the army.

How did you leave Sant' Omero?

Uh, that time was a....a.... horse with a two, two or four horses - something like that with the biggest wagon.

Like a stage coach?

Use to like a - yeh - like a stage coach.

Like a stage coach.

Yeh, almost the same, the same thing yeh.

Uh huh. And from Sant' Omerowhere did you go on this stage coach?

Well, uh, uh, down uh, uh, station.

A train station?

It's a train station. It was a, we say, about six mile from my home town.

About six miles from your home town.

The name of the station was Tortoreto, Nereto.

Tortoreto, Nereto.

Nereto, yes.

Now where did you, you took a train there?

Took a train there.

And where did you go from there?

Uh, I took a train there....a...we did it to France,

You went to France?

Yeh, and I was the head of a eleven younger people.

In other words there were eleven young people with you?

With me.

And you took the train in Tortoreto, Noreto and you went directly to France?

Directly to France, through Bologna and up the north and then Modane, (?) France. The train a stopped right in a line up of French in Italy because there was commissioner there that inspect, you know.

The customs inspection?

That's a right.

Yes.

So when they see this bunch of young people, they ask me where you people going. (chuckles) "America." "Who goin' to take you?" They point to me say, "That man over there." So they come to me; they come over to me and ask me, "How you goin' to America?" I say, "Why we have everything in..a..in a good condition. Everythings a ready to go." "So you can show me some paper of marit--- company which a....."

The maritime?

Yes, so I showed everything. I showed receiver of the port. I showed the letter we received from a Holland-a-Am---- company.

Holland-Amsterdam line, was that what it was?

Yeh, Amsterdam, Holland-Amsterdam line, yeh, that's it. Yeh, I got it, I forgot to get them but I got everything here. If you got a little time, I'll get them if you.....

Well, fine, after we finish this, we'll do it, O.K.?

Yes, everything was all right. Matter of fact a..a

soon as the train start to go again, I call this to man, I say, "Now you ask me, now I going to ask you question. Where we can go in Mondane to stay for couple days?"

Oh, you had to change trains there, is that it?

No, no, we just a got out there.

Oh, you got off, uh huh.

Yeh, to stay at least three days because we reach there, we no even think about this. We too young to think everything. But we, uh, start then was Saturday. Then we had Sunday to stay. We could of leave Santo Maro on a Sunday.

Yes.

Even on a Monday, but we left my home town on a Saturday to be there on time.

Yes.

So we got to wait one a..a..Sunday. Then Monday we went to see this a office of a

The Holland-Amsterdam line.

Yeh, when the man, a now not the banker(?) but the ----- . And when they went over there, I not....ask for the manager or the president of that company. A he talk how much he want over the representative. They treat me very good. Check it with me. Then I told them I want - what it's all about. We are eleven to leave to this port. So he opened his book. He see everything was there.

So everything was in order?

Everything was in order. We pay for the complete a ticket. Then was another beautiful coincidence. When I went out from that office, there were at least a two, three cars outside wait to be called. And when they see me, you got to see, all grab a me. They say, "Please, a please a see what you can do about."

What were these, these are people waiting for, for passage on the, on the ship?

That's right. On the ship, that's right.

Uh huh.

They have a passport. They have everything, but they can't get no boat cause that time it was pretty hard to come this country. Uh, not a because a the immigration was so strict but a because a...a the boat then it was, a, it was right there through the war.

Yes, and they didn't have enough space on the ship.

No, not enough space on the ship. No, it was a pretty hard. We were luck to get a

In other words when you got to Modane, you had to wait until the a, the a.....

No, the ship was ready for us.

The ship was ready but the office was not open on the weekend, is that it?

No, no. So we got to wait till Monday.

So that's why you had to wait there. I see.

Monday, till Monday.

Yes, yes. All right, now after a you had all your papers in order, what did you do, get on a train again?

Yeh, well, a, I went outside of office like I say and met ten more people to get them same a boat.

Uh huh.

Cause they, they same company as ----- for...

They had ten more openings and

Openings.

And you made it possible for ten more people....

I made for it ten more people.

Oh, that was wonderful.

Yeh, I could make a myself, uh, uh, 'nough to come over this country as treat.

Oh really, by getting those people?

Certainly, certainly..... at least two-hundred, one-hundred, two-hundred lira.

So you got a

Each!

Yes.

But I, I was good enough that time a...a...that time no malice(?), nothing, just a ...a...simple man.

Right, you were not looking to.....

No!

Cheat anybody.

Ask anybody.

You were just trying to help them.

Even a, even a my ten people I ask ----percent(?).

So you brought twenty people over here then.

Twenty people.

And by bringing those twenty people you got free passage over on the ship.

I could, I could have a free passage for myself but I, I no profit from anybody so some of the, those ten people from my home town. They were mostly farmer.

Yes.

And they took me, some would bring me big jar of olives, some a.... two, three a....a... heel of a cheese, some a big bottle of wine. Everybody bring something.

Everybody brought you something.

Yeh.

Now when you left Modane, a where did you go?

From Modane, a we a went to a Paris. We stop there and we stay 'bout five, six hours there.

Did you have to change trains there?

