**Paul:** Good afternoon this is Paul Seacrest for the National Park Service. Today is Monday August 21st 1995, I’m in Albany New York, at the Good Samaritan Lutheran Home and I’m here with Hector Tonetti.

Mr. Tonetti came from Italy, from the north of Italy and he came to America twice. The first time was in 1909 when he was three and a half and then he came back in 1920 when he was 14. Mr. Tonetti, can we begin by you giving me your birth date please.

**Hector:** July 9th 1905.

**Paul:** Where in Italy were you born?

**Hector:** You want the address?

**Paul:** You can give it to me sure.

**Hector:** In a very small town. I was born in Piemonte, it belongs in Italia now, Piemonte north of Italy. A very small town in Brusnengo.

**Paul:** Can you spell that please.

**Hector:** Yeah B-R-U-S-N-E-N-G-O, Brusnengo. It’s some sort of German tone in here, Nengo like Bergamo for example, was a town part of Belgium and Italia. I was born there in the province at that time, province of Prov.Celli, was it? Yeah.

**Paul:** Can you spell that?

**Hector:** Yeah, the province of Prov.Celli, still is, P-R-O-V.C-E-L-L-I Prov.Celli.

**Paul:** What can you tell me about this small town that you were born in?

**Hector:** I tell you I was born there. We had a little bit of a family farm, very small, very difficult to make a living. My father and one of his brothers, they start to emigrate because we couldn’t make a living there. That’s before I was born.

The emigration was very big and from the North of Italy in our area, the emigration was divided up North America, United States and then Africa. South Africa at that time mostly and South America and North America, the United States mostly, [inaudible 00:02:47] much.

Some of those who emigrated for a few months within Europe, Switzerland, France, they actually go to work for the season for emigration. Because the living was better in this country, just to mention, than Italy. Because Italy comprised North of Italy, Central Italy and Southern Italy, geographically speaking, different and the cultures were a bit different.

**Paul:** Why did your family choose to come to the United States?

**Hector:** Because first of all somebody else was here, my father’s not brother, but yes one of his brother and cousin. Because somebody that they knew was already here. From the North of Italy, from our area, from our village in our town, most of us went in New York City to work in the finest hotels New York had at that time.

Included Waldorf Astoria, The Plaza, a very old hotel and they made a career in that. When I came after, in 1920, I was just 14, but I lied I said I was 16. To get the working paper to the head waiter and that waiter asked me, “Bring me the birth certificate.”

The following day my brother, who had been here three years before, said, “Just tell him that you forgot to bring the papers.”I forgot, the head waiter forgot at that time, I wasn't quite 15, I was supposed to be 16.

The law already was in effect, but it was not enforced like now, now you couldn’t do thing like that. I worked in the hotel, many more just build. Arrived in the Grand Central Station area and I only worked a couple of years. Now you want me to tell my personal story?

**Paul:** Yes, actually I want to go back. I want to go back to why you guys came?

**Hector:** Because we were very poor, the farm wouldn’t provide enough for the extended family. Because they were three brothers, out of father mother, three brothers, divide the living quarters and divide the land to cultivate. Cattle for example, there was only one cow and we couldn’t live. The emigration was very strong at that time.

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

**Hector:** Joseph.

**Paul:** What was his family background, what do you know about his background?

**Hector:** He was born, already got two, three brothers, and a little sister, one sister. The background was a farmer, but he didn’t like to work in the farm, he emigrated, before he married, to South America in Argentina Buenos Aires, emigrated there.

Then he got tired of working there, he went with his father, my grandfather. Somehow my grandfather was a little bit, tired of staying in the same place, he moved to the United States in Los Angeles where he died. My father left Los Angeles, they confused the name now, Los Angeles and …

**Paul:** Buenos Aires?

**Hector:** Buenos Aires. We moved to ...

**Paul:** Your father was in Buenos Aires?

**Hector:** Yeah. My father was still in Buenos Aires, he only stayed a very short time after his father came and went to Los Angeles. His father wanted him to go back home and work on the farm because he wouldn’t go.

My father was only in his early 20s. He went to South Africa in Cape Town, South Africa. For at that time was during the Boer War, you’ve heard of a Boer War? B-O-E-R Dutch against the English?

**Paul:** It was around 1900, 1901?

**Hector:** You got it right. They were fighting for control of the -The English and the Dutch, the Europeans were fighting. There was a war, a local war and my father was timid, he was a small man physical like me. He went back home. Still in that little farm was too much work, he went and land in New York City. That’s how we happened to …

**Paul:** This is the 1909 trip?

**Hector:** I was born all ready, was three and a half years old, was born in 1905.

**Paul:** The whole family went to New York in 1909?

**Hector:** Right. The whole family consisted of, I was the second, two children, two boys, father and mother, that’s it.

**Paul:** How long did you stay?

**Hector:** Then we arrived in New York for hotel work. My father was not a very ambitious man, he never made much of a grade in the kitchen, in fact he was never a cook, just a kitchen worker.

My mother had to go to work in sweat shop, you’ve probably heard of it, a famous sweat shops in New York City. What do you call it? Manufacture of clothes and Jewish were in control of the famous sweater shop of New York.

He didn’t like it much, but my mother couldn’t stand it, she had babies to take care of. She became pregnant so she told my father, I was born already. [Inaudible 00:09:41] of my younger brother, that she wanted to have the baby in the village where she was born. She knew that the, what do you call the maid that takes care of the birth of babies?

**Paul:** The midwife?

**Hector:** The midwife. She knew the mid wife was safe, she already had two children. She wanted to have the baby there. She left and her husband was left alone, she went there, she had a baby there. We stayed, this was in 1909, 1911 we went back.

Then the war arrived, there was a Libyan war against Italy at that time, before the First World War which started in 1914. 1914 but it didn’t end until 1915 and we got stuck with the war. To make it short, we reentered here in 1920.

**Paul:** The whole family came back in 1920?

**Hector:** The whole family. My father was always here.

**Paul:** Everyone but your father?

**Hector:** My mother and no girls, and three boys. The oldest boy came first 1917, instead of 1920 when the war was raging, 1917. He came over accompanied by a local responsible man and he went in the hotel. Then two of us older, I was at that time, how old was I? 1920?

**Paul:** 14.

**Hector:** I was 14 yeah. The first time I’m thinking about I arrived here I was three and a half. I went back at five, six, I made the grade schools over there and that’s the only schooling I’ve had all my life. Seven years in school, six grades. I repeated one grade to keep you, I can explain why, there was a reason there between the teacher and my mother. Then we come back.

**Paul:** In 1909, when you first came, do you know the name of the ship that you came across in 1909?

**Hector:** Yeah. The name of the ship was French line, because [inaudible 00:12:27] on everything, the, what do you call the person responsible? Travel agent. The travel agent noticed that it’s easier from us here from North of Italy go through France, take the ship in the harbor, France 1909. Then from the harbor its much shorter, the ocean is narrower.

We did. We took only eight days, ordinarily it would have been 11, 12, 15. In fact, in 1920 when we arrived after the war Italian line Dante Alighieri name of the ship, 1920 in March, it took us 18 days. Because it was in 1920, there was still shortage of coal, they were using coal. It was a steam ship, it was using coal for fuel and short duration. From Genoa to New York, 18 days.

**Paul:** That was in 1920?

**Hector:** Yet 1909, with the French ship, only 11 days.

**Paul:** Do you remember the name of the French ship?

**Hector:** La Lorraine.

**Paul:** Were you ever told any stories about when your mother gave both to you? Is there any story about that circumstance?

