**Janet:** Today is September 22nd, 1995 and I’m here with Marie Di Bella …

**Marie:** Correct.

**Janet:** Who came from what was Croatia at that time …

**Marie:** Exactly.

**Janet:** In 1913, you think and came through Ellis Island at the age of six years.

**Marie:** That’s right, of course.

**Janet:** Today, we are in Ellis Island, however, not in the studio and we have with us Rosemary Schmidt who is Mrs. Di Bella’s daughter. I’m delighted to talk with you and anything you can remember …

**Marie:** You make it delightful to speak to.

**Janet:** Thank you. Let’s start at the beginning Mrs. Di Bella, could you say your birth date for the tape?

**Marie:** January 30.

**Janet:** Nineteen …

**Marie:** 1907, ’07.

**Janet:** Where in Croatia where you born?

**Marie:** In the principal city. It has really two names. The Croatian name, Rijeka and the Italian name Fiume, which means river, translated. It’s at the very top of the Adriatic if you look on the map, at the very top to the right in a large gulf. That was the principal city of the … well, Croatia. It wasn’t Yugoslavia at that time yet.

**Janet:** The Croatian word is R-I-J-E-K-A?

**Marie:** R-I-J, Rijeka.

**Janet:** Rijeka?

**Marie:** Correct.

**Janet:** Did you live in Fiume or Rijeka …

**Marie:** I was born there.

**Janet:** Did you live up there until you were six-years-old?

**Marie:** Until I was six-years-old. My mother had died after I was born and my aunt took me. My mother’s … not my mother’s. How was the connection? My father’s sister took me because their family was already in New York and they had plans to come here. They took me of course because I would have been left there and she was very loving. I don’t think she would have been able to do it, which she decided on the right thing, make an American out of her.

**Janet:** What your father’s name?

**Marie:** Anton. Anthony. Oh, I affect it. I didn’t know that. Anton, Anton A-N-T-O-N, Kovach K-O-V-A-C-H.

**Janet:** Your mother’s, do you remember her …

**Marie:** My …

**Janet:** Maiden name as well as her first name.

**Marie:** Bibiana, Bibiana … oh dear me, oh. I had the name.

**Janet:** Perhaps your daughter can say.

**Marie:** Bibiana Grbac G-R-B-A-C. Grbac. It’s a soft C at the end. Grbac.

**Janet:** Your aunt’s name- your father’s sister.

**Marie:** Well, she was let’s see. What was her name? My father’s …

**Janet:** Here, you have it on this form. It’s Teresa Sucher.

**Marie:** That’s it. It’s a German. He was German or Austrian, more Austrian. That’s correct then. S-U-C-H-E-R.

**Janet:** Did you know your aunt and uncle while you were growing up before you came here?

**Marie:** They raised me.

**Janet:** I mean before ... after your mother died and up until you were six years old, they raised you too?

**Marie:** They took me immediately at my mother’s death, I was an infant. How old I was, I don’t know. I must have been maybe a year or some ... maybe almost two. That I don’t know. I never heard that brought up so I wouldn’t remember it just how but I was their baby because they took me in and I became … they became my parents.

**Janet:** Do you remember the house you lived in when you were in Fiume?

**Marie:** Where she lived. It was right off the main street but I took a trip years ago now back and I visited the place and all that but I don’t have the address.

**Janet:** No, I mean, can you describe it? What was it like where you lived in Fiume?

**Marie:** Very nice, great big rooms. I don’t know. They had an apartment. I remember sometimes I think of my past and I think once I had five or six-room apartment very nice on the second floor. What I remember is it was so far back that we didn’t have a stove but a built-in fireplace to cook on. A full size in the kitchen, so that kept you also warmer in the winter, I suppose.

**Janet:** Can you remember anything that your aunt cooked that she made on that fireplace?

**Marie:** Naturally, she cooked for a baby and then a child later. I always remember enjoying my food and what it was I can’t tell you exactly now.

**Janet:** Do you remember any experiences with your aunt when you were in Fiume, places you went with her or activities?

**Marie:** Yes, her daughter Rayzi, she ... since I was growing, so she sewed for me, made me dresses, wanted me to look as cute as she could make me, I suppose. It was nothing but love, really all the way through. I was very fortunate.

**Janet:** How about your uncle, what was he like?

**Marie:** My uncle ... you see at that point that I recall, the men folk were already in New York, in America. I didn’t see much of them when they would come in for visits but they went back because they were employed, which was difficult in Europe when it came to employment. That’s why the men left.