Changed a train, yeh, to change a train. Eh, we stay there and then after five, six hours we got to another train and we went to Havre. (pronunciation: slurred)

Havre?

Havre, France, to get the boat.

And that's where you caught your ship. Now tell me something, why did you go to France to catch a ship? Wouldn't it have been easier if you went to Naples or Genoa or even to Trieste to catch a ship?

You know what's wrong - no passage over at all.

There was no passage over at all?

No passage at all! Nobody can go to Naples or Genoa. From Italy nobody can leave.

Because the ships were all filled, is that it?

Well, a, I think that's what is the reason because there was just a little after war was over.

Right after the world war, yes.

And things was still a disorganized.

I see.

I mean a lot of those ship was...a...a...transform as war.

For war purposes, yes.

Purpose so to put it back on a passenger ship takes time.

I see.

That time nobody could a leave from Italy.

So you had to leave from France.

How long did it take you to get from France to the United States?

Ohhhhh, nine days.

It took nine days. It didn't stop anywhere else, did it?

Oh no.

It came straight to the United States?

Well, in Europe, yes.

It did stop. Where else did it stop in Europe?

Oh, we stop a...a... what a you call Gibrilterra.

Gibraltar.

We stop in Spain. We stop in England. We stop almost a every place on the Adriatic (?) coast. (loud noise as bus goes by)

Mediterranean? In France?

Wait a minute. We got the boat there.

You got the boat in France.

Then turn back to go Gibraltar, Spain and then back to England and then a we, we a....

Came to the United States and

Came to the United States.

And this all took nine days?

Nine days.

Very good. Now what was it like aboard ship?

Well, a, like I said before that boat a, oh, it's a nice big boat - very big boat - but a, seem to me they didn't have enough men to take care of.....

The crew wasn't large enough?

I don't think so because a the people a they were on their own. They could do whatever they want.

They were strictly on their own?

They could do what's ever they want. They could go to bed mixed a sex a.....

In other words everybody was sleeping together, men and women and children.

Men and women and children all together. They were in the cabin where I was sleeping; there was four, six, or eight all mixed.

In other words you had about eight people in the cabin with you and they were all men and women, all mixed.

Men and women.

I see. Now what was the food like?

The food was plenty, was plenty food, but people no eat because a...a...seem to me mostly sea sick.

Everybody was sea sick so nobody ate much.

Yeh.

Where did you land in the United States?

New York.

In New York.

New York City.

How were you received there?

Well.....

Now when I say how were you received I mean by the government, by the customs people.

Oh, they, they treat us fine. They were....we reach(?) exactly where we come and examine us. They make take a shirt off. They examine pretty good and uh, but mostly, most all we went through without a trouble.

I see. I recall that before you told me that when you left France one girl was not permitted

That's right.

To continue.

That's right.

Why wasn't she able to continue?

Well, a, what I can understand she have a, a, the head or the hair....

Had lice?

Yeh, some like that.

Is that what it was?

Yeh, some like that and uh, well,

And they just....

They make, they keep her there one week and she...

Until she got better.

Come over after one week.

I see. In other words they kept her there till she got...

Got clean up.

Got cleaned up and then....

Yeh.

Now aboard ship was there much of this sort of thing? Was there much in the way of lice or a.....

Yes, yes, because I remember a...a...when we arrive in New York, I went to a my aunt house to stay and a I feel, I feel during night, I feel a lot of bite on my body.

Yes.

As a matter of fact, I could catch them.

Really?

Can catch them just like that. They were pretty big size.

Well-fed lice, huh? (chuckles)

Catch them with my finger. Well, was kind of bad, you know, because a, a was first time you go in house and you find you have that a thing on body.

Body lice.

And a....it was kind of - I couldn't sleep.

You couldn't sleep?

First a night, no.

I see.

And then the next day, my aunt make a - maybe she seen them or she hear me scratch myself or come, you know. So she made me take everything off. Throw 'em away. Everything I have on my a...suitcase.

She made you throw away all your clothes? Everything you brought with you?

Oh, all my clothes, all. She have a two boys almost same age, same size. So she give me some their.

She gave you some of their clothes?

The two boys clothes and I went in.

Now, you already had some relatives, some brothers in this country, didn't you?

Yeh, two brothers.

Where were they?

Here in a Wilmington.

Did they come to New York to meet you?

No, no. I went out from the boat. I went out my aunt house by myself.

Did anyone know you were coming here?

Oh yeh, my aunt, my brother, too.

But nobody met you?

No.

Why didn't they meet you, do you know?

I can't say now. Too, too far away now to remember.

You don't remember why?

To explain why - I don't know. Maybe they were busy working and can't leave their work.

I see. I see. Now after you say that after you were processed they just let you go. The customs official and how did you get to your aunt's house?

I took out my address, her address in my hand.

You had her address.

Little piece of paper, I read the sign, match with the a address. So I keep a going that a direction and maybe I did ask a couple times somebody, "Where is this street or this house." But I find.

But you found it all my yourself. You walked, too, from the port.

All by..... I walked!

Where did your aunt live in New York?

In the Bronx.

And you walked from the a port of New York up to the Bronx.

