

EI-326

ERVANTHOUHI GARABIDIAN ASSADOURIAN

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LEVINE: Today is May 26, 1993, and I am here in the Ellis Island Oral History Studio with Ervanthouhi Assadourian, who came from Turkey in 1921 when she was fourteen years old.

ASSADOURIAN: That's right.

LEVINE: Well, I'm very happy to be here with you. I look forward to hearing your story. Whatever you remember will be wonderful.

ASSADOURIAN: I tell you, when I came United States and it was dream country, we have the respect, you know. And after I move out from the Ellis Island after forty days and I went in Massachusetts for my father, and I lost my mother, my sisters, they hang my brother, he was graduating the college, and I lost my, my grandpa had, my uncle has the

seven son, two daughters. They're all killed. And my grandfather's brother has the eight son, one daughter.

LEVINE: When were they killed?

ASSADOURIAN: In 1915. And I always dreamed that my childhood, we are very religious people, educated people. We have culture and we accept the Christian as women. And I don't know what to say.

LEVINE: Well, let me . . .

ASSADOURIAN: I had a hard time. And sometimes I get nervous, and . . .

LEVINE: Mrs. Assadourian, why don't I ask you some questions about your early life.

ASSADOURIAN: Do that, yeah.

LEVINE: And then we'll go from there.

ASSADOURIAN: Okay.

LEVINE: Where were you born?

ASSADOURIAN: Bunyan, Kayseria.

LEVINE: And that is in Turkey.

ASSADOURIAN: In Turkey.

LEVINE: And Bunyan is a small city.

ASSADOURIAN: A village.

LEVINE: A small village. Now, what is your birth date?

ASSADOURIAN: 1906, January 6.

LEVINE: Did you live in Bunyan the entire time before you left?

ASSADOURIAN: The entire time, yeah.

LEVINE: For the United States.

ASSADOURIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Describe Bunyan. What was that small village or city like?

ASSADOURIAN: It's a beautiful village. They call, a small Switzerland, you know. And it was dream country. Mostly Greeks and Armenians. We have about three hundred families. And mostly Barbar Turk, scary. And we couldn't go out at night, and those things very miserable thing for us.

LEVINE: What would the Turks do?

ASSADOURIAN: Turks, a Turk is a Turk. You know, they call the Christian people a pig. The neighbors say the Armenians, pigs, they call them, always.

LEVINE: Were they hurt, the Armenians?

ASSADOURIAN: Yeah. But, say, and some, they call a jackass, though jackass is mixed with different nationality. That was very nice for, but all the womens were beautiful, the Turkish womens, and Turk get married with them, and sometimes they help for the Christian people, those womens.

LEVINE: These were women who are a mixture of . . .

ASSADOURIAN: We not mixture with them.

LEVINE: No.

ASSADOURIAN: No. We have nothing to do. In 1915 massacre start, and they take my uncles, all my family. They came to home to pick up everything. They don't left anything. And I have, we have buffalo, water buffalo. And the Georgians gave my brother for a horse, gift. And they take from government, all the, somebody came and picked me up and they keep all the girls and womens some rooms. And I was walking in the garden there. Our horse, my neighbor can't go near my brother's horse. Those horse came from garden, he licked me. He started tear in his eyes, and I start to cry, too. Even the wild buffalo came near to me. The animal have the feeling, too. And those things, and I lost my sisters,

Miriam and, and Elizabeth, and my brothers, my aunts.

LEVINE: Were they taken away?

ASSADOURIAN: Yeah, and we lost them. We lost them all.

LEVINE: Were you taken away also?

ASSADOURIAN: No. Some politician men know my grandfather. They take me them home. And they keep me. But after Mrs. Jane Wingate, American University, and my mother's friend, and they take them and the government, the Turkish government came, and Mrs. Jane Wingate, she was the principal of the American schools. Her husband was a doctor, and Dorothy was my girlfriend, her daughter. And she lives in Mississippi, and we don't see each other a long time. And anyway, Mrs. Jane Wingate helped me, and she put us some house there and keep me there, and secretly, because Turkish takes all the young girls, they do all kinds of things. I don't have to mention about that. It's very sad. And they had my brothers, and he say after, he is innocent, and they take them down. But they kill my uncle, they hang my uncle, one. He was a principal of the, all over Kayseria, principal in those schools, they hang him.

LEVINE: Right there in the village?

ASSADOURIAN: Kayseria. Not only him. They hang about three or four men. That's what I came today, I have to see that things. Maybe one is my uncle. (she is moved)

LEVINE: I see. So, in other words, many of the people were taken away from the towns.

