



Citation for this collection:

MSS 179 Robert H. Richards, Jr., Delaware oral history collection, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware

Contact:

Special Collections, University of Delaware Library
181 South College Avenue
Newark, DE 19717-5267
302.831.2229 / 302.831.1046 (fax)
<http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec>
askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu

Terms governing use and reproduction:

Use of materials from this collection beyond the exceptions provided for in the Fair Use and Educational Use clauses of the U.S. Copyright Law may violate federal law.

Permission to publish or reproduce is required from the copyright holder. Please contact Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, for questions. askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu

A note about transcriptions:

Of the original 252 audio-recordings in this collection, 212 of these tapes were transcribed around the time of the original recordings (between 1966 and 1978). In 2012, Cabbage Tree Solutions was contracted to create transcriptions for the remaining tapes. Corrections to and clarifications for all transcriptions are welcome, especially for names and places. Please contact Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, for questions. askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu

Mr. Giuseppe Esposito

[0:00:00]

Mr. Esposito: You want me to talk to you in the American.

Interviewer: Yes, you speak in English. Now, this is an interview with Mr. Giuseppe Esposito.

Mr. Esposito: Esposito.

Interviewer: Esposito. This is how you pronounce it. E-S-P-O-S-I-T-O.

Mr. Esposito: That's right.

Interviewer: Right, Esposito. Fine. Mr. Esposito, where were you born?

Mr. Esposito: I'm born in Italy.

Interviewer: What part of Italy?

Mr. Esposito: It's Sant'Agnello.

Interviewer: Sant'Agnello. Now, let me spell this. It's Comune, C-O-M-U-N-E.

Mr. Esposito: Comune di Sant'Agnello.

Interviewer: Right. Comune ...

Mr. Esposito: Provincia di Napoli.

Interviewer: Right. Di is D-I, Sant'Agnello. It's S-A-N-T' A-G-N-E-L-L-O. It's Provincia di Napoli. That's the Province of Naples. What year were you born, Mr. Esposito?

Mr. Esposito: 1885.

Interviewer: 1885. Could you tell me what month and what day?

Mr. Esposito: May 14 – April 14.

Interviewer: April 14? Where is Sant'Agnello located?

Mr. Esposito: Near Sorrento.

Interviewer: Near Sorrento?

Mr. Esposito: Near Sorrento.

Interviewer: Close on the Mediterranean?

Mr. Esposito: In Mediterranean.

Interviewer: It is right on the ocean then?

Mr. Esposito: That's right.

Interviewer: What did your father do in Sant'Agnello?

Mr. Esposito: My father was laborer.

Interviewer: A laborer? What sort of work did he do? Did he work on farm?

Mr. Esposito: ***[inaudible] [0:01:34]*** in the city – carry fruit from farms to the city.

Interviewer: He just transported the fruit from the farms to the city.

Mr. Esposito: Carry it on the shoulder.

Interviewer: He carried it on his back?

Mr. Esposito: That's right.

Interviewer: You're going to tell me something else about your father?

Mr. Esposito: When my father, when he got married I was the first one in the family. And it was about 1902, he had seven children. And he was working very hard to support us. So I was sent with friend of mine, he was here before and he came back in Italy and then he had to come here again. So my father gave me to him to come in New York. So I came on in.

Interviewer: All right. How old were you then?

Mr. Esposito: About 15 years old.

Interviewer: You're 15. Did you ever go to school in Italy?

Mr. Esposito: For a couple of months.

Interviewer: What did they teach? Do you remember?

Mr. Esposito: Oh it's a ...

Interviewer: It's been so long ago?

Mr. Esposito: It's so long to – few words and ...

Interviewer: Just the alphabet and few words, a little bit how to write a bit.

[Cross talk]

Mr. Esposito: ... and that's all.

Interviewer: How old were you when you started school?

Mr. Esposito: When I was about 12 years old.

Interviewer: You're about 12 years old.

Mr. Esposito: Yes, because Sant'Agnello had no schools. We had to go up the next city, the little bit of a town. They had one teach and then about 10, 15 kids take a ...

Interviewer: Do you remember the name of this town? Do you remember the name of the town where you went to school?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah, Coli di Fontanello.

Interviewer: Cola?

Mr. Esposito: Coli di Fontanello.

Interviewer: Okay, I'll see how you spell that now. C-O-L-I.

Mr. Esposito: Coli.

Interviewer: Yes, Coli, C-O-L-I.

Mr. Esposito: Yeah.

Interviewer: Then di, D-I. And Fontanello.

Mr. Esposito: Fontanello.

Interviewer: F-O-N-T-A-N-E-L-L-O.

Mr. Esposito: Double L, O.

Interviewer: L-L-O. Okay, fine.

Mr. Esposito: Fontanello.

Interviewer: Coli di Fontanello. Now, they have – excuse me. Go ahead.

Mr. Esposito: Real little city, a very strong city, two to three hours and *[inaudible]* **[0:03:52]**.

Interviewer: But how far was that from Sant'Agnello?

Mr. Esposito: Oh, about half an hour walk.

Interviewer: A half-hour walk?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah.

Interviewer: When you went to this school, is it a public school?

Mr. Esposito: Public school.

Interviewer: You don't have to pay anything to go there, do you?

Mr. Esposito: Oh, no, no, no.

Interviewer: It was completely free?

Mr. Esposito: That's right.

Interviewer: Now, why did you wait until you're 12 years old to start school? Is that the right year age when children start?

Mr. Esposito: No, I could have gone before but because I was – went over my aunt, the aunt who supported me because my father couldn't support me. He had another six kids besides me. So I went to my aunt in a little bit of house, a little land up town. So she took me with her arm and that's where I reached from eight years old to 12 years old.

