

EI-29

SARAH ASHER CRESPI

BIRTH DATE: SEPTEMBER 1, 1903

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL EUGENE SIGRIST, JR.

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TRANSCRIPT ORIGINALLY PREPARED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 1991

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TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

TURKEY, 1913 RESIDENCE: ANKARA
AGE 10

PORT: PATRAS

SHIP: ARGENTINA

RESIDENCES:

TURKEY: ANKARA

US: NYC, LOWER EAST SIDE ON LUDLOW STREET

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: MRS. CRESPI IS THE WIFE OF NISSIM CRESPI
(EI-30) JL

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. We are here in Far Rockaway with Sarah Crespi, who came from Turkey in 1913 when she was ten. Good afternoon. Mrs. Crespi, could you please tell me your full name and your date of birth, please.

CRESPI: My name is Sarah Crespi. I was born September 1, 1903 and I came from Turkey, Ankara.

SIGRIST: What is your maiden name?

CRESPI: My maiden name is Sarah Asher.

SIGRIST: Could you spell that please?

CRESPI: A-S-H-E-R.

SIGRIST: I see. And, I'm sorry, where in Turkey did you come from?

CRESPI: I came from Ankara, Turkey.

SIGRIST: That's A-N...

CRESPI: A-N-K-A-R-A. But now they call it, on, excuse me, I came from Ankara but then it was Angora, A-N-G-O-R-A. They changed it to Ankara years back but when I was in Turkey it was Angora.

SIGRIST: What kind of town was this? Was it a big town?

CRESPI: It wasn't a big town. During the Inquisition Turkey opened their doors and they took all these people in. They were very good to the Jewish people and since my ancestors, they settled in Angora, which is now Ankara, and we used to get very good, they were very

good to the Jewish people. Some of them, during the Inquisition, some of them went to Greece. They went to other parts of the world but my ancestors settled in Turkey. They're still there, you know, from...

SIGRIST: In that town, Ankara, did your father's side and your mother's side come from that town?

CRESPI: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Let's talk a little bit about your father. What was his name?

CRESPI: My father was Joseph Asher.

SIGRIST: Yes, and what did he do for a living?

CRESPI: And he used to be a tinsmith in Turkey.

SIGRIST: What did he do exactly?

CRESPI: He used to solder, he used to make lamps. There we didn't have electricity. They used to make gasoline lamps, kerosene lamps. He used to make little lamps and sold them. That was...

SIGRIST: How did he sell them? Did he have a store?

CRESPI: He had a little bit of a store and people used to come from outside of the outskirts, from the outskirts they used to come and buy those little things. Sometimes they used to bring to solder some things they had broken. My father used to solder it for them and that was his livelihood.

SIGRIST: I see. Can you describe the store for me? Do you remember what it looked like?

CRESPI: It was a little bit of nothing. I was only five. I didn't go to the store that much and it was a little...only my father could fit there and they had whatever within, tin, whatever he used to buy to make the little lamps and that's all I remember and he didn't make much. It was a hard life to make a living.

SIGRIST: Were you poor?

CRESPI: We weren't poor but we got along. Things weren't that expensive then but we used to get along. And then my

father, my father came to America.

SIGRIST: Before you did?

CRESPI: Yes.

SIGRIST: When did he come?

CRESPI: My father came in, sometime in May, 1912.

SIGRIST: Why did he come?

CRESPI: He, why? My mother had a sister here and they sent tickets for my father, so he came in May.

SIGRIST: Of 1912.

CRESPI: In 1912 and he went into, he started to work. He stayed with them for a while and then he went to work in a battery factory. He used to solder batteries, "Eveready" probably, some famous batteries. And they didn't make much money so while my father was with my aunt living there, then he found another place. They used to board years back. They used to board in some places. So he must have gone to the East side but my

aunt lived in Harlem. He went to the East side. He boarded with some people and he was working. He didn't make much money and at the same time on Sundays he used to shine shoes and make a few dollars. So it came time he wanted the family to come to America, he borrowed some money from some friend and he sent tickets for the family. We were four. Let's see, we were...

SIGRIST: Yes, I wanted to ask you your brothers and sisters. What were their names?

CRESPI: My name you know is Sarah. My brother Eli and I have a sister Mary. You want second names? Mary and then comes the younger brother Victor.

SIGRIST: I see. Let's talk a little bit about your mother, too. What was your mother's name?

CRESPI: My mother's name is Julia Asher. Her maiden name was Altman.

SIGRIST: Spell that, please.

CRESPI: A-L-T-M-A-N. Altman.

SIGRIST: And did she work?

CRESPI: Oh, nobody worked in Turkey.

