

EI-173/APANOMITH

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JAMES APANOMITH

BIRTH DATE: AUGUST 22, 1895

INTERVIEW DATE: 6/17/1992

RUNNING TIME: 59:10

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER: PETER HOM

INTERVIEW LOCATION: BASKING RIDGE, NJ

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 1/1993

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 1/1993

GREECE, 1911

AGE 16

PASSAGE ON "THE PATRIS"

PORT: PIREAUS

RESIDENCES: GREECE: VOLOS US: NEWARK, NJ

Oral Historian's Note: Mr. Apanomith is the husband of Mary Apanomith, EI-174. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of the Oral History Project, 2/2/1993.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today with James Apanomith, who came from Greece in 1911 when he was sixteen years old.

APANOMITH: That's right.

LEVINE: And I'm here today, it's June 17th, 1992, and I'm here in Basking Ridge at Mr. and Mrs. Apanomith's home. Peter Hom is the recording engineer. Well, I'm happy to be here today, and I'm very interested in hearing your story about Greece and coming to the United States and settling here. So why don't I start by asking you your birth date.

APANOMITH: My birthday, August 22nd, 1895.

LEVINE: And where were you born?

APANOMITH: The village I was born, the village I was born was Afede.

LEVINE: Could you spell that?

APANOMITH: But I was, yeah. And I was born, I was raised in Volos.

LEVINE: Could you spell both of them?

APANOMITH: I'm from Volos. V-O-L-O-S.

LEVINE: And how about Afede. Afede?

APANOMITH: The Afede, you mean?

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LEVINE: How do you spell that?

APANOMITH: A-F-E-D-E.

LEVINE: Okay. And so when you were very young you moved?

APANOMITH: What's that?

LEVINE: You moved to Volos?

APANOMITH: There was Volos. My father and mother, I was the first one in the family.

LEVINE: Do you remember . . .

APANOMITH: I remember, I mean, I was raised in Volos. From Volos, I come to the United States.

LEVINE: Can you tell me about Volos?

APANOMITH: Volos is the city, what do you call, a waterfront. Very well liked and well built city, very nice. Very nice.

LEVINE: What do you remember about it? Can you describe some parts of it?

APANOMITH: Well, they had good schools, outstanding churches. Greek Orthodox church, you know, the Greeks are Greek Orthodox. And from there . . .

MRS. APANOMITH: There were boats coming, a seaport.

APANOMITH: And the boats coming in, in and out, you know, the fishing boats, you know, passing boats from one port to another port. But the oceanliners, we had to go, too big to come to the United States. (he hears a door open) I bet that's my daughter.

LEVINE: Peter, can we just turn this off? (break in tape) Okay, we're resuming now the tape with James Apanomith. And you were talking about the seaport, the town.

APANOMITH: From, uh, Volos.

LEVINE: Yes.

APANOMITH: The oceanliners didn't go there because the oceanliners were bigger, and the water not so deep. Deep enough, but not for oceanliners. And we used to go to, uh, Piraeus, a port named Piraeus near Athens.

LEVINE: And what did you do there?

APANOMITH: Then we got the boat. We showed the papers and everything else, and we stayed, my father and I. My father

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stayed there two, three, no, two days, three nights. Two days and three nights, I remember. And my father didn't say to go to America or not to go to America. He didn't say a word. He figured out that I make up my own mind. Although I was sixteen years old, I make up my own mind. And when the oceanliner come in, we were notified that the passengers are going to get in now.

LEVINE: You were notified, say that again.

APANOMITH: We were notified from the mail office that the boat is in, then we can go aboard. But the whole time we're going to leave, I don't know exact details, all right, but they're going to leave soon. So my father and I, we walk, and we go in a rowboat because the oceanliner wouldn't get to the pier. We get in a rowboat, and we get on the oceanliner. My father and I, we get in up on the deck. Then my father, for the first time, that is, he expressed his opinion, how he felt. We shake hands, and he say, "James, I never say to you go or not go. I'm very great and proud that you make up your own mind to go to America. But I know you're going to have a better life in America than we have here." Because here my father was a hardworking man, working day and night. He was in the fish business here, fishing boat, with the nets. And then we left and he was crying. He was crying, we left. And you know how I felt when I left my home, father and mother. And I was the first in my family to come to the United States. Then when we landed in New York everybody was hungry on the boat, on the oceanliner. And they said, "Something to eat, something to eat." And it was me, it was Jewish schoolmates. We used to go to school together. One of them, his father was here. And when the son come over he come over with his father. And then his father, you know what I mean, he was a man working on the piers where they used to load boats on the pier, in a different place in Brooklyn sometimes. And then everybody hungry, everybody hungry. So the father and the son was in alongside the man, and then another fellow. There was three boys, three schoolmates. The one in the center was his father with them, too. And then this boy with the father, he had a stiff collar and he was a heavy eater, and that's how his father died, and he did. The son was a heavy eater, too. They had spaghetti and chopped meat for lunch. Everybody was hungry. So what happened with the fork, picking up the spaghetti, and one piece of spaghetti dropped on his collar, he had a stiff collar, and it left a mark. (he laughs) So the father and the son, they were in an argument. "How are you going to go now to Ellis Island with the collar with this line?" Oh, the son was saying, "By the time we get there maybe it will wear out, dry out." Well, anyhow, we got in, and then they started examinations on the Ellis Island. And I was alongside the one without the father. He was husky, a heavy eater. The three of them, the whole family on that side, they was heavy eaters except me. So the fellow that didn't have the father, I noticed he had a chalk mark on his back in Ellis Island. So I couldn't reach my back, I don't know, and I was saying, "Hey, Gus," his name was. "Do I have a chalk mark on the back?" So he looked, he say, "No." I say, "You've got one." And I was thinking, you know, I'm that type, even today, you know, thinking. Either he goes back to