ASSADOURIAN: Almost that, my village, only left all three or four old ladies. They take them out of a garden, and they kill them there. And I don't know where to go. I lost my grandmother. I was those places, garden, near the river there. And I looked, I saw some dead bodies there. I remind my grandmother there, my mother's mother. I say, "Mom, Mom, Mom." No answer. And I went the other womens, and I know them all. We call "Doo Doo." Doo Doo mean grandmother or aunt, something like that. And I don't know what to do. I am alone there. I take the alfalfas, I make cross, I pray to my grandmother there. I never forget. (she is moved) And I lost my family. And later we went to Turkish orphanage.

LEVINE: When, let me just say, there were about three hundred families that were Armenians?

ASSADOURIAN: All Armenians.

LEVINE: And they were all taken away?

ASSADOURIAN: All taken away, yes.

LEVINE: And you were one of the very few that were saved?

ASSADOURIAN: I lost my small sister and my, Elizabeth. And my uncle's daughter and son, and we have eighty-seven families, my mother's side, my father's side. We all lost, no one left except me.

LEVINE: So tell me what exactly happened. The Turks came at night, did they or . . . ?

ASSADOURIAN: You know, Turks say that war time, 1915, Balkan War. I don't know that time, we don't know. Because in that they don't let them go to school, Armenian school there. The language, they have to keep in Turkish.

LEVINE: Did you go to school?

ASSADOURIAN: Turkish school, see, Turkish writing. They teach you to pray.

LEVINE: So in other words you had to go to a Turkish school, learn Turkish writing.

ASSADOURIAN: Turkish, all writing.

LEVINE: And Turkish religion.

ASSADOURIAN: Turkish religion.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. I see.

ASSADOURIAN: That's what it was.

LEVINE: I see. So did you speak Armenian?

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, of course.

LEVINE: But you learned, you did that at home?

ASSADOURIAN: I learned Armenian from Constantinople. When I came in Constantinople 1917 or 1916 I remember there. And I stay in the Constantinople with my uncle, was an officer in the army, Turkish Army. And he was living in Istanbul, Dardanelle. And I went with him, and I went to school there.

LEVINE: I see. But when you were in Bunyan.

ASSADOURIAN: Bunyan.

LEVINE: Bunyan, you didn't speak Armenian.

ASSADOURIAN: No, no. The Turkish, they don't . . .

LEVINE: Even at home.

ASSADOURIAN: They don't let them that time.

LEVINE: Even at home you didn't.

ASSADOURIAN: No, they don't let them. Only thing, church, praying is in Turkish, writing is in Armenian.

LEVINE: I see. Uh-huh. So, but what was the church that you went to in Bunyan? What church did you go to there?

ASSADOURIAN: You know, they get everything we have in home, our monies and our properties. Everything, they take them. They don't get nothing except our clothing.

LEVINE: So you actually saw, did you see a lot of violence in 1915?

ASSADOURIAN: I saw plenty, I saw plenty.

LEVINE: And what about the Greeks? What was happening to them at that time?

ASSADOURIAN: Greeks help us, and I tell you something. In 1987 I went, I've been seven times to look my roots in Armenia. And I, I've been there. And I like to donate for foundation there, the memory for my family. And it was fifteen, twenty archbishops and reverends. And I was crying that in 1915 massacre, April 24th, one of the reverends told me, he

say, "Lady, I am from Kayseria." I say, "What's your name?" He say, "I don't remember my name." Believe it or not, and, he say, "I went to Greek orphanage in, near the village of the Bunyan." See Ziginderet, Greek orphanage. They take them, four, five, seven boys, Greek people save them, they take them. They were orphanage. And I went to the hotel in Armenia, and I say, "This face I have to know, I have to know." And I had a hundred and one fever that day, I was sick. And I remember that boy. And my grandmother's grandson, and (?), my mother's name is Assoutan. And after that somebody was going to Armenia, and I ask, "Please, go see this reverend and ask for anything he remembers." He don't remember nothing, he don't remember it. And he put his hand to his face, he say he don't remember anything. And I had a picture of our cousins, and exactly same thing, same fingers, same face. You know, some kind of, you have feeling. And once in here I had a guest from Istanbul and somebody was, I was reading the Armenian letter or something, and I find that my cousin there, my uncles and somebody adopted and they raised him.

