

Ellis Island Oral Interview

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Education Department
Ellis Island Immigration Museum
Statue of Liberty National Monument



Interviewee: Birgitta Hedman Fichter

Date of Birth: April 7, 1917

Date of Interview: November 29, 1990

Interviewer: Paul E. Sigrist, Jr.

Immigrated from Italy at Age 6 in 1924

Ellis Island Collection: EI-11

Fichter (Going to School in America):

I turned seven after we got here and here children were starting at the age of five in kindergarten, so at age seven they put me in the first grade, which was kind of dumb because I didn't know the language and, I didn't know "yes" and "no." That's how bad it was. I just sat there and every time the teacher even looked at me I would start to cry because I was afraid she was going to say something and I didn't know what, what she was saying. But there was one little girl that I'll never forget and when it was recess time I didn't know why everybody got up and went out of the classroom. But this one little girl came and put her arm around my shoulder, didn't say anything, she just took me outside, stayed with me during recess, and when recess was over she brought me back to my seat in school. And then, that girl, I'll never forget her. But, uh, it was very hard not knowing the language and getting started in school. But when you're young you, you pick it up, I think, a lot easier, especially when, when you're with kids and I had, a couple of my mother's cousins...they could speak Swedish and everything