Interviewer: So you were living with your aunt then?

Mr. Esposito: That's right, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, now, while you are living with your aunt, did you work on the farm?

Mr. Esposito: A little bit. *[inaudible]* **[0:04:57]** a little bit on the farm – on the farmland, you know.

[0:05:01]

Interviewer: Now, you said you went to school for just a couple of months. Is there any reason why you stopped going to school?

Mr. Esposito: Well, I stopped because my father sent me over here.

Interviewer: Oh, because he sent you here in this country.

Mr. Esposito: I was sent over here with a friend of his.

Interviewer: Then you were right. You were still about 12 years old when you came here.

Mr. Esposito: No, I was about 15 I guess. I was 12 when I went traveling with my aunt.

Interviewer: You're traveling with your aunt?

Mr. Esposito: That's right.

Interviewer: I see. Now, your father decided to send you to the United States.

Mr. Esposito: Yes.

Interviewer: Now, this friend of his, was he related at all to you?

Mr. Esposito: No, just a friend.

Interviewer: Why did your father decide to send you to the United States?

Mr. Esposito: Because he can't fully support me. He had too many kids.

Interviewer: Did he know how you are going to support yourself here?

Mr. Esposito: He doesn't know it.

Interviewer: You went over here *[phonetic]* [0:05:53] you just come here and find a job.

Mr. Esposito: That's right. That right. He did.

Interviewer: Now, how did you get the money to come to this country?

Mr. Esposito: Oh, my father had a little money and a little of this friend of my father have some, they pulled out and paid my passport to come over here.

Interviewer: Do you remember how much it costs to come here?

Mr. Esposito: No, no I don't.

Interviewer: Do you remember what process you had to go through in order to make out the necessary papers to come to the United States?

Mr. Esposito: No, that I don't.

Interviewer: You don't remember that. Do you remember where you boarded the ship to come to the United States?

Mr. Esposito: I remember the name in the ship. Yeah. Savoia.

Interviewer: Savoia?

Mr. Esposito: Savoia.

Interviewer: S-A-V-O-A-I-A, isn't it?

Mr. Esposito: And took me about 38 days before we got here.

Interviewer: Thirty-eight days?

Mr. Esposito: Thirty-eight days.

Interviewer: Where did you catch the ship? In Naples?

Mr. Esposito: In Naples.

Interviewer: How did you get to Naples from Sant'Agnello?

Mr. Esposito: With a car – then, we have a coach to sit our horses.

Interviewer: Horsing? Yes, horse and buggy.

Mr. Esposito: It took me over there.

Interviewer: I see. That's how you got there. How long did it take? Do you remember?

Mr. Esposito: It took me about half a day.

Interviewer: About half a day?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah, from inside of Sant'Agnello to over there. Yeah.

Interviewer: But how far is that? Do you know ...

[Cross talk]

Mr. Esposito: Well, we got from Sant'Agnello *[inaudible]* **[0:07:23]** to Raul to the City of Italy *[phonetic]* **[0:07:23]** we got to the Naples.

Interviewer: I see. And it took you about half a day to make it.

Mr. Esposito: Yeah.

Interviewer: All right. Now, once you got to Naples, was the ship in port?

Mr. Esposito: The ship was there, yeah.

Interviewer: So you don't have to stay ...

Mr. Esposito: No.

Interviewer: ... in a hotel. You just kind of board ship.

Mr. Esposito: That's right, yeah.

Interviewer: Do you remember what it was like to board ship?

Mr. Esposito: No, no, I don't remember.

Interviewer: You don't remember that at all? You don't remember what the quarters were like where you slept or ...?

Mr. Esposito: Oh well, it was okay. And on board there was a little room. On the top of the room, there were three beds. So one, two, three on the top – yeah. And I slept on one. My friend slept from the other and another friend that I don't know who slept on top of it.

Interviewer: I see.

Mr. Esposito: There're three in each room.

Interviewer: There were three in each room?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah, I only think of it now, but for three days, we were under the board *[inaudible] [0:08:21]* there wasn't a lot of a *[inaudible] [0:08:22]* but so much water from on the steam.

Interviewer: You mean the sea was rough.

Mr. Esposito: It was rough.

Interviewer: And you couldn't go on deck?

Mr. Esposito: That's right.

Interviewer: Now, you said it took you about 30 days.

Mr. Esposito: Thirty days or 31 days to come ...

Interviewer: Thirty, 31 days to come here? Did the ship stop at any ports along the way?

Mr. Esposito: No.

Interviewer: It came straight through?

Mr. Esposito: Right, straight.

Interviewer: Were there mostly all Italians aboard ship? Do you remember?

Mr. Esposito: The majority, yeah. We were all Italians.

Interviewer: How were you fed? How did they feed you aboard the ship?

Mr. Esposito: Well, it was pretty well. Meat with spaghetti, soup. And most of the time – the first three, four days, I threw up whatever I was eating.

Interviewer: You're sea sick?

Mr. Esposito: Yes, sea sick.

Interviewer: Did they treat you pretty good *[inaudible]* **[0:09:15]**?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah, they treat pretty good, yeah.

Interviewer: Now, when you arrived in the United States, where did the ship dock?

Mr. Esposito: Well, I can only describe my *[inaudible]* **[0:09:26]** had a fruit store, not a store, a stand. I used to keep, to stock it down a basement in the night. And in the morning, he had a place outside the butcher shop. He used to bring his fruit down to sell and put it in front of the windows for the shop and they use it down the market to buy and bring over there and resell it.

Interviewer: I see.

Mr. Esposito: That's why I *[inaudible]* **[0:09:57]** by four or five months.

Interviewer: You stayed with him about four or five months.

