**Paul:** Good afternoon this is Paul Seacrest for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday June 1st 1995. I’m at the Ellis Island recording studio with Patrick Izzo. Mr. Izzo worked for the WPA here at the Ellis Island as a painter. You also did painting at the Statue of Liberty and the Governors Island I believe.

**Patrick:** Yes sir.

**Paul:** We believe that Mr. Izzo began working sometime around 1936.

**Patrick:** That’s correct.

**Paul:** Can we begin Mr. Izzo by you giving me your birth date please.

**Patrick:** My birthday is March the 27th 1908.

**Paul:** Can you give me a little bit about your family background.

**Patrick:** My family background is that my father came here to America I think it was around 1890. My mother came about a year or two later and when they came here, as far as I recall, things were very hard.

He had a little job as a carpenter at 50 cents or so much about a day or an hour or something like that. I found out later that he learned to be a barber. When I was a little boy I used to go and help him in the barber shop, with a little stool. I used to lather up the customers and my father used to shave them. That’s a very long story.

**Paul:** What country did your parents come from?

**Patrick:** My father came from Naples Italy and also my mother …

**Paul:** When they came to the US?

**Patrick:** In New York City, in Brooklyn.

**Paul:** Where were you born?

**Patrick:** I was born in Brooklyn in 1908.

**Paul:** Tell me a little bit about your parent’s adjustment to America?

**Patrick:** Adjustment those days was very hard. Things were much reasonable so they got a long a little bit. My mother had to take some sewing to keep the family, we were eight in the family and things were very hard in those days.

We tried to help one another some way or another. That’s as far as I could remember, because we never talked about old times. My parents never told us much about Europe or where they came from.

**Paul:** For the sake of the tape, can we please have the names of everybody. What was your father’s name?

**Patrick:** My father’s name was Gennaro Izzo.

**Paul:** Can you spell Gennaro please?

**Patrick:** G-E-N-N-A-R-O. My mother’s name was Anna Sasso, S-A-S-S-O. They got some friends of my father they met my mother, so they got married somewhere around 1901 or 1902 at that time. I was nowhere near.

**Paul:** What about your brothers and sisters, can you name them?

**Patrick:** I have four brothers and four sisters. The only one that are alive today is my older sister, she is 91. My two brothers, one is in Connecticut and one is in New Jersey, and the rest of them are [inaudible 00:03:34] and that’s all.

**Paul:** Can you name them, give me the names please.

**Patrick:** My older sister’s name is Teresa Laurino, my second sister’s name is Rose Scutari, my third sister is Josephine Laurino, these are married names. My other sister is Nelly Moses. My brother, one of my brother’s name is Frank Izzo, my other brother is Augustine Izzo, and the other one is Ogi Augustine and I.

**Paul:** Are you the youngest of all these?

**Patrick:** I’m the oldest of the boys.

**Paul:** You’re the oldest of the boys. How do you fall in terms of all the brothers and sisters?

**Patrick:** I’m the oldest and …

**Paul:** Not now but I mean originally, who was the oldest child?

**Patrick:** My sister Teresa, she’s 91 years old.

**Paul:** She’s the oldest child and she’s still living now?

**Patrick:** Yes, she is the only one living. Well three of us are still alive.

**Paul:** Then were there children born after you were born in 1908?

**Patrick:** Yes.

**Paul:** Was everyone born in Brooklyn?

**Patrick:** Yes.

**Paul:** Because your parents had already been in this country for some time?

**Patrick:** Yes they had been in this country a little while. In those days when I was a youngster, I went to public school 155 in Brooklyn. We only had up to six grade then we had to change to another school. Things were happier, you left the doors open, nobody bothered you. Today it’s all gotten different.

**Paul:** Tell me a little bit about how you became involved with the WPA later on in your life?

**Patrick:** I was working in the printing line in 1929, even before a couple of years before that. In 1929 we had Wall Street crash, I lost my job. I had my wife. Myself and my daughter Ann. Things were hard to get a job.

I didn’t want no charity. I didn’t want anybody to give me charity. Understand this. WPA was out to get a job as a wiper. Before that I had to work on the roads, shoveling snow, shoveling in the winter time.

