

EI-336

ANGELO HONDROS AND JOHN HONDROS

BIRTH DATES: JUNE 20, 1927 and AUGUST 22, 1932

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

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GREECE, 1947

AGES 19 and 14

PASSAGE ON "THE CATUBA"

PORT OF EMBARKATION: PIRAEUS

RESIDENCES: KARYA LACADAIMOS (NEAR SPARTA)

CHARLOTTE, NC

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Friday, June 18, 1993. I'm at the Ellis Island Recording Studio with Angelo Hondros and John Hondros, two brothers who came from Greece in 1947. Angelo was nineteen. John was fourteen. They were both detained at Ellis Island and, in fact, John ended up detained from January of 1947 until April of 1947. I welcome you both to Ellis Island. Angelo, can you begin by giving me your full name and date of birth, please?

ANGELO: Do you want it in Greek?

SIGRIST: Sure!

ANGELO: Angelos Andrupolus.

SIGRIST: And in English it's?

ANGELO: Angelo Hondros.

SIGRIST: And your date of birth?

ANGELO: June the 20th, 1927.

SIGRIST: John?

JOHN: Ioannes Hondropoulus, John Hondros. August the 22nd,  
1932.

SIGRIST: And let me ask Angelo, were you both born in the same  
place?

ANGELO: Yes.

SIGRIST: Where was that place?

ANGELO: Karya Lacadaimos.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that for me, please?

ANGELO: K-A-R-Y-A. Lacdaimos is L-A-C-D-A-I-M-O-S.

JOHN: (in background) C-A.

SIGRIST: Whereabouts in Greece is that?

JOHN: Near Sparta, about 20 miles from Sparta. We are like in a triangle. Trivilus is on one side, Sparta on the other. Karya is in the middle, like a triangle. We're twenty miles from either one of the two . . .

ANGELO: Southern Greece.

JOHN: The city, yeah.

SIGRIST: I see.

JOHN: The southern part of Greece.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what the town looked like? I'll ask each of you individually. I'll start with Angelo. Just describe what you remember about the town.

ANGELO: It was a small village. It was about seventeen hundred people before the war. It was destroyed 1944 by the Germans. They came there and destroyed the village in 1944, as I say. On March the 13th and the 14th of 1944. They burned up the village, all the homes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember if the Germans . . .

JOHN: Oh, yes. I was there.

SIGRIST: What do you remember, John?

JOHN: Well, I was there when it happened. In fact, they came in and they blew up our school, and our house was near the school. And a German soldier took me and a friend of mine who died in Greenwood, South Carolina here about a year ago. And his little sister, and they marched us to another house, and they blew up the school, then. Our house was the first house to be set on fire. And when some of the villagers saw our house burning, they realized they were going to torch the whole damn town, so a lot of them took precautions and got some of the things out, but we were not able to save anything except the clothes that we had on our backs. And, in fact, my grandmother was laying in the bed, and one of the Germans, one of the guys set her on fire, and the other fellow pulled her out. So it was a real harrowing experience. They burned up a lot of people alive in the, some elderly people died in the homes when they set the homes on fire. They came the next day, and some of the houses that were not burned up, they torched some of those, too, you know.

So we had a harrowing experience with the Nazis.

SIGRIST: Angelo, do you have similar kinds of memories of the German occupation at the time?

ANGELO: Of course.

JOHN: See, we both lived there together.

ANGELO: See we lived in occupation there from 1941 to 1945 when the allies come in Greece, the war was over. I remember the execution of the when the Germans came September 19, 1943 and killed about fifty civilians before it was over. And I remember the whole war..

SIGRIST: Before World War Two, talk to me about pleasant memories of your childhood in that town. What sticks out in your mind growing up when you were a kid?

ANGELO: Well, I was a teenager.

SIGRIST: Well, you had to be a kid at some point.

ANGELO: I was going to school, okay. That's what I remember, really. It was good times.

SIGRIST: It was much more pleasant.

ANGELO: And Daddy was in the States. He was working, and he

was sending us a lot of money. Not lots of money, but enough money. We have better made.

SIGRIST: When did he come to the United States?

ANGELO: Daddy came to the United States 1921.

SIGRIST: And what did he do when he got here?

ANGELO: He was working the Drake Hotel in Chicago.

SIGRIST: Doing what kind of work?

ANGELO: I guess he was with the food service, in the restaurant.

JOHN: In the kitchen.

SIGRIST: Did he have family in Chicago?

BOTH: No.

SIGRIST: But he just left Greece to come here.

JOHN: Right.

SIGRIST: He just thought it would be better.

JOHN: See, he, he came here and he came back and married my mother. Of course, they were like school sweethearts.

And they had him, the misfortune of the family.

SIGRIST: Angelo, you're referring to.

JOHN: Then he came back to the States, and stayed for about four years. But after World War One everything was, you know recession, worldwide. And Greece was not, we lived in the village we raised all our food and all our vegetables. And there was, it was peaceful and good times, because we had no fear of anything, and everybody was in a small village and we, Greeks got to have a tendency to congregate, have a good time, and we loved to be with people, and we all loved our schools and our kinfolks. So he came back to the States and stayed for four years and came back, and got me, but he left before I was born. My mom was seven months pregnant. And then he left, and I didn't see him until I landed in New York in 1947.

SIGRIST: So he's kind of going back and forth.

ANGELO: Yes.

JOHN: A lot of the Greek immigrants did that because their love was for the, their family love was very, very strong, but poverty was there, so they could make a

living here and send some of the money over there, and hoping that they will come back or we will come over here, you know. So the war put a damper on a lot of things.

SIGRIST: Angelo, what was your Dad's name?

ANGELO: Pete.

SIGRIST: Pete?

ANGELO: Myothos.

SIGRIST: And can you spell your Greek last name before it was shortened to Hondros?

ANGELO: Yes. H-O-N-D-R-O-O-U . . .

JOHN: No, no, no. H-O-N-D-R-P-O-U-L-O-S. Hondrpoulos.

ANGELO: You've got it.

SIGRIST: I see. Let me ask both of you, when you think about your dad, especially, well, you didn't meet him till you came to America.

JOHN: Right, yeah.

SIGRIST: So maybe I'd better direct this to Angelo. When you

were a kid, what sticks out in your mind about your dad? What do you remember about your father?

