

**EI-230**

**ARMEN HANISIAN**

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

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**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 7/1994**

**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: IRV SILBERG**

**SYRIA (ARMENIAN), 1920**

**AGE 20**

**SHIP: THE PANNONIA**

**PORT: GREEK PORT**

**RESIDENCES:**

- **SYRIA: MOSABAGH**
- **EGYPT: PORT SAID**
- **US: NEW BRITAIN,CT; PATTERSON, NJ**

**HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mr. Armen Hanisian is being interviewed. His daughter, Virginia Atanian, is also present.**

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today in Clifton, New Jersey. It's November 22, 1992. And I'm here with Armen Hanisian, and Mr. Hanisian's daughter, Virginia Atanian, is here with us. And Mr. Hanisian came from Syria. He is Armenian. He came from Syria in 1920 when he was twenty years of age. Well, I'm very happy to be here, and I'm looking forward to hearing your story.

HANISIAN: You're welcome, I'm sure.

LEVINE: Okay. Mr. Hanisian, why don't you start by telling me your birth date.

HANISIAN: My birthday is 1900, January 1st.

LEVINE: The first day of the first month of the first year.

HANISIAN: Of January, of the first year, 1900. So I have no trouble to say my age. I go by the years. 1992, now, that's mean I'm ninety-two years old.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, where were you born?

HANISIAN: I born in Mosabagh.

LEVINE: Now, when you say words like Mosabagh, can you spell them for me, because I'll have trouble when I get back?

HANISIAN: M-O-S-A, Mosa, B-A-G-H. Mosabagh.

LEVINE: Okay.

HANISIAN: That way we spell it, I believe.

LEVINE: Okay. And is Mosabagh in Syria?

HANISIAN: It -- it -- it was in Syria when I came. Now under the Turkish government now, control the Turkish government now. It was under the Turks before. 19, uh, 1915 the war, the French took it over and gave it to the Syria. Syria, we were there till 19, uh, 1949. Then French give it to the -- back to the Turk again. That's what happened. Now Turkey again.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. Well, do you remember Mosabagh? Do you remember

the town as it was before you left it?

HANISIAN: Yeah. I remember it. We are so close together. We were about five villages. And all the people, they're very close together. So everybody knows everybody in our village, you know.

LEVINE: And what did people do there? What, how did people make a living?

HANISIAN: Well, it was very hard to make a living. Whoever have a little farm like, you know. What they can plant in a farm, they satisfied with that. Some people have a little trade like weaving, like comb making, comb making, and what? The shoemakers, tailors. And the rest is just like plain workers.

LEVINE: What about your father? What did he do?

HANISIAN: He worked agriculture. He was working in a farm, and we were not so rich. We were poor. Just enough to had our living by working hard. Farm work, you know, that's seven days' work, and you have to work. No laziness down there. You have to work to eat. Otherwise, too bad. You'll be hungry.

LEVINE: Now, did your father work on someone else's farm?

HANISIAN: No. We had our own, but very small. Hardly to make a living out of it, but very small.

LEVINE: What was your father's name?

HANISIAN: Uh, Vania. V-A-N-I-A. They call him Vania. That must be a John before they change it to Vania, you know. They call him Vania.

LEVINE: And your mother? What was her name?

HANISIAN: My mother's name is Hartun, Hartun. So, she was very, very nice mother, believin' me. And she died when she was hundred and some years old.

LEVINE: And what was your mother's maiden name? Do you remember that?

HANISIAN: K -- Koshian.

LEVINE: Can you spell it?

HANISIAN: K-O-S-H-I-A-N. Koshian.

LEVINE: Now, did your mother work at all, or was she at home? Did your mother work?

HANISIAN: No, nobody. Yeah, worked in a farm, I mean.

LEVINE: On the farm.

HANISIAN: They milked the cows. Whatever's necessary to do. They worked in a farm, in other words. Th-- we had no factory to work in a factory. They do the home work, like washing and cooking and milking and whatever they -- necessary to do.

LEVINE: I see. So you had some livestock and then you grew vegetables?

HANISIAN: Yes. We grow vegetables, whatever we can, and they had fruit trees. So hardly -- hardly buy a meat, like. We are more like vegetarians, 'stead of meat and stuff. Every once in a while we had milk, but everybody live with the farm productive stuff. You know, vegetarian you call 'em -- I don't know

what you call them.

LEVINE: Do you remember any of the foods that your mother prepared when you were young? What kind of dishes do you remember from your childhood?

HANISIAN: (laughs) *Sarma, dorma*. That's all Oriental. *Sarma, dorma*, beans and cucumbers and squash and black, uh, black peppers, peppers. All those things. I mean, salad things, you know.

LEVINE: When you think, when you think back to your childhood, to your boyhood, what are the things that you think about?

HANISIAN: When I were a child, I know nothing. I know nothing. Because we didn't go out the villages to see something. Where my father was born, I was born. Whatever my father do, I -- they learn me the same thing, same, too. When you are thirteen -- twelve, thirteen years old -- you are start helping your father. And we had a school, a school in there. You are a kid now, what are you gonna do? We have to go in a school, so they sent us in a school. So the father, mother, nobody's home. Everybody in the farm, working the farm. Young kids, what they're gonna do? Like it or not, they have to go to school. So that was my. I don't see much. I mean, what I see? I live the country life. Don't -- led country life. We had no electric, of course. We had no bath. Everybody used to sleep in one room, one big room. Daddy, Mommy here, the youngest one there -- the brother, older, older -- seven, eight family; they livin' in the same room. They eat the same table, they enjoyed together, they work together. There very, very nice time they have together. They love each -- so I grew up that way.

LEVINE: Where did you fit in in the family with your brothers and sisters? Were you in the middle, or were you the youngest?

HANISIAN: I was the last one.

LEVINE: You were the baby?

HANISIAN: I was the last one. My mother was, I told my daughter now, fifty-five years of age when she got me. She must be a strong lady! (laughs) They are strong that way.

