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Interview with Mr. Vincent Bertomeu, Spanish immigrant, in Wilmington, Delaware, February 29, 1968, by Francis J. Fierro.

Q Mr. Bertomeu--your first name is Vincent, right?

A Yeah.

Q Where were you born, sir?

A Spain.

Q In Spain. Where in Spain?

A Benisa.

Q Where is that located?

A In the province of Alicante.

Q Alicante? Where is Alicante--what part of Spain?

A Eastern part of Spain.

Q The eastern part? Would that be near...

A The Mediterranean.

Q The Mediterranean side. What did you do when you were in Spain?

A Well, I lived with my grandfather for five or six years, you know, helping around. I was nine at the time.

Q You were a miner?

A Yes, nine years old.

Q Nine years old, working a mine?

A Not in a mine. You know, helping around the farm, see.

Q Oh, helping around the farm.

A At the age of 14--well, 15, my father decided to go to Canada, and he brought me with him...at the age of 15.

Q Um hmm. And what year was this now?

A That was 1914.

Q In 1914. This was just prior to the outbreak of World War I. How did you get to Canada?

A By boat.

Q Where did you catch the boat?

A In Valencia, Spain.

- Q In Valencia. Was it...do you know what flag the boat sailed under?
- A I believe it was French.
- Q A French boat?
- A A French boat, I believe.
- Q Did it come straight to Canada?
- A Straight.
- Q Straight to Canada? Where did it land, in Canada?
- A No, in Providence, Rhode Island.
- Q In Providence, Rhode Island? Did you have any difficulty once you arrived in Providence? Could you just leave...
- A Well, that's what I mean...cause I was with my father...he took care of everything. You know what I mean, I didn't bother with anything. I just followed my father.
- Q O.K. Now, when you got in Providence, what happened then. Did you stay there, or did you go...
- A No, no. We went to immigration where we was, and from there took a train to Canada.
- Q Now, why did your father choose Canada?
- A Well, because the same way over there as over here. In Canada you could go out in the street and get a shovel and shovel money into a basket, you know what I mean? Over there they were working for 20 cents a day, you know...over here they were making that every hour, you know.
- Q In Spain they'd get 20 cents a day...
- A Yeah. Over here you were making that every hour.
- Q Now, why did your father choose Spain? Did he have friends in Spain?
- A What do you mean?
- Q I'm sorry. Why did he choose Canada.
- A I don't know.
- Q Did he have any people in Canada?
- A When we went there, we didn't know anybody. Didn't know the language...
- Q Did your father ever give you any reason for going to Canada?
- A To make money.
- Q Just to make money?

A To make a better living.

Q But he never said why he chose Canada instead of the United States?

A No.

Q What did he do when he got to Canada? What sort of work--do you remember?

A Well, all kinds of work.

Q You were working with your father.

A Yeah.

Q Then you didn't go to school when you got to this country?

A I only had three years of schooling--when I was in Spain.

Q Now, you're in the United States now, and I know you lived in Canada. What happened between the time that you started in Canada and you came here.

A Well, what happened, there was a....I actually came to the United States in 1919, I think it was. There was prohibition in Canada.

Q Prohibition? In Canada?

A Yeah, yeah. Over here, you know...I was living about 50 miles from Niagara Falls, New York, you know, or Niagara Falls, Canada. So we used to come over across the bridge every weekend, you know. One of the times I stayed. I've been here ever since. That was in 1919, I believe.

Q O.K. Now, when you crossed over, did your father stay in Canada?

A No, he went back to Spain.

Q He went back to Spain? Now, had your father already gone back to Spain when you came to the United States?

A Yes.

Q In other words, he decided to go back to Spain and you decided to stay. What sort of trade did you engage in when you came to the United States then?

A Well, work. First job I got in the United States, worked in a steel mill.

Q Where was this?

A Buffalo, New York--Mackawana? From there went to Akron, Ohio, worked in a rubber plant--Goodyear and Firestone. From there I went to Bridgeport, Connecticut. All in about a year's time I went half the United States. From Bridgeport, Connecticut I went to Eddystone, Pennsylvania, and from Eddystone to Rockland. I've been here ever since.