ANGELO: I remember when I was a little kid he killed a chicken for us, for our dinner. The way he cut this chicken's throat. As a matter of fact, it was a rooster.

JOHN: Yeah.

ANGELO: And after the rooster was headless, the rooster started jumping, you know.

SIGRIST: So that stuck out in your mind.

ANGELO: Yeah, really.

SIGRIST: Was your father sort of a dim figure to you because he was over here a lot, not someone who was around very much?

ANGELO: Uh, yes.

SIGRIST: For the most part?

ANGELO: Yes.

SIGRIST: What was your mom's name?

ANGELO: Panagiota.

SIGRIST: Oh, dear. Can you spell that?

JOHN: Yeah. P-A-N-A-G-I-O-T-A.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

JOHN: Samardzis, S-A-M-A-R-D-Z-I-S.

SIGRIST: What did your mom look like?

JOHN: She was a beautiful lady and a hardworking lady. She was orphaned, and she had a sister who was raped and died at age thirteen. So my mama had a real tragic life. And then she lived with me, of course, we all lived together. My grandmother on my mother's side, and my mother, and he and I lived in the same, in the same house, you know.

SIGRIST: Is this typical of Greek families to have extended family that lives in the house also?

ANGELO: Yes.

JOHN: Yes. Back in those days, because we were all very poor. The majority of us living in villages were dirt poor. We had, we loved one another and we had good times as far as that goes, but as far as having material things, a nice home and nice clothes, we were

barefooted most of the time, all the time, we didn't have those. But we had deep love and respect and affection for each other, you know. And our neighbors and our friends. So instead of having material things we had like what you might call spiritual things, you know.

SIGRIST: I see. Angelo, like your story about your father with the rooster, is there a story that sticks out in your mind about your mom when you were growing up in Greece?

ANGELO: Yes. We were, irrigate potatoes.

JOHN: Yeah. Well, irrigation.

ANGELO: Yeah. We had to water, I guess, for potatoes.

SIGRIST: Water for potatoes.

ANGELO: Yeah. To irrigate the potatoes, you know, to, just like spread the water.

JOHN: Well, we had the, we had the rows of potatoes. You see, we grew a lot of potatoes in our village.

ANGELO: There was a snake in the water, okay. And because the Germans come out of the house, we hate the Germans

then, okay. She forgot her shovel.

JOHN: Shovel.

ANGELO: Shovel, and she was sticking in the shovel on the snake, and said, "Oh, you damn German," you know, just push him down and kill the snake. And she finally killed the snake.

SIGRIST: I think it's interesting, the two stories that stick out in your mind about your parents involve killing animals.

JOHN: Killing, yeah. ( Mr. Sigrist laughs ) That was part of our lives.

SIGRIST: What about you, John? What, when, because you're somewhat younger, when you think about your mom, what comes to your mind, when you were a kid?

JOHN: Well, she, my mother would, like I said, was a very, she had a tragic life. But in all the tragedy, she was, she was a natural comedienne. Because of the tragic life, she would make everybody laugh. She was the life of the party anywhere she went. She did not have an education, but she had more brass and more guts than any human being I've ever seen in my life.

She alone raised us. She was both a mom and a dad and the United States Marine Corps, I believe. She was just an absolute fabulous, fabulous woman. With the hardship that she had, but my best recollection from her, I don't know if I told him or not. We had a mule, a big mule, Marcos, okay. And they drafted him, the army took him in World War Two, the Greek Army. You know, we didn't have tanks, so they had mules. And she went to a bazaar and brought back a big donkey, which was a humiliating experience to own a damn donkey over there. If you had a good mule or a horse you were somebody. If you had a donkey, it was just. And I remember her coming around the corner, and I saw this huge donkey. I mean, big as a horse. Right?

ANGELO: Uh-huh.

JOHN: And all, and she was a female, and that's where all the male donkeys we got, and they would just absolutely humiliate us, to see my mother coming around with a donkey. I never will forget that as long as I live. We were just, but she was an exceptional human being. A very tragic life, very, very tragic. Very hard worker.

SIGRIST: Now, you said you lived with a grandmother?

JOHN: Our grandmother lived with us, you know. We all lived in the same house.

SIGRIST: Let me ask Angelo, what do you remember about your grandmother? What sticks out in your mind about living with your grandmother? When you think about your grandmother, what sticks out in your mind?

ANGELO: My grandmother, my mother was working every day in the fields, okay, on the farm. My grandmother was home. She prepared everything for us. We'd go home at night, you know, we had something for breakfast. And she was real good.

SIGRIST: What did she make? What kinds of foods did you eat?

ANGELO: Potatoes, noodles, vegetables.

SIGRIST: Was there something that your grandmother made that you particularly liked?

ANGELO: The noodles.

SIGRIST: The noodles. How would she make the noodles?

ANGELO: Well, she would make them from scratch. Get the milk

and flour, you know, roll it and cut it. It was delicious.

SIGRIST: What about you?

ANGELO: She was also, she was also a good embroiderer and made, she used to make me some socks made out of wool and, like knee socks. And since I was sickly most of the time, they kept my legs warm, because in the old country we wore short pants. And we lived in the village, which is very, very cold, extremely cold. Even in the summer time, even now. It might be ninety-five degrees during the day, but at night you need a heavy sweater or a topcoat, because the wind blows ferociously most of the time, and it's very, very, it's bitter cold. In the winter time it's really cold. So she used to make a lot of things for me to wear made out of wool, which kept me warm and semi-comfortable, you know. Because we didn't have any heat in the house. We just had a fireplace, that people have luxury today, it was a necessity for us then. So . . .

SIGRIST: What did she look like?

JOHN: She was a petite lady. I would say, she probably, in

today's, about five-two and probably weigh about a hundred and twenty pounds. She was a widow. My grandfather, her husband died at age thirty-two with appendicitis. So she, I guess, was when Mama got her, she became a, well, not a merchant, but she would go down and buy fruits, like pears and oranges. She became like a merchant, you know.

SIGRIST: She could sell these to people.

ANGELO: Yes.

JOHN: She was going to the produce markets.

ANGELO: Yeah.

JOHN: And buy the produce, okay, and go around the village and sell them.