That's right.

How long did it take you to walk to their house?

Couldn't remember exactly. It's quite a distance, about four hours.

It took you about four hours to walk to her house?

Couldn't remember exactly. It's quite a distance, you know.

Yes, that, that is.

Yes, but that's what a it tooks me.

All right. Now after you moved in with your aunt, how long were you there before you found a job?

A....they find a job a for me.

They found a job for you?

And a dress factory.

Uh huh.

We...a...have some friend who worked there - some home town people - get me job a press.

As a presser, you.....

Press.

Ironing dresses.

Ironing dresses.

How long did you work there?

Oh, about a month and a half or two.

About a month and a half. Was the pay very good?

Not at start. The reason is a that a time usually have a lot of piece work job. A this a man in charge of presses dress, he was doing everything was piece work.

Everything was piece work.

Yes, and you know I wasn't old for that job. I mean I'm shoemaker.

Yes, so until you became

So I, I did the best I could to learn. I did the best I could to press the many dress good so I could - I don't think it was enough to make too much. So he start to give me ten dollars the first a week, twenty dollar the second week. Then thirty dollar, I think, the third week and I stopped there.

I see. So the top pay that you achieved there was thirty dollars.

Thirty dollars week - that was pretty good that time.

Did you pay your aunt a for room and board.

Ah, first a week no because I no have nothing to pay. Soon as I start to get my pay I give a half to my aunt.

Uh huh. Now when you came to the United States, did you pay for your transportation here by yourself, did you pay for it yourself or did you borrow the money? Did you have it sent to you from the United States or....

Ah....like I said before I was in a special army and this a special army pay us pretty good.

And you got more money than the regular army.

Oh certainly! The soldier over there only get two cents a, a, day; but we make a lot of money.

I see.

We make a lot of money. Especially when we go on a special mission. They pay us a good money.

In other words

So when I went home I had a pretty good money but tell you the truth I was about a...a.. I don't remember - I was about a two hundred, three hundred lira short. And some a man come back from a this country from Wilmington know my relatives here. I just a ask, he give me two hundred lira just like that. "I know your relatives in Wilmington - all good..a... all honest. I give you two hundred lira right away." So he give me two hundred lira. So I went...I went...my money and that two hundred lira.

Now when you started to work, did you send him back the money that you borrowed from him?

No, he come back here. He come back here in Wilmington.

Yes.

Soon as Iah...I come here I talk with my uncle. He's a dead now, Ernest a DiSabatino. He give him me the two hun-

dred dollars for him to me.

Lira?

Lira.

He gave him the two hundred lira for you.

That's right and then a...a.. after about'bout six months.... I have regular job.... I send the two hundred dollars to him.

Oh, in other words after you got on your feet you sent the two hundred lira to your uncle.

To my uncle.

All right, now ...a... we were talking about your working as a presser and you worked there for a couple months, is that it?

That's right.

Now why did you stop working as a presser.

Well...a...a...cause man from Jamestown, New York come over to New York to get a one of his boy come from Italy.

I see.

So they start to talk together and found out I was shoemaker. So he shoemaker himself. He have a shoe shop Jamestown.

He had a shoe shop in Jamestown?

So really..... he brag a little bit. He make under, understand my uncle he was a big businessman in this a shoe repair.

Yes.

So he persuade my uncle to take me with him Jamestown.

So he persuaded your uncle to let you go with him to Jamestown.

That's right because ...a...a.. make him understand he need a man. So when I was in Jamestown, I find a things a dif-

ferent.

I see. Now when you left New York to go to Jamestown with this man...

That's right.

Well, tell me something, now why didn't you work as a shoemaker in New York City?

Well, my a...my aunt suggest me, "You better work in a factory cause you know you get clear pay. If you work yourself, you never know what you make."

I see. In other words it was a sure pay working in a factory, but it wasn't so sure working for yourself.

No, shoemaker you never know what you make.

O.K.

And besides I never was crazy for shoemaker trade.

Oh, you didn't like it?

No, never did like it.

I see. Well, now, this man who came from Jamestown his - what was his name?

Antonio Rubini.

Antonio Rubini. All right. Now when he left New York with you to go back to Jamestown, did he go straight back to Jamestown?

No, we went through here, Wilmington.

You came down first and then back up there?

That's right.

Why did he come to Wilmington?

Well, because a, he had a lot of friend here from old country he wanted to meet ..a...

He wanted to come down and see them?

To see those people. Matter of fact most of his friends

they were my relatives.

I see. Now when you came down here with him that was the first time you had seen your relatives here?

That's a right.

Since you came to the United States.

That's a right.

And you were here about two months before you saw them, is that right?

That's right.

That's fine. Now when you went back to Jamestown, how did you live?

With them in a house.

You lived with them. They supplied you with room and board?

Yes.

Did this man pay you well?

No pay me at all for three months.

He didn't pay you?

For three months he don't give me nothing at all because he say that man come from Italy he got to learn the trade again. No matter a how good shoemaker he is in Italy, in this country it's different altogether.

In other words he kept you as an apprentice.

That's right.

And didn't pay you at all?

No, at all.

