**Elisa:** Good afternoon. This is Elisa Mattson for the National Park Service. Today is September 22nd, 1994, and I'm at Ellis Island with Mr. Benny Panelli who came from Northern Italy in January of 1922 when he was 18 years old. Mr. Panelli, can you tell me the name of the town that you were born in?

**Benny:** Yeah, Monte Lungo.

**Elisa:** Can spell that for me?

**Benny:** Well, I'll give you the picture because the name is there. Monte Lungo. Here's the name in the picture.

**Elisa:** That's probably... Oh okay. M-O-N-T-E L-U-N-G-O. Can you tell me a little bit about that town?

**Benny:** That time, we all farmer.

**Elisa:** What did the farmers grow?

**Benny:** Grow wheat, corn, potatoes, vegetable and all that stuff.

**Elisa:** Now how long did you live in that town?

**Benny:** Since I was born and raised there, till 18 years old.

**Elisa:** Till you were 18 years old?

**Benny:** Yup.

**Elisa:** Can you tell me what your father's name was?

**Benny:** Raymond.

**Elisa:** Raymond Panelli?

**Benny:** Raymond Panelli.

**Elisa:** And what did your father do for a living?

**Benny:** What he done for a living? Farmer like, all farmers.

**Elisa:** He was a farmer? What crops did he farm?

**Benny:** The same thing. Wheat, corn, potatoes, vegetable, all that stuff.

**Elisa:** Can you tell me what your father looked like?

**Benny:** Pardon?

**Elisa:** What did your father look like? Can you describe him for me?

**Benny:** My father looks like? If I had a picture, I would show, but I haven't got it. How can I describe?

**Elisa:** Was he a tall man?

**Benny:** He was a little taller than me, an inch over than me. He had a lot of hair, I haven't got it. He had a lot of hair. He had a little, than this.

**Elisa:** Mustache?

**Benny:**   A mustache. That's right.

**Elisa:** What can you tell me about your father? What was he like? Do you remember a story from your childhood?

**Benny:** Well, I lost my father when I was five years old so I don't remember. I still remember my father but I was five years old when I lost him.

**Elisa:** You were very young. How about your mother? Can you tell me about your mother what she looked like?

**Benny:** My mother was a beautiful woman. My mother was tall, slim, nice shape and I don't know... What can I tell you?

**Elisa:** Is there anything you remember from your childhood, a story that you associate with your mother that you remember from your childhood?

**Benny:** My mother was left with six kids without father, so she had to help in the farm, to work in the farm and try to grow up the family.

**Elisa:** So it was a lot of hard work.

**Benny:** Then the First World War broke out. My older brother had to go in the army, and I was the oldest to take care of the family.

**Elisa:** How many brothers and sisters did you have and what were their names?

**Benny:** My brothers? I had three brothers, three brother and two sisters.

**Elisa:** What are their names, what were their names?

**Benny:** All of them?

**Elisa:** Yes, please, if you know.

**Benny:** I can even spell all of them.

**Elisa:** You can just tell me what their names are, what you can remember.

**Benny:** The first one, John Panelli, one Alfredo Panelli, one Massimo Panelli and my sister was Louis Panelli and one of the sisters was Juditha Panelli.

**Elisa:** What did your house look like?

**Benny:** In Europe?

**Elisa:** Yes, in Italy.

**Benny:** In Italy, we had a very nice, pretty nice home.

**Elisa:** What was it made out of?

**Benny:** Made out of stone.

**Elisa:** It was a stone building?

**Benny:** Stone. Yeah.

**Elisa:** Did you have a garden for your family, do you remember? In your backyard, did you have a garden?

**Benny:** Of course. We had a farm, we had everything. The only thing my mother had to buy, oil, olive oil. That's it. Otherwise we had everything in the house because we had wheat—

**Elisa:** Did you have the animals?

**Benny:** We had flour. From the wheat, you make flour. From the corn, you make flour. Potato you make potatoes. We had sheep, we had cows, and we had... what do you call it?

**Elisa:** Chickens?

**Benny:** One more, Pig. We had pigs. You kill the pigs, when my mother used to, anybody in the house that needs clothes, shoes, we used to raise the calf. We raised them big, nice and then we used to take them in the market and sell it. That's how we make money to buy whatever we need. My mother used to do that.

