**Paul:** Good afternoon. This is Paul Seacrest for the National Park Service. Today is Friday, September 29th 1995. I’m in Toms River, New Jersey with August Mercandino. Mr. Mercandino came from the north of Italy in 1921 and he was 17 years old at that time.

Present also is Mrs. Mercandino, who’s going to be joining us and perhaps may interject with information as the interview goes on. Thank you very much for letting me come out and can we begin by you giving me your birth date please.

**August:** February 24th, 1904.

**Paul:** Where in the north of Italy were you born?

**August:** A small town in the Alps. They call it Pralungo.

**Paul:** Mrs. Mercandino can you spell?

**Mrs. Mercandino:** Yes, P-R-A-L-U-N-G-O.

**Paul:** P-R-A-L-U-N-G-O. What can you tell me about that town when you were a child? What sticks out in your mind?

**August:** It was a small town down in the Alp and there was nothing. That was right after the First World War. We didn’t have nothing to eat. It was very poor, that’s all.

**Paul:** What did the buildings look like in that town?

**August:** They were make out of stucco. All the buildings they make out of stucco.

**Paul:** Is there one building in that town that sticks out in your mind from when you were growing up there?

**August:** That was the store nearby, Coop; Cooperativa.

**Paul:** Mrs. Mercandino if you need to speak, speak full voice so the microphone picks you up.

**Mrs. Mercandino:** Beautiful church you had.

**August:** Yes, the church was beautiful. Otherwise was [unclear 00:02:13] it’s a small town was nothing too in it.

**Paul:** Can you describe for me the house that you grew up in?

**August:** Was a house with two room downstairs and two room upstairs and we had the attic was upstairs, there where I used to sleep, in the attic.

**Paul:** It was stucco like the other houses?

**August:** Yes.

**Paul:** What kind of a roof did it have on it?

**August:** All…

**Mrs. Mercandino:** Tile.

**August:** No there was no tiles. There was clay. They would mix like this.

**Paul:** Like a semi-circle?

**August:** Yes.

**Paul:** So, there were two storeys and then an attic. What kind of floor did you have in the house?

**August:** Wood.

**Paul:** Wood floors. How did you heat the house?

**August:** With a stove in a kitchen.

**Paul:** What kind of a stove?

**August:** Gravel stove. We didn’t get nothing else but that. We used to burn wood in the stove and we didn’t get nothing else. We would stay in the kitchen at winter time.

**Paul:** Did it get cold in the winter?

**August:** Yes, we had snow and sometimes three or four feet tall.

**Paul:** Is there a story that you have about experiencing a snow storm or something like that in Italy as a child?

**August:** No, I don’t have.

**Paul:** You just remember that it was deep.

**August:** The snow was up in the Alps by [unclear 00:03:43] we used to come two or three feet high. But I used to go work about a mile away from home. I was 12 years old when I went to work. We used to walk in the snow with short pants on.

**Paul:** The snow was about three feet high and you’re working in short pants?

**August:** Yes. At that time nobody worked in the snow industry, nothing.

**Paul:** How did you light your house?

**August:** With something about this big. They put oil in it and we used to light a thing there. It was a little bit of a light, nothing else. Then my father later on he put the electric in the house.

**Paul:** Do you remember when that happened? When your father had the house converted to electricity?

**August:** Sure, I remember.

**Paul:** Can you tell me what that process was?

**August:** The light was not light like this, was only a little tiny bulb. That’s all. We used to stay like that.

**Paul:** What did they have to do to the house in order to put the electricity in it?

**August:** They have to take the wire from the street and bring them over where I used to live. Then they have a light outside, so everybody can see when they was coming in the street. My father did that.

**Paul:** How did he run the wires into the house?

**August:** Like they do over here. When they come over from the street they have the wire. From there they come in and out, like they do over here.

**Paul:** Were the wires inside the wall?

**August:** Yes, sure. The wire was inside the wall.

**Paul:** So did he have to take the walls down to do that?

**August:** My uncle he used to build houses. He cut the place just to put the wire in then he pluck it. That’s the only way you can do it.

**Paul:** How did your family feel about having electricity in their house?

**August:** They were happy, that’s all. It was nothing really new.

**Paul:** How old were you when that happened?

**August:** I was about nine or 10 years old.

**Paul:** Did you have running water in your house?

**August:** No.

**Paul:** Where did the water come from?

**August:** We used to go in the street and pick it up. In the winter time it was a little brook outside in the street. We used to break the ice to pick the water to wash our face and then they had a well we used to put the pail go down in a well, pull, pick the water.