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Greece or I go back to Greece. So what happened, the one with the chalk mark went back to Greece. Being they're neighbors, "Where's Jim?" Jim's staying in the United States, in America. So this fellow, he went back, he was telling my mother, he was telling my mother, "Now, your son, really light eater, he don't eat much, and not just so heavy." Even today I'm not heavy. And he come back, my son comes back, and his son stays there. But anyhow, in a couple of years the one that went back, he make up his business, he come over. He was in the United States for a long time. But he didn't like it here, and he went to, he didn't like Elizabeth the way it was, and he went to Wheeling, West Virginia, at that time.

LEVINE: Well, tell me more about your life in Greece before you left to come to America. What did you do in your town? What do you remember?

APANOMITH: I wasn't doing much. I was only sixteen years old. I went to school, school, school, school, school.

LEVINE: Tell me about school. What was school like for you?

APANOMITH: Good. It was good. If my father was able enough, if my father was able enough financially, I would go get a long education, because I was very smart. Even the teacher was telling my father and mother, "I hope you let your son go progress himself because he's very smart." I was very smart. In fact, in a couple of classes the teacher was saying, "Don't let him go. Don't let him go. It's going to hurt him because he's so young." But anyhow, I make up my mind to come to America and I did, thank God. And I'm very proud that I was admitted in the United States through Ellis Island without a chalk mark on my back. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Well, what did your father do in Greece. Tell me about his work.

APANOMITH: His work? He had a fishing boat with the nets. You know, those days, they didn't have no motors in the boats. It was oars. Six men on each side. So they let the nets go all around. You know, bigger, bigger, smaller, smaller, smaller, so it could come to a big circle. Then six men on each side, they had the rope, you know, from the nets, pulling it to shore. And in a big sack, the nets, they were very thin, they wouldn't get out, they used to take the fish, bring the fish in the boat.

LEVINE: What kind of fish?

APANOMITH: According to the season. You know, sometimes sardines, sometimes mackerel, sometimes, you know, big fish. You know, the fish, it runs according to the season, what kind of fish. You can go for mackerel and get sardines. No. That's the way they hang out, like the way you say it. And that's what my father was doing all his life up till the time I left.

LEVINE: Did you fish with your father?

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APANOMITH: What's that?

LEVINE: Did you go fishing with your father?

APANOMITH: Who, me?

LEVINE: Yes.

APANOMITH: I didn't. I was on the boat many times, but I didn't work. Because I was only a kid, they wouldn't let my father break me into the fishing business.

LEVINE: Can you remember any times when you went on the boat with your father, your experiences on the boat? Can you remember any particular days when you went out with your father? Anything that happened on the boat?

APANOMITH: Nothing happened on the boat. Nothing happened on the boat. No, no. Everybody was equal. Everybody was well-liked. But when my father, he had a section there where he was sleeping. I was sleeping, staying with my father. Three, four days, three, four nights. Then when he come to the shore again, I go home.

LEVINE: Oh, I see.

APANOMITH: But I didn't like the life the way my father had anyhow. You know what I mean? Outside all the time, sleeping in the boat.

LEVINE: What was your mother like?

APANOMITH: My mother? My mother was a regular housewife. She didn't work in no place. But, you know, take care of the children, after I was born there were two sisters and a brother.

LEVINE: And what was your mother's name?

APANOMITH: Persephone.

LEVINE: And what was her maiden name?

APANOMITH: I, uh . . . (he pauses) I'm thinking now, that Greek name. Valaho.

LEVINE: Could you spell that?

APANOMITH: V-A-L-A-H-O.

LEVINE: And what was your father's name?

APANOMITH: Our father's name?

LEVINE: Yeah. His first name.

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APANOMITH: (he pauses) I don't remember. You know, that's years back. I don't remember.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, if you remember it, you can say it. And what, so you were the oldest, and then you had two sisters.

APANOMITH: Yeah.

LEVINE: And do you remember their names?

APANOMITH: Names, uh, Helen, one, and Magdaline. Magdaline and Helen. And my brother, the one that's living now, that's the only one left as far as the family, as far as, you know, the father and mother and all of that. (Greek) Tom. Tom (Greek).

