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PEROOZ DINAHNIAN HALAGIAN

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 4/1993

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TURKEY (ARMENIAN), 1921

AGE 22

RESIDENCE: TURKEY (ARMENIAN) SEVAS

US RESIDENCE: BRIDGEPORT, CT

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here at the Lord Chamberlain Home in Stratford, Connecticut on June 20, 1992 with Mrs. Halagian. Mrs. Halagian's maiden name, her first name is Perooz, and her second, her maiden name is Dinahnian.

HALAGIAN: Yeah. My real mother, Dinahnian. When I married, Halagian.

LEVINE: Right, and married Halagian. Halagian. Mrs. Halagian came in 1921 when she was twenty-two years old. She is Armenian. And she came

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here through Ellis Island at that time. I'm very happy to be here, Mrs. Halagian. And I would like to start by asking your birth date, your birth date.

HALAGIAN: My birth date. January, uh, January 5.

LEVINE: And the year? Do you remember what year you were born? Well, you told me you were ninety-two. Is that right?

HALAGIAN: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: So we can . . .

HALAGIAN: I am ninety, I am ninety-two and six months.

LEVINE: Okay.

HALAGIAN: (she laughs)

LEVINE: Now, where were you born? What was the name of the town?

HALAGIAN: Sevas.

LEVINE: Can you spell that?

HALAGIAN: Sevas. Must be over here, my citizen papers. It has Diahnian over there.

LEVINE: So it's Sevas, the town?

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HALAGIAN: Sevas.

LEVINE: Sevas.

HALAGIAN: In Turkey.

LEVINE: Now, do you remember that town? Do you remember what it looked like?

HALAGIAN: Oh, yeah. I'm thirteen years old when massacre time over there.

LEVINE: Tell me about that.

HALAGIAN: I remember, yeah.

LEVINE: What do you remember?

HALAGIAN: Uh, my mother, my father, my sister, my brother and, uh, like that, I lose all my father, my mother, and three sisters, four brothers. All massacre time, that Turkish massacre time. Make seventy-five million people killed, Turkey. All the Catholic, Protestant, Armenian, all massacred. Seven, I remember, seven thousand five hundred people.

LEVINE: What happened? Do you remember what happened?

HALAGIAN: First my father, my father, put him in a jail, all the men. Monday in the town, people were over there, man. Our place no have a ladies and, uh, ladies and a man. No, ladies always home. Man over there. One day,

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and we think something happened, everybody, you don't worry about Turkish or Armenian, something. And one day all the Turkish soldiers got all the men and tied their hands, and put them in a jail. First that.

LEVINE: That was the first thing.

HALAGIAN: That's the first thing. And after one week, two weeks after, everybody just to have clothes, and have to go out the home. Everything leave over there and go out. And after go mountain and mountain, mountain and mountain, lots of people die. Lots of people, make a hole like that, all the Armenian children and the man put over there. I saw there, too much. Oh.

LEVINE: So you left your home and you had to go over the mountains?

HALAGIAN: Sure, everybody. Two, three months.

LEVINE: Oh, my goodness. And what was that like?

HALAGIAN: And after (?), you know. And after come little kids, take them out and, at a place over there, and have open a little place, you know. All the children over there. But lots of people died. Lots of people put in the ocean, want to die. Lots of people walk. Lots of people we walk, and no water, two, three days, four days or something. Oh, I don't want to remember. (she is moved)

LEVINE: No, you don't want to remember. Yeah. Then how did you come to the United States after you left your town?

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HALAGIAN: Uh . . . (she pauses to regain her composure) I'm really sad. That's why I don't want to . . . (she laughs)

LEVINE: I'm sorry. Okay. You don't want to talk about that part. How about, then, when you came to the United States? Do you remember that part?

HALAGIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you want to take a break? (Break in tape) We're resuming now after a little bit of a break and we're going to talk about coming to this country. Okay.

HALAGIAN: I coming at this country. I come Bridgeport, ship.

LEVINE: Do you remember the name of the ship?

HALAGIAN: No. My citizen paper put over there. I forget lots of things.

LEVINE: Okay.

HALAGIAN: And after I come over there to Bridgeport, I marry, and after here I have a work in a store, my husband. I go Naugatuck, Naugatuck.

LEVINE: Is that a town?

HALAGIAN: A little town.

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LEVINE: What kind of a store did you work in with your husband?

HALAGIAN: Oh, he's an uncle. His uncle have an ice cream, candy, something like that. And after we married, two years after, working at the building. And after he worked in the Peter Paul.