**Paul:** Was there a sink inside the house?

**August:** No. We didn’t get nothing like that.

**Paul:** Did you have a toilet inside the house?

**August:** No. Outside, the toilet.

**Paul:** Did you have glass on the windows?

**August:** Yes, we have glass.

**Paul:** Did you have a garden with the house?

**August:** Yes we have a garden in the back of the house.

**Paul:** What did you grow in the garden?

**August:** Vegetable. My father he had some fruit, plum, and vegetable. That’s all.

**Paul:** What did you do with the vegetables?

**August:** We used to eat them.

**Paul:** Did you do anything else with them?

**August:** No.

**Paul:** Did you ever sell any of the vegetables?

**August:** No. Practically everybody over there had a garden at the back of their house. They used to raise the vegetables that you eat in the winter time, like cabbage.

**Paul:** What kinds of food do people eat in the north of Italy up there? What did you eat when you lived in Italy?

**August:** We used to eat polentas, if you know what it is.

**Paul:** Can you describe for us on tape what polenta is?

**August:** You put water with salt in it then you put cornmeal and you cook and then you turn it all the time until it cook. We used to eat that with milk. We didn’t get nothing to eat over there. That’s why I come over in this country.

**Paul:** Did you ever eat meat when you lived in Italy?

**August:** Once a week. Braised veal we used to eat once a week, on Sunday.

**Paul:** What did you drink in Italy?

**August:** Wine.

**Paul:** Where did you get the wine?

**August:** Obvious to buy it. The place they used to buy the wine we used to buy it.

**Paul:** Where did you sleep in the house?

**August:** In a bed but I didn’t get no mattress. They used to take the cornmeal, the leaves…

**Paul:** The husks.

**August:** Yes. They used to take that, put them in a big bed, all in it in both sides; two like this and two over there. When you get up there my mother she used to raise the thing again.

**Paul:** Rough it up.

**August:** Rough it up, yes and when you go to sit, used to sink in.

**Paul:** Did you sleep alone in a bed?

**August:** Yes. I was alone.

**Paul:** I’ll go back to the question I was going to ask you. Do you know anything about your birth? When you were born, did anyone ever tell you anything about when you were born?

**August:** This is a long story. When I was born my father went away and my mother went to work, so they give me to another woman to mind me. I was a little boy, very little. I was there until I was about six or seven years old.

When I come back I didn’t know my mother, I didn’t know my father because they didn’t raise me. My father when he come back from where he was, I remember he picked me up but I was scared because I don’t know who he was. That’s my story over there.

**Paul:** Where did your father go?

**August:** He went to South Italy.

**Paul:** To the south of Italy?

**August:** Yes.

**Paul:** To do what?

**August:** He was working in textile. He was fixing machine in a textile.

**Paul:** Why did he leave the town?

**August:** For the money, to make more money over there.

**Paul:** What did he do in the town where you were raised?

**August:** The same thing.

**Paul:** Where did your mother go?

**August:** My mother she was a textile worker. She used to run the loom. She used to make… where I come from a lot of woollen mill. They used to make material with that stuff, all the time.

**Paul:** Did she ever visit you while…?

**August:** She used to come down to see me once a month. I remember that because as I say I was about six or seven years old when they took me home. I remember like it was now. Once a month I used to see my mother.

**Paul:** Can you tell me a little bit about the family that you lived with? Who they were and…

**August:** They was not related to us at all. What happened that that woman she had a baby and the baby died and so that’s why they take me. She, that woman, used to feed me like she used to feed her own baby.

**Paul:** She would breastfeed you?

**August:** Yes. In the summertime she used to take me up in the street. He had a goat and on the way up she used to stop, milk the goat and give me that milk to drink. Goat milk, that was very good.

**Paul:** What else do you remember about living with that family from when you were small?

**August:** There’s nothing that I remember much. I remember they had a boy and a daughter and they was [inaudible 00:12:52]. That’s all I remembered. I remember nothing else.

**Paul:** You went back to live with your mother and father when you were… so I’m to believe that your father had returned from the south of Italy at that time.

**August:** Yes.

**Paul:** Did they live in the same house that they had lived before?

**August:** Same house. When my grandfather die, my father bought the house from my grandmother and my grandmother she always lived with us until she died.

**Paul:** Whose mother is she?

**August:** My mother.

**Paul:** That’s your mother’s parents. How come you didn’t go to live with the grandmother when your parents went to their respective jobs?

**August:** My grandmother she couldn’t take me, had 13 children. She couldn’t keep me there. Until my grandfather die, my mother took her mother again in the house. They were with us.

**Paul:** Tell me a little bit about what you had to go through to adjust to living with your mother and father once you went back to live with them.

**August:** Was nothing to it, we just lived together.

**Paul:** You said you were a little frightened of your father.

**August:** Yes, that I was. When I came to this country I still was afraid of my father. I was 17 years old. But then we went back to Italy in 1949 then it was altogether different. We was talking now. We was talking and it was nice, it was beautiful.

