

EI-299

AROUSIAG DADIAN BOYAJIAN

BIRTH DATE: MAY 1, 1905

INTERVIEW DATE: 4/23/1993

RUNNING TIME: 56:45

INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

RECORDING ENGINEER: KEVIN DALEY

INTERVIEW LOCATION: ARMENIAN HOME FOR THE AGED  
FLUSHING, NEW YORK

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 4/1994

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 6/1994

TURKEY (ARMENIAN), 1921

AGE 15

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. I'm at the Armenian Home for the Aged in Flushing, New York. Today is Friday, April 23, 1993, and I'm here with Arousiag Boyajian, who is Armenian, and who came to America from Turkey in 1921. She was fifteen years old at that time. Good afternoon. It's been a long afternoon.

BOYAJIAN: Good afternoon, good afternoon.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Boyajian, can you please give me the approximate date of your birth, please, and the year.

BOYAJIAN: Like I said, I do not know. But that's what I give

all my official papers, May 1st.

SIGRIST: And the year, please?

BOYAJIAN: 1905.

SIGRIST: I see. And can you tell me where you were born, exactly?

BOYAJIAN: In Sivas, Sivas, Turkey.

SIGRIST: Whereabouts in Turkey is that?

BOYAJIAN: I don't know. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Not sure? Can you describe a little bit what that town looked like for me?

BOYAJIAN: Well, the town was very nice. We had very few churches and schools. Three schools, churches. It was very nice.

SIGRIST: Was it a big town or a small town?

BOYAJIAN: Yeah, a big town.

SIGRIST: What was the major industry in the town?

BOYAJIAN: Everything, all kinds.

SIGRIST: What did your father do for a living?

BOYAJIAN: My father had his own business. He had a helper, three or four helpers. He was agriculture, he was making agriculture, to separate the wheat from hay. That was, that was what he was making, and also making cradles, cradles. He was . . .

SIGRIST: Cradles.

BOYAJIAN: Cradles, yeah. He was marangos. Now, just now I forgot. Marangos, carpenter.

SIGRIST: Carpenter.

BOYAJIAN: Carpenter.

SIGRIST: Did he have his own carpenter shop somewhere?

BOYAJIAN: He has his own, yes. He had two stores, because that was a seasonal business. He had two stores. One he used. They had one he used to make. He used to make wheels, you know, the cart that they pull?

SIGRIST: Like a pony cart or something?

BOYAJIAN: Cart, car, you know. The other side, they used to use the car. Cow cart.

SIGRIST: Cow carts.

BOYAJIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Like an oxcart?

BOYAJIAN: Yeah, oxcart. He used to make the wheels and, you know, wood and, wood and things. And he used to have that iron all around. That was his business.

SIGRIST: As a little girl, what do you remember about his shop? Did you ever go visit his shop?

BOYAJIAN: I did once in a while.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what it looked like on the inside?

BOYAJIAN: Yeah. It's all woods, things like that for his business.

SIGRIST: What was your dad's name?

BOYAJIAN: Habog.

SIGRIST: Can you spell it, please?

BOYAJIAN: H, H-O. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: That's all right. Take your time.

BOYAJIAN: H-O-B-O-H. Hoboh.

SIGRIST: H, Hagab, is that what you . . .

BOYAJIAN: Habog. H-A-B-O-G.

SIGRIST: B-O-G. And what was your dad's personality like?

BOYAJIAN: He was a very nice man. One, we were a big family, I had five sisters. I was the smallest among all, five sisters, three sisters and one brother. And 19, 1895 when the Turks raid the houses, you know, they used to take everything, food and money and everything, they killed my uncle. He had raised, we were five for five, two, four sisters, one brother, and he had to raise two of her, my father's brother's son. And one son and two daughters, he would all, you know, we were a big family already. He had to raise them. He married off, and they had their own family. And when we, we were exiled my sister, I was the smallest one. My sisters were all married. One had three child, the other one had four and the other one five. And when we were going to exile, my father said, "I want all of you to come here so that," because they had a section, you know. Section, section, this section going to go in certain, on a certain day, and the

other section going to go on a certain day. They were exiling. So my father said, "I want all, everyone to my house so we all go together. If we're going to die, we die together." So we start, you know, go to exile.

SIGRIST: Can I back up just a little bit? Do you remember family members talking about or telling stories about exactly what happened in 1895?

BOYAJIAN: Well, they arrived, they raid and kill people. They took everything away and killed people. They killed my uncle, so my father had to take them in, and he raised them, and he married them off.

SIGRIST: So this is, you have a big family, sort of all over the place.

BOYAJIAN: And my mother was very, very nice person. All the neighbors used to like her very much, because she was very kind.

