

EI-304/ZOTIAN

EI-304

YERCHANIG APRAHAMIAN ZOTIAN

BIRTHDATE: SEPTEMBER 12, 1909

INTERVIEW DATE: 4/27/1993

RUNNING TIME: 40:00

INTERVIEWER: GRACE OFLAZIAN

RECORDING ENGINEER: KEVIN DALEY

INTERVIEW LOCATION: ELLIS ISLAND RECORDING STUDIO

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: JOHN MURIELLO, 9/1995

TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

TURKEY VIA EGYPT (ARMENIAN), 1926

AGE 17

SHIP NAME NOT RECALLED

OFLAZIAN: Good afternoon. This is Grace Oflazian for the National Park Service. I am here today, April 28, 1993, on a Tuesday afternoon at Ellis Island recording studio. I am here with Mrs. Yerchanig Zotian, who is an Armenian, was born in Aziziyi [PH], Turkey. She came to America in 1926 when she was seventeen years old. Good afternoon, Mrs. Zotian. Would you like to give me the date of birth, please?

ZOTIAN: 19, 1909. (there is a pause)

OFLAZIAN: Do you remember the month you were born in?

ZOTIAN: September, September 12? September 12.

OFLAZIAN: How many people you were at home?

ZOTIAN: That time?

OFLAZIAN: That time, yes.

ZOTIAN: My father, my mother and I had baby brother.

OFLAZIAN: What was his name?

ZOTIAN: Bagdasar.

OFLAZIAN: Can you spell Bagdasar?

ZOTIAN: B-A-G-D-A-S-A-R. Aprahamian. I, I said Aprahamian.

OFLAZIAN: Your brother's name was Bagdasar Aprahamian.

ZOTIAN: Yes.

OFLAZIAN: What was your mother's name?

ZOTIAN: Haigouhie.

OFLAZIAN: Can you spell Haigouhie?

ZOTIAN: H-A-I-G-O-U-H-I-E.

OFLAZIAN: What was her maiden name?

ZOTIAN: That's it.

OFLAZIAN: Do you remember her maiden name?

ZOTIAN: That's what it was.

OFLAZIAN: Before she got married?

ZOTIAN: Haigouhie.

OFLAZIAN: From which family?

ZOTIAN: She was, she was the daughter of priest. (Armenian)

OFLAZIAN: So, Derparserghian [PH].

ZOTIAN: (Armenian).

OFLAZIAN: Okay. What was your father's name?

ZOTIAN: Apraham Aprahamian.

OFLAZIAN: Can you spell it?

ZOTIAN: A-P-A-R-H-A-M. Apraham. And Aprahamian is last name.

OFLAZIAN: What was his occupation?

ZOTIAN: That, I was too small. I don't remember exactly. He had a store. But I don't know what he and selling.

OFLAZIAN: How old you were that time?

ZOTIAN: Oh, about three or four years, I don't know.

OFLAZIAN: Do you remember playing with your brother?

ZOTIAN: No. He was a baby, and I, we used to...

OFLAZIAN: Do you remember your town, Aziziyi?

ZOTIAN: Aziziyi.

OFLAZIAN: Do you remember?

ZOTIAN: Yeah.

OFLAZIAN: Can you talk about it for me?

ZOTIAN: We had a home there. Aziziyi. And my uncle, my father's brother was older. And he had to build a big house there. It was a big place, and we had our house next to them. It was beautiful. There was garden, big garden, and there was river running, small river. We had a very nice time. My uncle and his wife and children. So we used to lock the door. Nobody could get in. Outside was a big, big street, and big river.

OFLAZIAN: Do you remember what kind of trees you had in the garden?

ZOTIAN: Pardon?

OFLAZIAN: Do you remember what kind of trees you had in the garden?

ZOTIAN: Oh. Apple trees and different fruits, and...

OFLAZIAN: Like what?

ZOTIAN: I don't exactly remember. I was too small to walk around the garden, but I remember apple trees near. Big, a lot of trees.

OFLAZIAN: Have you ever climbed any tree?

ZOTIAN: No. Not me. I was too small.

OFLAZIAN: Do you remember going to church?

ZOTIAN: Maybe we did, but I don't, I don't remember too well. We used to go, my mother was a priest daughter. Everything was fine.