**Paul:** Did you have to make any adjustments to being with your mother?

**August:** No.

**Paul:** What work did your father get when he returned to your town?

**August:** He was working at textile. He would fix the machines in the textile mill. That’s why he went to South Italy because he was making more money there. When he had to teach the people to work, when he was finished he come back to the town.

**Paul:** Did you have any brothers and sisters?

**August:** Yes, I’ve got one brother.

**Paul:** What’s his name?

**August:** Armon.

**Paul:** Is he younger or older?

**August:** 13 younger than me.

**Paul:** 13 years younger than you. Did you go to school in Italy?

**August:** Yes.

**Paul:** Tell me what you remember about going to school.

**August:** I went to school only the first class. When I was 13 years they sent me to work. I couldn’t go ahead because my mother soon I was getting here my mother she forgot to give me [inaudible 00:15:53].

**Paul:** We’re talking about going to school and they sent you to work when you were 13 but you said you went to school for a year.

**Mrs. Mercandino:** No.

**August:** No.

**Paul:** More than that?

**August:** I went to school until the fourth class then after that they sent me to work in the textile mill.

**Paul:** What do you remember about going to school? What sticks out in your mind about that experience?

**August:** It was nothing. It was like when you go to school over here.

**Paul:** Could your parents read and write?

**August:** Yes, especially my mother. My father he was four brother and a sister and the mother died when they was very young. My father went to work he was seven years old and all the other brother too. That was tough for them. My grandfather was a shoemaker. He was making shoes.

**Paul:** Were they all from this same town?

**August:** The same town, yes.

**Paul:** Do you know how your parents met?

**August:** No, that I don’t know. They met in a town because they both live in the same town.

**Paul:** What job did they send you to when you were 13?

**August:** 12. First, they sent me to work in a foundry.

**Paul:** Like an iron foundry?

**August:** Yes. They used to hit me over there. There was one guy who used to hit me all the time. I was supposed to… they love to say, “You want to make a wheel” I was supposed to go up the stairs and get the wheel and bring them down so that they make a foam in dirt. If I was late, if I had to look around if I was delayed he used to hit me on the back all the time until I told my father about it and my father come down and the president of the company was the mayor of the city.

When my father come down they call me in the office and I tell him the truth, what happened. He said, “Take your coat and go home.” From there I learn to work in textile.

**Paul:** Can you describe for me what it was you did in the textile mill? What was your job?

**August:** We used to mix spool then the spool they used to go to another machine, and they got a big wheel, tremendous big wheel. They used to make like a wop, they used to call them. From there they’d bring them to the loom and they used to make the material.

**Paul:** The thread is on a spool, then it goes on to the wop around this big wheel and then that is what was brought to the loom to be woven.

**August:** Yes.

**Paul:** What was your job in there?

**August:** I was making the spool.

**Paul:** You did the spools?

**August:** Yes.

**Paul:** Do you remember how much you were paid at that young age?

**August:** I tell you I was making… that was according to how much the spool used to make then they used to give you a bonus. We used to make more than that. I always get a bonus. The bonus I was supposed to keep it for myself but my mother said, “Never, give it to me”. She used to take it.

My friend used to work in that mill as a secretary then he fixed it that was the more no bonus so he used to give the money to me. Otherwise I would have no money, I never had the money. I didn’t have the money to buy a cigarette.

**Paul:** You turned over your pay check right to your mother then? The money comes…

**August:** Yes.

**Paul:** What did she do with it?

**August:** She used to buy the food. Whatever we was able to buy.

**Paul:** You mentioned that you didn’t have enough money for a cigarette. When did you start smoking? How old were you?

**August:** 12.

**Paul:** Do you remember who taught you how to smoke?

**August:** Nobody. Everybody was smoking over there at work. I stopped to smoke not many years ago. I was working yet. I can’t remember where I was but I stopped smoking.

**Paul:** Do you remember what kind of cigarettes you liked?

**August:** Macedonia. I always remember that, Macedonia cigarette.

**Paul:** What did they look like? Were they…?

**August:** Like cigarette over here. It’s the same thing. The only thing over there you could not buy a cigarette in any store that you want. You only buy from the store run by the government. The drug store was run by the government.

**Paul:** Why was that?

**August:** I don’t know. I can’t explain.

**Paul:** Can you talk to me a little bit about World War One and the period between 1914 and 1918, and if the war had any effect on your life?

**August:** It was terrible. It was bad. We didn’t get nothing to eat and we used to go in a rice field and pick rice in a black market. We used to go with a bicycle at night with a sac on the back. There was not near, it was about two hours with a bicycle. That’s the way we used to eat.

They used to make soup with rice and that’s it. With water and rice, that’s all.

