

**EI-369**

**NORMAN C. SIMO**

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**INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.**

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**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: JOHN MURIELLO, DECEMBER, 1995**

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**ALBANIA, 1938**

**AGE 9**

**PORT OF EMBARCATION: NAPLES**

**RESIDENCES: PERMET**

**WORCESTER, MA**

LEVINE: Okay, this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today in Worcester, Massachusetts. I'm, it's August 9th, 1993, and I'm here with Norman Simo who came from Albania in 1938 when he was nine years old.

SIMO: That's right.

LEVINE: Well, I'm very happy to be here, and happy to be interviewing one more Albanian person...

SIMO: Oh, that's great.

LEVINE: ...for the collection.

SIMO: It's really my pleasure. And I'm hoping that more Albanians will come forward so that we can have the artifacts and the voice recordings available to all people of the country, so that they'll get an idea, you know, who's an Albanian, what is an Albanian, and is there such a country as Albania.

LEVINE: Well, I think that's, I think that's good. And I know you've donated artifacts to the collection, and that's...

SIMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: That's what Ellis Island is all about.

SIMO: Right.

LEVINE: Representing all the different ethnic groups.

SIMO: Yeah, that was our pleasure. My wife and I wanted to do this so that we could preserve something for the future of those that are researching Albania, and want to visit Ellis Island, they want to see the artifacts, and

maybe understand what all America is about. That it's like a more or less a ceramic where you see different nations, different countries, making a contribution that makes up the total of America.

LEVINE: Wonderful. Well I'm really happy, and I looking forward to hearing your particular story.

SIMO: Oh.

LEVINE: Why don't we start at the beginning...

SIMO: Okay.

LEVINE: If you would tell me your birth date.

SIMO: I was born January 28th, 1929. And I was born in Permet, P-E-R-M-E-T, Albania. And it was a home delivery. ((he laughs)) I mean, you know, they had no hospitals there or anything. So I was delivered at home. As a matter of fact they said that I was, like, a large baby. Ten pounds six ounces. ((he laughs)) So everybody was "Wow." They were kind of like astonished.

LEVINE: Were the first child?

SIMO: No I was the second child. I have an older brother who unfortunately passed away. But I'm the second, and we had a young sister who unfortunately passed away also. And I have a younger brother that was born here. And...

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, what is, what was your, or your, your sister and brother who were born in Albania, what were their names?

SIMO: My sister was born here.

LEVINE: Oh.

SIMO: My brother was born in Albania and I was born in Albania. My brother was two and a half to three years older than myself.

LEVINE: And what was his name?

SIMO: Charles.

LEVINE: Charles. Okay. And your, and your sister and brother who were born here, their names?

SIMO: Yes. Janet and Steve.

LEVINE: And your mother's name?

SIMO: Hariklia.

LEVINE: Could you spell that?

SIMO: Yes. H-A-R-I-K-L-I-A. Hariklia. Isn't that something?

LEVINE: Beautiful.

SIMO: Now, when we first came here it was Simo, it was Simollari. S-I-M-O-L-L-A-R-I. And when my father came, I came, I guess he came in 1920's. '20 something, '21 or something like that. And he originally lived in Philadelphia, and his uncle which was my grandfather's brother had cut the name to Simo, so my father did the same thing. He cut the name down to

Simo. So when we arrived here, they changed our names to Simo.

LEVINE: I see. So when you got on the boat, was it Simo, or...

SIMO: It was Simollari.

LEVINE: Simollari.

SIMO: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SIMO: Yes. And I donated the card to Ellis Island stating, you know, and with my picture, with my arrival card from, from Albania. And Simollari is on there.

LEVINE: I see.

SIMO: So.

LEVINE: So, when you were in Albania up until the age of nine...

SIMO: Yes.

LEVINE: ...you were Simollari.

SIMO: Yes. That's right.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, the name, the town where you were born?

SIMO: Yes.

LEVINE: Do you remember it?

SIMO: Very well.

LEVINE: Can you describe it?

SIMO: Oh, very well. It was, well, to, you know, when you're nine years old you think it's a large town. It, since recently, since I've been there I found out it's really a small, very small town. ((he laughs)) It, it's in southern Albania. And the climate is similar to California. They have orange trees, pomegranates, fig trees, just to give you an idea of the climate and what it

contains. It, it's probably population of maybe twelve or thirteen thousand. You know, in those days we thought that was a large town, or large city. It was a popular trading center, believe it or not. And a lot of goods used to flow through there. They had open markets I remember very well. As a matter of fact, when we were kids we used to go down and get a few oranges, on the side naturally. ((he laughs)) As a kid. And it had two churches. It had one synagogue. It had temple, the mosque. It had no hotels, but a lot of individual houses. And the industry, of course, was farming. It had a large river. I remember the river, my God, during the spring. When you had the melt, there used to be the overflow. I mean, speak about floods and currents fast flowing. I remember one time my cousin's house, who lived close to the river, it, it not only got flooded out, but the stones came rolling down. So this one time it was probably int 1935 or something. '34 or '35. We visited, we heard about the bad, bad floods when the river flood. And they said well, there's a big stone that landed in their yard. My God, we thought it was a rock. This thing was like the size of the house. So you can imagine the force of that river and how devastating it was.

LEVINE: Do you remember the name of it? The river?

SIMO: I think it was the Volga. Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, now, you say it was a trading town.

SIMO: Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: Trade was going from other countries?

SIMO: There, there was a trading within the country itself, where they bought goods and so forth. And people came from all over. It had a, it had a reputation for all kinds of goods. So they must have been bringing goods in from other countries as well, and trading there, because it's, it's near the, the border of Greece. And the farming goods were available readily. And, you know, there was no storage area, so they had to make sure they sold them, the goods rather quickly.

LEVINE: Do you remember market day?

SIMO: Yes.

LEVINE: Was there such a thing as market day?

SIMO: Yes. There were market days, particularly on the weekends. The market days on the weekends were abundant. And it was like an open market. I remember when I first came to the United States, in Worcester they had an open market right by the bus station. You know, the old bus, near, near the Worcester Common. And it was similar to that. The, the, all, all the farmers would bring their goods in. And they would just open blankets up, they'd set their goods out, and people would come in and buy and purchase from all over. So that was...

LEVINE: What do you remember about the market in Albania? Was it, was it all produce...

SIMO: It was...

LEVINE: ...or was it other things, too?

SIMO: It was produce, and it had farm, like animals and, of that nature. And they had goods like blankets and what have you. I remember all that. Yeah. Yeah. So it was really quite interesting. Yeah. There were stores, too, around. So in other words it was like an open, large plaza where they used

to stretch out their goods. But then surrounding the plaza were all these little shops that sold individual items. They specialized in one area. (he laughs) Someone would specialize in blankets, someone would tailor. You know, it's, a butcher or baker. You know, it's one of those things.

LEVINE: Well, it sounds like you have fond memories of...

SIMO: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: ...your childhood there.

SIMO: It's, it was pleasant. It really was.

LEVINE: What was the countryside like?

SIMO: The countryside was more or less like farmland. And groves. And, well, like corn and wheat. They had olive groves. Olives grew readily. And pomegranates and figs and grapefruits. Quince. Quince. But large size quince. I've never, I haven't seen anything comparable here to be honest with you. The oranges were, were quite large. And, and they were thick skinned, but they were also juicy. The only, let's see, I think I've seen the

Jewish people that brought in from Israel thick skinned oranges, or from California the Sunkist. Not the Florida type. The Florida type is the thin skinned type. That's the kind that they were growing.

LEVINE: Do you remember the house you lived in there?

SIMO: Yes. Very well. It was a, it was a two story. I remember the cellar very well. It was dark and we were kind of like afraid to go in the cellar. (he laughs)

LEVINE: What did you have in the cellar?

SIMO: It really, there wasn't that much in the cellar. But, I mean, you know, it kind of like, it was so dark. There was no electricity. You know. So you more or less went with a, with a candle or a lantern. And they'd say, "Stay away from the cellar." So who knows what they had down in the cellar. (he laughs) So we really never went in the cellar. It was kind of like a, a scary thing, you know. And then there was upstairs. Upstairs there were five or six rooms. It was quite large. One of the rooms, we called it the parlor, more or less. It was kind of like the combination living room and the bedroom. And we used to sleep there on the floor, naturally on mattresses.

And we had the fireplace there. And all, all your more or less expensive furniture was in, in that one particular room. And there were separate bedrooms. But we never used the separate bedrooms. (he laughs) We more or less all stayed in that one room. So it was...

LEVINE: It was warmer, I guess.

SIMO: Yeah, exactly. It was warmer. And it kind of like gave you a feeling of security, too, that you didn't have to worry about or be afraid of anything. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SIMO: Yeah. Then there was some attic rooms upstairs. I used to visit those every once in a while just out of curiosity.

LEVINE: And what was up there?

SIMO: That, that was like more or less a storage area. They used to store things up there, you know.

LEVINE: Food, or...

SIMO: Food, food, like, and sausages. You know, they would hang the sausages from the ceiling and dry them out. And then when they were cured, then they would eat and use that more or less. Yeah. It was very interesting. It's amazing how they did things in those days, you know.

LEVINE: Do you remember your mother preparing the sausages? Is she the one who...

SIMO: Yes. Yes. She had a hand machine. She had a hand machine. And they used to use the guts from sheep. They loved the lamb, you know. They, they used to go down to the market and would buy them. And they would grind it up, and they, with the hand, and they would stuff it by hand. Grind it up in this little hand machine. And they would mix it all up, and then they would stuff it in here. (he gestures) And, the skin, you know, the, and they would slowly just keep filling it up and filling it up until it was complete. And then they would tie it up with this string.

LEVINE: And then hang it in the attic?

SIMO: And then they would hang it up in the attic. And it just drip and dry up and use it. For the winter. Or they would use it immediately if company came. But they would cook it differently, you know.

LEVINE: How did they...

SIMO: Once it dried up it would, they could fry it. But if it was fresh they could bake it. Amazing. Yeah. Or they would make, yeah, they would, like, you know how they make the shish kabob. Well, they call this kolofata. You know, this, this...

LEVINE: How do you spell that? Do you know?

SIMO: Kolo, okay, kolofata. K-O-L-O-F-A, fata, T-A. Close. Kolofata. It was, it was a delicacy, really.

LEVINE: And then what, how would they serve it?

SIMO: They would serve it with, with rice pilaf. And they would serve it with peppers. You know, they would, they would kind of like fry the peppers in olive oil, pure olive oil. And they would chill the peppers. They wouldn't

serve it hot. The rice was hot, but the peppers were chilled. And they would pour a little vinegar and oil after. And you would eat it that way. And it was delicious.

LEVINE: Now that's if it was fresh.

SIMO: It was fresh. Right.

LEVINE: Now, if it was dry?

SIMO: If it was dry they had it like, more like sausages. Then they could add potatoes, they could add eggplant or, or peppers. Or tomatoes. It was, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you remember any other dishes that were really Albanian?