LEVINE: And so you had two sisters and one brother.

APANOMITH: Yeah.

LEVINE: And you had another brother, too.

APANOMITH: No, no, no. That's all.

LEVINE: Just one brother, okay.

APANOMITH: He's the only one living now. Well, if, when he dies and I die, there won't be no more Apanomiths. Because there's no other boys in the family.

LEVINE: When you lived in Greece, did you have other family like aunts and uncles?

APANOMITH: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I got one now, his name is Philip. He's well-liked, and his wife is outstanding, Yurgia.

LEVINE: Are they in Greece now?

APANOMITH: Yeah.

LEVINE: Did you have a grandmother and a grandfather when you were there?

APANOMITH: No.

LEVINE: No. And what did you do for religious occasions? Were you a religious family when you were growing up?

APANOMITH: If I, when I was going to school?

LEVINE: Yeah. Were you a religious family? Was your family religious?

APANOMITH: Yeah. I was always with my family. I never left my home.

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LEVINE: And what about, did you go to church?

APANOMITH: Yeah. Go to church? Even now I never miss Sunday.

LEVINE: Oh. And did you have religious celebrations when you were in Greece with your family?

APANOMITH: If I have a what?

LEVINE: Did you celebrate religious occasions?

APANOMITH: Celebrate? Celebrate, you know, when you get diplomas, that's a celebration, from one class to another.

LEVINE: In school?

APANOMITH: In school and in home. In home, you know what I mean? Home cooking. They don't go out and get drunk.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything your mother cooked that you particularly liked?

APANOMITH: Well, mostly in my home was lamb, lamb. Not like here, chicken, chicken, chicken, chicken. Fish, we never bought fish because right near there, if I go, and my father was in a very close port with the boat, all the fish, the men that were selling fish, they know that I was the son of my father and they used to give me, I used to buy fish and they wouldn't take no money. You know, they figure if I tell, if they were telling my father that they give me two pounds, three pounds, five pounds fish, my father say here, give them fish for what they give me.

LEVINE: What else do you remember when you think of, when you think of Volos. What comes to your mind?

APANOMITH: Well, I'll tell you one thing, there's a good church members. They go to church, they go to church. They're not going to go rob any church like here. They break in the church and they wrapped even the priest there. They don't do that where I come from. No, no. They're very religious people. What's the use of going to church if you don't keep up with it. That's the way I look at it. What's the use of going to church Sunday, and then Monday going to rob the priest and going to rob everything in the collections. No, no, no, no. Thank God. I didn't come to the point, and there was nobody that I know that come to that point. No, no, no, no. And my mother, she was very well-liked. My father, he used to send out fish, like sardines or mackerel, and they put them like you go and buy now all ready sardines, salted sardines, you know, in delicatessen stores, you know. My father used to send out and make them. And they used to send, and at the end, a strip, they used to send a little keg with sardines or mackerel. And the neighbors, if they may need something, that is, if they had a little celebration or something, they'd come to my mother. She was very big-hearted. "How about a few sardines or a few mackerel? We've got a party here." "Sure." My mother did that. So my father used to go

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down, sometimes, when he was home, he'd go down to the basement and pick up some sardines and he'd tell my mother, "You know, you keep on going there, we've almost reached the bottom of the barrel with the sardines." (he laughs) My mother used give them out, she was big-hearted. Well, I'll tell you one thing, even now, I'm ninety-six, I'm big-hearted. No, no, no. I don't like to see anybody suffer. No, no, no. I'd rather suffer myself than see somebody else suffer. No, no, no, no.

LEVINE: What made you decide that you wanted to come to the United States?

APANOMITH: Well, you know, some big show of Greeks, they make five thousand dollars, that was the idea of me, make five thousand dollars and go back. But when I finally saw this (?) was better than over there, I say forget about the five thousand dollars, I'm going to stay right here. And I'm here since 1911.

LEVINE: Now, did you hear stories about the United States before you came? Do you remember what you heard before you ever came?

APANOMITH: Well, they said Greeks come over, after they spend five, after they make five thousand dollars, when they use the five thousand dollars they come back again. They come back here to get some more. But I never believed that go back and forth, go back and forth, no. Either stay or go back and stay. No, go back, go back. What are we going here, market? Supermarket here? Buy at half price like Shop Rite? (he laughs)

LEVINE: Now, do you remember anything your mother or your father told you? Any advice they gave you?

APANOMITH: My mother, she said, "Don't go, don't go, don't go." So I sent a letter when my father, my brother was sixteen, or a little over sixteen, to come over here. And I got a letter from my mother, she send letter to me, if my brother wants to come to the America. And she say, "Now, Jim, I lost one son, I don't want to lose the other one." You know what I mean? She lost one son. In one way, she had one son at home. You know what I mean. That was Mother's idea, and that was Mother's love, and I don't blame her for that, anyway. Because if he come over here, he would stay with me for up till now if he was living that long. Oh, thank God. The only thing I pray, dear Lord, and thank God that I was admitted to the United States, they didn't put the chalk mark on the back of me and get discussion to say if I was going to go again.

