

Angelina Davis

AD: When I went to the house, you know, the hugging and this and that, and she say something to me--

FF: She?

AD: Mama--John's mother. You know, I don't know what she said, maybe she said welcome; I don't know, but she was talking to me and I look at her. You know, but Winnie was there just jumping up and down, "Ooh, she's cute, and this and that." And Mary--Winnie didn't work that day; it was Friday. She waited for us to come. And she was all dressed up, you know, for us. And we went in the house and the whole time my head was buzzing. They all were talking and yakety-yak and I couldn't understand a word, you know. What a natural, and this and that. And Mama Chadie would say, "Hi." And I would say, "Hi." So, it went up to the next day like that. And then the next day, they fix breakfast and--they fix, they say, a "good breakfast": sausage and eggs, and--scrambled egg and everything and when I saw it, my stomach! Because in Italy, we just, coffee and milk, you know. Coffee and milk. We have that and then biscuits and--"*bisqwit*." And when I saw all the food, I said, "What is this?"

FF: Because you really didn't have biscuits; it was more like a--

AD: Bread from the bakery. We never baked bread at home. And when I saw all that greasy ham and stuff, I said, "John, can I get up for a minute? Can I go to the bathroom?" He said, "Sure." I went to the bathroom and emptied. Oh gosh. They knew I was vomiting, so they came over to see if I was sick. I said, "Yes, I am sick." And I say, "I hope it's not like that every morning. I can't take that."

FF: Yeah one time you told me too about eating corn for the first time.

AD: Yeah, that day. We had lunch, you know, big lunch, and Mama Chadie fixed everything: chickens, you know, all the stuff. I like the dish that had rice and gravy and I enjoyed that and then she put this big bowl of creamed corn. And I said, "What's she doing? Why?" Strange, you know. And I say, "John, what's that?" And he said, "That's corn." And I say, "What are we supposed to do with it?" He say, "Eat it!" I made a face like that and his brother understood what was going on. And he say, "Yeah, they don't eat corn in Italy, you know." "What you do with all that corn?" asked Mama Chadie. And I say, "We give it to the animals." We fed the pigs. So.

Then, after we finished eating, John say, "Come on, I'll take you to see the town." I say, "Okay." And we got in a car. We didn't even go straight because, you know, there was a mountain there at the cross of 441, there was a mountain with a hotel on top. And we went around and went this way south, and then it go north, and I said, "John, please, I'm getting sick. You said you're going to take me to see the town." He said, "This is it. We've been looking at it." Oh god, I said, "Don't say that." He told me it was a small town but that is not small; it's nothing. And you know,

now you can see the town. You see the drugstore and Main Street is pretty full, you know. But then there was nothing there. But, I tell you, I said, "This is the town?" I was expecting to see a town, you know, a group of houses together and I came home and put my head under the pillow and cried, cried, cried. I would've come home if I could. I understand it was a small town, but that was nothing! It wasn't a small town. And, but you know, a little at a time I got used to. Then the people start coming and wanted to know me and they made a big fuss about me. "Oh, she's beautiful! She's pretty. And she--" they start talking and some words I caught on and I say yes, no, and they were looking at my shoe with the platform. That was Friday, and then Saturday night, they had a dance at the gym--at the old gym. And Daddy took me there to, you know, show me to the people. And everybody was so great. I tell you, I never forget the way people treated me when I came. They were just sweet. And if somebody, I like them, I try to force myself to understand. But if I didn't like them, I say, "Me no understand," to get rid of it.

FF: I know, 'cause I know you and Daddy spoke Italian so that people wouldn't understand.

AD: Yeah.

FF: I know for years, you didn't get your citizenship.

AD: No, I got it--in fact, I found a letter, it was in about the late '60s that I got my citizenship. I was scared. I was scared that I had to take the test. I went there and they asked so many questions, you know, and I was shaking. Joe Broaden and Miss Larson came down with me to Atlanta as a witness. And I remember the questions--he was good. He was asking many questions to everybody. And then he asked one--

FF: Who's 'he'?