SIGRIST: No?! (they laugh)

CRESPI: They only took care of the house and they never went shopping either. The men used to do all the shopping. The clothes they used to make home and, so the women didn't have to, they didn't have ready made clothes there. And that's it. We used to go to school. The children used to go to school. They used to bring teachers from Istanbul to Turkey from Alliance, Israeli Alliance, French. They used to teach us French. There weren't any teachers in where I lived.

SIGRIST: How far from Istanbul were you?

CRESPI: Well, by train it was about two days.

SIGRIST: Oh, so it was a long way.

CRESPI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Where, can you tell me where in Turkey it was?

CRESPI: Oh.

SIGRIST: Was it near the Iraq border or...where was it?

CRESPI: I really wouldn't know that, Turkey. Well, now, during the war you can tell where Turkey is and Iraq. It's near.

SIGRIST: It's near.

CRESPI: It's near. The Turkish...

SIGRIST: The town you lived in was near...

CRESPI: Well, the town that we lived , I don't know how far it is but it was a beautiful town. It was in a mountain. It was a beautiful place and that's how much I can remember from there.

SIGRIST: Since your mother is still living, why don't you tell us her birthdate.

CRESPI: Oh, my mother's birthday? My sister knows better than

I do. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: I believe it's 1883, I believe.

CRESPI: 1883?

SIGRIST: I believe that's what I have written down. We'll check it later.

CRESPI: No, I think it's more. She's going to be one hundred eight.

SIGRIST: Yes.

CRESPI: Could it be 1883?

SIGRIST: Well, we'll check it after the interview.

CRESPI: And she had, she had, and when my father left and my father sent us tickets, my mother got ready to sell all her belongings to have a few dollars coming here. And we went by train to Istanbul...

SIGRIST: O.K., let's, I still want to ask you some questions about, for instance, going to school. You said you

learned French.

CRESPI: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Did you ever learn anything about America in school?

CRESPI: No, no, no, no. Not America. But we learned about different countries, but we learned here better the geography. There it probably was about France and other things, arithmetic, and we used to speak fluently French. Now I don't speak it so well. When I came here there was nobody to talk with.

SIGRIST: No reason to keep it up.

CRESPI: So I, uh...

SIGRIST: Could you describe the house that you lived in?

CRESPI: Oh, it was nice. (she laughs) It was a nice one room with two rooms we had and the kitchens were in a big outside, in the courtyards it was the kitchen and in the courtyard was the bathroom. The bathrooms weren't like the ones here. Was like old, like the ones we see in parks years back. They didn't have flushing

water or something like that. That's the way the bathrooms were in where I lived. And they used to cook and they had a place, they had kitchens out there and they had, like, uh, not a stove, like a bakery, whatever he bakeries...

SIGRIST: Ovens?

CRESPI: Ovens. Big ovens. They used to, Saturday, I mean Friday, they used to cook and bake and do everything there. And most of the, and to heat the houses they used to have coal. I don't know what they call those things.

SIGRIST: Like a stove, a little stove?

CRESPI: Like a little stove. They used to put coal and on Saturday they used to have people come in. They didn't touch, uh, Jewish people didn't touch light. They used to light it for them and they had the stoves like they used to have in the stations, belly stoves, and they used to warm up the apartments.

SIGRIST: Where in your one room was the stove? Was it in the middle or...?

CRESPI: They used to put it in one corner so because they used to sleep in that room.

SIGRIST: I see. So you did all your living in this one room.

CRESPI: Yes, probably. That we had two rooms. And in one room we didn't have no beds. We slept on the floor.

SIGRIST: Slept on the floor. Was it a wooden floor or dirt floor?

CRESPI: No, it was, yeah, it was a wooden floor and they used to have carpets, especially Turkey had beautiful carpets. And they used to have mattresses and we all used to sleep in the same room. Probably when children got older they used to sleep in a different room but they were small. They slept in the same room with the parents. And, uh...

SIGRIST: Was there furniture in the other parts of the house?

CRESPI: Well, yeah, there was table. There was table, the kitchen, they had dishes in the kitchen and sometime they used to eat outside. And besides the room there

was like a deck and they used to put tables there. We used to eat there and then sleep in the rooms. But in the rooms they didn't have, they didn't have too many chairs. They had benches all around the house. They used to build benches and fill it up nice with mattresses and pillows and very comfortable.

SIGRIST: So it was comfortable.

CRESPI: It was comfortable, yes. And...

SIGRIST: You talked about eating. What sorts of things did you eat?

CRESPI: Oh, we used to eat very good.

SIGRIST: What kinds of foods did you eat in Turkey?

CRESPI: What kinds of foods? In Turkey they had a lot of vegetables. We used to have a lot of vegetables which, when we came here, we didn't have that. They didn't know about it but we knew. And they used to make beautiful meals.

SIGRIST: Your mother, did she do the cooking?