**Hector:** Seems that I was wanted. Stories, not until I was three when I start to understand, three, three and a half. We had enough to eat, our own land, our own house, house of the grandparents and …

**Paul:** Is that your mother’s parents or your father’s?

**Hector:** No, the father’s side always. Mother in the same village, but she moved to the father’s house. My father had two brothers, one was normal, he went to work in Africa also. We got loss, he died there. The other brother was retarded like and we have a problem with him. He remained a bachelor and never married.

**Paul:** Do you know what your mother’s maiden name was?

**Hector:** Maria, Mary Oliaro O-L-I-A-R-O.

**Paul:** What do you know about her family background?

**Hector:** I didn’t know anything till I was four, five years old, you don’t understand. There were both father and mother, both born in the same village. They used to marry close, same village if possible.

If, at that time, a young fellow would cross the border we had there on east side of the village and marry somebody there. They used to criticize him or her. Because they were marrying across the border, extreme imagine that, across the border they would be [inaudible 00:16:09]. It was like marrying here a foreigner almost. They were all close.

**Paul:** What was your mother’s personality like?

**Hector:** She was very timid and not very practical. She never learned to become a professional seamstress in New York City, those workshops there. She took [inaudible 00:16:36] instead, the Roman border, singer young fellow would arrive there. As I said my father never earned much, 50 cents and one dollar a day, six days a week.

**Paul:** Which hotel did he work in?

**Hector:** He worked at the Waldorf Astoria I’ve heard also, the old Waldorf Astoria of course not the one that’s still. The old one was in 42nd street in Fifth Avenue. The new one is 51st Park Avenue, something like that. I know about New York now, you can’t fool me.

**Paul:** What is your earliest memory?

**Hector:** Earliest memory?

**Paul:** Yes, what’s the earliest memory that you have of your life?

**Hector:** When I was a small kid, I was very close to my so-called retarded uncle. He always kept me under his arms, he was very friendly with me. He used to take me to go and -It was a [inaudible 00:17:53] time, we had grapes, walnuts. We had walnut trees and we even made walnut oil, rich edible oil.

**Paul:** Could you describe how that was done?

**Hector:** Pardon me.

**Paul:** Can you describe how the walnut oil was made?

**Hector:** The oil was made? They were still using the press or wood with the weight we trunk and a donkey around it to turn the, can’t think of the word now. It’s a press, the compressor, the same as the grape press. You could have made oil out of walnuts. [Inaudible 00:18:46] was better because it was not too normal.

They [inaudible 00:18:53] when you made that oil, it’s so thick, so expensive more than the olive oil. When we had no olives up in Northern Italy remember that. There’s a line there from where Tuscany, that’s about the northeast area where they have olive trees, Tuscany and the Liguria, Genoa area.

Then you have to go down south towards Naples, Southern Italy, Sicily, very good olive oil, very good olives. We were using the press and of course our most per produce that would pay for us was work on and work in the vineyards, produce wine. Because at that time the wine, Italy was behind France, the amount of produce. Now I understand that Italy produces as much wine as France does mostly …

**Paul:** Can you talk to me about the procedure, when you were in Italy, of tending the vineyards and making wine?

**Hector:** I was seven, eight years old when they put to work after school. The season last about two weeks, that’s the harvest season. Usually the first week of September, then a week or two, depending on the size of the property, how many vineyards you have and produce that.

What I did myself, I want to tell you, I should remember. We, the whole family, no schools, one or two weeks about. The dates, was a proclamation from the mayor, that he decided at town hall, when they should start pick the grapes until you finish it. Because it could go by the weather, not every season has the same temperature. Sometimes a season with a few days later [inaudible 00:21:27].

Then we started to work at sunrise until late at night for that week or two weeks. Everybody in the family worked to pick the grapes. Then we hired help, usually here people were so poor with very little or no vineyards.

Maybe just a garden, not for flowers but vegetable garden and for trees, but not much vineyards. They were working for others by the hour. They work in order to pick the grapes at the right time and finish fast enough.

The grapes were picked and crashed and started fermentation, the very same day. Because if you late the fermentation [inaudible 00:22:31] at night in the wine cellar that’s all wasted.

We did most of the picking off, we knew how much we have to pick and complete the job whole day. You start to cut the grapes after the dew is off, D-E-W, formed during the night. Because we were producing very good work, very honest, very conscientious at that time.

Nowadays, commercial, their ways of fixing the wine. Trying to get that certain taste, a certain degree of alcoholic content and they want and they work for that. We don’t care too much about taste, it was just natural.

We’d pick the grapes in the morning after the dew, I’d say we’d start about nine o’clock in the morning. With all the buckets everything ready, wagon, horse, mule or donkeys, couple of cows sometimes. Some of them had the male [inaudible 00:23:52] the cow.

**Paul:** The ox?

**Hector:** The ox. Yeah [inaudible 00:23:59] because the other one had milk, the oxen, the teams of oxen were used in the farm to cultivate the land. Now I think they go more for horses, of course now they have machines. We pick it in the morning.

**Paul:** Was there a certain technique to picking the grapes?

**Hector:** They had to be ripe the right way, not too much, not rotten. Pick the grapes, you look at it, take off a few bad and in the basket. We finish in the morning or the afternoon picking the grapes. Then we take everything home right away.

Those grapes had to be in the vats the same evening. Otherwise they would suffer the alcohol content, the strength of the grape would be -Those that were very ripe, they suffer during the night [inaudible 00:25:00].

We do as much work as possible in a full day. Then we have vats, [inaudible 00:25:11] on top of the vat, with a bucket there. Men would throw the grapes there and they push it down the vat. Fermentation would last eight, 10 days, when it stops [inaudible 00:25:29].

Then they transfer it, they stop the fermentation, they reuse it actually. The first wine, the wine that would be sold and the best part was the one that came from the bottom of the vat, not being pressed at all.

The pressed because it was all the grapes and a lot of, what do you call it? The stems. The stems in there would take care some of the usual so they had to be pressed. This first wine, the most expensive wine, no pressing come out naturally, [inaudible 00:26:13] vat and the fermentation would continue.

**Paul:** How were the grapes pressed?

**Hector:** The old days when we were kids, small [inaudible 00:26:24].

**Paul:** You pour them to your feet.

**Hector:** Up to here my feet, seven eight, you heard about it? I actually did it, seven, eight, 10 years old. Everything has to be done, we would wash our feet …

**Paul:** Was there a trick to doing it somehow?

**Hector:** Pardon me?

**Paul:** Was there a trick? How did you learn how to stomp grapes?

**Hector:** We were born there. We’d watch when we could open our eyes and we would learn by watching. Traditionally, they follow the custom of the parents, father to son and carry on.

A custom like that lasted for centuries until about, when we started to have machinery. Before the First World War, I was there 1910, 11, we had crashers. Is that the way you call it in English? Crasher?

You transfer from one bag to the other. Then the machine crasher pass by, turn the handle by hand. We had electricity by then, goes through the press. The press occur at the bottom, the juice was clean, no seed, no stems, no skins, stems of course not, skin was of course. We transferred in a vat that would mature.

First it has to stop the fermentation. Then when the fermentation was stopped, it was put in a permanent vat for months. Would mature, get ready to drink, which would not be until the next spring. Because the grape when its freshly crashed its actually sweet, the juice remain sweet for weeks and a few months. It’s not good to drink, not to make wine. Good wine has to be aged.

