**Vincent:** I’d better get a drink or water. Would you like some water?

**Janet:** I’m okay. Today is December 3rd 1994 and I’m here in Waban, Massachusetts at the home of Mr. Vincent Cioffari. Mr. Cioffari came from Italy in 1917 when he was just three days shy of being 12 years old. Today, December 3rd 1994, Mr. Cioffari is 89 years old and I just want to say I’m delighted to be here and I’m looking forward to hearing about your life.

**Vincent:** Thank you.

**Janet:** Why don’t we start at the beginning? If you could say your birth date and where in Italy you were born.

**Vincent:** I was born on February 24th 1905 in a little town in the Apennines. The town is called Calitri and it dates back to 500 BC.

**Janet:** Calitri, is that C-A-L-

**Vincent:** I-T-R-I, Calitri.

**Janet:** Did you live in Calitri up until the time you left for the United States?

**Vincent:** Until the time we left for the United States except for minor trips for bath during the summer we used to go. The rest of the time was all spent in Calitri.

**Janet:** You say you went for baths?

**Vincent:** Yes, that’s a custom among people in southern Italy to go during the summer to some place where they can have bathing facilities.

**Janet:** What was that like? What would you do, would you travel? Tell about what it would be like when you would go on one of those excursions.

**Vincent:** We went by train and the place where we went was about 20km away. When we got there, there was a pool. We stayed about two weeks bathing and roaming around the little mountain place.

**Janet:** Like a spa?

**Vincent:** A spa, exactly. Most of the families that were fairly well-off, we weren’t particularly well-off, but fairly well-off would make it a point to spend a couple of weeks at a spa during the summer.

**Janet:** What was the highlight of doing that for you as a boy?

**Vincent:** For the three of us and my mother, it was just a slight vacation but mostly for my mother who worked all year. Our father was in the United States at the time, so we would go out to this place and spend about two weeks.

**Janet:** Were there supposed to be health benefits accrued from…?

**Vincent:** Exactly. Yes, there were supposed to be health benefits.

**Janet:** What was your father’s name?

**Vincent:** Constantino.

**Janet:** Constantino. Where [inaudible 00:03:55]?

**Vincent:** During my lifetime, he first went to the United States in 1907 and stayed until 1910. Then he came back to Calitri from 1910 to 1913 or beginning of 14. He went back to the United States in 1914. He was back in the United States and we were left in Calitri. Then he decided that he wanted us in the United States and that decision was made just at the time of the First World War.

There was a great deal of correspondence between my parents as to whether we should come to United States or stay there. My mother wanted to stay there and my father said no. My father was a very peaceful man but when he said the final no that was it. So in the middle of the war, we got on the ship.

**Janet:** Before we talk about the voyage, did your father tell you anything about the United States that you remember? That you thought about the United States before you ever came here?

**Vincent:** No, nothing particular. We may have discussed minor things but not much.

**Janet:** Do you remember any experiences in Italy with your father when he was back in that period of years?

**Vincent:** Of three years, yes.

**Janet:** Things you did together or…

**Vincent:** No, we watched him work.

**Janet:** What was his work?

**Vincent:** His work, he was a tailor and in those towns the tailor was also a barber. The customers would come in and we’d chat once in a while but my father was not a very chatty man. He was perfectly fine to us at any time but not sociable and all of that.

He had one particular habit, if we got into an argument the three of us he would ask us to extend a hand, all three of us, and give us a smack with a ruler. Never asking who was responsible for what, just all three got the same treatment and off we went.

**Janet:** Do you know if he apprenticed to be a barber and a tailor?

**Vincent:** Yes, everyone that was in a trade had to be apprenticed for a long time, sometimes three or four years' apprenticeship.

**Janet:** Did you have any sense of what you wanted to do when you were a little boy before you came to this country?

**Vincent:** We went to school and that’s about all we were supposed to do.

**Janet:** But I meant as far as your aspirations were.

**Vincent:** No aspirations, nothing in particular. In the town when I was very small, there were four grades. Then during the time that I was growing up the town increased to six grades. My older brother was one of the first ones that went through the whole six grades and he was all finished at the age of 12 and a half. So he was apprenticed to being a tailor also, my older brother.

I was at the time about 10 or so but I had been apprenticed to being a carpenter. After you get to be 10 you get apprenticed. I still carry a souvenir of my apprenticeship as a carpenter.

**Janet:** What did [inaudible 00:09:08]?

**Vincent:** My finger, I cut my finger and it’s been that way ever since, since 1910.

**Janet:** What did you do as an apprentice?

**Vincent:** You learnt to first of all to help the older people and secondly you learn how to cut wood and carve especially that is furniture, is very carefully carved with all kinds of designs and you learn how to make those designs.

In 1910, there was a very strong earthquake in my town of Calitri. For about two week we had to leave the town and live out in the country. The reason being the town is one house on top of another up the side of a hill. If one house falls, the ones above start falling.