**Paul:** What else sticks out in your mind about that time period?

**August:** The only thing I know is bad, very bad.

**Paul:** But it was the food that was the worst part for you.

**August:** The food. We didn’t get no food at all. Don’t forget… we was in war with Germany that time, with Kaiser I think was… we didn’t get nothing to eat.

**Paul:** Did you ever see any soldiers during that time period?

**August:** No. They didn’t come into Italy. The Second World War they did but not the First World War.

**Paul:** What religion were you?

**August:** Catholic.

**Paul:** How did you practise your religion back then?

**August:** We used to go to church in Sunday, at the school we used to go in church for pray, where a priest just tell us what to do, talk all about religion.

**Paul:** What about at home? How did you practise your religion at home?

**August:** We never mentioned religion in home. My mother she was working six days a week and Sundays clean the house, wash, because she didn’t get no time to do anything during the week. She was working and she could never go to church. But she was a religion woman though.

**Paul:** Was she more religious than your father? Who was more religious, your mother or your father?

**August:** My mother, I think was more religious.

**Paul:** Do you remember any prayers that you were taught as a child in Italian?

**August:** Yes. I remember Ave Maria.

**Paul:** Can you say that in Italian?

**August:** Say the Ave Maria?

**Mrs. Mercandino:** It’s Latin.

**August:** It’s not in Italian, its Latin.

**Paul:** Is there a prayer that you can say in Italian that you remember? Not a Latin prayer.

**August:** No, everything was in Latin over there.

**Paul:** Everything was in Latin you learned. What about a holiday celebration, did you celebrate the religious holidays?

**August:** Yes. 15th of August was the religious out of town.

**Paul:** Is that like a Saint celebration?

**August:** Yes.

**Paul:** Do you know what Saint it is, Mrs. Mercandino?

**Mrs. Mercandino:** Madonna [unclear 00:25:59].

**Paul:** It was some feast of the Madonna?

**Mrs. Mercandino:** Yes.

**August:** Then we have the Black Madonna there too.

**Paul:** How did you celebrate? How did you…?

**August:** Everybody used to go in a salon in the morning, have a very vermouth, and afternoon everybody used to go out a good time and that’s it. They had the band playing all the time. They have a place where they used to dance outside. I used to play there too. I used to play music over there.

**Paul:** Did you say you went to a tavern and had vermouth?

**August:** Yes.

**Paul:** That’s how the celebration would get kicked off?

**August:** Yes, when it start in the morning.

**Paul:** What about Christmas?

**August:** We never celebrated like they do over here. Christmas they used to make like here they make the Christmas tree. Over there they make no Christmas tree because they had the baby, Jesus. We used to go over there and see the baby lay in a stable-like. We used to go over there look at him so there was no Christmas [unclear 00:26:19] over there. Not like over here.

**Paul:** Was there a special meal that went with Christmas over there?

**August:** No.

**Paul:** It just wasn’t a very important holiday to celebrate.

**August:** Yes. The meal was like any other Sunday.

**Paul:** You said that you played an instrument. What instrument did you play?

**August:** Trombone.

**Paul:** Who taught you to play the trombone?

**August:** I went to school for that.

**Paul:** In Italy?

**August:** Yes.

**Paul:** There was a music school in town?

**August:** We had a band in town and the teacher is the one who teach me. But before I start to play it I had to read all the music. It took me about almost a year. I was like this all the time until I was able to read music then they put me in a band and the teacher told me, “If you think you don’t know that note, don’t play it”, until I got used to it. When I got used to it I come to this country, when I was 17.

**Paul**: So you still played the trombone once you got to America then?

**August:** No. Wait and this was in Eastern Pennsylvania. A friend of mine he was playing a band there and he took me there. Columbus Band they used to call it. I don’t know what happened over there that they start to fight. Me and my friend we get out and I don’t go back no more. I [unclear 00:28:07] scared to forget it.

**Paul:** Do you remember any of the names of the music songs that you played in Italy?

**August:** No, I don’t remember. We used to play marching, that’s all.

**Paul:** When you were growing up in Italy, what did you know about America? Before you got here what did you know about this country?

**August:** In the town they used to say the American they all rich. They didn’t realize how hard you’ve got to work over here too. I thought when I come over here I say I was rich. I’d be a rich man too, but that never happened.

**Paul:** Had your father ever been to America?

**August:** No. I only have one uncle in this country, my father’s brother. That’s the one in Philipsburg. He sent me the money and the paper to come over here.

**Paul:** Tell me about why you wanted to come to America.

**August:** Everybody wants to come over here over there.

**Paul:** Why? Is it the money? What was it that…?

**August:** The money, everything but mostly is the money. I want to tell you one thing what my mother said. My mother said, “The American they only got the money good, nothing else.” I was offended with my mother but I excuse her because she didn’t know any better.