AD: The man there in charge. And then he asked me--each one of us, one question--and he asked me, he said, "How many justices there are in the Supreme Court?" And I said, "Eight." And he said, "No, nine." And I said, "Well, I didn't finish." I said, "Eight plus the chief justice makes nine." And he smiled and he said, "You deserve it." And then I had to fill out the paper on the things I belonged to at the time. I'd been here a while and I put the Lady Legionnaires, the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, you know, I was working for, and I am a den mother at the school and I wrote lots of stuff. And he said, "This is very impressive." The man kept reading and he looked at me, you know. And John said, "Isn't that something? She did all of this and she didn't even speak well English," you know. And it was fun, and then everybody was inviting me and this club and that club, and PTA and I was embarrassed. And I have those eyes looking at me and I say, "Sorry," I kept apologizing, "I don't speak English." Well, "We don't care what you say, we like to hear you talk. Say whatever you want to."

FF: How did you learn to speak the language?

AD: One word at a time. Well, I'll tell you. It wasn't as hard as somebody else because I work at the office in Italy, headquarters, and there were always officers coming in and out, in and out.

And you grab words, you know. In fact, when they talked to me, I always answered in Italian, but you know, I understood what they asked me. And then when John gave me the other job, he had to travel all over this town and he had to communicate with people. I don't know the English word for them, but I knew what he was saying and I translated to the people and said what he wanted, what he was telling them, you know. And so you know, I thought, well, I knew enough to be by myself if I had to go somewhere. But when I came here, shoot, "Donchu? Ainchu goin' there? Ainchu?" I looked in the dictionary; I couldn't find ainchu. "Donchu like it? Donchu?" "I ain't. I ain't doin' that." And I look at daddy like to say, "Please help me."

FF: Well tell me the can opener thing, goin' to Belk's

AD: Yeah, I went to Belk's and I said, "Daddy, let's go in there and see--" I was looking for knitting wool, you know. And he said, "No, you go in and get what you need." I said, "Please don't leave me here. Please, please." He said, "You'll never learn if I come in with you. If I come in with you, you don't learn." I could see him standing at the door to Belk's. It wasn't Belk's yet. I--matter of fact, the lady that owned it at the time, she just died last month. And I was scared, "Don't leave me please." He said, "No. You will never learn if I come with you." So they came up and they asked me, said, "Can I help you?" "I don't know. I need, you know?" Tried to explain it. They brought me something, said, "No, no." I tell them, you know, the motion, you know. And show me something else. No. We went on about 30 minutes. They were laughing. They enjoy it; they enjoy the game, you know. And I kept saying, when they were laughing, I started laughing too. And I explain and I said, "No, you know baby? Baby sweater? Baby, you know?" And I say, you know, work. Finally one of them brought me something, I remember it was Doris Bleckley's mama. She brings it, "This one?" "Yes!" And everybody, "Yeah!"

That was something that happened every day. It happened every day. Every store I went, it was like that.

Many houses--homes--they invite me to supper, me and daddy. And so one night, we had this beautiful supper. There was fried chicken and mashed potatoes and all the vegetables. Okay. Tuesday, we were invited for supper. I went to this other house, and I ate fried chicken, mashed potatoes, green beans. Then, I went to, I don't know how many homes that they invited me for supper. I didn't realize that that was the best, you know, special supper. You know, to fix fried chicken, that was special. I thought that everybody was eating fried chicken, mashed potatoes, and green beans. Then I turn to John, I say, "That's all they eat here? Fried chicken, green beans, and mashed potatoes?" And he said, "No, they do this special for you." I'm like, "Please, tell them not to fix it one more time or I'm gonna croak." It was awful. But then he explained it to me that they were being nice, doing something special, they do something special. So I accepted better.

FF: Have you ever regretted?

AD: No, never. I have nostalgia of home. I was homesick many times. And I dreamed and I say, "Oh, I'd like to go home and do this and this and this at home," you know. But no, I have no regrets.