**Janet:** Did your father leave too for America?

**Marie:** Yes, yes. Yes, in fact, I don’t remember him. Maybe once, that I was old enough to recall his visit that he came and that was it. Then I was … then when I was brought here, we took a trip to see my father to show him his daughter.

**Janet:** What were the men doing here in the United…?

**Marie:** Pardon.

**Janet:** What kind of work was your uncle and your father doing in the United States?

**Marie:** He was a baker on shipboard, a baker. He plied back and forth and then he finally decided that’s what he continued doing. He was a baker and that’s all I can remember. Then I remember he ended up in Cleveland and that’s where I was taken every summer to see him and that’s the story of my infancy.

**Janet:** Can you remember anything else about the town, any celebrations that occurred when you were small?

**Marie:** You mean in Europe. Yes, yes. There was because we had an apartment upstairs and that was when we heard music, everybody was flowing to the front windows to see, to enjoy the music. There is plenty of that in Europe. The associations love music. I do recall that, which was very nice.

**Janet:** Where you a religious family? Where you brought up religious?

**Marie:** Yes, yes, yes. Not strict I must say but instilled goodness by showing, by speaking of it. We all have to behave, teaching a child more or less the same thing there as they do here.

**Janet:** What particular church did you go to?

**Marie:** The one that was … it’s funny. When I went back, I couldn’t find it because I didn’t remember its name. I really didn’t. I was disappointed that time.

**Janet:** Was it a Catholic church?

**Marie:** Yes, absolutely. Everybody was Catholic there.

**Janet:** Do you remember any kind of social life that the grownups had? Do you remember?

**Marie:** Yes. There was company. It depended on the associations and the schools that my cousin attended. Her brother was already in America and then they lived a very nice life. Of course, the money came mostly from America because there it was getting worse and worse. That’s why half of Europe has left through the years and that far back, which is in the early 1900s. It couldn’t have been very good.

**Janet:** It was mostly the men who had gone to America.

**Marie:** Pardon.

**Janet:** A lot of men had already gone to America and women and children were left.

**Marie:** That’s truth. That’s the way it’s … maybe different now but it wasn’t then. The men went where they could win the bread.

**Janet:** Did you have friends? Do you remember any friends that you had as a little girl?

**Marie:** No. I was too young. I was … what was I? I was five, barely six.

**Janet:** You didn’t start school either in you’re …

**Marie:** It was more of a kindergarten. That’s what I recall. We played. That was my first choice to go and see that when I came. We had a large walled, very pleasant wall all-around of two sides and we played outdoors all the time. It was more of a kindergarten than first grade.

**Janet:** You spent a year there and you enjoyed that.

**Marie:** Pardon.

**Janet:** You enjoyed a year, a whole year there.

**Marie:** No, no. This is when I was still living there and then of course, when I visited, when I grew up and I took a trip. I’ve been there twice after. Once I flew, once by ship and I would go to I think its natural your earliest memories are of most interest to one when you are repeating that same place.

**Janet:** Where there any other early memories that we haven’t talked about, anything else that you remember about that early time?

**Marie:** Nothing else standing, nothing that. No. I had a very quiet, happy life.

**Janet:** Do you know what kind of a child you were?

**Marie:** I suppose, I remember being scolded once in a while but on the whole I didn’t … I think with boys it’s different because the little girl they are more obedient, maybe. I can’t say that I was chastised ever, you know, badly, never.

**Janet:** Did you have grandparents?

**Marie:** No, no.

**Janet:** How about other extended family members? Any other family members?

**Marie:** I couldn’t find anyone. See, many years had gone by before I returned there and of course, I looked because I remember their name and I got nowhere unfortunately.

**Janet:** Do you remember what you thought about America before you came to this country?

**Marie:** What could I think?

**Janet:** Did you have any ideas?

**Marie:** How can a child that age think if she hasn’t seen something, think of it? I hadn’t seen it yet but then I remember that I was very happy. I was taken immediately. Of course, where are we now?

**Janet:** Ellis Island.

**Marie:** Ellis, well in Ellis Island, that’s right.

**Janet:** Before we talk about Ellis Island, do you remember leaving Fiume and going to get the ship to take you to America?

**Marie:** Yes, yes. I remember that trip very well. It was the first time that … I had sailed on smaller boat but this was a ship for you know the Atlantic that when we went to New York. I remember one pleasant interlude. I was of course, dancing up and down the deck once and a gentleman an American he was so nice.