**Elisa:** So the family was very self-sufficient?

**Benny:** Sheep the same thing. We used to raise the little lamb and then we used to sell her in the market. That's how we lived.

**Elisa:** So everything was taken care of from the farm.

**Benny:** Everything was taken care from the farm.

**Elisa:** Do you remember what your mom used to cook for you for dinner? What would she make for dinner?

**Benny:** We used to eat a lot of polenta, you know polenta?

**Elisa:** Yes, I do.

**Benny:** We used to have a lot of corn and we used to make flour. My mother used to make polenta with gravy. She used to make gravy and then polenta. We had cheese, a lot of cheese, hard cheese because we used to make our own cheese.

**Elisa:** Do you remember how you'd make it?

**Benny:** The cheese?

**Elisa:** Yeah.

**Benny:** Oh, yeah.

**Elisa:** Tell me about how you'd make it. Describe it for me.

**Benny:** Well, you boil the milk and then you've got the [inaudible 00:06:54] what we call it, and you dissolve it, put it in the milk and it cakes up. The milk cakes up and you put them in the form and you squeeze it and squeeze it and squeeze until it don't draw no more juice.

When it's finished making the juice, then you put them in shelves, in a dry room and it dries up there. Then you turn it the other way. Once they're done, you turn it then it dries off there.

**Elisa:** Then it's Parmesan, Romano, that kind of a cheese?

**Benny:** Well, we made only for ourselves. We didn't sell it. We didn't sell it. That was only for our own use in the house. And we used to make cheese that big that in the winter it doesn't come up. We coat it with a lot of cream of the milk and you don't cake up. We used to eat it with the polenta, nice, soft like cream. Who was better than us? [Inaudible 00:08:12].

**Elisa:** Did you have vegetables? Do you remember eating vegetables with your dinner? Did you have any certain ones that were your favorites?

**Benny:** Vegetables we have everything.

**Elisa:** What was your favorite?

**Benny:** Salad.

**Elisa:** What was your favorite thing to eat?

**Benny:** Salad, onion. What do I call it? [Inaudible 00:08:33] I've got to think a little.

**Elisa:** Okay. How about your grandparents? Do you remember your grandparents?

**Benny:** Oh, yeah.

**Elisa:** Tell me about them.

**Benny:** My grandparents...

**Elisa:** Tell me about your grandparents.

**Benny:** My grandparents, they were no farmers.

**Elisa:** They were not farmers?

**Benny:** No.

**Elisa:** What did they do?

**Benny:** Like my mother's mother, they had transport, go in the city, transport stuff wherever, wine or whatever they get to transport it with horses.

**Elisa:** Oh, so they had their own business?

**Benny:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** Do you remember their names? What was your mother's mother's name? First name?

**Benny:** My mother's name, my mother's mother?

**Elisa:** Mm-hmm? Your grandmother. No, that's okay.

**Benny:** Oreoli. I know the second name was Oreoli.

**Elisa:** That's your mother's last name? Okay. Can you spell that?

**Benny:** Huh?

**Elisa:** Can you spell that? Spell the name?

**Benny:** Oreoli? O-R-E-O-L-I. Oreoli.

**Elisa:** What can you tell me about holidays in your house? Do you remember celebrating holidays when you were living in Italy? Tell me.

**Benny:** We had New Year's holiday, the La Madonna, La Madonna delle Grazie.

**Elisa:** And how would you celebrate the holiday?

**Benny:** We celebrate like they do here. You got a feast in the house, outside, we go to church. We used to go to church- What?

