**Janet:** This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm here today in Wakefield, Massachusetts. It's December 4th, 1994. I'm here with Mr. and Mrs. Peter Monterisi.

Mr. Monterisi came from Italy in 1920 when he was 8 years old. Today at the time of the interview you're 82.

**Peter:**  Yeah.

**Janet:** Well, I'm very happy to be here. I'm looking forward to anything you can remember related to what we talked. I’ll ask some questions and anything you can think of and if you don’t remember something, it’s fine. Okay I'll start at the beginning if you give your birthdate.

**Peter:**  March 12th, 1912.

**Janet:** And where in Italy were you born?

**Peter:**  Bari B-A-R-I, it's at the seaport.

**Janet:** Well and did you live in Bari the whole time until you left for the United States?

**Peter:**  Well Bari and maybe a small town where my mother came from.

**Janet:** Where is that?

**Peter:**  Telidgi, they called it.

**Janet:** Oh boy, were could you possibly spell it?

**Peter:**  Oh yeah. T- E- L- I- D- G- I. Telidgi. That’s it.

**Janet:** And so you were back and forth between Bari and Telidgi?

**Peter:**  Right because my father was in the First World War and I remember that.

**Janet:** Oh you do?

**Peter:**  I went to school there. To the second Reich.

**Janet:** I see so when your father went off to the First World War, then your mother and the children went to Telidgi?

**Peter:**  No, she came from there. We stayed with his folks in Bari. A la Verna.

**Janet:** Oh, I see.

**Peter:**  We didn't have our own home there while we were there. Going back and forth we stayed in his house.

**Janet:** So you moved in with your father's Mother....

**Peter:**  Right, right, right.

**Janet:** Okay what were their names, your grandparents?

**Peter:**  Monterisi, right?

**Janet:** Do you remember them, do you remember?

**Peter:**  I remember what they walked with them. My grandfather used to take me for a walk when I was I was 4 years old, 5 years old.

**Janet:** Do you remember where you went?

**Peter:**  In the town itself, yeah.

**Janet:** What kind of a man was he? You better stay on your toes. I remember going to school. I was in the second grade. They give you verbs for homework. You stand up, all men teachers over there. I never saw a woman teacher. I stand up to say a verb. I stutter, I didn't know a certain line, bang right in the kisser. Do you think you think I'd go home and tell my mother and father what he did to me? Never, just keep quiet and take it.

**Janet:** What would happen if you'd....?

**Peter:**  I would have gotten more. It's not like over here they want it slow. Now that’s one incident I'll never forget. Oh my face was... [Laughter]

**Janet:** Well, go ahead. What did you do?

**Peter:**  Nothing. I just took it.

**Janet:** What did you do to get it?

**Peter:**  I didn't know my lesson there when he told me say a certain verb and I went to recited it, I didn't know it. Then when I came over here right In South Boston that's where with my uncle live. We lived with him for a while and I went to school there. Second grade.

**Janet:** How was the school different? Here than it was there?

**Peter:**  Do you even want to know the truth?

**Janet:** Yeah

**Peter:**  Oh I didn't know how to speak English but they didn't teach me a thing until I came to the seventh grade. That’s how far advanced I was, alright. They put me and my brother, second grade. He got a double promotion, second to the forth. I went to a second, third, fourth fifth all the way up. Because I knew addition, subtraction as good as the teacher but I couldn't speak English and I had to take my family [0:04:34.4][ inaudible] without reading books then I was alright.

**Janet:** How was the school different?

**Peter:**  It was good the schools over here. I didn't I didn't mind in those days. It's not like today, never had any problems. Children used to, naturally we were poor, didn't have nothing. They used to make two or three cents and a carton of milk every day, every siesta time? I never any money for that, the teacher was buying it for me.

**Janet:** Were there a lot of other children who didn't speak English?

**Peter:**  No, I was the only one in school like that. I was in south Boston that was all Irish people but I got along.

**Janet:** Tell me your mother's name?

**Peter:**  Magdalena.

**Janet**: And her maiden name?

**Peter:**  Maiden name was Mucibelo. M-U-C-I- B-E-L-O. Mucibelo.

**Janet:** And your brother and sister’s?

**Peter:**  My older brother Frank, he's gone and Mina my younger sister, Guillemina her name was. We used to call her Mina and she died young. She was only nine years old when she died.