CRESPI: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Was she a good cook?

CRESPI: Sure she was.

SIGRIST: Did she teach you how to cook?

CRESPI: Well, I'll tell you, no. I couldn't learn from my mother in Turkey. But when I came here I was a little older, I learned a little bit. But I learned mostly when I got married.

SIGRIST: I see. Out of necessity.

CRESPI: Yes. So I learned how to cook. We used to have lentils, beans, rice, all kinds of vegetables. They used to have brains, they used to make all, uh, they had all kinds of meats. They had lamb chops. They had chopped meat. They used to make hamburgers and meatloaf, no, not meatloaf, hamburgers and spaghetti and meatballs hey used to make and they used to make their own tomato sauce. In the summer they used to get a lot of tomatoes and cook them for hours and

hours and hours. They used to make delicious tomato paste. And that you could eat a whole bread with it and...

SIGRIST: Did your mother make bread? Did she...

CRESPI: Yes, they used to make bread. Yeah, they used to bake bread. They used to make cookies. They made a lot of things. They used to boil eggs on Friday for Saturday and they used to make knishes to feed the children on Saturdays after they came from shul and, uh, all of these things.

SIGRIST: Let's talk about, because the Jewish religion is so important in your day to day life, let's talk a little bit about your religious life at that time. Would you say you were a religious family?

CRESPI: Yes, in Turkey we were very religious and really orthodox but when we came here it was a little different.

SIGRIST: In the town in Turkey that you lived in was there a large Jewish population?

CRESPI: Was there what?

SIGRIST: A large Jewish population? Were there a lot of Jews?

CRESPI: Yes, yes, yes, yes, there was. We all lived we can say maybe in three, four, five blocks, maybe six blocks was all the Jewish. And among that there was Christ..., there were Turkish that were very friendly. They used to come. We used to go to them.

SIGRIST: Turkish Christians you mean?

CRESPI: Uh...

SIGRIST: They were friendly to the Jews.

CRESPI: Yeah, Christians, I don't know. We lived in Mohammed, uh, not Christ.

SIGRIST: Oh, yes, right.

CRESPI: Yeah, they were Islamic. They were very good. They used to come visit and we used to go to them and they were very really good. They opened doors for all these people and that's...

SIGRIST: Was there a synagogue nearby?

CRESPI: Oh, yes. There was a beautiful synagogue.

SIGRIST: Can you describe that a little bit?

CRESPI: Oh, the synagogue?

SIGRIST: What it looked like.

CRESPI: The synagogue. (pointing to her husband Nissim Crespi, EI-30) He'll describe it. I'm going to show you a picture.

SIGRIST: O.K., let's talk a little bit...

CRESPI: The synagogue. I remember my mother used to and my father used to take us on holidays, Saturdays. There was a special place for women on the upper decks.

SIGRIST: Like a balcony that went around.

CRESPI: In the balcony they had, what do you call these things, so you couldn't see through, you know, they

were like...

SIGRIST: Like a screen?

CRESPI: Screen, like this. (she gestures)

SIGRIST: And that's where the women sat?

CRESPI: Yeah, for the women's section.

SIGRIST: Why did the women have to sit behind a screen?

CRESPI: Eh, well, if you'll remember here, the Jewish people, the orthodox people, they put a curtain between the men and the women. But by us in Turkey was that on the balcony there were screens that they looked through so the men shouldn't look at the ladies or the ladies don't look at the men. But you could see through.

SIGRIST: As a child did you and your brothers and sisters sit with your mother upstairs or did the boys go sit with your father downstairs?

CRESPI: Well, I don't remember my father during the holidays. He used to take my brother, my oldest brother, that

was the only one that was old enough. He used to take him to shul with him and we used to sit with my mother and the little one, and the little one also my mother used to take him in her arms and bring him upstairs where we used to sit.

SIGRIST: Can you describe some of the holiday celebrations? For instance, what did you do? Can you describe like a Passover celebration?

CRESPI: The holidays, oh, Passover celebration. Before Passover all the rooms had to be scraped with a brush and take the wood out. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Take the wood out?

CRESPI: Scrape so much that they used to make it so clean. And God forbid you couldn't go to the room. You couldn't go. There was a special room and we used to take off our shoes outside. We never went anywhere, we never went in the room with shoes. Always we used to leave the shoes outside and the few days before Passover we used to eat in the courtyard. We couldn't eat in the room, God forbid there's going to be crumbs. And it was beautiful. Then when the night

after holiday came and the families, one or two families, used to get together, relatives, and they used to have a beautiful Seder and the Seder used to take maybe six hours and the children used to fall asleep already and even the women were very tired from all the work and all the cleaning and cooking because on Saturdays they don't cook. They had to cook for a few days for the holidays and it was a very nice holiday and the children, we used to get new clothes on Passover.

