

**EI-114**

**PHILIP SULIDES**

**BIRTH DATE: MAY 23, 1899**

**INTERVIEW DATE: 11/4/1991**

**RUNNING TIME: 31:32**

**INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.**

**RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME**

**INTERVIEW LOCATION: ROCKLAND, MAINE**

**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 12/1993**

**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 3/1994**

**ALBANIA, 1917**

**AGE 17**

**PORT: NAPLES**

**RESIDENCES: ALBANIA; OSTEVE**

**US: BIDDEFORD, ROCKLAND, ME**

**Oral Historian's Note: There is a constant mechanical noise throughout the recording of this interview. Two daughters of Mr. Sulides were present during the interview and help him to answer the questions. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of the Oral History Project, 3/4/1994.**

LEVINE: [This is] Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today in Rockland, Maine. It's November 4, 1991, and I'm here with Mr. Sulides, who came from Albania at the age of seventeen in either 1916 or 1917.

SULIDES: 1917.

LEVINE: 1917 was when you came, okay. Well, why don't we begin then by you telling me your birth date.

SULIDES: I don't know. ( he laughs )

DAUGHTER: May 23rd, 1899. Tell them.

SULIDES: Yeah.

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LEVINE: May 23rd, 18 . . .

DAUGHTER: '99.

LEVINE: '99. Okay, great. Now, do you remember the name of the town you were born in?

SULIDES: What did she say?

LEVINE: The town where you were born?

SULIDES: Oh, in the old country?

LEVINE: Yes.

SULIDES: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Osteve.

LEVINE: Could you spell it, by any chance?

SULIDES: Gee, I can't.

DAUGHTER: It's, it was on those papers. H-O-S . . . (Voice off mike "It's O-S.") O-S-T-E-V-E.

LEVINE: O-S-T-E-V-E.

SULIDES: They can tell you better than I can.

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LEVINE: Okay. Why don't you tell me what the town was like? What was the town like where you were born? Can you describe it?

DAUGHTER: Can you tell us what Osteve was like?

SULIDES: Osteve, yeah. Osteve, yeah.

LEVINE: What was Osteve like? What was the town like? Was it a big town?

SULIDES: It was like here, what we got here. I don't have the words in my head.

LEVINE: Do you remember the house that you lived in?

SULIDES: Yeah.

LEVINE: In Osteve. What was that like?

SULIDES: What do you mean?

LEVINE: Was it a big house?

SULIDES: Oh, yeah, a beautiful home, yeah. And they have stone walls all around. It had goats, sheeps. They milk in the morning, they have a partition there, and they put them inside, night time. And then put them, the whole village have. One side of the village, another side, in the morning they take them out, they bring them back in the evening. And every one comes right to your own house, just like bring them right here on North Main Street, and they all go in their own houses. Once in a while you see one

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mix. That was quite a thing.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, now, what did people do around Osteve?

SULIDES: Well, they plant corn, wheat, everything we eat, everything we eat. They work hard. And hay, they go on the mountain, cut them, tie them up, they put them on the horses, take them to the village, and they have big pole there, and they put them right there, all around, right up, for the wintertime.

LEVINE: And what did you, was your father a farmer?

SULIDES: No. My father was working, you know, on houses and everything. Mostly he should be pulling teeth out. His father have a license, you know. This one license, you know, give him license because you get through high school you get a license. He used to go with the horse, every village, for weeks. Somebody broke an arm, my father knew how to do all that, or broke a leg, and that happened when I was a kid. Gets a cast and put it right on, tie it and look for something clean, an old shirt or something, clean, you know. ( he laughs ) Like we have over here.

LEVINE: So in other words your father was kind of a doctor even though he didn't have a license.

SULIDES: Just pulling teeth, nothing else. No medicine. You break your arm or your leg, everything. His father have a license. He cured one of the big shots

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there and then he got a license. (?)

LEVINE: Now what was your father's name?

SULIDES: Apostol, I think.

DAUGHTER: Apostol. Translates as "Paul."

LEVINE: Apostol, uh-huh. And your mother? Do you remember her name and her maiden name?

SULIDES: I bring my mother here.

LEVINE: Oh. At the same time you came?

SULIDES: Of course I did.

DAUGHTER: She came when my mother came. Her name was Constantina.

LEVINE: Now, did you have sisters and brothers?

SULIDES: I have sister and brother. I have a brother here.

LEVINE: What are their names?

SULIDES: Nick.

DAUGHTER: Your brother's name was Nick?

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LEVINE: Uh-huh. And Constantina is the sister?

DAUGHTER: No, that was his mother.

LEVINE: His mother. Okay. What's your sister's name?