SIGRIST: What was her name?

BOYAJIAN: Mariam.

SIGRIST: And her maiden name?

BOYAJIAN: Dadian. D-A-D-I-A-N.

SIGRIST: And can you tell me also a little bit about what her personality was like.

BOYAJIAN: Very nice.

SIGRIST: Is there a story that you remember or a special memory of a good time that you spent with your mother when you were a little girl, something that sticks out in your mind?

BOYAJIAN: Well, not much, because my mother was very busy.

SIGRIST: Busy doing what?

BOYAJIAN: Well, her grandchildren, her cooking, you know, cleaning. The other side we had to do everything.

SIGRIST: Do you remember . . .

BOYAJIAN: Knitting and making the yarn.

SIGRIST: You did that at home?

BOYAJIAN: No, my mother used to do it.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about how she would make yarn?

BOYAJIAN: Well, first they buy the wool, you know, and they wash. After they wash they comb. After they comb they spin. You know, they have machines, like you see sometimes.

SIGRIST: Spinning wheels.

BOYAJIAN: Yeah, spinning wheels. They spin. Then after they spin, they dye whatever the colors they want. After they dye, you know, they make yarn, of course. After it's dry they make wools and they work.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things would she make out of the yarn?

BOYAJIAN: Oh, stockings, stockings, whatever they need.

SIGRIST: Is it cold in that part of Turkey?

BOYAJIAN: Very cold, yes.

SIGRIST: Is there snow there?

BOYAJIAN: Snow? When the snow comes, it stays there.

SIGRIST: Do you remember a big snowstorm?

BOYAJIAN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me about that?

BOYAJIAN: All the time, just the snow. I mean, one snow, the snow was there. ( she gestures ) Sivas is high on the mountain, and all around is snow country.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the house that you lived in as a little girl?

BOYAJIAN: The house that I lived in was a two-family and the bottom, they had oven, a big one, you know. People used to come and bake that was just for helping them. They used to come and ask my mother, they all came. We had a big house. After my sister, my cousin, they got married already, and my sisters, all of them were married. So it was my father, my mother, me and my brother. My brother, I had, we had one brother and besides raising all of us with my uncle's daughter and son, my father also had another orphan. Now I know everything but I, I just, I can't bring.

SIGRIST: Somebody else's child?

BOYAJIAN: Somebody else's, not somebody else's child. Somebody who had no mother or father. He took in, he raised that, too. Besides raising all of us with my uncle's three children, he also raised that guy.

SIGRIST: Your father must have loved children.

BOYAJIAN: He loved, he was a very kind man.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what games he would play with you all as children?

BOYAJIAN: No.

SIGRIST: No? But it sounds like kind of a busy household.

BOYAJIAN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Certainly. So you have a big oven downstairs. What kinds of foods did you eat in Turkey?

BOYAJIAN: Every kind of food. We used to have bulgur wheat and okra, tomatoes. You know, everything.

SIGRIST: Did your mother make some kind of special dish for special occasions, or . . .

BOYAJIAN: ( she laughs ) Yes.

SIGRIST: What did she make?

BOYAJIAN: She used to make kirshda, a round, made with bulgur.

SIGRIST: Bulgur wheat.

BOYAJIAN: Bulgur. And inside with meat, meat, onions, stuffed, you know. She used to make that, she used to make toma. She used to bake. We had the oven. We also had over there they have big, you could say oven. But like a very big type, you know. It's stone.

SIGRIST: Set in the ground?

BOYAJIAN: Set in the ground. They have, they have that for warming up. For one side of the room, they had that. It was specially made for that. They say, "tunish." And they have that to warm up the place. Besides that they have so, like they used to have here years ago, you know. In the houses they have a stove.

SIGRIST: Like a little parlor stove?

BOYAJIAN: Yes. They used to have that all the time because it was cold, and wintertime we had that fire going on. And when the fire died, died down, she used to put three or four pots there and used to cook like beans and things, you know, hard boiled things like that she used to cook there, and with the meat and vegetables she used to cook there. And we had two outside kitchens, like. This was out of, away from the house. We had two, like you have here, when you

go to a picnic you make fire?

SIGRIST: Oh, like a grill.

BOYAJIAN: A grill. We have two grills. One over here, one over here. ( she gestures ) And a big, big room.

SIGRIST: Did you eat a lot of meat? What did you grill? What would you have used to grill?

BOYAJIAN: We didn't grow anything. Everything came from outside. Vegetables, very little vegetables. The countries used to grow and bring them.

SIGRIST: So you ate mostly grain and . . .

BOYAJIAN: Grain or cucumbers, tomatoes, okra, you know, string beans, things like that, that used to come from outside. They didn't grow much because it was too cold around there.