ANGELO: Yeah. Like door-to-door, or set up a, you know.

SIGRIST: To bring you some money.

JOHN: To bring herself, to raise her family, and then her daughter, like I said, was raped and died from it, and then she raised Mama, you know.

SIGRIST: Was the daughter that died significantly older than

your mother?

JOHN: She was a little bit older than my mother, yes.

SIGRIST: Because that must have been a terrible tragedy for your mother.

JOHN: It was a horrible experience for her, and her father died at age thirty-two. That didn't help matters any either. So, they were orphaned, you know, kind of in a sad situation.

SIGRIST: You described this town. Can you describe the house that you lived in and what it was made out of? I'll ask Angelo first.

ANGELO: It was a three-bedroom house. It had a kitchen, a living room, bedroom and a hallway.

SIGRIST: What was it made out of?

ANGELO: Rock. Rocks, yeah.

SIGRIST: And you had a fireplace, you said.

ANGELO: A fireplace, yes.

JOHN: Most of the houses in the village over there have a tremendous amount. It's rocky, a very rocky country.

And the wall's about two-and-a-half, two-and-a-half feet thick. It's like a two-story, the house, you know. And you have the main floor, and then on the roof they used red clay used in mostly European roofs, you know, because of the wind and the cold. And underneath the house we kept our animals on one side, like the donkeys and the goats. And on the other side we had the, not like the drums have, but it was a wine cellar. We had big barrels. Since we raised our own grapes, we used to make our own wine, so with our meals we drank wine like people over here drink milk.

We were raised on drinking wine.

SIGRIST: Who made the wine? Did you make wine?

ANGELO: We did, yes.

SIGRIST: Tell me, Angelo, how you made the wine. What was the process?

ANGELO: We got the grapes. We put them in a big barrel. Then we put them in a, like a tub. We used to get in the tub with our feet and squeeze them, squeeze the juice, okay. And then we put them in another barrel, and put some (?) in it.

JOHN: Like rosin.

ANGELO: Okay. Then stay for one month.

JOHN: You let it ferment.

ANGELO: A few weeks?

JOHN: It depended.

ANGELO: That was it.

JOHN: We had tremendous barrels, big as this room.

ANGELO: Two thousand gallon barrels.

JOHN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you make this wine to sell, or just to use?

ANGELO: Just to use.

SIGRIST: Did you bottle it then, or . . .

JOHN: No. We go down and open the spigot and get a glass of wine and have it with our meals. It was, it was just a normal everyday thing to drink wine with our meals.

SIGRIST: That's just what you had in the culture.

JOHN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about your religious life in Greece? Was your mother or grandmother particularly religious?

ANGELO: Well, not really. But we attended church every Sunday and holidays.

SIGRIST: Were you Greek Orthodox?

JOHN: Yes, oh, yes.

ANGELO: Holidays, yes. We get dressed up, put shoes on if we had a pair of shoes to wear, clean clothes we go to church.

SIGRIST: Do you have a particular memory about church?

JOHN: Well, I was . . .

ANGELO: It was (?) church.

JOHN: I was very active in the church because there's a fellow who's still alive now in the old country. I would go over there and we would make the candles and clean the church. And I was, I don't know if you're familiar with the Greek Orthodox religion, but our, what the people said, then they had the icons. And

then behind is the priest. Well, the priest has young kids who assist him with different things, you know. And then at the end of the service, almost to the end of the service, we had people take Communion, and he'd give us a little piece of bread, like, you know, to take this in my body and so forth, and right from the little wine for the blood of Jesus, you know. So I used to go in there because the (?), people made home made bread, blessed bread, to give to the priest. Well, this fellow would give us a big chunk of bread.

So I would help them in order to get a big chunk of the bread, because that's the only bread I could eat, you know. So I was, it was kind of a selfish thing to do, ( he laughs ) but I attended church every Sunday for about four or five years. You know, we'd ring the bell and we'd clean the church and this sort of thing.

SIGRIST: Was there a church nearby the houses?

ANGELO: Yes. There was a church within about fifty yards of our house, and there was another church. We have a lot of churches in our village. And, like I say, in Constantine days we had the church of St. John's, but the main church, there was one in the lower part of the village, and one in the northern part of the

village, so we had two.

SIGRIST: I see. Angelo, I wanted to ask you earlier and I forgot. Do you remember when John was born?

ANGELO: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about what you remember about when he was born?

ANGELO: Well, a neighbor of ours was getting married. It was in 1932, August the 22nd. And I was carrying a piece of the dowry from the bridegroom's house to the groom's house, we carried the dowry.

SIGRIST: A dowry, you're saying.

ANGELO: A dowry, yes.

SIGRIST: The bride's dowry.

ANGELO: Right. And I was carrying a pillow in my hand. And how you call the lady, Johnny?

JOHN: Oh, a midwife.

ANGELO: A midwife come over there, and she grabbed the pillow from my hand and she threw it to the ground, and she gave a prescription to go to the drug store and get a

prescription for my mother. And I went to get the medication for my mother. Okay, I went back, John was crying on the belly of my mother.

JOHN: I was born in the house.

ANGELO: He was born in the house.

JOHN: Midwives used to deliver babies then.

SIGRIST: Now, when you were, how old were you when . . .

ANGELO: I was, what, five years old.

SIGRIST: Five years old. Do you remember what you thought when you saw this little baby?

ANGELO: No. I was kind of bashful. I didn't look much, if you ask me. ( he laughs )

SIGRIST: I meant to ask you that before. So your father's in Chicago.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Right. And he comes back occasionally. But actually not after you were born.

JOHN: No, no. 1931 was the last time he was in Greece.

SIGRIST: If he's sending money to your mother . . .

ANGELO: Yes.

JOHN: Yes.

SIGRIST: So she's living on that money, plus whatever your grandmother is bringing in.

JOHN: We had little farms. We had, like, little farms, you know. We raised all our grapes. We raised our wheat to make our bread. We raised corn. We raised potatoes, tomatoes and all that stuff. We couldn't raise anything like oranges because our village was very cold. So we raised everything we ate. We had a goat to get our milk, and we had a chicken to get a few eggs once in a while and maybe to kill a chicken once in a while. And that was, we raised everything that we had. And I, the money that he sent us was very little. Don't forget now, when he was here, the Depression was on. So my dad, in the early '30's and the middle '30's, he didn't have a job. He would be in soup kitchens and get a job making fifty cents a day, or something like that. So consequently he sent us whatever he could, and this we bought our sugar and maybe a little coffee.