LEVINE: So you left from Pireaus? Where did you leave from when you left Greece to come to the United States.

APANOMITH: If I did what?

LEVINE: Where did you leave? Where did the ship go from?

APANOMITH: From Greece it was come straight. They didn't stop

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no place.

LEVINE: Yeah. What was the name of the ship?

APANOMITH: Patris, I was saying.

LEVINE: Patris. And where did it leave from?

APANOMITH: You know what it means? Patris means what we call in the United States, Patris. Patris, like from one nation where you come from.

MRS. APANOMITH: That's right.

APANOMITH: Like from one nation we come, Patris.

LEVINE: Okay, where did you leave from? Where did the Patris leave from?

APANOMITH: From Greece?

LEVINE: Yeah.

APANOMITH: Pireaus.

LEVINE: Okay. And then how long did it take, the trip?

APANOMITH: It took us twenty-two days in the ocean. Twenty-two days in the ocean.

LEVINE: And can you tell me anything about that trip? What was it like?

APANOMITH: Oh, we were third class, you know. Seventy-five dollars for the ticket. There was three in three. I was on the bottom, and this man that got the chalk mark, his father was on the top of me. And every time from the place where they used to bring something in to the ocean to the cooking place, they had a big basket on their back, and he used to go by this man upstairs, used to grab. Eat, eat, eat. Heavy eater. He died from heavy eating. Eating, eating, eating. So every time he put his hand in there, this man that was holding the basket, he was checking. He turned around, and he say, "Next time I'll put something in the back there, when you put your hand in there you'll have scratches all over your hand." He didn't touch it no more.

LEVINE: Did you go up on deck?

APANOMITH: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. In fact, I used to walk over there and get the soup and get the ones that they couldn't walk, and I used to bring it. When they had soup all the floor was wet. They had to be very careful they wouldn't slide down it. And I used to bring for three, I'd tell the chef, "For three." "For three?" "For three." So bring it little by little by little. This fat guy, the one, "Uhhhh, uhhhh, uhhhh, don't give it all, don't give it all." "You want to take the whole soup?"

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Take it." Oh, I used to, I walk on where they were giving it out. I do the walking every day.

LEVINE: Do you remember when the ship came in to the New York Harbor?

APANOMITH: What, the day?

LEVINE: Do you remember coming in to New York?

APANOMITH: Coming, no, no. From the Ellis Island I went to Jersey Shore, the Jersey Railroad.

LEVINE: Well, before you got there did you see the Statue of Liberty?

APANOMITH: Yeah. Now, good thing you remind me about the Statue of Liberty. Now, being I read about the history of New York and the Statue of Liberty, the meaning of the Statue of Liberty, and this son of the father, being the father was in the United States working in Brooklyn some time, as a longshoreman, he asked me, "What's the statue? What's that statue?" And then we're looking at the statue, and he say, "That's Christopher Columbus." And I put my two cents out. I say, "Listen, this don't look like Christopher Columbus. That's a lady there." (they laugh) Christopher Columbus, he's not like that Christopher Columbus. Especially Italian. That couldn't be, no, lady, that's a lady. What I read is what we call in Greek (Greek). Statue of Liberty. That's (Greek). Statue of Liberty. In Greek it's, like I say before, (Greek). The statue of freedom, the statute of freedom. That's in Greek. I went to school and I read it. So, "Jimmy's right." The other guy, the guy said, "Jimmy's right, because he goes to school, high school, he knows what he's talking about." I said, "Christopher Columbus, a lady, Christopher Columbus." So anyhow, when I land . . .

LEVINE: Let me just stop you for a minute so we can turn the tape over, and then we'll talk about when you landed, okay?

APANOMITH: What?

LEVINE: I just want to stop the tape.

END OF SIDE ONE
BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: You were talking about when you landed. Do you want to tell what you thought when you landed at Ellis Island?

APANOMITH: If I remember the Ellis Island?

LEVINE: Do you remember when you first saw it, what you thought?

APANOMITH: I don't get that.

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LEVINE: When you first came to Ellis Island, do you remember what you thought about what was going to happen there, what you knew? Did you know about Ellis Island?

