

EI-380
JAMES DRAPOS
BIRTH DATE: MAY 21, 1920
INTERVIEW DATE: AUGUST 13, 1993
RUNNING TIME: 56:40
INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.
RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME
INTERVIEW LOCATION: WORCESTER, MA
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 2/1996
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: IRV SILBERG

ALBANIA 1932
AGE 10

SHIP: "THE SATURNIA"
PORT: PATRAS
RESIDENCES:
? ALBANIA: EIPIROS
? US: WORCESTER, MA

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here in Worcester, Massachusetts at the St. Spiradon Greek Cathedral. I'm here with James E. Drapos, who came from Greece when he was ten years old, and that was, he spent New Year's Eve, that is, in December, he was in December 30th and 31st of 1931, he spent at Ellis Island and left, perhaps, January 1, 1932. Uh, I want to thank you very much for coming here to tell me what you remember about coming to the United States.

DRAPOS: Thank you for asking me.

LEVINE: Why don't we start with your birth date?

DRAPOS: I was born in, on May 21, 1920.

LEVINE: Okay. And where were you born?

DRAPOS: Well, I was born in the Epiros, Greece, on the Albanian side of the border, and we were considered, we were and we are a minority of Greek extraction that live in Albania, the bordering towns. (he sighs) They're all speak Greek, Greek churches, Greek schools, that is, until 1931 when I left they had closed the schools and, uh, they had begun teaching only Albanian where we used to have all Greek and part Albanian, they made it so we could be taught Albanian language with very little Greek, but that last year that didn't open the school for September, and three or four months later we left to come to the States. My sister, myself and my mother, with a cousin of ours, that we met in Greece, Patras, Greece, where we left from the port.

LEVINE: Uh, what was your mother's name?

DRAPOS: My mother's name is Theodora.

LEVINE: Theodora. Do you know her maiden name?

DRAPOS: Yes, Liazos, Liazos. L-I-A-Z-O-S. She's still living, thank God. She's still holding her own, as the saying goes, and gets about, does her own thing. She's ninety-five. And . . .

LEVINE: Is she here in Worcester?

DRAPOS: She's here in Worcester.

LEVINE: Ah. Well, tell me about her when you were a little boy in Greece, or in . . .

DRAPOS: Well, right. Greece, we were considered it Albania, whichever you want to use. Uh, what would you like to know? (he laughs)

LEVINE: Well, um, do you remember things that she did, or experiences you had in relation to her when you were there, before you were under ten years old. What kind of a person was she? What were her activities, maybe things she told you that she wanted you to learn?

DRAPOS: Well, she's always tried to, of course, where we were, it's a small town, a village, if I may say, and all you had an opportunity for was to go to school, go to the farm and help out in small chores, or one way or another, be somewhat useful around the house, if you could. And she always told us to, to be good and be mindful and behave, like any mother. [both laugh]

LEVINE: What were her, what were her duties, or what did she do in a typical day?

DRAPOS: Well, a housewife or a mother's chores. She used to wash and, let's say, and cookin'. We had a situation we -- we had some farmland, and my grandfather and my grandmother spent most of the summer maybe at the farm, which was maybe three or four miles away, five miles away. That's where all the farming was. The village was somewhat up towards the hill, and my mother used to go on occasion, you know, when they had reaping, you know, to gather the corn in or the wheat or whatever, do some of the chores. But she spent most of the time at the village with us youngsters.

LEVINE: What, did the farm consist of corn, wheat, anything else?

DRAPOS: Well, uh, there was another type of wheat which I can't explain. I don't know what the, uh, translated word would be, but it's similar to, uh, to wheat. Uh, that's about all that we raised. Of course, we had, uh, grapes, my grandfather was great with his grapes and his, uh, making the Greek rati [ph], Ouzo, if you want to call it. And he had, every year he would take, after he distilled the first gallon, he would put it aside. And he had twenty-year-old stock which he enjoyed every day when he came from the farmhouse, from the farm. That would be his first chore, go to the cupboard, open up the cupboard and have one,

and on occasion have a second one, and really enjoy it from the bottom. He would say, "Ahhh! Wonderful." You know, that's, I remember from, of my grandfather, which was a, who was, rather, a big husky man in stature, always minding himself, his business, his home, being helpful. And hard working.