SIMO: Oh, yeah. Well, the lamb. You know, we're, we're lamb lovers. We love to eat lamb, you know. Also like stuffed peppers and stuffed tomatoes. That was one of our delicacies. Our stews, with lamb. Again our lamb, the stews we cooked with lamb. And you would use like string beans. You would use okra. Okra is another that grows very well in Albania. So that

was part of it. There was also stuffed zucchini. And there was stuffed eggplant. Now, this isn't the round eggplant. This was the long, thin eggplant. They would stuff those. You know, it was really amazing what they would do. I remember also where we had, she would make, my mother would make, it was not spaghetti, but like rigatoni. And she would cook that. And she would use cream cheese and another kind, like cottage cheese. And she would mix that up. She would cook them and she would mix that up. And it was like unbelievable. Unbelievable taste. You know.

LEVINE: Was your mother a particularly good cook?

SIMO: Oh, yeah. She was a great cook.

LEVINE: Well, tell me more about your mother. What kind of person was she?

SIMO: Oh, she was, she was unbelievably, what a brave person. Let me tell you an incident that, that happened in Albania. We were up in the attic, my brother and I and a friend. And when we were up there, all of a sudden a snake was in the attic. All of a sudden she saw this snake. Without thinking there was a can there. A can. She went, grabbed the can, and the bottom had an edge, a thin edge around the bottom of the can. ANd she

went and pounced on that snake, and she killed it right then and there. Now, without even thinking, right? Just think about it, right? And she, that, that's the kind of a person. She was sweet and warm and loveable and an angel. Everybody will tell you she was an angel. You know. It's, it's, I was blessed. I really was blessed with a sweet, wonderful mother. She cared for us, she took care of us, and really loving.

LEVINE: What was her maiden name?

SIMO: Adams. Yeah.

LEVINE: That doesn't sound Albanian.

SIMO: Well, it, we kind of like, made it...

LEVINE: Anglicized it?

SIMO: Right. Anglicized when we came here. It was, really over there it was like Thomas, you know. Thoma. Thoma. T-H-O-M-A. Thoma. But, you know, they said over here it comes out to Adam. You know. Who, who knows, right? (they laugh)

LEVINE: That's funny.

SIMO: They, they changed a lot of names when they came here to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, now, your father, what was his name?

SIMO: Koczi. K-O-[CH], it's like a "chuh", -I. Koczi. Gus, he would, you know he would call himself Gus.

LEVINE: Now he came over here before?

SIMO: Oh, yeah. He came here in, in very early 1920's with my grandfather and my uncle. My father's brother. Younger brother. And they, they resided originally in Philadelphia. And they used to use a push cart. That how they made their living. A push cart. (he laughs) Selling ice cream or, you know, Italian ice, or something like that, which was ice, they told me. Crushed ice with like...

LEVINE: Syrup.

SIMO: Syrup on it. Yeah. And that was a popular number. But that was so back breaking, because the roads, they were dirt roads. And pushing that, if it got wet or something, if it rained it was really a horror story. So...

LEVINE: So how long did they stay here then?

SIMO: They stayed in Philadelphia, well, my father stayed here, and he just went for a visit. In other words he went for a visit, that's how I became, no. No, I never knew my father. I didn't meet my father until I came to the United States. My grandfather had made some visits here. He made a couple of visits, several visits, so I knew him. But I never knew my father until we arrived in the United States nine years later.

LEVINE: Well, he must have visited before your brother was born, too.

SIMO: Well, he got married, you know. He visited, and then he got married. He came, he came to Albania. He got married, you know. And then he came back to the United States. He never took, I don't know why he didn't take my mother. Well, I guess because his mother and sister were there. I guess, you know, we were established with the home, we had our own home. And I guess just because of that. They probably figured they were

just going to come here, make their fortune, then return. (he laughs) I'm sure a lot of them had the same thought that they were going to make their fortune and return back to the homeland. And it just didn't work out that way.

LEVINE: Do you remember any stories about your mother and father, I mean, how they happened to marry each other?

SIMO: You know what? That was an arranged kind of a marriage. My mother came from Bualia.

LEVINE: Could you spell it?

SIMO: Bualia. It's capital B-U-A-L-I-A. Bualia. And my father lived in Permet. Now, my, my mother was the youngest of fourteen children. And she was the last daughter, you know. So, I mean, you know, and she, she came from like a very weal, very, very wealthy family. They had two homes. The smallest home was something like twenty-two rooms. So the larger home, which is now a museum, by the way, in Albania. They made it a museum. The larger one had about forty some odd rooms. And it was like a big, big farm, big ranch, and it was like an estate more or less, you know. So then

they heard about my father. So then we had relatives that were living in Albania. My mother had some sisters and brothers that lived in, in Permet. So then they found that this young man from America wanted to get married. And they fixed them up. (he laughs) And that's how they met. They met at church, and they got married and that was it.

LEVINE: Well now, was it, was it considered, I guess it was considered a good thing...

SIMO: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: ...for a young woman to marry a man...

SIMO: Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: ...who had gone to America?

SIMO: Yes. Yes. Yes. And they, well, they thought that it was going to be, you know, they knew the families. They always knew the background of each family. So, I mean, if they fixed someone up, it wasn't to a complete stranger. You know, we might think, oh, my God. You mean, they didn't

meet before this? But they knew the families. They knew who, who the young couples were. And they knew that they were compatible.

LEVINE: Did, did your father come from also a, a well established family?

SIMO: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yes. A well established family. As a matter of fact, one of my uncles used to hang out with one of the, he was like the Shah of Turkey. You know, he became, he became like the king. You know, the Shah of Turkey. And he came from a well established family, and they had doctors and lawyers in the family, and professional people. So, you know. My background is more or less solid. Yeah.

LEVINE: I'm going to, just going to turn this off for a minute...

SIMO: Go ahead.

LEVINE: ...because there is someone making noise here in the back. (break in tape)  
Okay, we're resuming now, having closed the door.

SIMO: Okay.

LEVINE: Is, is there a name of the museum that was in your mother's family that is in Albania now?

SIMO: Well, it would, it would be the Thoma Estate, you know. And they just made this more or less like a museum. And they, they have tourists going there and everything else.

LEVINE: So, for your father, what had he done in Albania before he went to the United States, do you know?

SIMO: Well, well, he was very young when he came over here. He was only like sixteen or seventeen himself. So he really hadn't done anything. And when he found out that there were a lot of hard work in pushing those wagons, (he laughs) and selling ice cream on the street, then he decided to go into the food business. So he, he became more or less like a bus boy in a restaurant. And his interest was to learn about food all that he could. And he became, believe it or not he became a top chef. So, so, so well known a chef that he, he could write his own ticket in the Worcester and Boston area. He became very well known, you know. It's unfortunate. I wish, I wish he had written a book or something with all the knowledge and, you know, because he had so many good recipes.

LEVINE: Well, do you remember, like when, when you and your mother and your brother...

SIMO: Yes.

LEVINE: ...is that who you travelled with when you came?

SIMO: Okay. When we came, it was my grandmother, Varvara [PH]. It was my aunt Persephone, unfortunately who just passed away. She would have been an ideal candidate as well. It was my brother, my mother and myself that came over.

LEVINE: Well, at what stage in your father's career was he when you and your family came here?

SIMO: Okay, he...

LEVINE: What was he doing?

SIMO: He was, he was, he just established himself as a chef in a restaurant. A

cook and a chef. And he, he was doing very well. You know, as a, as a chef, who's a master, as a matter of fact he serviced many of the restaurants in the Worcester area. He was very well known. And they, they always asked for him. "Come on, work here. Come on, work here." You know.

LEVINE: So, and is that why, is that the reason that you and your family came at that point, because your father had finally sort of made it as a, as a chef in demand?

SIMO: I don't think so. I think what had happened, the winds of war. This was in 1938. The winds of war were really blowing. And they were afraid that if they didn't bring us over when they did, then God knows the whole family could have been wiped out in Albania. So it was by the grace of God that we arrived here. Actually when we arrived here it was on Armistice Day, November 11th. It was like a, you know, a blessing. Can you imagine arriving here on November 11th. And on April 1st, the following year, 1939, April 1st, which is a matter of what, four, five, six months, Albania was attacked. And we would, if we didn't get out when we did, we would have been stuck, and God knows what would have happened, you know. I remember when I went back for a visit in 1984, a couple of my friends that I

used to hang around with were killed, you know, in the war, you know. They were killed by the Nazis. One of them was taken, and he was captured, he was shot. It was very, oh, God, when you think of it. Really devastating what the Nazis had done.

LEVINE: So, so you were, you were more or less in a fatherless family for your first nine years.

SIMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: And did your mother work, or...

SIMO: No, no. My mother didn't work. As a matter of fact, when you think of it, there were all, only women, with the exception of my brother and I, and we were very young. So they didn't work. We, we used to get money from over here. From America. From my father. He was sending money over here, you know.

LEVINE: Do you remember any experiences as a, as a young boy with your grandmother in Albania?

SIMO: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. I remember some of the customs that we used to have. Like during the new year, in order to celebrate the new year, they would go out and get some pine. There was a special pine tree out in the woods. We'd have to get some of the pines, and we'd get some of the old wood. And they would burn this to kind of like bring, burning in the old and bringing in the new. That was very interesting. And we would set a table laden with food. And all kinds of goodies, you know. And then we would shake the table, pick it up and shake it three times.

LEVINE: The table cloth?

SIMO: The whole table.

LEVINE: Oh, the table. (s(he laughs))

SIMO: You would pick up, everybody would just gather around the table, and they would sing, "O lek, bulek [PH]," you know, and kind of like bringing in the new year, and bringing in hopefully a better year, you know. That was, that was one of the incidences [sic]. And I remember she used to take me to church all the time.

LEVINE: What church?

SIMO: Every Sunday the Albanian Orthodox church was, was just up the street from us. It was, you know, when you're small it's like, five hundred feet is a long ways off. But it really wasn't, wasn't that far. And we used to go not only on Sundays, but every like major holidays. And we'd be doing something and she'd say, "Oh, no, no. Don't do that now. It's a holy day. You can't do that." So they had all these holy day customs. (he laughs) I think they set that up themselves so they wouldn't have to do any work. (they laugh)

LEVINE: So there were a lot of holy days?

SIMO: There were a lot of holy days, saint days and everything else. (he laughs) Amazing, you know.

LEVINE: Well, how about school? Do you remember school?

SIMO: Yes, I remember school. The school was two houses up from us where we lived. And the church was right next door to the school. So you could imagine how close we were.

LEVINE: Was it a public school, or was it a...

SIMO: It was a, it was a public school. And it only went up to the sixth grade. Then after you, you finished that school, then you went on to a higher school. Now if you went to the higher school, you, you had to make sure that you passed certain exams, and were qualified, and, and knew that material, or could do the, the higher, the higher schools. But I remember doing the multiplication table and the words and the spellings and everything else like that. And gymnastics was also a very, every part of it. I guess they believed in the healthy mind and the healthy body. It's the old Plato philosophy, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SIMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, you went then to school here after you got here?