During the winter they used to transfer it and put it in permanent vats or big bottles. Let it stay until or after a couple of transfers, at least three maybe. Wine for sale and for drink to be good. You had to wait until the following fall, for one year. You could drink any time before.

**Paul:** How was it stored in the meantime?

**Hector:** Always one vat to another vat and …

**Paul:** In large vats?

**Hector:** Yeah. Then when the vats there wasn’t more room, there were small containers mostly [inaudible 00:29:41], what do you call them in English? The wine, the most time you were [inaudible 00:29:53] because it was not wine yet so you still have to watch it. It would ferment there.

Then before you start to transfer it and taste it, mix one kind with the other. Because the grapes were different varieties of the grapes, not all one grape only and a blend of grapes was better than having just one.

One grape is special was very good for quantity, but light in, the [inaudible 00:30:27] instead very rich and heavy and not too much oil. Then you have to watch it. Then you can start sell it, we used to sell in bulk because we were so small, we didn’t have the manpower. It was not profitable to finish all the process.

Then bottle the wine and wait till it age. We used to sell it in bulk during the winter, in special [inaudible 00:31:06] wholesaler used to buy them, buy the wine. They have to wait till it to ripen right and there was a proper taste. The good wine would start two years later.

**Paul:** Was this a major business for you?

**Hector:** The locals were drinking it much before farming.

**Paul:** Was this the major business for your family?

**Hector:** Yes. Most of the families over there, that [inaudible 00:31:36] area. Although everybody had one or more cows, one or more horse, some had donkey. The donkeys usually were alone and the mules, we had animals. That was before the First World War. The trucks then show up and kill all of [inaudible 00:32:01] and they came …

**Paul:** Could you describe for me the house that you lived in on the farm?

**Hector:** The houses there they were built around the courtyard. The courtyard was which still is, my old house which we’re trying to sell now but I’m having trouble, around the courtyard. The courtyard was divided up, different ownership, build a house around.

You have one entrance to the courtyard. In the back they had the stables and the horses and animals and cows would go in the back. The best part of the courtyard where there was a view, a view of the Alps, look of the valley, the animals would get there was stables.

Because the courtyard was the main part, because it was practical. They all come out to the same courtyard houses, and they were a short driveway to get into the street. They used to surround the view with the houses.

If you wanted to have the beautiful view of the Alps, which we had all year round, we have to go on the top floor, where you get the best view. Looking at the back of our houses, you have the view.

**Paul:** What was the house made out of?

**Hector:** All brick and stone and only local products [inaudible 00:33:44]. Because they used to produce lime for brick work and stone, mixed brick and stone in the center, finished brick on the outside. No wood. My house even now, they build a wood floor only a few years ago over sort of a new floor, very thin.

**Paul:** How was the house heated?

**Hector:** The house was heated originally with fireplace. Fireplace only certain rooms, not the bathroom ordinarily because it would be too extravagant to heat up the bathroom to go to bed. We first went to eat.

Most important was the kitchen combination, kitchen and dining room. Where you eat and where you cooked. Fire in the wood was owned by part of the property, property was [inaudible 00:35:03] not solid area.

Small piece here, few square feet there, not feet but few square yards. One was suitable for rain on the plane, the valley, where we stored it and on the hills some vineyards and woods, everything was local.

Every property had part wood, part vineyard, part for trees. We had the houses that you see there and then in the back on the side or at the end of that walk where the street is, we had a separate piece for fruits and vegetables, orchid and vegetables.

**Paul:** What kind of fruits did you raise?

**Hector:** Up in Northern Italy in Piemonte and Piedmont there, by the way the main city is Turin you heard of it? [Inaudible 00:36:15] is Milan, Milan is most very commercial. Turin is still in the corner of France and Italy. In Turin, it was what we wanted to see most as kids is to go to Turin to see the big city. Where were we?

**Paul:** The fruits, what kind of fruits did you rise?

**Hector:** I came late, you have to go back centuries. Centuries ago, they had pears.

**Paul:** In your time there what did you have?

**Hector:** The same thing, pears, apples, not the tropical fruit, is what you want to know. Pears, apples, the best to produce. Grapes for the, not just for the wine but also for grapes. Because you could preserve the grapes by putting on straw and it would become dry a little bit, like raisin and eat that in the winter. We didn’t go out and buy grapes in the store. The mid-temperature fruits, what do we call it over here?

**Paul:** The average?

**Hector:** The average temperature, yeah. The same as, where we live is quite a bit colder than where I was born. The temperature in Piemonte [inaudible 00:37:52], once you were down off the mountains, because the snow and ice was cold.

It was grapes on the sunny side of the hill. Most you then worked on, because it had to be worked. Then the other fruit, pears and apples because you could preserve it for a while through the winter by drying them in a straw.

Even figs, warm enough for figs, peaches, apricots and plums, all those fruits. What other? As I said, [inaudible 00:38:49] would stop at the olive, it was too cold for olive in our area. We didn’t have any olives at all. The olives started in Liguira, that’s where Genoa is and fishing in the Mediterranean.

**Paul:** Getting back to the house, how did you light your house?

**Hector:** We had no inside toilet.

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

**Hector:** Oil lamps. [Inaudible 00:39:25] yeah oil lamps. We didn’t have any electricity, because then the whole town have to have it. Electricity, I think I remember now, the war was already on in my house, different houses depending on the oldest were living and the money to buy. The attachment of electricity we had it already in 1913, 14, not before that.

**Paul:** What do you remember about the installation of the electricity?

**Hector:** When they installed it in my house, my mother was alone, my father was already here. She didn’t want the electricity, connections were too expensive. We managed with lamps to keep our light.

Not only oil lamps, we used to use kerosene too. Kerosene oil lamp [inaudible 00:40:29] any light [inaudible 00:40:32]. Then the candles, we have candles also. The kerosene for the stable, we had to milk the cows. The kitchen attached center.

As I remember had to be 1910 but not before, that’s when we had. The electric general installment in the village, in the centre of the village, happened way back when I was born, 1905 or something like that.

**Paul:** What were your mother’s objections to getting the electricity in the house?

**Hector:** She found out it was more better light, more practical and less expensive. You didn’t have to carry your lamp with you to light few square feet at a time or room.

**Paul:** Do you remember them installing the electricity into the house?

**Hector:** Yes.

**Paul:** How did they do that?

**Hector:** All the wires are open.

**Paul:** The wires were on the outside of the wall?

**Hector:** On the outside of the wall, because inside brick and stone. Houses those days were built, even now, mixing brick and stone. Because those are two local products, stones from the mountains, from the hills and bricks down in the plane.

They bring brick factories. Soon it was lime and there was brick and then stones, steps for example were all stone, steps from one floor to another. The bricks were curved.

**Paul:** Curved?

**Hector:** Yeah. The original ones, curved like that and lay one on top of the other. They had to be checked occasionally.

**Paul:** Is there a piece of furniture in your house that sticks out in your mind for some reason?

**Hector:** I tell you the bed would be a yes. Two boys were sleeping together, when that big bed come in and it was made locally. Because one was by the way I forgot to mention there [inaudible 00:43:08] local were very good. There were English warmers, we called them here.

**Paul:** Your parents or somebody had a bed made?

**Hector:** Yeah. We had carpenters and cabinet makers had to build the furniture. The beds was the most important because the most useful. We could put a box on the floor for children especially and then mattress over on that, not a regular bed. The beds came with legs, they [inaudible 00:43:56]. Furniture wasn’t even necessarily, boxes equivalent of dresser and store room, storage boxes.