Because he said you were learning the trade from him therefore he didn't pay you.

That's right. That's right.

Now when you were living in New York City you were

sending money home to Italy to your wife, weren't you?

Right.

Well, how did your wife (feel) now when you couldn't send her any money because you weren't making any?

Well, ah, I tell you the truth.... I was a...a..mad all the time and almost go crazy and I no even write a to a my wife because I can't send her no money.

Were you embarrassed to write to her?

Certainly.

Uh, did you speak to Mr. Rubini about this? Did you tell him?

I did tell him. He say he can't do nothing about it.

He said he couldn't do a thing about it?

And after three months...he make... a some kind of paper which I can not read at that time.

In other words he had a paper drawn up.

Drawn up.

Course you couldn't read English.

I can't read that time. And he wanted me to sign that paper.

He wanted ... what did the paper contain? Do you have any idea what it meant? What the paper was about?

Well, yes, yes. I can see the numbers on there. I can 'stand the numbers.

Yes.

But I can't understand the writing. They say he going a give me eighteen dollars a mon-week. This eighteen dollars I suppose to give him six dollars board, for board. Six dollars because he give two hundred dollars to make my wife come over and six, no seven

In other words in this paper it was a contract for you to sign?

That's right, like a contract.

And the contract said he would pay you eighteen dollars a week?

That's right.

And of this eighteen dollars you were to pay him six dollars for room and board each week?

That's right.

Plus six dollars you were to pay him...

For bank.

Toward the two hundred dollars he gave you to have your wife brought over here?

That's right, right.

And you had six dollars for yourself each week?

That's right.

How did you react to this?

I no like at all. Even if I can't read what's ever was there but understand none good to sign something if you don't know what you sign.

In other words you did, you refused to sign it?

I refuse to sign. So he told me to leave.

So you refused to sign it so he told you to leave his house, is that it?

That's right.

Now when you were ordered out of his house, where did you go?

I went a... to a another friend a mine from my home town, name a Giuseppe Tomasini.

Giuseppe Tomasini?

Right.

And now he lived in Jamestown also.

Jamestown, in Jamestown. So he already told me before.

You had already spoken with Masini?

Spoken to.....yeh...told me in case something because he expected that.

Oh, he knew what this Rubini was like.

He knows whats all about because he work with him.

Oh, in other words Rubini did the same thing to Masini?

That's right.

And Masini left him, too?

Eh, yes, but he stay, he stay quite a few years with him because a was a...sickling, was a young - he didn't know what....

And he didn't have anybody to go to, is that it?

He didn't have anybody to go so he remain with him quite a few years. But then he got married. The girl...Rubini - come over from old country.- which he no want to but.....

I see. He married a girl that Rubini had brought over.

That's a right.

Now this fellow, Tomasini, did not want to marry her?

No.

And Rubini made him marry her?

Force!

Forced him to marry her.

That's right. So I...went a to a to this Tomasini home and he opened a little shoe shop of his brother-in-law. And this brother-in-law really, you know, was a...a...finish shoemaker.

He wasn't a very good shoemaker?

No. So he was glad to keep me in the house and make me work in that little shoe shop because a he knows I know something about it.

In other words you were a better shoemaker than his brother-in-law.

That's right.

He kept you in his house?

That's right.

Did you have to pay him room and board?

Well a, a no because I'm working in that little shoe shop so we.....

You worked in the shoe shop?

See my - what he supposed to pay me for there go for the free board.

In other words what he was supposed to pay you, a, he just gave you free room and board.

That's right.

But a what did you do for money if you were just getting free room and board for working in the shoe shop.

Well, a, I tell you the truth a that time a...we... a....we....

Did you have any other job besides?

A...we no use to go out...we no spend a no money.

Didn't spend, I see.

But....a...he give me job, yes. A soon as I went up there after a couple of days I guess it was.

Oh, after you left Rubini, you went to Tomasini.

Yes. Left Rubini, I went to Tomasini and he was boss for ..a...Broadhead Wool Company.

The Broadhead Wool Company?

Yeh, the wool used to go in there raw. Just a...
dirty.

Yes, in other words they got raw wool.

Raw wool.

It was unprocessed.

Yeh, it come out ...a...good.

In other words, they processed the wool, twist it
in yarns and also make cloth out of it.

That's a right.

So he a, he was boss in this factory so he give me
job in there -ah - handyman, just a....take care machinery a...a...
if a raw wool been pick up, replacing a....lot of, you know.

In other words you were a handyman in the shop.

Handyman that floor.

Oh, that floor, I see.

That floor.

Uh huh.

That big room.

Yes, and then that's how you made your money, and
then you worked in.....

Money I send in Italy.

And you worked in the shoe shop at night?

For free.

For a room and board.

That's right.

That's good. How much a did you make in the a wool
shop?

Fifteen dollars a week.

Fifteen dollars a week.

But a O.K, but then I have a little extra job put oil

on the machinery on Saturday.

On Saturday you'd go in and oil the machines?

Oil the machinery.

Now that's when the factory was closed on Saturday?

That's right, factory was closed. A...a...give me a..bout three dollars extra.

And they paid you an extra....so you made about eighteen dollars a week.