SIMO: Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: How, how did the school in, in Albania compare when you, to the school when you got here?

SIMO: I have an interesting experience that, that happened. When I came here, I mean, all I could speak was Albanian. So when I came here I had some friends that I met. They lived in the same house. We lived in a three decker. They lived in the same house. They lived in the first floor. Bobby and Paul. I don't remember their last name, but I remember their first names. And the school was Winslow Street, which was just down the road. It's not there anymore now. It's gone now. They took us to that school. All I do was more or less like sign language. (he laughs) If I was hungry, you know, I would make a sign that I'm hungry, then, you know, for my stomach. Or thirsty, I wanted to, to drink, I would make through sign language. When I first started school, they started me in the first grade because I didn't have, I didn't know the language. And when I went there, now in those days, the teacher would read from the Bible, and the kids would say the prayer. So I said to myself, oh, my God, the teacher is reading, and they're remembering what the teacher is reading. And they're reciting it back. So I'm saying, boy, I'd better learn the language quickly, or I'm going to find myself at the bottom of the ladder. (he laughs)

**END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE**

**BEGINNING OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO**

SIMO: So I made a point to make sure I learned the language as quickly as I could. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Do you remember when you were learning it any kind of breakthroughs that you had experienced in learning the language?

SIMO: There, there was, there was a fellow by the name of Johnny Jones that was Albanian, he knew some Albanian, that was at the school. So they, I couldn't speak any English. They brought him over, and they said, well, he can speak some Albanian. When I saw him and he started speaking Albanian, he, I gave him a big hug. (he laughs) It was like, oh, thank God there's someone here I can communicate with and tell him how I feel, and what I'm thinking, you know, and what I want to do and what I want to know. So that's how, that's how he became almost my tutor the very beginning of the early stages, until I picked the words. And believe it or

not, within six months I was speaking the language. It's amazing. Just, I guess Albanian, the language Albanian, is very close to a lot of languages, including French and Latin and English. So it, it kind of like came relatively easy.

LEVINE: So do you remember, do you remember, (she clears her throat) excuse me. Talking about the school in Albania...

SIMO: Yes.

LEVINE: ...was there anything different about that?

SIMO: Yeah, it was more, more strict and structured. It was more mechanical, whereas here you had the independence to think and kind of like bring up different thoughts. Over there you were structured to do and you do that and you do this. Then everybody in the whole room recites this, and, you know, you do this and report, you make sure you listen to the other person. No one got out of line. I mean, the teacher was the teacher, period. And that was it. And when you learned it was so structured, that everybody was like, I mean, yeah, you were like, okay, this is it. You have to do this, and you do it this way. There is no other way. This is the way

we all do this. And you would do it. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Yeah. Are there any other ways or customs that, that you remember from Albania, that are particular to, to that place, that either your mother carried over or dropped, but things in Albania that were particular?

SIMO: Oh. Oh, yeah, like the weddings. The weddings were unbelievable. They would, they would last a whole week. And when they sent out invitations it was (Albanian). That was "beginning to the end." (he laughs) The beginning started one week before, and the end was like one day after the wedding was over. So you needed like, to more or less to recuperate. And they would, they had a night where they would visit the bride. The groom's family would visit the bride. And they would go in there, you know, unannounced, and kind of like ransack the house. Not, not, you know, ransack, to, to get some artifacts of the girl, of the, of the bride to be, and then bring them to the, to the house of the groom, you know, the future groom. And then they in turn, the following day would to the same, or the following evening would do the same thing.

LEVINE: You mean the parents of the bride would go to the groom...

SIMO: The, the whole family. In other words, uncles and cousins that would visit the groom's house, and then try and get some artifacts. And then when the wedding came, at the wedding, they would bring all these gifts out and present them to the couple. (he laughs) It was amazing, you know?

LEVINE: What would they choose? Like, what kinds of things...

SIMO: They'd choose like pillows and pillow cases and doilies and pictures and, you know, things of that nature.

LEVINE: And then, and then these artifacts would be for the bride and groom to start their own house with?

SIMO: For the bride, to, to, yeah. Yeah, to start their own house with. You know? Or if they didn't want them they would return them back to their original families. But it was so interesting that they would do something like that, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SIMO: And then they always went, they always went and picked up the bride.

They wanted to make sure that the bride didn't jilt him. So they would show, make sure that they went there, and picked up the bride. Then they had a "lahn [PH]." Lahn would be like a brother. And he would make sure that the bride came with, with us. The groom wouldn't see the bride.

LEVINE: This is the day of the wedding?

SIMO: Yeah. The day of the wedding. And they would take the bride into a, well, they didn't have, they didn't have automobiles there. (he laughs) Into a horse or, or mule or donkey, or whatever means of transportation. On a rare occasion maybe someone would bring in a car. But, I mean, or, you know, a horse drawn wagon or something like that. But they would, they would make sure that they picked up the bride so that the bride would be at the church.

LEVINE: Was jilting a common thing?

SIMO: No. It was, it was not. But, I mean, you know, this is one way of saying, hey, don't worry, the wedding is gonnal go on. So, you know.

LEVINE: And what would the bride be wearing?

SIMO: The bride would be wearing a veil, and, and a gown. A beautiful gown. And the face was not seen. You didn't see the face. One of the things that they were afraid of, that's why they would make they would check out, they would pick up the bride, that they didn't switch...

LEVINE: Brides?

SIMO: ...brides. They didn't switch brides.

LEVINE: Did that happen?

SIMO: On occasion it happened. They would switch brides. That certain sister that couldn't get married, they would switch them to one that was, you know, pleasant. They, they wanted to make sure that all the girls got married.

LEVINE: Was, was the bride wearing white as they do here?

SIMO: Yes, the bride would wear white. And, and they'd also have some, like, color. Not just white. They had white underneath, but then they had like a

color vest. Beautiful, you know? Decorated in jewelry. And then they had, the church had crowns, so that when they got married they were crowned in church. And those crowns stayed with the church as a permanent kind of, they would use them for different weddings, different brides and grooms.

LEVINE: Were flowers involved?

SIMO: Yes. Yeah. They always had some flowers. And then they had a banquet, big banquet afterwards. And sometimes the banquet, the bride and groom would leave, the banquet would continue for twenty-four hours or more. (he laughs) So they really enjoyed the weddings.

LEVINE: Would the bride and groom go on a honeymoon?

SIMO: No, there was, no. They would more or less give them a home somewhere. They would stay in, independently in someone's house. They would leave, and they would stay there. That would be their, their honeymoon cottage. (he laughs) At least they gave them a chance to be alone, right, and get to know each other.

LEVINE: While everybody else was at the banquet.

SIMO: Right. (they laugh) That's right. They're all at the banquet enjoying themselves.

LEVINE: Well, how about funerals? Do you remember any...

SIMO: Yeah. The funerals were, yes. I'm, you know, surprisingly you brought those up. Everybody had one grave lot. They had one grave lot. It was a family lot. And they would bury everybody in this one grave. And then after a year they would go and dig up the bones, and they would clean them, wash them, oil them and then gather them together and put them together in a corner of the lot. And they would just store them. It's amazing how I remember these things, you know. So, so that...

LEVINE: When, when they put them in the corner of the lot they were above the ground?

SIMO: No, no. They were in the ground, but they were, they were in the ground, but they were like all, that one person, this is all his bones. And this other one person, all his bones were all gathered so that they, they didn't

distribute all the bones separately. They would keep them intact. This person's head, and, well, the skull, and all the bones were together. And this is one person, and this is another person, and all the...

LEVINE: And they'd bury them?

SIMO: They would bury them up in the top, at the head of the, of the casket more or less. So that they could have maybe ten, fifteen, twenty skulls there with the bones. So all family members were buried in that one family plot.

LEVINE: So in other words, when they buried them first...

SIMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...and, and they stayed buried for a year, the body would all decompose...

SIMO: Yes. Yeah.

LEVINE: ...so by the time they dug it back up...

SIMO: By the time, right. Right. By the time they dug it back up all there was,

there was bones. And they would clean the bones and, you know, they would bring them to church, you know. And pray for them. And they would clean them and wash them and would bring them back into the grave.

LEVINE: Wow.

SIMO: Yeah. It's amazing.

LEVINE: Now who would clean, who would clean the bones and...

SIMO: The family. The family members. It would be a wife or a mother or, you know.

LEVINE: And do you remember what they cleaned them with?

SIMO: Yeah, they cleaned them with, well, first they would rinse them with water and soap. And then they would bathe them with, with olive oil. Yeah. With olive oil and some, like, like, incense and myrrh, you know what I mean? Yeah. They some potions. Sweet, sweet smelling potions. Yeah. It's amazing.

LEVINE: Yeah. Now, so, okay. So this, were there any ceremonies surrounding the...

SIMO: Oh, yeah. There, there, oh, I was going to say, funerals, you had the funerals first, you know. They would take up the church and so forth. And then they would march with the cross. They would lead the procession with the cross, and the priest behind, and they would carry the caskets. And then the people behind the casket, they would all march to the cemetery. Now the cemetery was a distance away.

LEVINE: From the church that you would go to...

SIMO: From the church. Right. And so everyone would, would just go to the cemetery. Yeah. Amazing.

LEVINE: Did they have the casket, before the church service, would it be on display?

SIMO: Yes, it would be, they would always display them at home. You know, that big room I was telling you about, the parlor? Yeah. They would display

them in the, in the home, the parlor. And they had the, the mourners. There would be these women that would just stay up all night with the body. And they would mourn. And, and some of those songs, you know, they would just to make sure everybody cried. I guess they knew that people get depressed. And the loss, to get over the loss, they would cry and they would kind of like chant and sing these songs about the person. You know? Oh, he was such a good man, and he did this, and he did that, and he was married, and he two kids, and the kids name were such and such, you know. And he loved them, and did this, and he would play with them, you know. So that they would bring out all this kind of thing. Then each individual that would hear it, you know, would think of that individual person. And then think of all the good things that they had done, and cry over it, and kind of like try and get over the emotional factor. So, it's interesting when you think about it.

LEVINE: Yeah. What a wonderful therapeutic...

SIMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...idea.

SIMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, now these women were professional mourners?

SIMO: No, they were, they were more or less the family members that would...

LEVINE: Oh, that would do this.

SIMO: ...would gather and do this. And the women always, the minute, the minute the head of the family died would wear black. The women automatically wear black. I mean, they could be twenty-five years old, and they would wear black.

LEVINE: How long would they wear it?

SIMO: They'd wear them forever. Amazing. And then for like sixty days they would wear a black arm band. You know, the men would wear a black arm band indicating that there was a death in the family, you know. It's amazing. Amazing. Even today I, when I went over there they still do that. I can't believe it.

LEVINE: Was there any particular religious idea about death that is unique to the Albanian Orthodox church that...

SIMO: No. No. Death, as a matter of fact, you're supposed to be ready for, you know, death is just a passing from one phase to another. It's just a passing stage. But I guess it's the loss within the family. When you think about the loss within the family that kind of like, oh, this person is gone. He's no longer in our eyes, in our sight. He's only in our memory, and we miss him, and death's a kind of depression, you know. They were depressed about that, that they're not, that person is no longer going to be with them.