And I had company from Turkey. They know each other, by talking like that. One day that fellow came and said, "You know, I like you, lady." I say, "I like you, too." I say, "Where you born?" "Someplace, but I don't know." One of

the Turkish men say my father save his life. My father was a blacksmith, and he put something his horse, and that Turk came to my mother and he say, "You know, can I help you? Your husband helped me." My mother say, "No, I am Armenian. I am a religious woman. My nation die, I die, too." And that officer or whatever it is, he take that boy, my uncle's boy, he saved him. He brought him to. This is the guy. I find him like that.

LEVINE: Wow. That's quite a story, yes. Well, let's back up, before 1915, just for a minute. Tell me your father's name.

ASSADOURIAN: Pardon me?

LEVINE: Your father's name?

ASSADOURIAN: Garabit. Garabit, Charlie.

LEVINE: Could you spell that, please?

ASSADOURIAN: Garabit.

LEVINE: G-A-R . . .

ASSADOURIAN: Yeah. G-A-R . . . (she writes)

LEVINE: Okay. After, we'll do the spelling. Okay. So, and your

mother's name?

ASSADOURIAN: Maritza.

LEVINE: Maritza.

ASSADOURIAN: Maritza.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

ASSADOURIAN: Casparian. Casparian.

LEVINE: Casparian. And your father's last name, your maiden name.

ASSADOURIAN: Yeah, my maiden name.

LEVINE: Is what?

ASSADOURIAN: Garabidian.

LEVINE: Garabidian. Okay. Now, your father's first name?

ASSADOURIAN: Charlie.

LEVINE: Charlie, okay. Now, before 1915, when you were, up till nine years old, let's say, what was your life like in Bunyan?

ASSADOURIAN: You know, at that time I was going to kindegarten, and we don't have any paper and pencil. We write the ABC by a

small . . .

LEVINE: Like a blackboard?

ASSADOURIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Slate, uh-huh.

ASSADOURIAN: That's right. And the, we were, all the families, we came together, loving each other. And, you know, that time, when womans sit separate at the table, the mans sit separate at the table, and they used wooden spoon and knife that time, all colorful thing like that. And Christmas and New Year's and, beautiful. We have a life there, child life.

LEVINE: What were the things that you did that were most enjoyable as a young child?

ASSADOURIAN: My child, I liked feel arts, nature. I always a nature girl.

LEVINE: And how about the Armenian culture, the arts and crafts. Did you have any . . .

ASSADOURIAN: Well, I tell you. You know, that time they wear just simple dresses and I know my mother has a coat inside is the fur, on top of the material, and they wear the boots

and things, you know. And then my grandmother, some long pants and this and that, you know.

LEVINE: The women wore pants, did they?

ASSADOURIAN: No. In the, my grandfather has in the, businessman, shipper, lamb. He has a hundred thousand lambs. And they have to go to a small mountain, the sheeps have to be there. They take the milk, they make yogurt.

LEVINE: That was what your grandfather did for work? He had sheep?

ASSADOURIAN: He's a businessman. He was, yeah. He was a businessman. That's why I go sometime with my cousin, the mountain, but I don't know, one hour or one-and-a-half hour. And they keep the sheeps in summer time in the mountain. And then those baby sheeps, it's beautiful. I love animals, especially horse and lamb, and it's my dream.

LEVINE: Now, your grandfather would buy sheep in the . . .

ASSADOURIAN: And then kill them.

LEVINE: And then he would raise them through the summer on the mountains.

ASSADOURIAN: Everything the Turks get. Everything, they kill my grandfather. He was the richest man in the village, but

everything, he lost. His children, my uncles, and families.

LEVINE: What was your grandfather's name?

ASSADOURIAN: Caspar.

LEVINE: Caspar.

ASSADOURIAN: Caspar.

LEVINE: That was his first name.

ASSADOURIAN: First name.

LEVINE: And his last name?

ASSADOURIAN: Manougian.

LEVINE: That was your mother's father?

ASSADOURIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. So how about your father? What did he do?

ASSADOURIAN: My father was a blacksmith.

LEVINE: And did he, do you remember any experiences with your father or your grandfather from when you were a little girl?

ASSADOURIAN: I tell you. My father, my grandfather is my father. I don't remember him. He died.

LEVINE: Your father died.

ASSADOURIAN: No. My grandfather died.

LEVINE: You don't remember.

ASSADOURIAN: No.

LEVINE: I see.

ASSADOURIAN: And I had a twin sister and brother, but boy die and girl is, the Turk killed them, Elizabeth.

