

EI-1084

GEORGE NESTOR

BIRTHDATE: MARCH 13, 1917

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AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 82

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D. GEORGE TSELOS, PH.D.

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GREECE, 1929

AGE: 11

SHIP:

PORT: PATRAS [PH]

RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: Today is June 23rd, 1999. And George Sellis and I, Janet Levine, are here in Ab—Absecon, New Jersey at the home of Mr. and Mrs. George Nestor. Mr. Nestor came from Greece in 1929 at the age of 11. And we are very interested in hearing whatever you can remember about your early life, coming here and then settling here, and where you settled and what it was like for you and your family. Okay, let's start at the beginning. If you would say your birth date for the tape, and if there's a story connected with that, fine.

NESTOR: I was born March 13th, 1917.

LEVINE: And where were you born?

NESTOR: I was born in a small community called Siaka [PH]—Siaka, Greece. And from there, after my mother passed away, my father moved to the community or the town I was raised in, called

Akrata. [PH] Akrata lies on the map between Ayun [PH] and Patras along the main highway overlooking the sea.

LEVINE: Do you remember your mother's maiden name, her full name and her maiden name?

NESTOR: Uh, it always—when my—remember—

LEVINE: No.

NESTOR: —one name we had, Sophia [PH].

LEVINE: How about—wh—well, how old were you when your mother died?

NESTOR: Well, I was five years old and I do remember my mother, and I still remember why or how she died. She got bit by something along her cheek. And she passed away when I was five years old.

LEVINE: Wow. Do you remember her at all?

NESTOR: Very much.

LEVINE: Wh—how do you remember her? When you close your eyes and think of her, what is it—

NESTOR: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: —that you see?

NESTOR: Well, I remember she was my mother. I remember how much she loved my brother and me. Was only two sons, two children. And, of course, after she passed away, my father remarried and moved into Akrata, the community of Akrata.

LEVINE: How about your moth—I'm sorry. How about your mother? Can you remember anything about her, what kind of a person she was, how she was with you?

NESTOR: My mother, I remember, was a hard-working person. She did all the cooking, all the baking in a small, outdoor furnace that my father had built for her. She did all the preparations, the foods. I remember her hanging fresh grapes from the cellar of our house from my father's grape arbor. And those grapes would hang there in the cellar, dark cellar till Christmas and New Year's. We had fresh grapes. But she was also protecting my brother and myself, because Dad was a no-nonsense man. He gave you an order

and you better follow if. And if we didn't follow it, thank the Lord, Mom was around to protect us.

LEVINE: [chuckles] Okay. And your father's name?

NESTOR: My father's name was Panayorte [PH], which means Peter. Panayorte—Peter. That's my middle name. That's my son's name today, Panayorte, or Peter.

LEVINE: And grandparents? Do you—did you have any grandparents—

NESTOR: I'm sorry. I don't remember hardly anything of my grandparents at all.

LEVINE: Were they from the area in Greece that you lived in?

NESTOR: Yes.

LEVINE: Both sides?

NESTOR: Yeah, they—in Greece, it's all—if I remember correctly, the homesteads are—are passed from grandfather to father to son. So therefore, all the properties that we own actually came from the grandparents.

LEVINE: I see. Let's see. So do you have any memories before you moved to Akrata? Do you remember, like, a house and—

NESTOR: Yes, yes. The—in Siaka, in the little community of Siaka, we lived next to my father's brother. And he had four sons. I—and the oldest son's still living today. He's the king of the tribe, so to say. He's up in his late 80s, still lives there, still controls the fields, the grape arbors, the olive orchards, the lemon and orange orchards. His name is Spiro [PH]. And the three brothers also living. Some—well, they're all retired from work, including Spiro, except he has natives working the fields for him, the wheat fields, the corn fields, the olives and all that. But we lived next door to them and I do remember—we're talking about figs a little while ago, and I remember this big fig tree between the two properties that I used to climb up when I was a youngster, stuffing the fresh-picked figs into my shirt and bringing it down. And every time Dad caught me, it was another beating I got, because I was getting my shirts all dirty. But I still remember my cousins. We still visit them, if and when—go to Greece.

SELLIS: How did your father happen to move to the second town? Did he—was there property there from his—that belonged to a second wife's family? Or did he have other family property there? I wondered how he happened to choose the other town.

NESTOR: Oh, the understanding I had was that my uncle, my father's brother, who was the chief of police of Athens, was the so-called director or the ruler of the family. And when it came time for splitting these properties up, he thought it was time for my father, go to Akrata from Siaka and leaving the Siaka property to my uncle, Thenasi [PH] and my aunt, Caliope [PH]. And their homesteads are next to each other today. They built next to each other but Thea [PH] Caliope passed away. And, of course, my uncle passed away. But the nephews, or the sons, still own the properties next to each other.

LEVINE: Did you have a lot of aunts and uncles?

NESTOR: Oh, yes. Yeah.

LEVINE: So you—you saw them? I mean, you had a big extended family when you were in Greece?

NESTOR: W—every time we go we make sure that we leave Akrata by—mostly by bus, sometimes by train, and visit Siaka, and visit my oldest cousin. And of course, next door to him is our nephew, George, and his family. They both have beautiful property, beautiful lands. And the uncanny part about it, these two families, although they were first cousins, they didn't speak to each other for years. And yet, they lived next to each other. But finally, the ice broke about eight years ago and now they're good friends, good relatives.

LEVINE: Do you know what the feud was—was over that lasted all those years?