**Janet:** Can you describe what happened when you had to evacuate the town and how much damage was done in the town?

**Vincent:** In our own particular house, the only damage done- there wasn’t any damage because the iron bars were jelled into the walls to hold the walls up. Ours was one of the fortunate houses where the bars held. Sometimes the bars didn’t hold and down came the house.

**Janet:** This was done because there was an active volcano, or this was an earthquake area rather.

**Vincent:** Earthquake area, yes.

**Janet:** So the bars were built in?

**Vincent:** Yes. The earthquake in my town, just east of Naples was in 1910. The most well-known earthquake at the time was in 1908 in Sicily and Calabria and that was very destructive. But it’s a region which is subject to earthquakes.

**Janet:** How about your mother, what was your mother’s name?

**Vincent:** Antonietta.

**Janet:** And her maiden name?

**Vincent:** Armiento.

**Janet:** A-R-M-A-N-

**Vincent:** I-E-N-T-O. A-R-M-I-E-N-T-O.

**Janet:** Did you have grandparents there?

**Vincent:** Yes, on both sides.

**Janet:** Were they all in Calitri?

**Vincent:** The grandparents were all in Calitri except that my mother’s mother died when my mother was two years old and my grandfather married again so on that one side we had a grandfather who was actually a grandfather and his wife who was a second wife. The pass time in the town was just playing around with other children all over the town.

**Janet:** Do you remember any stories you were told as a child? Any kind of folklore or legend that was passed on to you as a child?

**Vincent:** Yes, great many stories. So much so that later on I wrote them up in a little book. I write many text books and one of them is called *Raccontini,* little stories and there are other stories that my father used to tell us, retold in modern style.

**Janet:** What is the name of the book? Because I think that should be on the tape.

**Vincent:** It’s *Raccontini*. It’s from the Graded Italian Readers published by the [unclear 00:13:49] my readers books in Italian where the reason where I was called to D.C Heath and Company later on to head the department because I had already written these books in Italian and one of those is just a reader of these stories exactly as they were told.

**Janet:** Do you think those stories influenced you in any way?

**Vincent:** I suppose anything influences you but…

**Janet:** Favourite story that you’ve read maybe? A favorite story that jumps to mind?

**Vincent:** No. The stories I just made them very brief and put them all in one little book.

**Janet:** Had you just remembered those? Is that how you came to write them up for the book?

**Vincent:** Yes, I was supposed to write a book, a graded reader for D.C. Heath and Company and I decided to just recall stories that were told to me and write them up in a book.

**Janet:** Wonderful, was storytelling a frequent activity?

**Vincent:** Yes, a favorite pass time because there were no movies. In fact in that town- the town was not really small; it was about six or seven thousand people at the time. When the first automobile came into town they let schools out so we could go and see it. We went to the town to see the first automobile in the public square.

**Janet:** What year was that?

**Vincent:** That must have been in about 1915 that the first automobile came into town. Otherwise transportation was by donkeys.

**Janet:** Did you have a donkey?

**Vincent:** No.

**Janet:** Did families have their own donkeys?

**Vincent:** Some families did but we did not.

**Janet:** Did you have any kind of livestock that you raised?

**Vincent:** We had chickens. In those towns at the time, the people were divided into the trade’s people, people that had a trade and contadini, people who worked out in the fields. There was a distinct line dividing the trades people who were contadini, never to be mixed up. For example in marriage normally if you belong to the class of the trades people, you married within that class.

**Janet:** Did you feel slightly privileged for the fact that you were in that trades people category?

**Vincent:** Yes.

**Janet:** Were you a religious family?

**Vincent:** The family was, because the nickname for my grandfather was ‘religious man’.

**Janet:** What is that word in Italian?

**Vincent:** In the dialect it’s [foreign 00:17:50].

**Janet:** How would you spell that?

**Vincent:** P-inverted E-C-U-O-C-O. Pecuoco. That means a church-goer.

**Janet:** And that was the name of your grandfather.

**Vincent:** The nickname, because in Italy most people were known and still are known by their nicknames much more than they are by their regular name.

**Janet:** Really?

**Vincent:** That’s right.

**Janet:** Did you have one? A nickname?

**Vincent:** That’s it.

**Janet:** So if your grandfather was known as…

**Vincent:** Pecuoco, my father was the son of Pecuoco and we were the grandchildren of Pecuoco. Later on when we visited town many years later I took my wife over to see it, one day I started wandering around the old town and I got lost. So I asked somebody, “Where was I?” He told me, “You’re at your grandfather’s house right there.” Then I remembered just how to get back to where I was supposed to be.

**Janet:** Did your other grandfather have a nickname?

**Vincent:** No, he didn’t have a nickname. Some people don’t.

**Janet:** That’s interesting. I’ve never heard that before if that was the case. Your grandfather obviously was a church-goer. Did that actually transfer through the generations?