[0:10:01]

Mr. Esposito: And the reason why I left him, he made me sleep down the cell on top of potato bags but he had a room on the 101st street on First Avenue. And this place was on 104th street on Third *[phonetic]* **[0:10:20]** Avenue. He went to go a normal and managed to sleep down to seven.

Interviewer: And you had to sleep in that cellar where he used to keep his fruits and vegetables?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah, that's it.

Interviewer: And so in other words, when you first – let me go back, when you first arrived in the United States, you arrived in New York.

Mr. Esposito: Yeah.

Interviewer: And you stayed in New York.

Mr. Esposito: And we stayed in New York.

Interviewer: Now, this friend that you came with, he also stayed in New York?

Mr. Esposito: Yes, he stayed in New York. So we have the business there.

Interviewer: It was his business?

Mr. Esposito: They have business there.

Interviewer: Now, when you first – I want to go back just a little bit. When you first arrived in the United States, do you have to go to Customs and everything?

Mr. Esposito: No. *[inaudible]* **[0:11:04]**.

Interviewer: You just arrived in New York and *[inaudible]* **[0:11:06]**. You just left the ship and went about your business.

Mr. Esposito: Went to business. That's right.

Interviewer: And what year is this again 1902?

Mr. Esposito: 1902, I remember that very well.

Interviewer: Now, you said you only stayed with this man about four, five months.

Mr. Esposito: It was about four, five months I stayed with this man and then I had a friend of mine, he had a job in the butcher, some place, a few blocks away. So I left him and I went in the butcher which the butcher would give me a dollar and a half a week.

Interviewer: Well, what did the man with the fruit stand give you a week?

Mr. Esposito: Nothing.

Interviewer: Nothing?

Mr. Esposito: Nothing. Just feed. And, you know, what I had to eat in the morning?

Interviewer: What?

Mr. Esposito: For breakfast? Used to buy a quarter milk for 2 cents and three lemons used to get from the place where I've been *[phonetic]* **[0:11:55]** away,

squeeze those lemons on the milk and the two still rolls dip it in the milk and eat it in the morning for breakfast.

Interviewer: No, I haven't. That was not a very good breakfast.

Mr. Esposito: That's it. That's all I have.

Interviewer: But didn't lemon juice make the milk curdle?

Mr. Esposito: No, there's one point right next store was a jamming bakery. And they were selling their breads and was having their breakfast in the morning. Well, I used to go out to them to sell in the morning. This was a girl and they used to call me – the motion. Now, the way I would talk, I could not understand them, see? She used to give me little bread, a little coffee and I was in there, wash my face because there was rubble in the cellar. After I wash my face, this girl will give me little to eat even the 12 o'clock lunch, she used to give me something to eat.

But in the morning where I used to get up, I had to sleep outside store, started through my place and sleep over there too. And she see me when that happened and she'd feed me for say about seven or eight months.

Interviewer: Tell me something now. This man didn't pay you at all.

Mr. Esposito: No, but after two months of payroll, a month or two, he sent \$5 to my father. But I didn't get any money for my own. He sent \$5 to my father.

Interviewer: How did you live if he never paid you anything? You didn't have any money. Did he buy your clothes for you?

Mr. Esposito: Well, I have some clothes from Italy.

Interviewer: And that was the only thing you had?

Mr. Esposito: The only thing I had.

Interviewer: And nothing else besides that?

Mr. Esposito: Nothing else. But this girl, that I saw at the bakery, she used to buy me shades *[inaudible]* [0:13:54] the way and she'll pay the stockings but she never took money though.

Interviewer: Well, you don't have any money to give her, did you?

Mr. Esposito: *[inaudible] [0:14:06]*.

Interviewer: Tell me something. What did you do? Did you work all day long?

Mr. Esposito: All day long. I wake to clean the stand and clean the store to put them on stand for selling. And try to sell it. One time, I had an argument with a customer. He had a sign *[inaudible] [0:14:31]* 5 cents a bond at the sign now. So the lady say, give me half a bond. She went like this – half a bond. So I don't understand that the sign was no good. So I took the sign and turned it off trying to her to think that I don't understand what the lady was saying. And then I had an argument with the butcher. The butcher was inside and he said, I shouldn't say the same. The lady want half a bond. And he got a bag and he gave her half a bond. And then I understand it what half a bond *[inaudible] [0:15:03]*.

[0:15:06]

Interviewer: Did you work seven days a week?

Mr. Esposito: Seven days a week, even on Sunday too.

Interviewer: And you worked from the time you got up in the morning to time you went to bed at night?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you ever have time to yourself?

Mr. Esposito: No. Serve there. Go there. That time *[inaudible] [0:15:22]* and everybody's done. Okay, 1903, '04, I mean 1903, there was difference of that *[inaudible] [0:15:37]*.

Interviewer: After you left this man and went to work for a butcher, he paid you a dollar and a half a week.

Mr. Esposito: That's right.

Interviewer: That was the first money you ever received in this country then?

Mr. Esposito: That's right. *[inaudible] [0:15:49]*.

Interviewer: Now, after you went to work for this butcher, where did you sleep then?

Mr. Esposito: This girl that I used to *[inaudible] [0:15:56]* that it was in the bakery – it was two girls, they had a room on the 11th street on second avenue. They had three-room. So they took me with them. And I used to clean *[inaudible] [0:16:11]*. I sleep there in the morning, in the night. But I used to look in the house so I used to clean in the house. I used to get up early in the morning, clean the bed, clean the dish and everything.

Interviewer: Were these Italian girls?

Mr. Esposito: No, they were German.

Interviewer: Did they speak English?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you speak any English then?

Mr. Esposito: No, *[inaudible] [0:16:31]* but I'm trying to learn it. Every night I had to stay with them. They had a book, Italian book and American and they would sit down with me went to go without saying anything else. I pick up quite a few words with that.