LEVINE: Peter Paul?

HALAGIAN: Peter Paul candy.

LEVINE: Oh, Peter Paul.

HALAGIAN: Candy, yeah. He worked over there.

LEVINE: I see. Well, now, how did you meet your husband?

HALAGIAN: Oh. (she laughs) That's a long story. He live Naugatuck. Finally we go to Naugatuck, you know. His aunt, uncle home. He uncle home. When I come, she says, "You know, I think I call up Martin and come over here Bridgeport. He want to with us together." (she laughs) That's the way and after we married. I come, we spend three years, three months or four months. I married, because no room, nothing, you know.

LEVINE: Who did you stay with before you got married?

HALAGIAN: Oh, three months of some Armenian people. I don't know the name. I forget long time.

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LEVINE: Well, did you come by yourself to this country?

HALAGIAN: No. We come whole bunch. But everyone go to Massachusetts, some. Or we come on a French. We come over there. After boat we take over there, come this country, Bridgeport. I have, I think, ten or fifteen people, Armenian, all together. But one come Bridgeport, one come Springfield, Massachusetts, and one come Boston, you know. After we come in the United States and everybody go his own place. Some people lucky, his own people come over there, in the beach. You know what . . .

LEVINE: Some people come, their own people come and meet the person in Ellis Island.

HALAGIAN: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: But did you know the people that you lived with?

HALAGIAN: Oh, that's all die.

LEVINE: But did you know them before you went to live with them?

HALAGIAN: Oh, yeah. I know, because some are Armenian, old country, all like that. All left over.

LEVINE: Now, what did you like about your husband when you met him?

HALAGIAN: Oh, he tell, eat together, talk together. One, three months after we get married and we go Naugatuck, living. And after, I stayed Naugatuck fifty-

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one years. Yeah.

LEVINE: And did you have children?

HALAGIAN: No.

LEVINE: No children?

HALAGIAN: No. But I have Paul I adopt, eight years old. Beautiful. His picture over there. And that's his daughter. You bring over here, little one. And he get married. He get married, he have his daughter. And this is Paul.

LEVINE: I see.

HALAGIAN: Eight days old. What a nice time that time.

LEVINE: So do you remember anything about the voyage, coming here by ship, coming to . . .

HALAGIAN: Oh, that ship. (she laughs) I have a, we take the, not the second and all, second and third class. No, we don't have much money. We have a downstairs. And always when I wake up, two weeks that time. Take two weeks. Everyone like that. Everyone over there down, you know, solid. Not that second and not third because no have enough money. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Did you have any fun on the ship?

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HALAGIAN: Fun?

LEVINE: Yeah.

HALAGIAN: No.

LEVINE: Was there anything pleasant about the voyage?

HALAGIAN: No.

LEVINE: Do you remember coming into the New York Harbor?

HALAGIAN: Uh, I come a Spring, a Springfield, Mass. over there. I stay my cousin over there. Two weeks after I come Bridgeport and marry Bridgeport. I live Naugatuck and after my husband was retired and I come Stratford.

LEVINE: I see. Now, did you have trouble learning English? How did you learn English?

HALAGIAN: Huh?

LEVINE: How did you learn to speak English?

HALAGIAN: Oh. (she laughs) My husband have a, that uncle have a Peter Paul factory. He give it to his store for my husband. He buy it, you know. And after, I stay over there two years. I learned, I worked over there. And after a little bit, a little bit, I like. But I make one big, big mistake. I go night to school. I have my citizen papers. My teacher, and I don't come

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when I have my citizen papers. I don't go school, night school. And she's so nice, she says, "Mrs. Halagian, some day you'll be sorry. You come two, three nights, two,, three years, and you will write, because you know Armenian, and you have to read and write in English yourself." Now, I read a little bit not much because I don't go. She begged me lots of times. What a nice teacher. That time, you know, twenty-two years old.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about school in Armenia before you came?

HALAGIAN: Yeah. And we go over there. Sister house, Sister school.

LEVINE: A Catholic school?

HALAGIAN: Catholic church. Lots of Catholic people over there, Nun. My country have a beautiful building, a beautiful place. I come over there.

LEVINE: And you went to the Catholic school there?

HALAGIAN: Yeah, Armenian.

LEVINE: Armenian Catholic school. Uh-huh. And what was school like? Were the sisters strict?