I found out from one of the fellows I worked with, he said, “Why don’t you take a test and be a painter?” Which I did, I went to New York, I took a test and I passed. The following week I got a job to work in Statue of Liberty first.

We worked the Statue of Liberty then they transferred us to here. When we came here, there was a lot of [unclear 00:06:39]. Everything here was not what you see today, everything was different. There were woods, chairs. There were benches where they used to eat meals.

There were where the immigrants came off the boats. They had to come through here and the doctors was up here, if I’m not mistaken, to examine them. If they pass, if they had no disease they’d let them into this city, if not they had to be shipped back.

**Paul:** Let me back up a little bit, what did you paint at the Statue of Liberty?

**Patrick:** We painted the ceilings, walls, rooms. We had a lot of scraping to be done. We couldn’t talk to the aliens; we couldn’t give no cigarettes if they asked, because they asked for cigarettes. If we spoke any of their languages, “How was this city, how was the …”

**Paul:** That was here at Ellis Island?

**Patrick:** Yeah.

**Paul:** Go back to the Statue of Liberty where you first -That was your first job out here was the Statue of Liberty?

**Patrick:** Yes.

**Paul:** Tell me exactly what you had to do?

**Patrick:** We went to the Statue of Liberty because we had to paint the inside of -The Statue of Liberty on the inside they had bends all around the copper of the Statue of Liberty. We had to scarp them; the bends and paint behind the bends were a wreck. The inspector used to come with a mirror to see if we had skipped, because if you skipped any he rejected it.

When it rained, they had little holes into the ceiling. We had to use torches first. We had to burn the stuff off. When it rained, you got a shower because you could go nowhere, so we were stuck. The stairs in the Statue of Liberty were very well worn; you had to be very careful.

The only time you could have gotten up there into the crown, that’s up, nobody could have gone up to the arm. We sneaked up in the arm and we went up to see what was going on, but there was a lot of moths and over a thousand volts of lights.

**Paul:** You’re saying moth?

**Patrick:** Yeah.

**Paul:** Like a little butterfly?

**Patrick:** They come to keep warm, they always come. Because the windows were a little open so they came in. We used to go up there in the arm to have our lunch because we could, because people were coming up the stairs.

After a while, they stopped the people from coming up. The only time they could have come is after we had our lunch. It was a very experience to do this work.

**Paul:** Do you remember what kind of paints or what color you were using for the inside?

**Patrick:** First we were using a two color job. The first was a primer and the second was a like an item a little over like an ivory. Just exactly I don’t recall, but I’m pretty sure it was a moth color.

Then we had to go down into where her shoes were. We had to use what they used to call [inaudible 00:10:14] oil. We had to spray it in because nobody could have gone there and where she had her book. Because nobody could have gone over there we had to use a lawn, nozzles and shoot this liquid in.

What an experience I had when I went into the subway, I smelled like a fish. The funny part of it, people kept twitching, there was a smell.

**Paul:** Maybe that’s a good thing. Get a scene on the subway. Tell me who taught you how to do this?

**Patrick:** As I said before, when I got out of school I got a job as an errand boy in a printing line. After a while, they asked me if I wanted to learn how to run a machine, printing press. I said, “Why not?” I was a young fellow, I wasn’t married at all. I learned how to work down the presses.

This boss of mine, his name is Mr. Richardson from New Jersey. He was a very wonderful person. He sent me to school, printing school. Then the crash came in 1929, I’ve lost my job, because he couldn’t afford to keep all of us on a job.

I was looking for a job. I was out of work for about a year and then my brother-in-law, his name is Joseph Laurino, he was in a painting contract. He says, “Okay it’s time for you to come and work with me.” That’s where I learned my painting. I used to learn how to mix colors.

It was really tough then, I was working for about three dollars a day with my brother-in-law. I always forget about the hours because if he had to pay me for overtime he could afford it. That’s how I became a painter.

Before I retired, I worked for a wonderful boss, his name was Straus. He had two sons. I was a foreman; I was a foreman for 18 years.