LEVINE: But the, the idea of such of a complete mourning...

SIMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...is, is really...

SIMO: Yeah, when you think of it.

LEVINE: ...quite wonderful.

SIMO: It is. When you think of it.

LEVINE: Now, okay, so we've talked about weddings and deaths and their ceremonies.

SIMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Was there any ceremony surrounding birth?

SIMO: Yes, there was. Funny you brought that out. When, when someone was born in the family, they would make what they call "petula."

LEVINE: Spell it.

SIMO: P-E-T-U-L-A. Petula. And petula would be like beignets, beignets? In, in French? Beignet?

LEVINE: Oh.

SIMO: The fried dough. The fried dough. And they would then go out and, you

know, the children would go out and announce to everybody, and give them a petula, and announce the birth of that child. So everybody knew now that there was a child born in that family. And at baptism, when they had the baptism, normally the "kumbara," that would be the person that's standing in for the youngster, would give the name to the youngster. The kumbara. The person that's sponsoring the child would give the name to that youngster. The parents did not know what name they were going to pick. So, now, what happens? Then, they would announce in church at the baptism, "What will you name this child?" And, "I name this child so and so." Now, the minute that name came out, someone would run to the house and let the family know what the name of the child was. And the first one, the first one that arrived at the house, would receive a coin or two as a reward for giving them the name of the youngster. (he laughs) Unbelievable. Isn't that something?

LEVINE: Now the sponsor, who would that be?

SIMO: It would be someone within the family, you know.

LEVINE: Would it be like a godfather?

SIMO: Yeah, it was, be, the godfather. Yeah, it would be the godfather. Yeah.  
The godfather would name the youngster. Unbelievable.

LEVINE: And how do you spell that name? Com, compa...

SIMO: Kumbara. Kumbara. K-U-M-B-A-R-A. Kumbara.

LEVINE: Wow.

SIMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: So, so the baptism was when the name was given. And then what other ceremonies did a, did a, an Albanian child go through? Birth, baptism...

SIMO: Well, those were the majors. Then the weddings.

LEVINE: The weddings.

SIMO: Yeah. Yeah. Those were the major ones. Yeah. And sometimes they didn't even name the, you know, they, they didn't have the baptism for a year or two, you know. So they would say baby so and so. (he laughs)

Unbelievable. But I'm sure that, that the mother's got together with the, with the kumbara, you know, and exchanged some kind of feeling as to what the name should be. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Well, what was it, what would be the basis for naming?

SIMO: Well, generally, the basis would be, if they were born on a particular day, they would find out the saint of that day, and they would more or less take the, the saint's name of that day. So that would be more or less the basis of it.

LEVINE: And then were there name days? Would they celebrate their name days?

SIMO: Yes. Yes. Oh, people celebrated their name days. They would visit the name days, it would be a big thing. They'd have the dinner, and they'd have all kinds of refreshment and entertainment. It was like open house. Name days was open house for everybody. Friend and foe alike. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Foes would come...

SIMO: Foes would come. The doors were wide open. That was one way of breaking the ice of someone that was angry at a family member. So they would come for the name day. And, you know, it's, it's really great when you think about it. And then they would break the ice, and kind of like more or less, hey, say, hey, look. What are we angry about? Let's forget those things. And let's get it resolved and come to an understanding.

LEVINE: Yeah. Wow. Now, would a saint have more than one date?

SIMO: No, because, the saint, they would take the saint when the saint died. They wouldn't take when the saint...

LEVINE: Oh, the day the saint died.

SIMO: Yeah. They would...

LEVINE: I see.

SIMO: Yeah. That would be, that would be the saint. So, it was, they usually named the saints when they died, not when they were born. (he laughs) I don't know why, you know. But that's when they, so when a person was

born, a saint that died on that day, that, that saint would be, probably be renewed within that one person. Or maybe the guardian of that person in, throughout their living life. Isn't that something? Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you think there was a saint who died on every day of the year?

SIMO: I'm sure there was. I'm sure that they have saints that, that died on every year. Yeah.

LEVINE: Wow. Well, is there anything else? My goodness...

SIMO: Oh, we're running out of time?

LEVINE: ...this is fascinating. No, we'll keep going, because we...

SIMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Is there anything else that you can think about Albania, and the customs and the ways of your family in particular, or the people in general before we...

SIMO: Yeah. Everybody knew each. I mean, literally, everybody knew each other. And, whether you were Muslim or Jewish or Orthodox or Catholic or what have you, it didn't make any difference. You know, you were an Albanian, and you were part of everybody and everybody's life. It was like a universally accepted individual. If you were Albanian, hey, my house is open, my door is open to you. So that was always, always, as far as I can remember the house was always open. Everybody was welcome.

LEVINE: Do you have any interpretation of why the Albanians were so close knit as a group?

SIMO: Yes. You have to remember that the Albanians were in captivity for over five hundred years. Over five hundred years. And they only had each other. So that when, when the Ottoman Empire, you know, the Albanians, through Skenderbeu, they call George Costiolti [PH], Skenderbeu, he kind of like held the Ottoman Empire back. Albania was the front that held the Ottoman Empire back for over twenty-five years. And then Europe recovered and they stopped him after that. As a matter of fact there's a large statue, and he was honored by, by the pope of the time, and there's a statue in the papacy of this, this individual who stopped the Ottoman Empire, and stopped the, you know, from the conquest of the Ottoman

Empire.

LEVINE: What, what was the title that was given to this Albanian who stopped the...

SIMO: Well, he, he became like the king, you know. Skenderbeau. He's was the "bret [PH]," bret.

LEVINE: How do you spell Skenderbeau?

SIMO: Skenderbeau. Sken, Skender, S-K-E-N, Skender, D-E-R-B-E-A-U, beau. You know? Skenderbeau, that's means, he was like the, the king of Albania. He was captured by the Turks when he was nine years old, and taken in captivity to the palace of the, the sultan. And he was raised there, and he was forced to join the army. He was well, he was an intelligent individual. He was a good soldier. A well trained soldier. And he had a quick mind. He had a good military mind. So they kind of like made him an officer and increased him in rank. Then when he became older, then they attacked the Ottoman, attacked Albania. Then he found out that he was Albanian. So he defected and went to Albania, and became a general in the army of Albania. And he knew all their tactics. And the majority of, they call them the "generali." The generali were like their

crack troops. The Turkish crack troops. Most of them were captured Albanians that they had trained and become soldiers. And they were the vicious generali, they were the most vicious soldiers, and the most destructive. Well, he knew a lot of them, you know. And he...

LEVINE: What years are you, you...

SIMO: You're talking about in the fourteen hundreds. 1425, 1440's, in, in that era. So he really, you know, he held back the Ottoman Empire. Then they fell. They became part of the Ottoman Empire. Unfortunately, Europe didn't come to their rescue, and they were in captivity until 1912. They became their slaves, you know. Sad. It's really sad.

LEVINE: So that's why they...

SIMO: So, what happened was, then, right. Exactly. They were so, you know, slaves, and brutalized, and oh, some of the horror stories. It's unbelievable. That they became, the more in captivity they became, the closer knit family they all became.

LEVINE: So you must have known...

SIMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...or people in your own family...

SIMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...who remember the captivity.

SIMO: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Who remember the...

SIMO: Yeah. The atrocities and captivity and what have you. They used to tell me that at one time there was a pregnant woman, and these two soldiers, I guess they must have been drunk. They came up and they made a bet. "I'll bet you she has a boy." "No, no, she has a girl." "No, no, she has a boy." And they cut her open, took the baby out to determine whether it was a boy or a girl.

LEVINE: So, you, did people discuss those things when you were a little boy in

Albania?

SIMO: They, they try to hide them from us, you know, more or less.

LEVINE: But how did you know about them?

SIMO: Then when we came over here they started telling us those stories, you know. They, they'd kind of like talk, and we would listen, you know, talk amongst themselves, and we would listen, we would pick up all these different stories. Atrocities. Oh, it's, man's inhumanity to man. And it still goes on.

LEVINE: Right now in Albania.

SIMO: Yeah. Yeah. Well, thank God, now, they, they have their democracy. They're, they're living in democracy now. And they're trying to change things, and become a democratic country.

LEVINE: Okay. So when your father, I guess it was because the war was brewing...

SIMO: Yes.

LEVINE: ...the second world war...

SIMO: Yeah, the second world war was brewing.

LEVINE: ...when your father sent you tickets? Is that what he did?

SIMO: Yeah. They decided that it's time that it's that we came over. So they made all kinds of arrangements. Now in those days you had to have, you know, you had to have security, and you have to have a home. So they had a house. You know, they didn't have, I mean, they were renting a house. Then they had good jobs, good paying jobs. And they could well afford to bring us over without any difficulty, that we would not be a burden to the country. So they had to get visas and permission from the government of the United States to bring us over here. And it wasn't easy, because, like I said, again, you know, the King Zog, King Zog of Albania was thinking of him, his own neck and trying to flee the country at the same time the Europe that, that is brewing, and Italy is ready to conquer, come over and try and conquer Albania. So it was really difficult times. You know, it wasn't much after when, when Hitler invaded Poland. So,

you know, it was just, the thing, the war was brewing, and Chamberlain was trying to make the peace with, with Hitler, and trying to establish. So these things were all in works. And the armies were building, and the Nazis were growing more powerful. And the Italians were growing in, in strength, and building up their army. So it was a very, very touchy time of, of the year.

LEVINE: So in other words, it took quite a while, and you were like waiting to...

SIMO: Wait...

LEVINE: ...to receive your, your visa?

SIMO: Yeah. There, a bus used to, yeah. As a matter of fact there was a, it was tricky getting out of Albania. We went from Permet to, we travelled by bus to capital, which is Tirane. T-I-R-N, A-N-A [sic]. Tirane. And, oh, that's, that's another story, that bus trip is another story. Because it's all...

LEVINE: Oh, tell me.

SIMO: ...it's all mountainous country. And it was during the time of the rains and

so forth. You know, the rainy season. And I remember the rivers. My God. At one, one point the bus stopped, and the mountain was so steep, and the road was so curvy, that the bus driver says, "Well, if you want to walk," in case the bus went over the cliff, "walk, and I'll meet you down at the bottom." So we got off the bus, and we walked the mountain down to the bottom. (he laughs) And then we got back on the bus, and we went, then we came to this river. We came to this river near Tirane. And the thing, would you believe it? It was like overflowing. And the bridge was threatened. And so that had a pulley, a seat pulley. Now, either you took a chance with the bus and crossed the bridge, or you could get off and go over, get on this pulley, seat pulley, and they'd pull you over the river on, on ropes. I remember that vividly. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Did you go on the bus?