LEVINE: Yeah! Well, how many brothers and sisters did you have?

HANISIAN: I had, well, four brothers and one sister in the family. Father, mother, seven people.

LEVINE: And was, did you live in a house?

HANISIAN: Yeah, the same house.

LEVINE: A little house, just your family?

HANISIAN: Yeah. The house belonged to us. You know, we built it. It belonged to us. So everybody lived the same, the same house, same room, you know. If you have a little cows or goats or something, a little room for them, and the other for us. We shared the same thing. (laughs)

LEVINE: So was it, your house was then one room, and then a separate section for the animals.

HANISIAN: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HANISIAN: Yes. Two rooms -- like -- you know, two big rooms. One belonged to animals, one belonged to us. (laughs)

LEVINE: And what was it made out of? What kind of . . .

HANISIAN: House?

LEVINE: Yeah.

HANISIAN: All stone down there. We had plenty of stone, so it was stone. You know, it was a stone-built home.

LEVINE: Can you describe it at all so I can picture it?

HANISIAN: The house, you mean?

LEVINE: Yeah.

HANISIAN: Four -- four-wall house. Very seldom you see two -- two ---

LEVINE: Stories.

HANISIAN: Stories, very seldom. All one four-room house. And they covered the top with this special -- I don't know what they call them -- which the rain won't go in. That's it, I mean, the plain -- anyone. No bed. Everybody, as I said, everybody work on the floor.

LEVINE: How about cooking? How did your mother cook?

HANISIAN: How the mother cook? The same way you cook. We eat the same; we have no special place, except the table in there. A big pot we have in the

middle, everybody his own spoon. (laughs) Hey, eat until it's finished. It's finished, that's all. You're still -- you're still hungry there? Too bad. (laughs) That's finished, and you have to wait until tomorrow. Have to prepare something again.

LEVINE: What did your mother cook on? What kind of stove did she have?

HANISIAN: Wood.

LEVINE: Oh, it was a fire.

HANISIAN: Yeah, a fire.

LEVINE: On the floor?

HANISIAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Because we had a lot of wood. Everybody goes the mountains to prepare the wood for the fire and for their use, whatever it is. So wood, we used top go wood.

LEVINE: And what did you do for fun when you were young? What did you do for enjoyment -- for amusement?

HANISIAN: What the young kids do. Run here, run there -- sometimes we go hunting, you know, the hunting. And the villagers, they had the habit -- the hunting habit. Every morning they used to go hunting the little birdies, whatever they thinkin'. The wintertime have a special birdies. Springtime and autumn, you know, all the time -- all the seasons -- they bring their own kind of birdies. So the people started hunting, then half the food come from that hunting birdies. So that's what I said, very hungry. They buy the meat, because they're all nice meat, you know, meat and everything. So they got the big onions. They chopped the onions, they chopped those

little birdies in there -- two together, hey, that's good. (laughs)

LEVINE: (laughs) Let's see. How about religion? Was your family religious?

HANISIAN: What?

LEVINE: Was your family a religious family?

HANISIAN: Of course, yes. Every Sunday, every Sunday we have to go to church. Even in the nighttime. They had it twice, like, in morning and night. When we heard ringing, we got nothing to do -- we have to go church. We have to go church. Very religious people. Very religious people. They believe in the God. And God ---

LEVINE: What church was it that you went to?

HANISIAN: Uh, what -- will come, (speaks Armenian). The Church, Apostolic, Apostolic Church, Apostolic Church. We have a lot of churches. You are not -- you never meet Armenian people in here?

LEVINE: Not very many, no.

HANISIAN: We have a big church down at Ridge -- Ridgefield. We have a church down in New York and, you know. Armenians are very religious people.

LEVINE: Tell me more about your mother. Tell me what you remember of your mother, what she was like, when you were a little boy.

HANISIAN: My mother was very, as I say, a very, very sweet woman. She never say bad things. Always says, "Sonny." Always says, you know, nobody hear nothing from her mouth bad words. She tried to help everybody. She tried

to help our neighbors. Everybody, they used to like her. She likes them, you know. So everybody used to say, "Mom," and "Mom, Mom." Sometimes they come there to ask advice for her. "What can I do?" You know, such a thing for the woman thing, -- like -- she tried to help them all. She was a very, very nice woman, always smiling.

LEVINE: And how about your father? What was he like?

HANISIAN: Well, my father was nice man, too. (laughs) How the fathers are? All fathers are good, right? Like the mommies? He was all right. He does he share of work. He does he share of work. He gave the, you know, he take care of the boys and all, he tell them what to do. He's the head of the family, right? And everybody ask him what to do. He asks them what to do. So he was very, very close with the childrens. The children were very, very close with the father and mother; and we used to live that kind of life.

LEVINE: Do you remember any things that your father taught you?

HANISIAN: My father said, "You're " -- all the time must -- says, "Sonny, first you have to learn how to read, write." He says, "Because I don't know how to read and write. My father had no chance to send me in school." He say, "I don't care what you're gonna do, but you've got to learn how to read and write. You don't have to be a priest, and you don't have to be a teacher. But just, you know, to -- to ----you can write a letter at least. Suppose your brother's not here, you want to send a letter. I don't have to call from outsider to send my son letters. I want you to do that." So I took his advice. I learn much as I can. At least I could write the letters, when my brother was no more in the country.

They were out to the South America. They went South America. They run away from the Turks, you know, because they were gonna -- they were

gonna take them in Army. My oldest brother was in Army anyway. He served them for years, and then they want to try them for the war, to work in the war. And they stayed, let them go in a war. And because they have no guns. When they take them as a soldier, they don't give them no guns, they don't give them no guns. They give them the works, works, dirty works. The Army have a lot of dirty works, right? They used to do that. Nobody, nobody gave them the trust -- Armenians to have a gun. The Turks, that way.

LEVINE: You mean they gave guns to other people in the Army?