NESTOR: Yes, I—the—the—after arriving in America in 1929, I didn't go back to Greece till 35 years later. And of course, I was anxious to see my relatives. I was anxious to see my land. And in Greece, the understanding I have, there's no such thing as a written law. But the understanding is when the oldest son is living and the father passes away, it's automatic the properties, the houses, the lands, the orchards automatically reverts back to the oldest son. And then he's—to see that the understanding is, again, that he shares those properties with the rest of the family. Now, when I said before I was missing—after 35 years, two daughters had the

opportunity to go to—to Greece on a college trip. And they—that trip was—they were to spend a week in Egypt and a week in Greece. Well, they then missed the opportunity when they visited Greece—my sister knew about it and she went down and picked them up and took them to our homestead. And of course, when our two daughters returned, they both said, “Dad, what are you waiting for? Your sister’s crying every day she saw us. She wants to see you. She wants to talk to you.” Shortly thereafter, of course, my wife, being the boss she is, we packed up and returned to Greece and saw my sister after 30-some years.

LEVINE: Wow. You mentioned you had a brother. How many children were there altogether?

NESTOR: There was just the two of us, my brother, Nick, and I. Of course, my stepmother was left with a—a child when Dad passed away. And she turned out to be a female. And today, my sister, whom I visit—we see her all the time, and I’d rather spend every minute I can with her.

LEVINE: What’s her name?

NESTOR: Her name is—

MRS. NESTOR: Boniota.

NESTOR: Boniota [PH]. Again, it’s a female name for Peter, really. Boniota. And going back again to the property and the land—

LEVINE: Oh, we were talking about the feud that lasted so long, what it was based on.

NESTOR: Right.

LEVINE: The feud. The feud of your cousins.

NESTOR: Oh, it was—it was the other community. It was from my older cousin, Spiro, to my nephew, my Aunt Caliope’s son, Yoro [PH] (George) lived next to each other. The feud went on and on and on. But in the new community in Akrata, only my sister lived there with her mother-in-law and her family, four sons and a daughter. So I have four nephews and a wonderful niece. There isn’t too much that they would spend on me or the trips that would take—my wife and I, when—if and when we visit them.

LEVINE: You—you were starting to say about the feud that lasted all those years. It had to do with the oldest son inherits all the property and then is supposed to share it with the other children?

NESTOR: Well, there's—see, there was two families there.

MRS. NESTOR: What was the difference—

NESTOR: The oldest cousin was living and the oldest son of my aunt was living next door, because that's where my uncle had built the house. But the feud carried, I think, from my uncle to my cousin. That's why the feud was on. But thank the Lord, it—everything smoothed, going over nicely now.

MRS. NESTOR: What feud? What was the feud about?

NESTOR: Not speaking to each other all these years?

MRS. NESTOR: What were they mad about?

NESTOR: Oh, I don't know what the feud was all about. I never—

LEVINE: They forgot what the feud—

NESTOR: I never—I never dared to ask them—

LEVINE: [laughs]

NESTOR: —to start with. [chuckles] I wouldn't—all—all I know, I begged both of them, what—your first cousins? I—what's going on? I mean, after all, he's from your blood and he's from your blood. Anyhow, I went on for these—thank the Lord, the last time we were there both families were speaking to each other and everything was lovey-dovey.

LEVINE: Now, where were you in the birth order? Were you the oldest son or was your brother the oldest?

NESTOR: I was the oldest and a story goes with that. My uncle, my father's brother, who lived in America, had married a German woman, a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful woman. And they couldn't have any children. So after Dad passed away and left my stepmother pregnant, my aunt from America wrote down to Greece and said, "Send us one of the sons." And from Greece, my uncle wrote back and said, "Which one you want?" The oldest, which was me, or the youngest, which was Nick. So my German—eventually to

be mother, adoptive mother, writes back. She says, "Send me the wildest one of the two." And I was chosen. I was the wildest one, evidently. [chuckles]

LEVINE: How would you describe yourself as—as a young boy in Greece? What kind of personality? What kind of temperament would you—what were you like as—

NESTOR: Bashful, scared.

MRS. NESTOR: In Greece.

NESTOR: Wild. As a matter of fact, one of the areas in Akrata, we had moved into this new area—on the bottom of a hill was a river, lots of water running out of the mountains, the water running down. And I got so curious one day, I went too far on the edge of the—looking into the river, that I fell down the side of the mountain, cracked my head. I still remember the blood running down my face. I had a compound fracture in my leg where the bone protruded through the skin. And my father climbed down the side of the mountain where I was laying, crying, picked me up and he gave me a beating. And with the beating, he carried me on top of the mountain. And I've still got a scar on my leg where the bone came through. That's how I remember being a fresh, sarcastic kid in those days.

LEVINE: Did you go to school? Do you remember school in Greece?

NESTOR: Yes, I went to school as far as fourth grade, if I remember right. But as far as my schooling's concerned, when I came over to this country I started going to the American school to learn English. Can you imagine an 11-and-a-half-year-old boy sitting in kindergarten class with a special chair trying to learn English? [chuckles] Well, I learned it. And I thank the Lord today and the neighborhood that we went to school to had a lot of Jewish people. And those Jewish boys took me in like I was their brother. They taught me everything. They fed me. They clothed me. They made friends out of me. They made me join a Jewish community center. Through the Jewish people, I remember them well. Some of them are still living. They were wonderful people.

LEVINE: Okay, let's—let's go back to the Greek part, the part where you lived in Greece. And then we'll get to the part where you lived in America. Do you—what was school like in Greece up until the time that you left? Do—

NESTOR: Well, school wasn't too much in those days. But we, more or less, were forced to go to school, because if you didn't go to school you were a dummy, to start with. And the grades—the amount of people weren't too big because we lived in small communities. And what I learned, believe it or not, in fourth grade over in Greece, I was learning back here in America when I was in sixth grade. That's how far advanced those European people were in those days. But our classes were very small. The teachers were very rough and tough. They had a stick made out of cherry wood, I think, or something. And every time you were bad, hold your hand out and you'd get a—a good whacking on top of the knuckles. And they didn't waste time. You were there to learn and you had to learn. They were very rough on us. Unfortunately, I didn't get enough Greek education to consider myself a smart Greek student.