OFLAZIAN: Did you go to school?

ZOTIAN: Over there? No. No. I was too small to go to school, and, later the things happened, you know.

OFLAZIAN: Happened like what?

ZOTIAN: (she sighs) They killed our parents and took everything away.

OFLAZIAN: Who killed your parents?

ZOTIAN: (she coughs) Turks. Turks all of a sudden came and took, took us out of our house, and put the ladies and children in the church, and took the men to prison. So we're there, and I, I used to be scared. Over there the Turks used to come and

walk around all the time. And I used to hide under my mother's skirt. I was scared. They took some of the children and threw them in the rivers.

OFLAZIAN: Do you remember which river was that?

ZOTIAN: I can't remember. Big, big river. They were taking us, later on they were taking us to a village, separately, you know. Few people here and there. They used to take us to the village, and I could see the big river and the children in it. I know from that that they throw the children in the river.

OFLAZIAN: Where was your brother that time?

ZOTIAN: My brother was with us. Baby, baby, small. (she clears her throat)

OFLAZIAN: And your father?

ZOTIAN: They took him to prison and we didn't see him anymore. (she clears her throat)

OFLAZIAN: So since then you did not see him?

ZOTIAN: No.

OFLAZIAN: And then where did you go?

ZOTIAN: I can't remember the name of the, of the village. They took, they took us and put in a, in a village where the Turks are, you know, all the Turks are there. We stayed there I don't know how long. Not much, not much. (she pauses) And then here and there they changed our place, and I don't know exactly. Later on, I don't know how long, somehow we came to, to our town, as I remember, if I'm not wrong. So here and there my, my brother died. I don't know what it was. We stayed here and there for a long time, I don't remember. It was terrible. Hungry and Turks were very bad, mean. My uncle's wife was with us, but I don't know where she went later, and her daughters. (she pauses) I can't remember much. And later on, we were in a house with my, my aunt and others. Later on somehow they, my mother died.

OFLAZIAN: Do you remember what was her reason of her death?

ZOTIAN: I don't know. We were walking and looking for things and places, and there was no water, no, no bread, nothing.

OFLAZIAN: Do you remember where you were walking?

ZOTIAN: It was changed a lot of times, to come to the villages and all that. I used to hide all the time under my mother's skirt.

OFLAZIAN: After your mother died, where did you go?

ZOTIAN: I was with my aunt, there with my aunt.

OFLAZIAN: Where did she take you?

ZOTIAN: I don't know. I don't remember many things, but later on my uncle from Egypt and his son had come to, to this little country, I don't which country it was in Turkey. So, his daughter came and took me, and he took me to Egypt to his parents.

OFLAZIAN: How old you were that time?

ZOTIAN: I was young. Really young. I don't remember.

OFLAZIAN: Around?

ZOTIAN: Around four, five, four years, but I don't know. So he took me to his parents.

OFLAZIAN: How, how did you travel to Egypt? Do you remember that?

ZOTIAN: In the, in the boat. Travelling boat. There were some young children, daughters, and I think their mother or what, they had somebody that. Anyway I was next to them, they took care of me. And my cousin, I think he came with me, I don't exactly remember. He took me to his parents. I stayed there a few years, I grew up, and from there I had my old aunt, my father's wife and his daughters. Somehow, I don't know, they had come to America. So from there my aunt had another daughter in Cairo, Egypt. So they took me from my aunt's house to her house in Cairo. This was Alexandria. In Cairo I went. They sent me to Cairo with my cousin, I was with my cousin. And from here, my, my aunt knew, knew families and boys, neighbor, nice boy. They sent him to Egypt to get me. Somehow he came over and I didn't know what to say. I couldn't say anything. I was going, he was going to take me to (she pauses), he, we got married. And he took me to America.

OFLAZIAN: When you were in Alexandria, in Egypt, Alexandria, Egypt, did you go to school over there?

ZOTIAN: Very little. Very little. We saw Armenian school there. I went there. I learned a little Armenian.

OFLAZIAN: Do you remember the name of the school?

ZOTIAN: No.

OFLAZIAN: Do you remember going to church in Alexandria?

ZOTIAN: I can't remember. So from there my husband came. We married and came to America.

OFLAZIAN: So you married in Alexandria.