SULIDES: I don't know. ( he laughs )

DAUGHTER: Do you remember your sister's name? Maybe he's forgotten.

SULIDES: I should know.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, so you went to school in the old country?

SULIDES: Yeah. When I was fifteen years old, I come here when I was sixteen.  
There was no night school here in them days, you know.

LEVINE: So when you came here you didn't really know any English?

SULIDES: I had my brother here. He brought me here. That's why I come here.  
And he had me a shoe shine at the Curtis Lane Theater, and I did that for  
twenty-five, thirty years.

DAUGHTER: His brother was here. Remember, he brought him over. His brother  
owned a pool hall on Main Street.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. I see. Well, now, when you think about the old country what are  
the kinds of things that you remember about it?

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SULIDES: I did make a trip too, you know, when I come here. That's why I got married over here.

LEVINE: What are the things you remember about it over there?

SULIDES: The old country?

LEVINE: Yeah.

SULIDES: It's like a farm, you know. It's like here they have farms. They have horses, cows, sheep, goats. And they go in the morning out, and (?) the fields, you know. One year they planted wheat, the other they planted corn. You know, they changed them around.

LEVINE: Were you a religious family when you were there?

SULIDES: Huh?

LEVINE: Was your family religious at all?

SULIDES: No. I guess they had a good time. ( he laughs )

DAUGHTER: Daddy, Daddy. She wanted to know if you were religious. You had a priest in the family.

SULIDES: Oh, yeah. They had their own wedding, preacher. They were Christian. But they never married each other. Some (?), Christian (?). But when I come, all Christians, all one section. Three villages on one side, three on

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the other side, a mountain, the river. They're beautiful, in summer, especially. And mostly they have goats and sheep, and some of their mountains. They bring them from the low ground, they sell it to different companies, the sheeps, you know. Through the village, you know, everything.

LEVINE: So do you remember, what was school like? What was the school like that you went to there?

SULIDES: It was no more school in them days. Greek, no, Albanian school. No languages. 1919 they got Albanian language. In the home they talk Albanian. At school you had to go to Greek.

LEVINE: I see. So were you speaking Greek?

SULIDES: Yeah, I speak Greek. I can't read or write Greek. I can read Albanian.

LEVINE: So was the town composed of like half Greek and half Albanian?

SULIDES: No, all Albanian.

DAUGHTER: The Greeks occupied Albania then.

SULIDES: They used to be under the Turkish government. Albania, they got, 1917 they got their freedom. That's when the schools started Albanian.

LEVINE: Well, were the Greeks, were the Albanians feeling in any way persecuted

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by the Greeks at that time?

SULIDES: Oh, yes. They did. They had trouble all the time.

LEVINE: Could you tell me what kinds of trouble did you see personally?

SULIDES: Well, one used to say better than nothing, you know what I mean? You grow up. Some, they grow up under Mohammedan schools, some they know have a church at all, you know, them days when I was a boy there, you know. After 1917 mostly every village has Mohammadan, they have it one side, and the Christians have another side. One section is all Mohammedan, and one section Christians. They have trouble.

LEVINE: Do you remember any trouble that involved, like, bloodshed? Was there actual fighting?

SULIDES: No. The Albanians and the Greeks have trouble together. They changed. Because at that time I'm young, you know. (?)

LEVINE: Now, who came from your family first? Who came to the United States first?

SULIDES: My brother.

LEVINE: Your brother.

SULIDES: He was in Biddeford.

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LEVINE: I'm sorry, he was . . .

SULIDES: He come to Biddeford. And here they come through a long time.

LEVINE: So when your brother came, your mother and father and your sister and you were still over there.

SULIDES: Yeah.

LEVINE: And then what did he do? He went to Biddeford, and did he save up money to send for the rest of the family?

SULIDES: Oh, yeah. He sent money ever three or four months, fifteen, twenty dollars. There was much money here.

DAUGHTER: Did your brother send money back so that you could come to the United States?

SULIDES: His wife got it.

DAUGHTER: No, no. When you were in Albania and Nicholas was in Rockland, did he send you money to come to the United States?

SULIDES: Oh, yeah, sure. My brother sent it.

LEVINE: So how long was he here before you . . .

SULIDES: He was in Biddeford four years, and he was three years here.

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LEVINE: And that's when you came over? And did you come with your mother and father and sister?

SULIDES: My father passed away. I brought my mother here. My sister got married.

LEVINE: Your sister stayed there.

SULIDES: Mother died here.

LEVINE: So you came with your mother.

DAUGHTER: No. He came alone.

LEVINE: Oh. Okay. So your brother was here, and then you came.