LEVINE: But you—you knew Greek fluently and you spoke Greek and—

NESTOR: Oh, yes. Spoke Greek, wrote Greek. Yes. Oh, yeah. Read Greek.

LEVINE: You could read and write and—

NESTOR: But fourth grade isn't too far, as far as schooling in Greece is concerned. You—you got a decent start but that's about all.

SELLIS: Did the school run most of the year except for the summer? Were kids expected to help in the fields while they were going to school or—

NESTOR: School was strictly a winter school. Summer came along. I remember my father building a sort of a hut or a bamboo-made tent where we would build next to the grape fields where we'd live all summer long. Us kids never wore shoes in the summertime. We had an awful job trying to get refitted in the wintertime—we'd go back to school. But like I said, a pair of pants and a shirt. No shoes, nothing else. Not even a hat.

MRS. NESTOR: Did you play or work?

NESTOR: And we didn't have school in the summer and Dad took me out to the grape fields, I remember. I was around—oh, I guess I was around five, five-and-a-half. He had these so-called servants. And the—each servant had a mule or a donkey. There were—with bags, sacks on the side of the—the animal walking down between rows of grapes. And they had other servants cutting the

grapes and putting them in these bags. So I finally convinced my father, as young as I was, "Why can't I have a donkey so I can walk the aisles?" And I did. He got me a donkey and I remember that donkey to today. One day, that donkey sat down. He wouldn't move. I pulled him and I pulled him. He still wouldn't move. I took a stick and started beating his rear end. And before I knew it, he lifted one of his legs and kicked me right in the stomach. And then I went out of breath and I laid back there and I cried and I screamed. [chuckles] And my father finally came over and picked me up and I never went near that donkey again. But—

SELLIS: These—these grapes that [clears throat] you were picking, were they for wine or for drying, for dried grapes or—

NESTOR: No, these was seedless grapes. They were picked for raisins. They would cut these grapes, like I said, with these animals. Then they'd make a circle and come out to a field where Dad and another crew would lay brown paper down, rolls of brown paper. And, as the grapes were brought out, they were spread along this brown paper, let the sun hit it—hit them and dry them. And that's where they got their raisins from. Of course, in those days, they didn't have plants or take the grapes in. You did it all on your own. And when the grapes were dried on—on the—on the br—on the stem itself, I remember well, Dad used to have a pitchfork, like, or a wood fork. And he would take a bunch of those grapes and throw them up in the air. And if the wind was blowing right, it would take the dry stem and push it away, and the grapes would fall to the ground for—for raisins. That's the way they made the raisins that day and they would put them in sacks. And they'd be loaded and sent into the factory.

LEVINE: Did your father then sell the grape—or the raisins to—

NESTOR: Oh, yes. Yeah, those raisins actually—and again, if I remember right, were bought before they were even dry. The so-called merchants, the big merchants would pick—pick—give them a price for the grapes—for the raisins. And then when they were put in sacks, he would come along and buy them. Now, while growing up—my wife just left me a note, "Remind to tell you the story about how my godfather baptized me." In those days, normally, a good friend or the father or the family, once a child is born, he would claim you as his godchild. Well, Father, evidently, must have had a lot of friends and didn't commit himself to one or the other. But my godfather, as smart as he was, he found out the day that Mother was going to take me to church for the first time to receive my blessings from the priest. And he snuck in the

church's back door as—as Mother lay me—so the story goes. I was—I was there but I don't remember it. [chuckles]

SELLIS: Sure. [chuckles]

NESTOR: But as—as Mother was laying me in the steps or the altar, the godfather or godmother would run up and throw a handkerchief off the baby's face. Well, my godfather-to-be, who was in back of the church—back of the altar, and he watched Mother. As soon as she brought the—me to the altar, lay me on the steps of the altar, he would run from back of the altar and throw the handkerchief off of my face. That's how he became my godfather.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

NESTOR: And by the way, speaking of godfather, years later—many years later, I went back and through my cousins, one of my female cousins, I asked her to look up—she could find my godfather, which I hadn't seen since he baptized me. And sure enough, she found him having a chicken barbecue store in the heart—the heart of Patras. You know, Patras is one of the largest communities in Greece. And when she found him, she didn't say anything to him. But the first time I returned, we went to Patras and she showed me the restaurant. And I walked in the restaurant by myself. And my godfather had this—I remember had this dirty old apron on from neck down to his toes, sweeping the floor of the restaurant. And I walk up to him and I said—I said, "Hello, Godfather." And he looked [chuckles] at me and he said, "Yoro. Is that you? George, is that you?" And he recognized who I was immediately. And so I saw him many years later. I guess I was—I was in my 30s by then.

MRS. NESTOR: This fits right now.

NESTOR: Anyhow, he had this chickens—place, chicken eating place.

MRS. NESTOR: [unclear] fried chicken [several words unclear].

NESTOR: In the meantime, I had got acquainted with my godfather's brother, who lived in Atlantic City, had a restaurant also. And for years, I was calling him my godfather because I didn't know if and when I was returning to Greece. And I was calling his brother my godfather, so actually I had a godfather. Because, in our religion, a godfather means a lot to a child.