LEVINE: Was he your mother's father?

DRAPOS: No, he was my father's father. We lived in my father's home, or my grandfather's home. My mother's side, uh, they were merchants. They had the general store, one in the village and one down towards the farm about four or five miles away, uh, which was the trend at the time. They had opened up a new one there and, uh, my grandfather, my great-grandfather on my mother's side, they were, the local merchants in the general area, not only in our village, but covering all the villages in that certain part. My great-grandfather was a well-to-do man on my mother's side, her grandfather, in other words. He was killed in 1928. The people, well, robbers came into the house to rob the house, and in the tussle or whatever happened, my brother was there, he was the only one of our family that happened to be there that evening, and, uh, he was stabbed two or three times, and he didn't make it through the night.

LEVINE: What was his name?

DRAPOS: His name was John Uanis [ph] Liazos. He was well-known in the area. He was very well-respected. He was a very well-traveled man. But as it is, when situations like that, accidents do happen, and they never really did catch the individuals responsible to a point, but the man never made it.

LEVINE: What did he make his money in? What was his . . .

DRAPOS: Well, he was a merchant. He used to run the general store. He had his own vineyard, and he had his few pieces of farmland. But he was able, you know, buying and selling, and he used to travel to Constantinople, travel to Greece and buy and bring back merchandise to sell to the general public in, like I said, not only of our village, but the surrounding villages in the area.

LEVINE: Do you remember any experiences with him when you were a little boy?

DRAPOS: Not too many because, you know, when you're a youngster you just, you know, you know, out of sight, what is the saying now?

LEVINE: Out of mind.

DRAPOS: Out of mind. Well, the children, you know, should be seen and not heard, and I was the type that never had that, I wasn't really outgoing and curious like my brother, let's say, who always used to go around and try to be the merchant, try to be helpful in his general store. And, uh, my uncle, my mother's sis-- my mother's brother, who happened to be a teacher, used to always send him from room to room or inside and outside just to get him out of the way because he was always

so inquisitive and curious and always, well, let's put it in quotes, sticking his nose all around, everywhere.

LEVINE: But you were . . .

DRAPOS: But I was sort of the reserved, I was more or less like my father's side, my grandfather, my paternal grandfather. Not a loner, but under, on the reserved side, on the other side of the book, on the other side of the page.

LEVINE: Now, what was that grandfather's name, your father's, uh . . .

DRAPOS: Athenasios, Arthur.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, what did you do, as sort of a less, uh, outgoing child. What kinds of activities would you do to . . .

DRAPOS: The usual child games that, with my friends in the neighborhood, and a lot of times, of course, during the good weather, when we weren't in school, I would go with my grandfather to the farm and, like I said, help out, or get in the way, you know, be somewhat, I used to enjoy to go there and sleep overnight out in the open air, out in the fields.

LEVINE: Your grandfather would do that?

DRAPOS: Yes. We had, we had a small, let's call it a shack, a small house down there. But, uh, most of the, uh, time you would sleep out, out in the open air.

LEVINE: Why would he do that?

DRAPOS: Well, it was the general, to, uh, tend the, uh, not the flock, because there were taken care of otherwise, but, uh, there used to be, uh, animals, wild animals probably come around. He would have his dog, and he would sleep close to the, to the corn, to the fields, so he could be able to build a little fire, and be able to watch and shoo away any wild animals that might come around to start eating his crop.

LEVINE: So he must have really, uh, been a real, uh . . .

DRAPOS: A real outdoorsman, absolutely. And he had also had spent some time in Constantinople himself in the few years before that. He, doing the same thing. He had a farm, a small garden, or whatever, raising crop and so forth.

LEVINE: So how about your grandmother?

DRAPOS: She used to be the silent, stand by her husband and the family and do whatever she could at all times. A little bit of a woman, always doing, always working, hardly saying anything.

LEVINE: Was she, did she cook?

DRAPOS: Somewhat, but my mother used to do most of the cooking being, of course, at the home in the village, she would do most of the cooking.

LEVINE: So your grandmother, would she be in the village? She . . .