- Q In all this time that you were travelling, did you ever encounter any problems at all?
- A No.
- Q Never any problems at all.
- A The only problems I had was the language.
- Q The language. You didn't speak English that well. When you travelled, did you always travel alone?
- A No, no. I was with friends.
- Q Were these friends of yours also Spanish?
- A Yeah. That's why I didn't learn English, you know, sooner. 'Cause we were a bunch of guys, you know, five or six guys. That's all we talked was Spanish. We couldn't talk none together because we didn't know any English.
- Q Did you ever associate with anyone other than your Spanish friends?
- A Not 'til after I got married.
- Q Now you were working at Rockland and this was when you met your wife, right? You lived right there, at the time. O.K. In other words, you have lived the same place where you were working when you met your wife and got married. And this would go back a few years, now, huh?
- A What is it, forty-two--I mean twenty-two?
- B (Mrs. Bertomeu) We've been married forty-five years.
- Q Forty-five years? Have you ever been back to Spain since having come over here? Do you ever have any desire to go back?
- A No. She wanted me to go last summer when she went. You know I have a daughter over there. She wanted me to go, well, I said, if I go over there, I have a sister and a brother. If I go over there they'd be strangers to me. It's like going to China. You know what I mean? I'd be happy to see 'em--you know what I mean--but at the same time, if I go over there at my age, it's like saying, well, so long forever, you know what I mean? 'Cause I'd never see 'em again. Chicken-hearted--you know what I mean?
- Q Do you have any comments that you could make about your life here in the United States?
- A Well, my life here has been hard work. The only comment I have, is I had to go through a Depression, that's all. That was rough.
- Q Yeah, I suppose we all felt that about the Depression.
- A Outside of that, I have no complaints. Been pretty good, the work.
- Q You just said that you didn't want to go back to Spain, to see your

family, because well, you hadn't seen them in such a long time that it'd almost be like saying goodbye forever. But have you ever had any desires, really, to go back, just to see Spain, to see the area you came from?

A No, I never have.

Q You've never missed it at all. Can you make any comments on the changes in the mode of living in the United States from the time that you arrived 'til now? If you were to point out any periods of time during which there were some real great changes--that really changed the whole direction of society...could you think of any specific points, or any time?

A Well, up until the first World War, living here was altogether different. After the first World War when the boys were over there, seeing what Paris looked like and all that kind of stuff, you know, when they come back, things started to change.

Q Could you be specific as to just in which ways things started to change?

A Well, I mean, life got much faster. You know what I mean? Like and they keep doing it right along, you know what I mean? Up until today. After the second World War, another big change. You know, people got wiser--or wilder, I don't know which.

Q And do you feel that people perhaps started to break out of a provincial shell that they might have been in before? They were coming aware of the rest of the world, something outside of their own little community?

A Before...you know, years ago, if you saw trouble on the street there, people would go and help, you know what I mean, try. Today that don't happen, you know what I mean? People I don't know are more independent today--they don't care what happen to people next door. But that's the only changes I've seen.

Q Would you say this is one of the biggest changes that you've seen?

A That's right. Yeah.

Q You know, it seems that everytime we see something that's different than what something used to be, we try to say it's either better or it's worse. How would you qualify this change?

A Yeah, today's worse than it was years ago.

Q It's worse. Are there any things that you can say about it that you would classify as better?

A Well, better living.

Q The standard of living is better?

A Yeah, better living...people have more today than they ever had.

Q People are materially better off.