SULIDES: That's right.

LEVINE: Now, do you remember where you, where you sailed from, where you got the ship to come to the United States from?

SULIDES: It was an Italian ship. Giuseppe Verde.

LEVINE: Say it again.

SULIDES: Giuseppe Verde.

LEVINE: Okay. And did you leave from an Italian port? Where did the boat leave from?

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SULIDES: From Naples.

LEVINE: From Naples, uh-huh.

SULIDES: To New York. And I stayed, one week we come in, New York. I came one week there. They clean you up, everything. They have a doctor to see you and everything, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, do you, what was it like? How did you get to Naples from . . .

SULIDES: From Albania?

LEVINE: Yes.

SULIDES: Well, you go, by town you go to the city with a horse, you know. And they go, from the city, they have, they go, old fashioned, what do you call them?

LEVINE: Trolley car?

DAUGHTER: Did you go by boat to Bari?

SULIDES: No. The boat go to different place, you know. For my building go in the city. Just like here, I live, go outside in the car. Over there you get the boat and you go. Greek boat you go to Greece, Caorfu. After that, they (?). You go there, you come from there, from Greece.

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LEVINE: From Corfu you went to Naples to get the boat to go to the United States.  
And how long a trip was it? How long did it take you?

LEVINE: From Naples to New York, three days and three nights.

DAUGHTER: No, no, no.

SULIDES: Yes!

DAUGHTER: No, Daddy, it was more than that.

SULIDES: I think so. Probably, it was two days, anyway.

LEVINE: How did you feel about leaving Albania?

SULIDES: Well, I was a little boy. I was tickled to death.

LEVINE: You were excited about going.

SULIDES: My brother used to run, Curtis Lane Theater, he used to run pool room,  
shoe shine. After two or three years, a friend of mine, (?) cleaning hats. I  
go over there, stay with him, with nice clean hats, you know.

LEVINE: You learned how to . . .

SULIDES: Clean hats.

DAUGHTER: He used to clean, dry, hats.

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LEVINE: Oh, hats. I see.

SULIDES: Everybody had to work out there, even kids. Come home from Sunday from church, you know, you see them on the street there, Main Street. I used to go in the restaurant. I used to buy custard pie, you know. I used to go with the fingers, you know. All the pies in the restaurant had finger marks on them. ( he laughs )

LEVINE: Okay. Well, now, okay. So when you got to New York, do you remember coming into the port? Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

SULIDES: I don't remember, no.

LEVINE: But you remember Ellis Island?

SULIDES: Ellis Island, yeah. I'd been dragged around.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, tell me everything you can remember about Ellis Island, what you first, when you first got there.

SULIDES: Personally, I remember the ride there, because I stayed, first time we come out, we had to put us in a hotel. And they don't leave anybody going in a hotel. Them workers in that section. You know, we were followed. Probably been a burden on that one here, (?), you know.

LEVINE: Oh, you mean, when you got to Biddeford after Ellis Island.

SULIDES: Oh, yeah. They came through there. (?), they take you to a little hotel,

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and a doctor come, examine, everything. You had to stay there two days.

LEVINE: And what did they do? Can you remember anything about the examination?

SULIDES: Nothing. You go eat, sleep and they put you on the train. (?)

LEVINE: And what, do you remember the sleeping quarters?

SULIDES: No, I don't remember that.

LEVINE: Do you remember the food? Was the food good?

SULIDES: Oh, the food was nice. (?) They were talking English. Some lived in Biddeford, some lived in Worcester, some lived in Boston. And then everywhere, they take you. You come off the train, they take you and put you in another station. (?)

LEVINE: So in other words there were five people who were coming to Biddeford from there?

DAUGHTER: He can't hear you. Were there five Albanians that you came with?

LEVINE: That came to Biddeford?

DAUGHTER: Came together?

SULIDES: Yeah, there was five. Three stayed in New York, in New York City. (?)

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there, brother and sister. Everybody have somebody here, like me. And my brother was here, brother-in-law. He have a shoe shine at the Curtis Lane Theater.

LEVINE: Well, now, did you travel to Naples with these other Albanian people?

SULIDES: Naples, yeah. There were three all together.

LEVINE: So you weren't all by yourself.

SULIDES: One come to Boston, one go to (?), New Jersey.

LEVINE: So then you got off, do you remember when you got to the United States and you took the train to Biddeford, what were you thinking? Were there, did it all look different to you? What struck you about it?

SULIDES: I was the happiest boy in the world.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember seeing your brother, then, when you got to Biddeford, when you met him again?

SULIDES: Yes.