ZOTIAN: Hm-hmm.

OFLAZIAN: And you came with your husband to America?

ZOTIAN: Yes.

OFLAZIAN: How did you come to America?

ZOTIAN: In a boat. (she coughs)

OFLAZIAN: From, do you remember the port, the harbor you left Alexandria?

ZOTIAN: I can't remember the thing. From there we came here, and they

were trying to examine me. Who I was, where I was. I came from Egypt. And...

OFLAZIAN: Who tried to examine you?

ZOTIAN: (unintelligible) Ellis Island. (she clears her throat)

OFLAZIAN: So you did come to Ellis Island?

ZOTIAN: Yes.

OFLAZIAN: Was it the same boat you came from Alexandria? You said you took, you came by boat, right?

ZOTIAN: Yeah.

OFLAZIAN: Okay. Was it the same boat brought you to Ellis Island?

ZOTIAN: I suppose it was, I don't know. So they left me in, in Ellis Island. My husband (she clears her throat) went home, but he left me here because they wanted to examine me. They want to keep me here. I stayed one night. They gave me a nice room. And then the next day when I got out, walking wherever we have to walk, there was a man there examining. Questioning. He was questioning me in Egypt, Egyptian language. I knew a

little English. I answered him in English.

OFLAZIAN: Oh, that's great.

ZOTIAN: In, in English. The names and all that. And everything, whatever he did ask me. And when I was, it was finished I, I didn't go to bed there anymore. One night, and my husband came and took me home.

OFLAZIAN: Do you remember how old you were that time?

ZOTIAN: About sixteen or something like that.

OFLAZIAN: So, when you slept in Ellis Island, did you eat anything?

ZOTIAN: I don't remember anything. I was awake, but they knocked at my door and wake me up. And I dressed and go out, and then we walked to that place where the man questioned. And then over there someplace my husband came and took me home.

OFLAZIAN: Do you remember going through medical examination in Ellis Island?

ZOTIAN: No. No.

OFLAZIAN: Do you remember if Ellis Island was crowded that time?

ZOTIAN: I didn't see too many people. Not too many people.

OFLAZIAN: Can you describe me that room that you slept in it, in, that night?

ZOTIAN: It was a small room, but it was nice. There was a bed. Comfortable. (she clears her throat) Put me, put me in there that, for one night.

OFLAZIAN: Was it clean?

ZOTIAN: Yes. Yes, it was all right. It was like near the office or what.

OFLAZIAN: Did you take shower?

ZOTIAN: No. Nothing like that.

OFLAZIAN: So the following morning your husband came to take you.

ZOTIAN: Yeah.

OFLAZIAN: So, how did you go? Where did you go?

ZOTIAN:           Where...

OFLAZIAN:         Where did you go?

ZOTIAN:           When?

OFLAZIAN:         When your husband came to Ellis Island to take you.

ZOTIAN:           Yeah.

OFLAZIAN:         So, where did you go together?

ZOTIAN:           Oh, he took me to his home with his parents. With his  
                    parents. And he had two other brothers. They were married.  
                    They had wives, too. They were all in one family.

OFLAZIAN:         So, when you left Ellis Island with your husband to go to his  
                    parent's room, right?

ZOTIAN:           Yeah.

OFLAZIAN:         How did you travel to his parents room?

ZOTIAN:           My husband took me. I don't remember. He took a taxi or

what. That's what it was.

OFLAZIAN: You remember. Do you remember anything seeing in New York that you never seen before?

ZOTIAN: We used to live in Long Island. I didn't come to New York too often.

OFLAZIAN: No. I meant when you left Ellis Island with your husband to go to his parent's room. I mean to his parent's house, right? So, what did you see in New York that you never seen before? (there is a pause)

ZOTIAN: Everything was all right. Everything looked nice, streets and all that. It wasn't like Egypt. Good town.

OFLAZIAN: How was Egypt?

ZOTIAN: All right, but too many Egyptians. (she laughs)

OFLAZIAN: Do you remember them?

ZOTIAN: I remember the way they are.

OFLAZIAN: When you said they are not like them, what you meant with

that? Why, what you meant with they were different than Egyptians?

ZOTIAN: They're, they're in Egypt. They're Egyptians. Yeah.