Interviewer: Well, did you have to pay them for staying there?

Mr. Esposito: No, I just clean a little bit.

Interviewer: And that was it. They just let you stay.

Mr. Esposito: That was it. *[inaudible] [0:16:55]*.

Interviewer: Well, that sounds like a pretty good arrangement.

Mr. Esposito: Oh yeah. I still *[inaudible] [0:17:00]* girls. They used to be very nice.

Interviewer: Now, what happened after a year? After you were there a year? You say, you stayed there about a year then what did you do?

Mr. Esposito: And then I find a job on Park Haven in the ninth street, on the fruit stand. And this guy gave me a board and everything. And he used to give me \$3 a week. But he know my father in the other side.

Interviewer: Yes.

Mr. Esposito: See, which I don't know it. Another three or four month or three, four weeks *[inaudible]* [0:17:36] used to send 15, \$20 to my father. And my father used to write to me, *[inaudible]* [0:17:42] the Italians are no good. *[inaudible]* [0:17:46].

Interviewer: I see. Now, when you worked for the butcher, did you have to work seven days a week?

Mr. Esposito: No, like four days, five days a week.

Interviewer: Five days. You had your weekends off, is that it?

Mr. Esposito: That's right, yeah.

Interviewer: What did you do then when you have free time? What did you do in your time off?

Mr. Esposito: Oh, I hang around the bakery.

Interviewer: You used to hang around the bakery?

Mr. Esposito: I clean up the bakery. I help her on and ...

Interviewer: Now, when you went to work to sell at the fruit stand, did you work five days a week there too?

Mr. Esposito: No, with fruit stands, Saturday was off. I used to go to church. And I would sleep there and the morning then I was still there. So I just went to the girl's room.

Interviewer: I see. Now, when you worked for this man on the fruit stand, how many hours a day did you work?

Mr. Esposito: *[inaudible]* [0:18:41] I get up 3 o'clock in the morning, fix out the stand, *[inaudible]* [0:18:46] at the noon, have a one-hour sleep and then go back to work to 6, 7 o'clock in the night.

Interviewer: That's a pretty long day then.

Mr. Esposito: Yeah, well, *[inaudible]* [0:18:58].

Interviewer: And you did this six days a week.

Mr. Esposito: That *[inaudible]* [0:19:04] about two, three years.

Interviewer: Did he ever give you a raise in pay?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah.

Interviewer: What was the most you ever made working for him?

Mr. Esposito: Well, you mean the money?

Interviewer: Yes.

Mr. Esposito: It used to be at 7, 8, 9, \$10 every week.

Interviewer: And that was for six days a week hours, unlimited.

Mr. Esposito: That's right *[inaudible]* **[0:19:29]** to that.

Interviewer: Why did you leave him?

Mr. Esposito: Well, I found another better job. As soon as I get a better job, I leave him down there. Then I can speak much English. I can talk a better English now. I can understand now the fish *[phonetic]* **[0:19:45]** stand you know.

Interviewer: Now, when you left him it was what, about 1907?

Mr. Esposito: About 1907, 1908, something like that.

Interviewer: And when you left him, you said you got a better job, was it another fruit stand?

[0:20:00]

Mr. Esposito: *[inaudible]* **[0:20:00]** fruit stand, all the time fruit stand.

Interviewer: And did you know the man that you went to work for then?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah.

Interviewer: Was he Italian too?

Mr. Esposito: Italian, yeah.

Interviewer: Was he a *[inaudible]* **[0:20:12]** done or was he ...?

Mr. Esposito: No, this was his decision.

Interviewer: To see ...

Mr. Esposito: A very nice father.

Interviewer: Did you get your board from him too?

Mr. Esposito: Boards, I eat, clean, everything. He treated me like I was like his own son.

Interviewer: Really?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah.

Interviewer: That was good. Now, what did he pay you per week there?

Mr. Esposito: Well, at that time, it's 5, \$6 a week. It was a good money. Anybody who will get 5, \$6 a week on that days, they were all right.

Interviewer: What did you do with your free time when you weren't working?

Mr. Esposito: I went to old friends, see the moving pictures, look around, you know, looking around.

Interviewer: Now, where you lived, in the various places that you lived and you've grown with these people. What were the houses like?

Mr. Esposito: The house?

Interviewer: Yes, what was the house like?

Mr. Esposito: Well, he has his wife there, a couple of children and *[inaudible] [0:21:11]* lived with us.

Interviewer: I mean what kind of a house was it though?

Mr. Esposito: Like house *[inaudible] [0:21:18]* rooms, bed ...

Interviewer: Like big buildings?

Mr. Esposito: *[inaudible] [0:21:21]* five, six family in the *[inaudible] [0:21:23]*.

Interviewer: Five or six family in the *[inaudible] [0:21:25]*.

Mr. Esposito: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Did they have any central heating or anything?

Mr. Esposito: No. They'd no gas. They had coal fires, coal stoves *[inaudible]* [0:21:35].

Interviewer: What? In each apartment?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah, in each apartment.

Interviewer: But in just one room.

Mr. Esposito: Yeah, there was no gas. And the lights, oil cans sometimes.

Interviewer: Oil lights?

Mr. Esposito: Oil lights, yeah.

Interviewer: No electric?

Mr. Esposito: No, later we had electric two, three years after.

Interviewer: Did the houses have any plumbing in them?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah, but only cold water; no hot water.

Interviewer: No hot water. How about toilets, do they have toilets inside?

Mr. Esposito: No, it was back downstairs in the yard.

Interviewer: They're downstairs in the back.

Mr. Esposito: In the yard, yeah.

Interviewer: Tell me now, when you are in a multi-family dwelling, like that where you had maybe five families in a building, what do they have, an outhouse for each family?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah, we have three family in the house, three rooms family, four for – four rooms.