LEVINE: And how long had it been since you had seen your brother? He'd probably been here a few years. It was seven years.

DAUGHTER: Seven or eight years he hadn't seen him.

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LEVINE: Yeah. So was that a nice meeting to see your brother after the second year?

SULIDES: I work in Thomaston three years.

LEVINE: Which factory?

SULIDES: Thomason, pants factory. I worked three years there. I used to go to the restaurant on Eastern . . .

DAUGHTER: Daddy.

SULIDES: (?) Pie, they had pies. A long walk for me, you know.

LEVINE: Now, you were in Biddeford for how long before you came up this way.

SULIDES: Straight to Rockland.

LEVINE: Oh, straight through.

SULIDES: Brother, he was here.

LEVINE: Oh.

DAUGHTER: His brother had come here. He had stayed in Biddeford and then his brother came here to this shop. And my father worked in the factory during the day and at night worked for his brother.

SULIDES: Somebody, some friend they had there said, "Why you going to Rockland?"

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They don't have no store there, no pool room, no shoe shine." That's where they come from Rockland. They have three hundred dollars, you know. They save it for Biddeford. Forty dollar a month. That was a lot of mortgage in them days, forty dollars.

LEVINE: Did you stay, then, and live with your brother?

SULIDES: Yeah, oh, yeah.

LEVINE: And was your brother married?

SULIDES: Oh, yeah. He was married with a wife here. We lived on Christopher Lane there, a nice small neighborhood.

LEVINE: And then how long were you here before you got married?

SULIDES: ( he laughs ) A long time.

DAUGHTER: He went back in 1926. His father was sick.

SULIDES: Five or six years before I went out.

DAUGHTER: Yes. You went home in 1926 to see your father and mother.

SULIDES: Six years, yeah.

LEVINE: So you went home to Albania because your father was ill.

SULIDES: Yeah.

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LEVINE: And then did you . . .

SULIDES: No, my brother was here, no father.

LEVINE: Your brother was here, right. Now, when you got back to Albania is that where you met your wife?

SULIDES: I can't hear you very well.

DAUGHTER: When you went back to see your father, that's when you met Mama?

SULIDES: Yeah. That's right. Oh, yeah. I went back and meet my wife, and I got married.

LEVINE: And did you know her before, from before? No. So how long did you stay in Albania, then?

SULIDES: I stayed three months. I got married while I was there (?), a nice girl. Matchmakers, you know.

LEVINE: Who made the match?

SULIDES: Well, one of the people there.

LEVINE: The matchmaker.

SULIDES: My people and their people made it. You go over there and everybody meet for dinner there, I see the girl. Beautiful girl.

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LEVINE: What was your wife's name?

SULIDES: Efime.

DAUGHTER: Efime.

LEVINE: Efime. Uh-huh.

SULIDES: And the father say, "Here's my daughter." He say, "You like her?" I say, "Pretty girl." I told him, "Beautiful girl." They were beautiful, to be honest with you.

LEVINE: You had in mind to marry somebody in Albania, from Albania, while you were there?

SULIDES: No. What'd she say?

DAUGHTER: When you went you were going to get married. That's why you went, one of the reasons.

SULIDES: I went to get married, too. There were no Albanian girls here.

LEVINE: I see. And you wanted to marry an Albanian girl.

SULIDES: No.

LEVINE: You didn't care.

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SULIDES: But here if you marry American you can speak with her to learn English.  
( they laugh ) You won't understand, but it's true.

LEVINE: Okay. So then you stayed three months and you came back, then, to  
Rockland with your wife, with your bride.

SULIDES: My father died, and I left my wife over there.

LEVINE: Oh, you left her there.

SULIDES: Because I ended up cleaning a lot of hats in them days, you know. And  
I . . .

LEVINE: You were busy.

SULIDES: And I come back. My father died. And my mother, they come together,  
and I meet them in New York, Ellis Island. I drove her there, and just  
come off from Boston, and they were sitting there together. ( he laughs )

LEVINE: Your wife and your mother came over after your father died.

SULIDES: Yeah. I bought this house here and fixed it all up. I lived upstairs for three  
or four years, renting downstairs and fixing upstairs.

LEVINE: Well, now how did you learn English?

SULIDES: Like everybody, talk. Everybody teach me in the store, everybody.

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LEVINE: And then did you get citizen papers?

SULIDES: Yeah. 1926.

LEVINE: Were you proud of that? Were you happy?