ANGELO: Coffee and sugar.

JOHN: And maybe some cloth to make some pants and a pair of shoes for Easter, you know.

SIGRIST: Maybe just that little bit extra that you needed.

JOHN: Yes, yes. They kept us in the, with a little bit of the luxury as it was, you know.

SIGRIST: Then how was it decided that mom would take you two to America? Who, did your father make that decision how . . .

ANGELO: In 1940 the war came to home. Okay, from 1940 to 1945 there were no communications between me, us and my daddy. The war, it was over 1945, and they fill out the proper papers. He invited us to come to the States.

SIGRIST: How did your mother feel about leaving Greece?

ANGELO: She loved to come over. She loved America.

SIGRIST: But before she got here, how did she feel about it?

JOHN: Well, see, we had a horrible thing happen over there. After the Germans left, we got into it ourselves.

Like the things happening in Bosnia? We went through it. Then the Communists and the Loyalists.

ANGELO: Civil war.

JOHN: Yeah, we had a civil war.

SIGRIST: A little civil . . .

JOHN: It was a horrible experience. It was just as bad as the Germans. So she wanted to get us out of there because he was becoming draft age. They would have taken him in the army, or the guerilla would have killed us, one way or the other. And the only, the sadness of her was that she had left her mother, she left her mother behind. But in order to save us, you know, and bring us in this country, you know. So she left her mom over there, and we all came over here. And it was horrible, because her mother died, my mother never did see her mother again after she came over here.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, either of you, saying goodbye to your grandmother, that whole process of leaving?

ANGELO: Well, there was a lot of tears and a lot of heartaches, you know. And we left in, under horrible

circumstances, because the civil war was full blast, and we barely escaped, you know. We were really, just liked to get the hell out of there.

SIGRIST: The day I left my home town my grandmother was, back when she was screaming, "Where you going, Angelo? Where you going?" I ran, I left in a hurry, because they brought three heads and put them on the sidewalk there.

JOHN: On the ground.

ANGELO: On the ground. Greeks, religious against Greeks, okay. When I saw the sight I got scared, and I run to the bigger town, and I never went back to the village.

SIGRIST: Yeah. What a horrible time.

ANGELO: My grandmother was screaming, "Angelo, where are you going?" Because she saw me go down the highway. That was the last time I saw her.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you packed, what you actually took with you for luggage, if you had any?

JOHN: Just whatever we had on.

ANGELO: Can I say something else that's funny?

SIGRIST: Sure.

ANGELO: It took us thirty days to come to the States. The ship by the name Catuba [ph], the name of the ship.

SIGRIST: Catuba [ph].

ANGELO: Catuba [ph].

JOHN: They condemned that thing after it came to the States. It was a horrible, horrible . . .

SIGRIST: Can you spell Catooba [Catuba?]?

JOHN: I think it was C-A-T-O-O-B-A [Catuba?], if I remember it correctly.

ANGELO: And because of the destruction back in Greece, John and I were going to the dining room of the ship, and pick up fancy bottles, put them in big bags to bring them to the States, so we can put it in the wine and vinegar and all, for storage, okay? You know, water? Because we had those things in Greece. My father came to the ship, and he saw the bottles on the top. I said, "I got some bottles over here." ( John laughs ) He said, "What you going to do?" I said, "I'm going to take them and put water and vinegar and oil."

He said, "What are you, crazy? People over here dump them in the ocean." And I left them there.

SIGRIST: Isn't that interesting, you know, you were so worried that . . .

JOHN: Oh, yeah.

ANGELO: Sure.

SIGRIST: What port did you leave from?

ANGELO: Leave?

JOHN: Piraeus.

SIGRIST: From Piraeus.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Can you describe, I'll ask Angelo first, describe a little bit what the boat looked like, you know.

ANGELO: It was a very small boat. That was not the original. The real was Cardio. It was a very small fishing boat. And this fishing boat took us to . . .

JOHN: Naples.

ANGELO: Naples.

JOHN: Naples.

ANGELO: Naples. And then we got to the bigger boat.

SIGRIST: The Catooba [Catuba?].

ANGELO: And we came to the States, which took us thirty days.  
It usually takes about ten, eleven days, then, maybe  
nine.

SIGRIST: And what sticks out in your mind about the trip across  
the Atlantic?

ANGELO: The rough ocean, the rough waters. Rough.

SIGRIST: Did you get sick?

ANGELO: No.

SIGRIST: Do you remember being on deck and seeing . . .

ANGELO: I seen the water, rough waters. You know, (?) for us  
to get, go inside.

SIGRIST: What do you remember, John?

JOHN: Well . . .

ANGELO: He was sick.

JOHN: I was, yeah. The boat that we left Piraeus, my father paid a lot of money for us to come here.

SIGRIST: The boat that you left from Piraeus was a smaller boat. What was the name of that?

JOHN: Cadio.

ANGELO: Cadio.

JOHN: Cadio.

SIGRIST: C-A-D-I-O.

ANGELO: Something like that.

JOHN: We were on Third Class. My father, how much did he spend?

ANGELO: Eighteen hundred dollars.

JOHN: Eighteen or twenty-four hundred dollars.

ANGELO: Eighteen hundred dollars, I guess a check.

JOHN: Yeah. Then, in 1946 . . .

ANGELO: Six hundred dollars apiece.

JOHN: Then, and they put us in the Third Class. And we left

Piraeus, and we were downstairs in the very bottom of the damn thing, and there was water everywhere. And I got deathly ill the first day, seasick. My mother, who was used to get deathly ill riding in an automobile once in a while, was never seasick until we came. And we went to Naples, then we got on the Catooba [Catuba?], you know, this thing. And we went from there to Genoa. We spent a week in Genoa. We picked up some Italian immigrants. And then we left Genoa and we went to Morocco.

ANGELO: Iran.

JOHN: Well, yeah. But that's the Morocco.

ANGELO: Yeah. You're right. Yeah. In Africa.