**Janet:** So when you came over you were eight and how old was Frank?

**Peter:**  Ten.

**Janet:** And Mina?

**Peter:**  She must have been six or seven or something like that.

**Janet:** So tell me anything you can remember about your father going off into World War One or anything about World War One?

**Peter:**  Sure. They used to bomb Bari. You know what I mean, like they did in London? We used to run down our cellars.

**Janet:** Do you remember bomb across....?

**Peter:**  1918, I was only six then. That’s when the war was over. I just remember me and my buddy. My mother was taking me to see a friend we were out in the street and you must know what a flood is. Flood came we were just about to go over this bridge. Bridge was vault and we turn over and went back. It wasn't that easy.

**Janet:** Did your father come back?

**Peter:**  After the war was over, yeah. Naturally they must had like you wait for your turn when you want to come to this country and you put in for it. So in 1918 to 1920, that was two years.

**Janet:** When he came out from the First World War, how long was it before he came to the United States?

**Peter:**  Two years. 1918 the First World War was over, 1920 he came over.

**Janet:** Oh I see, he came with you? He didn't come first?

**Peter:**  That's right. He came with us. No he took us all. The whole family came and my mother was pregnant with the oldest girl now. She wasn't revered. She’s still around. She's a great grandmother.

**Janet:** So do you remember preparing to come to the United States?

**Peter:**  We had to go to Naples to get the boat, right? Pompeii is right near Naples. What I remember is I had my first communion in Pompeii. Now, you must know about [unclear 00:08:13] right there. You wouldn't believe if I told you but next time I went to communion, you know how old I was? I was about 22, 23, I was only 10. My mother used to live in church. But I'm catholic but I’m a better catholic, I think I go to church every Sunday if you'd believe me, but I don't.

**Janet:** Do you remember any religious celebrations when you were still Italy?

**Peter:**  Yeah, they used to have a big parade every year. I forget what they call it but oh, these things, they used no horses carrying them down. The men carrying them....

**Janet:** You mean like the pictures of the saints?

**Peter:**  Yeah everything, saints statues everything. They used to do that. But there never any horses carried, the men and then you push them, about 10, 20 men going down the street.

**Janet:** And then what would happen?

**PETER:**  Nothing we just looked waited till it's over like you see in parades here.

**Janet:** Like a parade?

**Peter:**  Yes, just like a parade.

**Janet:** What did people do for fun? What did the men do? What did the women do? What did the children do?

**Peter:**  Movie. That’s about it.

**Janet:** What?

**Peter:**  Go to a movie. Oh sure we had movie houses there in Bari, plenty of them. Oh yeah. We were at the movie.

**Janet:** Let's see.

**Peter:**  I remember going to school. Your father was in the service, right? They would give you a bun like at recess about this big. I did not like that because someone looking at you eating they couldn't get one. You get my point now? That, I never liked that, that war they had, nothing to do about it.

Go to school once a day not here twice, eight in the morning to one. Now that's a long session. A half hour, about 11- 11:30 we used to go to recess , that’s when we'd get the bun, go home at 1 and have our big meal at two o’clock. Every day, never 12 [inaudible 00:10:37:09] that’s the rule of the house.

**Janet:** Can you describe like a typical day? In other words would you get up real early?

**Peter:**  Yeah, I had to go to school.

**Janet:** Did you have chores?

**Peter:**  No, I was too young then?

**Janet:** So you would get up around 7 or something, go to school?

**Peter:**  Yeah, then we'd always have homework to do in the second grade. Homework believe me.

**Janet:** Where would you do it? Would you do it at home?

**Peter:**  At home. All the time.

**Janet:** Was your brother and sister? Was that what you were doing in there?

**Peter:**  Just my brother. He was older than me. My sister wasn't going anyway. I never went to a first grade or a kindergarten in my life because I had two aunts that were school teachers over there. They taught me at home. I never went to a first grade, believe it or not. Second grade I started.