LEVINE: What does it mean in—

- NESTOR: It means, well, if you have a birthday, if no one gives you a gift, your godfather's going to give. If you were hungry and he knew about it, he's going to feed you. Or if you need a pair of shoes every so often, godfather's going to get 'em for you.
- SELLIS: So if your family was having trouble taking care of you or if you became an orphan or something—
- NESTOR: Well—
- SELLIS: —I guess the godfather would help.
- NESTOR: It's an understanding. It's an understanding, more or less, that not only as a godfather, but if you are the best man at a wedding, if something happens to bride or groom, or in the family or the grandson, then the godfather's responsible for the people. He's like a second father, you might as well say. And unfortunately, I only baptized one youngster in my life. And of course, [chuckles] he—he sort of left us dry. He went out and got married and is on his own. And of course, I haven't seen him for years now. He lives, New York or Philadelphia somewhere. So that's the job of a godfather. Godfather is—is—is a strong person. It means a lot to a godchild. Yes.
- MRS. NESTOR: It happens to the family, the god—
- NESTOR: And if anything happens to the father while he's young, again, automatic, the godfather is the father. I mean, the mother won't hold him responsible, no. But he knows his duty. He knows his job. He is the father. And we—our religion always took it that way.
- LEVINE: What about rituals, like birth, marriage, death? Were there any ways that these events were—were celebrated in Greece that were particularly, maybe, different from [unclear]—
- MRS. NESTOR: Name day instead of birthday.
- NESTOR: Well—
- LEVINE: Name day?
- MRS. NESTOR: Name day instead of birthday.
- NESTOR: Weddings is a big holiday, particularly—

LEVINE: What happened on a wedding day?

NESTOR: Particularly the wedding date. It all depends on how financially well the father or the—the father-to-be is. But their wedding can go on for days and days and days. That means eating and drinking and dancing. Celebrating for days goes on. But of course, in America today we're more modern. It goes on for a couple hours, maybe the night and it's finished. Now, name days are like birthdays in America. Name day, you celebrate. St. George's Day, St. John's Day, St. Sophia's Day. That's big holidays for the person who's named for that—

MRS. NESTOR: Saint.

NESTOR: —saint. And again, the celebration is held. It goes on for days. Now, my wife forgot celebration because we never had any money to celebrate with [chuckles] so she don't even say "Happy birthday" to me anymore.

LEVINE: [chuckles] Is—is there any basis for, like, naming somebody after a particular saint? I mean, is—

MRS. NESTOR: No.

NESTOR: Uh—

MRS. NESTOR: We follow—we follow—

NESTOR: Actually, the family usually chooses a saint from, again, my religion, if I remember right. And this saint is—lived. The saint is celebrated. The saint is appreciated, prayed on that date. And the saint would go down from father to son to son, like, my name is George. That was my grandfather's name. Now, my—

MRS. NESTOR: [unclear] grandparents.

NESTOR: —grandson took my name. So therefore, St. George was our saint in our religion. And we adopted that and St. George is my favorite saint. And my father—grandfather's saint was St. George also. That's how it's handed down. We pick a saint and we pray to him.

MRS. NESTOR: Everybody's not named after a saint.

NESTOR: No, you're right. Everybody's not named as a saint. But the people are named after saints.

MRS. NESTOR: [unclear] same as a saint. You celebrate that day.

LEVINE: But you don't have—do you have a particular connection to St. George? I mean, like when you pray, do you pray to St. George?

NESTOR: Well, I know, and I was taught years ago, childhood, that St. George killed the dragon. And I have his—I have his icon on my dresser today, St. George killing the dragon. It's not a big icon, a small icon. And my sister gave me that when I was in Greece a couple years ago. So St. George was our saint.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, is there anything else about life in Greece before you came over to your aunt and uncle? Anything that sticks in your mind when you think of those first 11 years in—

NESTOR: Well—

LEVINE: —your life at that time?

NESTOR: From the day they picked me to become—to—to come to America, I was so disappointed, so mad, so discouraged.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

NESTOR: —so discouraged that for years and years and years, even today, I'm so mad at my uncle sending me over to America, although I have no regrets. My adoptive mother, my aunt al—adopted me legally, my uncle and the name, that she gave me everything and anything I wanted. During Depression in the 30s, of course, you people were too young to remember that—

MRS. NESTOR: They want to know what did you do in Greece before you came to America.

NESTOR: The—my mother—my adoptive mother bought me an automobile on 17 years of age in those days. And they were hard days, rough days. She was a waitress and my father was a waiter. By the way, I want to tell you how our name became Nestor. When my adoptive father came over as a young man, couldn't speak English, didn't know where to go, how to get there, how to make a living or how to eat. Somehow, he got involved with the Greeks of

New York City. And through those people, he made friends that got him a job in the Waldorf Astoria Hotel as a dishwasher. And of course, Dad was only five foot, four. He was a hustler. He worked hard. So from a dishwasher, they made him a busboy. From a busboy, they made him a waiter till, finally, the maitre d of the Waldorf Astoria told him—they nicknamed him Charlie, by the way—and he said to him, “Charlie.” He says, “We’ve got to do something about your name.” Dad said to him, “What would you like to do?” He says, “We’ve got to change it.” He says, “Change it?” It’s unheard of in—you know, in Greek lingo, you know, change your—today, you tell a Greek to change his name, you better run, because he’s [chuckles] liable to shoot you. Anyhow, Dad says, “Will you help me?” He says, “I’ll help you.” So they made all papers for the courts and all this. So as they’re going to court one day in a taxicab, this Englishman, the maitre d, said to him, “By the way, Charlie, did you choose your name?” He says, “Yeah.” He says, “What’d you choose?” He says, “Charlie Nestor.” So the maitre d says to him, “You can’t take that name.” He says, “Why not?” He says, “That’s my name.” So he says, “Aren’t you my friend?” So he says—so he couldn’t talk Dad out of it, evidently, because he kept the name officially and went to court and changed it to Charles Nestor. And that was his name. That’s the name we adopted and that’s the name I go by today. That’s [chuckles]—

LEVINE: [chuckles] Well—

NESTOR: That’s the story that, you know—

MRS. NESTOR: When he came to America.