**Paul:** How did your parents feel about you going to America?

**August:** They’re the one who sent that over here. They’re the one they write to my brother to send me the paper and the money. This what my uncle did over here in Philipsburg.

**Paul:** They wrote to your uncle to send you the…

**August:** Yes.

**Paul:** What did you have to do to get ready to leave Italy?

**August:** We were to go to the American Consul. The first time I was supposed to come over here they won’t let me come in. I was young. The second year I went over with a friend of mine that he know the American Consul. I didn’t have no problem at all. I got the passport then I went to the agency to get the ticket for the boat.

**Paul:** Did you have to undergo any kind of medical?

**August:** No. The medical is only here Ellis Island.

**Paul:** Was here in America but not in Italy? You didn’t have to do that.

**August:** No.

**Paul:** Where did you go to go to the American consulate? Was there one in town?

**August:** No, the city called Turin. It’s about two hours by train.

**Paul:** So you travelled to Turin to get to the consulate.

**August:** Yes.

**Paul:** Had you ever been on a train before?

**August:** No.

**Paul:** Does anything stick out in your mind about that experience being on the train?

**August:** No. I was so happy to come over here that I never think about the train or nothing but what was bad, the boat.

**Paul:** We haven’t gotten you on the boat yet, hang on. Let’s get you on the boat before we talk about it. What did you pack to take with you to come to America?

**August:** I had old second-hand suit on it, an old pair of shoes, pair of stocking, nothing else and a valise.

**Paul:** What was in the valise?

**August:** Nothing. That’s all I’ll tell you.

**Paul:** Was there an object that you took with you as a remembrance of Italy?

**August:** No.

**Paul:** Did anyone give you anything to take?

**August:** Yes, my father then they gave me some towel to bring to some cousin over here in United States.

**Paul:** A towel? Towels.

**August:** Towels.

**Paul:** Was there any kind of a send-off, or a gathering for you before you left?

**August:** No. My father he come to the station to the city where I took the train. I think with another uncle they came. Then I took the train and I went.

**Paul:** Where did you go to get on the ship?

**August:** Genoa.

**Paul:** How long of a ride is it from your town to Genoa?

**August:** If we make that by car when we went over there it’s about four hours.

**Paul:** By car? I’m wondering how long the train ride was from when you left to when you arrived in Genoa.

**August:** I don’t know, four or five cars. It was a small train.

**Paul:** Does anything stick out in your mind about that train ride going to Genoa?

**August:** No.

**Paul:** Are you by yourself?

**August:** No, I had another woman from the town.

**Paul:** From your town another woman’s…

**August:** If it wasn’t for that woman I wouldn’t be here neither because she was supposed to take care of me.

**Paul:** Like a chaperone?

**August:** Yes, until I come over here. And I come over here when they both wanted to come over here. It was in Thursday. We stay three days in a boat for quarantine before they take us to Ellis Island.

Then they took us to Ellis Island in a bus and then from there I went to all the examination and then I went for the train, six o’clock I took the train. I know my uncle was there waiting for me in New York but they missed the ship to go to Ellis Island.

When I was in Ellis Island I saw a place where they send a telegram away. I went over there, in Italian, I went over there to send a telegram and they said, “Address”. I had the address where I was supposed to go.

There was nobody home by my uncle so they bring them to the people next door. The people next door they bring them to my aunt’s father and he wasn’t home. When they come home they see that and they come down in the station and pick me up.

**Paul:** Was the chaperone, the woman with you through that whole experience?

**August:** No.

**Paul:** Where did she go away?

**August:** When she got off the boat, she just got off because her husband was in United States already to pick her up and that’s it.

**Paul:** That was it. When the ship docked you went off to Ellis Island or were in quarantine actually before Ellis Island and she got off the ship and went home.

**August:** Yes.

**Paul:** What was the name of the ship?

**August:** [unclear 00:35:41].

**Paul:** What do you remember about seeing the ship for the first time?

**August:** For me it was normal. I was shipping but in the ship we used to eat in the floor. Did I tell you that before?

**Paul:** No, tell me about it now.

**August:** We used to eat on the floor and they [unclear 00:36:05] being sixth together. They give you a sac with one dish, one fork, one knife, one spoon and one bottle of wine, empty though. Nobody liked the food over there.

**Paul:** On the ship?

**August:** On the ship, nobody. At night we used to go down below to sleep. Was one bath there and one bathing tub. Then the ship when it left Genoa, it stopped in Naples. When all the Naples people come in there they stole everything we have. Like we had the table set already downstairs with breakfast, they stole everything. That’s why we used to stay upstairs, right there in the front of the ship. We used to sit there.