**Paul:** Was there a piece of furniture in the house that was considered particularly precious?

**Hector:** Some of them …

**Paul:** In your house?

**Hector:** In my house no. There was from my grandfather yeah, but ordinary. Dresser yeah, we had dresser [inaudible 00:44:35] before I was born.

Living room was a luxury, only those who were able to make money outside of the property, in selling and buying, especially men. Men it was their territory to go out would produce and then buy some furniture, whatever they needed or sheets from the city markets.

Period furniture, where do you think it comes from? Centuries ago when I was 14, I worked in furniture, I know something about that, don’t try to catch me because I fool you. I worked in period furniture 10 years between 1920 and 1929, nine years. Then I got sick, that’s was it.

**Paul:** Tell me about your religious life in Italy, what religion were you?

**Hector:** A small village like that, it still is, there’s only one religion, the Roman Catholic. Maybe two, three churches, but now they cut them down, instead of having two, three small ones, they have one large one to save heat and all that.

Roman Catholic is [inaudible 00:46:13]. All over Italy was Roman Catholic. It was not until centuries later that the evangelist, Seven Day Adventists, it was all imports from the United States most of them.

**Paul:** How did you practice your religion at home?

**Hector:** It was a must to go to church every Sunday morning, I’m talking about the children now because I was a kid. We had to go to church every Sunday morning, serve in the [inaudible 00:46:48] a sister and priest. Learned the Catechism, read the bible, is that what you want to know?

**Paul:** What about home, what did you do at home?

**Hector:** At home we had to, the average house because there were stubborn who followed the rules. Sunday mass every Sunday, and have baptism first and then first communion. It was a must for everybody even parents.

**Paul:** Were there any prayers that you were taught by your parents as children?

**Hector:** Yes, some depending on the parents.

**Paul:** Your parents?

**Hector:** My parents were not very fussy about it. We had to say some prayer but we can also whisper it, we didn’t have to say it out loud, just before going to sleep. My mother wasn’t very strict in that for different reason and my father neither.

Our family, we were not very religion at all, not in our house. We were told to go to Catechism school and go to mass every Sunday morning. If you skip once in a while, find some excuse. Mother was peculiar, she wasn’t going to church, only irregularly because she hated the parish priest.

The reason she hated was when we were kids was that he was so rough and so intolerant. That he was threatening, especially the grandmothers, that if they didn’t follow the line, the rules of the church and the rules of the priest. That our departed mother, fathers and grandfathers, they would suffer, they would go to hell.

Really one true story here. My grandmother, mother’s side, was very -My grandmother father’s side, I never knew her. She was very devout and she used to go to church. The parish priest was tough, he expected the wife part of the husband and wife, for example, to make sure they’d be enough money that went to the church after a partner died. Otherwise the Lord would hurt the family.

This really happened. They used to have communion and confession regularly [inaudible 00:50:30] almost and quietly during weekdays and confessional. A neighbor of my mother was praying quietly in a corner in the dark. She could over hear from the confessional what the priest was threatening my grandmother my mother’s side, that shouting too.

This woman said, “Yes I heard him shouting, I was in that corner.” The priest thought they were alone, but they were not. That he threatened my grandmother that if she didn’t leave 100,000 liras, at that time was not a fortune. 100,000 lira to the church, when my grandfather died, that she will go to hell, he shouted that.

This woman overheard and she told my mother. My mother hated that parish priest, she didn’t want to talk to him anymore. [Inaudible 00:51:33] and nobody liked that priest he was very rude, rough.

**Paul:** What about practicing religious holidays for instance, what holidays did you observe?

**Hector:** The same Roman Catholic Church, same holidays.

**Paul:** Can you describe how your family celebrated Christmas?

**Hector:** It was one of the biggest, believe it or not, most important holiday is not Christmas but is Easter, the resurrection. They considered that much more important, because of the story of the man dying. They paid more attention for Easter holidays, even now, than Christmas. Over here Christmas is everything.

**Paul:** How did your family celebrate Easter?

**Hector:** Like everybody else, go to mass, confession first, preparation was required confession, communion. That was a must, confession and communion. Now the confession, not so much anymore, but communion still is.

**Paul:** Was there a special meal that your family had in Easter time or?

**Hector:** I don’t think I paid much attention, I never remember, pay much attention on the dais. If you’re talking about the Jewish, for example, are much more strict than that.

**Paul:** I’m just wondering how your family celebrated at home?

**Hector:** We were not very strict down the line. Sometime we skip going to church, find some reason, some excuse.

**Paul:** Can you tell me how your family, to change the subject, how your family was affected by World War 1, if they were affected at all in any way?

**Hector:** Definitely. World War 1, I remember very well in 1913. Italy was an ally of German empire at the time and the Austria Hungarian Empire. They control most of Europe at that time when the war and this was in 1913. Then the war, English and French, French England [inaudible 00:54:09] neutral.

**Paul:** Your own family, how was your own family affected?

**Hector:** My own family of course. They were to go to a war because as revenge for what Austria did to Northern Italy. Italy was never united country until 1970, believe it or not, it’s a very young country. Before that Italy was just geographical put [inaudible 00:54:52] and [inaudible 00:54:57].

During the middle of the last century, Austria was under the rule by German practically and they wanted Austria to become big. It became an empire by taking part of Europe and Germany. Between the two they controlled the whole Europe and part of Northern Italy also. Italy was the one calling for revenge as they decided to become allied to French and England who were [inaudible 00:55:58].

**Paul:** I’m interested in what happened to you during those days, not necessarily the [inaudible 00:56:03]?

**Hector:** My family went in the side of Italy, they were patriotic.

**Paul:** Did anyone have to serve?

**Hector:** Because then Italy would also expand, we would take part of the Alps area that belongs to Austria. There was always an argument there and the Alps have two, three different languages.

Austria wants to expand some more. Austria go down in the Balkans where Yugoslavia wasn’t all that in the Balkan area [inaudible 00:56:39] Mediterranean small countries. They are still fighting now.

**Paul:** Did you observe any fighting at that time?

**Hector:** Yes. I was 12, 13 years old and I was listening to the speeches that the ordinary men [inaudible 00:56:58] of getting together under Portugal and talk about politics when the war started.

I was always very patriotic, yes we should get rid of Austria because Austria occupied too much territory of the Alps, belonged to us geographically. Then we should go help France and England to push Austria back and also break up the German empire.

Russia at that time was ally of France and England also. They wanted to breakdown the German empire. Family was, but I wasn’t favor -I was just a kid, I was favoring neutrality. That’s not the way to do it, have a war for the just fight, we’re all trying to get peace and get together.

**Paul:** Were there any hardships suffered by your family because of the war?

**Hector:** Not too much, because we were out to the territory of the fighting, what do you call it? Territory. It was noticed Italy was occupied, almost as far as Venice not quite and [inaudible 00:58:30]. We were in the corner of France, Northern Italy from the Alps, Switzerland and Italy.

We never had First World War affecting except obligated to send soldiers over. The majority were in favor, they were glad that they broke up, as they used to call it the German Austrian Empire which was Kaiser, you remember Kaiser? Kaiser and Austria was Emperor Joseph, two names.

**Paul:** Franz Joseph.

**Hector:** Franzescha Josephe, known it in Italia. They say Francis Joseph?

**Paul:** Franz Joseph.

**Hector:** Franz, in German yeah, with Z in the end.

**Paul:** Mr. Tonetti we’re going to stop just for a second so that I can put a new tape in. we’re just going to pause we are at the end of tape one. This is Paul Seacrest we’re now beginning tape two with Hector Tonetti who came from the North of Italy and we’re going to talk about when he came in 1920 when he was 14.