HALAGIAN: Oh, no, no. But nice, a nice place. I mean, you put something wrong, well, "Try." You know? And punish, but . . .

LEVINE: How would you be punished if you did something wrong?

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HALAGIAN: Oh, nothing. Just like that, you know. Say, "Monday," and say change the room. Not hard, no. Nice.

LEVINE: Do you remember any games that you played when you were a little girl? What did you like to play?

HALAGIAN: Oh. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Did you play with dolls?

HALAGIAN: Dolls, and we have a rope, jump. And lots of that kind of stuff. And make all the, every week, sometimes, all the little girls, my mother give something to eat, you know. You come all together, all the little girls, you know.

LEVINE: What are your happiest memories? What are your happiest memories from when you were a little girl?

HALAGIAN: Happy. Oh, really happy. My mother, father nice. My father work hard, my mother in the house. Lots of things.

LEVINE: What was your father's first name?

HALAGIAN: Uh, Ohanes.

LEVINE: That's John in English?

HALAGIAN: John, yeah.

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LEVINE: And . . .

HALAGIAN: My mother Alice.

LEVINE: Alice.

HALAGIAN: Alpas, Alice. And I have my brother, my sister. Four sisters, brothers.

LEVINE: Four sisters?

HALAGIAN: And brothers.

LEVINE: And did they come to America?

HALAGIAN: No, no. All massacred time. One brother come, and me. He's smaller than I am. And he married. (she sighs) Ah, he married, he's very lucky, nice girl. And I find Halab, old country, you know, not my country, Arab place.

LEVINE: Arab place.

HALAGIAN: They go over there. We stay over there a little while. And lots of girls, lots of boys. What's it called that? One man, all the, take the little girls, little boys, over there, Halab. Nice country. Make the school over there, but I don't know how to spell Arab. You know, Arab. Over there. Make the big store, big, big, big school . . .

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LEVINE: This was before . . .

HALAGIAN: And (?) people over there, after massacre. Take them out over there, little one boy over there, you know. American people take them up. All come, maybe two, three hundred. And after find them, find cousin like this in United States, write over here, your cousin over here and he write, tell the money and send it over here. Not mother, father, cousin. Lots of Armenian people send lots of money bring over here.

LEVINE: I see. And what was your brothers name, the one who came here too?

HALAGIAN: Uh, Armedian.

LEVINE: A-R . . .

HALAGIAN: (she laughs)

LEVINE: Armedian?

HALAGIAN: Yeah. That's the one.

LEVINE: Is there an English translation?

HALAGIAN: Yeah. You talk that name, same thing. Same as mine. Mine Perooz, over here says Perooz.

LEVINE: So did you keep in touch with your brother when you came to the United States?

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HALAGIAN: Oh, yeah. My brother come over here. We come together, but we don't have money. And after he come this country she work in a lace factory. Six months, another three hundred dollars, and I come over here. That's the way we come.

LEVINE: Your brother came.

HALAGIAN: First.

LEVINE: And he worked in the lace factory.

HALAGIAN: Six months after send the three hundred dollars and I take it and I come over here. And after one lady come, one lady, another smaller woman like that, he stayed three, four months.

LEVINE: And then you met your husband?

HALAGIAN: After my husband, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember Ellis Island at all? When you came on the ship, do you remember Ellis Island?

HALAGIAN: Well, when we come on the ship, honey, and take them out, everyone. But them in a room like this. Anybody have a place, people come and come take them out.

LEVINE: And did the people come take you out?

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HALAGIAN: My uncle, my, I brought my uncle home, but over there have one teacher look like my uncle, he's an old man, old lady, you know, no have nobody. And one teacher take me, take the train. She bring a Spring. After a Spring, I come in the Bridgeport.

LEVINE: After Spring, you came to Bridgeport.

HALAGIAN: Yeah. After, when I get married, I go to Naugatuck.

LEVINE: That's in Connecticut, too?

HALAGIAN: Yeah. Oh, yeah. One hour over here.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything that you remember that your mother or your father taught you?

HALAGIAN: Oh, all the time.

LEVINE: What kinds of things did they want you to know?

HALAGIAN: Oh, my mother, father, nice, nice, very nice. My father and my mother teach (?). My mother, four o'clock in the morning, have nineteen children, you know. And after no like it, we have a church over there, come over there, after come over there, take out the children, wake up the children, make the breakfast and this and that.

LEVINE: So she went to church before she woke up the children?

