**Janet:** Today's November 7th, 1995 and I'm here in West Newton Massachusetts with Michael Carella who came from Southern Italy in 1935 when he was 15 years of age. I just want to say that I'm looking forward to whatever you can remember and we'll see how far we get today. Why don't you say at the very beginning your birth date and where you were born?

**Michael:** I was born in Grotteria, Italy. Southern Italy on January 3rd, 1920.

**Janet:** And you say Grotteria.

**Michael:** Yes, G-R-O-T-T-E-R-I-A.

**Janet:** Was that a small town?

**Michael:** Yes, about 7000.

**Janet:** Were you in Grotteria up until you left?

**Michael:** Yes.

**Janet:** Did you have grandparents who lived near you?

**Michael:** I had a grandmother, my father's mother. I don't remember the others. They died before I was born.

**Janet:** I see but did you spend some time with your father's mother? Do you remember?

**Michael:** Not that much, we'd go over and see her like my mother used to send- like she used to cook and send food but I didn't spend very much time.

**Janet:** Do you have any memories of times with your grandmother?

**Michael:** Not really. She was a sickly woman and I go over there and I do what I'm supposed to do and I wasn't too anxious to stay there.

**Janet:** Okay, and what was your mother's name?

**Michael:** My mother Maria.

**Janet:** And her maiden name?

**Michael:** Belcastro.

**Janet:** B-E-L-C.

**Michael:** C-A-S-T-R-O.

**Janet:** Did she have brothers and sisters that were around you?

**Michael:** She had 3 brothers, the youngest one was here. One got killed in World War 1 in the Italian army and the other one- I don't know which one was the oldest and the other one was here and over there. He used to travel like back and forth like my father did for a while. No sisters.

**Janet:** No sisters, and how about your father? What was his name?

**Michael:** Rosario.

**Janet:** Did he have brothers and sisters who were around that you had contact with?

**Michael:** He had two sisters and one brother but I never met the brother. He was since at America.

**Janet:** And the two sisters you knew.

**Michael:** They were over there yes.

**Janet:** When you think back to your time there, how do you remember your mother? I mean when the kinds of things she would be doing in a typical day?

**Michael:** My mother had seven children and I'm the fourth one. The oldest one is in Australia now but she was in Italy and the next two died during the epidemic, they had after world war two and being the only son she spoilt me like she used to make the bread and when we had the last loaf, she hide a little piece for me. She didn’t me to go hungry. I was sort of the special one.

**Janet:** Because you were the boy?

**Michael:** Because for one thing I was a boy and another thing, girls in them days didn't go out to play or do anything like that. They went to school after they came from school, they stay in the house and do housework and help the mother, help with the cooking. Boys went out to play and she didn't want me get in trouble like if I was hungry I was stealing. I think that’s the main reason not because I was special.

**Janet:** What would you play? What kinds of things do you remember playing when you were a little boy?

**Michael:** Well, we run, we played, we go for hikes with friends, we do different things not organized games you know. We just get five or six kids and we decided to for hike, go here, go there things like that.

**Janet:** Do you remember your mother and father, like did they do anything you would consider like a social life?

**Michael:** My father was never over there because he used to come over here and stay two -three years and then right around Christmas and then you couldn't work in the winter time due to the cold, now they got off and they used to come over there just before Christmas and the only much days to leave come back here.

So I don't remember much of my father, I know that when he came back for instance one time he took me to a tailor and he made three suits for me and got new shoes, things like that but I was mummy's boy.

**Janet:** And you were the man of the family I suppose when your father was not--?

**Michael:** No, my mother she was a very good mother. She knew how to bring up kids. She did the part of the mother and a father and she did a very good job.

**Janet:** Did she discipline you?

**Michael:** She did yeah but she had a way of doing it.

**Janet:** What was her way?

**Michael:** Well, one time we had a farm over there with trees, fruit trees and stuff like that and we're raising a pig in the farm and we were staying in the village which was about 20 minutes’ walk and my mother used to send me and one of my sisters to bring stuff of the pig over there.

It was in the summer time during the grape season and I went over there and one time I went by this farm before our farm and I stole some grapes and I don't know to this day but I'm assuming my sister told my mother, so my mother called me on the side, she mentioned the name of the lady down the farm, “She came over to me she said and she told me she's going to write to your father saying that you stole the grapes in her farm” and that got me scared and that’s she used to do, she didn't get a whip, whip me but she had a way of doing it, disciplining you.

So that scared me that I never done it anymore see, that was a good lesson.

**Janet:** Was the town of Grotteria in the mountains?

**Michael:** Yes, the city hangs around on the mountain like that.

**Janet:** And so it was a farming area?

**Michael:** It was nothing, hills and rocks. You don't make a living over there. When I was over there the town had 7000 population and I don't think it’s got a thousand now because everybody goes up north to work and we were over there with one of my sons, three years ago in the month of august and I couldn't believe all the cars that were there because people that go up north work, they come out spend their vacation in August.

**Janet:** But when you were growing up there, were there any cars?

**Michael:** One car.

**Janet:** Who had that one? Do you know who?

**Michael:** Yeah, some guy that he came over here in this country and he made some money and got himself a car.

**Janet:** How did people get around generally?

**Michael:** Walked, not anymore. Walked.

**Janet:** Were there animals? Did people have livestock?

**Michael:** No, not over there. Further up yes but not in our town. The town you find few sheep and few goats that’s all. Life was very very bad. People didn't have enough to eat, we did thank God because my father was over here otherwise we'd be like and people get up in the morning in the summer time and sit outside the door and by nightfall they never went in to drink or eat because they haven't nothing to eat and my mother used to cook.