LEVINE: So you, did you have any brothers and sisters? When you came here you were the only child.

ASSADOURIAN: No one. Nothing, I don't have anybody except my (?).

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So do you remember any experiences with your mother when you were a little girl?

ASSADOURIAN: I tell you, my mother was a beautiful woman, and humble, helpful. And if he give me something to take for poor people he say, "If anybody ask you, you don't say anything." It was like that my mother was an educated woman. She went to school for, my mother cry, his father,

I remember that. They say, and she liked to go to school, because we don't have any school that day, time. My mother's time. And he went for Mazuran. It's a girl's school there. And she learn, and my mother write a letter for all the people as, you know, man goes out of town to make living, wife stay in the village. And they came to my mother, "Maritza, write me a letter for my husband." It was like that. I remember.

LEVINE: So she, she knew how to write in Armenian? Uh-huh.

ASSADOURIAN: Because they needed for Constantinople, Istanbul. We had a school there. See, in my village, very Barbarians village.

LEVINE: And were the Greeks getting along well with the Armenians?

ASSADOURIAN: Yes.

LEVINE: In your village, before the massacre?

ASSADOURIAN: We are like family. We are like family, because they are, I don't know. And I remember something in my grandmother. She take the sheeps in the mountain and those lambs eating the grass, and it was basil there, they say. And they dig that, whole city. And my grandmother found some money there, or they dig there, and they find there in the Bible. That Bible, somebody told me that, the name is a Barchman.

He was working for American missionary. And when I came here he told me, you know, I said so-and-so. He say, "I was loving your Aunt Elizabeth, but your grandfather don't give me," he say. And he told me that Bible story. He say, "They find the Bible, old letters or something." That Bible is now Oxford University in England, and it was Russian Bible.

LEVINE: They found the Bible in the ground?

ASSADOURIAN: In the ground, and somewhere, they dig there, whatever it is. Well, anyway, my grand-grandmother, they give for Greeks, archbishop, and they give some money for my grand-grandmother, whatever it is. It's a real story, that, but real story. And they giving the priests for suit and thing like that. And Greek has so much money from Russians. And that Bible is now, Russians sell that to the British, England, and that Bible in the Oxford Museum there. That's what I know the history. Our place is a very historical place. All cave, and I know a mountain, it's a big rock. They take them out by chain. Sometimes they went, the Christian people, inside there. And they close the doors, and then could not come anybody. Seven, eight mile away, they could live there.

LEVINE: It was like a cave.

ASSADOURIAN: Yeah. Cave.

LEVINE: In the mountain. And people hid there?

ASSADOURIAN: In case something happened, they started killing the Armenians or Greeks, they go there. That's a secret place, they say.

LEVINE: So did people actually go there when the massacre started?

ASSADOURIAN: No. But I know the place there. We always climb up there, and I know that place.

LEVINE: Well, before the massacre started in 1915, was there anything that led up to it? Did you realize that something bad was happening before it happened?

ASSADOURIAN: It was always happening, see. It was always happening. In case some people travel alone, and it is robbery and killing, they against the Christian people. Even they kill Greeks, too. They like Genghis Khan.

LEVINE: Were they as bad to the Greeks as they were to the Armenians?

ASSADOURIAN: Well, Greek and Armenian, we are together. But they are

bad for Greeks too, sometimes. But Greek has a kingdom, they could do as much as they do to Armenians.

LEVINE: I see. So when the massacre started did, where were the people taken that were taken out of town?

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, far away, very far away. I don't know. Near desert, they call, desert. Near Red Sea, Arabic countries.

LEVINE: Was there any communication with those people after?

ASSADOURIAN: My mother get lost there, and my sister, my cousins, my aunts, they all die there. Even that's, my cousin's sister, aunt, her family.

LEVINE: And what was it like for you being hidden by the Greek family? What did you experience when you were with that Greek family? When you were hidden, Mrs. Wingate?

ASSADOURIAN: Mrs. Wingate was like a mother to me. You know, when we came, I came United States and when I married I came from first Massachusetts, Watertown, Mass. And when I married, I started to go to church and I meet Mrs. Wingate here. And Mrs. Wingate was living Eighth Street and University Place, and her sons, she has three sons, John and Ruben and Kevin. And Mrs. Wingate was going to write the book, and she came to me, saying, "Eve, can't you tell the

archbishop, let him, he write for me the translating." She translate Raffi's book. Raffi's book, and he translate the English. And I told the Cartican archbishop, he was the holiness for, he was the Catholicos for Armenians in Sicily. And that book was a really valuable book.