**Vincent:** Weekly.

**Janet:** Do you remember everything?

**Vincent:** Yes.

**Janet:** Do you remember any religious occasions and how they were celebrated?

**Vincent:** Oh they were and that was the big in the town of Calitri as well as in the other towns, the religious celebrations at various times of the year. Each town had its own patron saint. From the patron saint of the town, many of the youngsters are named.

Patron saint of my town of Calitri was Canio and many young people are named Canio, even now long after the people left and came to United States. Their children are still named Canio, which has been translated into English as Kenneth. Whenever you see a Kenneth whose people came from this town, his original name was Canio.

**Janet:** How did a town… do you know the origin of how a town came to have a particular patron saint? Why that saint and not another saint?

**Vincent:** Because supposedly that saint had visited the town at one time in the middle Ages. The main church of the town is usually dedicated to the town that came or a secondary church by some other saint that came to the town and another saint that came to the town in the 14th century was Saint Bernard of Siena, San Bernardino da Siena.

**Janet:** And there’s a secondary church?

**Vincent:** Yes, that was the very important secondary church. My other grandfather was Bernardino. My first brother who died when I was about less than three years old, his name was Canio. That was a normal thing for the first born to be named from… the name passes from the first born from one generation to the next.

**Janet:** Were there any other occasions for celebration besides the Saint day or…

**Vincent:** Usually the celebration of the Saints day because governments change too much to have any religious, any repeated significance. That section of Italy was unified in 1870. Prior to that, it changed and now that section of the country at one time belonged to Greece, Magna Graecia, the greater larger Greece so that the dialect has a great many Greek words. If you don’t find a word in the Italian dictionary you look in the Greek dictionary and there it is.

**Janet:** Do you think that had any influence on your interest in romance languages? The fact that there was a…

**Vincent:** The interest in romance languages came in a peculiar way.

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

**Vincent:** My older brother Bernard and I were in the same classes. When we came to this country, he was put in the fourth grade and I was put in the third. This was in March. We came at the end of February. In March, he was put in the fourth grade, I was put in third. Before the end of April, I was moved from third to the fourth and we were in the same class but he wasn’t moved because it was too late in the year.

From that point on, through all the elementary, high school, and college years we were always in the same class sitting one row right next to the other until the end of the second year of college. Then we decided one day it’s silly to keep on doing the same thing. You take the sciences, I’ll take the languages. He became a physicist and I became a language.

**Janet:** You obviously knew you loved languages and he probably knew it, no?

**Vincent:** No.

**Janet:** It wasn’t that you had particularly been going in that [unclear 00:26:03]?

**Vincent:** No because we took the same subjects and we were always competing with each other. He being older and perhaps more intelligent, I don’t know but he always had a slight edge over me and so we ended up in high school the two highest in New York State, highest grades in New York State. His was the highest and I was second highest. When the third brother came along the year after that, he happened to be third highest in New York State.

**Janet:** Your mother must have been a very proud woman, and your father.

**Vincent:** Yes, they wrote us up in the newspapers all over. But we were just competing with each other. I wasn’t going to let him get too far ahead and he wasn’t going to let me get ahead at all.

**Janet:** Bernard was your older brother, what was your younger brother’s name?

**Vincent:** Mario.

**Janet:** Were you closest to one or the other of them?

**Vincent:** No. Well, the mere fact that Bernard and I were always in the same class you might say but Mario at the time there was a great man for muscles. I’ve forgotten for the moment what his name was but he was preaching that everybody had to have big muscles and so Mario was going to be a big muscle man.

Exercises day in and day out. Then when he became interested in medicine he was going to show that medicine was all bunk. That if you take the proper exercise you don’t need medicine so he studied medicine and became quite a well-known paediatrician.

**Janet:** Obviously he changed his mind about it being a bunk?

**Vincent:** No.

**Janet:** No he didn’t.

**Vincent:** He still throughout his career as a paediatrician he didn’t prescribe medicines unless they were absolutely necessary. He became at one time the head of the Paediatrics Association in Detroit.

**Janet:** How would you describe the three of you, the three sons as far as temperament or personality and the different routes that you took?

**Vincent:** All three are hard-headed. All three are very definite in what we wanted to do.

**Janet:** How do you think that came about? Was there an influence for that in your family that you were all so achieving?

**Vincent:** Yes. The Cioffari is a group of people in the town had at one time there were seven brothers. All very poor but all seven brothers became professionals and they were known as the Cioffaris. One became a druggist, another a medical doctor and so forth and so on. So it dates back to the whole group.

**Janet:** So you were aware of that as part of your heritage.

**Vincent:** Yes, you were supposed to be good. Otherwise you didn’t belong there.

**Janet:** How was it your father finally prevailed and your mother… did he send tickets or when you finally did leave for the United States how was that all arranged?