SIGRIST: Tell me about your religious life?

BOYAJIAN: My religious life, I am Christian.

SIGRIST: At that time in Turkey. Tell me about . . .

BOYAJIAN: All the time we used to go to church.

SIGRIST: Was there a church nearby at the house?

BOYAJIAN: Right there, right across. We had the big church, very big church, which is, I never seen over here. I don't know how they build that at that time, because they didn't have no machines like they have now.

SIGRIST: Who was more religious, your mother or your father?

BOYAJIAN: My mother.

SIGRIST: What would she do at home to practice her religion?

BOYAJIAN: Oh, she used to go to church every morning, because the church was right across the street.

SIGRIST: Was there anything that she did at home? Did you have to say prayers or anything like that at home?

BOYAJIAN: At the, you know, supertime we used to pray.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of the prayers that you said as a child?

BOYAJIAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Could you say one of them for us in Armenian?

BOYAJIAN: ( she recites a prayer in Armenian )

SIGRIST: Thank you. Was that the Lord's Prayer?

BOYAJIAN: The Lord's Prayer.

SIGRIST: That's wonderful. Can you tell me a little bit about celebrating Easter maybe? How did you celebrate Easter in Turkey?

BOYAJIAN: Just like over here. We used to have eggs and fruit and soup. They used to make soup with apricot, raisin and wheat. Skinned wheat, not regular wheat. Over there they, uh, they knock the skin off.

SIGRIST: They break it open, sort of?

BOYAJIAN: Not break open, just skin. And she used to use that for soup. Anushabus. That was made with apricot, raisin and sugar.

SIGRIST: Hmm.

BOYAJIAN: Sweet sugar. And they used to have that after supper, you know, like a dessert.

SIGRIST: You said eggs. Did you color Easter eggs?

BOYAJIAN: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: How did you color Easter eggs in Turkey? How did you

do that?

BOYAJIAN: Well, they had, my mother had all kinds of color, you know. They used to color red, ink colors, different colors.

SIGRIST: Would it be the same dyes that she used for her yarn?

BOYAJIAN: Yeah. And when it's Easter or Christmas, you know, all the relatives' children come to kiss hands. So she gives them, you know, if it's Easter she gives them eggs. If it's Christmas she gives them sugar and laplabou. You know, laplabou is the chick beans which is expanded and roasted. It's very delicious. I don't know if they have it, laplabou.

SIGRIST: So there were lots of different kinds of festive foods that she . . .

BOYAJIAN: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you explain to me kissing hands? What do you mean by that? You said the relatives came to . . .

BOYAJIAN: Well, we spell it, to respect. They come to kiss hands.

SIGRIST: I see. Did you go to school in Turkey?

BOYAJIAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you talk to me a little bit about what going to school was like when you were a girl?

BOYAJIAN: It was a long walk.

SIGRIST: You had to walk to school.

BOYAJIAN: Oh, yeah. You had no, we had no transportation. I had to walk, and it wasn't near. It was quite far.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did you learn in school?

BOYAJIAN: Well, Armenian, and then after a certain age they teach French. When we were exiled, after we were exiled on the way, being that my father had agriculture things, so all of the country people, they came. And when we start, we start with two ox carts, you know, because with all my sisters and children and everything. We started with two ox carts and one donkey. On the way these Turkish people, you know, his customers. They came and they took from the line they took out. Whenever I see, I don't remember. On, well, anyway, they took us out from the line with the cart. My father said, "What are

you doing?" He said, "When you go, they're going to kill you. So don't go with them. Come with us. We'll keep you." My father said, I said, she said, I mean, she said, "I have daughters and grandchildren. I have eighteen, twenty," twenty-four with my, with my uncle's daughter. She said, "I have all those." She said, "No, we can't do that. We could only save four of you, not your grandchildren or not your daughters, the married one." We were my mother, my father, me and my brothers. They all had married and they were, they had their own homes. But when we were going to exile my father said, "You don't go with nobody." Because they were taking section and section. They said, "You're not going to go before me, or I'm not going to go after you. You have to come with me." So we all went, and my father said, "If you're not going to save them, if all my children are going to die, all these Armenians going to die, I'm going to die. My life is not worth anything. Since they're going to die, I can." This happened three times.

SIGRIST: Can I back us up just a little bit, and let me ask you how you came about to be exiled? How did that

happen?

BOYAJIAN: You mean to tell me you never heard about Turkey?

SIGRIST: I understand that the Turks came but, I mean, for you, your family specifically, how did it happen?

BOYAJIAN: It's not just my family. The whole country.

SIGRIST: I know. But I want you to tell me your experience, how it happened to you and your family, how the Turks came and did whatever they did.