**Janet:** So what were your aunts like?

**Peter:**  Well very good, I got along so well with them, everybody.

**Janet:** What do you remember about them? Do you remember them?

**Peter:**  They're all go now. That’s what we went to Italy and I wouldn't go there on account of I wouldn't know anybody there now. Figure it out.

**Janet:** You could see your old..?

**Peter:**  Yeah, probably the house. It probably be standing but what I'm I going to see. The reason I wouldn't go, I got a younger that went there where he says to me Peter, don't go there. Everybody wants to be your relative over there. Get out of there. He says, “How many over there is like Jones over here. Forget it.” She wanted to go but I wasn't going to go. They had a nice time though. I went. I went up the Adriatic and come down the Mediterranean and looked for all the big cities around.

**Janet:** So are there anything’s about your aunts that you remember?? Any experience?

**Peter:**  Well, I’ll tell you. They were high school teachers. None of them ever got married while I was there, I don't know what happened after I left, I was young.

**Janet:** What was their personalities then?

**Peter:**  Oh they were good but my grandmother ruled the roost. Nobody could say anything. Never talk back or oh were they strict.

**Janet:** Your grandmother was your mother's mother and...?

**Peter:**  No, my father's mother. That's right. My other grandfather on my mother's side was back in Forth over here.

**Janet:** Really?

**Peter:**  Yeah, he was here when I was living here. I went back. He’d done about two or three times.

**Janet:** And what was he doing when he was here?

**Peter:**  Going to work and just stay for a while because he had my mother and my uncle, two children living here.

**Janet:** Oh I see.

**Peter:**  He come down to see him.

**Janet:** What did your father do when he wasn't in the army?

**Peter:**  Well, he worked like a sales man in a store. Then he learned how to play the clarinet and he was very good at it. When we came here after from south Boston and went to east Boston.

He was in a marine band, they call it. First clarinet. He used to give lessons. He was a very good player, clarinet player. Tried to teach me, says no, I couldn't never teach you somebody else that tried to teach me had his own complete [laughter], he was stationed and getting paid and he was paying for me. I said no it's not for me.

**Janet:** Why would he think he couldn't teach you?

**Peter:**  If I had a son, I wouldn't listen. Then he said maybe a stranger he played it I’ll pick it up. I never picked it up. I'm the only one he tried that with. I had an older brother. No.

**Janet:** Do you play any other instrument?

**Peter:**  No. just the clarinet.

**Janet:** No but I mean you?

**Peter:**  Me, never, never, nothing. No I didn't have an ear for music.

**Janet:** How about music when you were over in Italy. Do you remember any times when music was played or..?

**Peter:**  No, not that much.

**Janet:** Your father was playing?

**Peter:**  No, he wasn't playing that much because he was in the service, he had to work when he come home. That’s it.

**Janet:** Did your mother work ever?

**Peter:**  Yes, when she came here. She worked in [unclear 00:15:03] when they had to have shoe factories, we lived in Quincy, take the train up [unclear 00:15:07] and the train home. That was rough.

**Janet:** In Italy she wasn't working?

**Peter:**  No never. Never.

**Janet:** When you think back on those first eight years, what are the things you remember about the towns or about the people or...?

**Peter:**  I very seldom saw any snow there. Not where we lived. Rain yeah, no matter the rain it was never cold like up here.

**Janet:** Do you remember games you played?

**PETER:**  Yeah. Twenty one they've got here, seven and a half, the whole fairy, with pennies. If I made a dime that was half a lira, like a half a dollar. Oh big deal.

**Janet:** Now where would you do that?

**Peter:**  In our own home there they'd have it in the evening. There all get together, gather around and play.

**Janet:** How about stories did anybody tell you stories when you were a little boy?

**Peter:**  No. not like over here. No. it's all I hear about these kids. They give them all stories when they grow up for crying aloud they're all murderers and everything else. You see what happens.