LEVINE: I want to hear about that, but we're going to pause now for a minute while we turn the tape over.

ASSADOURIAN: Okay, dear.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Okay. We're on Side B now and I've been speaking with Ervanthouhi Assadourian. We were talking about Raffi, who is the writer. Apparently that's a pseudonym that he used. Now, the book that you were trying to remember was A Mad Man. And so he, he wrote that book, and Mrs. Wingate wanted to translate it?

ASSADOURIAN: Mrs. Wingate asked me to say the Catholicos, to translate that, yeah, Wingate translate that. And first writings of her introduced for Catholicos Rosepian did that.

LEVINE: And, now, tell me about him. He was like a father to you.

ASSADOURIAN: Well, Catholicos was our, head of, the pope. Catholicos is our Armenian pope.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

ASSADOURIAN: This is (?).

LEVINE: I see, I see.

ASSADOURIAN: He was a well-educated man. He's a philosophy.

LEVINE: How did you meet him? Where did you meet him?

ASSADOURIAN: Well, when he came in United States, Second War time, and we, you know, he came from Russia, (?), and he suffered so much at that time. And he came around here, and we know in the church, we get the signature all over, the Armenian people, door by door, to keep them in the United States. In case that time he was going to Russia, they was going to kill him. That's what I know him. And he always my house.

LEVINE: Tell me, tell me more about him, what he was like.

ASSADOURIAN: And he was a philosophy, he was a joking, a lovable man. I mean, humble. I learned many things from him.

LEVINE: Like what did you learn?

ASSADOURIAN: Well, how can I say? He was in Germany. He gets education

in Germany. And he has a schoolmate, but (?). And they was very close to each other. But here, we start the culture here. And he start for our center, Second Avenue.

LEVINE: Oh, on 34th Street.

ASSADOURIAN: 34th Street. He was the first man that his idea, he started for culture, and was able, we worked together, all the society womens, it's a beautiful thing. All women die, only I'm left.

LEVINE: Well, good. I'm glad you're here.

ASSADOURIAN: Let's go back to when you were hidden, when Mrs. Wingate arranged for you to be hidden with the Greek family, what happened then?

ASSADOURIAN: Mrs. Wingate keep many children.

LEVINE: How many, about?

ASSADOURIAN: More than twenty, twenty-five, boys and girls. But Turk came there, he say, "Gour." Gour means Christian. He say, "You keeping all the gours here." And he take the flag down, they make the number two and give the hand (?). And Mrs. Wingate has a daughter, Dorothy, and they was going to attack them. And secretly Dorothy sent some other place

and, Greek place, and then came from Istanbul, Istanbul to United States. She was, Dorothy was my age. And, but Mrs. Wingate die here.

LEVINE: Well, tell me about, how did you actually leave the place where you were being hidden? How did you get to Constantinople?

ASSADOURIAN: They keep us in a dark place. The only thing they give is the meal and things, until the, you know, opened for whatever it is. I don't know at that time, because we was blind. We don't know anything. Everything secret.

LEVINE: So then you went by train, or how did you get to Constantinople?

ASSADOURIAN: Constantinople, oh, Constantinople. I had an uncle, Adana, they called, that Turkish city. And we went to orphanage, and orphanage move for Adana, and Adana I came, I find to my cousins. And my cousins sent me Constantinople for my uncle was there. HE was a Turkish officer. And that's why I came to the United States. And Mrs. Wingate find for my father first, and I told Mrs. Wingate, "You know, my father, he's the Boston message said." She says, "But missionary, between the old missionary, they find my father, and my father knows I'm alive." That's when I

came.

LEVINE: Now, you said your uncle was a Turkish officer.

ASSADOURIAN: Officer, yeah.

LEVINE: Now, so in other words the Armenians served in the Turkish army at that time.

ASSADOURIAN: That's right. Some ones, they get killed. Sometimes, some of those officers, they get killed. But my uncle is the friend. He liked them very much, he save his life.

LEVINE: Now, what kind of a situation was it for your uncle being a Turkish officer at the time of the massacre?

ASSADOURIAN: Well, he was in the army that time, before he was in the army.

LEVINE: But, I mean, it must have been very difficult to be in the Turkish Army.

ASSADOURIAN: I know, but many Armenian doctors in the Army, secretly they kill them. Only my uncle was lucky, he was alive. That's what I know.

LEVINE: Well, so when did your father come to America?

ASSADOURIAN: 1913.