**Vincent:** All arranged because he said, “You come or else…” He didn’t explain what the ‘or else’ was. My mother realised that it had to be done and in the middle of the war we got our tickets and came.

**Janet:** Did your mother sell the house or did you pack everything, did she pack everything you had?

**Vincent:** We didn’t have much of anything. Just packed what we need and then the family- her own family took care of whatever else needed to be done. In those small towns the families take over for any member that needs them. Long years after the person has left the town, there’s someone in the family that takes care of whatever needs to be done for their house.

**Janet:** Did you actually have a house that you lived in? Could you describe it? What was it made out of and what was it like?

**Vincent:** The house had a kitchen, had a bedroom and it had a store because my father had a store for selling goods, clothing and when he wasn’t in town my mother carried on the store. The negozio.

**Janet:** So this was ready made things, not tailored things that were being sold in the store?

**Vincent:** No, the materials because ready made things just didn’t exist. So we had a store.

**Janet:** Did you have certain chores that you were responsible for before you left Calitri?

**Vincent:** Nothing in particular except to obey. When you were told to do something, you did it.

**Janet:** Were there attitudes about child-rearing that you were brought up under that you can recall? Or the obedience only.

**Vincent:** Obedience but very considerate obedience. In the better families you weren’t asked to do anything that wasn’t considered proper. Whatever you were supposed to do you would… in fact when I was very small we didn’t have any running water in the house. I had to go to the fountain a mile or so away, fill up the cans or the pottery and take them home.

That’s how the water came. But when I was must have been under 10, running water came to town. Before that, you had the drinking water from the public fountain far away and water for washing came from the skies in the rain. It was always collected and you hear music when it rains, from the roof of your house, goes into the pan.

**Janet:** Was it a big event when running water came in?

**Vincent:** Yes. It changed the whole town. It became one of the prosperous town.

**Janet:** What was the major industry, or what did most people do for work in Calitri?

**Vincent:** There was no main industry, just butchers, bakers. You had your own bakery shop where people bake their bread at home then took it to the forno, to the public ovens. That’s where the ladies have to learn to be erect because they carry the bread or the baked goods up and down the hills on their head, and if their head isn’t balanced properly everything goes down. So they learnt to stand erect.

**Janet:** When you got the tickets and you left, do you remember leaving the town?

**Vincent:** Sure, of course.

**Janet:** How was that like, your leaving, your departure?

**Vincent:** A kind of excitement at that age, just excitement about what was going to come next. Since my mother was running the store, every once in a while she would have to leave Calitri to go to Naples to buy the goods that she was going to sell.

Whenever a mother leaves the town, she has to be accompanied by somebody. First, her father used to accompany her and then my older brother took over even though he was only 11 or 12. But she would not leave Calitri without being accompanied by somebody.

**Janet:** Are there any other things that had to do with customs that pertained to women of the town that maybe are different than would be here?

**Vincent:** I’m sure there are differences but I couldn’t quite describe. Of course each one of those towns has its own characteristic clothing. You can tell where the women come from by the clothing.

**Janet:** What might be a sign of where somebody came from? What aspect of the clothing?

**Vincent:** In my home town the women had a starched lace thing that rose about three inches around the neck. That’s how you can tell that the lady came from Calitri because it was crocheted about two to three inches and came down to about… but never to the division. Otherwise you were not a proper woman. That characterizes the women of Calitri.

**Janet:** Interesting, were the girls treated differently than the boys when you were growing up in Calitri? Was there a difference of treatment?

**Vincent:** Nothing in particular.

**Janet:** You went to the same schools?

**Vincent:** Yes, we went to the same school.

**Janet:** By what means of transportation did you leave Calitri?

**Vincent:** There was a train.

**Janet:** And you went to Naples or no?

**Vincent:** Yes. From Calitri to Naples there’s a train that goes right through once a day and the train goes through Avellino, which is the seat of the province. Calitri belongs to the province of Avellino. Now, right near there there’s a place called Grottaminarda where the road turns from Avellino the main road turns off at Grottaminarda to go to Calitri.

It’s an interesting here because the mayor of Boston descents from people that were in Grottaminarda and when he went back to Italy just six months ago a tremendous ovation for him.

**Janet:** What happened to you when you got to Naples? Did you have to be examined? Did you go right on to the ship?

**Vincent:** We went right on to the ship.

**Janet:** And the name of the ship?

**Vincent:** Patria, it was a French ship.

**Janet:** What about the voyage, is there anything that stands out in your mind about that?

**Vincent:** While we were on the voyage, Germany decided that they would attack any ship, passenger or any kind of a ship on the sea and we received that news while we were on the ship.

**Janet:** What was the route? I can imagine, what was the response?

**Vincent:** Everybody was frightened stiff but the three of us were too young to be worried too much. The trip took 21 days, I think.