SIMO: We went on the bus. We took a chance. After, a, well, what happened was after a couple of mountains we trusted the bus, so we knew. (he laughs) That's funny, isn't it? We knew that bus was safe enough. If he's taking a chance, then we're going to take a chance with him. So we stayed on the bus. And there was some, there was peddlers all along the way, you know. They knew that these buses were coming and people

were hungry. And they would sell food. They would sell chicken legs, and they would sell fruit, and all kinds of, of meat, and so forth, or, or tea and coffee and what have you. You could buy food along the way.

LEVINE: Oh, my gosh. Well, what were you, what did you bring with you, you and your family? What kind of luggage, or what kind of bags...

SIMO: Okay. We, we brought, one of the things that we brought, and I don't know why, were these silk cocoons. I remember them vividly. We brought up these silk cocoons. You know how they make silk? Yeah, there's a worm, you know. And there's a certain tree that, a mulberry tree that has this worm. And then the, the caterpillar would make a home. And this was the silk. This is how silk is made.

LEVINE: Out of the mulberry leaves?

SIMO: No, out of the, out of the cocoon that the, the caterpillar made. And that was the silk. And they would, then they would, they would make this home, and they would become butterflies after that. And they would leave their cocoon. They would gather those, and that was the silk that they, they would spin, and make silk out of that. It's amazing, you know?

LEVINE: So your mother and grandmother...

SIMO: So they brought...

LEVINE: ...brought these...

SIMO: They brought some of that...

LEVINE: ...cocoons.

SIMO: ...they would brought, yeah, they brought some of those cocoons. And they brought some pictures. And they brought some, they didn't brought any furniture. They brought like some tableware and some dishes, you know.

LEVINE: Did they bring pictures of people?

SIMO: Yeah. Pictures of people. Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, did you mother, wait. We're going to pause now...

SIMO: Okay.

LEVINE: ...and change the tape.

SIMO: Okay. Wow.

LEVINE: Okay, we're...

**END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO**

**BEGINNING OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE**

LEVINE: Okay, we're beginning now tape two. And I'm talking with Norman Simo.

SIMO: Yes.

LEVINE: And he came in 1938 from Albania when he was nine years old.

SIMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: And we're talking now about...

SIMO: The trip. (they laugh)

LEVINE: ...the very tumultuous bus trip...

SIMO: Right, right.

LEVINE: ...leaving Albania. Okay, so, go ahead.

SIMO: All right. So now, we arrive, we finally arrive in Tirane, which is the capital of Albania. And we, I mean, you know, there's hotels there, but I mean, we don't, you know, we don't, we don't have that much money. So what we, fortunately we have family, so we stayed with family. And the family had a car, believe it or not, in Tirane, the capital. So that came in very, very handy. They not only toured us of Albania, but we had to stay in Albania for something like two weeks. We had to get permission to leave Albania. And why are we leaving Albania, and why are two young boys leaving Albania, and why is this young girl. Now that was, be my aunt.

She was sixteen. Why is she leaving Albania. Why aren't just the old ladies, you know, my mother and my grandmother. We should stay, in other words. So...

LEVINE: What, what (he coughs), what was, what was a satisfactory answer to give for leaving Albania?

SIMO: Well, it, the reason, the reason we left Albania, the satisfactory answer was that we're just going, we're going to be together as a family, you know, the mother, the father and the grandfather and the grandmother and brother. So the family is going to join together. And eventually we're going to make enough money, the whole family, and then return back to Albania. So that more or less, you know, kind of like satisfied them. Except for one incident where they didn't really want to let my aunt go. So it took a bribe. We had a five dollar gold piece. It took a bribe with that five dollar gold piece to get them to release her.

LEVINE: Do you know why she was the one that they picked on?

SIMO: I guess there, there was the, why should she go?

LEVINE: Because she's not the immediate family?

SIMO: She's not the immediate family, but she, but I mean, you know, her grandmother, I mean my grandmother is her mother, you know. So we had to kind of like explain that. You know? So that's how we finally got her to come over here. It was unbelievable. It was unbelievable. So finally we took, we went from to Tirane, we went to Durres. And from Durres we took a boat to, to cross the Adriatic to go to Italy. Then we went to Italy. And I thought that was a, a devastating trip. I mean, you know, the Adriatic I thought was a small sea, right? It would be nice and smooth? It was choppy, and forget it. I was seasick for two days. It took two days. Can you imagine city that? It took two days across over to Italy. (he coughs) So we finally got to Naples. And then at Naples it took another week before we could get out of, make, you know, make the connections from Naples to get onto the boat. And then we finally, after another week in Naples, and that was an interesting, city you know. It was the first time I ever saw a policeman in white uniform directing traffic in the middle of the, I'd say, "My God, what is this." (he laughs) I mean, can you imagine, my eyes were open. For the first time I saw all kinds of automobiles and buses and transportation and these policemen and soldiers. I mean, you know, it was, like what is this?

LEVINE: Had ever seen policemen in Albania?

SIMO: No. Never. I had never seen them. Once in a while we see a soldier because there was a barracks close by, but we had never seen a policeman.

LEVINE: And you didn't have cars to speak of?

SIMO: And no, there were no cars to speak of. Nothing. Nothing.

LEVINE: What else struck you about Naples? Can you think of anything...

SIMO: Yeah. In, in Naples the, the people were like flies. I'm, I'm saying, my God, look at them, you know. It was so crowded. I'm saying, wow, are there that many people in this world. (he laughs) So you can imagine my sight of New York City. Oh, my God. When we arrived in New York I could see from the distance the automobiles. They were like little flies, you know, jetting through. And I'm saying, what is that? And then these high rise buildings, when I saw them, I'm saying, my God, look at the size of those buildings. How can they stand up? How come they're not,

they're not falling down? Why are they up there? What's holding them up? (he laughs) The wind should be blowing them down. So you, you know, the marvel, the engineering marvel that had happened, you know. It's unbelievable.

LEVINE: Well, you said earlier that the name of the ship that you came on is on the card...

SIMO: Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: ...that you donated to Ellis Island.

SIMO: It's, yes. So.

LEVINE: We need to find that...

SIMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...but it was an Italian ship?

SIMO: It was an Italian ship. And it came, sailed out of Naples.

LEVINE: And did you...

SIMO: Yeah. (he coughs)

LEVINE: ...did you, do you happen to know precisely the date that you left?

SIMO: It took about two and a half weeks. We arrived here November 11th, so we probably left the middle of October. Probably the middle of October that we left, and those were the days when the seas are choppy. Oh, boy.

LEVINE: You had a choppy trip?

SIMO: Oh, yeah. Ooh, was it a choppy trip.

LEVINE: Well, do you, were you in steerage, were you in...

SIMO: We were in second class.

LEVINE: Was that, was that pleasant, were the accommodations...

SIMO: That, that was crowded. It was crowded. I never knew there was another third class. We were in second class, so I thought we were in heaven. I mean, you know, compared to what I had experienced, second class wasn't bad. (he laughs) There was good accommodations. Then, then we took, you know, being a kid you can get away with going up. So we visited first class. And, I mean, you know, talk about plush. (he laughs) That was plush. We just snuck [sic] a peek...

LEVINE: What did you see there in the first class?

SIMO: We saw, we saw, I mean, luxury that you would believe. It, it, the, the tables were laden with food, and there was all kinds plush chairs and furniture, and, and rugs. I mean, you know, oriental rugs, the most expensive that you could buy. Speak about luxury. And these beautiful, big chandeliers. And you saw people in uniform that were handling, and bringing drinks, and you know, you say, wow, what is this? It was like another world. It was a different kind of a world. Of course, we, you didn't have that in, in the second class. You just had a little room, and it was like a, like a crowded hotel more or less.

LEVINE: And how about third class? Did you get a look at that?

SIMO: We went to, yes, come to think of it, we went down to the third class, and that was even more crowded than we were. That was kind of like, you know, speaking of cattle. That was where they push everybody together. They just had maybe, maybe bunk beds, you know. It was like five beds to a, five beds to one row, you know. And that was...

LEVINE: Well, this trip must have been a real eye opener for a nine year old.

SIMO: It, it was unbelievable. I couldn't believe the difference. Can you imagine seeing the Atlantic Ocean, you know? I never thought there was that much water in the world. (he laughs) And the, the waves that, my God. At one time we had a storm. It was like, you know, everybody had to stay in doors. The water would just go right over the boat. I thought for sure we were gone. I said, this is it, you know. What a place to go.

LEVINE: What about your mother and grandmother? How, how were they faring on this trip?

SIMO: My, my mother used to get seasick. My grandmother did all right. My brother, he had a ball. (he laughs) He, he didn't get seasick. As a matter

of fact I used to watch him. They, they would wet the deck, and they would make like a slide on the deck, and they would run and slide with their shoes, you know. (he laughs) There were all these little kids. Kids, kids, language is no barrier for kids. Kids are kids. They'll get along together. And they were, they were sliding. I'd try it and it wasn't for me, you know, because I used to get sick, and I'd be [woah], you know, over the side, or, you know. Or I'd be laying down. And it was a terrible trip for me.

LEVINE: Were there any examinations involved either before you left or on the ship?

SIMO: There was a quick examination on the ship to make sure that you were in good health. You know, you, good going in, make sure you were in good health going out. And the final examination was, of course, at Ellis Island. That was devastating.

LEVINE: Well, first tell me about when you came into the harbor. Did you see the Statue of Liberty?

SIMO: Yes. Yes. Actually it was the, the, the word came out. "Guess what?

The Statue of Liberty.” You know? So next thing you know, I mean, it’s like everybody. Can you imagine. Thousands of people just running over. (he laughs) I mean, we thought the boat was going to capsize. Running over to the side to see this beautiful Statue of Liberty. All we could hear was, the Statue of Liberty. You are now coming into freedom. This is the country where everybody is free. This is the country where opportunity, where gold. You could pick up gold in the street. You didn’t, you didn’t have to work or anything. All you had to do was just go around. You wanted to something to eat? Pick up some gold and go buy something. (he laughs) It was unbelievable. All these stories that you heard about. But when you saw that, that beautiful lady. When you saw that, that, that flame. Oh, it was unbelievable. It was like a relief, you know. Like goose bumps came over you. Here you are coming into the land of opportunity. And finally that, that it’s over, you know. That freedom is now just around the corner. And there was the statue. There was the light to guide you in, into the harbor. Oh, it was unbelievable. And everybody, “Oh, the statue, the statue.” Everybody, that’s all they talked about, you know. The big rush was on. It was, oh, it was something. you know. And you could see some people were crying. I mean, it was, was wonderful, you know. Tears of joy. It wasn’t tears of, it was tears of joy. And you’re saying, my God, you know, this is it. This is America. We’re here. We finally made it.

Especially after a bad trip on the ocean. (he laughs) You know, two, two and half weeks. It's a long to be out on that ocean, you know.

LEVINE: So then you saw, you saw New York City from the boat?