**Elisa:** Was there special food that your mother would make for you?

**Benny:** Oh, yeah.

**Elisa:** Do you remember what thing was?

**Benny:** Most of that time that was La Madonna, used to make ravioli, homemade. You know ravioli?

**Elisa:** Yes, I do.

**Benny:** You do? Well we used to make all in the house.

**Elisa:** Do you remember how it was made?

**Benny:** Oh, because we make them home now. I make them home, me and my wife.

**Elisa:** Tell me about that. How do you make it?

**Benny:** Like now, I make everything home.

**Elisa:** You do the cooking?

**Benny:** Of course.

**Elisa:** Tell me how you make it.

**Benny:** I make my own pasta home. We make my own ravioli. I make my own cappelletti.

**Elisa:** Can you tell me how you make it?

**Benny:** Of course, yes. I hit the mic.

**Elisa:** Tell me.

**Benny:** You've got to make your filling. You’ve got to make your pasta. I've got the machine to make pasta.

**Elisa:** Well, what goes in the filling?

**Benny:** Huh?

**Elisa:** What goes in the filling?

**Benny:** In the filling, you want cheese, parsley, a little garlic, and a little spinach.

**Elisa:** So ravioli was one thing that they would make special on the holidays.

**Benny:** There'll be like homemade pasta, noodles.

**Elisa:** What about dessert?

**Benny:** Huh?

**Elisa:** What about desert? How about dessert? Would there be something special for dessert on the holidays?

**Benny:** Dessert? Dessert, we don't cook no cake. We not a bakery in the house. We don't cook that.

**Elisa:** Okay. What can you tell me about church when you were in Italy? Where was the church? Was it far?

**Benny:** In church, in [inaudible 00:12:02] you have to go to church because you know everybody in town, everybody. And you go to church and the boss of the town is the priest. If you don't go to church, yeah, you know how they took... You have to come to church. So you had to go to church. I serve in church too in Italy. I serve the priests in church. Oh, yeah.

**Elisa:** You remember your neighbors who lived around you when you were in Italy?

**Benny:** My neighbor [inaudible 00:12:34] forget them. Don't forget, I'm 74 years old in this country. I'm 90 years old.

**Elisa:** I know. I know.

**Benny:** And you lose a little bit of memory. You're not 20 years old anymore. I'm lucky I've got all my senses. I remember most of everything. I'm lucky about that.

**Elisa:** What the about the war? Do you remember war time in Italy?

**Benny:** It was a bad time.

**Elisa:** What was that like to live there then?

**Benny:** First World War?

**Elisa:** Yes.

**Benny:** Like I told you before, my brother was in the army, and my mother was there with five kids. I was the oldest after my brother, and my mother had to work the farm with me.

**Elisa:** Did the war affect the town? Did they come into your town? Was there any fighting in your town? Was there any air raids, anything?

**Benny:** No.

**Elisa:** No?

**Benny:** No.

**Elisa:** What about school when you were in Italy? Did you go to school while you were in Italy?

**Benny:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** Can you tell me about what it was like to go to school there?

**Benny:** School, yeah. Over there we start from first grade, you go to school for two years the first grade. It's not like here. You go two years, first grade, two years in the second grade, two years in the third grade, finish school.

**Elisa:** Do you remember what you studied?

**Benny:** Up to there, we study only read and write. After 17, 18 years, you have to go, if you have the money, you go to a higher school but you haven’t got the money, you got to graduate to the third class. So it's as far you go. You go to the third class. That's it.

**Elisa:** And then you go out to work.

**Benny:** Then if you have money, you go to a higher grade.

**Elisa:** How about as a child? Do you remember any games you used to play when you were in Italy with other children, any games?

**Benny:** Games?

**Elisa:** Yeah.

**Benny:** Oh yeah. We used to play, you know bocce ball?

**Elisa:** Bocce ball?

**Benny:** That's what we used to play in them times but I used to play [inaudible 00:15:00] It's nice.

**Elisa:** Well, when you decided to come to America, can you tell me about that? Who decided to come to America and why did you come to this country?

**Benny:** I don’t know why. I still think about it today, why did I come here.

**Elisa:** Did you come by yourself or did you come with other family members?

**Benny:** No, I came with somebody much older than me, about 30, 35 years old because my mother said to watch after me.

**Elisa:** Oh, okay. Was it a friend of your mother's or a relative?

**Benny:** Yeah, from the town.

**Elisa:** Somebody from the town.

**Benny:** From the same town.

**Elisa:** Where did you leave? Do you remember what port you left from?

**Benny:** Oh, yeah. Genoa.

**Elisa:** Genoa, and do you remember the name of your ship that you came on?

**Benny:** Yeah. The Taormina.

**Elisa:** You came in 1922, it was January?

**Benny:** Yeah. 1922.

**Elisa:** What did the ship look like? Can you tell me about it?

**Benny:** The ship? Well you got on the ship. You go in line to eat like in the army. You had a tin plate, a tin cup. In the cup, they give you wine. No water or nothing like that. It was wine while you eat and then of course you eat. Then you go, you've got to wash your own plate, your own cup. You've got to put it in your place, where you live, where you sleep.