JOHN: Yeah. And then we went to Gibraltar, spent, I think, a day. And then we crossed the ocean, and probably one of the worst seas ever seen. It was unbelievable.

SIGRIST: You were at the height of winter, which . . .

JOHN: The height of winter, and the ship was not very good. The food was horrible and filthy and dirty and bugs and everything else. And I became deathly ill on the damn thing. And I had rheumatic fever real bad, in my

joints and everything. When we came into New York, another day or so and I'd have been a goner, that's how bad I was. I was just on death's door, you know.

That's when they took such good care of me over here, you know.

SIGRIST: Was it just seasickness, or was it just a combination of things?

JOHN: No. I was sick only one time. I got over after that. I just got simple rheumatic fever.

ANGELO: He had a fever.

JOHN: A high fever . . .

SIGRIST: Did you pick that up on the boat, probably?

JOHN: Well, see, I had, this was my third time. I had it in Greece. And because of the conditions on the boat, the cold and the dampness and not good food, my system became so weak that I had also, again, because I had tonsillitis, and I had an infection, and then it went into my heart and gave me rheumatic fever. So I had another bout, because of the ship.

SIGRIST: So you were just in terrible shape.

JOHN: Oh, I mean, I would have died. I couldn't lift my head up. I was vomiting, and when they put me in the wheelchair and brought me into the Great Hall here, I was wrecked with fever, you know. Then, of course, the doctors took care of me.

SIGRIST: Was there a hospital on the ship that you could have gone to?

JOHN: No. They had a doctor there. There was probably like a, he wasn't a doctor, just maybe a pharmacist or something. Who knows. Then the ship came over here, we should have never got on that ship. The agent here should have never booked us on that ship. They just saw an opportunity to take my father, to take advantage of the situation, and they did. If we had known any better then we should have sued them for everything they had, and, you know. They're still in business, probably.

SIGRIST: Was it mostly immigrants riding on this boat?

ANGELO: Yes.

JOHN: Yes. Greeks and Italians.

SIGRIST: Greeks and Italians. Of course, you'd gone this very

sort of, the scenic route around the Mediterranean to get out. So it was thirty days from the time you left Piraeus to the time you got to New York Harbor.

JOHN: New York, uh-huh.

SIGRIST: And you were very sick when you arrived. We're going to pause, this is a good place to pause so Peter can flip all the tapes, and then we'll get you to Ellis Island and get that experience.

JOHN: All right.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: Okay. We're now resuming the interview. Angelo, let me ask you, do you remember arriving in New York, in New York Harbor?

ANGELO: Yes.

SIGRIST: Arriving in New York Harbor.

ANGELO: Yes.

SIGRIST: What do You remember about that?

ANGELO: I know what's in my head is the lights and the

traffic. Beautiful.

SIGRIST: Now, when the boat docked . . .

ANGELO: Yes.

SIGRIST: Then what happened? Obviously John is very sick.

ANGELO: I come with John. We came the same ferryboat. The ferry got hold of us, okay. We came this island here, Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: And what is, the date? It's January . . .

ANGELO: January 10, 1947.

SIGRIST: January the 10th. And your mom's with you.

ANGELO: Three of us.

SIGRIST: What is your mother thinking when they're taking her to Ellis Island?

JOHN: She came with us.

ANGELO: She came with us.

SIGRIST: Right, I know, but what?

ANGELO: She had no choice. No English. She don't know what

they're saying. So, the same thing.

SIGRIST: How did, John, how did they do it? Did the doctors just come on the boat, aboard?

JOHN: When we docked and they let people in, my father came down. I was in bed. I couldn't get up. And they brought my daddy in, and this was the first time I saw him. And, of course, he and my mama hugged and hugged, you know, the crying bit, and that sort of thing. So they, they took me out and put me in, like, not a stretcher, but like on a wheelchair, you know. That's the last thing I remember until we came down here into the Great Hall where there was a lot of commotion and a lot of people, a lot of policemen, and all this thing, you know. And then the doctors came and they took me, they put me in the hospital the same day. And, of course, they started administering, they gave me medication.

ANGELO: Antibiotics and all that.

JOHN: Yeah, antibiotics. And there were some wonderful people here.

SIGRIST: Now, did they, I'll have to ask Angelo, where did you

sleep while this was going on? You're taken to the hospital, I assume.

JOHN: Right.

ANGELO: We were sleeping with one of the dormitories here. And if I'm not mistaken German prisoners were here.

SIGRIST: Can you describe what that looked like, the dormitory?

ANGELO: Yeah. It was a big, a big room. I don't know, I can't know how many people they had. They had the doors, sliding doors made of steel, and closed. And we go down the big cafeteria hall and eat your breakfast and dinner in trays. And every afternoon, of course, I would go to the playground. They had grass in the corner. You go for three hours in the afternoon for exercise and maybe play, and bring us back at night, and we were in bed by nine o'clock.

SIGRIST: Did they lock you in at night in the dormitory?

ANGELO: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Were you guarded?

ANGELO: Yes, I guess so.

SIGRIST: Now, where's your Mom during all this?

ANGELO: She was in there, in here.

SIGRIST: She would be . . .

ANGELO: The women, with the women.

SIGRIST: I see. So it was divided by sex.

ANGELO: Yes.

SIGRIST: How did you feel? What were you feeling at this time?

ANGELO: I don't know. I wish, I can't remember. I wish I could get out. You know that.

SIGRIST: Did you spend time with your mother during the day?

ANGELO: All day long in this big hall down here.

SIGRIST: Just hanging out down in the big hall.

ANGELO: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me, tell me what you remember about being in the hospital and that whole thing.

JOHN: Well, I was awfully sick and hurting real bad. And they started giving me pills. I used to take, I never

will forget. They used to give me a shot ( he clears his throat ) a shot glass, you know. They used to put twelve pills in that thing, and I took four of those a day. I took forty-eight pills a day for ninety days.

They had some beautiful nurses. And there was a Dr. Kinvoy. I never will forget the guy. His wife was a beautiful lady, and she used to come and visit me. I couldn't speak English, of course. And they would give me rubdowns. And my joints were very inflamed and very large. And I was bedridden. Most of the time I stayed here. Then towards the end of my stay I used to get up and go to the bathroom. But until then I was bedridden. They would not let me out, because I had damaged my heart valves, you know.