Mr. Tonetti, we just finished talking about your recollections of World War 1. I’d like to begin tape two with you telling me, again you started telling me about your father going back to America. Tell me why you wanted to come to America and how that all that happened? This would be the second time you would be going?

**Hector:** Because we were making a better living here than over there.

**Paul:** When did your father go back, before you came? How long ago did he go before you came?

**Hector:** He went back only for a short while, I only say because he didn’t like to work the soil, the land. He didn’t like to be a farmer. He only stayed here three years and then he came back to New York. Because he died in New York, he’s buried in the cemetery there in Queens, what do you call that cemetery? Calvary …

**Paul:** Calvary?

**Hector:** Yeah. They stored him there.

**Paul:** At that time did you have any recollections of living in New York as a small child?

**Hector:** Yes believe it or not, yes because I went to kindergarten. When I arrived here I was three and a half, they took me, you know which kindergarten they took me? French kindergarten. You know why?

**Paul:** We were talking about you going to French kindergarten?

**Hector:** That’s in the [inaudible 01:01:40]. We were living on 30 street, one of those, they call it a house kitchen afterwards, but in a slum of New York. 30 Street in Eighth Avenue and they had just finished a section of the subway there. Right near Pennsylvania Station, you know anything about New York? The other side of Eighth Avenue, main post office, which I think is still active, but the., what do you call it?

**Paul:** What do you remember about going to French kindergarten?

**Hector:** I was three and a half, I was [inaudible 01:02:28] kindergarten. We applied nearby, walking distance of course, 30 Street and on 28th Street was a French kindergarten. In France, it’s the only French I know, [French 01:02:46] to be honest I know three words.

My mother they told her she could apply because we were born, where we came from, near the border of France. Our dialect, in Europe they have dialects. When you’re born you don’t learn the real language of the country, not until you go to school at that time.

You learn the local dialect. It’s not a written dialect it’s a spoken one, you can’t spell it, everybody spells it differently. You know that? You know about dialects? Not only Italian, but French and the Patois, that means dialect in French. In German I don’t know German. All over Europe, they have dialects in different area and they have to learn.

Some friend of my mother, neighbor over in Brusnengo the same courtyard, they met there. Said, “Maria weren’t you trying to put [inaudible 01:03:54],” we call him [inaudible 01:03:57]. They’re [inaudible 01:03:59] in a local school there, but they speak French.

“You know the kid is three, two and a half, its French school, very fast.” Madam Anna, I remember the name, she was a supervisor, she took us in from what I hear, of course they didn’t talk to me then. Because we were born over near France and our dialect in Piemonte’s is something like the area near France, I can’t think of it now, everybody knows it except me.

She accepted me, because I was in the middle, three and a half. My baby brother was not born yet, no. The older, three years older than me, he was already in the first grade or second grade. She took me so my mother could go work in the sweat shop there in Seventh Avenue, women’s clothes we would call it. She took me in.

The neighbors say, “Wait a minute, you’re not French. She took you in because North of Italy is different.” The Southern Italian people, the few that she met, they were jealous, “How come they won’t take my little kid from Naples?” They didn’t know a word of dialect, of French, it’s a different culture. Now it’s getting even [inaudible 01:05:52].

**Paul:** What do you remember about the experience of going to … ?

**Hector:** The experience that I had there was very nice. Madam Anna she talked French and then she talked English and I knew a few words right away. We ate at tables, long tables at lunch. I remember backyard there.

Then they walked us to school and to homes, accompanied us because we had to cross Eighth Avenue New Jersey at that time. They still had horses for transportation instead of street cars, they still had horses and the street cars came in later.

The thing is that I only stayed a year and a half because then we went back to Italy again. I liked it. We were well taken care of. We were allowed to bring home some left over. We were learning something, we learned to scribble, to draw.

**Paul:** Let’s skip ahead to 1920.

**Hector:** I have a picture of the whole classroom.

**Paul:** In the kindergarten?

**Hector:** Still have it.

**Paul:** In 1920, tell me a little bit about the preparations that were made to get ready to go again to America?

**Hector:** The decision was made by my mother. She couldn’t make it there in 1920. My father was already here, she was separated from my father, through the war period imagine about seven or eight years. She had no choice to come back here.

My older brother came in 1917 [inaudible 01:07:56] the war because he was accompanied by a local man. He was the guardian, because my older brother was three years older, he was six and maybe for the first grade. They came and stayed with my father.

Then we waited another three years because the war was raging, very difficult to get a passport. 1920 was already finished two years, 1918 the war ended in Italy. In United States there was a picnic for that.

They enter in 1914 I think and 1917 the war was over for the United States, it was already won, United States and England. Italy stayed the next two year. I had no problem at all learning English, but it wasn’t …

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

**Hector:** When I came back in 1920 I was already …

**Paul:** What did you have to do to get ready to leave for Italy in 1920?

**Hector:** In 1920, no problem at all, because my father was here.

**Paul:** It’s just you and your mother who were going to travel?

**Hector:** My mother was with me when we got here, yeah. 1920 I finished grade school, how old was I?

**Paul:** You had gone up to the sixth grade?

**Hector:** Sure I finished. I didn’t tell you why, I was in the sixth grade and I went to school seven years. When I went there I immediately learned Italian in the first grade, they didn’t push me back. I went to the local [inaudible 01:10:07] school.

There was an agreement between the town, public school and local [inaudible 01:10:13] school at that time. That I could go to that [inaudible 01:10:17] school because the school was in my courtyard. I save half hour 20, 25 minutes walk to go to the town school, what do you call it? The school, the community of the town.

I went over here in 1920, I went to the first grade. No, I was 13 years old, I was 14 and a half almost 15, I was 15 by the time I entered in the fall September. Yeah, 15 when the first grade over and …

**Paul:** They put you in first grade when you came to the United States?

**Hector:** Yeah.

**Paul:** You were 15 by the time you were put into first grade?

**Hector:** Right. I already had first and second grade over there in Italia. Here I skipped one of those two, either the first or the second, I skipped one. I wasn’t in line with the other boys. I was learning the language fast, because I still knew some English words, quite a bit. There is a …

**Paul:** Tell me …

**Hector:** Let me finish this one sentence.

**Paul:** Sure.

**Hector:** I went four years in a row and I passed everyone, in the public school. The public school I went by the way was built the year I was born. I passed them. When I was in the fourth grade, my mother told me that she went to the teacher who was not a priest, he was teaching the [inaudible 01:12:20] school, his brother was a priest.

I passed every [inaudible 01:12:32] when I arrived in the fourth grade, the classes in the village of the grammar school on the fifth grade, only five grades. Our next village, the next commune town, had an extra grade, sixth.

Then if you go to that school there, at the end of -You have an extra school in grammar school. Then if you go into high school, you had to start all over again. My mother said, “No, we have to go back to America.” That year we be learning English right way, because she had been here before.

“Couldn’t you do something?” Gave me five which was the equivalent of 50 here, 10 is equivalent of 100. [Inaudible 01:13:29] on arithmetic. We had no at that time I recall, the second grade already have mathematics. [Inaudible 01:13:40] mathematics I score high grades.

We got together and said okay, they send me to the next village. We were four or five boys and I went to school in sixth grade and I passed very easily. Then I came over here, but I went an extra year because there was no seventh grade. Seventh grade was called junior high or something like that.