**Elisa:** Do you remember what that room looks like? How many people stayed there?

**Benny:** Oh, no, no. No room. I came in in the third class. Third class you have no room. You have like one, two, three, everybody [inaudible 00:16:46] down below. You understand? When the ocean is so bad that it goes over the sea, they send you down below and they lock you down there. They used to lock us down there below, and if anything happen then the ship sink, you can't come out. You're dead.

**Elisa:** You're stuck down there. Was the ocean very rough when you came?

**Benny:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** Was it cold?

**Benny:** The Ocean was very rough when I came here.

**Elisa:** Was it cold? Do you remember if it was cold?

**Benny:** Cold in the winter and most of the time I was in the ship hospital. I got very sick.

**Elisa:** You were seasick or did you have another illness?

**Benny:** What?

**Elisa:** Were you seasick or did you have another type of illness?

**Benny:** No, no sick from the ocean, sea sick.

**Elisa:** You were seasick.

**Benny:** I used to get seasick very, very fast.

**Elisa:** So you were in the hospital of the ship?

**Benny:** Everyone in the hospital, they used to give us nothing. What can they give you when you're seasick? But the guy that was with me, he was afraid I was going to die because I couldn't eat no more. As soon as I smelled the food, I used to vomit green, pneumonia, stomach to throw up.

**Elisa:** You were very sick.

**Benny:** And you want it green. So my friend that used to take care of me, he used to take me in a hospital. In a hospital it was okay. They used to give me something to drink, but I don't remember what kind of stuff they used to give me. The way I used to drink I used to throw up.

**Elisa:** So it wasn't a very nice trip for you?

**Benny:** No.

**Elisa:** How long did it take?

**Benny:** From Genoa to Gibraltar it was very good. I didn't get sick at all.

**Elisa:** You stopped in Gibraltar?

**Benny:** After Gibraltar, then they begin to get rough and I got very sick. As soon as it stopped over here I was fine. That's all that seasick is, fine.

**Elisa:** Now how long did it take you?

**Benny:** 16 days.

**Elisa:** When you arrived here, do you remember Ellis Island? Do you remember seeing the statue?

**Benny:** I see the picture I saw today. I remember everything.

**Elisa:** Well, tell me about it.

**Benny:** They took us to this place over here at Ellis Island and they used to gave us coffee and cake, something like that, I remember. Then they used to call you one by one to go under an examination. They used to- your eyes with the doctor. The one that wasn't good, a little sick, they go in room. The one like me, I was alright in the other room. [Inaudible 00:25:56] you go back to Italy. They used to send them back.

**Elisa:** So there were three places for you to go?

**Benny:** Right.

**Elisa:** Were you told that you were sick or-

**Benny:** A lot of people used to have red eyes. Sometimes you're red, no good. They used to send them back.

**Elisa:** Now which line did you go in? Were you okay?

**Benny:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** How long did you stay at Ellis Island?

**Benny:** I think two days.

**Elisa:** Why did they keep you there for two days? Do you remember why?

**Benny:** Because they had a lot of people, you couldn't go through in one day. They couldn't go through in one day.

**Elisa:** Oh, so there were just too many people?

**Benny:** Couldn't go through in one day so they have to keep us one day. We arrive here with the boat in the morning with the ship, but the boat, another boat, we get on the boat and take us in this island over here.

**Elisa:** Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

**Benny:** The what?

**Elisa:** The Statue of Liberty? Do you remember seeing?

**Benny:** I remember, oh yeah. I remember every little thing that we did.

**Elisa:** Well, you have to tell me all these things.

**Benny:** I remember.

**Elisa:** Who came to pick you up at Ellis Island? Or did you just leave your-

**Benny:** My sister's husband.

**Elisa:** What was his name?

**Benny:** Joseph Pinelli. Instead of Panelli, he was Pinelli with an I. He picked me up because them days you had to have somebody in this country. You had to have somebody to go with. If you didn't have anybody, they didn't take just anybody that you are in a strange country by yourself, you don't know where to go, you don't know nobody. [Inaudible 00:27:50] You had to have somebody that you go with in the house, that you had a house to go.

**Elisa:** Now when did your sister come to America?

**Benny:** What?

**Elisa:** When did your sister come to America? She was already here in America when you came?

**Benny:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** When did she come?

**Benny:** I don't get it.

**Elisa:** Okay. Your sister?

**Benny:** Oh, she came, let me see. She came about five or six years before me.

**Elisa:** Did she come by herself?

**Benny:** No, she came with other woman.

**Elisa:** But no one from your family went with her, just your sister? Did anyone else from your family come to America, anyone from your family besides you and your sister?