He must have said something but I didn’t understand him but he gave me two American-Indian pennies. Have you ever seen any? I don’t think there money around anymore. That was … the penny was usually the American-Indian design and that was very … it remained, I was only what? Six years old and I remember that, how gracious he was. I must have been prancing around and he gives me two American pennies and I thought that was wonderful, American. Anything American was tops.

**Janet:** Do you remember the name of the ship?

**Marie:** I’ve been trying to remember and I think I did at one point. Ivernia, I-V-E-R-N-I-A.

**Janet:** Do you remember anything about it, about the passage?

**Marie:** About the passage? It was very pleasant. We had a beautiful dining room and beautiful staircase going down to the dining room and lots of service. It was very nice.

**Janet:** It sounds as though you were not traveling steerage or third class.

**Marie:** No, no. No, no. We had our … I was with my aunt and cousin. It was a bedroom with two beds. One higher than the other.

**Janet:** A bunk bed.

**Marie:** Of course, my aunt had the lower one and my cousin who was younger she was there and I was tucked on a velvet couch on the other wall. It was cozy.

**Janet:** Do you remember when the ship, when the Ivernia came into the New York Harbor.

**Marie:** I should remember. I do remember but what I am trying to say is I don’t remember any particular details that … it was evening and then of course, we didn’t leave until the morning. That was exciting, America, you know, the bird alone, New York. There isn’t much to tell about that part. I had nothing I can recount.

**Janet:** Do you have impressions of Ellis Island of coming here?

**Marie:** No, see how in speaking I forgot that I’m in Ellis Island at this moment. Yes, we were together, yes. We were together my aunt, my cousin and I and it was very nice, decent. The people were pleasant. Ellis Island is a big word to Europeans- it used to be Europe many years ago. When they reach there, they know they are safe in New York.

**Janet:** Do you recall … the ship came in the evening and then did you stay overnight at Ellis Island or did you stay overnight on the ship?

**Marie:** We had to. Yes, yes, on Ellis Island we got off because I suppose they had other plans and well, I suppose you know the story about that I went up some place to sleep. I went up high, high, high. There were different layers.

**Janet:** Bunks.

**Marie:** I was put there. Children, the children, the smaller ones they were able to take care of them in that manner at that time.

**Janet:** Was it like a big dormitory room with a lot of children in it?

**Marie:** It wasn’t a room exactly or I may not remember correctly. At that point, a sleepy child at six you don’t know what you see or don’t see but it was … oh yes. Did you tell the lady what happened to me? No, I want to.

**Rosemary:** Should I?

**Marie:** I don’t want to say.

**Rosemary:** No, I think it’s …

**Janet:** Exactly, do you want to tell it?

**Marie:** Pardon.

**Janet:** Would you like to tell it?

**Marie:** That was the shame of a little boy that I was on up high and the little boy was up higher and he had to do something. So, I got wet. It isn’t a pleasant memory but it’s pretty funny.

**Janet:** Do you remember anything else, anything else that happened in Ellis Island? Do you remember going to the dining room?

**Marie:** That was special. That was nice. As I said, we had a nice staircase. The dining room was a lower level I suppose and beautifully served and nice table setting.

**Janet:** This was on the Ivernia?

**Marie:** Ivernia.

**Janet:** How about when you got to Ellis Island, was that very different.

**Marie:** In Ellis Island, let’s see. The [inaudible 00:22:45] eating. Oh, oh, it was adequate. After all, it wasn’t a hotel but I don’t think I gave that a matter of thought at that age. Excuse me.

**Janet:** Do you remember if someone met you at Ellis Island? Did your uncle or your father come and meet you?

**Marie:** No, they couldn’t. The family lived way out in Ohio. I know the first I saw them was there. I didn’t see them on shipboard.

**Janet:** You were traveling with your aunt and your cousin, right.

**Marie:** Exactly.

**Janet:** Do you remember when you left Ellis Island? What did you do then?

**Marie:** This is it. Then were … we got on a train and we went to Ohio.

**Janet:** Do you remember any first impressions getting on the train or traveling to Ohio?

**Marie:** I had been on trains before in Europe so that was nothing unusual. It was very nice, of course and my impressions were all pleasant. There was nothing that I remember with the ugly recollection.

**Janet:** Do you remember arriving in Ohio?

**Marie:** Yes, yes. We traveled all night and then later I saw that we had to back up somewhere in Pennsylvania to get out of the way of another train or something and so we were delayed and it was winter when we arrived. There we were met with piles of snow and I had never seen snow in my before but anyhow.

The family was there and I was picked up then or somebody another would carry me, the males on their back and there I was, in Youngstown then in Ohio. I went all the way over to Ohio to see the United States.