SIMO: Yeah. Yeah. You saw New York City. And you could also see Ellis Island, you know. And they said, "We're going to go around. We got to go in there." "What for?" "Well, you got to go over there first. They're going to check out, make sure, you know." And I had never seen my father. I had seen pictures of him. I knew what he looked like, but I had never met him. So I kind of like, you know, I knew my grandfather, but I didn't know my father. So it was kind of like, wow, you know. What is he like? What is this going to be, you know. And my grandfather used to tell my father, you should see, you know. Because my father knew my, my brother, because he had come over, you know, after my brother was born. And he had seen my brother, but he had never seen me. So he didn't know what I looked like, who I was, what I was like, and I didn't know him at all. (he laughs) Like you said, I was born, what, nine years without a father. So it was like...

LEVINE: So...

SIMO: ...an anxious moment. For all of us. It really was an anxious moment for all of us. And, and I say that, I'll tell you why. My mother got the hives. Can you imagine? So here we are in Ellis Island, and she's got the hives. So when she's being checked up, they didn't know what she had. They thought that she had brought something from Albania. So they had to kind of like took her. And we were separated. Oh, my God, can you imagine what an experience that was? To be separated, "Where are you going? What are you taking her?" We were crying, and we were all, we didn't know what was happening, you know. There was nobody there, the language barrier. It was unbelievable. Really a scary moment. So we didn't what's going to happen. Are we going to go back, or are they going to send my mother back, or what's going to happen, you know.

LEVINE: So what did happen?

SIMO: Finally, they kept her over, you know. They took her, and for about three hours, and they finally, she calmed down. The fear of the separation from us, this is what she told us afterwards. She said, the fear of the separation, she calmed down, and they went away. And they, then they brought her back, and we get the check up and, I remember running all

over the place, you know. We had met some other kids, we were all running all over the place in Ellis Island. (he laughs) Checking it over, and seeing what it was like, and looking at all the people. And you say, my God, how could all these people be here. And then finally I met my father...

LEVINE: Where did you meet him?

SIMO: ...and my grandfather. They were outside waiting for us. We were released. What a sight.

LEVINE: What, what was it like...

SIMO: Well, right away I went to my grandfather, you know. And I hugged and I grabbed my grandfather. And then my grandfather said, "Well, this is your father." And I looked. I, I didn't, you know, I didn't go right away, you know what I'm saying? Because I didn't know him, and I didn't know how he was going to react, how, how he was going to take to me, you know. So I looked and I said, "Is eh [PH]," meaning "how are you." You know, and he said, "Mira [PH]." I did. And he says, "Come here." So then when he said that then I went over, you know, and he give me a hug and a kiss,

and he welcomed me. And that was how I met my father. Yeah. And you know what happened, what else happened, is we were going to take the train. They had reservations to take the train back to Worcester. That way they would have taken our trunks and everything, you know. But someone else had come to pick up their family. They thought their family was going to be on the same bought that we were on. And they lived in Worcester. And their family wasn't on. But he had a car. So, my father says, "Are you going back to Worcester?" He says, "Yeah." "Well, we'll give you five dollars if you take the whole family back. We'll all go with you." And he says, "I have to go back, anyway. Come on." So we came to Worcester by car rather than the train, which delayed, I think that was a stupid mistake, because it delayed all of our, all our luggage. (he laughs) You know, we didn't have our luggage.

LEVINE: The luggage came on the train?

SIMO: The luggage came on the train. If we had stayed with the train, when we got off, we would taken all our luggage, identified our luggage, getting it all, and then taken it with us. You hire a taxi and you take, or, you know, you get someone to meet you at the train station. Or hire a cab. But unfortunately it wasn't to be. So...

LEVINE: I wonder why they made that decision. Why do you think? Was it because of the automobile?

SIMO: Because of the automobile, and rather the train, to see the sights. To see different sights of, of America, you know.

LEVINE: What were the sights of America that impressed you right in the very beginning...

SIMO: The very beginning was the, I'm telling you, the automobiles. It was like little flies. And then I said, "Are those cars?" I mean, "Are those automobiles? People own all those automobiles?" It was unbelievable. It was a new world for me. I mean, I was like coming out of the feudal times and into the twentieth century. And that was something. And then, in New York, all those people. My God. Thousands and thousands and thousands of people. I'm saying, where are those people going? Where are they coming from? What do they do here? Where do they live? How do they live? How do they make a living? How do they feed them? It was just unbelievable, you know. And those skyscrapers. It was just something. Oh. And then a ferry. I never had been on a ferry before. (he

laughs) Taking a ferry over, you know, crossing? Wow. And then again we saw the Statue of Liberty. But this time we had a chance to really see it close, you know. So, I mean, talk about beauty. She really stood out like a golden sun, you know what I mean? At that point it was, it was unbelievable. Then we knew, right then and there, we knew that we were home, you know, in America. It was just something else.

LEVINE: What was it like for your, your mother and father to be reunited here?

SIMO: That was, that was probably one of the reasons she must have gotten hives. (he laughs) I mean, you know, after a long time, she hadn't seen him, what, in nine years, you know. Here it was for the first time. And you couldn't really get together because there were all of us, you know. But he took her aside and gave her, you know, a little smack and a hug and he welcomed her, you know. (he laughs) But it was, it's really like being reintroduced when you think about it. Because, you know, nine years is a long, long lapse.

LEVINE: Did, did, did he write? Did they write...

SIMO: Oh, yeah. The commun, oh, yeah, they used to communicate.

LEVINE: Well, do you remember, like, from the letters what kinds of things he told about America?

SIMO: Well, he, yeah. Yes. He used to say, he used to say, "Wait till you come over here. You're not going to believe this big land that we have here." All the land. I mean, you know, when you compare America to, to Albania, it's like a little postage stamp, you know, on a carrier. So, you're not going to, you're going to, you're not going to believe this country. You're not going to believe what, what they have here, and the opportunities that are available. And you're going to see homes, I mean, really, all kinds of luxuries in these homes. And you're going to have running water. (he laughs) Running water. Toilets in the house. What? What do you mean toilets in the house? (he laughs) You mean there's no outhouse? Toilets in the house. Like, we had a toilet, we had an outhouse, right? It was still within our own bounds. But then we had like a kitchen aside. The kitchen was not in the house, the kitchen was set aside. Now we had running water, but it was just only for cooking, you know. It was outside, though, with, in our own, in our own yard. We had the running water. But they never used to have to drink in Albania. We used to, we used to go, now there was a faucet, like, twenty feet away from the house. No, you can't

get the faucet there. You got to go by Shincolli [PH]. That was the name of the church. They had a faucet up there. That water comes directly from the mountain. When we get, you know, those pitchers? You got to go and fill the pitcher up there, because that's cold water. So, I mean, you know, that was the difference. (he laughs) But in America everybody's got running water. And you got hot water. What's hot water? (he laughs) Running hot water. I mean, you know, unbelievable. So these are some of the luxuries that they used to talk about. And some of the good things. Food. Food. I mean, you know, let's face it. In Albania at times, if, if it was in season you ate good. If it was not in season, you kind of like sacrificed. And you ate just what was available. And meat, we probably had meat maybe once a month, you know, if we were fortunate. So because they, they weren't working. We didn't have any kind of a business over there. They depended upon the family from here to send the money to Albania.

LEVINE: So when you, it must have been crowded, the car, the automobile that you...

SIMO: Oh, yeah. But it was a big, it was a big automobile. Well, he was the driver, and then there was my father, my grandfather, my grandmother,

my aunt, my mother, myself and my brother. So you're talking about what, a lot of people there. But it was one of those, it was one of those big cars.

LEVINE: So now, was this your grandmother and grandfather who were married? Or was it your...

SIMO: My, my grandmother and my grandfather on my father's side. Okay, there was my father, his father, my father's father, and my father's mother.

LEVINE: Oh, so they were reunited, too.

SIMO: Yes, they were reunited, also. But see, he had, he had made several trips, my grandfather. So, I mean, you know, he was not really a stranger. I had seen him a couple of times, three or four times. So he came over, you know, he paid more visits. Whereas the boys would work and the father, we'll send, we'll send the father back to Albania. They didn't come over. My father came once. That's when I was born. you know, he left before I was born. He didn't even see me. He left like three months before I was born. So he really never saw me. Only, only through pictures. So.

LEVINE: So what was, what saint died on the day you were born? What is your name day?

SIMO: Well, unfortunately I was not named after a saint. I was named after a general. (they laugh)

LEVINE: I see. Was that...

SIMO: So...

LEVINE: ...was that the other thing that...

SIMO: Yeah, that was, that was the other thing. (he laughs) And when my godmother, because I had a godmother, named me, right?

LEVINE: So it would be one person, whether it was a godmother or a godfather?

SIMO: Or, or godfather, yes. When she named me, they looked at her, because she gave the name of a general. (he laughs) I, I don't think they were too pleased with what she did. You know, they said, "What, what, what did you give the name of a general for? What, with all the saints? With all the

saints.” (he laughs) I think Saint Seraphin was...

LEVINE: The one that you would have...

SIMO: ...the one that I would have been attached to. She says, “No, no, no. I, that’s, I’m the godmother. I get the name. That’s it.” (he laughs) And that was it.

LEVINE: Was this, was this the aunt who came over with you?

SIMO: No.

LEVINE: No, another one.

SIMO: No, this was, this was someone else. This was a, a, an aunt of my, my grandfather. Unbelievable. Unbelievable.

LEVINE: So, okay, so, you got, you’re all in the automobile...

SIMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...and you got to Worcester.

SIMO: Right.

LEVINE: And then what?

SIMO: Right. Okay, when we got to Worcester, now we all lived together, you know. All the families. My grandfather, my grandmother, my aunt, you know. So it was one, big, happy family. My uncle Otis was working in Lowell at the time, so we hadn't seen him. We were still we were waiting to see him. He, he hadn't come. Then after about a month he finally go some time off and he came in to see us. So that was a nice, nice experience when he came. Then after he came, he decided to go back to Lowell for only a few months. Then he got a job in Worcester, because he wanted to be with the family as well, you know.

LEVINE: So now, was your father working as a chef in Worcester at the time?

SIMO: Yes. Yes. Yes, he was working as a chef. He worked in, in like, T. & T. Grill, and The Coronado Hotel. And he had worked, then he had worked in a few other places. And then finally he got a job at Cosgrove's Chop

House. He stayed there a few years. And then he got into the New Yorker Restaurant. And then, then he went back to Cosgrove's Chop House. And then the New Yorker Restaurant...

LEVINE: Where was the New Yorker?

SIMO: It was right on Main Street. Right on Main Street. And the owner said to my father, he said, "Look," because my father was thinking of leaving again, you know. He said, "Look, why don't we do this. Let's become partners. I don't want any money from you. We'll become partners. We'll split the profits fifty fifty. You just be the chef. You be the chef, and then I'll run everything else." There was a bar room there. It was a high class restaurant, you know. Really high class. And he says, "No, I don't want to be a partner." I don't know why. He didn't want to be a partner. But he says, "Give me a salary." And the guys says, "Okay." I'll tell you how fair he was. He says, "Not only I'll give you a salary, but at the end of year I'll give you a profit from the shares." So he did that. And he did that quite well. And...