**Benny:** Me and my sister and one of my brother, John Panelli.

**Elisa:** When did he come?

**Benny:** He came after my sister. My sister then he came then I came.

**Elisa:** Then you came?

**Benny:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** What was your first job in America?

**Benny:** Wash dishes in Hotel Chelsea. Hotel Chelsea is still there today on 23rd Street 710.

**Elisa:** Where did you live?

**Benny:** I lived with my sister.

**Elisa:** You lived with your sister. How long did you live with your sister before you got your own place?

**Benny:** Since 1927. Then I got married in 1927.

**Elisa:** How did you meet your wife?

**Benny:** I meet my wife in the [inaudible 00:29:33].

**Elisa:** What is that mean? Where did you meet your wife?

**Benny:** At [inaudible 00:29:38] in the farm.

**Elisa:** How did you meet?

**Benny:** We used to go in this farm, that's how I meet my wife. I met my wife when she was 16 years old and I was 22.

**Elisa:** When were you married?

**Benny:** I'm married now 65 years.

**Elisa:** Oh, congratulations.

**Benny:** 65 years and I'm going to 66, I'm going to make it until 1970 then I'll have a party.

**Elisa:** Then you'll have a party?

**Benny:** Yup.

**Elisa:** What did you do after that? Tell me about your career as an American. What did you do after you worked at that hotel?

**Benny:** Working?

**Elisa:** Yeah.

**Benny:** I told you, I worked at Chelsea as a dishwasher.

**Elisa:** Then what did you do next? What was your next job?

**Benny:** After dishwasher, I work in the kitchen as a breakfast man in the same hotel. From there they change everybody. All the cooks out and new cooks came in, you out of a job. Then you work different places, I don't remember where because this wasn't a hotel. This was only nightclubs and I don't think they exist anymore.

**Elisa:** What was your very last job?

**Benny:** My last job?

**Elisa:** Yes.

**Benny:** As a cook.

**Elisa:** You were a cook?

**Benny:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** What can you tell me about your family? How many children do you have?

**Benny:** I have two, a daughter and a son.

**Elisa:** And what are their names?

**Benny:** Their names?

**Elisa:** Yes.

**Benny:** Louis Panelli and Ritchie Panelli.

**Elisa:** Do you have any grandchildren?

**Benny:** No.

**Elisa:** No grandchildren?

**Benny:** No. I got one.

**Elisa:** You have one grandchild that I know of.

**Benny:** I got one. Only one.

**Elisa:** Oh, I think maybe you have two.

**Benny:** No, only and he's 33 year old, from my son.

**Elisa:** Well, what else would you like to tell me about your life in America? Is there anything you'd like to tell me for the tape? Are you glad you came here?

**Benny:** What can I say about my life? My life here is working, go home, I marry and marry like I tell you, 65 years old was with one woman. Isn't it nice?

**Elisa:** It's very nice.

**Benny:** So what can I tell you?

**Elisa:** Are you glad you came to America?

**Benny:** Sometime, sometime I'm thinking but too late now because I'm 74 years old in this country. When I came in this country, the next day I wanted to go back, right back to Italy. I asked my sister “I want you to give me the money because I want to go right back to the same city. I want to go back.”

She start to tell me, because you don't know the language, you don't know nothing, you have nobody, you find yourself into one building over here one building on this side and you're not used to you was to open air in the farm with your friends and you're young, you miss all your friends in Europe. I wanted to come back when I was [inaudible 00:27:14]. But she finally, today as a man and as she told me to get used to it.

**Elisa:** So you got used to it.

**Benny:** And I got sick on malaria.

**Elisa:** Oh you did?

**Benny:** Malaria. I got sick on malaria at 62nd Street. I don't know, what can I tell you?

**Elisa:** Thank you very much for telling us your story and about coming to America.

**Benny:** The worst thing to leave your country where you was born and raised, when you leave your mother.

**Elisa:** It's hard to do that. Well Mr. Panelli, thank you very much for doing this interview with me. This is Elisa Mattson, I'm signing off with Mr. Benny Panelli and it is September 22 1994 for the Ellis Island Oral History Project. Thank you, Mr. Panelli.

**Benny:** Thank you.