Interviewer: No, I'm talking about the toilets outside, whether they one for each family?

Mr. Esposito: No, one for all family.

Interviewer: One for everybody.

Mr. Esposito: Yeah.

Interviewer: And that was all. That could have caused problems every now and then.

Mr. Esposito: Especially in the winter time when you got on the way to the backyard in the winter. Oh boy, yeah.

Interviewer: In the winter, pretty cold

[Cross talk]

Interviewer: But then you might have maybe – if you had five families, you might have ...

Mr. Esposito: **[inaudible] [0:23:01]** sometimes.

Interviewer: That's it. You might have 20 ...

Mr. Esposito: But anybody – they had what they called a bowl.

Interviewer: A night pot.

Mr. Esposito: Night pot that was in bed.

Interviewer: Chamber pot rather, yeah.

Mr. Esposito: In the morning, you have to have a time to go to dam, wash it and bring them back.

Interviewer: I see. That's what you did then. Now, I imagine the winter, these buildings, they're pretty cold inside too, weren't they?

Mr. Esposito: Oh, chilling.

Interviewer: I mean there was no heat in the bedrooms or anything.

Mr. Esposito: No, no. I recall it was just a coal stove and a kitchen and that's all.

Interviewer: And that was it. So imagine it was a pretty difficult life, wasn't it?

Mr. Esposito: So, so ...

Interviewer: Now, did you just continue working with fruit stands all the time?

Mr. Esposito: All my life, that was my business.

Interviewer: Did you eventually get your own business?

Mr. Esposito: Oh yes, then I ...

Interviewer: I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Mr. Esposito: Pick up and little by little, I can talk better in a while and make understand to the people and was sociable and everybody and everybody liked me though.

Interviewer: So you eventually got your own business, right?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah.

Interviewer: When did you get your own business?

Mr. Esposito: Well, the first time I had business, this was on 44th street at Amsterdam Avenue. I was about 20 years old.

Interviewer: About 20?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah. I had a good job that time though. I used to make pretty good money. And then when I was about 21 years old or well 20 years old, I started keeping company and 21 years I have married.

Interviewer: Now, was your wife also Italian?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah, she is. She's dead now. She dies about 20 years ago. And the first two – well, this was about, I don't remember what years. I got married, I was 21, 22. *[inaudible]* **[0:25:11]**.

[0:25:11]

Interviewer: Now, you got married when you're 21 years old.

Mr. Esposito: Yeah.

Interviewer: So this would put it in what, 1911.

Mr. Esposito: 1911.

Interviewer: 1911. And 1912, your first daughter is born.

Mr. Esposito: Yeah.

Interviewer: And you had your own business by that time, right?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah. I had business so I had to work *[inaudible]* [0:25:27].

Interviewer: Now, when you got married, you got your own apartment?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah, and I got my own apartment 141st street on Eighth Avenue. At that time, New York, Eighth Avenue was all white people, all good people. Now, there are other colors.

Interviewer: The things change.

Mr. Esposito: Now, you can't leave *[inaudible]* [0:25:49] then I got married and I went on business and little by little I *[inaudible]* [0:25:58].

Interviewer: Tell me something now, when World War I started, when Italy got into World War I, did this affect you in any way at all?

Mr. Esposito: Well, at that time I was 23 years old or 24 I think, and I have two kids and every day I was afraid I had to go in the army. But they called me, I told them who I was, how many kids I have and then they put me down at the first call. And then they didn't call me and then the war was over.

Interviewer: Were you an American citizen by this ...?

Mr. Esposito: I was American citizen in 1920 I think.

Interviewer: In 1920, you became an American citizen.

Mr. Esposito: *[inaudible]* [0:26:52]. I don't know. I believe I'm not.

Interviewer: But it was after World War I then?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: And tell me, I want to ask you some other questions now. You lived in New York all your life then?

Mr. Esposito: That's right.

Interviewer: What was the city like when you first got to New York? Could you tell me what your impression was when you first got there in the city in the United States?

Mr. Esposito: Well, to begin it was pretty hard on me. I didn't understand nothing. And then later on I started to understand and it was all right. It got a little nice on me. But we have to create vision and we have that time, but I still alone *[inaudible] [0:27:32]* because when you *[inaudible] [0:27:37]* you can get what you want. But me, I was always working. *[inaudible] [0:27:47]*.

Interviewer: But the thing that I want to ask you though, here in Italy, you lived in a small town.

Mr. Esposito: Very small town.

Interviewer: That was more like a farm community *[inaudible] [0:27:58]* anything else, right?

Mr. Esposito: That's right. That's right. Yes.

Interviewer: And you came to this country and you're immediately in the biggest city in this country which is quite a scene. I was wondering what your impressions were when you first came into New York and you saw this big city and the traffic and everything else. What did you think?

Mr. Esposito: I think this was a paradise. The place I was and the place I came, I thought this was a paradise. Even I don't have enough to eat, you know, but I get a lot to eat. In Italy, many times I had to go to bed without eating, but not here. Whenever there was something left over, I always got something to eat. That was a ...

Interviewer: So even when you were sleeping on potato bags you were better off here than you were in Italy?

Mr. Esposito: Better off in Italy, right. Even though I came on from down south *[phonetic] [0:28:50]* with my face dirty, you know, *[inaudible] [0:28:54]* I had to go to the next bakery to wash my face was all right. But in Italy, I had put the vase of water outside, when you get up in the morning, five or six of us had to wash our face in the same water. So that if you want water in Italy, you have to go about two blocks down, there's a little

farmland surrounded with water and you have to get it. That was about seven to eight family around that tap water, they get that. If you get down early morning, you got water *[inaudible]* **[0:29:31]** they got to wait. That was in Italy.