**Paul:** What else do you remember about being on this ship?

**August:** Nothing else.

**Paul:** What did you do all day?

**August:** Nothing. We didn’t get a place to sit. We used to sit in the floor until one day the ship is start to move like that, up and down with big waves just before we got into New York, a night before. They all send us down the stairs and I fall asleep, good thing I fall asleep. Until the next day we get up in the morning, the ocean was calm like… beautiful. Then we come to New York.

**Paul:** How long did the ship take to get to New York?

**August:** We sailed in 6th of May we got in New York the 18th of May.

**Paul:** Is there anything else that you remember about being on the ship or anything that you might have seen that you had never seen before when you were on the ship?

**August:** We passed the [unclear 00:38:10] .That a miracle I saw. It was used to see like a small island. I don’t know what else.

**Paul:** Did you see any animals from the deck of the ship?

**August:** Yes, we used to see those dolphins go in and out in the boat. They used to follow the boat. But when we went to… oh no this one we went to Italy after, when we stop in Spain.

**Paul:** The ship came in and stopped…

**August:** Yes.

**Paul:** Can you describe what that was like?

**August:** Everybody used to [unclear 00:38:59] but I don’t know what it was until I come over here. I know the French they donate that, I think, to America, the Statue of Liberty.

We passed the Statue of Liberty then the boat stopped there after that. Then the [unclear 00:39:23] come in on the boat and they check on the passport, everything that was alright, then we went to New York.

**Paul:** Why was the ship quarantined for three days before you were let out?

**August:** Because they don’t want people that come over here with disease. Every day we used to take a shower. They was afraid that time, especially Naples, the people they was not clean at all. You can see with this thing they got in their hair. I don’t know what they call.

**Paul:** Lice.

**August:** Lice, yes. We used to see that.

**Paul:** What happened during those three days? You said you had to take a shower. Was there anything else that you had to do?

**August:** No. After we was in New York we didn’t take no more shower.

**Paul:** When the ship was quarantined for those three days before you were brought to Ellis Island, had the ship docked already or were you just anchored in the harbor?

**August:** The ship was docked already.

**Paul:** The ship had docked but no one was let off. You had to stay there.

**August:** We had to stay there. We used to watch outside they was playing baseball. I used to say, “Look the stupid [unclear 00:40:41]. They hit the ball with a stick.” I didn’t know it was baseball. Then there was a train going right there. Now it’s not there, there’s no more train over there at all.

**Paul:** Tell me about how they took you to Ellis Island when you were finally released from the quarantine.

**August:** As I told you before, they put me in a boat, all the people, then they went over there. They went to Ellis Island.

**Paul:** Were they all Italians on this ship?

**August:** Yes, they was all Italian.

**Paul:** But some were from the north and some were from the south?

**August:** Yes. But there was boy was a brother and sister. They was Italian. The sister she talk Italian but the boy didn’t talk Italian. They have a different dialect altogether than us where they used to live. He couldn’t talk Italian. That boy they send him back. They didn’t let him come in over here. I don’t know if it because he didn’t know the language or… I don’t think it’s that. He may have something wrong. They send them back to Italy, to where they come from right in the Alps.

**Paul:** From the north?

**August:** Yes.

**Paul:** Tell me what happened when the boat stopped at Ellis Island. What happened? Go through the process for me.

**August:** Like I said before, you go in like going in the church, benches, benches like this. It was all different kinds of benches. Every bench was the destination where you’re supposed to go. Some they used to go to California, and different state here. They make examination. After that they send me downstairs.

**Paul:** When they examined you what did they look at?

**August:** Everything they went through, from head to foot. They check everything, my heart, my lung, everything.

**Paul:** Did you have to take your clothes off or could you leave your clothes on?

**August:** Only the top.

**Paul:** The shirt.

**August:** Yes. Then after that they send us downstairs then afterwards you wait downstairs for the train. Downstairs they were selling… I can’t remember what they were selling. I know I bought cigarette…. Oh! Ice cream. In Italy I never have ice cream so they used to give you big thing with ice cream, I used to give them money, a dollar maybe, or five.

I don’t know how much I used to give them, and they used to give me a lot of money back. I said, “Jesus!” I used to put in my pocket and I was happy because when I left Italy I told you I had $20 in my pocket. When I went home I still have some money left.

**Paul:** Did you have to show money at Ellis Island?

**August:** No.

**Paul:** At Ellis Island you bought cigarettes and ice cream. Was that at Ellis Island that you bought the ice cream and the cigarettes?

**August:** Yes.

**Paul:** Did you eat anything else while you were there?

**August:** No.

**Paul:** How did they get you to the train station?

**August:** The train down below. We went down and there was a train there ready to leave. I can’t remember if it was the Central or Lehigh Valley train. I know they let me off in Philipsburg. They put a ticket over here.