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HALAGIAN: Every morning. Because children sleep, you know, my father over there. And after my mother went to church. My father and mother, oh. Every night, my father had eight, nine, ten children, little by little. Every one sit down like stand like, one hour pray.

LEVINE: Every night?

HALAGIAN: Every single night. Half a stand up, half sit down. Now I know some, but I see my father, all that pray one hour every night.

LEVINE: Before you went to bed?

HALAGIAN: Oh, yeah. Children, too, all together. Nice.

LEVINE: What else did you do as far as religious activities when you were little?

HALAGIAN: My father?

LEVINE: You. Did you, your whole family do, did you celebrate religious holidays?

HALAGIAN: Oh. (she laughs) We have three days, Easter, Summer, New Year's and New Day, New Year's. And all like that, three days. Not over here just one hour, then have to go to work. Three days.

LEVINE: What did you do in those three days?

HALAGIAN: Oh, three days. Over there no have a car, you know. Everybody walk

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each other. Not over here, at Christmas says, have a cousin or a friend, you know, come in a car and just go. Over there have to walk. You don't get how far you have to go. Suppose your father over here, then you marry, you go over here. Over here, far away, you have to go see your father and mother.

LEVINE: On the three religious days you would go walk to your father and mother.

HALAGIAN: Oh, walk, walk, all the time. No car that time. Almost seventy-five years ago the massacre in time.

LEVINE: So you were a very religious family.

HALAGIAN: Oh. I go every morning over here. We have a nice church, a Catholic church, you know. And a little corner. One day I go, five years I go every morning seven o'clock in the morning. And one day I go no more over there, can't come out.

LEVINE: So now where do you go?

HALAGIAN: Over here in the morning sometimes. But forget all that, father, what he knows and we knows. We have to learn that. Some time, one time one says, well, this one I want you learn it for me, you talk to me, you know. And we have to learn it.

LEVINE: So you learned the prayers by heart?

HALAGIAN: Oh, yeah, yeah. Not the, over here. I see lots, all here, all lady or all man.

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I have a book open like this. Or before you just . . .

LEVINE: What other things, when you think about the United States and you think about Armenia, what are the big differences?

HALAGIAN: Oh, lots of differences. Work different and a place different, that you understand. Over there, you know.

LEVINE: What do you like about the United States?

HALAGIAN: Everything. (they laugh) That's my country now.

LEVINE: That's your country now.

HALAGIAN: Oh, I love it, I like it. Lots of times I says why my father don't come before this country, I born in this country. I no read or write in my own country. I always say myself, I says, "Why stay over there?" Oh, I love. Over here different, over there different. Altogether, that time, now sees over there change.

LEVINE: Is there anything you'd like to say before we close about coming to this country or anything about ways that you had in the old country that you still like to carry on? Are there some things that you still that you learned in the old country?

HALAGIAN: I learned Armenian, and I have Turkey. Once in a while over here come a lady over there and we talk together.

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LEVINE: In Armenian?

HALAGIAN: Yeah, no. Armenian and Turkish, sometimes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HALAGIAN: Nice country, fresh air, but Turkish is no good. Always twenty-five, fifty years, killing the Armenian people, Christian people, over there, all, all the time. All, all the time. And after he make the massacre, all that people and all the man put in a jail that time.

LEVINE: But, anyway . . .

HALAGIAN: Very sad, very sad to me, very sad.

LEVINE: But then you came to this country and your life got better after that.

HALAGIAN: Oh, my God, a million times. Oh, this country different, altogether, over there. That time and over, when I come over here, this country not like this either. (she laughs) Yeah. No have a car. Rich people have a car. And people walk, walk, walk go the shop, go to work, just like old country. Now almost fifty, sixty years ago when I was getting, no, no, nothing. Now I see a million, million car.

LEVINE: It changed a lot since you came.

HALAGIAN: (she laughs) Yeah.

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LEVINE: Okay. Well, I think maybe this is a good place to stop, and I want to thank you so much for sharing your story with us.

HALAGIAN: Oh, you're welcome. Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: It was a pleasure meeting you and talking.

HALAGIAN: I want to meet you niece. You come again any time you want to, and this gentleman too. (referring to Kevine Daley) He's nice, nice looking.
That's what? No? (she laughs)

LEVINE: Okay. This is Janet Levine of the National Park Service.

HALAGIAN: Both no have this?

LEVINE: No. One June 20th . . .

HALAGIAN: I'm surprised.

LEVINE: This is my grandmother's.

END OF INTERVIEW