Interviewer: Okay, now, how did World War I affect you?

Mr. Esposito: It didn't affect me, no. I was working.

Interviewer: You're working but didn't it make any changes in your life? Didn't it cause any changes at all in your life?

Mr. Esposito: No, *[inaudible]* **[0:29:49]** change. In fact, I was *[inaudible]* **[0:29:53]** to call me and get out of the world. But I've been – doesn't call me.

Interviewer: But they never did call you.

Mr. Esposito: No.

Interviewer: Okay, but you still have your business all during the war, right?

[0:30:01]

Mr. Esposito: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Now, when you asked you how did it affect you, well, you didn't have to go in New York and this is one it didn't affect you.

Mr. Esposito: Yeah.

Interviewer: But what did it do to the prices of your fruits and vegetables?

Mr. Esposito: Well, the price went a little high.

Interviewer: The prices went higher?

Mr. Esposito: A little higher and you paid a little higher down the market, you get it a little and you sell it.

Interviewer: But your business still prospered?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah, yeah. Not too much. It was a little slow but get along nicely.

Interviewer: Now, after World War I there was a big change in the way people lived in this country.

Mr. Esposito: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: What changes did you see in the way you lived?

Mr. Esposito: No change at all.

Interviewer: Did your apartment changed at all?

Mr. Esposito: No.

Interviewer: Did you get electricity or did you get gas where you first had coal?

Mr. Esposito: We had gas in the kitchen; we have everything in the Second World War

Interviewer: I mean with first War World, I'm talking about.

Mr. Esposito: No, First World War, we don't have gas. *[inaudible] [0:30:57]* we would work on gas.

Interviewer: You had gas?

Mr. Esposito: That's right.

Interviewer: But after the war, did this change your electricity?

Mr. Esposito: Yes, it has.

Interviewer: After World War I, it changed?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah, and then it changed, yeah.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Esposito: But that's for every house.

Interviewer: They changed to electricity? How about heating? Did you get any central heating?

Mr. Esposito: Oh yes, it was heated. We still have coal stoves though, not heated apartment. All the coal stove and the chop board everyday *[inaudible]*

[0:31:25] bigger space and first **[inaudible] [0:31:26]** on the bottom and then the coal on top.

Interviewer: And you still had to do this thing.

Mr. Esposito: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you have any hot water in the house then?

Mr. Esposito: No, but we have to **[inaudible] [0:31:39]** make coal stove with connection. When you open a coal stove, you have your hot water.

Interviewer: In other words, it was hooked up to the coal stoves so you could make hot water.

Mr. Esposito: That's right. Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, now arrive 1923, Mussolini started to become quite powerful in Italy.

Mr. Esposito: In Italy, not here.

Interviewer: Not here, no. In Italy.

Mr. Esposito: Yeah.

Interviewer: What did you know about him then?

Mr. Esposito: I wouldn't know anything about him. I don't know anything but he affected my family that they got to Mussolini over there. He used to write to me and it's this and this. And we got no money and we got nothing and I used to send them a lot of money **[inaudible] [0:32:27]**. My wife used to send a lot of money over there.

Interviewer: Was your wife's family in Italy too?

Mr. Esposito: No, they were all here.

Interviewer: Now, you had no opinion at all about Mussolini of what kind of a man he was?

Mr. Esposito: No, no, no. You know, when I came here, the first years, I have no idea to go back to Italy.

Interviewer: You never had intention to go back?

Mr. Esposito: No intention at all.

Interviewer: And you came here ...

Mr. Esposito: My mother used to send me, "Joe, come over here. I want to see you," in a mail.

Interviewer: Have you ever gone back to Italy for a visit?

Mr. Esposito: Never.

Interviewer: You have never been back?

Mr. Esposito: Never went back. In fact, my mother was so anxious to see me. She was 83 years old *[inaudible] [0:33:12]* 10, 12 years ago, she came over here to see me, 83 years old. She stayed here seven months and when she went back she died.

Interviewer: Do you have any other brothers over here?

Mr. Esposito: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: Or sisters?

Mr. Esposito: The Second World War, one of my brother, he was working on this ship and there was a *[inaudible] [0:33:43]* called him for war – in the war. So he called me. He write to me, was in Baltimore loading some coal to take back in Italy. He said, Joe if you come in Baltimore and get me then I don't have to go out to war. If I go back in the war in Italy, then I got to go to war.

So I had a place at that time, 156th street in Amsterdam Avenue, one side of *[inaudible] [0:34:16]* I got another friend of mine went to Baltimore. And we got him moved.

Interviewer: Now, what was your brother? Was he still ...

Mr. Esposito: He was on his ship *[inaudible] [0:34:25]*.

Interviewer: An Italian ship?

Mr. Esposito: Italian ship, yeah. That comes over here to get coal, to load coal to bring them in Italy.

Interviewer: And this was before World War II started?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah, before the war. So I got in there. And I put him to work with me. You know, *[inaudible]* **[0:34:46]** and then in New York, I mean America had to go to war with Germany and Italy – was that – I forgot *[inaudible]* **[0:34:56]**.

Interviewer: Yes, Germany, Italy and Japan.

Mr. Esposito: Yeah. And this is not the man *[inaudible]* **[0:35:02]** in the world. He went voluntarily.

[0:35:06]

Interviewer: Oh he did?

Mr. Esposito: He did. In the war *[inaudible]* **[0:35:08]** he came back, he got a *[inaudible]* **[0:35:14]** right away and he went to work with district, community *[inaudible]* **[0:35:20]** alike, driving truck.

Interviewer: Yes, but I want to ask you some other questions. And before that I wanted to ask you what it was like for you in New York when the prohibitions started?

Mr. Esposito: I still went on with business.