LEVINE: Oh. So he came before the massacre?

ASSADOURIAN: Before, yeah. My husband came, my husband's name is Khron, K-H-R-O-N. He came 1910.

LEVINE: Well, why did your father come in 1913?

ASSADOURIAN: Well, my father came 1913. We had the cousins, and they came together.

LEVINE: What was his reason for leaving then?

ASSADOURIAN: Well, he don't like the situation there. Turkish and Armenian, that's why they start to come out of Turkey. And my brother, Ronnie, Rohan, they hanged them. But he fall down, they say he's innocent. Another person, they start to come before, he was going to come to the United States, he went, he left the home, and five days later he came back because they don't let them to go out. We are in the war now. See, that's why my brother get killed.

LEVINE: So your brother got killed, and Elizabeth, your sister, got killed. Were there other children in your family besides you and your . . .

ASSADOURIAN: Besides me, all killed.

LEVINE: How many other brothers and sisters did you have?

ASSADOURIAN: I had one brother.

LEVINE: And one sister?

ASSADOURIAN: Two sisters.

LEVINE: What was your other sister's name?

ASSADOURIAN: Elizabeth and Miriam.

LEVINE: What became of Miriam?

ASSADOURIAN: Miriam was three or four years old was that time, three years. I had a very big family. My uncle had seven sons.

LEVINE: And did Miriam, was Miriam killed or did she . . .

ASSADOURIAN: Miriam, everything, everything goes.

LEVINE: Everything. And how many people did you say there was in your whole extended family?

ASSADOURIAN: Extended family, my father's side I had an aunt, two aunts or three aunts. But I know the two. The other one was a different village. And my aunt has three sons, one daughter. And the other aunt has one girl and two boys.

LEVINE: And you were close to them?

ASSADOURIAN: We are very close each other, but we all disappeared.

LEVINE: I see. Okay. So you were then in the orphanage in Constantinople?

ASSADOURIAN: No. In Kayseria.

LEVINE: In Kayseria you were in the orphanage.

ASSADOURIAN: In Kayseria, yeah. And after I came to Adana, Adana I came to Istanbul.

LEVINE: I see. So how long were you in Adana?

ASSADOURIAN: Adana I stayed about three months with my father's cousins.

LEVINE: And what was that like? What do you remember about that time?

ASSADOURIAN: Adana was, they have some Armenian and Turkish problem there, too. And if you call charts, you know, killing again the Armenians. And we came for (?), to boat. I went for boat to Istanbul.

LEVINE: I see. So you stayed there knowing that you were going to, you were waiting for the boat from Istanbul.

ASSADOURIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And then, who came with you? When you came to this country, who was on the boat with you?

ASSADOURIAN: I had, my cousin came with me.

LEVINE: What's your cousin's name?

ASSADOURIAN: Elizabeth, Elizabeth.

LEVINE: And what did you come here with? What did you bring with you?

ASSADOURIAN: Nothing, except me. (she laughs)

LEVINE: And so you came with your cousin Elizabeth, and you went to Istanbul. And what was the name of the ship?

ASSADOURIAN: I came by, oh, that, French ship. It was French boat from Mersin to Istanbul.

LEVINE: Well, oh. A French ship to get to Istanbul.

ASSADOURIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And then what . . .

ASSADOURIAN: They go to the Mediterranean Sea.

LEVINE: I see, I see. Do you remember the name of that French ship?

ASSADOURIAN: No. I forget.

LEVINE: But, and then how long were you in Istanbul before you left?

ASSADOURIAN: Well, I stayed in Istanbul about two, three years.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And do you remember anything about Istanbul?

ASSADOURIAN: Well, I had my cousins and things, you know. And I went to Dardanelle, and Dardanelle my uncle got married, and his family there. We had a wonderful time there, and I go to school there.

LEVINE: In Dardanelle.

ASSADOURIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, when was that?

ASSADOURIAN: 1918, 1919, 1920.

LEVINE: And how long were you there in Dardanelle?

ASSADOURIAN: Dardanelle 19, 1919, 1920. In 1920 when I came United States.

LEVINE: So after you left Turkey you had, you went to school, you stayed with your uncle.

ASSADOURIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And you had a pleasant enough life.

ASSADOURIAN: A family life. My uncle married a widow woman, he has one son. And after 1921 is (?), they killing the Turks start, (?) people, they came for Corfu, Greece, Greece to Argentina. My uncle died in Argentina.

LEVINE: I see. So when you came what was the name of the ship that you left Istanbul on?