That’s why I went to school seven years. I hardly believe that, because she knew I was going to finish going to school there and then come over here. If he has an extra school here an extra year that will do him good. She was right, yeah that’s why.

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

**Hector:** When?

**Paul:** Where?

**Hector:** At that time was the Dante Alighieri, it was in Genoa.

**Paul:** You went to Genoa to get the ship?

**Hector:** Genoa of course yeah. That’s the trip that took us 18 days.

**Paul:** It’s you and your mother and who else?

**Hector:** I got a picture, me and my mother and one brother.

**Paul:** One brother?

**Hector:** The youngest, because the other brother was already here, he arrived in 1917, you remember? My father was already here too.

**Paul:** How did you get from your village to Genoa?

**Hector:** Through a travel agency.

**Paul:** I mean how did you travel from?

**Hector:** By car already.

**Paul:** By automobile?

**Hector:** 1920 to Genoa on mobile, 1920, I don’t think we had any carriage, why not …

**Paul:** Train?

**Hector:** Probably by train. You’re right I think we went by train.

**Paul:** It’s quite a distance isn’t it to Genoa?

**Hector:** Yeah quite a distance. The automobile was in 1920, [inaudible 01:15:56] we went by train. No horse and carriage, because the travel agency took care of the [inaudible 01:16:06] for the families, we were a big group.

**Paul:** There was a group of people from your village?

**Hector:** Yeah. We slept one night in Genoa too, we arrived here one day before.

**Paul:** Did you have to undergo any examinations in Genoa?

**Hector:** Definitely.

**Paul:** Before you got on the ship?

**Hector:** Physical examination mainly, health. I developed TB after, when I was 22, that was a long way off from [inaudible 01:16:38]. I was a weakling, I had what they used to call whooping cough and the children had it, babies. I got all kinds of disease of children.

**Paul:** Can you describe for me where on the Dante Alighieri you slept?

**Hector:** Where I slept in the Dante Alighieri?

**Paul:** Yes, can you describe the accommodations?

**Hector:** Very bad we were arranged [inaudible 01:17:12] people. You slept with cattle, steerage, you’ve heard that word steerage? I was almost 14, almost 15 and we had a picture of passport, my mother and two boys, myself and the other boy, together.

They separate that picture, take me apart because I was over 14. That I was special passport, [inaudible 01:17:49] two, three days, special passport for that because I was over 14. I had to sleep with the men in the steerage. Husband and wife didn’t matter because it was only 18 days, they were separated.

The steerage, big room, carts, [inaudible 01:18:08] one or the other [inaudible 01:18:14] my face. I was sleeping, woke up, my face was all wet. That’s the steerage there. My mother was with my younger brother who was six. He could sleep with mom in different beds and we’d meet every morning. What did we have? We didn’t have sheets, mattress, we changed our underpants. That’s all.

**Paul:** Where were you fed on the ship?

**Hector:** I suppose we had the dining halls. From Genoa to Naples we made many stops, that trip was [inaudible 01:19:03]. Then they told us, the sailors told us, “You complain about this, wait till you reach Naples.” The mob starts to get in, [inaudible 01:19:17] he called it a nickname.

We were in Southern Italia, near [inaudible 01:19:22] because we were supposed to be superior. When they arrived, and the men who were running -We were in groups together, we used to eat on the deck.

The food, we had to stay in line, fill up our sacks and then carry it with us, a group of eight or 10 with family or friends that you wanted to. It was optional the way, if you want to go -We were all from the same village, three families I think. We were all together, we ate here on the deck, on top of those air vents.

Because when we saw the dining hall, when [inaudible 01:20:09] practically over a thousand gallons, same day. I said, “Why would we want to go to eat in there [inaudible 01:20:19] let’s eat on the deck,” this was already the latter part of March.

The weather was not too bad, except for the sea sickness and something else. That’s how we ate, 18 days because we had to stop, talk about the trip?

**Paul:** I was going to say talk about the sea sickness.

**Hector:** I can tell you that because I had it badly. The sea sickness seemed to affect teenagers much more than younger people. My kid brother used to make fun of me, because he was seven or eight between seven or eight and he could eat. Then he’d watch me throw up he’d laugh, it was fun.

I had very sick sea sickness and they gave us the stuff, sea sickness. In fact, my mother brought some concussion liquid that they told her in the village. “Maria take this and put it in the container there.” It’s got onions, that helps thin out.

We could buy water of course we had water, free. The food was just mostly stew, couple of times a day. Then we threw up in the corner regularly. I got very sick and I was 14, then I got over it toward the end.

**Paul:** If so many people are sick?

**Hector:** Yeah.

**Paul:** Were there lavatories somewhere for people to use?

**Hector:** There was lavatory, but by the time you find the lavatory, the corner was behind there in the stairways. These poor men all they would do is clean up, nothing but mops and sweepers. It was a tough thing. We threw up the food [inaudible 01:22:32] it was not funny. We had tables in the dining hall, but as I said, we refused to go at the table …

**Paul:** Because the Southern Italians were eating on the tables?

**Hector:** Right. Some of them when we got on in Naples, we could not get seats, they were all taken over by the new arrivals those tables. We had to more or less we wanted to fight we didn’t. They kicked us out of the dining hall, and then the smell, so much rotten food.

The whole journey wasn’t pleasant to take and very long. The reason of that length was the war was practically two years old, there was still scarcity of everything. You had to eat what they gave you and the food was very bad. They used to be a lot of sea sickness.

The captain used to keep the ship at, what they call, the best speed possible. It was a moderate speed, so that we wouldn’t throw up too much. I got sick, my mother not too much. We had to carry our own bag in groups, stand in line, then eat, wash all our utensils. Nothing but sea water and that sea cold water and keep together.

Then when we arrived there in harbor of New York City, they only have the lower bay and the upper bay. The last meal we got we got in the morning, some breakfast I guess, was breakfast in the morning. On the upper bay said, “That’s our last meal.”

They went and got the meal we had left over, “What are we going to do with this now? This shit here, what we do?” “We eat it, let’s throw it out, there goes your garbage.” Even the sailors didn’t dare stop us. We threw away the sacks of the utensils and the plates and glasses everything and leftover food. When we landed we didn’t have a bit of food to eat. You couldn’t do it anyway, the food was …

**Paul:** You said the trip took 18 days?

**Hector:** 18 days.

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

**Hector:** The Statue of Liberty? We landed, because I had lived mean time, it was eight, nine years between 1909 and 1920. No, 1909 and 1911, three year living in New York. 1911 we come back here. Then back again, anyway, this was 1920. We had that oatmeal in morning. What were you saying about …

**Paul:** The Statue of Liberty, do you remember seeing it?

**Hector:** Yeah. We saw it, we knew all about it. The harbor was so packed, ships arrivals, they were arriving after the war. The Manhattan, the docks were all filled, we had to dock on the New Jersey side, opposite about 14 street something like that. I remember seeing a big sign Colgate, what is it?

It’s a factory by the name of Colgate Soaps. The pier landing was on the same building, did I sleep there? Yes, then we had to go to Ellis Island. We couldn’t land in New Jersey. Ellis Island, I think by that time belonged to New York City, they were still arguing about it.

A small boat took us shore and we stayed there two nights, just sleeping, dressed up two nights. My father came over and claim us and we were all right. We took the boat to South ferry.

**Paul:** Describe for me what you remember about being at Ellis Island? What sticks out in your mind?

**Hector:** That’s when the kid wet my face. Being with all those men, I was afraid they might hurt me, but I slept I was so tired. I slept a big whole day. The carts were in two layers, the kids were usually on top and the women, of course the women and the little kids. Women where they slept I didn’t see them because I was already with the men. The men down below and the boys on the top.