OFLAZIAN: How were the Egyptians were?

ZOTIAN: Not too bad. Not too bad. They were all right.

OFLAZIAN: What was your expectations from America?

ZOTIAN: I didn't expect anything. I was too young to expect anything, any place. I lost everything in losing my parents. All that, whatever.

OFLAZIAN: So, after you went with your husband to his parent's home, did you live with them?

ZOTIAN: Yes.

OFLAZIAN: For how long?

ZOTIAN: For a long time. We didn't change.

OFLAZIAN: Do you remember the house you lived with these parents?

ZOTIAN: It was an apartment.

OFLAZIAN: How many bedrooms? Can you describe it for me?

ZOTIAN: Three or four bedrooms, but they were small, and not too many people have. They used to make beds in living rooms, and all that, and they go to sleep. They, they gave us a small room.  
Was all right.

OFLAZIAN: Were you disturbed with their presence, or did you felt any, annoyed by them, or...

ZOTIAN: No. No. I lost my parents and they were my parents now. I respected them.

OFLAZIAN: Tell me...

ZOTIAN: He was a nice man. When he came, when, when they took me, the house, he came out and cut the chicken's head right on to, outside. And they loved me. They kissed me. And they went up, we went up.

OFLAZIAN: So he welcomed you...

ZOTIAN: Yeah. Yeah.

OFLAZIAN: By slaughtering a chicken in front of your face.

ZOTIAN: Yeah.

OFLAZIAN: Was it an Armenian tradition or...

ZOTIAN: I suppose so. I don't know. (she laughs) They kissed me and pressed me.

OFLAZIAN: So tell me, how did you learn English.

ZOTIAN: I went to school over there in Egypt. They used to English, too. So when I came here I went to night schools. They have places to teach chil, people. I learned there. I must learn more. (she laughs)

OFLAZIAN: So you said you went to school at night. So what did you do during day time?

ZOTIAN: Take care of my house.

OFLAZIAN: Like what? What did you do?

ZOTIAN:           Cleaning or doing anything. You know. Whatever they need, they, I did that.

OFLAZIAN:         Have you ever tried to cook during that time?

ZOTIAN:           Cook?

OFLAZIAN:         Cook, yes.

ZOTIAN:           I didn't know how to cook.

OFLAZIAN:         And how did you learn then how to cook?

ZOTIAN:           Oh, later on I learned. They used to have books, you know. I used to learn from the books. And...

OFLAZIAN:         Were...

ZOTIAN:           ...and later on we had a house. I used to cook so much, and learn so much. And my husband used to call people, guests. I used to make...

OFLAZIAN:         That's nice.

ZOTIAN:           ...tables, and cooking. Everything. I...

OFLAZIAN: Do you remember what kind of food you cooked?

ZOTIAN: (she sighs) All kinds.

OFLAZIAN: Like what?

ZOTIAN: Chicken, shish kebab, pilaf, vegetable, all different kinds.  
I said (she pauses), was all right, everything all right that  
time. My, my husband died I felt very bad.

OFLAZIAN: We are going to pause for a few moments while Mr. Kevin, the  
recording engineer, flips the tape.

**END OF SIDE ONE**

**BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO**

OFLAZIAN: This is Grace Oflazian. We are resuming now the interview of  
Side B with Mrs. Zotian. Mrs. Zotian, you told us that your  
husband died. I'm sorry for that. Can you tell me what was  
the reason of his death?

ZOTIAN: He had cancer.

OFLAZIAN: How long did he suffer?

ZOTIAN: Pardon?

OFLAZIAN: How long did he suffer?

ZOTIAN: Few years. Not too long. He passed away ten years ago.

OFLAZIAN: And what was his occupation?

ZOTIAN: Insurance and things. He had an office, you know. He used to write things.

OFLAZIAN: Have you ever tried to work in America?

ZOTIAN: No. Outside, no.

OFLAZIAN: Not at all? So, did you continue your education?

ZOTIAN: I used to go where the school was in the morning and come back.

OFLAZIAN: Did you graduated?

ZOTIAN: No.

OFLAZIAN: And how many children do you have?

ZOTIAN: One.

OFLAZIAN: Only one? And boy or girl?

ZOTIAN: Boy. He's here with me.