About eighteen dollars, yeh.

Very good. When did a your wife come to the United States?

A....she come here..... I came here in a December.

You came here 1919, December.

She came here in '20.

She came here in 1920?

'20 in October.

In October of 1920, almost a year after you came.

Bout a...a..altogether, yeh.

Almost a year.

Cause she waited to have baby.

Oh, she had a baby there before she came here?

Yeh.

I see.

She wait to have baby. She have baby then. One of my boys born in Italy.

Is that....

Big boy I have, Vincent.

Your oldest son.

Yeh.

Now is that the reason she didn't come over here with

you because she was pregnant at the time you came?

That's right. That's right. But she was preparing there to come.

How did she come over here? Did she come the same way you came? Did she go to France?

No, she came through Naples.

She came through Naples.

This time, yeh.

So by that time the port of Naples was open?

Was open, yeh.

And she was able to come through there?

Yeh, yeh.

So she had a less difficulty I suppose getting to the ship than you did?

Well, yeh, she ...a...everything was all right but she had a lot of trouble. Takes three months, four, to a reach New York.

It took her three months?

Three months.

What happen..... you mean she was on, on board ship for three months?

Three months.

Well, why was this?

Because a...a...now...wait a minute let me remember the name of the boat.

Was it an Italian ship?

No, no, well I can't repeat. Can't expect to say the right name of the boat.

Oh....who...do you remember what nation it was from?

I.....

Was it a German ship or British?

I think it was a German, German ship. See that German ship went a to Naples and there all the passenger a board. As soon as they was ready to leave, Italian government stop the, because that ship been repaired in Naples and they no pay.

Oh, they hadn't paid for the repairs?

The repairs. And the Italian government stop them. So they stay close two month there.

They stayed almost a month in Naples?

Till they fixed up theirfare a....

Until they paid their bill to a the port.

So then a left Naple to go to Gibaltara.(Pronounced in Italian)

To Gibraltar, yes.

And from Naples to the Gi ba - Gibaltara, they have trouble again. They got call for a....tug boat to reach Gi ba - Gibaltara. (Falters over pronunciation)

So they had to be towed from the middle of the Mediterranean?

That's right.

To Gibraltar.

That's a right. And they stay another month in Gibaltara.

In Gibraltar they stayed a month in Gibraltar for repairs?

That's right.

Oh my heavens.

After that they left again. They went to England with another trouble.

And they had more trouble in England?

More trouble on way. Them, the, the, the worker start to, to, to a, a, strike because they get a..a...

Is this?

They get tired, get tired.

The crew of the ship?

The crew. Maybe they don't a get paid or something. They start to strike so the boat was a in England for a long time. So the company sent a new boat - new boat, another boat - over there; and all the passengers be transferred to the other boat and then they start to come over. I have telegram all my life. I still have all the telegrams.

You still have the telegrams?

Have all the telegrams. Then they come over all right, but it took three monthslet me see....

In other words three months from the time, it took three months from the time she left Naples..

Leave Naples.

Till the time she arrived in New York City?

That's right.

Did you meet your wife in New York City?

Oh, oh yeh.

You got there to meet her?

From Jamestown, yeh.

From Jamestown and what did you do, take a train back to Jamestown?

Yeh.

Directly to Jamestown?

Directly.

Uh, what did you do after your wife arrived, did you still stay with this friend of yours, Tomasino?

No, I'll, I rent a two rooms just a couple days before a she arrived.

You rented a two-room apartment?

Two room just a couple blocks a below Tomasini.

Now, this area where you lived were there all Italian people in this area?

No, a, a, just one family. (Phone rings, tape interrupted)

Now there was only one Italian family besides yourself in the area where you lived?

That's right. That's right.

Well, what were the other people? Were the other people in that area immigrants too, or were they people who had lived in this.....

They were immigrants, too.

Where were they from?

Uh, they from a Sicily.

They were, a, the other Italian family was from Sicily?

From Sicily.

And a the other people who lived in that area besides you and this family from Sicily, were they people who had lived in the United States for a long time? Were they born here?

Well, a, mostly. Some come from Europe too. Most ...a seventy-five percent of population of Jamestown they are, they come from Swedish a.....

A from Sweden.

Yeh.

They're Swedish, I see.

Swedish, a, ancestor.

O.K. Now when you and your wife lived there - you and

your wife and your son - were you still working in the wool factory?

Yeh.

For how long did you work in the wool factory?

Oh....we say....one year.

One....and then what did you do?

One year - then I went to work in the Jamestown Band
Factory.

The band factory?

Bed.

Bed factory.

Bedroom, bedroom.

Oh, oh, making bedroom furniture.

Bedroom furniture. Matter of fact you can see here
in Wilmington in many places.

Oh, really?

Many furniture store they come from Jamestown. I see
myself.

And what did you work as, a cabinet maker there?

Well, uh, I was work there....a...I was a spray...

Spraying the finish on the furniture?

Spraying the finish, put the finish on the....

And how long?

Stood there for about a year.

For one year?

Yeh.

And what did you do after that?

Then I start, I buy shoe shop - 1847 Jamestown - shoe
shop. Since then I been shoemake all my life.

