

DANBURY ETHNIC AND CULTURAL FESTIVAL

Danbury, Conn.

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Approved: 2 rand & spirit  
(narrator's signature)

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(narrator's address)

Date signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

NM: This is an interview with Mr. <sup>Frank</sup>~~Dominic~~ Esposito of 19 Starr Avenue, Danbury, Conn., conducted in his home by Nancy Morris.

Date: Age: 93  
Born: San Bernardo, De Collatura Region, Calabria, Italy.  
Well, off and running, so -- Okay, I don't know what--

H: maybe you ought to got that--that was his father's name, my brother's name, but that was his father's name. Remember the time when you told her, Dad, she asked a few questions about your father's name and stuff? That's where she got the name--

NM: That's my husband's name, Frank, so now I'll be able to remember that, I guess. Okay, do you mind going right back to Italy? Back to Calabria?

DE: Yes.

NM: Good. Okay. Well, let's start right at the beginning. Do you remember when you came to America?

DE: Yes. 19 hundred and three.

NM: And how old were you?

DE: Eleven or twelve only.

NM: Do you remember--well, you lived in Calabria--do you remember what it was like there?

DE: Well, it was nice. I worked with my father on the farm. I take care few sheeps we had. I watch couple cow. Because I wasn't old enough to dig--to work beside him, so I done them little cords (?)

NM: What made the decision to come to America? Do you remember anything about that?

DE: Well, you see, father, every couple of years he would come. See, he was a citizen. He come here two, three years and he go back home, stay to couple years or so. Then he come back here again.

NM: Oh, I see. So finally, he decided that he would take you with him, or did you want--?

DE: This one time he had come back, we build house alongside my grandfather and he was coming back, so I had another brother, he stayed home and I was the oldest--he took me along with him.

NM: The oldest of how many, Mr. Esposito? How many children were there?

DE: Well, mother had three. I'm the only survivor now.

NM: You've got the secret. Then there was an uncle who came with you also? Did an uncle, as well as your father, come?

DE: Several people--uncle, John 's father, Frank 's father--they was here.

NM: Those were all from the same area in Calabria? I see.

DE: Yes.

NM: Do you remember leaving your mother--did you think that you would sometime come back and see her, of course?

DE: Well, that's our--idea was to come, stay two, three years, and go back. But when I got here, I changed my mind. Father went back but I didn't. Several years after that, he went and the second time he come back, he was going to take me with him and I didn't go. So--

NM: Now, the trip. Do you remember how it was paid for? Remember how much it cost or anything like that?

DE: Well, I tell you. That time that was 300 lire they call it. Now, today, it be about fifty cents, I guess. But I can guess, by the way when I went back myself, it cost me \$35.00 from New York to Naples.

DE: That we started to--I told you--that time I come with my father, my uncles and several other people.

NM: And you said that you went from Calabria to Naples by train? Was that how you got there?

DE: Yes, by train.

NM: And the name of the boat?

DE: The name of the boat was Conte Bianca Madre (?). This the time I come the first time. The one I went back later, I tell you, this one, like I come the first time, is Conte Bianca Madre. We got in New York City sometime towards noon. We landed in little island--those day they had that opened, but they check us up, your clothes. We had to take a shower. Dressed up again. Then we went into New York. Well, it was near ten o'clock at night.

NM: So it was all day at Ellis Island.

DE: Well, most all day. From there we got train. We land in Pittsburgh the next morning.

NM: Now, was the whole group traveling with you or just your own family?

DE: Well, the whole group--some did, some didn't--see? Some they were in different destination. Some went to Rochester, some to Utica, New York, some came for Danbury. I mean, we were all in the boat, then over here, we got different direction. Then after that, in Pittsburgh we stayed in a hotel. A hotel from a person who was from back home. We stayed there. We eat and father found a boarding house. We didn't stay in Pittsburgh. We lived in Wilkensburg (?). That's about six miles

east of Pittsburgh. Well, then, I went to work.

NM: You were twelve years old when you went to work.

DE: I went to work carrying the water for men that dig ditches. My father worked Capalongos--worked for the company. The People National Gas Company those days. So we worked there. We went around West Virginia when they drill those gas wells. Then most of the time, around Pittsburgh and the little towns around that section.

NM: You didn't go to school? You were busy all day. There was no time for school then?

DE: No, I used to go to school in the winter.

NM: I see. When you couldn't dig?

DE: Winter I used to go to school. But in summer I had to work.

NM: Did you have any trouble with the language, Mr. Esposito? Learning the language? Or did you just pick it up quickly, I expect?

DE: Well, I picked it up the best I could, see? A young kid, you know, I pick up things quick.

NM: Exactly, they learn faster than older people, sure.

DE: So then, when I went to school, got a little better. But my confusion was that, because I had the Italian education. I knew how to read and write and things like that. And you know, the letters here were a little . Naturally, I--made a little confusion.

I sat beside a little girl in the school. She was an Italian. And every time the teacher told me something, she repeated it /to me in her own language. And I made it fine.

NM: How about that? That's wonderful.

DE: So I mean then--

NM: Do you remember how much you made being a water boy?

DE: Water boy? Well, I'll tell you. A man used to get 35¢ an hour. I get about 7.

NM: Well, when did you become a citizen?

DE: Well, I become citizen. Course I come here with my father citizen paper. But then when I went back in Italy in 1912, see, then I lost my citizenship because I served in the Italian Army. Then naturally, I was out. See? I come back in 1920. I stayed a while--I stayed in Williamsport--McKeesport--excuse me.

NM: McKeesport--that's in Pennsylvania, isn't it?

DE: Yes, McKeesport. And then from there I was working in the tube work and in the winter I was near the river. It was cold. So I had a friend of mine that worked in Chicago. He said, "Frank, why don't you come here?"