APANOMITH: No, no, no. I know they have the best examination. I know that from Greece, yet. You got to go in one place where they examine you. If you're good enough, they let you go through it. If not you go back. And they've got to make sure that you're going to have enough money. Besides your ticket, in case you're hungry, you have to go and steal something. They always have, the man in the United States send me a hundred dollars. Seventy-five for the ticket and twenty-five to show to Ellis Island that you had twenty-five dollars. Otherwise they'd keep you there. They wouldn't let you go to shore without money. I had twenty-five dollars. Of course, from the Jersey Railroad, I got on, a big ticket here, 105 First Street, Elizabeth, and every, I had a big suitcase hanging, holding on my back, and I remember everybody saying in the United States, in America it's cold in the wintertime. Extra blanket outside. How you're going to hold, sixteen years old, hand bag, and the blankets? I used to drop it, and show the guard who was watching which way to put the hand on it. That's why I didn't understand what they were talking about. And I'm following that line, when his hand went up. So when finally I got to Jackson Park, between Second and Third, St. Patrick's Church. And I seen the priest in the front there, the watchman was sitting on the bench. And I said, "Jesus, some old church." It's got a nice beautiful church that they had. I don't know how they are now. So I showed this man, I dropped the bags and showed this man. And he put his hand down, the watchman in the park, and I told him I couldn't talk. So he said to me, "All right. Lift up the bag," and he brought me down 105 First Street. And Gus, at the time, he was in and he didn't come out. You think he'd come up to Ellis Island and pick me up or something, or to New Jersey and pick me up at the railroad? No. Too cheap those days, to save a dollar to go back. Well, anyhow, I got in. Oh, welcome, welcome, welcome, welcome. And, uh, well, I hope he'll be all right. Then again I said he'll be all right, thank God there was that (?). That's what I told him. Or you would have back, and back and forth. And then he was cooper, barrels, cooper by trade. He was working during the day in New York Lubricating Oil Company, and some, after the work he used to be in the store. And I got a piece of white cheese, you know, the Greek cheese, white.

LEVINE: Feta cheese?

APANOMITH: Feta. And he had it marked, how he cut it, and how much he give me. He left me a piece. And I was after my money, I was only a young boy. I was only that small piece of cheese. I got another piece, but he had it marked. So when he come back, he look and the cheese was missing. So he told the other two boys, "Who took the cheese?" They said, "Jim." He called me in the back room there. He said, "Listen, I'm a cooper and I'll work this day, this way all day long, and I took just as much cheese as you took, and you've got a lot of nerve to take another one." I couldn't say a word, because after all there was the man

who sent me the hundred dollars. I started to cry. And I arrived at my father, I said it was a small cheese, my mother give the whole thing, we have home. And this cheapskate here, with the . . . I'll tell you a big story about him. And then he made me cry just because I took a small piece of cheese. So anyhow, he's supposed to go this year back to Greece but he didn't go. His wife and big daughter's married one time. And then he stayed another year, and I'm supposed to buy the store off him. He stay another year. I say, "What happened?" What happened, he went to Brooklyn shipping department there on the waterfront to pick up some barrels, wooden barrels in those days. And some, they were leaking, and he stayed in Brooklyn. I guess he got it fixed up with some bimbos, some young ladies on the pier, and he got fixed up, and he had to stay another year to get it cured, because the other way he'd give it to his wife. So listen to this. When he went back, I'll never forget the war declared at any time, even if he was leaving. Too bad he wasn't leaving. My, every time I sent a letter to my mother, of course my mother would get it first because my father wasn't there, he was out on the boat. "You got a letter from Jim?" He say, "Yeah." "What did it say? How is Jim?" My mother ask him now, he was in the United States. "How's Jim?" "Well, Jim, he was all right when I was there. And now I left, he's going to be a bum." You know why I say he be bum? Because I was young, good looking, and some young girls go back there, go to school or something, they used to knock at the window and give you, "Good morning, good morning." And he used to seen this. But when he got to Brooklyn to check out the barrels, he got fixed up with one of them and he had to stay here another year to get cured before he goes and faces his wife. So he was telling my mother, now I was there he was all right. Now I left he's going to be a bum. So I write to my mother, and I say, "Listen, hey, tell Gus," that was his name, "to keep his mouth shut, and not to say that I'm going to be a bum now because he left, he's not here. I think if he was here I'm going to be a bum myself if I take after him. If I know what I know about him, I'm going to write a letter to the coffee man. He was just like a newspaper, the coffee man." And ever since that time my mother, ask my mother, "How's Jim?" Right away she say got a letter, she say, "Yeah. He writes here now to keep his mouth shut and never say he's going to be a bum because if he knows what he knows about you he's going to write the coffee man here." It was in a time he never ask about he got a letter or no letter. And my father and mother wants to know what I was going to write to this coffee man. So help me God, I didn't write to him. I did not. But now, when I was in Greece, remember, before the coffee man and all the other. His daughter, this Gus, the one that was here, his daughter was just like him, two-faced. Funny looking face. And my brother used to say, "Jim." My brother used to sit along side of me, "Jim, you know that's Gus' daughter." I say, "Yeah. It looks just like him." I say, "Don't tell her anything about what I was going to write to the coffee man." I say, "No, no, no." It wasn't my business to write this daughter, he's dead now. This Gus is dead. He's dead and buried. He was no good for nobody. He didn't have no friends.

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LEVINE: So what happened? You were minding his store? You were taking over his business?

APANOMITH: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. He had a shoe shining and hot cleaning. And I worked darn hard there. Everybody liked me. And I used to make tip, a dollar a day, easy. A dollar a day tips. I had a box of (?), and I used to take his money, too. And my wages was twenty-five dollars a month, for God's sake.