**Janet:** This was your two brothers, your mother and you?

**Vincent:** That’s right.

**Janet:** Did you have any indication of German troops or…?

**Vincent:** German trouble? About two or three days out of New York while the three of us were playing on deck, we felt a definite quick move on the part of the ship. The Germans had thrown a missile in the water for our ship. Fortunately the captain was capable and turned the ship around and took us a day longer but I remember even now when the ship made the very quick turn to avoid the what do you call it, the missile?

**Janet:** Grenade?

**Vincent:** No, water missile. It’s like a torpedo. There’s a definite name for it which doesn’t come to my mind now.

**Janet:** I can’t think either. When that happened, did you put it together that that’s what the captain of the ship was…?

**Vincent:** Yes. Everybody knew that the ship almost got hit.

**Janet:** Do you remember when the ship came into the New York Harbor?

**Vincent:** Yes. As we approached the harbor we were told that we are slowly approaching and then we began seeing land in the distance. Everybody was on deck all the time. They watching to see the land come closer and closer took everyone over 24 hours from the time we saw land until we actually came in to the harbor.

**Janet:** Do you remember anything you thought or felt coming into that?

**Vincent:** Excitement. Everybody was excited. Of course many of the people got sea-sick on the trip especially the women. They are supposed to get sea-sick. They were supposed to but [unclear 45:04] because the three of us wouldn’t know any different. We were too busy just playing around to worry about getting sea-sick.

**Janet:** How about the Statue of Liberty, do you remember seeing that?

**Vincent:** Yes. That was the great event when finally the Statue of Liberty shows up there. Many of the passengers actually bent down and kissed the ground on the boat until we finally came right past the Statue of Liberty onto Ellis Island. Everybody had to go through Ellis Island.

**Janet:** What did you know about Ellis Island? Were you aware that that was going to be part of the…?

**Vincent:** Everybody told us that at Ellis Island is where you land and sure enough, that’s where we landed.

**Janet:** What was your impression of that place?

**Vincent:** It was nice to be on solid ground. We got off the ship and we entered the large hall which has been restored recently to what it was like at the time. Because this was 1917, as you well know, the island- Ellis Island was neglected from 1932 until recently. Now it’s been restored to what it was. When we got off the ship and we had to go through the examination, that’s where the examination came in for all the passengers.

**Janet:** What was your experience with that?

**Vincent:** We passed without any particular trouble. Just waiting patiently but all four of us passed the examination. There was great fear because conjunctivitis would prevent you from getting in; trouble with the eyes. It was considered extremely contagious at the time. If you had conjunctivitis, you would not be allowed in the United States, be put back on the ship at the expense of the ship, and taken back to Europe. Imagine coming in, seeing land, and being taken back to Europe.

**Janet:** Did you witness that at all? Anybody being sent back?

**Vincent:** No we didn’t. At least nobody that we knew.

**Janet:** Did your father then pick you up at Ellis Island?

**Vincent:** At Ellis Island, outside of the large hall, over in the right hand corner of the very large hall. As you come into the hall, go towards the right hand corner. Beyond that there was three or four rooms where the people who were expecting passengers they would have to wait there.

**Janet:** You’ve been to Ellis Island, that’s interesting. When you came in, did you come in under where the awnings are now? Where the main doors come into the main building?

**Vincent:** Yes.

**Janet:** That’s how you came in? And it was in the far right foyer was where this waiting area was.

**Vincent:** Yes and the waiting area’s still there. I went through all those rooms and saw what they looked like about two years ago. That’s where my father was waiting. He hadn’t seen us yet but we were taken into the large hall and I seem to remember that they fed us first and then you pass through the examination and we passed the examination. But as I said, conjunctivitis was one and if anybody had engaged in prostitution at any time that is like the professional prostitutes, they would not be allowed in the United States.

**Janet:** Do you know how anyone would know that other than asking that question?

**Vincent:** I guess they would examine them. Besides, at that time there was no such thing as loose morals. You were either an honorable girl or you were a dishonorable girl and the dishonorable ones somehow the rumor went around that so and so was a dishonorable one. In fact in town even the little kids knew that certain house belong to a dishonourable person. And you’d say hello to her from a distance.

**Janet:** What was it like seeing your father again?

**Vincent:** It was very exciting because we hadn’t seen him since three years before that. He was very excited too.

**Janet:** How about your mother? Initially she didn’t want to come. Did she change her mind?

**Vincent:** Yes. My mother was always very definite in her ability to take care of any situation. She would never wave at anything. If a situation had to be resolved it was resolved. She didn’t have to ask anybody.