HANISIAN: Yes.

LEVINE: But to the Armenians, they gave them the dirty job.

HANISIAN: They don't trust the Armenians. They don't trust the Armenians.

LEVINE: So your brothers ran away?

HANISIAN: My brother ran away, they declared the war in 1911. My brother -- with the Bulgaria -- the Turks declared war with the Bulgaria in 1911. So my brother says, "They tell us be ready tomorrow, we're gonna go war." Then him and my cou-- another boy, same village, said, "You're not gonna fight with the Bulgarian, for what? We run away." So they did run away. When they did run away, 'now we're goin' --going'. In the daytime, they can keep up their way to come back home. In the nighttime, they used to travel. Daytime, they used to hide. It took them two months; they come, they reach us. They took them two months, they come to reach us.

By the same time, the Turks send a -- send a -- some police. They lookin' for 'em. They know where they come from. You know, they're looking for

them. Then my brother says, "I wish I could see my son." He says, "Four years I don't see them," he says. But he came; my brother came separately -- him and then his friends, separately. He only stood for couple -- couple weeks, because he can't be around. So. "Well," they said. They said, "He is running away, he has to come here." Said, "We didn't had him." He said, "I wish I'd see him," he said, "once." "When are you gonna see him?" So they find a way -- my brother find a way, and run away and get the ship and go to the South America which my other two brothers were there already and some before. So that's way ---

LEVINE: I see. So then there were, what, there was one brother left, and your sister and you?

HANISIAN: My sister and me, father and mother left home.

LEVINE: Oh. All your brothers, then, were in South America?

HANISIAN: Three brothers were up to South America. Buenos Aires, Argentina. Argentina, Buenos Aires. They stood there for whole 1915. They went there '11, 1911, '12. They stood there till '15, and then 1915 they came from there to -- to this country.

LEVINE: Oh. Uh-huh.

HANISIAN: From there to here. This country. Then when I came 1920 they were here, up in Connecticut -- New Britain, Connecticut. So when I came I can get their address.

LEVINE: Now, did you, were you writing to them when they were in South America?

HANISIAN: Yes, yeah.

LEVINE: And when they came to here?

HANISIAN: Yes, we used to write them -- to them. And we -- we used to give them the news, whatever it's a news -- down there, you know. They send us back. They -- they try to help us a little bit now because, as I said, we were a poor family. They're earning whatever they're earning there, and they used to send us. So we were happy. At least my mother and my father was happy because, you know how it is. You have no money, you're nobody. So. Yeah, they're -- likes a little time.

LEVINE: Can you remember, like, what they wrote to you about South America, or about this country, when you were still in Syria?

HANISIAN: Well, in the wartime, we didn't hear from them. Wartime, you know wartime? We don't hear from them. And 1915 we weren't there no money in the village. You know, we fought forty day in Mosabagh. You haven't heard that stories?

LEVINE: You tell me.

HANISIAN: See, the -- when the Turks start genocide the Armenians, genocide -- which you must hear, a million-and-a-half Armenians they killed. And they take them from their villages and all, all. Oh, they put them on some desert. On the way they died; and they killed them -- and a million-and-a-half, did they get kill. So when the-- when they come to our villages, they said, "You're gonna go, too. Now, in two days' times for you, everybody has to leave the -- leave the house, gonna go away." He said, "For what?" He says, "We very danger around here because we have the war with the French, with the England and all." He says, "We don't want you to hurt. That's why we have to takin' 'em out." Then by then, our people, they

heard what's happening -- the others villages, you know. They killed and all. And they make a meeting. He says, "We're gonna die, let us die bravely." We have to go down there on the road, and they goin' to kill you and they goin' to insult you. You know how it is."

Then they says, "No. We go up the mountain, we fight. We die with the bravery." So that decide us -- 'stead of dying that way, let us die this way. So they decide, everybody start to go up the mountain. When -- when they go up the mountain, nobody goes you know. They come some policemen, some soldiers to take the people; there's no more people down there. So they organized, they organized. They sent us about two hundred soldiers, they bring us back from the mountain. We're all already in a mountain. Then we start the fighting now. We are not gonna go. So we fought forty days in there now, with hunting guns. We had no, we had a few regular guns we had, only all the hunting guns. You know, hunting guns with the powders -- you have to build it up.

And -- and rain in there, fog in there. You know, fog in there remain, there's one -- you can't use the guns, because it get damp, you know. So we have that troubles. So finally we fought, we fought. Because we know the places. The Turks, they come -- two thousand, three thousand Turk with the cannons and everything. They can't hurt us much because there's all big rocks down there. We are back to the rocks, and they look for you. Put on the back of the rock, put on here -- just like the bird, you know, all the good hunters. Just like the bird, they kill them -- when then, want to kill them. So that way we last forty days.

Now what? After forty days we have no more food, we have no more ammunition, you know. Everything is gone. Now figure out -- the Mediterranean Sea is not from -- from us, Mediterranean Sea. The right, the mountain, you got the mountain down in Mediterranean Sea. You

figure out maybe, maybe -- if the God willing -- some ships from England or France or something, they guarding around there, you un--. They always used to come every once in a while, and says they prepared a big red cross. They, we sent the boys down there, down the hill, they put that red cross down there, and written was there, "We are fighting with the -- your enemy." Because they declare war with the Turks at that time.

And it says, "Please send some ammunition, some food. We gonna try, we're gonna try fighting." So we wait, we wait. Finally one ship pass by. Pass by, and the people says, "Maybe they can see this flag in some way." They start a fire, mountain fire. So all that smoke and everything, so they take their attention. You know, what going on. Luckily, luckily one Armenian guy was in that ship, Armenian guy. Was a -- not the captain, less than captain. Whatever it was, he was serving with the French Army. Then he says, "Captain, I see some smoking in there." So the captain he look and then -- then says, "I see some flag in there." You know.