LEVINE: When you came to the United States . . .

APANOMITH: I worked for him.

LEVINE: He sent the money so you would work for him?

APANOMITH: Yeah. I worked and pay him a dollar a day interest, besides twenty-five dollars a month. Twenty-five dollars a month, my eye.

LEVINE: So did you know other people from Greece when you first came here?

APANOMITH: No. And I, the only ones I know was in New York, the Tobacco Importing Company. Cucciari's brothers. Three brothers. The two of them, they're still in the United States. One of them, well, the one with the brains, he went back to Greece to study there, and he got married over there. And when he know that I was in Greece I used to come over. Remember he used to come over and see me all the time. I knew him from New York. And then . . .

LEVINE: Did you have trouble learning English?

APANOMITH: Yeah.

LEVINE: How did you learn English?

APANOMITH: Well, I had a dictionary, I think it's in my drawer. Everybody thought that was a Bible. That wasn't a Bible. It was Greek-American, American-Greek dictionary. Every time I -- uhhhhhhhhh -- I mark it, mark it. And I had a schoolteacher who used to come in for a shine. Miss Woolsky. She used to teach the No. 1 school on New Jersey Street. "Jim, why don't you come to night school? Why don't you come to night school?" And I was telling this boss of mine, I said, "I'm going to go to night school." "Ahhh, go to night school. What do you come over here, to be an Englishman or make a few dollars and go back to Greece?" So that way he kept me away from going to school, night school. But that Bible of mine, that Bible helped me a lot. Yeah.

LEVINE: So then, you kept up with the business, with Gus' business, and then what? What did you do after that?

APANOMITH: After that, a fellow used to come in for a shine, every time he used to sell coffee. He was coffee salesman, a man named George Uniguis. He used to come in and see me well-liked

and all that. He say to me, "Why don't you come and work for us selling coffee?" I say, "How far can I go selling coffee?" He said, "New Jersey, Pennsylvania. I give you Pennsylvania, too." "What's the wages?" He say, "On commission only, fifteen percent." So I sold, I might as well have given it away, the shoe shine/hot cleaners. I said, "Take it. I don't want to see it no more." And I sat with the book. He took me over to Bank Street. The coffee was Aroma Coffee Company. Aroma Coffee Company. So he took me there, there was two brothers and George Uniguis. George Uniguis took me in. And Nick, one of the brothers, after I got the instructions and all that he gave me a list, how to go. And Nick said to me, "You're from Elizabeth." "Yeah, yeah." "How am I going to go in Elizabeth? I've got Elizabeth covered up." He had Elizabeth covered up. I say to him, "How many stops you got in Elizabeth?" He say, "I got three good stops." "Well, when I take over you're going to give up the three stops, right?" He say, "Yeah, why? What are you going to have?" "I'm going to have thirty-six." I did have thirty-six. Thirty-six stops in Elizabeth, I had. "Oh, I'm already here, Jim. I'm already selling coffee, Jim. I'm already selling coffee." I used to go to New Jersey, all the way down, down to the seashore. In Perth Amboy, one time, in Perth Amboy one time they had a luncheonette out as the rail come in. Big land there, and they had all cafeterias, cafeterias, luncheonettes, luncheonettes. And there was one man, only one man selling coffee. So every time I stopped there I'd bother them again. I say, "God bless you, God bless your time for spending five minutes with me. And it's my duty there as a salesman to stop and say hello to you anyhow, buy or not." So the neighbors, they were telling me they always run short of coffee. Now, "Stop again today." I say to me, you don't get me discuss it. I stop by there, and he say to me, and that was early in the morning, "Would you sell me a hundred pounds of coffee today?" I said, "Sure." "Are you sure?" I said, "Sure I'm sure. Otherwise . . ." So I didn't have no pen and pencil and paper with me. I said, "Give me a piece of paper and a pen, and an envelope." And I send special delivery, the post office was right across the street. I send it in special delivery, and then I call him up, too. He said, "What's the matter? You sleep in Perth Amboy." The boss, now, tells me I sleep in Perth Amboy. I said, "Yeah, I sleep in Perth Amboy, and I got you a hundred pounds of coffee, and I got a standing order a hundred pounds a week." That's a big order. So, "And tell your partner that I got thirty-six stops in Elizabeth." He only had three. "Yeah, I'm the boss, I'm the boss, I'm the boss." He couldn't speak English, he was the boss. But, anyhow, I got Pennsylvania after one guy left, I took Pennsylvania. I used to go far as Shemoken. I was well-liked out there, well-liked. One place there, in Reading, Pennsylvania, the Crystal Hotel. I used to stay there overnight. Then he had an office down the cellar, the restaurant, the restaurant, but his office was down the cellar. He was a hotel down there. A beautiful, beautiful cellar. And he had his desk there and everything. So we were sitting on the desk there, and he had a paper, a napkin holder. And I looked at it. He said, "What are you looking at?" they said to me. I say, "I got a napkin, something like this, in a holder, but better