**Janet:** Do you remember anything that struck you as different when you first got there, different from anything you had known?

**Marie:** No, not really, no. The children were pleasant and they were my first, you know, attention that I paid attention to more … the playmates that I happened to have. They were very pleasant and how I spoke with them, I don’t remember that how but I must have just played. You hear ... a child hearing words and phrases picks them up quicker. I suppose that’s what I had to do to understand what they were telling me.

**Janet:** Did you start school soon after you arrived?

**Marie:** Yes, right, the first semester, surely. I was just the right age so there was no time to fool around and I was pleased. I was pleased because I was used to that going to school over there, anyhow.

**Janet:** Are there any things you remember about learning the language?

**Marie:** It wasn’t immediate but I don’t remember any great difficulty because I didn’t expect it of myself. I was kind of dubious of what it was that was said but I strove to remember what I did learn to help me. Of course, if I imagine, this I don’t even remember, did I ever ask what was being said.

I don’t remember that part to be explained. I don’t remember that but of course, I think I learned immediately because there were other children and next-door there was a family of five children whom I came to know quickly and playing with them.

The child immediately, you pick it up. You pick it up. I had no trouble with English. When I started in school, I don’t remember any problem.

**Janet:** Where there many other children who had come from Europe around Youngstown that you knew about?

**Marie:** No, no, no. They were all American born, so they spoke only American English.

**Janet:** How were you received?

**Marie:** Pardon.

**Janet:** How were you received as a child coming from another country and another language?

**Marie:** They welcomed me. They asked me to play with them because they saw that I was interesting and you know, with a group of children they always want more, one more. I was welcomed I guess. I don’t know.

**Janet:** Did you stay in Youngstown until you grew up?

**Marie:** Stay. Yes, yes, I did. I started school and then after that high school and so on. I was there until … what broke me away to go in?

**Rosemary:** Study.

**Marie:** Study.

**Janet:** Do you remember how you met your husband?

**Marie:** No, no, I went to …

**Rosemary:** New York.

**Marie:** From Youngstown, I had my cousin from Fiume lived in … where did they live?

**Rosemary:** New York.

**Marie:** Huh.

**Rosemary:** New York.

**Janet:** In New York.

**Marie:** No, no. At the beginning, they did but later on when I was staying still with my aunt then Rayzi wrote, why don’t I come and visit?” because well, I was in my teens already there. I came when I left Ohio and of course, I spoke English by then correctly and so it …

**Janet:** You visited your cousin?

**Marie:** Rayzi was my first cousin and she had married a Di Bella and then later I did the same thing with her brother, her brother-in-law but it was family because she had me when I was tiny. She remembered me as an older sister, a baby. That’s why when she said, “Why don’t you come to New Jersey?”

Well, with a young person, it’s all they need to hear if they can go to some place different.

**Janet:** Do you remember meeting your husband?

**Marie:** Meeting, yes, oh, yes. My cousin married a Di Bella, what was his name? Sam and this future mother-in-law she was such a wonderful person. I ... in New York, a job in New York and she wanted me to stay with them. Here, you’ve been holding it long enough. Thanks dear.

**Janet:** You found a job in New York. What kind of a job was it?

**Marie:** Yes. Typing, the usual beginner because I had that knowledge from school to use and then my mother logged in and wanted me to travel all the way to Jersey, come and stay with us. They lived there in a beautiful, big apartment up on 110th Street right by the park and they had space because it was a big one. I agreed for the weekend and that’s how I met my future husband. He was still unmarried. The name Di Bella became double in our family.

**Janet:** What was your husband’s first name?

**Marie:** My husband, Peppe, Giuseppe, Joseph but Peppe is the … what do you call a name?

**Rosemary:** It’s a nickname. Giuseppe.

**Marie:** Favorite, what’s the other word for it? I can’t think if it now.

**Janet:** It’s an affectionate term.

**Marie:** Yeah, Peppe. Giuseppe and then it’s shortened by the Italian Peppe. Peppe here, Peppe there- instead of saying all of Giuseppe.

**Janet:** How many children did you have?

**Marie:** I had one child. Here she is. I had one.

**Janet:** Do you have grandchildren?

**Marie:** I have grandson, very nice grandson, Erick. I forget. How old is he now?

**Rosemary:** He’s thirty and a half. Lots of time had gone by.

**Marie:** Huh.

**Rosemary:** Thirty and a half.

**Marie:** Erick, I don’t believe it. Time flies. I feel older right away.

**Janet:** When you look back on your life, do you feel as though those early years and coming here to a new country, do you think that made a difference in the kind of person you became? Do you think it influenced you very much?