SIGRIST: Did your mother make them?

CRESPI: Yes, my mother made them or somebody helped and, because there weren't any ready made clothes there. Even the underwear they used to make it. And it was, and then they went to shul, they came from shul, it was a beautiful, joyous celebration of Passover.

SIGRIST: You talk about the family being there. Who, what other family members came?

CRESPI: Oh, my...

SIGRIST: Who else was in town?

CRESPI: Oh, my father's brother and nephews, nieces from my mother's side and my mother had sisters and children from those, so that we all used to get together.

SIGRIST: Were your grandparents alive at that time?

CRESPI: Yes, my grandparents were alive. When I left Turkey my, one of my grandmothers was passed away but my grandfather was alive and, uh, one of my grandfathers on my father's side passed away before we came. But my mother's side was alive and my grandmother on my father's side was alive. We left her in Turkey.

SIGRIST: Did you spend a lot of time with your grandparents on both sides?

CRESPI: Oh, yes. See, my grandfather on my father's side, he used to work in the outskirts and he used to, he also was a tinsmith and I, he was away and I used to stay with my grandmother in her house so she shouldn't be alone. And my grandfather used to come on Passover. They used to stay away for a long time and maybe during the holidays, certain holidays, he used to come for a few days and go back. He, I suppose, he had, he

used to stay in some hotel or something, whatever they had in those, at that time. And I always stayed with my grandmother. But many times I used to say, "Grandma, I don't want to stay. I want to go home." Well, I must have been about six, seven. I wasn't ten. I was ten when we came here.

SIGRIST: Describe Grandmother to me. What did she look like?

CRESPI: Oh, she was good.

SIGRIST: What did she look like?

CRESPI: Uh, I have no pictures, too bad. I have no pictures. She was an elderly woman and she wasn't very tall. She was very good. She was very good. She'd give anything to the grandchildren and, uh...

SIGRIST: Did they have a nice house?

CRESPI: Uh, no, they used to rent. They, my grandmother used to rent somebody else's house. They used to rent one or two rooms and that's where I stayed with her most of the time until my grandfather used to come home. And that's it. And on my mother's side my

grandmother, my grandmother died while we were there.

SIGRIST: Do you remember that happening?

CRESPI: Yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when she died? Did you have to go to the funeral?

CRESPI: No, no, nobody, no. At those times they don't. When my grandmother, there was a cholera and, you know, the Jewish people, they have to wash them. So as soon as my grandmother passed away my other got a few of her friends, there are special people that wash them and clean them before the government comes in and they quarantine the place.

SIGRIST: You're talking about washing the body.

CRESPI: Yes. And they, before the government would come in and they would quarantine the whole place, so they did then. So they brought them to the cemetery. The women and everything the men took them and everything was O.K. And that was maybe two, three years before we left Turkey.

SIGRIST: While we're still in Turkey before we bring you to America, I want to ask one question. Do you ever remember any kind of religious persecution? You said you got on pretty well with the non-Jewish community, so did you ever experience or did your parents ever experience, your grandparents, any kind of anti-Semitic behavior?

CRESPI: Not in my father's time or in my time, no.

SIGRIST: The community all got along well.

CRESPI: Yes, everybody, everybody got along. And we went to school. The boys, there was a special boy's school and a girl's school.

SIGRIST: Was this a Jewish school that you went to or is this...?

CRESPI: Yeah, it was Jewish. There weren't any Christians. There was a Greek school. Some Jewish people, some, not all of them, maybe two, three people, wanted to learn the language so they also went to Greek school. They learned how to talk Greek. There was Greek in

Turkey and there was Turkish. But we used to speak Turkish, too. We learned Turkish but our language in Ladino. We spoke the Spanish from Spain. We learned Ladino. In the house we used to speak Ladino. Outside with the Turks we had to speak Turkish. We learned Turkish and French we used to speak in school and they used to, we had to speak, when we were kids when we were outside we had to speak French. And we, there were monitors in the back of us. If we spoke Spanish, the Ladino, you have to pay a penny and a penny is a lot. Where would we get a penny in those days? So we made it our business that we spoke fluently and it was nice to know...

SIGRIST: Yeah, it sounds like you had a very international bringing up. You spoke a lot of languages and...

CRESPI: Yes, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: All right, let's bring you over to America. Your father's already come over and he's been sending money back and forth, so talk a little bit about, you said your mother was getting ready to sell all her possessions.

CRESPI: Sell all the things she got, she got whatever she got and then it was time to leave Turkey.

SIGRIST: Do you remember packing?

CRESPI: Packing? No, I don't remember. We didn't have to pack too much.

SIGRIST: You didn't bring very much.