BOYAJIAN: Well, they said that certain sections are going to go on this day, certain sections are going to go on a certain day. So we had, you know, a whole line, you know, we were out. And before us people went. Nobody, nobody's leaving. They take two days, or that's a very hot place, you know, a hot country. They all send there and, of course, when you are on the road three or four months they came and they robbed, even the gendarmes. They used to come and take the monies away. They took my father away, and all the men, not just my father, all the men they collected. They tied up like this ( she gestures ), eighteen, and they throw in the water. My father

went like that. My sister's husband, they were young, they grabbed them. They killed already.

SIGRIST: Now, were you marched?

BOYAJIAN: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: And then were you guarded by Turkish soldiers?

BOYAJIAN: There's yet three or four of them he had, they had guns, you know. If you didn't walk, they used to hit you with the big rifles.

SIGRIST: How did they feed you?

BOYAJIAN: Ha! Whatever we had, whatever we start with, we were feeding ourselves, and then they were starving. There is no feeding. They wanted all of them to die.

SIGRIST: And this is a long way from Turkey to, where are you going? Are you going to Syria?

BOYAJIAN: Yeah, I came here to Syria. I came to Manbij. And I told, a couple of times I told my mother after they took us someplace where even the donkey can't walk, can't walk. And we have to leave all the clothes, all the, whatever food we had, we just left it there, and we had to walk on the hills. And we had nothing,

just one donkey. The cart was down. Not just us,  
all of us.

SIGRIST: And there were many, many people.

BOYAJIAN: Many people, many. Line, line up.

SIGRIST: How long did that take? How long did it take to walk  
from Turkey to Syria, wherever you were going?

BOYAJIAN: Four months.

SIGRIST: So you were four months . . .

BOYAJIAN: Four months on the road. No place to sleep, no . . .

SIGRIST: Were you marched at night too, or were you allowed to  
rest?

BOYAJIAN: No. At night time they used to set to us a place.  
( there is an announcement heard in the background )  
Even with the well water, you know. We used to go,  
they used to say, all the Arabs used to come, and  
they wouldn't let us take water from the well. They  
used to ask for money. After a while we had no money  
no more, no clothes, nothing. Just whatever we had.

SIGRIST: So what was the final destination? Where did they march you to?

BOYAJIAN: They were marching up to Beirut, Beirut. Not Beirut, Halab, Halab. And then they said that, "It's Armistice. You could go home." I told my mother, "I cannot walk." Anyway, before we got there I told many times to my mother, "Please, leave me here. I want to stay here. I can't walk any more." And she used to drag me. One day all the group went and just me and my mother, because I told her, "I'm not coming, you go." So the gendarme came back from the group, and she came and hit my mother with the rifle, you know, with the sword. And I was hollering, she was hollering. ( she gestures )

SIGRIST: He sliced her throat?

BOYAJIAN: Not quite, but he tried to choke. He said, "Come on, walk." So we walked, and after, when we got to Manbij I said, "I'm not walking no more." So I went to a Turkish house just, you know, to help them.

SIGRIST: When your father was taken away how did your mother react to that? Was she just kind of numb to it all?

BOYAJIAN: Of course. It wasn't just her. It was the whole group.

SIGRIST: Sure. And so many awful things had happened.

BOYAJIAN: So she had, she couldn't help it. The gendarmes was over there. Maybe a hundred, a hundred fifty people, you know, on the road. Four gendarmes. And then as soon as we get to the country it was desert. We were walking on the desert. The Arabs used to come and rob everybody. And every once in a while they used to stop and they had tents for themselves. And they used to say, "Whoever has," They used to collect a few children, and they used to say, "Whoever wants their children, bring money and take it." My daughter, my mother, this happened to me three times. And our money was finished, gone. Not just us. All of them. And one day I had a school bag, you know, hanging on my shoulder. Being that I'm the smallest, they figured they wouldn't bother. So I had a few breadcrumbs, and all the gold was in there. So whenever we went they took us near country. They used to go out and buy things, and that finished, too. One day a guy came and grabbed for my neck. And he looked in and he just saw breadcrumbs and he

threw it back to me. And I said, "Thank God."  
Because that's all we had. They hang on my shoulders  
so that, you know, people wouldn't think that I had  
money.

SIGRIST: So you said ultimately you ended up in a Turkish  
household.

BOYAJIAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: And this is still in Syria, correct?

BOYAJIAN: This is in Syria, yes.

SIGRIST: Tell me about what that experience was like for you?