I see. Now a what was your life like while you were
living in Jamestown with your family? What things did you do for

entertainment? Did you go out and visit people? Did you.....

Oh, we a we were a three families. We were stick together just like athree brother and three sister.

Three Italian families?

Three Italian families, Tomasini, myself and other man. I told you before I took him from Italy and I was surprised to see him living in Jamestown in Tomasini house. So he went to get, he went a back in Italy after a couple years, get married. When he come back, we were family - we almost. Summer time almost every Sunday we use to go picnicking together.

Oh, really? Was there any other thing that you did a for entertainment besides going on picnics in the summer time and....

Oh, movies. I like movies and they was lot of....a a...vaudeville show that time.

Vaudeville shows and movies and so forth.

Oh yeh, yeh.

And you would go to the movies and vaude....

I enjoyed my life up there.

I see. Now you told me that you always had an automobile.

Yes.

When did you buy your first automobile?

1921.

In other words right after you came here, two years after you arrived here, you bought your first automobile?

That's right. That's right, yeh.

And what kind of a car was it, do you remember?

It was T-Ford.

A Model T-Ford? I see. Was it a convertible top,

the touring type?

Open, a, open a..... open car.

I see. And you've always had an automobile since then, is that it?

Since then.

Now, how were you an an Italian accepted in the community where you lived in Jamestown?

Well, uh, they treat a me very nice. First they treat a me very nice but in general with other Italians it was a little a....a.....

Little bit distant you want to say?

Yes, yes.

They didn't associate with them?

Well, no, no, but with me they treat me very good because to tell you the truth I try to be clean family. We try to dress up as best we could; and a.....when people see you do the best you can to be among people, they treat you right. But then if a they see dirt or other thing, you know, try to keep away from them.

Well, how about the a Sicilian family that a, a... you were in the same building with?

Yes, yes.

How were they?

No, not too good because a....a that time they were make spirit, alcohol.

Alcohol. This was during the Depression....a.... the a Prohibition?

That's right and....a....all the neighbor knows.

Everybody in the neighborhood knew this?

Sure, because you can a smell.

Yes.

That alcohol, you know, and really ...a...neighborhood people they no like that family.

They didn't care too much for them.

But they knew we got nothing to do with them.

They knew that you didn't have anything to do with them?

No.

That's right.

So they.....they respect us.....very lucky.

I see. Now you stayed in the shoe business in Jamestown, New York for a number of years. Until what year were you in the shoe business there?

1935.

Until 1935?

That's right.

And, uh, what did you do in 1935?

Just left Jamestown to come down to Wilmington.

You just decided to leave Jamestown?

That's right.

Why did you decide to leave Jamestown?

Well, becausea....most of my relatives a are residents of Wilmington and we figure maybe we have a better opportunity for the kids a growing up.

In other words you wanted to be with the rest of your family, is that it?

Yes, sure. I mean a.....

Uh, how was your material level living in Jamestown? Now certainly you moved out of the two room apartment after awhile, didn't you?

That's right. Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. I have, I have a

a... nice apartment after awhile.

Did you?

Very nice apartment. Matter of fact I can say we mentioned there I got automobile all there 1921. One of these first Italians. I have one of the best living room a.... living suite....or a.... living room furniture...of...among the Italians.

I see.

I...a...start a almost - I was...a...almost first for everything. I was the first ...a...what a you call them...a...call them gramaphona.

Oh, a...phonograph...a...

Phonograph!

Recorder?

Right.

A phono....a record player?

A record player.

Yes.

One of those you got to.....

A wind-up kind?

Wind.

Yes.

Sure they was high a type, you know, type.

Yes, the high ones.

Yeh, I have it till a...a...few years back, then I give it one my boy. I don't know what he did.

I see. Now what was your material level then? You'd say that your material level was pretty good, huh, because you lived a there pretty well?

It was good all time.

Did you ever buy your house in Jamestown?

No, I did try once but that...a..then it was the a time, I mean, you make offer to buy a house.

And it was rather difficult?

Yes.

Did you ...a...belong to any a social or fraternal organizations in Jamestown?

Yes.

What organizations would these be?

A....lodge...a.... Fiume di Mazzia.....r... Order Sons of Italy.

The Sons of Italy. Did you belong to any other a organizations?

A.....

Eagles, organizations, or anything like that?

A....I join the Eagle but a it was...a...pretty hard to keep up because...a...I no, no was make too much.

So it was rather difficult to.....

And the family start to grown up. The expense that a to.....

Accumulate and so forth?

Accumulate and uh.... so I dropped all those...a..few ..a..organizations and remain with Order.

Did the Italian community in Jamestown get larger and larger?

Yes, pretty - quite a few Italian up there.

I see.

There was quite a few Italian.

You don't have any idea as to how many do you?

A...that time....that time they figure...a...round a...from twelve to fifteen thousand.

Twelve to fifteen thousand?

Yes.

So you had...a...as many Italians there as you had in your whole little area in Italy?

Home town, yes.

A...what...a...was the reaction in Jamestown to Mussolini's rise to power in Italy?