**Paul:** Even after you got out of the WPA, you continued in that trade?

**Patrick:** Yes, when they shut WPA up, I got to work for a few different bosses, different jobs as a painter.

**Paul:** How much did you get paid while you worked for the WPA?

**Patrick:** I know they paid us three days, for three days, around $30, $35, a little over $30 or something like that.

**Paul:** You worked three days a week?

**Patrick:** About three days.

**Paul:** How many hours a day?

**Patrick:** We were working about seven or eight hours, we had to put a full day in. We had so many days to work and so many days we were off, to give the other fellows a chance to make a dollar. They were very rough times.

**Paul:** When you were still working at the Statue of Liberty before they brought you to Ellis, were there parts of the island, Bedloe’s Island that you were not allowed to go onto?

**Patrick:** On the Statue of Liberty?

**Paul:** Yeah Statue of Liberty.

**Patrick:** No. The only way was up to the arm.

**Paul:** That was the only place that was restricted?

**Patrick:** I wasn’t there in the Statue of Liberty yet, but they changed all the times. My boss, Mr. Straus, he said, “We’ve painted that about a few years ago.” They put all the structures and they repainted at the outside. I think inside or the outside I don’t really know.

**Paul:** Before we talk about your experience at Ellis Island, are there any stories that you like to tell about anything that may have happened while you were working at the Statue of Liberty? Maybe a funny thing that happened?

**Patrick:** The only thing that happened over here when I was working in Ellis Island. The Statue of Liberty we didn’t have much, the only thing is that when it rained we had [inaudible 00:14:09] all.

**Paul:** How long did you work at the Statue before you came to Ellis?

**Patrick:** I don’t recall. The only thing is that they took us off there for a while because the Queen Mary Mother had to come to the United States to see what the United States looked like. They took her here to Governors Island at the time because we had to paint outside -All the trade had to be done and finish it in one or two days.

**Paul:** You were really just moved around?

**Patrick:** I was in [inaudible 00:14:40] project. I tell these little stories every now and then to my granddaughters and to my grandsons. A lot of people think, you must be nuts.

**Paul:** Tell me what it was like working at Ellis Island?

**Patrick:** Here?

**Paul:** Yeah. What sticks out in your mind about that?

**Patrick:** I haven’t been here in a long time. When I got off the boat here today I was very shocked.

**Paul:** Tell me what it looked like in the late 1930s?

**Patrick:** In my days when I was here, worked here, downstairs there were all benches. That’s when the early [inaudible 00:15:19] used to come in. they had us come into that room. When they come into that room they had to come to be examined.

They had little tags when they got off the boat. These tags, they had to be examined by a doctor. If the doctor say that you have no illness or any disease, they put a mark on your shoulder or something on you. If you had, they put you in a separate place and they ship you back to whatever country you came from.

**Paul:** Your experience, tell me about your experience here at Ellis Island?

**Patrick:** My experience here, when I walked in everything was wood, mostly wood. The place was shabby. That’s why we had to work in such different places where we didn’t interfere with the immigrants.

We had to scrap paint to make it look more presentable. As I said, when I walked in here I really was shocked and surprised. A beautiful job they made it.

**Paul:** When you worked here in the late 1930s did you have any interaction with any of the aliens?

**Patrick:** No. We were told first thing before we started, “Don’t interfere with the immigrants. If they ask you for anything …” Because we were all different kinds of languages, I spoke Italian at that time. They said, “If an Italian ask you any question or ask you for a cigarette don’t talk to them and don’t give them anything.”

Because some time the benches where we were working on were a little bit on the side. They always talked through the fence. [Inaudible 00:17:02] say, “Hi, [inaudible 00:17:03] in Italian, or whatever language they were talking. “How is New York?” We were not allowed to say [inaudible 00:17:10].

**Paul:** Can you tell me any specific jobs here at Ellis Island? Do you remember about painting one specific room or the job specifically?

**Patrick:** Yes. We first started painting the, if I recall correctly, the kitchen, because that was the most important room. Then we had to paint rooms, different rooms at that particular time.

Then we had to paint the entrance coming in. Because everything was all wood, you had to scrap them and repaint them. While they were outside in the yard -Because they used to give them exercise.