So they took extra, extra good care of me. And I was in a dormitory, what, eighteen, maybe eighteen, twenty people there. And it was a different experience for me because I was not allowed, I didn't, I couldn't have any visitors. So I used to see, my mama used to visit me once a week on Wednesday for an hour. And the rest of the time I was by myself.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how you felt as a fourteen-year-old in this experience, or were you just so sick that it just

didn't matter?

JOHN: Apprehensive. Very scared and apprehensive. And I was just, I was relieved after a few days not to have the pain. But then, you know, then I just lay there and, of course, you know, during the day guys would talk to me, but I couldn't understand what they were saying. But they had a beautiful staff, and the doctors were wonderful.

SIGRIST: Angelo, did you see anything at Ellis Island that you had never seen before, like some type of a food maybe, or something that was completely new to you that you saw here for the first time?

ANGELO: Yes. I saw all guys, they were sleeping naked. And I was so bashful, from the old country, you know. They were sleeping naked, and they were (?) and all. I mean, I was just surprised.

SIGRIST: Well, of course, you would have had to shower that way and everything.

ANGELO: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about the cafeteria where they fed you, and what that procedure was, how you

were fed.

ANGELO: Just an ordinary cafeteria style. You pick up your silverware, your tray. You go there, and they give you food, you know. Then you just dump it in a can.

SIGRIST: Nothing special.

ANGELO: Nothing special.

SIGRIST: Now, you were actually released before John was, correct?

ANGELO: Yes.

SIGRIST: How long were you here?

ANGELO: One month.

SIGRIST: You were here one month with your mom.

ANGELO: Yes.

SIGRIST: And then when you were released, where did you go?

ANGELO: I went to Charlotte, North Carolina.

SIGRIST: With your mother?

ANGELO: Yes.

SIGRIST: So they're leaving you alone here in the hospital?

JOHN: No. Mom stayed.

ANGELO: Mom stayed. Yeah, she stayed in Schenectady, New York.

SIGRIST: She stayed in Schenectady.

ANGELO: New York, yes. Then, for the purpose of this John.

SIGRIST: That's still a long way to . . .

JOHN: We had a lady on my dad's side. Her husband was second cousin with my father. And now, she is still living, she lives in Spartanville, South Carolina. Virginia Cuchelle. And she would bring my mom, because my mom naturally couldn't understand anything, they would ride the train on Wednesday morning, come from Schenectady down here, and they would visit me from one to two. And two o'clock they'd leave me on Wednesday, and then we'd go back to Schenectady. And when they came and get me out of the hospital, I went from here to Schenectady, spent a couple of days, and they brought us back to New York and put us on the train, Pullman, and we went to Charlotte.

SIGRIST: Is there anything else that sticks out in your mind about the Ellis Island experience?

JOHN: The first time I saw a black person.

SIGRIST: Tell us about that.

JOHN: Was they took me to the room, and there was a bed in front. As you walk into the room, on the left was one bed, and I was the second patient on the left. And there was a black fellow, about six foot two, very young, I guess, probably in his twenties. I had never seen a black person before. And he was mopping the floor. And he looked at me and smiled at me, you know. And every afternoon he would come by there and just put his hand on me. That's the first person I've seen of color. Because, you know, in Greece we were all the same, you know. But that was my, now, the other thing that was strange to me was the food. I couldn't stand the food, because the things they would give, you know, like grapefruit juice, and things that we had before, you know. Very bitter, it was canned grapefruit juice. But I loved the mashed potatoes, and the bacon and the egg, and the toast. And there was a fellow in there that was on one of the other

wards. He was a little bit mentally incapacitated. But he used to build some beautiful ships in a bottle, beautiful work, absolutely. Beautiful. And it was fascinating. But then you would never know when he would wander around at night. And sometimes it would frighten me because, you know, he would come around and shake the beds at people, you know. Then they kind of watched out for him, you know. Not to come in and, of course, it scared the heck out of me, you know. But that was an interesting thing. But those were the things that that really stuck out. The first time I saw a black person. It was really fascinating, you know.

SIGRIST: And not scary, just fascinating.

JOHN: No. Not scary, not scary. But it was, I mean, I couldn't take my eyes off the guy, you know. He was just totally different from what I'd seen.

SIGRIST: When you were in the hospital did you know that your mother was so far away in Schenectady that she . . .

JOHN: I had no idea. I knew that she was away from me and from the city, but where Schenectady was, where New York was, that was totally incomprehensible to me

then.

SIGRIST: Angelo, tell me about what you did when you got to Charlotte while all this is going on for those first couple of months. What were you doing down there?

ANGELO: ( he laughs ) I went to work for my uncle.

SIGRIST: You had an uncle in Charlotte.

ANGELO: Yes. He gave me a job in the restaurant.

SIGRIST: Had he come from Greece to Charlotte at some point or . . .

ANGELO: Sometime.

JOHN: Way before, long . . .

SIGRIST: A long time, yeah. He had a restaurant in Charlotte.

ANGELO: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yeah. So what kind of job did you get?

ANGELO: Oh, dishwasher, yes. Mopped the floor.

SIGRIST: And where did you live?

ANGELO: In Charlotte.

SIGRIST: But I mean with whom?

ANGELO: Uh, with him, my uncle, which was right upstairs over the restaurant.

SIGRIST: Is there or was there at that time a large Greek population in Charlotte?

ANGELO: Uh, no. Not many, but now there is.

SIGRIST: Did you start learning English at that point?

ANGELO: Behind the counter, yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what that was like, having to learn English, how you went about learning English?

ANGELO: It was hard. But I pick up a word here, a word there, don't forget it.

SIGRIST: Do you ever remember making a terrible mistake when you were learning English?

ANGELO: No.

SIGRIST: No? Now . . .

JOHN: You always learn the bad words first.

SIGRIST: Did you learn English here?

JOHN: The first word I learn in English when I was here was "the F word." And I used it. The little nurse used to bring me my pills in the afternoon, a little short lady in her fifties then, a little stout. And I said the word, and I realized I had said the wrong thing, but I didn't understand exactly what I had said. And she turned around and gave those people in the dormitory such Hell. I mean, I wouldn't want to be in their shoes. And I realized, of course, when she told me, "No, no, no," I never used it again. But I didn't know. See, they told me it was like, "Good morning."