Interviewer: I mean this didn't affect you at all?

Mr. Esposito: Not at all because I had nothing to do with liquor, nothing to do about *[inaudible]* **[0:35:51]** fruit and vegetables, that's all.

Interviewer: Now, where you lived, mostly all Italians live where you lived?

Mr. Esposito: No, I lived, most American people and they *[inaudible]* **[0:36:03]** section all American, Jewish.

Interviewer: Okay, now, when the depression hit, when depression started, did this affect you at all?

Mr. Esposito: No.

Interviewer: Not at all. Your business was pretty much the same ...

Mr. Esposito: A lot of people that I know *[inaudible]* **[0:36:24]** this and that but I see that my little business make it even nicely, got along very nicely. A lot of people went with a basket and sitting out, collect bread, milk, cola, stuff and – but I never went.

Interviewer: You never had to go *[inaudible]* **[0:36:47]**.

Mr. Esposito: Never in my life.

Interviewer: You always managed to make enough from your own work?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah, I'm *[inaudible]* **[0:36:51]**.

Interviewer: Now you said you had a fruit stand?

Mr. Esposito: All the time.

Interviewer: Did you later go into a building or always a stand?

Mr. Esposito: It's always at the stands. Like a store, see, that come in and *[inaudible]* **[0:37:04]** down the market, buy the stuff in the market and bring them in the store and fix them up and sell them.

Interviewer: No, you did have store.

Mr. Esposito: Yes, a store.

Interviewer: A whole store. Now when World War II started, did this affect you in any way?

Mr. Esposito: No.

Interviewer: How did people treat you?

Mr. Esposito: Same. Like people are cheap. *[inaudible]* **[0:37:33]**. And some are cheap and ...

Interviewer: I'm talking about – not necessarily in business, but how about your own private life outside of business? Who are your friends? Were they mostly all Italians or were they ...?

Mr. Esposito: All kinds.

Interviewer: All kinds of people.

Mr. Esposito: Jewish, Italian, colored, French, all kinds.

Interviewer: Did anybody ever treat you any differently because you were Italian?

Mr. Esposito: No.

Interviewer: Do you feel that you're always treated pretty well?

Mr. Esposito: ***[inaudible] [0:38:02].***

Interviewer: Nobody ever made any ...

Mr. Esposito: Made bad remark? No, no.

Interviewer: Now, after World War II ended, our life really changed a lot. Everybody's life changed a lot.

Mr. Esposito: Everybody and I ...

Interviewer: How would you say yours changed?

Mr. Esposito: Same way.

Interviewer: What do you mean by same way?

Mr. Esposito: What you have, the way you make money, the way you spend, see?

Interviewer: Well, how about in your home for example? Everybody's starting – you got electricity in your home, right?

Mr. Esposito: Yes, ***[inaudible] [0:38:37].***

Interviewer: Centralized heating. You've got hot and cold running water.

Mr. Esposito: Everything.

Interviewer: Rugs on the floor.

Mr. Esposito: Sometimes, sometimes ***[inaudible] [0:38:51]*** worked like these and ***[inaudible] [0:38:55].***

Interviewer: But you got all kinds of furniture now?

[Cross talk]

Mr. Esposito: ... sleep.

Interviewer: You're about to go where?

Mr. Esposito: No, no, not here.

Interviewer: Life has changed a great deal. In the beginning, in most of the houses, it's a very bare. There wasn't too much furniture. Now, there' a lot of furniture in the house.

Mr. Esposito: Yes, *[inaudible] [0:39:14]* so it's everything *[inaudible] [0:39:15]*.

Interviewer: Right, in other words, you went to this same progression, right?

Mr. Esposito: The same way. *[inaudible] [0:39:22]* living like in Italy, you know.

Interviewer: Well, certainly no. *[inaudible] [0:39:24]*.

[Cross talk]

Interviewer: Yeah, so there has been this progression, right?

Mr. Esposito: Sure. *[inaudible] [0:39:29]* making your living and that's where you're making a living.

Interviewer: Now, you were telling me about your brother. That you went to Baltimore and got him.

Mr. Esposito: Yeah, and then I would say then he went on the war and then he come back from the war. He got himself a job ...

Interviewer: You did you get him off the ship?

Mr. Esposito: *[inaudible] [0:39:51]*. It was about 3 o'clock in the morning. He was gone, he was outside of the steam, went to vehicle *[inaudible] [0:40:02]*. And I think *[inaudible] [0:40:07]*.

[0:40:09]

Interviewer: Now, did anybody try to stop him.

Mr. Esposito: No.

Interviewer: How about the American Authorities. How did they react?

Mr. Esposito: Five to six to seven and eight years, he got his first citizen *[inaudible]* **[0:40:19]** full citizen.

Interviewer: Did they know that that's how you got in this country.

Mr. Esposito: When he came back from the war *[inaudible]* **[0:40:28]** right away.

Interviewer: But I mean when the America Authorities first found out that he jumped ship, what did they say?

Mr. Esposito: Nobody knew he *[inaudible]* **[0:40:39]**.

Interviewer: In other words, nobody ever found out about it?

Mr. Esposito: No.

Interviewer: He went into the army.

Mr. Esposito: He went in the army and *[inaudible]* **[0:40:46]**.

Interviewer: How did he get a birth certificate then to go into the army?

Mr. Esposito: Well, I don't know. He just got it because he went into army. When he came back he's got a citizen payer right away.

Interviewer: This is good. He was your ...

Mr. Esposito: *[inaudible]* **[0:41:03]** he waited about two or three *[inaudible]* **[0:41:06]** to see whether he was around *[inaudible]* **[0:41:09]**.

Interviewer: Now, he worked for you when he first came here.

Mr. Esposito: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: *[inaudible]* **[0:41:17]** he's still living in New York?