**Paul:** The aliens you’re talking about?

**Patrick:** In the yard and physical. Most of our work was done mostly at night. The scuffles were put up. We had to paint the ceilings. At that time they dint have the tiles; they put the tiles probably later on.

We had to paint the columns. We had to paint the floors at times; they didn’t have [inaudible 00:18:12] of a wood floor. Everything was 90% wood.

**Paul:** You were doing most of the work out here in the evening?

**Patrick:** No. Mostly you’d do it at day, but there special jobs we had to do at night time.

**Paul:** What was your day like? Tell me from the time you woke up to the time you got to …?

**Patrick:** I had to get up at five o’clock in the morning.

**Paul:** Were you living in Brooklyn?

**Patrick:** Right. My wife [inaudible 00:18:35] get me down to Battery by seven o’clock, seven or past seven to make the boat. Most of our employees of the WPA, like Richard Coppers, we all had to be on that boat. Because if you missed that boat you lost your day’s work.

**Paul:** Where did the boat leave from?

**Patrick:** From Battery Park. The boats are not like they are today; they were small boats, half the size. One night I got stuck here till about one o’clock in the morning, everybody forgot that I was working there.

When I went outside to look around and nobody -I was here by one o’clock in the morning. The guards called ashore, and a tug boat came and took me ashore, it was raining like cats and dogs. These experiences that I had, that I don’t recall very much, is something to remember.

**Paul:** Now we’re talking about Ellis Island now, do you remember paint colors here? What colors paints you were using here?

**Patrick:** Some of them was grey that I recall. Because grey was the color that couldn't get dirty so much or green. Some of the rooms were painted white, just that I recall so many time that when …

**Paul:** It’s a long time ago.

**Patrick:** It’s close to 50 years ago.

**Paul:** Did you use a primer when you painted here also?

**Patrick:** Yes. Because if you’re scraping and sparkling and plastering, you had to put a coat of paint. That time they didn’t call a primer, they call it first coat, second coat, and third coat.

**Paul:** Where was the paint stored?

**Patrick:** [Inaudible 00:20:23] had a place somewhere on the outside because they didn’t store it in the building. Because in those days there was a lot of lead, paint was made with a lot of lead those days. They had to keep it away from the immigrants. They must [inaudible 00:20:44] or something in those days, or they put ladders and stuff they had to put a [inaudible 00:20:50].

**Paul:** Whose job was it to mix the paint?

**Patrick:** To mix the paint we had to mix -The foreman had a helper, or it came already mixed. Sherman Williams, no that was Staten Island sorry. They got it from somewhere where they didn’t mix the paint.

Lost too many time mixing the colors, because you make it one time, one shade. The next time, add a little more it’s a different shade. They had these paint manufactures, gave them a sample and made correct. A lot of them used a lot of buff colors too.

**Paul:** What did you wear when you were working here?

**Patrick:** We wore just our clothes, painting clothes. No mask, no protection at all in those days. Today everything is different.

**Paul:** You mentioned that when you were painting the Statue of Liberty you used a sprayer for some of the parts.

**Patrick:** Yes.

**Paul:** What kinds of tools did you use to paint here at Ellis Island?

**Patrick:** We used brushes. In those days they don’t let you use roller. There was never invented a roller, we used the regular brushes. We used knives, like sparkly knives, scrappers and that’s about [inaudible 00:22:22].

**Paul:** How wide of a brush?

**Patrick:** In those days, they just have two or three kinds of brushes. They had an eight inch brush, calcimine brush.

**Paul:** Calcimine?

**Patrick:** Yeah, there was …

**Paul:** Eight inch?

**Patrick:** Then they had a four inch brush, a five inch brush, a three inch brush. All depends on what kind of work you was given.

**Paul:** Did different people only use one brush, like someone was only responsible for the jobs that used a three inch brush?

**Patrick:** No. If they gave you a job, the foreman would come in the morning and says, “Pat, you go in that room.” They give you, “This is the color, this is what you have to do.” The specification is, if it has to be scraped down, we scraped it down. If we had to give it a primer, we gave it a primer. If they gave it a finished coat, we gave it a finish coat. As painters we knew what kind of brushes we had to use.