**Janet:** Okay. So what else? Do you remember packing up to leave?

**Peter:**  Not me, I didn't do that. I was too young.

**Janet:** Do you remember anything your mother packed, that she brought with her to this country?

**Peter:**  No. I don't remember.

**Janet:** How about leaving? Do you remember saying goodbye to your grandparents?

**Peter:**  Oh yeah. I remember that yes. They all went to the train station.

**Janet:** How did people feel about either leaving or having to leave?

**Peter:**  Oh, you couldn't get a job there or nothing in those days. It was rough. Do you know what we had to do? You wouldn't believe this. Now we liked macaroni right? I had two uncles, they'd have to go down to the harbor there the water, get water from there to cook macaroni because we couldn't get the salt. We needed the salt.

There was already salt water. Imagine living like that. Every time we wanted that, no running water in the house. Right across the street where we lived there was a big fountain. You want water? Everybody goes over there to fill up their thing there and take it up. Now that's no way to live.

**Janet:** How did your mother do the washing?

**Peter:**  By hand that's all. You don't think of washing machine, have the board you know.

**Janet:** How about foods. Do you remember any meals or any particular dishes that you liked when you were little?

**Peter:**  Oh yeah. I still like it today. I'll eat macaroni ten times a week. She eats it more than I do now and she is not Italian.

**Janet:** So macaroni was the big...?

**Peter:**  Oh yes, big thing. Rice they have one they'd have something different everyday though but always when you finished your first meal always something to go after with that if they had it.

**Janet:** You mean like? What do you mean?

**Peter:**  For a second thin meal like maybe you'd have a meal, then you'd have some fish after that you know to eat. [Unclear 00:18:40]. There must have been plenty of homes in there. And all the homes were made of brick. It's not like you see any fires out there like you do over here.

**Janet:** Can you think of anything else about anything that happened in the towns where you were when you were in Italy? Anything else..?

**Peter:**  That's about it but I told you about the flood and the bridge going out and every time they come and bomb during the war. I was only six and I knew nothing.

**Janet:** When you finally left, where did you leave from? You left from Naples?

**Peter:**  From Naples, yeah.

**Janet:** But how did you get to Naples?

**Peter:**  By train.

**Janet:** Was that the first time you entered a train?

**Peter:**  That's right by train. I was never on a train before.

**Janet:** How did you feel? Remember how you felt when you were 8 years old and you were coming to this country?

**Peter:**  I felt alright, I don't know what I was getting into but still...

**Janet:** Had you heard of anything, about United States?

**Peter:**  No, nothing. They send me to the store. I never saw a car in my life. You know horse and carriage that was your cab or anything like. You go with a horse and carriage. I used to hop those thing there to the store so I wouldn't walk. Come back, look at the truffles.

**Janet:** When you were in Naples were you there before you had to board the ship?

**Peter:**  Naturally we stayed there a couple of days before the ship. Like I told you we went to that's like a Naples where I had my first communion. Yeah Pompeii is like that. We visited it. Believe it. I thought it was I saw everything up out of that. I was telling them, “At least they didn’t do a thing to this,” [unclear 00:20:31]. There beautiful, they didn’t touch it.

**Janet:** Was it planned? Did your mother plan to have your first communion?

**Peter:**  Yeah, when you're at that age, you have it. At least where there have it there than over she couldn’t speak English you know we’d have a lot of trouble. She didn't know that there’s Italian priests over here when you go to church. She didn't know anything about that stuff because she lived in church the last six months of her life. Always every morning she'd go to church, we lived right near a church, there this Boston.

**Janet:** So what happened for your first communion, do you remember anything about it?

**Peter:**  Yeah. I did think they let me go say a few Hail Mary's whatever it was and that he told me. That's it. I did twelve years, thirteen years when I, when was it I had done, first communion then you have your confirmation. The one standing up for me for confirmation was younger than me.