CRESPI: No, not too much. Maybe she had a carpet or something, a couple of pillows, something like that. And the rest she sold it. When we left Turkey, we left a big group from the same town.

SIGRIST: Oh, a whole group from that town.

CRESPI: A whole group from that town.

SIGRIST: How did you get there?

CRESPI: By train. There was a train.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the train ride at all?

CRESPI: Ah, very little. I remember the train. So we got, my mother had two sisters in Istanbul, so we went there and they prepared, they got a room for us to stay until it was time to leave.

SIGRIST: This was in a hotel?

CRESPI: It, no, it wasn't a hotel. It must have been a renting house, something like that, not a hotel. And we were there for some time. I don't remember exactly how long.

SIGRIST: Did you all stay in that one room?

CRESPI: Yes, yes, yes. We stayed all in one room. We couldn't afford it, we had to pay. My mother didn't have much money. And it just happened that we had to stay longer than we had to. So finally when the time came we left Turkey. On that trip my aunts gave my mother a jar of jelly to give it to the sister in America. So my mother took it and then we boarded, all that group that I said, we boarded a boat. But that boat, it wasn't a regular big boat. It must have been like a, I don't know, a very small boat with chickens. Chickens all over. It was terrible. But

the trip I don't remember how long it took from Istanbul to Greece.

SIGRIST: Patras, you said.

CRESPI: Patras, yes, Greece. This is from Istanbul you took the boat to Patras. Yeah, that's where the boat was going to come to dock to...

SIGRIST: The big boat.

CRESPI: Yeah, the big boat, to come to America.

SIGRIST: So where did you, the chickens weren't where you were sleeping, were they?

CRESPI: I'm telling you the chickens were running all around. We were all buggy. Well, they have bugs. We had, too, with them. And finally we arrived in Patras and we went to a hotel. The big group, they bought tickets from Istanbul but my father sent them from America. They had the privilege of having a lot of food. I don't know how it was but they had plenty of food. But we didn't have that. We had to buy, if we had money we would have bought and when we arrived

there they went into their rooms and my mother had to go to the top floor. It must have been two or three flights up, near the roof there was a room. We slept there and outside on the roof during the day we used to sit on the roof and play there, the kids. And my mother used to go down to buy bread and sometimes, at the beginning, she had a few pennies, whatever she had, she used to bring some cheese. But after there was no more money for those things and we used the jelly. My mother used the jelly 'til we, came bread and jelly, bread and jelly, was 'til finally two weeks we were there. My mother was broke, a few pennies she had, whatever kind of money they used. And then the boat came.

SIGRIST: So you were in Patras for two weeks then?

CRESPI: Almost.

SIGRIST: Kind of living hand to mouth.

CRESPI: Yeah, it was terrible. It was very bad because the boat was delayed.

END OF SIDE A

BEGINNING OF SIDE B

SIGRIST: How large of a group had come from Ankara?

CRESPI: Uh, oh, let's see. Maybe six, seven couples.

SIGRIST: Oh, so a large group.

CRESPI: Yeah, a large. Only one girl. She was a friend of mine. She must...

SIGRIST: You mean child? Only one...

CRESPI: Yeah, she was about my age. That was the only child. But the others were husband and wife or single women or single men. That was a big group that came. And it came to the day that the boat arrived and it was time to go and my mother didn't have no money to pay the fellow from the hotel. She begged, she begged the people because they were from the same town. So my mother didn't know what was going to happen in America so she begged them to borrow. She wanted to borrow money and they won't give her. She said, "We're going

to America. We don't know where we going to meet."
And it just happened that we lived in the same street
a block away from all of them, a block away. And so
what would my mother do? She won't be able to go on
the boat. The man, so my mother started to cry, which
don't blame her. Everybody left for the boat. My
mother and the children were the only ones left in the
hotel. So she went to the owner. She said, "I only
have this and what shall I do? They don't want to
lend me any money and I haven't got. I can't stay
here with my children." And the man was very good.
He was a Greek guy. He said, "Go in peace with your
husband and your children." And that's how we came to
the boat. And do you want something from the boat?

SIGRIST: Oh, yes. What was the name of the boat? Do you
remember?

CRESPI: The boat is, the boat was the "Argentina." It must
have been a Portuguese boat.

SIGRIST: I see. And this was a large boat?

CRESPI: Yes, that was a large boat.

SIGRIST: Yeah, let's talk a little bit about the boat ride over.

CRESPI: The boat.

SIGRIST: For instance, where did you stay in the boat? What were your accommodations?

CRESPI: We were in steerage. No money. What was it?!

SIGRIST: Stacks of...

CRESPI: Stacks. You see on boats one on top of the other. That's how we slept on the steerage all the way down, down where...

SIGRIST: Down at the bottom of the boat.