**Janet:** Where did you go after you met your father?

**Vincent:** Then we got on the ferry that took us to South Battery Park.

**Janet:** South Ferry, it’s called.

**Vincent:** Yes, South Ferry. And there our uncle, who lived in New York City, met us when we got on land. He was my mother’s one actual brother on both sides. She had a great many brothers and sisters but they were all half brothers and sisters. However in the Italian families you don’t distinguish. If they are brother or sister, that’s it. This was the actual brother who had been in the United States for about at least 15 years already. He was already established in the United States.

**Janet:** So then did you go home with him?

**Vincent:** We went to his house on East 67th street and lived with him for about a week or 10 days. That was his reception to us, his welcoming to us. Although the house in New Rochelle was already for us, it’s one of those expected things that the oldest brother in the family takes over as the welcoming committee.

**Janet:** Did you have a feast when you got to his house?

**Vincent:** Yes, for 10 days.

**Janet:** Really?

**Vincent:** Yes.

**Janet:** Do you remember any things that were really new to you? New and different those first few weeks in this country?

**Vincent:** We kind of expected… we had read a great deal and knew about the trains, the elevated trains and so forth and so on but we finally saw them.

**Janet:** What was your uncle doing?

**Vincent:** He was a shoemaker.

**Janet:** And your father was he being a tailor in this country?

**Vincent:** That’s right. As I said the uncle was at 67th street in New York City, my father was a tailor in New Rochelle. The reason why he settled in New Rochelle is because his slightly younger brother had come here before him and so he came. There was a colony of people from Calitri in New Rochelle.

**Janet:** That’s where you and your brothers continued on to school?

**Vincent:** That’s right. In Calitri, my older brother had already finished all schools. He was going to be a tailor. I was half-way through the sixth grade. I was destined to be a carpenter.

**Janet:** But then when there was more school available, you and your brother just continued on to…

**Vincent:** When we got to New Rochelle we started school all over again.

**Janet:** What was it like initially? Did you know any English when you came?

**Vincent:** No. As I mentioned in one of those discussions on the ship my older brother knew one English word. He told me one day on the ship, and the English word was ‘girl’, G-I-R-L. That was the beginning of our knowledge of English.

**Janet:** Did you have teachers that were helpful to you?

**Vincent:** Yes. They were extremely helpful. When we were in the seventh grade, there was one teacher who was the most helpful teacher, Bertha Smith. She saw promise in us which we didn’t even know was there. Every day after school she would keep us a couple of hours, nobody paid her to teach us because she saw there was a great deal of promise and she trained us and we skipped a grade from the seventh grade into the senior high, what was then the ninth.

We skipped into the high school itself. That’s where our skipping began because at the time, there were in New York State, regions examinations in the elementary schools. Although we had been here only a year, we came at the top in the elementary schools and then we went to high school and again we came at the top.

**Janet:** Were you and Bernard the only two children that Bertha Smith was tutoring or were there other children who were also…

**Vincent:** No, she just took a fancy to us.

**Janet:** Were there other children who didn’t speak English in New Rochelle at that time in your school that you recall? Or were you the ones that didn’t…

**Vincent:** There may have been but…

**Janet:** It wasn’t large.

**Vincent:** No. We were rather a rare specimen.

**Janet:** You mentioned how you decided you got in two years of college and then you and your brother decided you would take different paths.

**Vincent:** That’s right, and New Rochelle might be of interest to you. Bertha Smith had also been the teacher of Norman Rockwell. Norman Rockwell was just around the corner from our school. She decided that we could be good artists so she asked Norman Rockwell to take us on for [unclear 01:00:02]. No price was ever mentioned, no fee and Norman Rockwell very patiently took us for a year, a year and a half.

**Janet:** What was that like? Being a student of Norman Rockwell?

**Vincent:** It was a lot about painting.

**Janet:** What kind of man was he?

**Vincent:** He was a very fine man. He was born 94, he was 11 years older and he was the artist for the *Saturday Evening Post*. He liked Ms. Smith very much and any favour for her he was perfectly willing to do.

**Janet:** I think that’s a wonderful place to end this tape. We’ll do another bit of [inaudible 01:00:59] if you’re up to that.

**Vincent:** Yes.

**Janet:** Okay. This is the conclusion of tape one and we were going to continue with tape two right away.

We’re beginning again, this is tape two. I’m speaking with Vincent Cioffari. It’s December 3rd 1994 in this tape two. You then got through to your second year of college with Bernard and then you went your different paths.

**Vincent:** That’s right.

**Janet:** Can you just describe your path?

**Vincent:** Yes. Bernard went into Physics after the division which I mentioned before. He became first an instructor in Physics after he graduated at Cornell. In first year of graduate school he was assistant in the Physics department. I started teaching in a high school in New Rochelle, New York because we needed the money.

In college we went all on scholarships. Bernard had four scholarships at Cornell, I had three and Mario had two. So between three of us we had eleven scholarships. Cornell was the state scholarship for New York State. Automatically if you were in the first 150 in New York State you would get a tuition fee scholarship at Cornell.