**Janet:** Well, you took a while before you had it?

**Peter:**  Oh yeah. The priest said he wanted to know where I’d been.

**Janet:** Okay, so now what was the name of the ship?

**Peter:**  It was called Armando Palajano.

**Janet:** And what was your voyage like?

**Peter:**  We were in out there for quite a while. I don't think we came first class, it was brutal, I'm telling you.

**Janet:** Were you like in a dormitory down there

**Peter:**  Yeah. It wasn't that hard because when we landed.

**Janet:** Do you remember when the ship came into the harbor.

**Peter:**  Yeah. The first thing I saw was the statue of liberty. "We're here"

**Janet:** There were people up on deck?

**Peter:**  Yeah, we were all looking at it. Then we landed and they herded us like cattle right in the pens they had. I call them pens, that's what they were [unclear 00:22:39]. Everybody was treated the same, you couldn't say nothing.

**Janet:** Anything else about Ellis Island?

**Peter:**  No, that's about all I remember. I was glad to get away from there. We were waiting for my uncle to show up. He lived in south Boston. South Boston and where we are. It’s not that far.

**Janet:** So how long did you have to stay there?

**Peter:**  I don't know. I don't remember. Most about 3 or 4 days, that's it. 4, 3 day, first chance we had we left New York.

**Janet:** What do you remember about the meals there?

**Peter:**  Where?

**Janet:** In Ellis Island.

**Peter:**  I don't remember. I was young. I don't even know what kind of a meal we got.

**Janet:** Do you remember where you slept?

**Peter:**  Cot I guess, I don't know. I wanted to get that out of my mind.

**Janet:** Was it crowded?

**Peter:**  Yes. Oh it was really crowded, everybody waiting for somebody to come and pick them up.

**Janet:** Finally did you meet up with your uncle?

**Peter:**  Oh yeah.

**Janet:** At Ellis Island?

**Peter:**  No, we saw him out. He came on a boat, that's all. But when we left there we knew he gave the address for he was in south Boston. We came to south station in Boston here. Get in a taxi, he’s got no American money, he’s got Italian money. We went down, he didn't know how much to pay, he couldn't speak English. He wouldn't take it. I don't know what happened after that but everything was alright. We didn't live far from south station though. It took me about 3, 4 minutes with a car. That’s how fast. South Boston.

**Janet:** Did your uncle? He actually came to Ellis Island to pick you up?

**Peter:**  He didn't pick me up. No if he was with us, he'd know about the American money.

**Janet:** So you must have left Ellis Island and come to south Boston by train? You think?

**Peter:**  That's right. Yes it was by train. We got off the train.

**Janet:** I see. You went then to your uncle's address.

**Peter:**  That's right, that's right. That was it.

**Janet:** What was your uncle's name?

**Peter:**  My uncle's name? You know he died right at the wheel of his truck. What was his name? Frank

**Janet:** His name was Frank?

**Peter:**  Frank Chichiva we used to call him.

**Janet:** He was your father's brother or your mother’s?

**Peter:**  My mother’s. No my father didn't have any brothers there. None of them came. They stayed in Italy.

**Janet:** Do you remember anything about the first few days or weeks when you were in south Boston? Things that were new that you saw or things that struck you as different?

**Peter:**  Yeah. Well the houses were all wood. That’s all I remember and I didn't see anybody living in any brick house where we lived in south Boston on C street right near [unclear 00:25:53]. I remember is going to school. I went to school right away and they put me in second grade. But I couldn't speak a word of English.

**Janet:** Do you know what helped you to learn it?

**Peter:**  Well, all the times they teach you the alphabet. I knew the alphabet, I knew all that stuff but I to speak? I'd hang on with the children. You pick it up fast that way.

**Janet:** Was this a big Italian neighborhood or was it all...?

**Peter:**  No, no we were the only Italians on that neighborhood believe it or not. No, I didn't Italians, maybe one or two families but mostly it was an Irish town- stills an Irish town, south Boston. But I got along

**Janet:** How did your mother and father like being here?

**Peter:**  Oh, they liked it alright. We got along.

**Janet:** Did they want to go back?

**Peter:**  Oh no. never. No.

**Janet:** Can you think of any customs that either your mother or father tried to hang onto that were Italian in this country? Were there certain ways?

**Peter:**  Well you’re not supposed to talk back to your parents which I see everybody does it today.

**Janet:** Was it their idea that you should become American, that you should become Americanized?

**Peter:**  No, if tell you something, you won't believe it. See my father died young, he was only 43. He didn't even have a chance to take out the citizen papers. Now I’m going up there, I’m not a citizen either. Come before the Second World War, couple of years before, what year? I got my picture there with the thing there. Know you want to talk.