**Paul:** On your clothes?

**August:** On my clothes, to let me off in Philipsburg. When I got off at Philipsburg was grandfather and cousin, they picked me up and they took me home. When they took me home they gave me something to eat. That time is the first time I eat white bread with no wood in it.

**Paul:** White bread with no wood in it.

**August:** Yes.

**Paul:** How long was it before you got a job?

**August:** I start to learn a week. I stay one more week and by the way they teach me how to weave.

**Paul:** What did you do during that one week that when you didn’t have a job?

**August:** I was lost. I would stay home, that’s all. I was playing music. My aunt have thrown their other crank at like this and was put a disc on it and I used to play that.

**Paul:** Did you want to go to work?

**August:** Sure. But when I went to work in the beginning, first week I make $6 then after that I used to make one week maybe 22, next week 29, something like that.

**Paul:** So the first week you made $16?

**August:** Six. After that I met a fella, he come from Poland. He didn’t speak English, I couldn’t speak English but he was working in a place where they make lot of money. He told me… at six o’clock at night he come over to me and he grabbed me and he took me down where he was working. He introduced me to the foreman. He was very nice though, he give me a job right away. There is when I start to make money. At that time I used to make $120 a week.

**Paul:** Is this a weaving kind of job?

**August:** Yes, weaving.

**Paul:** Can you explain for me the first job what you actually had to do when you say weave, what do you mean? What did you actually do?

**August:** That what I told you, I learn how to weave. After that, they give me one loom to run. I was running it. Then after that they give me two.

**Paul:** In this part of Pennsylvania they’re doing the same kind of textile work that they did in Italy?

**August:** Same thing.

**Paul:** What kind of cloth are you making?

**August:** Cloth that you make in suit, like pant suit. No shirt.

**Paul:** The heavy weight fabric?

**August:** Yes.

**Paul:** Who taught you how to run the loom?

**August:** My aunt, my uncle’s wife.

**Paul:** Did she work?

**August:** She worked there.

**Paul:** She worked there too.

**August:** Yes.

**Paul:** Tell me how you went about learning English.

**August:** In Philipsburg that time nobody talk English.

**Paul:** Were they all Italians?

**August:** Lot of Italians there present all from the north.

**Paul:** What were the other nationalities there?

**August:** Irish, some Polish but very few, but lots of Irish and they used to belong to Ku Klux Klan too. But there was one family, they have five children. Her name was Mrs Lowe. With the five children and Mrs Lowe they used to teach me. Every night after work I used to go down there and teach me until I start to learn little by little.

**Paul:** Was she an Irish woman?

**August:** Yes.

**Paul:** Do you remember some of your first words that you learned in English?

**August:** ‘Yes’ and ‘No’. I know a hit a guy one time over there. This Irish guy used to insult me all the time. I hit him, knocked him down the street and I was kicking him and they not allowed to kick him down in the street but after they didn’t insult me no more.

**Paul:** How did he insult you?

**August:** Guinea, wop, that’s it.

**Paul:** He was making fun of you because you were an immigrant?

**August:** That’s right, yes.

**Paul:** Did that kind of thing happen a lot back then?

**August:** After that, everything was alright. Those Irish people… we had a club in Philipsburg, Italian-American pleasure club. All those Irish they liked the Italian. They would come over there and be a member and we accept them and they turn out to be nice.

But before that, one time we was coming down in a street and there was this bunch Irish in the corner. They insult us, but I had this big guy that just come over from Italy. They went over there they beat him up. That’s why they let us alone after that.

**Paul:** The Italian guy beat up the Irish guys.

**August:** Yes.

**Paul:** Were the Irish… I’m just curious. Did they insult any of the other groups? Nothing at all with the Polish?

**August:** No. I don’t think so.

**Paul:** It was just the Italians?

**August:** Yes.

**Paul:** How did the Italians feel about the Irish?

**August:** At that time they didn’t like it. Then we all got together then it was alright after a couple of years that I was there.

**Paul:** I’m just wondering if the Italians beat up the Irish as much as the Irish beat up the Italians here. It was all mutual.

**August:** No.

**Paul:** Where were you living all this time in Philipsburg? Were you living with your uncle and aunt?

**August:** Yes, my uncle and my aunt.

**Paul:** Can you describe where you slept in their house?

**August:** There were beds like you do over here.

**Paul:** Did you have your own room?

**August:** My own room. They have a house with three room downstairs, three room upstairs.

**Paul:** The money that you made, were you responsible for paying them a certain amount?

**August:** Yes. I used to send $50 a month to Italy too as I start to make lot of money.

**Paul:** How much did you have to pay your uncle and aunt?

**August:** $6 a week.

**Paul:** $6 a week and you’re sending $50 to Italy?

**August:** Yes.

**Paul:** That doesn’t leave you awful a lot.

**August:** I still have money.

**Paul:** What would you spend your money on? Other than cigarettes probably.

**August:** Cigarette was nothing, too worthless. I don’t even remember. Oh, suit. My office used to go where they sell cheap stuff. Cheap is cheap. I used a pair of pants every week in Philipsburg. Every week I used to buy a pair of pants.