So all our tuition was paid for and then they got some examinations and if you came out on top of those examinations you get some more money. But even so, since we had no money of our own, we had to work at the great sum of 35 cents an hour.

**Janet:** What were you doing?

**Vincent:** Washing dishes in a restaurant. That’s how we paid our way through college.

**Janet:** How would you describe your experience at Cornell?

**Vincent:** At Cornell, it was a very friendly place and very good students. At the time it was kept at definite, small entrance group. I’ve forgotten whether it was limited to 250 or 300 freshmen. It was quite limited. Then you learn to live together with others. We had to work but many other students had to work too because many of the friends we made at the time were from around New York City and they had to work for a living too.

**Janet:** So then what? What happened after you graduated?

**Vincent:** After we graduated Bernard went to teach for a while in City College in New York but that was extra job. His regular job came at the College of New Rochelle where he spent most of his life because we were both working for our doctorate. He went for his doctorate in Physics and I went for doctorate in romance languages.

For my regular living for a while I could make more money as a professional painter for a whole first year with two degrees. I was a house painter but fortunately I got sick from the paint and I had to stop and look for a teaching job and just at that time there was a teaching job in the New Rochelle High School. That’s where I began teaching in high school and the teaching job was in teaching French and Spanish.

**Janet:** How long did you stay there and where did you go after that?

**Vincent:** From New Rochelle I taught there about 10 years or more but I was also teaching at Hunter College in the afternoons and evenings. Bernard as I said was teaching at City College and also teaching at the College of New Rochelle. After that, I taught at the College of New Rochelle too and that’s where I found my wife. She was my student.

**Janet:** What class was she taking?

**Vincent:** I was teaching Dante because my doctorate was on Dante, so I taught courses in Italian language and in the *Divine Comedy* and she was in both classes.

**Janet:** Was she your student for quite a while before you realized that you were interested in her or?

**Vincent:** We expressed no interest, being respectable until she stopped being a student.

**Janet:** Is your wife of Italian background?

**Vincent:** Yes. She’s of Italian background born in this country, born in Port Chester, New York.

**Janet:** Your wife’s name?

**Vincent:** Angelina.

**Janet:** Beautiful. What’s her maiden name?

**Vincent:** Grimaldi.

**Janet:** Could you spell that?

**Vincent:** Grimaldi, G-R-I-M-A-L-D-I , which in Italy is a very famous name since the Prince of Monaco is a Grimaldi and it was originally a Genovese name in fact it’s even mentioned in the 13th century. Grimaldi name is quite important in Italy.

**Janet:** Did you have children?

**Vincent:** We have one.

**Janet:** Your child’s name?

**Vincent:** Vincent Grimaldi Cioffari. We just left him couple of hours ago. He is a professor of mathematics at Assumption College. He was a born mathematician.

**Janet:** What makes you say that?

**Vincent:** We took him to Europe when he was four and at the age of four he used to tell us just how much the exchange was when we were in France or when we were in Italy and he’s always had a tremendous facilities for mathematics. He had a definite mathematical mind but also in foreign languages.

When he was almost halfway through his doctorate, he decided that he wasn’t particularly interested in mathematics. He was more interested in romance languages so he went to Boston University for a year in the graduate school in romance languages. He was so admired by his students that he was a mathematician [inaudible 01:11:25] finish, go back to his mathematics and finish his doctorate.

**Janet:** Do you have grandchildren?

**Vincent:** No, he’s not married.

**Janet:** After you met your wife and you were teaching then what happened next in your career?

**Vincent:** We were approaching war, the Second World War and I was called to Washington to write the basic texts for teaching English to the troops to help to invent a fast way of teaching how to speak spoken languages. There was a group of five of us if I remember correctly who were called to Washington to invent the new methods for teaching foreign languages because they were needed immediately.

One was in Italian of course, one in Portuguese because they were using the officers from Brazil, one in French, one in Chinese. The five of us were working in Washington up on a hill, whatever hill that is as a college. We worked night and day to invent these methods for teaching languages and the army set up camps but different sections all over the country and we had to write fast enough to furnish material for the classes which were already going so we wrote at full speed.

My work happens to be always time-saving and systematic. I don’t like waste of time. So the Italian became the model for the others although we were all working together but we wrote and Italian being already done, served as a model. Then we had to record that for the soldiers that were being sent to Europe. It’s my voice on the spoken Italian dating back to 1945.

Couple of years ago I went to Harvard and asked to hear the records and sure enough, there it is, 40 years later. From there I went back into teaching at the College of New Rochelle then at Hunter College. After this I was asked by D.C. Heath and Company to take over the whole foreign language department and that’s when we came to Boston in 1946 and we remained in Boston ever since. I was head of that department for 22 years or a little over.