NESTOR: —I tell my grandchildren about.

LEVINE: What was his—what was Charlie’s real name?

NESTOR: Halambrous Banayer Tomamos [PH]. That was his real name.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NESTOR: But of course, that’s a big name for a little guy.

LEVINE: Oh. Oh, wow. And so he became Charlie Nestor.

NESTOR: Charlie Nestor.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

MRS. NESTOR: Charles.

LEVINE: Charles.

NESTOR: Yep.

LEVINE: Wow. Okay. So when you—you said you were angry at your uncle—

NESTOR: Right.

LEVINE: —for bringing you.

NESTOR: Right.

LEVINE: Why? Why were you angry?

NESTOR: Well, that was my home. I grew up there. I had my friends there, my relatives, had my surroundings, had my brother. I had my sister, baby sister, and they took me away from all that. You know, to me—I may be wrong; I probably am—but childhood days are the best days for a young man or a young woman, particularly in a—in a place like Greece. Because if you're raised in the country like I was—here, they call it country. In the Old Country they call it horo [PH], which is a very small community. You have your church. You have your priest. You might have a—a teacher. You might have good friends. And of course, you have your favorite cafenero [PH], coffee house. You have your favorite restaurant, if and when you go out to eat. And you have your relatives, close relatives. You have everything around you that you grew up with. And for them to take me away, I couldn't believe it. Always had in my mind, I'm going to return. Well, maybe someday I will, but right now, I have seven grandchildren I love so much. I have four children that grew up in my house. It's—it's hard to leave them more than a short length, like a month, maybe two months. That's why I was so mad at my uncle for sending me over here.

LEVINE: Do you remember leaving? Do you remember—

NESTOR: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: What was that—describe that.

NESTOR: Oh, yes. Yes. That was the sad part about it. Why don't you bring the picture out? They put me on this boat. I couldn't even tell you if it's in Mathis [PH] or Patras or where. They put me in this boat and they said to me, "This is an uncle of yours. He's going to Chicago. He's going to watch over you while you're on this boat to your Uncle Charlie [unclear] in America." So I got it in my mind, that's my keeper, my guide. But second day out, that ocean was so rough that I got so seasick, I couldn't stay indoors. I found myself a corner on one of the decks where I was out of the wind and out of the rain, out of the water and all. And I don't know how many days I set in that corner. But I set on the corner all that time till I got to America. And in America, sad thing happened. The so-called guide of mine, or uncle or relative, whoever he was, as soon as he got to Ellis Island, he left. Left me sitting. Even today, I have people—I tell them about these cages they brought us into. They had wire cages. And they gave us a medical. I remember that. And I think—I think they gave—also gave us a needle. I—I'm not too sure on that. But I think they gave us a needle. And I was supposed to sit in this special cage in the bench and wait for my uncle to come pick me up. Well, unfortunately, they had the dates mixed up somewhere. But my uncle didn't show up till the day later. And there I was, a little boy, little topcoat—I hope my wife finds the picture—sitting on this bench, and all these big people around me, waiting for somebody. I never saw my uncle, never met him. All I had is a picture. And I kept looking at the picture and look at the people. Look at the picture and look at the people. Finally, my uncle showed up about a day or so later. And what a happy day that was.

LEVINE: Did you recognize him?

NESTOR: No.

LEVINE: Did he recognize you?

MRS. NESTOR: No, he didn't know him.

NESTOR: No, he recognized me.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MRS. NESTOR: But you had his picture?

NESTOR: I expect to, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NESTOR: Yeah.

LEVINE: So you have a picture of you when you first arrived.

MRS. NESTOR: [unclear].

NESTOR: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Wow. Oh, you must have been so angry and sad and scared.

NESTOR: I was more sick by the time I got to America.

LEVINE: Sick. [chuckles]

NESTOR: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

NESTOR: Be—between the ocean being so rough and—and sitting on the weather all the time and not eating too well—

SELLIS: Was it a long trip from your village to the boat—wherever you took the boat from?

NESTOR: No. No, that wasn't a very long trip because—I must have taken a boat from Patras because it was a very short trip. The other port would be Athens.

SELLIS: Oh.

NESTOR: But—

LEVINE: Oh, that's wonderful. Oh, that's a wonderful picture.

NESTOR: That's me.

LEVINE: It's beautiful.

NESTOR: Yeah. Beautiful?

LEVINE: It is.

NESTOR: [chuckles]

LEVINE: It's just a wonderful picture.

MRS. NESTOR: I thought we had a better one.

NESTOR: That's a Greek haircut I have there. [laughter]

MRS. NESTOR: That's why he gets his hair cut like that now.

LEVINE: So—

SELLIS: Did they have—did they have anybody—while you were having to wait for this day or day and a half at Ellis Island, was there anybody there who spoke Greek?

NESTOR: I sort of remember someone speaking Greek to me, trying to comfort me. I didn't want to eat. I was worried that, 'Did my uncle desert me? Did the people waiting for me—or what's going to happen? Because I'm already in America.' I do remember the Statue of Liberty as we come into port. And that's a [several words unclear].

LEVINE: Did you know anything about that, the Statue of Liberty?

NESTOR: No.

LEVINE: You didn't know what it meant?

NESTOR: Nothing, nothing.

LEVINE: But you saw it.