BOYAJIAN: Well, of course, my sister, the childrens were on the  
way. That, when we went there they stayed three or  
four days you get in that city, Manbij. And whoever,  
a lot of people didn't want to go back no more. They  
said, "It's Armistice. If you want you can go  
back." Where are we going to go back? So a lot of  
them went to different houses. And I was one of  
them, and where I was, they're very kind to me. I  
was there until the Armistice. They come and collect  
the children.

SIGRIST: Were you doing work in the house?

BOYAJIAN: Well, I was doing work, of course. They, I used to help her.

SIGRIST: Were you the only Armenian refugee in the house?

BOYAJIAN: No, no. In the house? No, they also had, they had four gardeners, four Armenian gardeners they had. They used to use Arabs and Armenians. They saw that they needed. They had four different, you know, farms, like. They took those Armenian families. When it was Armistice, they said that they're going to go to their country. So, you know, the guy that took me in, he cried after them. He said, "The Armenians are so honest." He loves them very much.

SIGRIST: We're going to pause just for a second so Kevin can flip our tape over.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: We're now beginning Side B. You were talking about living with a Turkish family.

BOYAJIAN: The place, the place that I was was Caucasian. And

he had two daughters, one son. The son had gone to the army. Actually, the son came and took from my mother, from my sister. He said, he had a mother, he wants to be companion to his mother, and that's how she took me.

SIGRIST: So how long did you stay there?

BOYAJIAN: I stayed there till 19, 19 . . . About three or four years I stayed there.

SIGRIST: In 1919 or something?

BOYAJIAN: When they started to collect, you know, I guess the English wanted to help. So when they start to collect, they took me to court. They said, "Who's your mother?" Of course I knew my father had died. My mother also had died. So I used to give their name. They said, "No, you're not their daughter. You're too young, they're too old. You can't be their child." Anyway, you know, they take, before they take out, they question you. They took me twice, and each time I said that, I gave their name.

SIGRIST: When had your mother died?

BOYAJIAN: On the way, on the way.

SIGRIST: She had died on the way, also.

BOYAJIAN: And my sister.

SIGRIST: I see. So the British were questioning you?

BOYAJIAN: No, not the British. The Turkish.

SIGRIST: The Turks. Excuse me.

BOYAJIAN: They took me to court and they ask you, "What's your mother's name? What's your father's name?" I used to give their name. They said, "You can't be their daughter. You're too young and they're too old. What's your name anyway?" They told me that be ready on Sunday they're going to come and get you, and they came and got me and they took me to Halab, in an orphanage. I stayed in the orphanage, and from the orphanage somebody came to America. So my sister said, I don't know if she said, "We have uncle in America, but I don't, I haven't got his name. I don't know what's going to happen to our lives in there, you know, orphanage." When this lady came to America, you know, when somebody comes from the other side everybody goes to say welcome. So when this lady came over, when this lady came my uncle and my

aunt's son, they went to welcome her and, you know, they start talking. So this lady said, "You know your cousin, your nieces, nephews, your nieces are in orphanage." So they wrote letters and they sent money. We came to America.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about what life in the orphanage was like.

BOYAJIAN: ( she pauses ) Just living. I mean, not too much to eat, just certain amount.

SIGRIST: Who ran the orphanage?

BOYAJIAN: The Armenian men, I guess. They must have collected money or something.

SIGRIST: And you're with one of your sisters, right, in the orphanage?

BOYAJIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: I see. How did you, how did you feel about that? What did you know about America?

BOYAJIAN: It's very nice. But still, you know, you come to a strange place and my uncle had five child already and I was kind of a burden to them.

SIGRIST: When you were in the orphanage in Syria, what did you know about America? Did you know anything about America?

BOYAJIAN: No, no. I didn't know. My mother used to get a letter from her brother now and then, and that's about all. I didn't know anything about America.

SIGRIST: So, let's see.

BOYAJIAN: I just, you know, I was told that I have uncle in America and I have a cousin in America. That's about all.

SIGRIST: You knew it couldn't be any worse than what you . . .

BOYAJIAN: No, no.

SIGRIST: Than what you were living, so. Well, tell me a little bit about the process of getting you out of the orphanage and onto the boat. How did that all happen?

BOYAJIAN: Before that let me tell you that they were so kind to me that the lady, when they came to pick me up she gave me all my clothes and she gave me spending money. Not much, of course, but money. At that time

the guy had gone to Russia. That's where they came from. He was, you know, Caucasian. He had gone to Russia for vacation to see his people. He said, "I can't do nothing." He said, "You know, I'm a woman."