NM: To get warm--Chicago??

DE: Yes, I decided. I made a bad move, but sometime, you know. I went there and there I took my citizen papers.

NM: In Chicago, I see.

DE: Cook County Courthouse. From there then, I didn't stay long because I didn't like Chicago.

NM: Did you work in the stockyards there, or where did you work? In Chicago? What did you do there?

DE: Oh, I worked for the Wilson Company, packing house--meat packing. So, had a good job if somebody liked it. I didn't like it. So then I come back east again. I come back and I got a job again in place--back to Carbondale. I worked there in a mine.

DE: And from there--well, then I started--later on I went here, I went there--lots place I went--every place that I know I made a little more money, I used to go.

NM: Did you tell me that you went out to Omaha at one time?

~~EE:==Yes,-I-was-in-Omaha--laying-around---I-see--what-did-you-do--~~  
~~=----out-there?-~~

NM:--We--

DE: Yes, I was in Omaha.

NM: When you were laying around? I see.

What did you do out there?

DE: Well, I work--first I worked for the street department. Then in the winter when they laid me off, I found a job with the Union Pacific in the shop--in the machine shop.

NM: So you had lots of different skills; you could turn your hand to anything.

DE: Well, I make the rounds somehow, you know. Pick up things quick. I told them machines

NM: You told them you were a machinist.

DE: Sometime I would tell lie, you know, to get job. Anyway, but I'm make good. I used to get fifty cents an hour, boring wheels. Two bore drills, big, like that. And put this railroad wheel on it and I drill, position that hole, then another guy, he position the axle. But there, I was getting four dollars a day and it was pretty good in those days. 1920-22.

NM: When did you meet your wife?

DE: I met my wife in 1912, got married sometime there. I had to. (???) Well, I guess I got married about 1913 and I went to the army after married. When I come back, they discharged me, and we

DE: had this boy here. Then we had another one that died. And that's all back home. And in 1929, I sent for her to come here. Well, that year, because- depression, and I was in a bad place because then I changed around. I had a brother. My brother worked in Pennsylvania. He say, why don't you come here? We stay together . So I go over my brother. He was working in the brick plant. He was a brick layer. But I didn't know anything about it. bricklaying, so I work around as a laborer. And after this I got so I run the machine. Then from there, one time I got laid off. We had some trouble, a bunch of young fellows, you know. And the boss, he told us we had to hunt another job. So we did. I went to Monchum--this is in Penn. And I stayed there till--I worked there eleven years in that plant. That's the longest I ever was in one job.

NM: Were you doing machine work? In that plant?

DE: Then when I moved, I moved over here. In 1937.

NM: And what brought you to Danbury?

DE: Well, first when I come, I done everything I could. I can mason, dig cellars, things like that where I could. Then I started to inquire in hat shop. I was maintenance in hat shop.

NM: What hat shop was that?

DE: Well, that was--the Gregory boys---Danbury Rough Hat--Delay Street. Then some engineer quit--over Greens--Greens, they begged me. I went over there as maintenance man. I got a little more money. Then they shut down. I was without a job. During the war. Then I went to work in <sup>Bridgeport</sup> ~~Pittsburgh~~. I was assemblyman.



NM: Do you remember what the name of the company was in Bridgeport?

DE: Bassick. Then from there I was work for Bellini <sup>Bedini</sup> (?) in Ridgefield. Over there I done all kind of work. I ran one of these diggers, landscaping, painting, anything that he got a job, we do it.

NM: I don't think you ever sat around very much, Mr. Esposito. Seems to me, you turned your hand to anything, didn't you?

DE: Then my last job was working for Neuman-Endler. They -- wool hats.

NM: What was your job in the hat factory?

DE: I was watchman. The last time, because I was too old. I couldn't do nothing. So that's my history here.

N M: That's your history. Well, it sure is an interesting one. I think you're an amazing man.

DE: I had a now come to me--now the last time I told you I had worked one time in M West Virginia. I missed that.

NM: Was that in a mine?

DE: Yes, in a mine--but that was when I was young.

NM: Mr. Esposito, what would you like your children and your grandchildren to remember most about you? As far as your life and coming to America, and everything?

DE: Here, I like it better.

NM: You're happy.

DE: Over there, we were happy people. We worked, <sup>but</sup> we didn't had what we had here. We had to work hard <sup>er</sup> we're here than we did back home but the life more liberal here because you had a dollar to spend. Over there, you had to wait till

DE: industry come. Over here, in harvest time, but you get it and you sell it and you have a couple dollars. . This is the difference from there to here. Over there, too, you couldn't jump from place to place like me. I like to be jumping all over. Like the fellow--like the old saying, you see the grass is more greener on the other side of the fence.

NM: You were certainly like a grasshopper.

DE: alone---If I didn't like a job, I quit. I had fifteen-twenty dollar, took train --didn't have no prosperity in those days. Young fellow, you had somebody to side with you and you say you build a house or buy a piece of land. Nobody had that . You become old. So, of course, my children here has been better, naturally. They went to school and they had better job than I had. Some time I have tough job.

NM: But you always hope your children will have it a little easier than you did.

DE: Oh, yes.

NM: But they can learn from what you--from your life--

DE: I thank the Lord for the two boys I got. The third one he died in young.

NM: How many grandchildren do you have?

DE: One.

H: And she's got two daughters--great-grandchildren.

NM : Oh, wonderful.

H: That's my brother--well, you met him the last time--he's outside. they're getting ready to retire --

NM: Are they?

NM: Well, this certainly is an interesting story and I'm glad you let me come again to talk with you. I think you're a remarkable man. Shall we listen to you back now?

End of Side I taping.