NESTOR: Nothing.

LEVINE: Do you remember how it impressed you when you saw it?

NESTOR: Well, somebody said. You know, eventually, you understand what they're talking about, "The Statue of Liberty, Statue of Liberty." And of course, I didn't learn till years later what the Statue of Liberty meant, of course. But eventually, it got to me. It must be—you know, the Statue—you got to pass through the Statue and you enjoy it.

LEVINE: Where did your uncle take you when you first—

NESTOR: Atlantic City.

MRS. NESTOR: Right here.

NESTOR: Visited—I came to Atlantic City and, of course, my aunt was very proud. Remember, I said she was a German woman. She was Pennsylvania Dutch.

MRS. NESTOR: [unclear].

NESTOR: The original Pennsylvania Dutch. And she would take yes and no for an answer and nothing else. She was so proud of me. She took me around to—for instance, in my future bride's father's store, introduced me around to these various people, Greek people. And she was so happy to have me. Eventually, they took me to court, changed my name to their name, and they became Father and Mother instead of Aunt and Uncle. They were my adoptive parents. And this is where I grew up and this is where I went to school, didn't have too much education. But the education I had, I think I did pretty well with it. I joined the Army. I had a terrific Army career. I got a battlefield commission. I stayed in the Reserves after I was—come out. I was ready to go out, get my discharge, said, "What am I doing? Here I am as an officer, after being four and a half years as an enlisted man, going all through the campaigns of Africa, Sicily, first one at Omaha Beach." I said, "What am I doing? I'm not going to go out." I was wounded, stayed in the hospital and I joined the Reserves. And through the Reserves, I got my promotions and 22 years later I retired as a major and enjoyed life. I enjoyed military life. I'm still very active in military circles. And of course, between my children and my grandchildren and my battle-ax wife, here I am today, 83 years old, happy that God brought me home safely.

SELLIS: Did your stepmother—when you moved to Atlantic City, did she—had she learned Greek, and did she go to the Greek church, even though she was Pennsylvania Dutch?

NESTOR: She spoke very little Greek or understood very little Greek. But she did join the church. She was a member of the Greek Orthodox Church. As a matter of fact, I got a little story to tell you there. In those days, we couldn't afford a priest. We couldn't afford a building, call our own, as a church. So the—the large holidays, the archbishop evidently felt sorry for us. He used to send as a priest down for, like, Christmas and Fourth of July and 25th of March. It was a big, big holiday for the Greek people. And he sent us a priest and we would rent this hall in—on Kentucky Avenue again from the Ascension people. And that's where we—all our services. However, that would only be on the big holidays. Well, I was going to school with some pretty good basketball

players. And they asked me if I would like to play in a church league for their team. So I says, "Sure," particularly after they showed me beautiful uniform and a bright orange jacket. I joined the First Methodist Basketball Team. [chuckles] So my father found out. Of course, Father was only five foot, four. And I was taller than him then in school. And he said, "Who told you to join a Gr—a strange church?" So Mom was for me because I remember her saying, "What did you expect the boy to do? He's playing basketball. He's got a nice uniform. He's learning his Bible." And my Bible, I learned not in a Greek Orthodox Church. I learned it in a Methodist Church. And through the Methodist people—but till my father caught up to me, he stood up to me and he—pow, pow, pow! He—oh, he slapped my face till Mom stepped in and that was the end. But then we got—eventually, we got enough money in our treasury. We sort of got the kids involved. We bought a lot. We built a church through our help, the youngsters and the community in those days, and today we have our own little church on Mount Vernon Avenue. And we're about—we're building a brand new church. Unfortunately, we run [chuckles] out of money, so we've got to finish it ourselves. The young men are at church doing work every—two, three days a week. And eventually, maybe two months, we're going to have that church finished. But we are members of the Greek Orthodox Church. We feel that—that we helped them build the church, helped them keep this church together, and that we're very proud of our Greek community.

LEVINE: Talk about the Greek community here when you—when you got here.

NESTOR: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: The Greek community—

NESTOR: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: —in—

SELLIS: Atlantic City.

LEVINE: —Atlantic City.

NESTOR: Yes.

LEVINE: Wh—talk about the Greek community—

NESTOR: Okay.

LEVINE: —that was here when you came.

NESTOR: Okay, Greek community. I think we only had—

MRS. NESTOR: [unclear]—began in 1924.

NESTOR: Yeah, well, the origination, 1924, the history says. But the Greek community—any community, Greek community in the States, you will find out is built around a church. That's where you community lies. So our church was built in '30, '31. And that's why we had, maybe, 50 families.

MRS. NESTOR: '33.

NESTOR: Thirty-three families?

MRS. NESTOR: 1933.

NESTOR: All right, with 50 families then. That's how we built our first church. And progress.

SELLIS: Was that the one where your wife had been saying you put on these productions?

NESTOR: Yes.

SELLIS: Fund-raisers and—

NESTOR: They needed—they—

MRS. NESTOR: Not in the—not in the church but—

SELLIS: But to build, to raise the money.

NESTOR: They needed money badly to build this church. So they got—of course, my wife was one of the leading members of the youth of our Greek community. And they asked my wife to be the director of some kind of play, stage play or—anything. So—through the efforts of my wife—and of course, we had a young man who was in Hollywood. His name was Gregory—

MRS. NESTOR: Tallus [PH].

NESTOR: —Tallus. He was—and he came and helped with it. And we put a stage play on. And most of the stage play, tickets were sold to our Jewish friends. And through their effort and through the money that we made on that play, a short time later we burned the mortgage from the money that the young people made in those days. And almost every—every youngster in the community took part in that play in the Greek community. Very few did not want—participate or help us. But again, we're very proud that little church is still standing. Yeah.