ASSADOURIAN: Gulgimal, Turkish boat.

LEVINE: Okay. Gulgimal, uh-huh. And what did, how did you feel about coming to the United States when you left?

ASSADOURIAN: Well, I tell you, I was the happiest girl, because I wouldn't like to go to art school, learn something, and this and that. And I don't have any luck, because my father remarried and I came to, I was very comfortable in Istanbul, my uncle loved me, I loved him. And my father was working, he get married, and her wife, you know, it a problem was. And I give up. I came for, somebody asked me, help me, to Ellis Island. My husband was army. And Mr. Topakian helped me come out from Ellis Island. All the

people who came out of Ellis Island at that time, after the forty days. And I meet my husband at my cousin's house. He had cousin, I . . .

LEVINE: That's here in the United States?

ASSADOURIAN: Yeah, United States. New York.

LEVINE: Wait. First let's talk about the boat trip. What kind of a voyage did you have coming to the United States?

ASSADOURIAN: That Turkish boat, but it's a cheerful, all nation. Irish, French, Turkish, Greeks, international, was. And it was pleasure. And we came, to Ellis Island. All iron bar, iron bath, one blanket. (she laughs) Womens was a different place, men is a different place. And I say, "This is the United States?" (she laughs) Until I came out in New York, it was to me, at that time, on the elevator, when I came on the Ellis Island, and I see the Second Avenue train, Third Avenue, and different world. And that time people was poor, just they making the living. But it's a, something lovable, something honest-to-goodness, you know, not like now. It's a really dream. Sometimes I was traveling in Boston, going to see my father and this and that, it's a free country. But now the free country is too much freedom.

LEVINE: Well, tell me, tell me now who got you at Ellis Island?
Who met you at Ellis Island?

ASSADOURIAN: Who met me? My cousin Harry.

LEVINE: And had you communicated by letter?

ASSADOURIAN: No, no. I know him. I know, he came before me. Harry
came before me. My father brought him.

LEVINE: How did he know when you were arriving?

ASSADOURIAN: Well, I know the Harry from Turkey, and he left in 1920.
My father brought him, his uncle's son. And Harry came to
meet me at Ellis Island with my father.

LEVINE: Oh, your father came to Ellis Island, too.

ASSADOURIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: What was it like meeting your father and Harry at Ellis
Island?

ASSADOURIAN: Well, I was happy. I wanted somebody in my family, you
know. I remember my father. When he left I was a little
girl, and he wrote always letters, and he sent money, but
my mother say, "We don't need any money. We like to go to
United States." We like to come to United States but war

starts.

LEVINE: So when you left Ellis Island what were your first impressions, then, of New York?

ASSADOURIAN: Well, I'll tell you. One, it was 34th Street I came, and Third Avenue, fifth floor. Now, bottom was the civil police there, and it was the Protestant church there, Mrs. Wingate's church. That's where I went to meet Mrs. Wingate there.

LEVINE: Oh, you met Mrs. Wingate when you first came?

ASSADOURIAN: In the church, 34th Street church.

LEVINE: You mean, did you know you were going to meet her, or you met her by accident?

ASSADOURIAN: No. When I went the church, I asked for the principal. You know, I say, "Mrs. Wingate, I know Mrs. Wingate, the Protestant, and she goes that church." And that's when I found her.

LEVINE: Oh. Now, could you speak English when you came?

ASSADOURIAN: No, no.

LEVINE: So what did you do, then, when you first got here?

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, we cry, she cry. And John, he was a little boy. And I'd say, "Where's my Dorothy?" You know, I'd say Dorothy for Mississippi. Some time I read the article. Last time it was, the article was for Armenian massacre. And I guess Dorothy's daughter or granddaughter, I guess, she wrote the article for how the Turk killed the Armenians. I know that way, and I tried to get them, and I couldn't get it.

LEVINE: Where was the article?

ASSADOURIAN: Newspaper.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

ASSADOURIAN: It was New York Times. It was a couple of years ago.

LEVINE: Oh. Okay. Well, now, how did you meet your husband, then?

ASSADOURIAN: My husband, my cousin Harry's first cousin was my sister-in-law. And they say my husband, you know, "This girl was clean-cut and a well-known family, why don't you marry with them?" They asked my hand. And I wasn't even fourteen years old! I don't want to get married. I want to go to school. And my father and my step-mother don't want it. And that's when I married my husband.

LEVINE: Did you know your husband?