CRESPI: The bottom of the boat. (she says something unintelligible to her husband sitting nearby).

SIGRIST: Did, were there lots and lots of people?

CRESPI: Well, the same people that were...

SIGRIST: But, I mean, you weren't the only people on the boat.

CRESPI: Well, during the day we used to go on deck and sit there and they used to talk. The ones that weren't seasick, they enjoyed themselves. They used to feed, they used to give a lot of things.

SIGRIST: What sorts of things did they feed you on the boat?

CRESPI: Well, I'll tell you, I didn't eat nothing on the boat. The only thing that kept me alive was garlic and bread. That was my whole trip and I couldn't keep anything in my stomach.

SIGRIST: You were very sick.

CRESPI: Yeah, seasick. Seasick. I was throwing up all the time. Garlic and bread was the only food. They used to give beans, they used to give meat. They used to give them cheese, certain things that they give on the boat, they used to give O.K., lot of things. People that were O.K., they ate but it just happened my mother also, my mother, as soon as she went on the boat a day or so, she took sick. She went into the hospital in the boat and there were four kids. Who's

going to take care of all the children. I could hardly take care of myself and there was one from the group, from the same group we came together...

SIGRIST: From Ankara.

CRESPI: Yes, and she took care of the little ones and then the other ones and I used to take care of my brother, that's all. All, the woman used to take care of the other ones, the little ones.

SIGRIST: Were your brothers and sisters, were they sick? Did they get sick, too?

CRESPI: No, they didn't get sick. They didn't get sick. They were small, no.

SIGRIST: Right. How long was your mother in the hospital?

CRESPI: My mother was in the hospital about a week and a half. She was there and then when she came out, thank God, she wasn't too bad. But me, I was sick all the time and then, during that trip, one day we had a very, very big storm. It was awful. The boat was rocking and big fishes, we didn't know, probably they were

sharks at that time, we didn't, they used to jump almost coming on the boat. The boat, big ship. And it was a very big storm and people were afraid, even water was coming in the boat. And you know the Jewish people, when they're in a position like this, they always carried the matzoh, the afikomen from the Passover. They always used to carry it whenever they were going to go some place they always carried some of that. And then, when that happened, they started to pray because it was very bad. And they started to throw the matzohs in the ocean and so finally it calmed down. It calmed down very well and, thank God, we arrived at Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: You said the trip took three weeks.

CRESPI: Three weeks.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

CRESPI: I don't remember the Statue of Liberty because from where we were in Ellis Island I don't think you could see the Statue of Liberty. We were sitting. It was a big, big place with all windows all around. We sat on the floor waiting for my father to come. And my

father came. Before we left they investigate you, they tell you, they ask you questions if you can read, if you can write. They asked my mother something. I suppose she made a cross, something. And when they spoke to me, of course, I spoke to them. There was French people there and so they let us go. The other ones they won't bother, the little ones, the one four years. What does she know? Nothing, yeah.

SIGRIST: Describe the big room with windows. Were there a lot of people in that room at that time?

CRESPI: Of course. All the people that came from, got out from the boat. We all, they all went to Ellis Island in that room. You could hardly have room for us, the four children and my mother, because everybody sat on the floor waiting for their relatives to come for them.

SIGRIST: As a ten year old girl, how did you feel about being in a big strange place like that?

CRESPI: We didn't think that much. You couldn't think. The only thing you could think was waiting for my father. And now the kids ten years old, they know more.

They're more educated. They're more, how can I say, more, uh, alert and ...

SIGRIST: You were more innocent.

CRESPI: Yes, really. We didn't see things like that in, you know, a lot of people. We didn't have no theatres. All right, but probably other people used to go but kids, we didn't know anything about it.

SIGRIST: Did you, you may not remember but when you were at Ellis Island do you remember talking to anybody else while you were there? Were you pretty much...

CRESPI: No, no, no, no. Everybody was in one corner. They were sitting and they were talking with their own relatives. The only thing was that they asked us questions and they let us, uh, ready to go out. Ready, so we sat down. We sat down waiting for my father. My father came with my aunt, the one that was here. She came with him and the first thing when we saw my father, of course you know, we kissed and that and he gave us a banana which we didn't have in Turkey, bananas. Maybe they had in Istanbul but not in my town. And it was good. (she laughs) It was

good. And then we went, I remember we went on a train, no, from, we took a boat to the Elevator Second Avenue, Third Avenue, something like that. Second Avenue we went and my father already had made, he prepared an apartment, a room, two rooms, a bedroom and a living room.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what the address was?

CRESPI: The address must have been, it was on Ludlow Street, 150 Ludlow Street. That number I remember. Ludlow Street. But I didn't go with my parents to that address. My aunt took me for that night, she took me. She lived in Harlem. She took me with her and then the next day she brought me back to where my father was.