Mussolini sends me a letter to join the army over there. I’m not kidding you. I'm over here. I think I was 28 years old. I said, “What is he, crazy? I went up there…. I get my citizenship. I was a citizen, alright, that's okay. Come the war, naturally they put me there. They were now doing a year if you're under 28 in the service before the war breaks out.

I was over 28, going over 29, the whole year for me so they let me go. Then the war broke out. They got me to go to. They got me, I went in, done everything, went to camp Devens right away, boom back to east Boston. What’s the matter? I’m a citizen, back to East Boston, had to show him, alright back to camp Devens. This is what goes on in the army. Turn around. They want to make sure I don't go to Italy.

I wind up in the Philippines. I’m going to the Philippines. In the Guadalcanal, that stuff before we get to the Philippines and I spent four years in service. I got hurt, come out, and still got a disability. I've got a 30% disability. I was supposed to have- this leg is shorter than this one.

**Janet:** What did you have to do to get the citizenship at that point?

**Peter:**  Nothing, just like what they do today. You’ve earned, you grow up before them and they ask you questions and okay they get up they give it to you. I get the paper. I did it over over there. Don’t say nothing, go get the citizenship papers, I don't want you to talk, go get it. I’m not even sure. I mean it, go ahead.

**Janet:** How did you feel when you became a citizen?

**Peter:**  Good. No different. I wasn't even thinking about that because I was working all the time. I was...

**Janet:** What were you working at?

**Peter:**  Listen. When I was in south Boston I was sold newspapers in the morning. Two cents apiece they were. It isn’t like today. Just to get a few pennies to go to school. I’d be half asleep in school. This is when I was in seventh grade we had an Italian teacher who wanted to give you a foreign language, Italian didn’t want to give me. I said, ugh. She was mad because I was born in Italy and she wasn’t, Mrs. Bartholomew she was.

I’d get an A in everything I’d done in class, E, the homework. I wouldn't do my homework. I didn't have time. I have to sell papers in the morning and I don't know if you remember the narrow gauge train? You’re going to remember that. In [unclear 00:30:43] in the east Boston.

**Janet:** On the ship?

**Peter:**  No, no the train. In the morning I sold papers, at night trees and ferries to cross the Rosewood, sell the advertising because in the summer time they go to Riviera Beach, all the people there. And then go to school in the day time. But I was like that because I don't like to be broke. I like to have something in my pocket even when I was young and I’ve been like that ever since.

**Janet:** What was your father doing in the meantime?

**Peter:**  He was working. He was working in town, a press man there and a tailor. He was working.

**Janet:** Your mother was working at the....?

**Peter:**  Not then. She worked at first. She wasn't working then, later because she had all the children to take care of. She had four children when we came here.

**Janet:** When did she work?

**Peter:**  Before right after she had the baby here, the first one. She was pregnant, she had to go to work because the two of them, they didn't nothing here, they worked in a shoe shop in [unclear 00: 31:47]. That was a big place for shoe factory they always get a job there.

**Janet:** How did she feel about that?

**Peter:**  She didn't mind it. She never worked in her life but she had to get accustomed to it. She went back and forth.

**Janet:** Was Frank working too?

**Peter:**  My brother? He’s the reason why I had to leave school. He's gone now. My father died, right? And they wanted him to get a job to help out the family. Welfare the way they wanted it, they wanted to go work you had to go to work. He couldn't keep a job. He wouldn't work, so they come after me. I was in my ninth grade then in East Boston. I wanted an education.

**Janet:** You mean he was finished with school?

**Peter:**  No, just grammar school. He did want to go to school or nothing, he was working, he had a few jobs but he couldn't hold one.

**Janet:** Your mother needed to be at home with the children?

**Peter:**  That's right. So they wanted me to get out and go to work. They were after me and instead of going to look for a job I’d go to school. They finally took me out and I went to work after that and I’ve been working ever since.