**Marie:** I was very happy to be an American. I was happy with the family, with the friends I had. I would think of my place of birth, which I went back twice just to pick up the memories of you know, as a youngster. I’ve been rather a happy person. I can’t complain thank God.

**Janet:** What makes you feel very satisfied about having done in your lifetime?

**Marie:** I haven’t accomplished much. I haven’t accomplished much. I would have liked to have written a little book just my own experiences but I never got to it. It takes courage because you don’t want to feel as if you feel important enough to have to tell the world what happened to you.

Yet on the other hand, I regret because I had a sort of a full life although some years went by [inaudible 00:35:30] like everybody else’s but sometimes I think no, I have experienced. Maybe it’s because you find these little books and everybody feels the same way sometime or rather to put down what they have gone through. In a way to preserve that memory also, wants to write it but I never got to that point. I don’t think I’m good enough for that.

**Janet:** You speak very well.

**Marie:** Thank you.

**Janet:** I would assume you would write well. Could you put your finger on what you consider are high points?

**Marie:** Pardon.

**Janet:** Were there high points in your life? What you consider some of the best times in your life?

**Marie:** Bad times.

**Janet:** Good or bad.

**Marie:** When we had … when there was this … what do you call it when everybody is out of work?

**Janet:** The depression.

**Marie:** Depression, see, my memory is failing me. Depression, of course, I think everyone is affected by that and I too felt when one’s husband isn’t working. It’s bound to happen and naturally, you pick up with the stress and even when you lose a husband, you can’t go on crying all the time.

You’ve got to get back to normal. A person I think has a certain amount of love and pleasure and then there are times when it’s just the reverse and you have to accept that and I tried to and here I am. I’m a widow. How many years now that daddy’s gone?

**Rosemary:** Twenty-four.

**Marie:** It is, quarter of a century that I’m alone.

**Janet:** How would you describe this phase of your life, of your old age phase?

**Marie:** My old age is very good. It’s very good. Basically, I’m not ill and that’s the most important, isn’t it and then I have a lovely daughter, a very nice son-in-law and a grandson as family. That’s quite full too and happy. I can’t complain even though I’m a widow.

Those things happen but why is it that the husbands always go first? They worry a lot. They work hard and they give up and they get more responsibility in a way than a mother does. Who’s going to bring home the bacon? It’s daddy. I think I haven’t left anything unsaid.

**Janet:** I was just going to ask you if there was anything else you could think of relevant to your life before you came to this country and then since on.

**Marie:** You know what it was when I think of this country and I made it my business when I felt the courage enough to do it alone. I went back to Europe and I went to the spots that I remember with pleasure, you know, the parks, where in the evening we would hear music play in the [inaudible 00:39:54].

I wanted to replenish my memories with the same. Life is what you make it. I could cry all the time I’m alone but it’s only me going to make me sick and when I’m sick I’m a worry to my daughter. It doesn’t pay.

**Janet:** I think maybe we’ll close here. I want to thank you very much for a very interesting accounting.

**Marie:** You are very welcome. I hope I haven’t overtaken your time.

**Janet:** Not at all. It’s a pleasure. I’ve been speaking with Marie Di Bella who came in 1913 …

**Marie:** That’s correct.

**Janet:** From Croatia.

**Marie:** Yes, from Fiume.

**Janet:** Fiume and today is September 22nd, 1995. That makes you ... no, 88?

**Rosemary:** She’s 88.

**Janet:** 88, you are 88 years old now at this time.

**Marie:** That’s correct. Yes, that’s correct. 88, yeah, it’s close to 90. I don’t feel that close. You helped me by bringing everything forth with your questions.

**Janet:** I have the feelings that you’d do very well on your own speaking. Thank you very much and I want to say thank you and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I’m signing off.

We are going to continue here with some songs that Mrs. Di Bella remembers from Croatia. Here, would you like to sing?

**Marie:** Yes. Thank you. I see. Like this. [Singing 00:42:06]. Is it on?

**Janet:** However, you can remember to begin and whatever you can remember.

**Marie:** Yeah. See, I get it mixed up. I never sing this [singing 00:42:31]. Picking flowers and giving them to my lover, you know. [Inaudible 00:43:05].

**Janet:** That’s beautiful. Thank you so.

**Marie:** Please, I’m sorry that I can’t contribute the right way, you know, remembering because …

**Janet:** This is wonderful. Thanks.