But the thing, I didn't know what I said, but I said it. And it upset her. I don't think it was the word.

It was the fact that those guys, most of the fellows in there were elderly people, and I think most of them must have been Merchant Mariners, or service-connected. And a lot of them, unfortunately, died when I was there. In fact, the first bed, I saw several people die. And then they moved me in the middle of the, that's the reason I wanted to see the thing, they moved me halfway down, because I'd be looking on the side there and the fellows, most of them would, it's a strange thing about dying, they

would be real sick. They would have the oxygen. Back in those days they had a thing that you, under oxygen, kind of a plastic cover. It looked like they would become well for a few minutes or whatever. It would be a peaceful look in their face. This is the gospel truth. And then they'd look over there, and they were gone. So the nurses and everybody, you know, decided just to move me away from there, you know. Because, like I said, most of fellows in there were quite elderly, and when I used that word it was really uncalled for. And there was another nurse in the evening when the lights went out. They used to go in the back of the room and they would play cards. She was so, and she would bring me like candy, and bring me an orange, where she would tell everybody to just, "Shhh." To go back there and turn on a little light. And she was the boss, and she would play cards, poker or whatever they played. I mean, nothing naughty, just pass the night away, you know.

SIGRIST: Did you spend your whole three months in that one ward?

JOHN: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the day you were released?

JOHN: I think it was around April the 10th. I'm not certain, but I think, it just kind of sticks into my mind that we were there for ninety days.

SIGRIST: And your mom came down and got you.

JOHN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Where is your father? Is he still in Chicago during all of this?

JOHN: No. He's in Charlotte. They're working.

SIGRIST: Oh. Your father went down with you, Angelo.

ANGELO: Right.

SIGRIST: Is he working at the restaurant also?

ANGELO: He was, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: So you didn't see your dad till you ended up in Charlotte.

JOHN: I saw him the day that I was here, and then I saw him again when I moved to Charlotte.

SIGRIST: But what did you think? This is a person you don't

know at all, even though it's your father.

JOHN: I was apprehensive, and I was a little bit uncertain and frightened and confused because, you know, we were, I was transported, transported to a place that was totally foreign to me naturally, you know. And we had no friends to speak of. I couldn't speak the language. And it was ironic, and we were there. But I went to work like he did. I put on an apron and we washed dishes for seven days. We worked seven days a week, twelve, fourteen hours a day. We lived upstairs. The grill was downstairs. It was not a grill, it was a damn beer joint, you know. And we did very poorly in it, but we lived upstairs for about, what, two years? Then we bought the house.

SIGRIST: Did you guys get along as brothers?

ANGELO: Yes, sir.

JOHN: Well, he was five years older than me, so we had, it was really we had nothing in common. When he was a teenager he didn't want me around, you know. But as far as brothers go, we got along real, our whole family got along really well.

SIGRIST: Is there a story, Angelo, that sticks out in your mind about those early years in Charlotte that involved your brother somehow, something he did, or something you guys did together that sticks out in your mind?

ANGELO: No. But I remember this, back in the village.

SIGRIST: In Greece.

ANGELO: In Greece. He had a potato on a fork, and I stole his potato, and he threw the fork, and the fork got in my eye over here, and he had to pull it out.

SIGRIST: Oh, God! ( he laughs )

ANGELO: He stabbed me with the fork because I stole his potato.

JOHN: See, he used to have a trick. Every time I would get something to eat he would upset me and I'd get mad and leave the food and go there and cry. By the time I came back he's cleaning out the plate. So that day I just got mad and I threw the fork at him, and it stuck him in the rib. And, I mean, he screamed.  
( he laughs )

SIGRIST: No more stealing potatoes.

JOHN: From then on he left my food alone, you know.

SIGRIST: Angelo, when you were in the situation where you were with your father again and he's around all the time, how was your interaction with your father?

ANGELO: Real good, real good.

SIGRIST: Was he more kind of like a buddy rather than a father?

ANGELO: Uh, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Did he like the kids? Was he . . .

ANGELO: He love us.

JOHN: Yeah.

ANGELO: Like (?). He was good.

SIGRIST: Of course, I imagine he had Americanized quite a bit.

ANGELO: No, no. Not really.

JOHN: No.

SIGRIST: No?

ANGELO: No, no.

SIGRIST: Did he speak English?

ANGELO: Yes, but he was not Americanized.

JOHN: The reason that a lot of the Greek families were split apart was strictly economic. It was not because, they didn't abandon their families because of, you know, they find somebody else and they want to be with somebody else. It was a necessity for survival. So they came here, and they work like dogs to put their families, to educate their families. Then when we came here we were very, very close. Most Greek families are. It's just the nature of the society. So, and my father was a very nice hard-working individual. And we really had, he died, what, May the 4th, right? He was ninety, he would have been ninety-one years old. So we had a good relationship with our family, you know.

SIGRIST: What was the hardest thing getting used to? I'll ask each of you separately. John, you go first. What was the hardest thing about getting adjusted to America?

JOHN: The language. The language, and it was the hardest getting over the shock of the difference in culture, in the language. And the loneliness that goes with it, the hardships that go with it.

SIGRIST: Well, you're in a place that doesn't have a big Greek population, so you're really just an island within yourself.

JOHN: And even, even the Greek population that was there, they had been here for many, many years, and there were children who were born here from Greek parents. They were no different than any other, because they didn't want to have anything to do with us. We were displaced persons. We were the guys that wore the dirty clothes and the dirty shoes and couldn't speak the language. And we looked poor, and we were poor, and they didn't want to be associated with us, you know. So we had a double-whammy. We had the American kids who couldn't understand, and we had the Greek kids born here that would have nothing to do with us. So we were a little like lepers, you know. So we had, we had a tough, tough time.

SIGRIST: Were you put in a school when you came to Charlotte?

JOHN: I was, well, I went to school when I was fifteen, and I started in the first grade and then, to learn my ABC's. And then they moved me from the first grade to the sixth grade. From the first year I was a sixth

grade student. I was fifteen years old in sixth grade. But I learned my ABC's and, you know, learned how to read a little bit, and how to write. But my biggest thing in the language was when I was working at the grill. I would go to the movies in the afternoon and watch maybe two or three times. And the movies helped me. I was watching cowboy movies, you know, Roy Rogers and Gene Audrey and Les LaRoix and Hopalong Cassidy. And I would relay, like the guy would walk in to open the door, you know. And after a while you relate the action with the words, and that's how, that was my first experience in learning the language. It helped me tremendously.