If he was there he wouldn't, they wouldn't let you. He wouldn't let you go, because he was a powerful man there. But he says, "When you go," she says, "you try to run away and come back." I really was going to run back. She gave me money, she gave all my clothes. And even the guy that took us, he said, "Don't try to run." Because a lot of people used to run away, you know, they didn't want to go. They don't know where they're going to go. So this guy with the two cars, each time, about fifteen girls, they used to collect them. Every two weeks they used to send to Halab. So this guy said, "Don't try to run away, please. Let me give to them and get my money. I'll tell you how to run away. You take the sword, you come and stay. After two weeks I'll be back." Well, I was going to run away, but I didn't. And they had guards, anyway, at the door.

SIGRIST: So you couldn't go anywhere.

BOYAJIAN: You couldn't go out. And we went every week, we

went. We went to Turkish baths. We used to be on line and, you know, we had guards there.

SIGRIST: Tell me how it was that you got to the port that you left from. Where did you leave from?

BOYAJIAN: I left from Halab.

SIGRIST: But where'd you get the boat?

BOYAJIAN: The boat I got from Izmir.

SIGRIST: And how did you get from Halab to . . .

BOYAJIAN: I went to, from Izmir I went to, from Halab I went to Izmir. From Izmir I went to Pira. From Pira I went to Patras. It just happened that day the boat we were going to take had just left. We had to wait till that boat came back. So we were forty-five, forty or forty-five days in Patras. That's Greek.

SIGRIST: Right. So how are you, how are you going to all these places? Are you going by train, or how are you getting to all these towns?

BOYAJIAN: No. From Halab to Beirut we came with train. From Beirut we took the boat all different places.

SIGRIST: I see. So you finally ended up in Patras.

BOYAJIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And you had to stay for a long time.

BOYAJIAN: About, yeah. Until it came back.

SIGRIST: Who is with you?

BOYAJIAN: My sisters, my niece, me.

SIGRIST: And any other people from the orphanage, or  
just . . .

BOYAJIAN: Well, there was a lot of Armenians there, but from us  
it was just, you know, different times people find  
their relatives and they ask for it. So it just  
happened that my uncle sent for us and we came.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the boat? Do you remember?

BOYAJIAN: Cunard Line.

SIGRIST: It was a Cunard Line ship. But do you remember the  
specific name of the boat?

BOYAJIAN: No.

SIGRIST: Just that it was a Cunard Line.

BOYAJIAN: Cunard Line.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about what it was like to be on a boat. Was that . . .

BOYAJIAN: It wasn't pleasant, but I always had a tragic life, so . . .

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me where you slept in the boat?

BOYAJIAN: It was bunk. There was no, you know, bunk.

SIGRIST: Were you in a cabin, or were you in one big room?

BOYAJIAN: One big. It's a big, you know, the boat. They just had bunks all over. You could see. There's nothing to hide, everything was. ( they laugh )

SIGRIST: Did you get seasick?

BOYAJIAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Oh. Was that the first time you'd ever been seasick?

BOYAJIAN: Well, is that the first time I was on the boat.

SIGRIST: Oh, yeah. Do you remember, was there a storm or anything?

BOYAJIAN: Oh, yeah, a very bad storm. Pira was a very bad storm. We used to run and, ooh. Terrible.

SIGRIST: Do you remember being up on deck at all on the boat?

BOYAJIAN: Well, I used to go on the deck because I used to run all the time, so I used to go up there.

SIGRIST: It's the best place to do that.

BOYAJIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How long did the boat take?

BOYAJIAN: Oh, it took three weeks.

SIGRIST: Oh, on time. And do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when you came into New York Harbor?

BOYAJIAN: When I came to New York Harbor, the lights excite me. I don't know if I saw the Statue of Liberty, but it was evening when we came and all the lights were burning, like Coney Island. You know, it was beautiful.

SIGRIST: Yeah, because you'd never probably seen anything like that before.

BOYAJIAN: Yeah, it was beautiful.

SIGRIST: Tell me what happened at Ellis Island.

BOYAJIAN: We came to Ellis Island. My aunt's, my aunt's son, he was, he was army in America, World War, first army. He came to his name. So, he came to pick us up, but he was late. He wasn't late. They just took, you know, they just took out so many people, and the time came for close-up, five o'clock. So they told him, "Come tomorrow." You know, to my brother, my uncle's son. But he brought us, like, sister and brother. And he went, of course, to come the following day. The following, that night we were in Ellis Island all, the whole, I mean, other ships, too, not just us. The whole big place. There was also bunk that wasn't room. It was all bunks, big one. So that night, that's what I was told, a five years old kid died. So the next day the whole place they sent to quarantine. And, of course, he came and he couldn't take us out. After two or three weeks later they must have let them know, you know. They took us to Ellis Island. He came and he took us up.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you were thinking at that time?  
I mean, this is a lot for a fifteen-year-old girl to

understand.