So the ships, everybody waiting for another ship to start the turning like this, and the people started crying and hollering, you know. We gonna get saved. So finally they send a little boat from that battleship. They send them a boat. The boys were waiting for them. So one of two boys -- they took one of two boys -- they said the story, you know, they said to them. And then they believe in us, of course they believe in us. Then start to bomb, one bomb the trenches. The battleship is start to bomb the trenches, the village. So they're scared, the Turks are scared. They stopped their fighting. And now he says, "We can't help you in here now. We can't give you ammunition to fight, you know. But we are in a war, too. But we gonna try to save you someday, somehow.

Now we have to wait at least a week to find, to find, you know, from the headquarters whatever it is. So when we come back we let you know

everything." So we wait five days. We wait five days, then the same ship come back again and said, "We gonna save you. Be ready. We gonna save you tomorrow. You start to coming down from the mountain up the Mediterranean Sea, right back there, about one hour you have to go way down." So they come with the five battleships now -- following, they come with five battleships. All the people, you know how it is -- they were dying, now all of a sudden they were saved. So everybody was happy, everybody goes to the ship. They come and save them, in other word.

And the boys, fighting boys, still they were in the trenches, because they never know what gonna happen. They were ready less, the less people was them to go in the ships. So that's way they brought us to Port Said, in Egypt, Port Said. They have to put us somewhere, where? There was a desert down there. But the Suez Channel -- you know where the Suez Channel then there's desert? So they put the tents under that hot weather, they put the tents so put all the people down there. So thanks God, everybody was saved, everybody was happy. Even though they not used to that life -- hot, too hot. You know, they're don't used to hot weather. In our country was nice, all green and everything. So we, that way we got saved.

END SIDE A, TAPE ONE

BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE ONE

LEVINE: Now, how old were you when this happened?

HANISIAN: I was fifteen years old.

LEVINE: Fifteen. And then how long did you stay in Egypt?

HANISIAN: We used to -- till fif-- fifteen days pick us up. And the same battleship that took us back after the war is stop now; under the French control, come

back again to the French control in our places. So the same ships, they took us back to our villages. That was good, I mean, that was good. So everybody was happy. So it was less, 19, uh, 1919, I think, they start the people going now -- they start the people going. So I stood there only one year. Then I decide, "What I'm doin' I do now? I have no trade, you know. I have no trade, I have no education. What I'm gonna do in here?" We had nothing of farms in here. Then I figure out I'm gonna try get out from this country. So I wrote a letter to my brothers, and my brother wife was with us, too. He was married, you know, he had a son. Says --. They send us the money. So I took my brother's wife and kid. Together we came this country. 1920.

LEVINE: And what about your mother and father and sister?

HANISIAN: They stood there. They stood there, and we was figuring something after. We were gonna bring them after we were up there, or everything was settled down -- maybe my brother was not married yet. He was about thirty-eight years old, not married yet, because he was down there. Maybe send him by mom and dad and we'll see what we're gonna do. So he did that way. I came this country. After three months he went by mom and dad.

LEVINE: And they were still in Egypt then?

HANISIAN: No, no.

LEVINE: They had come back.

HANISIAN: They were in the old country; we came back in old country again.

LEVINE: So did you ever go back to your village?

HANISIAN: After I came, yes. 1961 I went.

LEVINE: Oh.

HANISIAN: 1961, I'm gonna go again. I went with -- I went with another friend. I went to Ain Diwar. Because, you know, there was no people no more, Mosabagh. 1939 the Turks, the French government gave them back to that sanjak, Alexandretta Sanjak, they call him, go back to the Turks. Was belonged to them anyway. Then the other people again, five thousand people, again, they have to go out. And they threw them out. So now where -- where -- where they gonna go? And they went all to Lebanon. They find them a place down there. Five thousand people now. They bring them in Ain Diwar. So 1939, before Second World War start. So all the people, a lot of people [not understood] there, I wasn't there. My father and mother and sister were there then. My brother, [not understood] married down there.

So 1961, I says, "I'm gonna see Mom and Dad once, you know, my sisters and all." So I went, 1961. They were grown then, you know. So I went to see. Then I says, "As far as I'm here now, I'm gonna go back again to see my villages, my home, my places, the mountain." I did, we did. We took the picture and everything, movies down there. And all the Turk refugees was there, Turk refugees were there. So first I went to m-- house which I born, the first thing there. There was a lady, there was a lady in there, she says, "Who's you?" In Turkish language and talked Turk--, you know, Turkey language. I understand a little bit Turkish language. She says, "Who you?" I says, "Who are you?" I says, "This my house." Then I tried to explain her I born here and what happening.

Then she started to cry. She said, "Sonny," she said, "We have the same

trouble." She said, "We was in Bulgaria. Over in Bulgarians that they chase us out, the half a million Turks. So when we were there no more, you know, they took us out. They bring all the people, refugees people, in our villages down there." So I says, "Well, this my house. "Well," she says, "Now your house. It was my house." I go around. I see no more trees. They cut the -- all the trees, fruit trees. I said, "You cut the fruit trees, why?" "To burn the, make a fire." "We used to go up the mountain to bring that wood instead of clipping the fruit trees. Now what we're gonna eat?" So she started to cry, she says, "My husband is not home yet. When he come back tonight, please come down." She says, "You know, see my husband, too." I says, "No, that's enough. I saw." So I forget then, go back. Then next day I went to, up to Mosabagh. Mosabagh is too deepy [sic] hill. You have to walk five hours before you get on the top.

LEVINE: Is that the hill that the battle was on?

HANISIAN: Yeah, yeah. So we know all the places where we battled, we fought. We know by name, by rocks and all. Another two boys I took with me from there now, from Mosabagh. He says, "I'm gonna go up the mountain." He says, "Oh, man," he says, "That's foolish you need to go up there." He says, "We are so many years in here now, we've never been there." I says, "I want to go to see it. I mean, you don't want to come, I go alone." So finally they come with us, and we go up the place that we fought, and there was a statue. We make the statue down there. They destroyed the statues down there, and then when we used to sleep in, you know, our tents, what it was. I stood there, and there was a spring water. We went on the spring water; we drink that water -- stood there half an hour, whatever it is, in the nighttime. Nighttime now, not daytime. Nighttime we come back again. Twelve o'clock we start in the morning, back again.