Well....a...to those really understand...a...they took a....Mussolini as a good man.

They thought he was a good man at that time?

Yes...a matter of fact...a...myself admire Mussolini personally but I never, I never have that idea or that ambition to join the name of fascism.

Oh...you...never joined the fascist organization?

Never!

But there was a

We have a, we have a little talk - it's all right?

Sure, go ahead.

A, we have a little talk with your father yesterday about this.

Uh huh, yes. I know he belonged to one of those organizations here in Wilmington.

Yes. I never did like. Matter of fact I tell him this organization no supposed to be here. Supposed to be in Italy. And I hope this is no going to last long. Matter of fact, it no a last long.

No, it didn't last very long.

No.

I see. Were...there...were there any fascist organizations in...a.... Jamestown?

Yes, -----.

Yeh?

Yes. There, there was one there. Some, some of the people come to see me.

I see. What did the fascist organizations do? Did they have rallies and meetings and so forth?

I can't give you complete...a...information because I no join them.

Yes, well....a... how did the a... your neighbors who were not Italians feel about Mussolini?

(pauses)

Do you have any ideas as to how they felt?

A, at first, first nobody like, but then whenever he does good to Italy especially when the President - Roosevelt it was President, it was or some President - recognize Mussolini as a good leader.

Yes, one of the Presidents of the United States recognized him as a good leader.

Yes, as a good leader. Then even the a people doesn't change. They like Mussolini, too.

I see. Well, yes, so they thought he was doing a pretty good job.

Good man, yes.

Now when you came to Wilmington after having left Jamestown, what difference did you notice between the people in Jamestown and the people in Wilmington?

Well, I find...a...I won't say too great a difference but was...a...quite a bit different the way they act, they way.....

They weren't quite as friendly would you say?

No, no.

They were much colder here, is that it?

They, they...people here....look like to me...a...
they thought they are big than anybody else.

They were self-centered, would you say?

Selfish a people in one way.

I see. Uh, did you a continue your a active part in
the Sons of Italy here in Wilmington when you came here?

Yes sir. Yes sir. Soon as I come down I join the
Sons of Columbus Lodge. And I did the best I could..a...benefit
with that organization for the Order and all. Matter of fact today
well...a...my...a...my a career as a member of the Order I been
almost everything.

So you've held almost.....

I....the Grand..... I stand the treasurer. I stand
the a...a...auditor as I am now and a for my lodge I'm a president,
board of directors, and auditor for the lodge.

I see. What's the greatest change you have seen in
the United States since your arrival here? What would you say has
been the biggest change?

Oh, big change, big change since a...a...Second World
War. Was big change.

There's the biggest change you say since the Second
World War?

Ohhhhhh, the biggest change, yes.

Well, how would you a characterize this change? Could
you a say it was in any one direction or in every a area?

In general.

In general, a general change in everything.

Change - everything!

Would you say.....?

Change in family a position, change city position, state a position, and ...a...a..government position in every way.

Go ahead. And as, and as regards the Italian you say their social conditions have changed?

Yes, they change.

Were.....

They change very much, a, today a Italian people they are much a respected by a other people.

Right, much more accepted. And the economic conditions are much better and so forth.

Much a better, yes.

Do you ever regret having come to the United States?

....No....but I never ...a...forget my a...home town.

But a, but a you're never sorry you came here, are you?

Oh no, no.

I mean. You're happy....you much rather live here than in Italy?

Well, a....a...that's problem because a...a...where you born you never can forget and acourse here different living, you know.

Life is much different.

Life is much different and not it's fifty years, you know.

You've been here fifty years? Yes, that is something.

It's a....pretty hard to adjust with life over there.

Yes, you'd have to adjust there, things that you take for granted here.

Yeh, yeh.

Would be real luxuries there.

Besides I got a three nice boys married with family.
I never can.

No, you'd never want to leave your own family.

No, no, I can't.

Do you ever long for the good old days? Do you ever wish you can go back and a...(Tape turned) Do you ever long for the good old days? Do you ever wish you could go back and live life over again?

If I can be young again.

If you can be young again. Do you think you'd make changes in your life you'd make any different decisions than the ones you've already made?

If I get young again - I know what I know now....

Uh huh.

There going a be lot of changes.

Do you think you'd still come to the United States?

A.....well..... I hear from many boys come over here....a...Italy today pretty good shape. The life change over there much too. So I know very well I got a niece and a few over there. They have beautiful home - bathroom lots better than what we have here.

So you think if you had to live life.....

Everything fine.

Yes. So you think if you had life to live over again you might stay in Italy?

Well.....uh.....yes, if a the conditions like today.

Yes.

I don't want a go back in the same spot that it was before.

No, not back into the old mountain town, huh?

No.

In the city where you have modern conveniences and everything else.

Well, yes.

Uh, granted that you would have the modern conveniences there that you have here, you'd rather stay in Italy, is that it?

(pause) I no want a...a...be against this country because I'm, I'm....

Oh no, it isn't that.

I'm one hundred per cent American but same time a I never forget Italy. I ----- for good like you say if I can go back young; I've all the conveniences exist a today, I'd rather live over there.

