

UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

Advice on Seeing Eye-to-Eye with Your Young Client

It can be a challenge successfully communicating with an unaccompanied child. The AILA National Ethics Committee provides tips on representing and getting through to your minor client. **13**

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A 94-Year-Old's
Long Journey to
Prove Citizenship

The Long Journey to Prove Citizenship

by Raymond Lahoud 

In September 2012, 94-year-old Anna Haight wanted to attend a group trip to Atlantic City. To receive a complimentary \$25 from the casino to gamble, she first needed to show a government-issued photo ID. With only expired passports that U.S. Department of State (DOS) issued years before and possessing no other identification, Haight applied for an ID card at the local Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV). The DMV clerks attempted to verify her identity, but no match was found in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) computer system. The DMV instead issued her a temporary ID, which allowed Haight to go on the casino trip.

A few days later, DMV clerks called Haight to say that there was no evidence that she had any legal status, even though she was previously issued U.S. passports. According to them, the passports issued by DOS did not prove her status in the United States, and DHS had no records for her. The only record Haight did have was a certificate of naturalization, with her name and picture listed. That certificate, however, was issued to her mother, and DHS claimed

that this was not sufficient to establish her status because the certificate predated the current version of the Immigration and Nationality Act, which does not recognize certificates like these. Therefore, they concluded, she technically was never a U.S. citizen.

USCIS Investigates ... and an AILA Attorney Gets Involved

When U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) was notified of Haight's unusual situation, it began investigating the matter. Ann Marie Ball, Haight's youngest daughter, then contacted me about her mother's very unique case. Moved by these circumstances, I took the case pro bono.

The process dragged on for many months. Haight often worried about the result. "All of my friends kept asking if they (the government) were going to



LOOKBOOK

After living in the United States for more than 90 years, Anna Haight is a confirmed U.S. citizen with the help of AILA attorney Raymond Lahoud.

ship me back to Italy," she said. Despite fearing the possibility of deportation, Haight knew that she was, in fact, a U.S. citizen. "I insisted that I was a citizen because I remember when my father went for his citizen papers in 1926 that I went with him," she explained, "and my name was on there."



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—94-year-old Anna Haight

A Historic Beginning and a Happy Ending

Born in Italy to Angelo and Carmella Latrechchia, Haight arrived in the United States in 1920 as a four-month-old. Her father had come to America when he was 17 years old to find work. But the Italian government requested young men to return to Italy to defend the country in World War I. After the war, the Italian government provided a free passage to soldiers who wanted to return to the United States.

The Latrechchia family settled in West Virginia after arriving through Ellis Island. Haight and her three siblings received their citizenship when their father himself became a citizen in 1926. Many of the original documents from the family’s journey can be found on the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation’s website.

I worked with USCIS in Philadelphia to secure

◀◀ [previous](#) ALLA Doc. No. 15020246. (Posted 2/2/15)

Haight’s certificate of naturalization. USCIS searched for her father’s citizenship records in its computer system, but did so in vain because the information was so old. The necessary documents were eventually found months later on microfilm.

Then, on November 15, 2013, after living in the United States for more 90 years, the long-awaited moment finally arrived. Haight’s friends and family, as well as my colleagues and me, gathered at Country Meadows Retirement Community in Bethlehem, PA to witness a USCIS officer deliver the oath of allegiance and present a certificate of citizenship to Haight.

Also on hand were fifth grade students from Green Street and Andover Morris Elementary Schools in Phillipsburg, NJ, where Ball teaches. The students, who were studying immigration, received a one-of-a-kind lesson.

Happy to finally be officially recognized as a U.S. citizen but exhausted by the ordeal, Haight simply concluded, “I am very relieved that it is all over.”

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