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quality than this." And he said, "I'm sorry that I can't give you a coffee order." I said, "Listen, my friend, blessed is the man who appreciates the value of another man's time." So he was thinking and thinking and thinking and thinking. "Say that again." I said, "Blessed is a man who appreciates the value of another man's time. Your time worth money to me, because you spend even five minutes, five seconds, it's worth it to me." He said to me, "You told me you had a better napkin than this. I'm going to show you that your time wasn't wasted." I say, "Yes. How much you pay for this?" He says, "Six dollars a case, six dollars a box." And the orders from me was no more than four dollars. I say, "Yeah, I'll give you a better napkin than this for six dollars a case." "Will you please send me ten cases, ten boxes?" So I call up Uniguis and Uniguis was there, it was Thelma who took the order, Thelma. So when Uniguis comes in the office he tells them that Jimmy comes up, he wants ten cases to Crystal Hotel and Restaurant, six dollars a case. So he grabs a hold of the telephone and calls me up. And he says to me, "Jim, good thing you're at the hotel." I say, "Yes. I'm going to leave today anyhow. I'm going to another town." He says to me, "I want you to take my advice." I say, "What?" "You can go to put a little more water in the oozu." Oozu is the Greek drink, you know, you put a little water it turns like milk. I say, "Yeah, I take that advice. Why?" He say to me, "Ten cases, six dollars a case. Ten cases, six dollars." Today, send out today. I wonder if he get ten cases. "And I want you to take my advice, too." He said, "What's your advice? He asked me what was his advice. I say to him, "I want you to put a little more water in the oozu like I do in mine." I say, "Why?" "Because you're thirty-five years in the coffee business and you've only got a little truck there to deliver to the neighborhood. And here I am, I'm giving orders from Pennsylvania." He shut off. That's why I tell him, I tell the mother, when we met him, remember, I was the best salesman he had. Christ, they used to like me. "Hello, Jim, hello, Jim, hello." They don't want me to pay there for lunch in Pennsylvania. They won't let me pay when I eat. I said, "Listen, I'm going to starve to death here in Pennsylvania. Take money." Tell them I told him I was the best salesman Uniguis ever had. Eh, big, he used to throw the collar up like this, walk like a big millionaire. Eh, eh, eh.

LEVINE: Did you stay a salesman, then? Is that what you did for the rest of your working life?

APANOMITH: No. After that I went and picked up the segments to go to Pennsylvania and then Balaskas, and there was one Fegere. He was telling me if he had Pennsylvania he would do better, more than I do. Because I never took a car. I never took the car to Pennsylvania. So anyhow, because how you can tell. The days are raining, the nights are snowing. You wouldn't be able to travel in Pennsylvania sometimes. So what happened is Balaskas, you know. He got a hole, take Pennsylvania. He took Pennsylvania. But my car's no good. He financed the car for Balaskas, he took Pennsylvania. So I want to ask him how Balaskas does in Pennsylvania, but they know the following month I went to pick up the statements to go to Pennsylvania and this new salesman for

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Pennsylvania, he said to me, "Don't take the same is, because I cover Pennsylvania." So I'm still in the house, Balaskas does Pennsylvania. He won't say to me when I get. So Uniguis calls me on the side. He say to me, "Do you want to take Pennsylvania again?" I say, "No, sir. I'm not good enough to cover Pennsylvania. Balaskas, even bought him a car." "I'll give you fifty percent of the profit." "If you gave me a hundred percent I wouldn't take it because you're a faker." I told the boss, I said, "You're a faker. You're no good, to work for you, anyhow, to call you a boss, to respect you like a boss. I might be down here or up this way, but you turn the collar up and you go around in a big, big, big, small truck, and try to deliver Pennsylvania, I mean the neighborhood here." So when the coffee went up, I say, "Listen, I say goodbye to you and Balaskas, the seller from Pennsylvania." (he laughs)

LEVINE: Tell me how you met your wife.

APANOMITH: So what happened, after that, I don't know where I went.

MRS. APANOMITH: We could stay here all day.

APANOMITH: So what happened, this man sell me business. I know him, my wife and his wife were very close friends. God bless her soul, she's dead now. And say can I, I got a brother-in-law working there. A nephew or somebody. And he die, and I want to sell somebody like me a wholesale meat business, Ninth Avenue and 14th Street, New York. So I asked, "When you want to sell? Tomorrow?" "Oh, no, no. Next week." And I worked for him, I worked over there.

LEVINE: And that's what you did?

APANOMITH: Selling meat, selling meat.

LEVINE: And after that? Well, tell me how you met your . . .