**Paul:** Because they were so cheap they just [unclear 00:52:06]?

**August:** Yes, but then when I start to grow up then I was alright. I was well dressed up.

**Paul:** Talk to me a little bit about this Italian club that you brought up.

**August:** Was beautiful over there, beautiful, nice people. Outside were two alley where we used to play bocce. You know what bocce are?

**Paul:** Bocce ball?

**August:** We used to play that inside where the pool table where everybody used to beat me. We played that for a drink, nothing else. New Year’s Eve we had a party upstairs that you won’t believe it. We had table all around, all the food was free and my wife she come over there. She can tell you she used to enjoy it there too.

**Paul:** When you were first in Philipsburg, was the club important to your life when you first got there? Or did it come later on?

**August:** Not right away but after I start to meet people and my uncle used to take me up in the club then I joined the club. After that was alright. It was beautiful.

**Paul:** Was the club an important… were women a member of the club also?

**August:** No. It was only men.

**Paul:** Were there events that women could come to?

**August:** Woman they used to come in, yes. We had a bar downstairs and the woman they used to come in as patrons of the night. Before I used to go home I used to go up and grab for a glass of beer and there I used to meet the same people, good friend of mine. We just had a cup of beer then we used to go home.

**Paul:** How did you feel… when you were in America, did you miss Italy?

**August:** No. I never miss Italy.

**Paul:** Were you in communication with your mother and father?

**August:** Yes, I used to write all the time. My mother used to write to me. She used to say all the time, “Come back, we want to see you once more.” Finally we decide me and my wife to go in 1949, to go back. We was there for four months.

**Paul:** What did Italy look like to you after having been in America all that time? How did you feel being there?

**August:** They had little improvement but not much difference.

**Paul:** What year did you meet your wife?

**August:** She was eight years old and she was terrible too. I remember one time it was Christmas, we went to… her father, mother they took us, me and my uncle, my aunt, they took us to a restaurant in Union City and they had music and she wanted dance. Her mother said, “You don’t know how to dance” so she still insists. Her mother she got up and she was dancing I remember like this.

**Paul:** Running all around…

**August:** Yes. I always remember that.

**Paul:** What year did you get married?

**August:** 1943.

**Paul:** Say your wife’s name for us on tape.

**August:** Elsie Lombardi

**Paul:** Elsie Lombardi, L-O-M-B-A-R-D-I. You were married in 1943, did you have children?

**August:** A son.

**Mrs. Mercandino:** Yes, in 1945.

**Paul:** What was his name?

**August:** Armon, Armano.

**Paul:** You went back to Italy with your wife for one of those trips?

**August:** Yes, and my son too but my son was only four years old.

**Paul:** Were your parents still living then?

**August:** Yes, that’s why we went over there because of them.

**Paul:** What did they think of your wife and child?

**August:** My wife I have to tell you she treat my mother like her mother, maybe better. But only one thing I don’t have this as a little boy I used to buy him toys, I used to buy ice cream over there and my mother she tell me, “He don’t have to have all that”. I told my mother, “He’s going to have what I didn’t have”, because they never give him nothing.

They don’t go by birthday, they go by Saint. My Saint they never gave me nothing. When we went back to Italy, my cousin, he was a florist. He come down of a ladder all full of fresh figs and all in between was all flowers. It was beautiful you won’t believe it. My people there never gave me this much.

**Paul:** Did you become a citizen?

**August:** Yes.

**Paul:** What year?

**August:** Long time ago. I know it was in February but was long time ago. I can’t remember the year.

**Paul:** How did it feel when you became a citizen?

**August:** We went over there in Belvidere, New Jersey, the capital of Warren County. As witness I have the mayor of the town and there’s Mrs Lowe. When I went over there the man raised his head and he say… the mayor and Mrs Lowe he know who they was. He say, “I don’t have to ask you no question.” This was a war time, war against United States. He say, “I don’t have to worry because I know he’s alright”, and he give me the paper.

**Paul:** Do you think of yourself as being Italian, or American, or Italian- American? How do you think of yourself?

**August:** I think to be an American. I’m an American, I think of be an American. I don’t even think about Italy no more, never.

**Paul:** That’s a good place for us to end. Mr. Mercandino I want to thank you very much for letting me ask you these questions. This is Paul Seacrest, signing off with August Mercandino and Mrs. Mercandino on Friday, September 29th 1995, in Toms River. Thank you very much sir.

**August:** You’re welcome.