ASSADOURIAN: No, by introducing. But they came a good family. He was a good husband. We worked together. His name is Khron, K-H-R-O-N. And he was in the United States, in the First War he went to France, yeah.

LEVINE: And so did you court, did he court you? How did you, did you just . . .

ASSADOURIAN: Matchmaker, that's all. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Well, now, did you have children?

ASSADOURIAN: No, I don't have any children.

LEVINE: Yeah, okay. So did you get to go to school?

ASSADOURIAN: I couldn't make it. I worked with him.

LEVINE: What did you work at?

ASSADOURIAN: Wholesale grocery. I know a little French. That's why I study my English, but I had short spelling. I don't have time to go to school. I'm sorry.

LEVINE: You do very well. You speak very well. So, what did you do, you worked with your husband?

ASSADOURIAN: Export/import business. We worked together.

LEVINE: And where were you living?

ASSADOURIAN: I live in the, used to be the Bronx.

LEVINE: The Bronx, uh-huh.

ASSADOURIAN: Still I live in Bronx, Pelham Parkway, I live. It used to be I lived on Prospect Avenue. At that time all the actor/actresses, Bing Crosby and this and that, they always came in RKO Theater. If you was watching, and things like that. We came 14th Street. And the night club there, you know, all the Arkin Kimmeroff was, he was Armenian, and Ruben Malmouljian, and they came there. I know Ruben Malmouljian was on stage there.

LEVINE: What was the name of the theater?

ASSADOURIAN: Ruben Malmouljian. He was an actress. And his mother and father I know, and we was neighbors with them.

LEVINE: Oh, neighbors.

ASSADOURIAN: Our neighbors. At that time I married, I lived at 32nd Street, 335 East 32nd Street. And I was a little girl. They liked, I liked them. I learned many things from them.

LEVINE: Well, what's the best part about having come to the United States and lived here?

ASSADOURIAN: Well, I tell you. I have a disappointment, good way and bad way. But thank God my husband respect me, I respect him. And I have my husband's families, and they love me, I love them. And they're just now those children, like my grandchildren. And I was very happy, because there was a clean-cut family.

LEVINE: Good. Well, what does it mean to you to be Armenian?

ASSADOURIAN: Well, I am proud that I am Armenian. We have culture, we have history.

LEVINE: And what kinds of customs do you hold onto that are Armenian?

ASSADOURIAN: Well, Armenian customs art, and how can I say you? It was dream to me, those customs, colorful and society. That's what I believe. And foods, meals, everything.

LEVINE: What kind of Armenian food and meals do you still make?

ASSADOURIAN: So I do.

LEVINE: Any particular dish?

ASSADOURIAN: Huh?

LEVINE: Any particular dish that you make that's Armenian?

ASSADOURIAN: I make all kinds. I have the name, I am a good cook.
(she laughs)

LEVINE: Yes?

ASSADOURIAN: Yes, I'm very particular.

LEVINE: What are your favorite dishes?

ASSADOURIAN: I tell you. I love artichokes and grape leaves, and we call kefta, and many, many things, and burack, you know, many things. And we have a thousand kind of things, meals.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything that you would like to say before we close about your starting out in Turkey and then going through all that you went through and coming to this country?

ASSADOURIAN: I have that past miserable life. I came to the United States, it's a paradise for me. I love United States. But now we live in the jungle. They have to do something, that jungle, control the jungle. Innocent people.

LEVINE: Do you have any advice for people who would be immigrants to this country now?

ASSADOURIAN: Well, I had a cousin in Armenia, they liked it here now.

And I tried, but I'm eighty-eight years old. I don't want to take that responsibility. And besides that, we are independent Armenians. I want to go there because I have no my family grave.

LEVINE: You want to go there?

ASSADOURIAN: Yeah, but they don't want me there, so I have to stay here, because my grave is here with my husband. And this is my last (?).

LEVINE: Are you, what is this period of your life like, now that you're older.

ASSADOURIAN: Well, I am only lonely at home. I read and I go all the meeting, Armenian meetings, and culture things I don't give up, and I give my life for Armenian society. I work hard the church, an (?) center, I well-known to Armenians in New York.

LEVINE: Well, I want to thank you very much. This has been a most enjoyable and interesting talk.

ASSADOURIAN: Really? Thank you, too.

LEVINE: Thank you. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. I've been speaking with Ervanthouhi Assadourian,

and we're here on May 26, 1993 at the Ellis Island Oral
History Studio, and I'm signing off. Thank you.

ASSADOURIAN: Okay. Can't you put my husband's name, too?