**Paul:** Ellis Island was …

**Hector:** The food wasn’t bad. We would stand in line and my kid brother used to come over we eat together from the women side. Because the dining hall was joined, husband and wife.

I remember my brother, eight years old, hungry like anything. We [inaudible 01:28:51] those tables there those big sandwich bread, we never saw them in Europe, in Italy. My brother was still hungry, the bread, so sweet, sweet bread like that, my mother never had that in Europe, ordinary with salt and water and that’s the way bread was made.

My brother used to go back and looked at it, I remember I was with the woman asked him, “Little kid, you want more bread?” “Yeah.” He was eating plain bread, he thought he was eating cake, he said, “It’s so sweet, just like biscuit,” cake.

We had to stay two days because they couldn’t go over and go through the inspection in time, in the regular one day, we stayed. The second day was only part of it, I think we were discharged about noon time.

**Paul:** You only slept there one night?

**Hector:** Yeah, it was only one night.

**Paul:** Did you have to undergo any kind of examination while you were there?

**Hector:** On Ellis Island? No examination, maybe yes, because one was in the ship before landing, a day before and then on Ellis Island again. Examined the eyes, ears, weight, we all went through. Then we took the …

**Paul:** Who met you at Ellis Island?

**Hector:** My father.

**Paul:** Can you describe for me seeing your father?

**Hector:** Seeing my father [inaudible 01:30:44] and my father was very cold toward my mother. I remember over hearing say, “Maria you look ugly, you’re ugly.” Because she had no makeup, nothing [inaudible 01:31:01] she’s a son of a gun complaining, he’s got his wife with him now, because I was 14 already.

We took the elevator, no taxis. The elevator from south ferry, there is as a subway, but the Eighth Avenue subway was not build yet. We had to go to Eighth Avenue. There was the elevator station Sixth Avenue, Eighth Avenue, 30 Street is where we landed. We stayed there for a while but we didn’t like it.

Ground floor humidity was high. [Inaudible 01:31:45] we used to call them rail road flats, front room and a room in the yard, you had a whole floor. Had windows in both.

The other rooms in between, the window was in a shaft way. The ones that were sleeping in the middle rooms, the one sleeping in the back they go to the kitchen and then go through there it’s a hallway.

**Paul:** Did the apartment have electricity?

**Hector:** Yes at that time yeah, 1920 yes. Electricity for light only, gas was still cheaper for cooking. I’m having a gas box here.

**Paul:** What were some of your impressions of New York City as a 14 year old? Of course you have a whole type of perspective …

**Hector:** I was really excited about it, because I was [inaudible 01:32:46] I was so tight in saving the knickers. We lived there with some friends found us [inaudible 01:32:55] right behind the Pennsylvania Station on 30 Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenue.

In order to go to the Biltmore hotel in Madison and 44th, you had to take the trolley car, I say there was no subway, trolley car Eighth Avenue, Seventh avenue. Then transfer for across town, 42nd Street with the street car there and then walk.

Madison and 42nd or 44 just two short blocks, do that and it was quite a trip. We had to be in the dining room 6:30 in the morning, 14, 15 year old and still they let me work.

**Paul:** Tell me how you got the job at the Biltmore?

**Hector:** As I said by lying the age. I tell you how, my poor mother she said, “Sit down I want to talk to you.” My other brother was working already, my father was still working. We were just the two of us, “Sit down.” She said, “Look here at the table.” I remember just as [inaudible 01:34:11].

She says, “You know your father is sick, he can’t work anymore and you’re not even 15, but would you like to go to school or go to work?” I was brought up in the old country to help your father and mother and all those stories from the bible. Help out your parents, not only adore them.

I said, “I’ll go to work?”I figure at work I can learn English after work, I didn’t realize the hours I had to put in. Instead at the Biltmore Hotel at 6:30 you had to be in dining room the great room, the ground floor there. Two blocks from no, three on block, square block 44th Madison Avenue. Then 43rd, 44th Madison Avenue, brand new building was built in 1913 just before the war.

6:30 I had to get up at 5:30. Then in the morning I wait for a street car it never showed up, 6, 6:30 I start to walk. 14 short blocks, but then three long blocks from Seventh Avenue to Madison Avenue, you know Manhattan where we are. I did that.

In the dining room, ready for breakfast at seven. We set up everything, dining room up at seven, 7:30 until 11, 11:30 they serve breakfast. We had to stay there until 11, 11:30 then you have time off, half hour for lunch where the help eats, not in the dining room.

Then from 12, since we work for breakfast, we were allowed to go in the dining room, right at the moment when they start serving from 12 to 2:30. Then from 2:30 until 5:30 you had time off, what would you do that afternoon time off?

14th 15th , 20 blocks from the flat which was [inaudible 01:36:51] the place and then go back for dinner, serve dinner. I walk home and I say, it’s a long trip and not too much time.

We had also English school in the afternoon. A couple of times a week, I was anxious to learn some English. I took that in and I learned that language you mix up now. Then one waiter told me he said, “Why do you want to go home in the afternoon? Get some fresh air.”

The double buses start to come in, you remember double deck buses on Fifth Avenue? Double fare, 10 cents instead of a nickel. I used to go up, pay a dime all the way at the end of the line, stay there pay another dime come back. I wanted to see the Hudson River and [inaudible 01:37:55] in the city. I was quite excited. It was a long strain so I lasted about two years then I quit.

**Paul:** What was your job at the Biltmore exactly? What were you doing?

**Hector:** The Biltmore hotel was in the class of Waldorf Astoria and The Plaza and St. Regis, first class hotels. They have a graduation, little kids are 16, are supposed to be 16, they make you silver boy and you take care of the silver and the water boy, not even a bus boy.

You have your stations in the dining room, here and there. Your pitchers of water and make sure there is enough silver all separated in the different trays and the rows. That was your job for a while.

Then you became bus boy. Bus boy is the helper of the waiter, clean the table and help set it and someone was serving. The waiter takes the order, the captain usually takes the order.

Every captain has a half a dozen waiters, two three tables, just those tables they have, that’s all. That’s the way they used to work in those days. I did that. Then I didn’t like it anymore I wanted to learn the trade.

**Paul:** You actually started then as a water boy or silver boy?

**Hector:** As a silver boy.

**Paul:** Were they all immigrants who worked at these jobs?

**Hector:** Yes I would say. You’d be surprised, there was segregation already prejudice among us. When I went there I talked to a waiter in Italian and they were all from our area, from North Italy, Piemonte and they knew dialect.

In fact they used to [inaudible 01:39:55], “Did you have before a girlfriend where you were?”I lie, say, “Yes.” I was only 14 I had no girlfriend. He’s talking dialect.

Southern Italians were hired in the kitchen, clean, all that hard work like that the southern Italian. Take care of the heat, at that time the heat was the shovel coal, yes it was coal.

**Paul:** The Southern Italians were hired in?

**Hector:** Were not in the dining room. The head waiter had not arrived, but what do you want, if you didn’t want certain men you tell the [inaudible 01:40:44] hotel. He said, “No, I know.” Southern Italians only the more menial work. Just at that time imagine that.

We had Northern Italians, French and Germans. Some Greeks just began to come in, but the Greeks also bus boys. The kitchen was strictly French service, French cooked food in the kitchen everybody was speaking French.