OFLAZIAN: What is his name?

ZOTIAN: Armand.

OFLAZIAN: Can you spell Armand?

ZOTIAN: A-R-M-A-N. Let me write it down.

OFLAZIAN: Sure. Here. Mrs. Zotian is going to write it, so she can spell it in a correct way, her son's name, Armand. Can you spell it now?

ZOTIAN: A-R-M-A-N-D.

OFLAZIAN: That's good.

ZOTIAN: Armand Zotian.

OFLAZIAN: Could you tell me how is the religious life in America?

ZOTIAN: It's all right. Nothing, nothing wrong. We have churches.  
I, I used to go to one of the churches and sing in the choir.

OFLAZIAN: Which church is that? Do you remember the name?

ZOTIAN: Saint, Saint Gregor the Savorich Yegeritzi [PH].

OFLAZIAN: Oh.

ZOTIAN: So I used to sing there. But later I fell down and something  
happened, the operation, me, I couldn't sing anymore. I felt  
very bad. They used to love my singing.

OFLAZIAN: So do you still have good voice? Pretty voice?

ZOTIAN: Not so much. I don't sing because I don't sing anymore. Not  
in my condition. I felt very bad.

OFLAZIAN: Do you play also any musical instruments?

ZOTIAN: I used to play the piano with my music, my Diuseltdt [PH] used to help me out.

OFLAZIAN: Do you still exercise?

ZOTIAN: No more. Everything is gone.

OFLAZIAN: So what kind of operation they operated on you?

ZOTIAN: They opened my, I don't what they did to me. I never had, I never thought over anything like that. They operated me so badly I couldn't walk, I couldn't, and now it's, my stomach is so big because of that. They ruined me.

OFLAZIAN: Why they operated on you? What was wrong?

ZOTIAN: I don't know. I didn't think it was so bad. There was nothing that bad. I had pain but I could do something for it.  
I didn't need operation, but those, you know, some doctors, they don't care.

OFLAZIAN: Do you remember which hospital was that?

ZOTIAN: I don't know. I think it was New York hospital.

OFLAZIAN: So, tell me, Mrs. Zotian, are you happy that you are in America?

ZOTIAN: (she laughs) Yes.

OFLAZIAN: Have you ever thought to go back to your homeland to see your home?

ZOTIAN: No. My home. Turks took our home. We can't see them anymore in, in Turkey.

OFLAZIAN: Have you ever tried to go to Egypt?

ZOTIAN: After I came?

OFLAZIAN: Yes.

ZOTIAN: No.

OFLAZIAN: So, tell me, how do you, how do you describe your life in America?

ZOTIAN: It's all right. (she laughs) Very nice. Nice country. Nice people. God bless them all.

OFLAZIAN: Have you ever face any misunderstand or conflicts with American people?

ZOTIAN: No. I don't argue with anybody or anything.

OFLAZIAN: What about your neighbors? Do you have good neighbors...

ZOTIAN: Yes.

OFLAZIAN: Around you?

ZOTIAN: Yeah.

OFLAZIAN: Do you communicate with them?

ZOTIAN: They're all right. We see them. Nothing.

OFLAZIAN: Do you go to their houses? Do they come to you?

ZOTIAN: No. No. Just good neighbors. That's all.

OFLAZIAN: The house you are living in, can you describe it for me?

ZOTIAN: It's a private house, but the walls are next to the other house, you know. We have garden in the back. Nice.

OFLAZIAN: Can you describe the garden for me?

ZOTIAN: Small garden. There is green grass, a small tree like thing there.

OFLAZIAN: Do you have any fruit tree in this garden?

ZOTIAN: No. No.

OFLAZIAN: Do you flowers planted?

ZOTIAN: Flowers. We had flowers, but now I can't, you know, I have been sick for a while. I can't do much about it.

OFLAZIAN: But do you used to take care of it, right?

ZOTIAN: Yeah.

OFLAZIAN: Do you like your neighborhood living in?

ZOTIAN: Yes. They're nice. They're nice.

OFLAZIAN: Okay, Mrs. Zotian. Thank you for sharing your nice life story.

ZOTIAN:           You're welcome.

OFLAZIAN:        So, this is Grace Oflazian signing off with Mrs. Zotian for  
the National Park Service.