So I was very happy to saw again, once more, once more my villages

which I born into, and my -- my people which I never seen them long time. Too bad I don't see my father. Too bad I don't see my mother. They were dead already. Only I saw my sisters. And then I stood there about three months. You know, In Ain Diwar now. All the people was happy down there, and everybody had apple grove. They make apple grove, they make a nice living. They used to live better than in our country. They had the nicest schooling down there, so everybody was happy. So I stood there three months and come back, back home, and I'm here now.

LEVINE: What did it feel like to be back there, to see your village and see ---?

HANISIAN: Believe me, I don't know what to say. I feel -- I feel better to see, once more I'm gonna see my birthplace. I had that in my mind, in my heart. So I'm gonna go, I don't care what happened, I'm gonna. I did, and I'm very satisfied. At least I saw my cousins and all, which I don't see them too many years, forty years, forty-five years. Yeah. So that's it.

LEVINE: Well, now, what was the circumstance under which you came to this country? How did it, how did you arrange that?

HANISIAN: We had a little boat, the little boat put on the Mediterranean, was Mosabagh, there's Mediterranean there -- Mediterranean Sea, right? The boats was down there, the boat to travel, travel for on the boat to the Alexandretta. It's a nice day, you could -- they could take about five, six hours.

LEVINE: Is this Alexandria, Egypt?

HANISIAN: Alexandretta.

LEVINE: Oh, Alexandretta.

HANISIAN: Alexandretta, by Mosabagh, in Turkey. So we -- we get the -- that little boat, you know, boat, and it took us three days because there no wind. How they gonna go, you know. It took us about three days until we got Alexandretta. Alexandretta, we stayed there a week, a couple of weeks. We took a ship to went to Ismailia, Ismailia. You know where it is? Ismailia. So we used to be in Ismailia for a month, to waiting for a ship come United States. So they didn't come a ship from Ismailia. So what we do? We go -- we took the ship to go to Greece, in Greece. We went to Greece. We wait until another week, another week too, before the ship ready to come in this country. We took that ship. Name was Pannonia, if I remember. So it took us twenty-one days from Egypt --- from the Greece to Ellis Island, twenty-one days.

LEVINE: What was the voyage like?

HANISIAN: What?

LEVINE: The voyage.

HANISIAN: The voyage was bad. I couldn't take the -- I was sick, sick in the first day, seasick. I couldn't eat. I couldn't, nothing. I was miserable. And the ship was, I don't know, not the passenger ship. You know, that time ships you're talking about.

LEVINE: Were you down in the bottom?

HANISIAN: The bottom! And where you're gonna sleep now? One -- one laying here, one here, five, six. You know, layin' down there -- and you have to sleep like that. Somebody, woman -- somebody, ohh --and dirty. I don't know -- louse all around and, oh, miserable. So it was bad. When I came in Ellis

Island, which I never see --- lights and all -- at nighttime, you see the New York lights and everything in there then. By God, I says, we were living in Hell. Now, we living in here now. Where, what is this now? You know, this is Heaven now. From Hell we get out, thanks God. You took us from Hell; you bring us to the Heaven. So we was so happy. We never see light like that and all, you know, all open, closed lights, and everything. You never seen light in my life, you know. There no electricity, no nothing. So I was very happy. I stood there about a week, I think, before I -- I had no more money. My money is all gone. I send again to my brother. I says, "Hey, I'm here now already. I have no money now." They send us some money.

LEVINE: Now, who were you with when you came on the ship?

HANISIAN: With my friend, my friend, village friend, you know. We came together. He went to Philadelphia, I went to Connecticut.

LEVINE: So you -- so did your brother know you were coming?

HANISIAN: Yes.

LEVINE: But he didn't know when. He didn't know when you would come, exactly.

HANISIAN: No. When I took a ship, I wrote them. I wrote them, I says we take this ship, and I know how many days it would take us, but did the ship we gonna take come. They find out from agents, I guess, you know. So they know, they know coming.

LEVINE: So then when you got to Ellis Island, why did you have to stay there for one week?

HANISIAN: You know, first they have to examine the people down there in the first, your eyes and whatever it is, you know, examining there. But all the refugees in commerce, they have to stay there to exam. They examined them. And somebody may come down there; they pick up their peoples. Somebody, they know the language, whatever it is. They can take care of themselves. They go out, they have money and everything. But we had no money. My friend had no money, too. So what I'm gonna do? I -- I can't speak English a word. Now what? Now what are we gonna do? So I sent them letters again. They send me, and the people down there, they gave -- they gave us, -- one fellow said, "Take these boys to the train." Because I don't know where to go, from Ellis Island. One boy from there, he took us to New York -- put us in the train. The train goes to the Connecticut, which my brother was in there. So that's way I reach my brothers.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what was it like to see your brother again?

HANISIAN: Oh, I was, I told you I was so happy I start to cry. You know -- you know how it is. I start to cry. What's too much feeling in you. And thanks God, thanks God. You understand, thank God I am here now, you know. We were happy, then, together. I live with my brother.

LEVINE: Well, before we talk about getting settled in this country, is there anything more you remember about Ellis Island when you were there for that week?

HANISIAN: Before, before I came this country?

LEVINE: Yes. No, when you first came, when you were at Ellis Island, before you met up with your brother.

HANISIAN: Yeah. Uh, I remember a big hall in Ellis Island, you know, it's a big hall in

there. Now, we went, how many months ago we went there?