O.K. fine. Thank you. (Chuckles) Is there anything you'd like to add about what your life has been like in this country and a....

Well, I'm fifty years of my life in this country. I went through many different stage of life. I went a through the best which some day we no even have piece bread to eat. Then went through....my....a....happy life.

In other words times where you had barely enough to eat with no luxuries at all.

No, no. Then I have my good time, too. I was...a... there was time when I was make a pretty good in my shoe shop and my family.....

When were the times when you would say you were making out fairly good in the shoe shop and when you were doing poorly? Could you a limit this to a date; could you give us a date, an approximate date?

Yes, yes...a.... I was make a pretty good from a -

we say - 1922 to 1928. Then Depression start, I mean in Jamestown. Some place maybe late, some place maybe start early.

Yes.

In Jamestown Depression start in '28 and a....shoes weren't a coming in enough to take care my family. Well, course we a cut a lot of things which we used to have, you know.

And you did without. Did you still have a car during these times?

Yeh. We get along just the same anyhow because it was...a...market right a next to me, my shoe shop. This market that time they was...a...a person - individual.....

Yes, was a small store.

Each a, each a...a...a..department belonged to a one person.

Oh, I see. It was a big store but each department in the store belonged to an individual.

That's right. So mainly with this people sell meat, egg, vegetable, many other thing - come over to me, bring two, three pair shoes, say, "Mr. DiSabatino, I got three pair shoes here to fix. Tell you the truth I no have money to pay you but we can exchange." "Fine," I say, "fine, fine."

Right, they would give you food and you would fix the shoes.

That's right. I was fix shoes....a....long time. For quite a bit time and they a give me meat, bake good, vegetable, anything we need family. My kids - when I see my kids eat, I was happiest man in world.

Yes, a, this, this was the essence of life then.

That's right.

Having enough to eat. In other words you were back on

a barter, in barter society, weren't you?

That's right.

Now a...that was....you went from the good times to the a fairly bad times, right?

Bad, them....a....yes.

And when did things start getting better again for you?

Well....a....in '32, '33.

In 193.....

I was work - I sold my shoe shop in Jamestown and I went to work in factory, '33. I went to work in a Warren, Pennsylvania. They use to make a those radio cabinet and a television cabinet - they start to come out this time, come out, you know.

In '33?

In '33.

Well, there weren't television cabinets then.

Well, uh, I....I.....

They were probably big radio cabinets and record cabinets, I suppose.

Well, I know they were for this things. Now I don't remember exactly if was for television, but I know they start soon after.

Yes.

A.....they were pretty busy and we were work night too. I mean a few hours extra.

Yes, you were working overtime.

And I was....I start to make pretty good money there, and then my family was start to go.....

Now how did you get to Warren, Pennsylvania from a Jamestown?

I was drive. I was take a five more people with me.

Oh, you had a car. In other words.....

Oh, you.....

You drive and they pay you for ...a...

They pay me for the a ride.

For riding. How long did you work there?

I work there until I come down to a Wilmington. Till
'35.

I see. Then when you came to Wilmington in '35....?

Well, then when I a come down to Wilmington I have
a two rough a year. Can't find no job...and a, course we have a
little money, we get along but a we struggle. Then after two years
struggle I buy shoe shop again on a Seventh and Tatnall and we start
a being on our feet again.

Ah...how....

And after then things a went better and better.

I see. And when would you say you enjoyed your greatest
period of prosperity?

A....since...oh, three my boy come back from the armies.
After World War II..

After Second World War II. They come back. All three,
no two, start to work and helping us and I was work. I have a shoe
shop. I was work, was make pretty good. It was the best time.

I see. What, what sort of work did your boys do?

Ah, one, two are a bricklayer. Matter of fact one
today is in construction business.

He has his own business?

Has own business.

What does he call his business?

Beg pardon?

What's the name of his business, his company?

A...a....Bonvetti DiSabatino Construction Company.

Uh huh.

They have office in a Twenty-seven Lan.... Twenty-seven hundred Lancaster Avenue.

Oh yes.

Right next a to him it's a real estate a man. Next to real estate man is a liquor store belong a my boy too.

Oh, I see. So he's doing all right for himself.

All right.

What's he do, build houses now?

I'm the happiest father today to see my three boys in good standings.

Are they all in construction business?

No, one like I say is construction business. One is bricklayer, work for duPont in Newport plant.

In Newport.

And he's the one run a the liquor store.

Yes.

There's another one, the youngest. Today work for Angerstein. That's a....a....

Angerstein, it's a building materials.

That's a right. Building materials firm and he's work in office as one the best over there. He's in...a...good a hand too. So I'm one of the happiest fathers today because I got all three boys richer than I am. I'm the poorest.

Well, good. Is there anything else you'd like to add to this now...a...

A...well...I think we....unless you want to...I don't know. You.....

Well, if you....

You ask me questions.

Well, I think I've asked you all the questions I can think of.

Because if you want to pick up all the, all the things. Many, many things but a you no want to go extra, you know.

Well, the things we were mainly interested in I think we've covered those pretty good.

Yes, yeh.

Well, this is good. Thanks a lot, Mr. DiSabatino.

Yeh.