LEVINE: You—you said earlier what—what you called your community or what Atlantic City was called.

NESTOR: The street.

MRS. NESTOR: [unclear] The neighborhood.

LEVINE: The street.

NESTOR: The street. See, Kentucky Avenue is—well, remind me—it—when we go to Atlantic City, show you Kentucky Av—Kentucky Avenue is one of the prominent streets in the center of—of the community, of the city. And from Atlantic Avenue—Atlantic is the main street in Atlantic City, and the boardwalk, of course. From Atlantic Avenue, two blocks to the boardwalk, is known as Little Greece. Micrea Lada [PH] because we had the—had the guest houses. We had restaurants. We had a coffee house, Cafe Neo [PH]. It was a—it was our area, was—you call a hang out or quarters. In the summertime, we used to—I used to work underneath the boardwalk. We used to have the hot dog stands in those days underneath the boardwalk. And the people'd come in off the beach. And I remember I couldn't—couldn't understand English or speak English. And this fellow hired me to work—work behind his counter. And the way I would sell things, I would go to, say, boxes of candy on the shelf and I would point to this. And if they shook their head, yes, that meant they wanted that bar of chocolate. Stuff like that and—and every—almost every afternoon, Jim Lundas [PH], the Greek world champion wrestler, would go on Kentucky Avenue Beach and put on a show for the people, be hundreds of people around him in a circle. They would wrestle on the beach on the sand. That was—that was our beach. That was the Greek Beach. And that's where we grew up.

LEVINE: Did you have other jobs, growing up, besides selling the candy on the boardwalk? Did—

NESTOR: No, I was going to school, more or less, till the time I became a—about 15 or 16, maybe. My father was working one of the better beach-front hotels—it was called the Shellburn [PH] Hotel—and through the maitre d, found out they needed a busboy for the summer to work the roof garden. Of course, the roof garden was the top, 12 stories high off the ocean. And they would bring leading bands down. The first summer I worked, I remember I— they had Xavier Cugat and his orchestra and the hat tamale dancer friend—girlfriend or wife [chuckles]—I don't know who she was, and her little poodle. I remember I was the busboy of that roof garden. And I'd go to work four o'clock in the afternoon, and I would work to two o'clock in the morning, my cousin and I. Then we'd leave there, go home, get a couple hours of sleep. And then we spent the rest of the afternoon on the beach. And what a job that was! [chuckles] I'd get paid for doing practically nothing. That was a beautiful job. I enjoyed that. I worked there and then, after I got out of school, I went to work as a—a interior decorator, painting contractor. Took that up in school. But it was too—too confined to me. I couldn't stand that. But I went to work for outdoor people. Anytime I found a better—an outdoor job, I went to work for them. And through that, till I was about—I guess about 20, I joined the Army. The reason I joined the Army, because the draft was on. And I wanted to join a certain unit. And I don't want to be drafted, shipped to nowhere. But I didn't have enough education. They threw me out of the Air Force. I ended up in the Infantry anyhow. So that's where I spent my beautiful year for military life, because I call that beautiful. I served with some wonderful people in the First Infantry Division, that big red one. And the only regret I had, I served under a terrible, terrible—to my opinion, to a lot of people's opinion, this general. And he was a mean general.

MRS. NESTOR: Name?

NESTOR: Huh?

MRS. NESTOR: Can you say the name?

NESTOR: Should I? Ah—

LEVINE: Why was he so terrible?

NESTOR: Well—

MRS. NESTOR: Some of the things he was—

NESTOR: His motto was—his motto was, “With my guts and your blood, I’ll beat any army in the world.”

MRS. NESTOR: So now he can say the name.

NESTOR: I was—my blood and his guts.

MRS. NESTOR: Now, you can say his name.

NESTOR: Okay.

MRS. NESTOR: And now you can say his name.

NESTOR: What was his name?

MRS. NESTOR: Patton.

NESTOR: General Patton.

LEVINE: Really?

NESTOR: Yeah.

LEVINE: Wow.

NESTOR: I don’t think he was well liked by a lot of people. I served under Patton, both as an officer, enlisted man. And we—we just did—he was—he was just mean. He—he was just—the reason—the reason, my opinion—and I don’t want to go into war. The reason—I guess you people heard about Bastogne [PH] where the American troops were cut off. The reason we were cut off—not we; I wasn’t there—as the armored outfit—is because he ran his tanks so fast, so far, that it ran out of gas. It ran out of fuel. So the Germans would circle them, cut them off. That’s why that happened. But the war is done, forget—forgotten with. The man is dead. He’s buried somewhere.

SELLIS: Did you happen to see the movie, “Patton?”

NESTOR: Yeah.

SELLIS: There was a movie. Did you feel that was accurate when you—at the time?

NESTOR: Certain points. Same as the other movie they made about this Private Ryan.

SELLIS: Oh, "Saving Private Ryan."

NESTOR: Okay? With the exception, if you people saw it. I don't know.

SELLIS: Yeah, I saw it.

LEVINE: Yeah, I did.

NESTOR: With the exception of the first two minutes of that film, that's the only true film—

LEVINE: Oh.

NESTOR: —from that beach. But the rest, Hollywood.

SELLIS: Uh-hmm.

NESTOR: She and to see it so I went with her.

LEVINE: How did you meet your wife?

NESTOR: Well, we were going to Greek school. I'm glad you brought that up because [laughs] we're—

MRS. NESTOR: At that rented church.