VIRGINIA: NO. It was a ----

HANISIAN: Four, five months ago? They renew it now -- they [not understood] -- my God. When we -- when we were there it was big hall, maybe couple room was upstairs or something. That's it. And thousands of the people were there, and there's no bed, nothing. Of course, you have to get a blanket on the floor. You have to, you know, sleep on the floor. And they take care of us good. Nighttime they show us movies, movies nighttime. And daytime they just go feed some sandwiches. I mean, they take care of us good. If you're sick the doctor's down there. So they take care of us good.

LEVINE: Okay. Do you remember the Statue of Liberty? Do you remember seeing the Statue when you first came into the Harbor?

HANISIAN: Yes, yes and they told us, "This the Statue of the Liberty." Of course. We -- I -- we don't know before. I had no idea before. So we know now. Now we know. Then we salute them, and we pray them. It was very, very happy.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, when you first got to the United States, when you first went on the train to go to Connecticut.

HANISIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, do you remember things about this country that struck you as different from anything you'd seen before?

HANISIAN: My God, I remember, I never seen the trains before, I never seen the planes before. We never see nothin' before. But when I see everything --

trains and the people, you know, factories, everybody happy, dressed up. They working, they singing, they eating. I said, "This the -- this the Heaven, this the Heaven!" Because I come from the Hell; so this the Heaven, this the Heaven. You know, I had that feeling now.

LEVINE: And how was it learning English. How did you learn English then?

HANISIAN: Well, little by little, little by little. Three months I went to night school, three months in night school, three months. Then my brother get me a job. When I get me -- get me a job, I couldn't go to school no more. Had to work ten hours and all. So that's it now. Little by little every day. I learn little bit. Not much, but I help myself and [not understood] it a little bit.

LEVINE: So what was the night school like? Were there people from all different countries in your class?

HANISIAN: Yes, yes, yes. Because nobody knows English, you know. And I used to know a little bit French. In school, in first grade in the school, one year they give us the French. Nobody know no English there, all French. Then all the -- all those countries -- Egypt and-- the French was the first, no English. English come after. So I understood little French. I could explain myself, like, you know. Just broken, just like now -- me, I talk to you. So my -- my teacher there, she knows how to speak French. Then, you know, I used to tell them, "What -- what the word of this?" She used to like me, I guess. She gave me this -- the name, this one. She helped me a lot. She helped me a lot. Just because, you know, she understand French. I understand a little French. So, between me and her -- little by little, little by little, it was all right.

LEVINE: And what kind of job did you start out with?

HANISIAN: It was, New Britain was the iron factories -- all the iron factories, iron. All iron factories was New Britain. Just like New Jersey, the Patterson was silk. City there, so call 'em before. Now, that was the iron city (laughs) -- of course, they call 'em. You know, all the -- all the iron things. I -- I worked there about four years. Be four year, then they teach me -- my cousin was in the silk, weaving silk -- weaving business. Says, "Armen, It's too dirty in those iron factories." He said, "Why don't you come down? I'll teach you how to weaving. At least you have to put the ties and you have to be clean. You play with the silk, you know." Then so, "Okay." (laughs) I left that job. I learn my weaving. When I learn my weaving, I came here -- Patterson. As I say, Patterson was the silk city. So I make my living from the weaving, in other words. That was my trade, in other words. I make a trade out of it.

LEVINE: I see. So that's what you stuck with, the weaving trade.

HANISIAN: Yes.

LEVINE: And then when did you meet your wife? What were the circumstances?

HANISIAN: My wife, we almost came together but different ways. They come in a French line. We come from another line. And I go my wife in old country. We were kind of cousin, you know, part cousin, like. We used to go, they used to come my house and we used to go their house. You know, we knew each other -- same village, some cousin. So they came the same place. So we started again going back and forth. So finally we married. (laughs) What can I say?

LEVINE: What was your wife's name?

HANISIAN: Sarah. My name --

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

HANISIAN: Serekian, Serekian.

LEVINE: S-E----

HANISIAN: S-E-R-E-K-I-A-N. Serekian.

LEVINE: And how many children did you have?

HANISIAN: I had five children. Three is living and two is dead. One boy and one daughter we lost. Nine, they were mine -- nine months old when they died. They took pneumonia or something. They couldn't help them, so they die -- both of them, they die.

LEVINE: And the names of your children, your children who didn't die?

HANISIAN: That died, John and Mary.

LEVINE: And how about the other children, the children that lived?

HANISIAN: Virginia, Mary and Neshtah, my son, only son. Which he died six -- six years ago, six years.

VIRGINIA: Four.

HANISIAN: Four years ago? Yeah, four years ago he die.

LEVINE: Neshtah?

HANISIAN: Neshtah, yeah.

LEVINE: How do you spell that?

HANISIAN: N-E-S-H-T-A-H. Neshtah.

LEVINE: Now, do you have grandchildren?

HANISIAN: I have nine grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

LEVINE: Wow.

HANISIAN: I was happy for them all.

LEVINE: Now, I asked you before what you learned from your father. Can you think of anything your mother tried to teach you or wanted you to know about life or about yourself?

HANISIAN: Try to help much as you can, try to help your friends, the other people. Try to be a nice boy. Try to be a church boy, you know. Don't get, mix with the bad boys. Bad boys is bad boys. You know, those kind of, what else can a mother say? (coughs)

LEVINE: Now, did your mother ever come, did your mother ever come to this country?

HANISIAN: No.

LEVINE: No.

HANISIAN: (coughs) She went Beirut. She died in Beirut. When everybody out again

the Mosabagh, you know, they gave the -- again back to the Turks. All the people, six thousand people, our people, they all come back again to Port Said. (coughs) Not Port Said. I mean, uh, Lebanon, Beirut, Beirut. My mother died in Beirut. 1945, I think -- which my brother, my sister was there, too. They died there.

LEVINE: Well, when you think over your life, when you think about the village where you started out and then going to Egypt and then coming here, what do you, what do you think when you think back over your long and interesting life?