Mr. Esposito: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: He's still there.

Mr. Esposito: He got married. He got children *[inaudible]* **[0:41:24]**.

Interviewer: Fun. He never had any problems with that then?

Mr. Esposito: No.

Interviewer: Now, you've lived in this country since 1902. That's 67 years. That's a long time.

Mr. Esposito: That's right.

Interviewer: You've seen a lot of changes here.

Mr. Esposito: I saw that it did, good and bad.

Interviewer: If you are to pick out one change and say this was the biggest change that occurred, could you do it?

Mr. Esposito: No.

Interviewer: You couldn't pick out any one change?

Mr. Esposito: I don't have any one right now. I have a *[inaudible]* **[0:41:53]** and all the way through.

Interviewer: I know but the things have changed. Some affected you more than others? Some change?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah, that's right.

Interviewer: So I was just wondering if you could pick out the one thing that probably affected you the most.

Mr. Esposito: I don't know.

Interviewer: What do you think is changed the most since you've been here? Would you say that people's relationships with one another have been the biggest change?

Mr. Esposito: It is a big change in the world. It isn't like it used to be. In fact, *[inaudible]* **[0:42:29]** 25, 30 years ago in New York, *[inaudible]* **[0:42:32]** and the people have changed.

Interviewer: Yes, they have changed. Right, this is exactly where I want to get your reaction to this. Do you think people have changed for the better or for the worse?

Mr. Esposito: For the worse.

Interviewer: Why?

Mr. Esposito: I don't know. Now, you can't trust anybody. Before, you could trust the people. Now, one man tell you one thing and I come out and find it different.

Interviewer: Would you say people were more friendly before?

Mr. Esposito: Before, yes.

Interviewer: That you spent more time with other people before.

Mr. Esposito: That's right.

Interviewer: What do you think is one of things that's changed all this?

Mr. Esposito: I don't know why.

Interviewer: Do you think television is one of the things that's changed this?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah, *[inaudible]* **[0:43:13]** television has got lot to do. It's true.

Interviewer: And people don't spend as much time talking anymore as they used to.

Mr. Esposito: That's right. That's true. Yeah.

Interviewer: And people sit in the house now and just watch television when before they go out and they talk to their friends.

Mr. Esposito: Yeah, that's true. That's true.

Interviewer: Now, they don't worry too much about it.

Mr. Esposito: No.

Interviewer: Okay, now, you've already told me you've never had a desire to go back to Italy at all, not even for a visit.

Mr. Esposito: No.

Interviewer: Have you ever been sorry that you came to the United States?

Mr. Esposito: Sorry? No, I'm glad.

Interviewer: You've never been sorry.

Mr. Esposito: Never been sorry. Yeah.

Interviewer: Quite the best decision that your father ever made for you.

Mr. Esposito: That's right. I never went to the wrong. I never went in jail. I've never done anything wrong. I wake, I make a living. I support my family. I raise nine kids. They're all even. They're all in business.

Interviewer: Wonderful. That's all.

Mr. Esposito: And I am now 50 years married. I'm 50 years in New York City.

Interviewer: Now ...

Mr. Esposito: **[inaudible] [0:44:18]** down in New York and about 300 people there.

Interviewer: Really? Well, were they family and friends?

Mr. Esposito: Family and friends.

Interviewer: How many grandchildren do you have?

Mr. Esposito: Many.

Interviewer: Just approximately.

Mr. Esposito: I think about grand grandchildren, I got about nine or 10.

Interviewer: Nine or 10 great grandchildren.

Mr. Esposito: Great grandchildren. Grandchildren, I think I have about 18 to 20 something like that.

Interviewer: It's your 20? Then you've got a big family here, haven't you?

Mr. Esposito: A big family.

Interviewer: Yes. Have you ever wished that you could go back in time or return to the good old days?

[0:45:03]

Mr. Esposito: No.

Interviewer: You accept progress as it comes.

Mr. Esposito: That's it. That's right. All right.

Interviewer: Now, you've lived in New York all your life and you've been in Delaware just what?

Mr. Esposito: Four years. When my wife died, I got four boys in New York that aren't married and she's the only girl I got in the family, only daughter. So I made up my mind my best *[inaudible]* **[0:45:31]** to come over here with my daughter. Say with a, you go where your daughter *[inaudible]* **[0:45:36]** you came *[inaudible]* **[0:45:38]**. But my best friend went to come over here and stay with my daughter. I'm about four years now.

Interviewer: How do you like Delaware?

Mr. Esposito: Well, at the beginning, I was reluctant. Now, I got a lot of friends, I met friends.

Interviewer: It's quite different from New York, isn't it?

Mr. Esposito: Yes, yes. Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you think you like it better or not as much as New York?

Mr. Esposito: No, better, quite. New York it's a life, lively life.

Interviewer: It's much more active. It's noisier and so and so?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah it's true.

Interviewer: And here it's much more quiet and perhaps a bit more peaceful.

Mr. Esposito: It's true.

Interviewer: Okay, do you have anything else you'd like to add to this Mr. Esposito? Do you have anything else you'd like to add to this to what we've already discussed?

Mr. Esposito: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you have anything else to say?

Mr. Esposito: No.

Interviewer: Okay, well, I have no more questions to ask you.

Mr. Esposito: That's great *[inaudible]* **[0:46:28]** we had a good time.

Interviewer: Fun.

Mr. Esposito: That's all. It's all my life. I made money, I spend money but in the nice way.

Interviewer: Well, good. You've enjoyed it.

Mr. Esposito: I wasn't gambling. I wouldn't do nothing *[inaudible]* **[0:46:40]** supported my family.

Interviewer: In other words, you enjoyed making ...

[0:46:46] **End of Audio**