NESTOR: At the rent—rented church. Yes. We were going to Greek school. And of course, they don't have no Greek teacher. The priest would come down every once in a while and teach Greek school. So they asked me, being I was a Greek boy, knew my Greek pretty well, to help with the Greek school. So I went and helped. And I remember the first note, and I think my wife still has it. I wrote in Greek, "[speaking in Greek]," which means, "I love you very much," in Greek. [chuckles] So that's how I met my wife, through that Greek school. But—

LEVINE: And say your wife's name.

NESTOR: Sophie—Sophia.

LEVINE: Maiden name.

NESTOR: Prodromos—P-R-O-D-R-O-M-O-S. Prodromos.

LEVINE: And your children's names?

NESTOR: Our children's names would be Peter, our oldest; Billy, the second son. And then lo and behold, God really helped me because the third one was a daughter. Thank the Lord. The fourth one—her name was Nicolette [PH]. She took my brother's name. And the fourth one was Audra [PH]. She took my mother-in-law's name.

MRS. NESTOR: [unclear].

NESTOR: And—and the only unfortunate part, I—we have a child in Ohio, a child in Maine, a child [chuckles] in Vermont. And somehow, driving don't seem the same to me anymore. Particularly, my eyes being so bad. And if I let my wife drive, I don't know which—more nerve wracking, me driving or her driving. So we don't drive to those destinations. We take a train or a bus or an airplane.

LEVINE: We—

NESTOR: That's our children.

LEVINE: Okay. We just have about a minute or so left. Thinking back on it—thinking back on coming here as a—as an 11-year-old, how do you—how do you think about coming here, immigrating here, living out most of your life here? How do you put the Greek and the American parts of you together?

NESTOR: Well, I can't say much of my Greek growing up, because I wasn't there long enough as a child to really tell. But I do remember missing it, because they say your childhood days are the hardest ones to forget. Well, it's hard for me to forget, even at my age. However, I thank the good Lord. He brought me to a wonderful house, gave me wonderful parents, wonderful friends. Wouldn't say they are all wonderful friends, but most of them are wonderful friends, [chuckles] both Greek and, particularly, American. I grew up with American people. I—I got along fabulously with everybody. I had a—a good military life. I got banged up a little bit. I'm drawing a pension, a military pension, disability pension. All in all, the Almighty was with me, because through that war, what we went through and the life itself, growing our children, having four children, been very, very hard with that—without the help of the Almighty.

MRS. NESTOR: And end with the fact that you got the Distinguished Service Cross.

NESTOR: My wife wants me to mention that I got the Distinguished Service Cross. That's the second highest award in the country in military life. I was originally put in for the Medal of Honor. But somehow, it was demoted to the Distinguished Service Cross, which is the second highest. Thank the Lord, my leg, when I was hurt, healed. I'm walking. I'm hunting. I have my beagle dogs out in the back. I used to cut my grass. I can't do it anymore, ever. Life goes on.

SELLIS: What was the event that led to the award, to your nomination for the award?

NESTOR: What was what?

SELLIS: What was the event in—in the—[unclear] award?

LEVINE: Military.

SELLIS: The military. What—what happened that led to your nomination?

NESTOR: I don't know if I—

MRS. NESTOR: Start by saying you were a forward observer.

NESTOR: Well—

MRS. NESTOR: Hurry up.

NESTOR: First, the job they gave me, I was never with my own troops. I was always between troops. I was always with that attacking element. I was called a forward observer. I was to observe targets of opportunity in front of me, mostly enemy targets, and allowed to direct mortar fire, artillery fire on those targets. And maybe I wouldn't see my friendly troops, my company troops days and days at end. But that's—that was my job. That was—I got used to it. I was called the forward observer. And—and that—that's what they taught me. As a matter of fact, I remember something I heard about the Greek Battalion coming over, the volunteer Americans, called the Greek Battalion coming over to help Greece. And I remember making papers out, signed them. And I turned them in—my company commander. And my company commander turned to the battalion commander. Battalion commander called me in and he says, "Nestor, what's all this foolish—what—what's these papers mean?" I said, "Sir, I'd like to transfer to the Greek Battalion because I'm Greek and I'm going in to help my country." So he took a look at me, Catholic, Irish boy, wonderful leader, brave. I think he's got seven Purple

Hearts. Anyhow, he says, "Nestor." He says, "You must be crazy." I said, "Why, Sir?" He says, "After"—it took me three years to train you and the rest of the men around you the way I want you to be, the way I want you to help this outfit. You want me to get rid of you?" He took those papers and ripped them up in front of my face. He said, "Now, get out. Take the Greek Battalion with you." And that was the end of that request.

LEVINE: Okay. We're going to—

MRS. NESTOR: Is that the end?

LEVINE: —close here. I want to thank you very much. Now, going to—okay.

MRS. NESTOR: George organized the baseball team of the young boys in our church community.

NESTOR: And girls.

MRS. NESTOR: And later, he formed a girls' team also. And they participated in the South Jersey Diocese, which included Philadelphia teams in the Greek Basketball League. And they were very successful. We also made a gigantic trip to Peabody, Massachusetts where they came in third in that particular league.

LEVINE: And that was an all-Greek league?

MRS. NESTOR: Oh, all-Greek league. Absolutely.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MRS. NESTOR: In the '70s, when we built the hall next door to the church proper, we started teaching the boys and girls how to dance Greek. And that continued for 25 years.

LEVINE: And you did that?

MRS. NESTOR: I was the director for 25 years. I was the advisor to the youth, to the GOYA, Greek Orthodox Youth of America. In the meantime, George continued the basketball leagues—teams playing in the leagues. That was a big, big part of our—

LEVINE: Life.

MRS. NESTOR: —later married life.

LEVINE: Wonderful.

NESTOR: Because the children had already grown up and were away from the community.

[END OF INTERVIEW]