We didn't have meat, we only had that once or twice a year but the macaroni beans, potatoes, figs, chestnuts, walnuts those things. In my house we never went hungry thanks to America because my father used to send money over there to support and my mother used to feel sorry for those people and she used to put something in the plates say, "Take it to so and so next door." It’s very tough life over there. It used to be not anymore.

**Janet:** Was there any kind of industry at all?

**Michael:** Nothing whatsoever, just those hills that you could go over there and try to cultivate. We didn't get any rain or anything like that and it was bad.

**Janet:** So your mother would buy the things that you did have to eat from people where they were hungry? Did you have them, did you grow them?

**Michael:** Well, we used to raise our own things and she had the money to buy the spaghettis, she used to buy the potatoes, you don't buy by the pound them, she used to [unclear 00:11:55], whatever she thought we need for the winter, she used to- the same way with chestnuts, she buy by the tone, not by the tone by whatever. Two or three hundred pounds and we had those things for the winter and figs we have those and she used to bake those in the oven. She used to dry them in the sun first and then she used to bake them and we had figs all winter.

**Janet:** Was there a market day? Like where people came with whatever they had to sell?

**Michael:** I used to go with my mother to the market and then we had surplus stuff from my farm like cherries because we had all kinds of fruits in my farm.

**Janet:** Were there other men then from the same town that were going and coming to and from America?

**Michael:** Oh yeah.

**Janet:** So there were a lot of men who were doing that in that town?

**Michael:** Yes.

**Janet:** Did your father ever tell you anything about America before you got here that you recall?

**Michael:** Not really because the last time he came over there was in 1930 and then he came over here and depression came and he never came back. He sent for me but he had no plans bringing me over here because being the only son he was going to give me an education. "Someday you'll be a lawyer," he used to say then depression came and everything fell and I didn't get the education then [unclear] was that and my father figure God knows how long this is going to last and that’s the reason why he sent for me over here.

Now, when I got here, the 17th of October, 1935. I was never away from home, I missed my family, I missed my mother and father and my mother and sisters and I told my father, “I don't want to stay here unless you bring the rest of the family” then he was determined that either send me back or bring the family over here and he decided that bring the family over here and my mother and my sister got here in 1936 in August, 10 months after.

**Janet:** When it was decided that you were going to leave, how did you feel before you left. Were you interested in coming?

**Michael:** Oh yes very much, I was happy to come to America. My God, in them days I'll have cut your arm off you go to America willingly one arm and one leg. They thought they come over here and pick up gold in the streets.

**Janet:** Do you remember anything that you brought with you when you left?

**Michael:** Cheese, I brought some cheese, I brought some olive oil. In them days I don't think you could buy it here and if you could would never be like what you make yourself so I brought some cheese and some olive oil.

**Janet:** And do you remember leaving your town and travelling to the port to get the boat?

**Michael:** I took taxi from the town to the next town to get a train and then we took the train to Naples.

**Janet:** And did you arrive right before the ship was about to leave or did you spend some time in Naples?

**Michael:** Well a few hours, we got there in the morning and we got on the ship around two or three hours after we got there.

**Janet:** And who were you travelling with?

**Michael:** I was travelling with this gentleman who's been here before and he had sons over here and then he had the whole family over here but then he decided he wanted to go back to Italy but all the sons stayed here. When he went back over there, it was alright while he had the money, once the money- so he thought he would come over here but he didn't get through because there was some kind of an illness and he had to go back.

**Janet:** So you were examined before you ever got on the ship?

**Michael:** Oh yeah.

**Janet:** Do you remember anything about that? Anything about the procedure or anything about your examination?

**Michael:** Vaguely, you know they have you take your clothes off. They ask you questions but very vaguely.

**Janet:** And so this man was rejected [crosstalk 00:17:42].

**Michael:** He was rejected.

**Janet:** Do you remember him talking about that? Did he ever tell you or you were right there when it happened?

**Michael:** Well, You stand in one room and you go to another room for examination and I don't remember I went in first or he went in first and when he came out he was disappointed he said that, "He's got to go back to Grettorie.

**Janet:** Did he ever get to the United States do you know?

**Michael:** After that no.

**Janet:** You said that you took the Rex?

**Michael:** Yes, R-E-X.

**Janet:** And do you remember anything about the voyage, anything stands out in your mind?

**Michael:** Very rough sea, I know I get sick and what saved me was bringing some of those figs. I couldn't go out and eat but I managed to eat those and they did me some good.

**Janet:** And were you in steerage? Were in the sort of a dormitory like arrangement in the back of the ship?

**Michael:** No, we had a cabin with I don't know how many people. Four - five people maybe.

**Janet:** And was there anything going on on the ship? I mean were people dancing, singing or was there any kind of a social [inaudible 00:19:17] or you were just too ill?

**Michael:** No, I wasn't ill all the time. I don't know there was maybe in 1st class or 2nd class, we came 3rd class. The lowest and I don't remember anything like that.

**Janet:** And do you remember how long it took you? The ship?

**Michael:** Five or six days because it was one of the newest if not the newest at that time. Five or six days.

**Janet:** Do you remember when Rex came into the New York harbor?

**Michael:** Yes.

**Janet:** What was it like?

**Michael:** I couldn't believe it you know I see New York City and it’s unbelievable. Something I’ve never seen before. Where I come from that’s all I see trees and mountains nothing else.

**Janet:** Did you know what the statue of liberty was when you first came here.

**Michael:** No.

**Janet:** No one talking to you and how about Ellis Island? What do you remember about that?