HANISIAN: Egypt was too hot, you know, too hot. And what can I say? The life was good in Mosabagh, as a life. But we are poor, as I said. That's number two. And we had no regular school down there. Regular teachers, we have no regular teachers. Take us couple years before we get A-B-C-D's. You know, old country.

LEVINE: What would you do? What was the school like? Was it a real school, or you just met with someone, or ---

HANISIAN: Yep. When we went to Port Said, right away they establish a school down there. Red Cross -- Armenian Red Cross -- and with the other helps -- with the other's helps -- they establish a school down there. About five hundred boys and girls was in the schooling.

LEVINE: Was that, was that the first school --

HANISIAN: First school.

LEVINE: ---you went to?

HANISIAN: Yeah. We learn down there; hardly I know A-B-C-D in old country. When I came down there we had the regulars teachers, you know. Then in fourth, four years they teach us, which I finished the fifth grade in that school. With fifth grade is not bad. Not so good, but not so bad.

LEVINE: Well, now, how many years were you there in Port Said?

HANISIAN: I told you, about four-and-a-half years.

LEVINE: Four-and-a-half. Uh-huh. So you started in the first grade.

HANISIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And you ---

HANISIAN: Ended the fifth grade, that's it. No more schooling after that. So then I built myself up when I came here, and I went to the club and papers and all, you know. So I bring myself up a little bit. I can read Armenian good. Not bad, but it's all right now.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So your life, your life in the village was good, but you were poor.

HANISIAN: Poor.

LEVINE: And in Port Said it was --.

HANISIAN: Too hot.

LEVINE: Hot.

HANISIAN: But the education way is good because you get regular teachers down

there, you know. If you had to live in, if you never been in my place before, you'll like the Egypt. But whoever live in my place before, with different life altogether. All greens, all flowers, all nature way, you live with the nature way -- in other words. You don't know with the other things, nature way. You live nature way. That's what you sow that's you -- you grow. That's what you see. That you will like.

LEVINE: So then when you came to America, then what? How would you talk about your life since you came here?

HANISIAN: Yes. When I came here everything was up-to-date here. By God, you got nice room; you got your own bath. You got gas to heat, you got the other things, and what can I tell you. You get the work. If you're not lazy, you work. You get -- you make a living. And independence, you don't have to worry no more the Turks coming, Turks coming, gonna kill us, gonna kill us. We always, they had that feeling in our heart down there, you know. So you feel independent. You feel real, United States people, yeah. So I felt myself as a United States, real, democratic way people. So, of course, be happy. I'm happy now, too. And, thanks God, see -- be there the --my children around me now, and I am old and enjoy my old life now. What I do? I do nothing now. I just take care of myself, my health, thanks God. My health is not so bad yet.

LEVINE: That's great. Are there any ways that you, that you had from, Armenian ways that you learned growing up that you still hold on to?

HANISIAN: Yes. When I -- I said when I come in here I belong to the society, Armenian [not understood] Society. Which we always fighting for the independence. Independence, independence. Which we had, that independence, 1918. Then the Bolsheviks come and grab from us. Now thanks God, again now we have that independence back again after the Bolsheviks fell. We always, always fighting against the Bolsheviks --

against the Bolsheviks. So I belonged to the clubs, Armenian clubs. And I learn lot. We had our meetings and all, little by little, little by little, you know. You learn something. Every day I learn something. We had the meetings, and they used to send me as a delegate to the meetings, and come back again and, you know, I feel myself good American and good Armenian. I [not understood] myself. Good Armenian and good American. And I live a nice life, a clean life, working hard. We never begged. We always working hard. We make ten dollar, we spend ten dollar. We got no ten dollar, we don't spend nothing, you know. So we are all right. And thanks God I'm all right right now.

LEVINE: Okay.

END SIDE B, TAPE ONE      BEGIN SIDE A, TAPE TWO

VIRGINIA: You know what I would think would be very interesting for Janet was remember when you and your friends had gone into town and your friends were all killed and you had gone to the priest. Your cousin was a priest. Do you remember that story? I think Janet would be very interested in that, how your life was spared and all your friends were killed by the Turks?

HANISIAN: Oh, I know it's ---

LEVINE: Well, when -----

HANISIAN: Before, see, when we just came back to the Mosabagh this happened again. I saw three wars, now, in my life, now. First War, Second War and the little war before I came United States. (clears throat) My brothers sent us a little money -- check, of course. And my father says, "Son, take the check, go to the city." The city is, you have to walk five, six hours before you get the marketplace. That's a --- that city, marketplace. Whatever you

need, you know, you get from there. You want to sell something, you sell it there. You want to buy something, you buy it there. You know. So we went, we went with seven, eight, [not understood] the boys. We went that city to buy something, and next day whatever we buy for home, we gonna bring it.

Then what happened? They put there again to genocide the Christians, in that city now. All the Turks, right? So I went with the group. I cash my check. Then we went to restaurant. We ate something. Then we gonna find some place to sleep. Then what happened? When I was walking, my cousin who saw me -- I was walking with the boys -- he says, "Hey, man, what you doing here?" I says, "I came to buy something." He say, "What you gonna do?" I says, "We're gonna go sleep someplace. I don't know where." "Well," he says, "you are not gonna go sleep someplace else because I got the room." He says he was secretary of the Bishop, Armenian Bishop down there. He was secretary down there. He says, "I'm not gonna be in my place tonight." He says, "I'll go up there, I take you up there." He says, "I'll introduce you with the Bishop. You'll stay in my room, until tomorrow you'll meet them back again."