**Janet:** What did you do at first for work?

**Peter:**  I worked for the Postal Telegraph Commercial Cable Company. They're out of business today. Western Union took it over in Boston. I learned all the bits and parts. [Laughter]

**Janet:** You delivered telegraphs?

**Peter:**  Telegrams.

**Janet:** Telegrams, I mean.

**Peter:**  Postal telegraphs. I don't know if you remember them. They used to be, they're gone now. It’s western union now. They’re gone. I worked there for a while. I enjoyed it. After that over here, what else did I do? Oh yeah, remember the depression when Roosevelt was in, send them boys out for a year, what did they call it? I didn’t go because somebody had to work. Whatever I could get I’d go to work. Turned around and what else did I do? All kinds of work.

**Janet:** Roosevelt was sending...?

**Peter:**  Do it for a year. What do they call that? He used to send the boys that were young a year all over different places to work and get so much to send home. And they wanted to send me like that. I didn't want to go, I go some other job, and I’d do it. Naturally the war broke out, right?

**Janet:** Yeah.

**Peter:**  So they called me, they put me in class 1A because I couldn't do the DEA and they were picking people in. I went along and worked in camp Devens. You know camp Devens over here behind these posts?

**Janet:** No

**Peter:**  They were building that up for the solders. What were they doing? They were going one gate, punch in, and go out the other gate. [Laughter] and getting a week’s pay. They all knew that. They got a bunch of them. I turned around, I says, “let me get the hell out of here." I quit and didn't want to go anymore. But camp Devens is a good distance from me. I had to go by car, I didn't have no car.

This fellow had a car but they wouldn't trust him driving, I’d have to drive them up and down. At that time it would be so far. You would see trailers trolled over on route two on the highways and I was doing that. And I said, "ah the heck with his." I went to work over here, so I met her in a shoe factory.

She worked over here in Wakefield. The reason I went to work, Uncle Sam is looking for boys, and if you're working maybe he wouldn't bother you. Turned around, I got called again, 180 for me and they give me the bomb flush. I've done four years in the service.

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

**Peter:**  Yeah, in the shoe factory.

**Janet:** Do you remember how it happened?

**Peter:**  We were working there, talking.

**Janet:** Did you see each other for a long time before you got married?

**Peter:**  No, I didn't know her from a hole in the wall. I was coming from East Boston back and forth. I friend of mine worked there said, “Come on Pitt, I’ll get you a job in the factory." Actually he got me a job in the shoe factory. I didn't like it but I stayed there till Uncle Sam called me again.

**Janet:** You went together six months?

**Peter:**  Yeah.

**Janet:** Say your wife's name for the tape.

**Peter:**  My wife's name, Elizabeth Cheatham, her maiden name was.

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

**Peter:**  Cheatham, C-H-E-A-T-H-A-M just like I said.

**Janet:** Did you have children?

**Peter:**  Did I? There’s my two grandchildren. One of them the last year in college he'll be all done. The other one is all through college. My daughter, the one that's a little advanced, she's the one that put them through because her husband died. He was a state trooper. He was a sergeant and a state trooper. He was going to be a lieutenant. He took the exam and everything else. He had a heart attack.

**Janet:** What are your children's names?

**Peter:**  Which one?

**Janet:** Either one. Both of them.

**Peter:**  The one here is Lila after her father and the other one she's in Baltimore, she's teaching college, English, advanced English and my son-in-law is professor of economics on the John Hopkins University. They’re both well off. Better off than I ever thought I’d be.

**Janet:** Never one's to pick up the duty.

**Peter:**  That's right. The one from Baltimore picked it out. She wants me to take her down here to see the place. I don't know what for. What’s there to see down there now, I know it's different. Maybe I’ll take a trip on of these days. ...

**Janet:** Let's see. You worked in the shoe factory six months and then what did you do?

**Peter:**  Then I got called.

**Janet:** Then you went in the service for how long?

**Peter:**  Four years. About two weeks less than four years. But I get out on disability but they weren't letting me out. They wouldn't let me work for six months when I got out. I had to sign the slip. If something happened, they'd get after me. See they fix up my leg and then they were going to close camp Devens or something, I don't know what happened at the hospital. But he says, look, they won't let me out. He says, “You're going to go to Florida, they're going to break your leg and reset it.” I said, “No you don't. It feels good, leave it alone.” “Okay on condition, we’ll let you out. You don't work for six months." And I had to sign a slip of paper, I won't work for six months and they gave me a disability when I got out.