LEVINE: Who was the man who was the owner of the New Yorker, who gave your father that offer?

SIMO: Oh, boy. Arthur, Arthur, oh. Because then he had, he had an ice cream. Then he opened, Smith. Arthur Smith. And then he opened, he left, because my father left, he, he, with Boston and started his own business there. That didn't work out. Anyway, but he left. And then Arthur Smith sold out and opened up the Smithfield Ice Cream business. (he laughs) Unbelievable, you know. Unbelievable.

LEVINE: That would be quite a person to be partners with. (s(he laughs))

SIMO: That, you're not kidding. That's right. Yeah. He, he could have, he could have, well, I don't know, he didn't want to take a chance, I guess, for some reason or another.

LEVINE: So what did you do? Do you start in school soon after?

SIMO: Yeah. Soon after that, because then, then they registered in school. As a matter of fact we started right after Christmas vacation. We waited until the Christmas vacation, we got settled and everything else. And then we started, then I started school. And then they put me in the first grade, because I didn't know the language. And I said to myself, I've got to learn

this language. This is ridiculous to be in with these little kids. I mean, I'm, I'm nine years old, and you're talking about six, six year olds [sic]. So the first thing, I made up my mind right then and there that I would learn the language as quickly as possible, which I did. And then I advanced, after while I advanced a couple of grades.

LEVINE: Can you think of anything that you did to help yourself learn the language more quickly?

SIMO: I started, I just made sure that I hung around with, with these American boys. And I said, talk to me. You know, tell me different things. And then this Jonesey [sic] fellow that knew Albanian, well, what does this mean? Then I would ask all kinds of questions from people. Well, tell me, you know, what, and I would say it in Albanian. And I'd say, well, what is this, to my father, you know, my grandfather, what is this. You know? And he would, then that, this is how I, I learned. And I just kept learning and hanging around with the, with the kids in the neighborhood. I made friends...

LEVINE: So in six months you say you were, you were pretty good?

SIMO: In six months I was pretty good.

LEVINE: So then what? Did you advance in school?

SIMO: Yeah. Then I advanced, then I advance a couple of grades, you know. But I still, I still didn't fully advance. Because once you get established in high school, junior high and high school, then you go through the process. So, but I advanced enough to, you know, almost catch up with my, my years. So then I went through junior high and then went through high school.

LEVINE: So did, did your mother, your grandmother, your grandfather, your father, did they have certain traditions that they tried to keep alive in this country?

SIMO: Yes. They always try to keep, you know, the, the, the holidays, of course. You know, the Christian holidays. They maintain them. We still maintain that New Year's celebration with the, with the feast and everything else. (he laughs) Christmas. Naturally Christmas was another thing. And Easter. Easter is one of the biggest holidays that we have. And always Eastertime, we would go out and got to get a new suit. (he laughs) That was the, once a year you dressed for Easter. That was the big thing.

Everybody had a new outfit for Easter, you know.

LEVINE: And was Christmas celebrated the same that it is here, or was there any variation on...

SIMO: Oh, no, the Christmas was different. There, there was no, no exchanging of the gifts as we, we have it here. It was a family celebration and it was a church celebration. And the only thing they exchanged was like, during, before that they used to have the Carnivale, you know, they would make like little cookies and stuff of that nature. And they would, and sweets. And they would exchange, you know, would, would, would invite people into the house if they came in, then they would, would give them the sweets. So that was a, it was a religious, more or less religious holiday. But Easter was the biggest holiday. That was celebrated for weeks, you know. With the, with the Lent and so forth. And you would, you would fast, and, you know, in anticipation for receiving Communion. And, and then you would go to church, and everybody would, would look at the new, what kind of a outfit did he have on. (he laughs) What kind of suit did they buy this year. You know? So, it was something to look forward to.

LEVINE: Well, actually you had most of your immediate family here then?

SIMO: Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: So you, you, did, did anybody in the family have regrets about coming here.

SIMO: I had regrets about coming here. (he laughs) Well, I left my friends there. You know, I had established some close relationship, well, not only relatives. You know, the boys that got killed by the Nazis, and, you know. We were very, we were all very close. And I really didn't want to come. I cried like a baby. I didn't want to come. I didn't want to leave all that. But then what do you...

**END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE**

**BEGINNING OF TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO**

SIMO: I had a dog, you know. Can you imagine leaving your dog? How can you leave your dog?

LEVINE: When you're nine years old.

SIMO: Yeah. When you're nine, it's like, like, you, you know, part of you. Part of the family. So I had to leave that. And another...

LEVINE: What was your dog's name?

SIMO: Oh, it was, oh. It...

LEVINE: What kind of a dog?

SIMO: It, it was a mongrel. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SIMO: It was a mongrel. But he was a vicious dog. He wouldn't let anybody, a stranger in the yard, you know. We had to muzzle him, because, because he would bite any strangers. What was his name. Oh. I can't remember. I can't recall.

LEVINE: Did you have him from a puppy?

SIMO: Yes. We had him from a puppy. Yeah, we had him from a puppy. And then you know what happened? When, before we came, someone had given a half a "lech," a coin. And you know that room, that parlor? Well, I dropped it near the fireplace. And there was a crack in the floor. And it fell in the crack. And I couldn't get that coin out to save myself. (he laughs) I tried everything to get it out. When I went back to Albania in 1984 I wanted to see that room. Unfortunately they had divided the house into two...

LEVINE: Apartments?

SIMO: Apartments. Yeah. So there was another family that owned it and lived there. And I couldn't get in. I wanted to see if that coin was still there.

LEVINE: You could see it, but you couldn't get it?

SIMO: I couldn't get it. I couldn't get it. (he laughs) I'm still going to go back one of these years and see if I can get back in there. It would be curious. I wonder if, if it's still there. Unbelievable.

LEVINE: So when you, did you feel that way after you arrived here?

SIMO: Oh, no. After we arrived, you know, with the family, then, then I made new friends and we became established. And then the war, then the war came. And then our thoughts were for different reasons, you know. And that's when we said thank God. Because we escaped what, five months. Five months, we would have been locked in, and, naturally we would have been in the army there, and fighting the Nazis, and God knows what would have happened.

LEVINE: So when you got out of school, you went through high school?

SIMO: Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: And then when you got out, what did you do?

SIMO: I, I, I graduated from high school, and I had a job at the same time. Well, I, I worked, well, even when I came over here, eleven years old I sold, started selling newspapers. I sold, I sold the, The Evening Gazette. And I sold, in the night it was The Daily Record. So I sold the morn, you know,

the afternoon gazette and the evening paper. And then when I became about fourteen I, I got a job in a Jewish delicatessen. That's, that's, this is a beauty. So I worked for these Jewish people in this Jewish delicatessen, right? And they started teaching me a little Yiddish. So I learned a little Yiddish. And he would have, have me make the cole slaw and the how sour pickles. One of my jobs was to make the how sour pickles. Now, the how sour pickles, we used to make in barrels underneath, you know, in the cellar of the delicatessen. So all the time the owner would be saying, "How's it going down there, Norman?" I'd say, "Fine," you know, "I'm making the how sour pickles." Two minutes later, "You're doing all right?" "Everything is good. Everything is no problem." You know? Couple minutes later, "How's it going, I mean, everything fine there? How's the mix?" "Oh, it's great." After while I, you know, when I left I said to him, "How come you kept calling me, you know, make sure I was all right?" He said, "If didn't call you, how do I know you're not eating my how sour pickles?" (they laugh)

LEVINE: So, you did that when you were still, you were still...

SIMO: I was still, yeah, around fourteen years old. And then I left the delicatessen. I got a job in a Jewish meat market. Ben Cohen. Ben

Cohen's Market. And there was a competitor, Mindig's [PH], just a little ways off, you know. So he'd say to me, "Go over to Mindig's and see what his prices are like. What is he selling his hamburg for? Take off your apron. I don't want him to see you." (he laughs)

LEVINE: As if he wouldn't know.

SIMO: I mean, they know who I was. My friends used to work at Mindig's Meat Market. (he laughs) So we would exchange back and forth, see what the prices are. It was funny, it was really funny. Then Cohen sold to Barney and another fellow, they sold the market to them. And they started training me, you know, and I started learning, becoming a butcher, you know. And they said to me, "Come on. Stay here." But I said, "No, I want to go to school. I want to be a lawyer." "No, no, no. Stay here. Stay here." "No, no. I don't want to learn the butcher business." "Well, we'll give you this, we'll give you that." (he laughs) I said, "Thanks, but no." And, so the Jewish customers, we had some very prominent customers. I would cut up the chickens and clean them and so forth. And they said to me, "My God, those hands. You should be a surgeon," you know, because I knew all the parts of the, of the chickens and so on. Then they would say, "Save me some chicken fat." (he laughs) "Put aside some

chicken fat.” Then they would bring me some nice goodies, you know. Apple strudel and some pastries as a reward. (he laughs) It was unbelievable.

LEVINE: So when you graduated from high school then, did you get a full time job as a butcher?

SIMO: Then, no, no. No. Then, then after, when I was in high school, I was a junior in high school, I got a job at the bakery. Table Talk Pastry Company. Yeah. So I worked in there doing all kinds of odd jobs, and I finally landed in the, in the shipping department. And I was a good worker. I was an excellent worker. But then I wanted to go to school. So he said to me, “You know, you’ll have a job here anytime you want.” You know? Said, “Well, thanks a lot.” But then I said, no, no, I’m going to go to school. So I graduated from high school, and then I went to, to B.U., Boston University. So I started, and then the war came. Korean War. So I, you know. So I decided to leave and join the army. Then I got out of the army, and I went back to school for a little bit, back to B.U. And then I got out again. I got married. And then went back, after I got married (he clears his throat), excuse me, I got my job back in the bakery. And so they put me in the shipping department, and they made me a supervisor in

the shipping department. But I really wasn't happy. I wasn't satisfied. I said that's not for me, you know. Somehow there was more to that, you know, more to life than that. And then when Kennedy became president he said, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." And that made a deep, deep impression in my mind. And I said, my God, this, I got to do something else. What, you know, I started looking at myself, and looking at my accomplishments, and where I'm at and what I'm doing. And I got two young kids. And I said there's got to be more. So, you know, being in, in the bakery, in the shipping room, we still had a union. A job came up in the morning. Now I had to take a cut in pay of a couple of thousand dollars to take this job, because I wanted to go to school nights. So I talked to the wife. I said, "Look." I said, "I'm really not happy doing what I'm doing. And I can't see this the rest of my life. I've got to do something more." So I said, "I'm going to take that job and go to school nights, and go into education teaching." She said okay. So I didn't, we didn't do it just arbitrarily. We figured out how much pay we were going to get. And I knew, I knew I wasn't going to get any overtime, because they were angry that I was leaving that I was leaving the supervisor's job, you know, to take a morning job. So I took that job anyway, and I started going to school nights. And within four years I got my bachelor's degree. And then I went into education, you

know, became a guidance counselor. And then I got my master's degree.