APANOMITH: After that. Now, how I met my wife. Remember the Greeks, the two of them that were here in the United States, yet? One married a girl, an Irish girl, and Spiro, he met a French girl. They're married, the two of them married. They hit the Balkan Importing Company. In Cherry Street, I think it was. Cherry Street in New York. And I was there one day, and what happened, my wife and her sister, they come in to buy Greek fish, olive oil or something. You know what I mean? And when they left, when they left Tom, Tom is down the seashore now, when they left he say to me, "Don't you know these girls?" I say, "Familiar, I know, I know him from the other side." He said to me, "They're the youngest daughters, Julia and Mary." I say, "Yeah." So they recognized me. They told their father. The father is big-hearted, too. We got an invitation to go for dinner, Sunday. And they put the hook on me. (they laugh)

LEVINE: They put the hook on you? (she laughs) Well, what did you like about your wife? What did you like when you first

met her?

APANOMITH: I know her from the other side, very small though, very, very, when we were smaller. Well, I pick up the youngest one. She was the youngest one. The other one is dead now. Well, I never kiss her. Although we were very close I never kiss her. When I offer my offering, I ask my father-in-law, God bless his soul, too, I ask my father-in-law for the daughter in marriage to become my wife, that's the first time I kiss, I kiss my wife. The first time was the engagement. Then Julia, and then Julia her sister, she said, well, she met a salesman, now she was going to marry a salesman, but she was going to marry a big importer. She thought she was going to get one of the three brothers. But she got disappointed because she wanted too much. She married one faker, the biggest faker, the guy, and he died. But the first one was a big heavy eater like his father. He become best man. But the father died from overeating, and he died from overeating, altogether.

LEVINE: Before we, before the tape ends, I want to ask you: Is there anything that you would like to say more about growing up in Greece, being there till you were sixteen and then making the decision to come here and then living the rest of your life here?

APANOMITH: No, no, no. I didn't tell anything. The longer I stay here, the more I like it. And I often said, I told my wife yesterday, yesterday, I think. If they had laws like they had before with the Ellis Island, they wouldn't have so much crap like they have in the United States today. You know that.

LEVINE: You know, I forgot to ask you something else. How many children did you have?

APANOMITH: Two.

LEVINE: And what are their names?

APANOMITH: One, her name was Athena, one of them, and the other one, uh, how do you say it in Greek again? (answer off mike) That's the full name, and we call her Percy for short. Persephone, Persephone. Even got it in the English books, Persephone, that name.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And do you have grandchildren?

APANOMITH: Two and six, the other one.

MRS. APANOMITH: Two, and two. Two, and two, four.

APANOMITH: You say six. That's the grandchildren, one is together, two now.

MRS. APANOMITH: Yes. Two and two, yes.

APANOMITH: Now we're talking about grandchildren, now we're jumping one.

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LEVINE: Okay. Let me just ask you, finally, if there's anything more you'd like to say? Anything else you'd like to say about coming to the United States? About settling here? About being an American?

APANOMITH: I became an American after five years, I become a citizen. You know, one time there was a Greek examiner, immigration examiner, at Union County Court in Elizabeth. And I went there with the two witnesses. You had to have two witnesses to become a citizen. And they told me one of the witnesses I had, he knew, the Greek. He say to me, "Jim, you're lucky." And I said, "Why?" "The Greek is not here, because the Greek puts so many questions besides what he's supposed to ask." I say, "I'm very sorry because I got a question in a report, I mean, the answer in my book, in my pocket. And if he ask me anything that's not in the book, I pull out the book and say, "Ask me what it is." They gave me this book here. They give it to me that time when I got the first papers. Now they haven't got no first papers. Now they give me this book. You ask me from this book here, and if I don't answer, then you can turn me down. So George McGrath, he say, "Pass, pass." But George McGrath become a good friend of mine, and he want me to put in paper, then he come to court, the Greek. So, "Pass, pass, pass, pass, pass." So the examiner was looking at me, "Pass, pass, pass." And they passed, and I become a citizen.

LEVINE: Was that a happy day for you? Was that a happy day?

APANOMITH: Oh, sure it was a happy day. One time I vote in the primaries. I'll never vote again. Why should I tell anybody who I am? That's the way I look at it. You know, in the primaries you got to say Republican or Democrat. You got to put Republican, if you're a Democrat you've got to put it. Why should I let the people know what I am? When it comes to the general election, I know what I'm going to vote. If I like a Republican, I put a Republican. If I like a Democrat, I vote Democrat. That's all.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I think we can wind up now, and I want to thank you very much.

APANOMITH: I'm very sure, I'm very great and very proud. And I bring you back old memories, and I'm very proud, and I hope to the Lord, and I want you to do me a big favor.

LEVINE: What's that?

APANOMITH: Would you do that for me? Keep healthy. That's the biggest favor I ask from you.

LEVINE: Thank you. The same to you.

APANOMITH: You too, you, too, big, boy. (addressing sound engineer)

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LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service.

APANOMITH: I was very proud when I heard that you were going to come from Ellis Island. I was very proud, very proud.

LEVINE: Well, I'm very happy to have been able to talk with you.

APANOMITH: And do me a favor, keep healthy.

LEVINE: Thank you. Okay. I've been talking with James Apanomith, and it's June 17, 1992, and I'm signing off.