SIGRIST: So what were your impressions of New York City? This was...

CRESPI: New York City? It was beautiful, you know, the language. You didn't know the language. It was hard for me but it wasn't too hard because when I started school it just happened that I had a French teacher and she used to keep me after school and she taught

this and this and this in French. But they gave me a test to put me in school so they put me in 4B because I was good in writing as French and English is same, arithmetic is the same and so they put me in 4B. And that's how I, the French teacher used to keep me after school. She was very good and I learned. And later on my father took us to Ellis Island to see the Statue of Liberty.

SIGRIST: When you were children?

CRESPI: Yeah, you know, maybe a month or two after he took us.
The boat was only five cents. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: And it went to Ellis Island?

CRESPI: To Ellis Island. It went to the Statue of Liberty.
It's near, it's there. It's there. It was beautiful,
the Statue of Liberty. We were kids. We were
impressed to see that beautiful statue.

SIGRIST: Did you get out onto the island?

CRESPI: Yes!

SIGRIST: What did you do?

CRESPI: Nothing. We walked.

SIGRIST: Did you go up inside the Statue?

CRESPI: Well, we went a little bit. Not too far. But later on when we were older we climbed up, further up. I took my children up there more but when we went with my father we only went a little bit inside.

SIGRIST: How old were you? Do you remember? When you went with your father?

CRESPI: Oh, with my father maybe I was about, uh, five, six months later the ten years to see the Statue of Liberty. But later on he took us again. He took us because it was beautiful. We used to go to the Battery and take the boat.

SIGRIST: How did your mother adjust to America? Was she glad that she came?

CRESPI: Oh, she adjusted. She adjusted very well. She adjusted and little by little she learned English.

SIGRIST: Yes, how did she do that?

CRESPI: How did she do, I don't know. She learned from us, from the children. We went to school so she learned one word, two words in the street. But later on, when she wanted to become a citizen, she went to school. That's how she got her, I mean she learned more.

SIGRIST: Now your father, did your father speak English? Of course, he had been here for a while.

CRESPI: Yes, yes, yes. He learned, yes. He learned English but I don't know how he learned. I guess from the children also and from the street they learned this. At the beginning they didn't know anything. They wanted to buy something. My mother or whoever it was, they used to go. They wanted eggs. They used to look at eggs. They show they want this. They want milk. They showed they want milk or whatever. The grocery store they used to go. They used to have vegetables or dried, uh, like beans or lentils or other things, rice. They were in barrels. That's the way they used to...

SIGRIST: They would just point.

CRESPI: Point. They used to point. Then they, if they wanted meat or neck or something they used to show this. (she gestures) Then they learned the language and then my mother used to speak pretty well, she used to get and my father, also.

SIGRIST: Did your mother get a job when she came here?

CRESPI: No, she had to take care of the four kids. And my father used to go, I told you, he found a job. He was working in the batteries and Sundays he used to go to shine shoes because my father didn't make much money, probably five, six dollars a week. And to pay rent and the children and clothes. Clothes, we didn't make clothes. Well, they used to make a little bit but still there were ready made clothes here. And he had to go. He made a few dollars and they used to enjoy themselves with friends. They used to get together and they used to go buy a pitcher of beer and they used to have a good time.

SIGRIST: Did you move to a Jewish neighborhood?

CRESPI: Yeah, they were all Jewish. Very seldom there was an Italian. Italians and the Jews used to get along very well and Christians I don't remember. But later on we lived with Irish people. They were very good, later on...

SIGRIST: Near Ludlow Street was there a synagogue?

CRESPI: There was a synagogue on Hester Street or, I don't remember very well. There were a few synagogues. There was a Sephardic synagogue on Ellen Street.

SIGRIST: Ellen Street?

CRESPI: E-L-L-E-N, something like, Ellen Street there was a synagogue and there were a few Ashkenazick synagogues, a lot of them, two or three.

SIGRIST: So when you came to America you still maintained a strong religious life.

CRESPI: Yes, yes, strong religious, still the same thing like Turkey. No lights on Saturday, no do this, everything's was got to be just so.

SIGRIST: Did your mother miss her family?

CRESPI: What family?

SIGRIST: The family left.

CRESPI: There were, there nothing was left, no. Only the mother-in-law.

SIGRIST: I see.

CRESPI: My grandmother on my father's side and my father's brother, my father's brother, all right. But we were with my father. She had to think of the family. She used to get along very well with all the neighbors, all the neighbors that we came together. They used to get together.

SIGRIST: You said they all lived in the same block.

CRESPI: Then lived in the same two, two blocks.

SIGRIST: Two blocks.