Then I continued after that, and I got my certificate of advanced graduate studies in social and rehabilitation counseling. So I got three degrees out of it, and I continued, that's what I'm doing now. I'm a guidance counselor, and, in a rehab as well, you know.

LEVINE: Well, does, did that fulfill you in, in the way that you had hoped?

SIMO: That, that, that did, that, the money isn't there. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Right. I know what...

SIMO: But there are, right, I should tell you, right? But there are intrinsic rewards. Then, then I was satisfied that I was helping the younger generation. I was making a better place for some kids for a brighter and a better future, for, for the country and for, for those kids. So, it's kind of like, you know, more or less fulfilled the need that I had, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, now, your wife.

SIMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: How did you meet her?

SIMO: Oh, wow, that was, I had gotten out of the service. Actually, she had spotted me. (s(he laughs)) You know? I thought I caught her, but she let me catch her I found out later on. We had, I had gotten out of the service. I was, well, I wasn't discharged yet, so I had gone to church in my uniform. And she saw that, and, oh. She said that was it. She knew that was it. She was after me. She knew I was going to school. She had worked at Paul Revere. And now Paul Revere is located in Worcester on Chestnut Street. She would come down. She would run down, knew what time I was coming home, run down to the corner of Main Street and Front Street and wait until she spotted me. And then she would walk, making sure that I saw her with her girl friend, because we lived close to each other, you know. So then I said hi, you know, and we started walking together. Then the girl friend, one time the girl friend said, "Well, he's calling you." She says, "Let him call. I'm going to wait till he catches up." She says, "Yeah, but you might lose him. You might lose him." And the girl friend said, "You might lose him." And my wife says, "No, no, no. I won't lose him. He's going to be there. I've got him caught." (he laughs) So she, she trapped, she trapped, she trapped me. You know what I

mean? So she knew what she was doing. She said that's for me. She caught me then. And she had set this web that I was not aware of, and she nailed me right away, you know.

LEVINE: Should we stop for a second? Yeah. Let me...(break in tape) Okay, we're resuming now...

SIMO: Hm-hmm.

LEVINE: ...after just discussing the new...

SIMO: Yes.

LEVINE: ...Eastern Orthodox, what, nursing home that's going to be...

SIMO: Well, we're, yeah. We're in the process now, we just received our H.U.D. funding, and we're, it's being, it's just being built now. It's going to be a one hundred and thirteen bed nursing home. And this is a combined effort of the Eastern Orthodox churches in central Massachusetts. There are twelve churches involved. And there are different ethnicity. This is the first time this has happened in America. There's the, the Greek, the

Albanian, the Syrian, the Rumanian, the Russian, all these faiths have come together. And, of course, we also celebrate once a year a divine liturgy, Sunday of Orthodoxy. We've had in Mechanic's Hall for a number of years. And now we're not only combining, but we're doing this nursing home as one body, you know.

LEVINE: Now how are you involved in this?

SIMO: Well, I'm, I'm one of the founders, and I was president of the, of the Council of Eastern Orthodox Churches at the time of its inception. And I, I'm the one that picked the, the two chairmen now, the, and the president of the, of the Holy Trinity Management Corporation. And I'm still on the board of directors. So I'm, you know, I'm one of the original members of the board. And we're going to see this thing through.

LEVINE: Wonderful. Well, let's get back...

SIMO: Okay.

LEVINE: ...tell me your wife's name and maiden name.

SIMO: Yeah. My, my wife's name is Gloria. Her maiden name is Treska. Gloria Treska.

LEVINE: How do you spell her last name?

SIMO: T-R-E-S-K-A. Treska. And...

LEVINE: Is she Albanian?

SIMO: She's Albanian. She's Albanian.

LEVINE: Was she, but she was born here?

SIMO: She was born here. Right. Yeah. She was born here.

LEVINE: And do you have children?

SIMO: Yes, I have two daughters. Barbara, who's the oldest. Barbara is now married. She was born in 1957. She has no children. She has a dog, and she says to me, "That's your grandson." I said, "You give me a dog for a grandson?" (he laughs)

LEVINE: (unintelligible) a dog.

SIMO: I know it, I know it. He said ciao.

LEVINE: What's her married name?

SIMO: Her married name is Pate. P-A-T-E. Her husband is a professional golfer. As a matter of fact he just won, thank God he just one a tournament out in the, the Dakotas. He came in first place. And that was a sigh of relief to do that. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Yeah. And how about your other daughter?

SIMO: And Barbara, Barbara is working. She's a, following in her father's footsteps, I guess, working for a non-profit organization. She a director of the Mobile, Alabama area American Cancer Society. And Denise, Denise is living in Auburn, Massachusetts. She's married to Peter. And, Peter Latino. And he, he has, or they have two grandchildren. So I have two grandsons. The oldest is six years old. Andrew. And the youngest is Paul. He'll be two in September. So, and she's, she's in the nursing

profession.

LEVINE: Well, tell me what you're most proud of that you've done in your life.

SIMO: Well, hopefully, well, I've done a, I've done a, my God, I've done a number of things. I was a boxer, and I'm a taunchet [PH] reader in the church and a chanter. And I've taught Sunday school, and I've done many things. I work with the poor, and I work with the destitute, and I work with the drugs for...

LEVINE: Rehab?

SIMO: ...rehabilitation. And also in education, teaching how to say no. Teaching students how to say no to drugs. We have an ongoing program where we teach the high school students to go down to the seventh grade, and to, to teach all the seventh graders how to say no drugs, and kind of like give them information as to what drugs can do. I guess, what am I most proud of. I guess that fact that I've gotten as far as I have with my education, you know, all the obstacles that I had facing. I mean, you know, I've got two young kids. Working, going to school nights, getting my degrees, and then finally changing at my age. I was thirty-nine when I went into

education. I mean, can you imagine changing careers at the age of thirty-nine, and accomplishing the things that I did. I think that's, that's part of the things that I'm proud of. And I've always received, I think I've received a lot from being in the United States. And I've been grateful for that, and I've always tried to give something back. Because, you know, God only knows what would have happened if the doors were not open for me in this country. So I've always tried to give something back to the country. And...

LEVINE: Tell me what, what part of you, if you can talk about it that way is Albanian, and, and what is American, or how has being Albanian in America been an influence?

SIMO: Okay. We, yeah. We, we have a close knit group here through the church. We have a, we have an Albanian church. Although it's open to everybody. You know, all orthodox. Even the liturgy is done in, in English primarily. But we, we kind of like gather as Albanians, and we've built and, a home for the elderly. We built a brand new church. And we're planning to do other things. So we've kind of like kept our ethnicity. Ever other year we have a huge festival, where anywhere from forty to fifty thousand people attend. We just got through in June having one. And a

lot of Albanians come and they point to Worcester as being like the center of the Albanian community. So we've maintained our ethnicity at the same time being part of the culture of America. You know, it's like, like I stated earlier, it's like a ceramic. You know, all nationalities put something on a mosaic, so to speak, and become a part of the total picture of what America is. So that's part of my contribution.

LEVINE: What is, this is, I'm not sure this is an answerable question, but what, what is it about having that, preserving and maintaining that ethnic connection that gives you back, or what does it give you back that, that you have as an Albanian.

SIMO: Okay. That's a good question. You know, there's a richness in the culture. There's a richness in all cultures. And unfortunately a lot of this we've lost in America, because we've tried to become a melting pot. Rather than become a melting pot, why can't we become a mosaic? Maintain some of our old background, old ethnicity, and then give this to America, and let this become part of America, you know. Even though, you know, it's part of, of a past, it could still be part of the future and part of the present. And maintain some of that ethnicity so that we kind of like understand each other a little better. We, we have to know where we

came from, who we were and where we are and where we're going. If we don't know that then we lose something. So I don't if that's an answer, but it kind of gives you an idea that we're all part of something. And we all belong to something. And why lose the richness of another culture if it still, it's not going to hurt anybody, but it could help. So I don't know if that's an answer, but...

LEVINE: Yeah. Yeah. Well, what do you, you're, you're among the youngest people I have a chance to interview...

SIMO: Oh.

LEVINE: So tell me, what do you see for your future...

SIMO: Okay. I'll be...

LEVINE: ...at this point.

SIMO: I'll be retiring soon. And I have different hobbies. Gardening is one of my hobbies. Photography is another one of my hobbies. The church is part of my life. The community is part of my life. So I mean, even though I'm

going to be retiring from my position as a guidance counselor in education, I'm still going to make a contribution to the American life and to the church and to the community. You know, I've been president of a number of different organizations, including the Council of Eastern Orthodox Churches, and I was president of the basketball league, and that included many, many churches. Protestant and Catholic and what have you. We were all part of that. I founded not only a nursing home, but I was part of the Homes for the Elderly, and the Credit Union. I've made several contributions to education. I've brought in one concept of pupils teaching pupils. I've brought in different other things like for the teaching of the gifted individuals. So hopefully I can contribute, I can continue to contribute towards making this a better life and a better place for the future.

LEVINE: Hm-hmm. Is there anything else you can think of. I, we actually have a few more minutes. I thought we were at the end, but is there anything else that you can think of that maybe came to mind over the time we were talking that you didn't have a chance to say, or...

SIMO: Yeah. You know, thinking back about Ellis Island. I went back for a visit. And it kind of like, it wasn't what I, you know, what I'd seen, what I had

previously experienced. But I'm glad that they're bringing it back, and they're restoring it. And I hope that they'll restore the hospitals, because I think that whole complex should be full and complete. Because it's a, it's a tribute to not only our country, but to all the people that arrived here through those doors. And even those that are arriving now. I think they should all go and visit and see what it was like, and see what, what the people that came here, what they faced, and check the similarities. Because there's no difference coming in now and when they came now, and when they came in then. The fears are still, the anguish is still there, the, the wonder, the wonder is still there. And that, that kind of like futuristic look. And the wishes are still there. The dreams. The dreams to fulfill, and the place to be that, wow, I can do things here. This is America. This is freedom. And, and you can taste it through Ellis Island coming in there, and looking back and thinking, wow, look at all the, we're talking about millions. Millions of people that came through and made a contribution this America today. And I think that's the key to America, that we all have to make a contribution. We have to give. And unfortunately we have some individuals today that are just take, take, take. And that's sad. Because if we all give, and we give generously of ourselves, and give in a good way, this country has no limits as to what it can do and what we can accomplish in the future. And believe me, I mean no limits.

Because the future can be so bright and so beautiful for all, for everyone to enjoy and to appreciate, that I hope that someday we'll come to that realization. That only through understanding, only through love, only through appreciation of another individual can we accomplish this. Not through hatred, not through fear, not through bullying, not through forces of evil. I guess that's about I can really think of.

LEVINE: That's great. Well, I want to thank you. You...

SIMO: Oh, I want to thank you. I appreciate the opportunity.

LEVINE: Wonderful interview. And I've been talking with Norman Simo, and you've given a really good idea of who you are, where you came from, and you've certainly given a rich contribution to this country.

SIMO: Thank you very much.

LEVINE: And I want to thank you. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. It's August 9th, 1993, and I'm signing off.