SIGRIST: Did, Angelo, did you go to school at all?

ANGELO: No, I did not.

SIGRIST: You didn't at all.

ANGELO: No.

SIGRIST: Did you wish that you had?

ANGELO: Of course.

SIGRIST: Were, your parents, I assume, probably were not

educated people.

ANGELO: No, not really, no.

JOHN: No.

SIGRIST: So this was not something that they were pushing on you to do.

ANGELO: No, no.

SIGRIST: Angelo, tell me a little bit about how your mother adjusted to this country. You said earlier that she liked this country. What did she like about this country?

ANGELO: She liked the people. She always liked people. She loved the people.

JOHN: The greenery.

ANGELO: She loved everything about America.

SIGRIST: Did she learn English?

ANGELO: A few words.

SIGRIST: How did she learn them?

ANGELO: By talking to people like you.

JOHN: In the restaurant.

ANGELO: In the restaurant.

SIGRIST: She worked in the restaurant, too.

JOHN: Oh, we all were.

SIGRIST: Your uncle had a whole labor force. ( he laughs )

JOHN: That's exactly right. We were making twelve dollars a week, working sixty, seventy hours a week, twelve dollars.

ANGELO: When I got a raise, they paid me seventeen.

JOHN: Yeah. And that was too much for people like us. We didn't deserve anything, in fact. We were a bunch of Commies, and this kind of crap, you know. But we had a tough time.

SIGRIST: Tell me, I'll ask you, John, what did you really like about this country? What was so different, something that you really liked about America?

JOHN: The, well, the food. I couldn't get enough, I couldn't get enough to eat, you know. And, well, just the, we had, then was peaceful times, you know. We

didn't have to worry about the war and the killings and all this kind of crash. And it was a good, we worked very hard, but it was, you know, you had plenty to eat. The food was the most, to me, and good clothes. But the food was the most important thing because we were never going hungry again. That's hard for people to understand until you've been hungry. But that was the thing. And my mama loved the, see, we come from a very arid type of country, and the greenery and all the grass and the beautiful trees, which she was just absolutely fascinated with. And the absence of rocks. You know, we had to move a rock to find a little bit of soil to plant a wheat seed, you know.

SIGRIST: It was that rocky.

JOHN: Oh, unreal, unreal. So to her, you know, just going and seeing people's yards with all the greenery was absolutely mind-boggling.

SIGRIST: Do you remember getting your first pair of American pants or your first American shirt?

JOHN: Sure. Got that in Schenectady. Got me a jacket and a brown looking shirt with no buttons, the buttons was

hidden, and my first pair of long pants. And I came here with short pants on. My first pair of long pants and my shoes and socks. And my uncle Jim, you know, he used to spend a little bit of money on us and it was just great. And then caught the Pullman, and some of the best food I ever had was in the Pullman, between Charlotte, I mean, between New York and, no, between New York and Charlotte.

SIGRIST: That's right. You would have gone from Schenectady to New York.

JOHN: Yeah. And then from, they put us on the train. We spent the night on, and it was, the food was absolutely fabulous. The waiters and all the silver-plated stuff, and we had a good breakfast and lunch was great.

SIGRIST: Well, now, Angelo, John thought the food was the greatest thing in America. What did you think the greatest thing was?

ANGELO: My sandals. My sandals, my shoes.

SIGRIST: Your sandals.

ANGELO: My shoe size is 9-1/2 B now. There was no new shoe to

fit my foot. So they took me to the shoe store. The shoes for me were too small, so they decided to buy me a pair of sandals, maybe fifteen, sixteen size, to put my shoe in it. When I walked in New York City you could hear the "clop, clop, clop, clop, clop" down the sidewalk. That was my shoes. They were looking at it . . . ( they laugh )

JOHN: See, we had a problem. We, you could go barefooted. Your foot has a tendency to spread, and it measures on the thing like you wear 7-1/2 D, but in reality it's not. It might be a 7-1/2 D, but when you walk it might become a 7-1/2 AAA. So the shoes were too narrow. It was too crampy. You were suffocated in them. We had been all those years with no shoes. So it was kind of a readjustment.

SIGRIST: And America gave you a pair of shoes. ( voices garbled ) Well, we've got to end now. I just want to ask you a final question, and I'll ask you each individually. Angelo, are you glad you came to this country?

ANGELO: You better believe it.

SIGRIST: How do you think your life would have been different

if you had stayed in Greece?

ANGELO: (?) when I got here. It was beautiful.

SIGRIST: Have you ever been back?

ANGELO: Yes, I went back. I was visiting. I cannot live there, no way.

SIGRIST: John, are you happy you came here?

JOHN: Oh, of course. I would have been dead if I was over there. That would just, you know, I would not have been, I would not have been alive today if I had stayed over there, because the medicine here was so far advanced in my sickness, and my condition back there would have killed me. You know, there's no doubt in my mind. So this country gave me life, and an opportunity, you know.

ANGELO: I came here in 1947. In 1952 I went in the United States Army, the Korean War, and I served two years of it. My God, I am proud. I'd do it again if I had to. It was the greatest.

SIGRIST: 1952, you said.

ANGELO: Yes. '52 to '54, Korean War.

SIGRIST: Were your parents very patriotic?

JOHN: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: About this country?

JOHN: Oh, yeah.

ANGELO: Father was the Greek (?) from 1915 to 1921.

JOHN: Fighting against the Germans and the Axis. Well, the  
Turks were aligned with them, you know. The . . .  
( voices garbled )

ANGELO: (?) was the sergeant.

JOHN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Huh. Oh. Well, I want to thank you both very much.

JOHN: We want to thank you.

SIGRIST: For taking the time coming up here. It's always a  
treat to interview family members together at the same  
time. You get different versions of the same story.

ANGELO: Sure, sure.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with John Hondros and

EI-336/HONDROS

Angelo Hondros on June 18, 1993 at the Ellis Island  
Immigration Museum.