**Janet:** Would you say for the tape what heading the romance language department at [inaudible 01:16:11]?

**Vincent:** Modern language department of D.C. Heath and Company which became a section of Raytheon. Raytheon of course is… D.C. Heath and Company is about two or three percent of the Raytheon Holdings.

**Janet:** In that position what did you do?

**Vincent:** I had to find authors all over the country and formulate the kind of books that would be needed in the teaching of foreign languages particularly the kind of books that would teach not only the language but the background and the civilization of the country. We had [unclear 01:17:20] that became well-known throughout the country.

**Janet:** What would you say you’re most proud of that you’ve done?

**Vincent:** Incidentally, among my work I’ve always been interested in Dante so while I was working at D.C Heath I was still continuing my research on Dante and that has been my life work for over 30 or 40 years now and I keep on publishing even now.

**Janet:** These are books that you’ve published?

**Vincent:** Yes.

**Janet:** How many book have you done?

**Vincent:** 30 or 40 I guess.

**Janet:** Oh my goodness. And are you still presently doing publishing?

**Vincent:** Yes, and now for the work in foreign languages at D.C. Heath I’d like to… I was allowed to go over to Europe not at their expense, but they never deducted anything and they allowed me to stay longer than the normal vacation, usually a double vacation and the family went to Europe and we went to various countries because it was all the foreign languages. German, French, Spanish.

**Janet:** Do you think coming here as an immigrant in any way had an influence on your life?

**Vincent:** Yes.

**Janet:** In what ways would you think that it did?

**Vincent:** If we hadn’t come over here the chances are that I would have remained like my cousins, a good tradesman in the town. I’d spend the whole life doing whatever trade you started to do. Coming over here meant expanding tremendously in any direction that you want.

So much so that after I left D.C. Heath because I had enough income to live comfortably then we started going all over Europe, one country after another with the general idea of working on Dante but incidentally just seeing countries and seeing the various civilizations and writing articles on various things like that.

**Janet:** That must have been a wonderful period of time.

**Vincent:** Yes, and we still keep on doing it.

**Janet:** I was just going to ask you, what is this phase of your life like for you?

**Vincent:** Trying to get things done. I have so many projects in mind there’s never any lack of something to do.

**Janet:** Well, that must be what has kept you so fit?

**Vincent:** Yes, I suppose.

**Janet:** If you consider that some people don’t know what to do.

**Vincent:** My wife and I have never had a moment’s time to wonder what to do next. Incidentally my wife was entered in the who’s who of American women way back 10, 15 years ago.

**Janet:** What was it that she had done that…?

**Vincent:** She writes great many… at one time I used to write them all then she began cooperating then she took them over because I’m interested in the Dante field, so she carries on all the work in the text books which bring a fair amount of royalties every year and I’m free to do my work on Dante.

**Janet:** I don’t know if this is possible but could you say just as simply as possible what it is about Dante that has kept your passion about working on that for all these years?

**Vincent:** It’s a view of the next world and the best of poetry. It’s a complete summary of all the civilizations that preceded him. He had that knack of putting in the poetic terms that anybody can understand and anybody can remember because that’s why poetry is carried from mouth to mouth. The concept of what the universe is like. The reason why poetry remains more than prose is because it goes from mouth to mouth. It doesn’t have to be written.

**Janet:** I was just thinking about the little stories that you wrote the book about. Were they also poetic?

**Vincent:** No. The teaching of Italian schools needed textbooks, so I wrote one and they brought in a great deal of money. Not so much but enough and Italian needed textbooks in this country, needed textbooks with a modern touch.

Not a repetition of what represents life as it is [inaudible 01:24:39] many times to Italy before writing a book take tremendous amount of notes and then from those write the book. The textbooks have been in use for over 50 years. They have influenced the teaching of Italian in this country.

**Janet:** It seems like you’ve influenced a number of teaching in your writing.

**Vincent:** Yes.

**Janet:** Is there anything else you can think of as pertains to coming to this country or being in this country, or your life before we close?

**Vincent:** The only thing I can say is that the country has offered and continues to offer an opportunity to develop in fields that you may not even have thought of as being possible to you or never even realising that such a career could be yours. There isn’t limits to the careers that you can aspire if you have the ability and the tenaciousness to do it.

There’s also one other thing, there’s no country in the world that really is democratic other than the United States. Its part of all its faults is the newspaper being it there’s no country where by and large people aren’t even with each other according to their abilities if they want a shot.

**Janet:** I think that’s a beautiful place to end our interview. I want to thank you so much.

**Vincent:** It’s been a great pleasure to have you here.

**Janet:** Okay, it’s December 3rd now and we are in Waban, Massachusetts and I’m talking with Vincent Cioffari and he came from Italy in 1917 just a few days short of his 12th birthday and at this time he’s 89 years old. Thank you very much.

**Vincent:** You’re very welcome, great pleasure to have you here.

**Janet:** Thank you, this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I’m signing off.