**Paul:** You said that the interior condition of the building was quite run down at that time?

**Patrick:** Definitely. It was a sight, believe me.

**Paul:** Was there a place where you were fed on the island?

**Patrick:** Yes, there was a restaurant. A lot of us brought lunch from home, but if you wanted say a drink or something. They had a little concession here for a sandwich, or ice cream, or soda, or something like that. Yes they did have that.

**Paul:** You mentioned that the other people who were employed as painters were from all different nationalities?

**Patrick:** Correct.

**Paul:** Did that ever create any problems?

**Patrick:** No. It did not create a problem because before we go into a room, the carpenter had to be finished, the electrician had to be finished and then the painters go in. We were the last ones to go into the building, so that there wasn’t friction or anything like that.

**Paul:** Was the main building here at Ellis Island, was this the only building that you painted in or did you paint …?

**Patrick:** As far as I recall, this was the only building.

**Paul:** Do you have any stories about Ellis Island, maybe interactions with your coworkers that stick out in your mind about the experience?

**Patrick:** Not that I remember. We all done our jobs.

**Paul:** Did you ever do anything wrong, paint something incorrectly?

**Patrick:** That we all do, we all make mistakes.

**Paul:** Do you remember a specific instance where that happened?

**Patrick:** If I recall correctly, the foreman told one of the boys he wanted that room a certain color. He probably didn’t get the idea, he painted the wrong color. He wasted material and time, that’s the only thing you’ll see that’s it. We all had a wonderful time, let me put it that way.

**Paul:** Did you work only at Ellis Island or were you …?

**Patrick:** The only time we went to Governors Island, when Queen Mary Mother came to visit with her husband. The Statue of Liberty was a different story, we hadn’t probably finished here and they shipped us to Ellis Island or vice versa, I really don’t recall [inaudible 00:25:32].

**Paul:** You stayed here until the WPA was ended …

**Patrick:** They laid us off. My experience was we worked here when Luciano was captured and sent to Italy. I think we were painting a boat that day, we had to go -I don’t remember correctly though. Either they sent us upstairs or they told us to stay on land till they got him. That was the only experience I recall having …

**Paul:** Did you see him? You never …?

**Patrick:** We were here, we could see, but not face to face we saw. Because he had a lot of bodyguards, lot of protection. Because there was a [inaudible 00:26:18] they were trying to get him, but he was well protected.

**Paul:** You were also responsible for painting the boats too you said?

**Patrick:** We painted.

**Paul:** Were the boats taken out of the water to do that?

**Patrick:** No. Go back and forth, back and forth.

**Paul:** Were you responsible for painting the exteriors of the boats or just the interiors?

**Patrick:** Just the interiors. We had nothing to do with the outside. You’re not painting outside because the water has a lot of -Ships are dried off.

**Paul:** I think it’s interesting that even after you left Ellis Island you went into the painting business and stayed into that.

**Patrick:** Yeah, I waited a while and I joined the union. I said, “This is not going to do.” I started trying to go into business with my brother, it didn’t work out. Some friend of ours says, “Why don’t you join the union?” I said, “We got nothing to lose” We only could lose $75 that was the initiation.

We got into the union and went out to Long Island. We went down to Long Island. It was too far for me to go back and forth to work. I got a call from my brother-in-law; he was in the plastering business. He see me out of work and he says, “Pat, I’m going to talk to somebody who I know, a painter boss.”

He got me a job with this painter boss, his name is Straus. My brother-in-law’s name was Jimmy Carmelo. He made an arrangement for him to meet me. That’s how I’ve been working for Steve [inaudible 00:27:59] Straus for 18 years as a foreman.

**Paul:** What year did you retire?

**Patrick:** Pardon me?

**Paul:** What year did you retire?

**Patrick:** I was 66 years old when I retired.

**Paul:** Mr. Izzo, thank you very much. This has been a most unique interview; we’ve never interviewed anyone who painted Ellis Island.

**Patrick:** I’ve done the best I could remember.

**Paul:** This is Paul Seacrest signing off with Patrick Izzo on Thursday June 1st 1995 at Ellis Island. Thanks.