BOYAJIAN: I wasn't thinking anything because I didn't have any, always tragic, tragic, you know. From orphan to . . .

SIGRIST: It's just one more disappointment, I guess. Tell me a little bit about what you remember about staying on Ellis Island. You said you remember the big room with the bunks.

BOYAJIAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Did they feed you while you were there?

BOYAJIAN: Yeah. We take, that night they gave us that, because it was late. We had to wait till the next day, so they gave us a sandwich and coffee and fruit. And that's what we had the next day.

SIGRIST: I see. And you stayed at this other island which I'm assuming was probably Hoffman Island, which was a quarantine area.

BOYAJIAN: I don't know where.

SIGRIST: You were there for three weeks, you said.

BOYAJIAN: About two or three weeks, I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me, when you were finally released from the quarantine at Hoffman Island, can you tell me about meeting your cousin or whoever this person is and going home?

BOYAJIAN: Yeah. Well, actually they don't let us because we were coming, my sister, me and my niece. So this guy that he sent affidavit, affidavit, they told him that, "You cannot take three of them, because these two are under age. Okay, you could take the big one. The other one you can't take." So he said, "I worked for the United States. I was in the army." You know.

SIGRIST: That's right. They wouldn't release you unless he was a single man, right?

BOYAJIAN: They wouldn't release me. So he said, he said he's going to take to his sister, you know. He had a sister over here. So she said, "I'll take care of them."

SIGRIST: So they released you.

BOYAJIAN: They released us.

SIGRIST: Tell me about the first night you spent in America,  
in New York.

BOYAJIAN: To me everything happened so fast that I don't know.

SIGRIST: What was, did you see anything that you had never  
seen before?

BOYAJIAN: Yeah. While we took the elevated, which I never had  
seen. You know, when we came out from Ellis Island  
we took the elevated to come, to come up to where  
they lived. Third Avenue Elevated. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Was that scary to go on that, or . . .

BOYAJIAN: Well, I'm not the scary type.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about what it was like getting  
adjusted to America. Let's start with how did you  
learn English?

BOYAJIAN: From my uncle and, you know, her children.

SIGRIST: Had he been in America a long time?

BOYAJIAN: I don't know how long, but he was before us, yeah.  
Quite a while before us.

SIGRIST: Did you ever take night school classes, or . . .

BOYAJIAN: Yes, I did.

SIGRIST: Can you describe a little bit to me what that was like?

BOYAJIAN: I don't know. Just like any other school, I guess.

SIGRIST: Did you enjoy it?

BOYAJIAN: Well, it's not the enjoying. You have to learn.

SIGRIST: Yes. Was it hard for you to learn English?

BOYAJIAN: Yeah, it was.

SIGRIST: Is there a story . . .

BOYAJIAN: You know, with me I catch very quick, but I forget very quick. When I came to America I knew Arabic. I had forgotten my Armenian language. I didn't know nothing. In fact, I even was punished in the orphanage when I was, it happened that, I don't know, I sang, I sang a Turkish song, so they punished me for singing. And that, I mean, I'd forgotten my Armenian and I learned Turkish. I learned this Caucasian language, which is very hard. I used to

speak very fluently, Turkish and Caucasian. And I had forgotten my Armenian. But now I forgot them and I learned Armenian and America, and, of course, Turkish I don't forget because sometimes they talk, but Caucasian they never talk.

SIGRIST: And by the time you go to America learning English was probably difficult for you.

BOYAJIAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember ever making a mistake trying to speak English, or an incident that sticks out in your mind where something happened, you didn't pronounce a word correctly, or . . .

BOYAJIAN: Hell, I don't know. It happened so many times. Which one shall I tell you? ( they laugh )

SIGRIST: What job did your uncle have?

BOYAJIAN: He was a shoemaker, shoemaker.

SIGRIST: And did he insist that you begin school when you got here?

BOYAJIAN: Yes. Well, I had to go to school because they said they would not let us, because we were underage. We

had to go to school, and they had to support us. And he said, "She will." And her sister said, "She will." So . . .

SIGRIST: What grade did they put you in when you got here?

BOYAJIAN: ( she laughs ) I don't remember that.

SIGRIST: Were you with kids that were younger than you?

BOYAJIAN: No, night school.

SIGRIST: Oh, you were put right into night school. Oh. How long did you go to night school?

BOYAJIAN: Not much, not much.

SIGRIST: Did you get a job?

BOYAJIAN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: What was your first job?

BOYAJIAN: Crochet beading. Crochet beading.

SIGRIST: Crochet beading, you're saying.

BOYAJIAN: My uncle's son had the place where they make dress, you know, crochet, and then after crochet they make evening dresses. So he had that and he took me

there. I learned, and that I had to work because he had to, he had five children, and he was supporting all of them.