CRESPI: From after Ludlow Street at that time they used to move very often. Then we moved to Orchard Street. I think we got three rooms on Orchard Street. So we moved there. That number I don't remember, Orchard Street. And over there was a busy street. They used to have pushcarts. They used to sell everything. It was...

SIGRIST: And your father was still working in the battery factory.

CRESPI: Yes, in the battery factory, yes. And we went to school. I used to go to school on Ludlow Street. There was a school near Delancey Street on the corner of Delancey and Ludlow and later on, when we moved to Orchard Street I went to Second Avenue. There was a school. And then from there we moved to Harlem where my aunt was.

SIGRIST: Now who was your aunt? What relation was she? She was your father's...

CRESPI: My mother's, my mother's sister. That's why we came. And we moved to Harlem on 110th Street.

SIGRIST: And again, may I ask, was there a large Jewish population in that neighborhood?

CRESPI: Everybody was Jewish but there were a few Italians. There were a few Italians. Maybe there were a few Irish but Italians, we lived with Italians in the same buildings. They were just like our own. They used to come in with the children. We used to go to them, very close. They used to get on very well with the Italians.

SIGRIST: So right from the beginning, when you got to America, you were always around people like yourself.

CRESPI: Yes, that's right, yes. And when we moved to Harlem there were a lot of Sephardic in different blocks and my aunt was also on 110th Street and we found rooms on 110th Street and then I went and started to go to school there. On 113th Street there was a school and I graduated from there, from 8B. Now they haven't got 8B. Then 8B was like now, like high school, something like that.

SIGRIST: So you did very well in school.

CRESPI: Yeah, I was, I went to school only four years. I finished school and I had to go to work to help my father.

SIGRIST: What was your first job?

CRESPI: My first job was working on children's dresses.

SIGRIST: In a factory?

CRESPI: In a loft, yeah.

SIGRIST: What sorts of things did you do when you say "working on children's dresses?" Specifically, what did you do?

CRESPI: I used to, uh, usually we used to make the whole dress. The whole dress we used to make.

SIGRIST: And how old were you?

CRESPI: I was, I finished school fourteen and as soon as I, but I was about fourteen and a half, fifteen.

SIGRIST: Fifteen, and...

CRESPI: And I had to put my hair up so I could get working papers. They won't give you unless you're seventeen or sixteen. I think sixteen and I looked a little older. I had to go to work and they gave me working papers so I could work.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you made a week?

CRESPI: Well, I was a piece worker.

SIGRIST: I see.

CRESPI: A piece worker. Whatever I make it wasn't bad. It was pretty good. And then the war, the war came. We, let's see, that was in 1917, no, excuse me. When I first started to work I worked on children's rompers, children's rompers, also in a factory.

SIGRIST: Right.

CRESPI: Then later I went to the...

SIGRIST: Children's...

CRESPI: Children's dresses.

SIGRIST: Well, in conclusion, let me just ask you a couple of questions. One is: were your parents happy that they came here?

CRESPI: Sure, they were happy.

SIGRIST: They felt they had made the right decision?

CRESPI: Yes, of course. There was nothing wrong from not being happy. In Europe what did we have there? If we were over there it was hard to get boyfriends or girlfriends, so here was different. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: I see. Did either of them ever want to go back?

CRESPI: No, they never mentioned going back. No, never. They were here, they're here, they're here.

SIGRIST: And I guess my final question is: are you glad that they came to America?

CRESPI: Of course I'm glad. If I was going to be in Europe I wouldn't have gotten married. You had to have a lot

of money to give a dowry. Where would I get money for dowry? Over here my husband didn't want dowry. (she laughs) Here you work. You work together. You make, uh, that's it.

SIGRIST: I see. So you're glad they came to America.

CRESPI: Yes, glad we came to America. God bless America and it's wonderful. I always, I always, when they mention Ellis Island, I always have it in my mind how the place looked. How is Ellis Island now?

SIGRIST: Well, it's...

CRESPI: Did they fix it up?

SIGRIST: It's all fixed up. You'll have to come out.

CRESPI: No more wood?

SIGRIST: No more wood.

CRESPI: No more windows?

SIGRIST: The windows are there, the windows are there.

CRESPI: The windows are there. What about the floor?

SIGRIST: Clean. The floors are clean. It's all very clean now.

CRESPI: Wood?

SIGRIST: Tile.

CRESPI: Oh, they made tile.

SIGRIST: Tile. Yes, that's right. All the tiling was done after you were there. You were there in 1913 and it was all tiled about five years later in 1918.

CRESPI: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: So it looks a little different. Well, anyway, we'll talk about this afterwards. I just want to thank you very much for inviting us into your home to do this.

CRESPI: Oh, you're welcome.

SIGRIST: And this is Paul Sigrist signing off for the National
Park Service.