- A That's it. It's a big difference, but as far as life itself is concerned, I don't know. There's so many...like we're better doing things. You know what I mean? 'Cause everything was slower, quieter, everything.
- Q You think that people in those days were...had more...would you call it spiritual peace?
- A That's right. That's right. Before...she can tell you herself. Before we used to get together you know, nighttime, three or four families, talk, you know what I mean, spend time together. When we first moved here--what was it, twenty-two years ago--they were all Italians...since I was here. We used to get together almost every night, you know what I mean, talk, you know, chew the fat. And today all that's gone. You know what I mean? Got that box there--that's all.
- Q You look at the television now and the television talks to you, is that it?
- B (Mrs. Bertomeu) The television's broken up a lot of friendships, I think. I really do.
- A That's all the changes I see.
- Q Let me ask you a couple of other questions now about Spain. Have you ever thought very much about Spain in the years past? It's hard to detach yourself. Let me be more specific about what I mean. Now, in the time that you've been in this country, Spain has lost a king; Spain came up with a republican form of government; Spain had what can be called a horrible civil war that could very easily be classified with our own civil war, maybe even worse, because I think that the two sides were even worse to one another--they absolutely murdered each other. Now during these periods of time, how did you feel. Did you ever think about this and worry about your own people who were...
- A Well, yes. I read in the paper, you know, of what's happening over there. Like it is now here, you read about in the paper Vietnam, you know what I mean. But what can you do? You feel sorry for the people over there, but...
- Q Did you ever have any opinions as to the political setup in Spain at any given time? Never really thought too much about it?
- A No, never bothered with it.
- Q During your years here in the United States, did you ever become involved in any social clubs, or political clubs, or church clubs or anything...
- A No, no.
- Q Never became involved...
- A I've been too busy working.
- Q O.K. Well, there is one other thing that I'd like to ask. Now, in the

early days, I know that Italians had a great deal of difficulty insofar as church was concerned...when they didn't have their own church. I know that there were churches, St. Peter's for one, when they had one gentlemen down there, a priest, who would not allow Italians to go to any Mass except one, the 9:00 Mass, which was the Italian Mass. And they weren't allowed to go to any other Mass. For a short time they had a priest here at St. Thomas that was exactly the same. He would stand outside of the door. If an Italian came to any Mass other than the 9:00, he would turn them away. There were people who had difficulty even getting a baby baptized in some churches, because they said, you just don't belong in this church. You're an Italian; this is not an Italian church. And up until the time that St. Anthony's was built, people did encounter difficulty and there were Italians who left the church, who became Protestants because they were welcome in the Protestant church where they weren't welcome in the Catholic churches. Did you ever run into any problems like this?

A Well, there's no Spanish churches here.

Q Right.

A That I know of. But I never had no trouble. Of course I'm not a church goer now, you know what I mean. The only time I go to church is wedding, christening and a funeral.

B (Mrs. Bertomeu) I'm glad he said that, too.

Q Well, he follows the typical procedure for, I think, all...most Italian and Spanish men. Father Tuppi used to say this, that the Italian men go to church three times in their life, when they're hatched, when they're matched and when they're dispatched. This is what he would say.

Q Mary, do you remember having any difficulty with church when you were a youngster--the kind of difficulty that I was just...

B No, because well, we lived in Rockland, we went to St. Joseph's up in Brandywine. Of course we had to walk from Rockland to St. Joseph's up at Brandywine on Sunday morning. But Father Gerard was there, Father Scott was there, I mean, and he welcomed everyone. There wasn't any problem.

Q You never had any problems there.

B We christened the children there, you know, the ones that was born... and then in the meantime, St. Anthony's was built. So I never had any problems with churches at all.

Q Well, I think that about covers everything....

A I want you to know that when he came--I don't want you to think that he's in this country illegal.

Q Oh, no, no.

A See, when he came over here and never went back to Canada. Because all that's been straightened out when he got his citizenship papers. Every-



thing was checked, everywheres that he said he had been, and where we had lived after we were married. Everyone was contacted and what he said was true and he did get his citizenship papers. 'Cause when he was young, he was fly-by-night, you know? Came over here and stayed and figured it was never gonna bother him. When he wanted to become a citizen after we were married, which I wanted to become a citizen, why he had to go through all that stuff to get everything straightened out--it was about three years before he could do anything about it.

Q O.K. Fine.

END OF INTERVIEW