Then the same time the Bishop, you know, the Bishop says, "Son," he says, "did you hear something?" I said, "What -- what I'm hearing?" I said, "No, I just came." He said, "They're preparing," he said, "to kill the Christians again." I says, "How you know those things?" "It's a lot of rumors," he says. Finally, he was all alone, old man -- he was about seventy, seventy-five years old. Then when he said that, then he says, "Bishop," I says, "you have any guns in here, any -- anything to protect?" He says, "Son, we have nothing in here. We have no food, we have nothing. It's just established, just established that position down there." And he said, "Only s-- only the gun had that your cousin took it, and went away." Then he says, "Well, see what happen"

Then four o'clock in the morning, I started to hear the boom-boom-boom-boom, guns noise. "What the hell is this now?" Boom-boom-boom. Four, five o'clock more, six o'clock more. Then it started. People rushing, hollering and swearing to the Christians they'll start killing. Just -- just like genocide again. "So here you are." he say, "Didn't I tell you what's gonna happen?" I say, "What do we gonna do now? You tell me." He says, "That's all the door in there, big door. Let us make the -- all those tables and everything in here, back the door so they can't come." (laughs) He says, "If they come they're gonna break the damn [not understood] and come back." Finally we stood there. When they stood there the people starting shooting them up, killing whoever they see. They know it's -- are Christian. Armenian and -- and Greek, or whatever it is, they kill them.

Then we're looking from the windows, second floor windows. I saw two -- two men naked with the rope -- they tied their feet with the rope, "Boom-boom-boom-boom." They poke them. I says, "Bishop, come here." I says, "You see those two people?" I says, "That's my friend. I was with them last night." Yeah. "Yeah?" I say, "Yeah." So he says, "Good thing you wasn't there then." Says -- says --- "What would happen, what you're gonna do." So three, they killed the three of the boys, with that. Another one, they shoot him. They warned him, he threw himself in the river there. He hidin' -- he hide himself in river two, three days with the wounded. Then when the French soldiers come out; then, you know, he come up. So we lost six Armenian boys that time in there.

So just luckily I wasn't with them. When they hear those -- those guns, you know, shooting guns; they try to run -- run and cross that bridge to come back again to villages, to Mosabagh. But the villages was occupied with their soldiers, you know, Turks, soldiers. Then whoever they see they shoot. So we stood there three or four days. Then he said, "Son, there's

Armenian livin' down there." He says, "If there's a way you can go up there, knock the doors hardly to tell them, 'Hey, Bishop is downs there, he need the help. He has no food, nothing, no gun. He need the help.'" So I says, "I'll do it." Opened the door, that's all the, surroundin' the people down there. All the corner, the houses was guarding. Then I went down there I look, and then the corner was gonna pass right away.

He saw me, son of a gun, he shoot. He shoot three, four guns. He says, "Ah, boys, it's too bad." He said, "Boys gone, Bishop, you no hear that." Right away, because another five minutes. I go back and run and knock the door and come in. He says, "I thought they shoot you." He says, "Almost, Bishop." I says, "I wait now, night time, when it's night I'm gonna try again." When the night come about ten o'clock, eleven o'clock, it's dark now. There's no electric or nothing down there. He says, "I went bed again." There was -- I don't see nobody, no guard, no nothing then. I run, I run, knock the door." He says, "Who is there?" From inside. I say, "The Bishop send me." He said, "Please," I said, "Open the door and he want help."

They opened the door. He says, "What happened?" He says, "Three days down there," he says, "we have no food, no gun, no nothing, and he want help." He said, "All right, not to worry. We help him." So they went to take them down there, then they had the guns and everything, so were happy. They went down. So five -- took us five day now, because raining like anything. So I want ready to go back again my place now, my village, my father and mother. My father and mother, they heard they killed all the Christians, they started cry themselves. Finally I go. I was watching, ready to run, to come back. I see my cou-- I see a fellow which my friend's father was, then I [not understood] "Uncle, Uncle." Says, "What? What are you doing here?" I says, "I was here, Uncle," I says. "Now," he says, "What you doing here?" He says, "Certain people send me in here to find out his

son is killed or still living?" His son is the one I saw. He's the one. "Well," I said, "I'm sorry to tell you. I saw him. He died, and they throw him in the river. Poor guy, they give, he gave him money, his father give him money to go, because it's dangerous, you know.

So anyway, he says, "I'm gonna go back right away now." He says, "Uncle," he says, "I'm gonna follow you." He says, "Son," he says, "I'm gonna run." He says, "I'm gonna run." He says, "I'll run with you," he says. "I'm not gonna stay here no more." I says, "God knows what my father and mother are feeling." So, anyway, I went -- I went with him. Now, we run, we run. And I have no shoes, I have nothing. I have one shirt. It was raining like anything. I start to shake. So finally I went home. I went home, took six, seven hours in that rain. I see a lot of people in my house. Who are these people in here? Everybody crying. Then they says, "Hey," my father and mother say, "Hey, here's Armen!" And finally I got home safely, you know, everybody happy. They said, "We thought you got killed." So that's happened. That's what you were saying?

VIRGINIA: Yeah. I thought that would be a---

LEVINE: It was an interesting story.

HANISIAN: Interesting. Then when I had that trouble and all I says, "This is it. I'm not gonna stay here no more."

LEVINE: How old were you when this happened?

HANISIAN: About twenty years old.

LEVINE: About twenty.

HANISIAN: About the same, the same year which I came this country. So I was so mad. I mad, you know. Always in danger. Always in danger. You can't sleep right. One gun shot your hear, right away, "Something happened, something happened?" In your mind, you know. So that's it. That's my life.

LEVINE: Wow. Very, very interesting. Thank you. Is there anything else you'd like to say before we close?

HANISIAN: What can I say? That said thanks to the American government, thanks to the people in here, they treated nice. And they did much as they can for us. We did as much as we can for this country, and my country --- my other people. My relatives and all, much as I can, much as we can out of it. So I was happy. I'm happy yet, I'm happy yet. I hope I be dying with the happiness, you know. That's all I could say.

LEVINE: Well, thank you so much.

HANISIAN: You're welcome, I'm sure.

LEVINE: And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. I've been talking with Armen Hanisian, and I'm here in Clifton, New Jersey, and it's November 22, 1992, and Mr. Hanisian is ninety-two.