SULIDES: You have to go in courthouse. Then the application. Citizenship, too, asking questions. Some I say yes, some I say no. ( he laughs ) I don't know. But I tell you in them days there was not much here to talk, you know. Especially in Rockland with them quotas there. Stone cutters. Tenant's Harbor. They're all, there was about five hundred stone cutters. All of them, when they built in there, (?) down there. All the stone come from here. Down in Washington, building the courthouses. They would get pretty tough. In Rockland they have much more in the stone. Just one family (?), and everyone (?).

LEVINE: Were a lot of the stone cutters immigrants from one place or another?

SULIDES: No, yeah. You mean the Albanians?

DAUGHTER: No. She wants to know who the stone cutters were?

SULIDES: Oh, they were the Swedes. Finns and Swedes. Mostly Swedes, the stone cutters. They usually come from the other side and they'd get drunk. There was nothing here. After the war, they began to come. Before just making a living, you know, getting by, and you got to spend,

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and see if they have a nickel to spend, and I'm honest about that. There no much money. There's no industry. We have no people around here and money here in Rockland.

LEVINE: And then after the Depression, and then . . .

SULIDES: After the Depression they come out all right and come on. After 1918 things changed around. 1920, a little better. And 1924 and '26 come industry. A little schoolhouse, you know, and not selling nothing, in high school, one floor.

LEVINE: So did you go to school here, too?

SULIDES: No. It was under (?). You could teach me in the pool room. ( he laughs )  
Not much education, I'll be honest with you.

LEVINE: Well, are you glad that you came here?

SULIDES: Huh?

LEVINE: Are you glad that you came to the United States? Are you happy that you came to the United States?

SULIDES: Oh, absolutely, hundred percent. I was a lucky boy. Very few come because, you know, they don't have any money to come.

LEVINE: Where did your brother get the idea to come before you?

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SULIDES: He was in biddeford. "Why not go on to Bangor? They have no shoe shine or pool in Bangor." So he goes on the (?), overnight, there come the money. They walk on Main Street, they see this place opening. They said, "Why you want to go to Bangor, there's (?) right here. And they pay \$35 a month. And after that, no education. Like air brains. ( he laughs )

LEVINE: So now you have, you and your wife had two daughters?

DAUGHTER: He wants to know how many children you had?

SULIDES: I don't now. ( he laughs )

BOTH DAUGHTERS Daddy!

DAUGHTER: How many children?

SULIDES: How do you know?

DAUGHTER: You have three sons and four daughters.

SULIDES: Four daughters, all born here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Oh. Can you tell me their names, your sons and daughters?

SULIDES: Pete, Joan, what's another one?

DAUGHTER: Paul.

SULIDES: And the girls? Tell her the girls. I forget. I'm excited talking.

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DAUGHTER: Jeanette, and then Ellen, Sylvia and Elizabeth.

SULIDES: Elizabeth. They're nice children. One thing, if I don't get married I'm going to have to educate my kids. This is all honest to God true and I've done it. I sent every one to college. (?), but I done it, and I'm happy.

LEVINE: That's wonderful.

SULIDES: And they all come good. I have a tough time with the two boys, but that happens to everybody. But they all done very nice. The girls are sweet little things.

LEVINE: And do you have grandchildren? Do you have grandchildren, too?

DAUGHTER: He has seven grandchildren.

LEVINE: Seven grandchildren. Wow.

SULIDES: I ask my wife, bring the children. I never forget that, to tell the children. I know you're smart, you know everything, but (?).

LEVINE: Say the last part? You're smart, you know everything, but?

SULIDES: What did I say. I forget. I know you're smart, but somebody else is smarter than you are.

LEVINE: Oh. Uh-huh. Do you remember any kinds of things that your mother or

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father told you when you were growing up, ideas that they had that you remember?

SULIDES: My brother was here. He was in Biddeford.

LEVINE: What was your mother like? Do you remember your mother?

SULIDES: I lived down here.

LEVINE: Yeah. What was your mother like?

SULIDES: A short-built woman, but she was pretty.

LEVINE: She was pretty. Do you remember things that she told you, ideas that she had, lessons she tried to teach you, or . . .

SULIDES: I don't know. I forget all of that. This country is a beautiful country. No country in the world, and I've been to Greece, I've been in Italy, in Turkey. I took a trip, you know. I got married. I'll never forget, a small village, you know. And this fellow, he had three daughters. Two married, one single. And he told me, he said, "This is my girl." Like it or not. That's how I got engaged. ( they laugh )

LEVINE: Well, is there anything else you would like to say about life in the old country or coming here?

SULIDES: Different all together, no question about it. A poor country. A poor

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country. And I brought my mother here. In the summer put a blanket around, long. I'll never forget that. (?) nicely. I work hard, a nice place to live and a nice place to work. I never have no trouble. ( tape ends abruptly )