SIGRIST: Can you explain to me exactly the kind of work that you did?

BOYAJIAN: Yes. With the frame, we put on the frame. The design is on the garment, you know, designer. They make designs that they stamp. Then we frame on the frame, and we work, without looking. You have to use your feeling. The beads or spangle. From the top you go and you pick up. Adn the right thing, the right is on the bottom, crochet beading.

SIGRIST: Well, of course, in the 1920's the women had beautiful beaded evening gowns.

BOYAJIAN: Yeah. Even now, actors, they have evening dresses. They have spangles. These singers, they all have jackets and everything. That's all spangles.

SIGRIST: Now, were there lots of other immigrant people working in this industry?

BOYAJIAN: Yes. At that time it was very busy.

SIGRIST: Where in New York did you do this?

BOYAJIAN: 24th Street. And we used to live 184th Street, Third Avenue.

SIGRIST: So you had a ways to travel to go to work.

BOYAJIAN: They used to take a train every morning.

SIGRIST: How long did you do that beading work?

BOYAJIAN: Until I got married.

SIGRIST: Which was in what year?

BOYAJIAN: 1923.

SIGRIST: And what was your husband's name?

BOYAJIAN: Habog. H-A-B-O-G. ( Mr. Sigrist laughs ) My husband's name was the same as my father's name.

SIGRIST: I see. And when did your husband, did your husband come to this country?

BOYAJIAN: Well, he had, he went to, uh, Istanbul, you know, to go to, to go to college. And they grabbed him, they put him in the, in the ( she speaks in Armenian ).

OFLAZIAN: ( student intern Grace Oflazian is also present )

Prison.

BOYAJIAN: In the jail. They put him in jail. And my husband's family, my husband's family was five brothers. They each had, they had a business in France. They had business in Istanbul, you know, they had it all over.

So when he was in the jail he wrote down a note saying, "Please take this note to a certain man." And he just threw it down and he said, he put, he gave, you know, a few cents, whatever. "Please take this note to that guy." He wrote the name. And the guy came and took him out. This is Turkish guy, you know. It's their partner, his uncle's partner. He took out and he said, "You go from here. Habog, you go. My son, go from here. Don't stay here." So he went to the boat. At that time I guess it wasn't so strict, while they were taking bundles, you know. This was a ship where they take . . .

SIGRIST: A cargo ship?

BOYAJIAN: So he grabbed the thing and once you go in the boat, I mean, they can't do anything at that time. That's what I was told.

SIGRIST: Like a stowaway.

BOYAJIAN: Yeah. So that's how he came. He went to Istanbul to go to college, and that's what happened. So the guy came and said, "You go from here. Don't stay here."

SIGRIST: So he stowed away on a boat.

BOYAJIAN: There were some good Turkish people, too.

SIGRIST: What year did your husband come to this country, do you know?

BOYAJIAN: He came in 1912.

SIGRIST: Oh. So fairly early on. Do you have any children?

BOYAJIAN: I have one daughter. I have three granddaughters, two granddaughters, one grandson. I have seven great-grandchildren. My family is very nice, wonderful people. I am here, they didn't want me to come here, but I told them, "I want to go there. I want to be with my age people." I don't want to be a burden to them after my husband died. My husband died 1965.

SIGRIST: What did he die of?

BOYAJIAN: Heart condition. Well, he was, you know, he wasn't young.

SIGRIST: Was he older than you are?

BOYAJIAN: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, let me ask you one final question. Are you glad you came to this country?

BOYAJIAN: Yes, I am, of course. I have very nice family. My daughter is very nice to me. My grandchildren are very nice to me. I have very wonderful family, but they didn't want me to come here. They wanted me to go in their house or go with my daughter. I said, "You have your life to live. I don't want to be a burden." You know, young people, they want to go someplace, they feel maybe they have to take you. I said, "No, I go there. I have very nice people." In fact, my daughter comes every week. She was here this morning. Sometimes she comes twice a week. And I am a member in this house ever since started, forty-five years. So is my daughter, she's also a volunteer worker. She works on the computer.

SIGRIST: Well, Mrs. Boyajian, I want to thank you very much

for giving us your time and letting us ask you questions about coming over to America. I appreciate it.

BOYAJIAN: Thank you very much.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Arousiag . . .

BOYAJIAN: Arousiag Boyajian.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

BOYAJIAN: I have very nice family.

SIGRIST: Say it with your maiden name in the middle. Say your whole name, your first name, your maiden name and your married name.

BOYAJIAN: Arousiag Dadian Boyajian.

SIGRIST: And this is Paul Sigrist signing off for the National Park Service on April 23, 1993.