They had head steward men, he order from him and make the [inaudible 01:41:28] call maid who is the assistant. I became a call maid, assistant waiter, takes the order, takes the order down to the kitchen. [Inaudible 01:41:38] upstairs and hand it over to the [inaudible 01:41:43] the orders.

In French, he says, the orders so much of this and that, all in French. Then you carry your trays up, imagine a kid 15 years old. Because I became a -They promoted me right away. I was only silver boy a few weeks a few months maybe. I was small and was a very hard worker.

**Paul:** How much did you get paid?

**Hector:** One or two dollars at the most a day. Your meals, six days a week, that was the order. The uniform, part of the uniform yes, black stripped front, not all the shirt, they supplied that.

In the afternoon sometimes they told me that there was an English class up in the 18th floor. I started going out around the buses I used to take English class in the afternoon, between an hour or two hour at the most.

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

**Hector:** School with private teachers, either they got teachers from the school system or private schools, I never considered private schools. Because she was nice the woman, but she didn’t know any Italian at all. I learned fast.

While we were learning English while working all those hours, I read the books and the newspaper. Newspaper I had to read New York American and New York journal, they were all equivalent of the daily news here, those papers. I learned that.

The signs on the windows. This is the funniest one, SALE big sign and through the window, right on Madison Avenue there near the hotel. Through the window I look at [inaudible 01:44:06], old men’s clothes, shirts, Italian SALE is Sale, you know what that is? Salt and you pronounce it sale.

I laughed at myself, it was a joke, why would they have a sign like that there. When I got in the room I talked to the waiter, English or the German waiter and I mentioned, “What’s the idea there?” “You didn’t get fooled well?” “For a moment I got fooled, but I don’t know what was wrong.” That’s what it is.

Sale here is salt in Italian. I was watching. I used to have a little pocket book pad I took from the hotel. I take home and I make notes, words I want to look up in dictionary. That way.

I never went full time school. Then I went to high school for a while, then I went to a book keeping school for a while after working then I quit. To school I went when I started to work in the factory. Then my regular eight hours, five and a half days. In the evening I had more time to go to school. I never went to regular school because regular school you don’t get paid.

**Paul:** Did your parents speak English?

**Hector:** Neither one or the other, they knew some words. Believe it or not, my mother more than my father. They learned some, my mother could understand. In fact, I remember we were buying some apples or something in a fruit store there and they were making fun of her English word.

My mother got mad at her and said, “Me no speak English, you no speak Italian, so we’re all right, we even.” She got mad, say, “I don’t speak English, you don’t speak Italian.” Because they know there’s no comparison and he was trying to teach her a word, she got offended.

**Paul:** Did you find, in the first couple of years you were here in New York, did you ever experience any prejudice because you were an immigrant, from maybe outside of the workplace, any kind of conflict?

**Hector:** Yes. Being North Italian, they could not figure out through my mistakes, through my patois, my English [inaudible 01:46:57] where I came from. In fact, this is years later when I was working in the club and a professor of Scottish language and he was Scottish not Scot He says, “Hector, you have a particular accent,” more than I have now.

He said, “You sound like you have a Scottish accent, are you Scottish?” He took me for a Scot, I said, “No, professor so and so.” I forgot his name. “I am Italian.” “Italian you are?” Italian over here, South Italia, North Italia. I said, “I know what you mean Professor, I come from so and so.” “No wonder, I knew there was a brogue.” They call it, sort of brogue, a Scottish brogue I said, “No.”

They made fun of me, but not me because I learned English [inaudible 01:48:15]. Then we made a pact, P-A-C-T with my older brother, he was here three years ahead of me and he had started a hard way too.

We said, “Listen, from now on we have to take a lesson before you go to bed, English. We have to make a pact to go together, part in Italian, not to speak any other language but English, even if you make mistake you correct.” It was hard the first few months, after that it was easy.

That’s how I learned my English. After that of course I did a little bit of school, not much. I read a lot, I’d read books, but now my eyes are going bad.

**Paul:** Did your parents ever wish to return to Italy to live or did they return to Italy to live?

**Hector:** No, no more after, because we rented the property there, we rented property. They were paying the taxes rather. My mother told me, except going over and visit. We used to have enough rooms to stay there for some days.

**Paul:** They used to go back to visit?

**Hector:** In the same house yeah. We never rented outside, the village was so small. I think there was only one house there.

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

**Hector:** American of course. American because we have so many nationalities here, many different languages and combined it becomes English. I’ve been here for so long. When I left there, 1920, I had made a decision not to go back anymore to live, except visit. That’s what I’ve been doing.

**Paul:** Did you become a citizen, a United States citizen?

**Hector:** As soon as possible. I was so anxious that I almost broke the law. That time I was 21.

**Paul:** This is when you were in United States …

**Hector:** Yeah I was 21. I would have been 21 in July, what happened?

**Paul:** You applied for citizenship?

**Hector:** I applied the papers there I wanted to -There was an examination in New York City, in Long Island City in December before 1926. I couldn’t do it they won’t let me, because I was not 21 yet. The minute I got the papers right away I applied to I’d like to vote. I voted as soon as I was 21.

I didn’t wait, most of them they wait two, three years. In fact, my father waited about 10 years before he became a citizen. He could have been before, [inaudible 01:51:36].

**Paul:** Were going to have to end soon anyway Mr. Tonetti. I have one final question before we end. Do you have any advice for young people who are just beginning their lives on ways to live their lives successfully? Maybe rules that you’ve lived by in your own life?

**Hector:** The rule is the common sense rule. The rule is, when you grow up try to learn as much as possible and be serious in school. Everything you do take it seriously, not just as a first time.

In fact, I was so serious when I was going to the special school in the afternoon that a teacher in the hotel he says, “What do you do in your time off Hector?” I think she called me Hector already, “When I go home, I go and lay down and rest.”

“Don’t you go out and play football or any games you play?” I have no time, six and a half days a week and [inaudible 01:53:00] over. I never had any too much into sports, I never followed football too much, all those games.

I worked in the golf club 28 years, I never played golf seriously. Six days and I said, my day off is Monday, I want to get out of here, no matter how nice it looks. I stay six days a week, go and see my people my family. I was very serious. I did read and write a lot, I read serious books, books, what do you call it? Not junk, what was it … ?

**Paul:** That’s all right, we were talking about …

**Hector:** Classics, classic books and reading and writing a lot on my own. When I became sick with the [inaudible 01:54:19], connection with this disease here. I decided I was getting old I was 75 or so, I decided to write my memoir, I said, very few people know my life and I want to leave something.

I wrote it in English, little by little. Only four relatives only, private I didn’t want anybody to, because amateur work. My brother and cousin say, “When can I see them? Why can’t I have a copy of it?” “Because you are a cousin, you are already too far distant in the relationship.”

Anyway I let myself down and I included all the cousins. That means about 75, 80 copies, maybe more all the cousins. I tell you only that many because in Italy they wanted two, say I have to write it in Italian though, I translated all that in Italian.

This volume, you haven’t seen it. [Inaudible 01:55:38] that they gave me, my daughter-in-law and my son, they made up some mementos in the cover they put, the book cover. Then they filled it in, they had everybody contribute something. The title is, ‘I remember when.’ I don’t think it’s so popular, my gosh everybody wanted.

**Paul:** This is probably a good place for us to end, I want to thank you very much Mr. Tonetti.

**Hector:** You’re welcome. I keep busy all the time.

**Paul:** Hang on a second. This is Paul Seacrest signing off with Hector Tonetti on Monday August 21st 1995 for the Ellis Island Immigration Oral history project. Thank you.