**Janet:** How did you feel serving in the armed forces?

**Peter:**  Like anybody else. What are you going to do? I'm not the only one. We’re all on the same boat. There was the soldier wound up in Kauai, from there Tulagi, Emmaus all islands. Then new guinea, from there to the Philippines, that's it.

**Janet:** After that did you work at all? After the service?

**Peter:**  When I got home? Yeah. I waited six months and I went to work right away. I worked in the post office almost 30 years. I'm retired. I'm retired 22 years from the postal office. Let Uncle Sam pay me.

**Janet:** I see.

**Peter:**  See, it's not good right now the post office now. They haven't got the retirement like we had. They pay social security, they're all mad.

**Janet:** Is there anything you can think of that the fact that you came here from another country when you were 8 years old, do you think that influenced your life in some way? Can you say how it made you...?

**Peter:**  The only thing is I couldn't speak English but I got along with everybody, that's all that counts.

**Janet:** Do you think you hold on to any Italian kinds of customs or ways yourself?

**Peter:**  Well, I mean, I do yes but what can you do? It's different in this country.

**Janet:** Could you say what they are?

**Peter:**  When I see some of these people the way they act, some of these children. Some of them I see doping and stuff like that. I never even heard of that stuff growing up. I smoked for 40 years, the joke going around saying go see a doctor and get rid of the issue. Pay so much and this. I stopped like this. Cold turkey. Without doing anything, she'll tell you.

I never gained any weight and I never done anything and I haven't smoked since. Now I smoked for 40 years and I haven't touched a cigarette for 22 years now. 23 years we live with this. Now I used to smoke everything. I even smoked stogies, cigars, everything. I don't touch them no more. And it isn't because I had to quit, there was nothing wrong with chest. The way I see the part about smoking on television I go nuts.

**Janet:** You got will power?

**Peter:**  That's what it is. I keep telling the people that's still smoking. Mind over matter. They won't listen to you. We had one bad fellow and just, he's got something wrong with him too. Quit smoking for two years now, he's back smoking.

**Janet:** What did you say you're most proud of that you've done in your life?

**Peter:**  Quit smoking.

**Janet:** Quit smoking?

**Peter:**  That's right. By my own, didn't pay a nickel. Nobody had to tell me to. That was two months before I quit that, I retired from the post office. I couldn't have a cup of coffee in the morning without a cigarette.

**Janet:** You have grand children?

**Peter:**  There's two of them there.

**Janet:** Two?

**Peter:**  No I’ve got more than two. How many has Tisa? No, just the two and two is four.

**Janet:** So four?

**Peter:**  Yeah, I’ve got four. There they are. The one from Baltimore’s got two. One’s going to school in Rhode Island College. The other one is getting a college education at home now he's going to school now. But I mean he was sick for 4-4years, he had leukemia. Bad.

**Janet:** How is this phase of your life? Your retirement phase?

**Peter:**  I don't mind, I love it. I don't do nothing. Do what I’ve been doing, enjoy myself. I go see the boys, talk. That’s all. We go out and eat a couple times a week. Only her and I have to cook, we go out and eat.

**Janet:** Is there anything else you can think of that you would want to say about coming to this country or anything about this country or in your life that we haven't really covered? Anything more you can thing of?

**Peter:**  Nothing I can think of. That’s about it. I'm 82 years, I’ll be 83 next march it's only a couple of two months away.

**Janet:** How you feel?

**Peter:**  I feel good. I've got a new knee put on. Now this isn't from the service, this knee. I had this done two years ago. Two hernia operations. Good as new.

**Janet:** Okay. We can close here. I want to thank you very much.

**Peter:**  You're welcome.

**Janet:** I’ve been speaking with Peter Monterisi in Wakefield Massachusetts on December 4th, 1994 this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off.