DRAPOS: During the summer months, she would be at the farm. She would take care of things there.

LEVINE: And what was that grandmother's name?

DRAPOS: Vasiliki, same as my wife's.

LEVINE: So, um, and how about, would she ever take you aside and, uh, either tell you stories, or . . .

DRAPOS: Oh, always. She always used to tell us stories. About Ali Baba, I don't know where she ever got them, but, uh, she probably heard it from somebody else, you know, and the forty thieves. And all other things which I don't remember too many of them, to be very frank with you, but she always was a quiet, hardworking individual.

LEVINE: When she would tell you stories, where would you be? Would you be, like, about to go to sleep, or would she take you someplace, or . . .

DRAPOS: No, uh, yes. Yes and no. (he laughs) Around the fire, you know, at night, when, that was the only time that they had a moment of relaxation. During the day there was always some chore of some sorts to be doing, but at night she would hold us and talk to us.

LEVINE: So, um, so on a typical day, uh, would you, you were in school, were you?

DRAPOS: Yes. I had started, uh, fourth, uh, five or six years old you, we have no kindergarten. We just started general tutoring, and then you start the first grade, and worked myself up to about the third grade, and then, of course, we left to come to the States, and that was the, there was a, uh, one large classroom that had the, it was a six grade school. It had the smaller grades, and one, the, uh, the upper grades, the sixth grade was in a smaller room by themselves, and, uh, we had two teachers locally. And, of course, when they started to teach Albanian also, we had three.

We had one local teacher, a very intelligent individual, who, uh, was a, sort of a marked man in a way. He had, he was very short, very stocky. He had one finger on one hand, on his right hand, and two fingers on his left. And he used to put those two together and write, and he used to, of course, they never spared the rod in the school. They always used it, and used it freely. And I recall two incidents. One with one teacher, and one with my uncle, who happened to be a teacher also. The one with the Constantineves [ph], as his name was, uh, he went to, he had, he used to take the rod and stick it in his sleeve, and

around his one finger, right hand, and he used to give you the whack without too much, and it used to hurt.

LEVINE: On your hand?

DRAPOS: On your hand. But once he used it, we had long desks where we used to sit, and he went to hit the third person over. I happened to be on the outside. The third person over. And as he did, his hand would, like I said, the man was deformed, and he had a sort of a, like a ball at the end, came on top of my head. And I felt that. (he laughs) I remember that incident quite well. The other one was my dear uncle, a wonderful teacher also. One day he comes out and he says, "I want some of you to bring me the, uh, some rods from, uh, your, uh, your home, somewhere, from somewhere you find them and bring them to me. We're going to use them." The cranberry tree is the most flexible, and that's what he preferred. And he asked and, of course, he asked me, being his nephew and knowing that we had them in our little garden there, in our little area.

But little did I know or any one of us that we would get the first rapping. (he laughs) When we brought the stick to him, "Oh," he says, "this is very good. Nice and long. Let's see. Stick your hand out." Little did I expect that I was going to get a whack with the, with what, with the ammunition I brought him. And, of course, he didn't spare it. He just came down. "That's very good," he says. "That's good." I looked and I went home and I told my mother about it. My mother laced into him, but it didn't do any good. (they laugh) I still got it, and he never spared it. He always was a very, he was a nervous teacher, a nervous individual, and he always, uh, used the rod when he had to. Not only him, but the rest of them also.

LEVINE: So he would be one of your teachers?

DRAPOS: He was one of our teachers.

LEVINE: You would be all in one room?

DRAPOS: One room. Now, they will take grades, maybe the first or second grade and tutor them, and then they would give you work to do and they would take the rest, the next one or two grades, and they would give you work to do while they were tutoring the others.

LEVINE: I see. So, um, what did you do before first grade? Do you remember any of that?

DRAPOS: Oh, no. (he laughs) Just, you know, the neighborhood, your friends used to play and get in mischief, and get out of mischief.

LEVINE: Do you remember the house you lived in?

DRAPOS: Yes, quite well.

LEVINE: Could you describe it?

DRAPOS: Well, it was a very mountainous-type home, no conveniences to amount to anything. Water we had to bring in. The bath facilities were outside. We had two rooms. My father always used to say that we had a hundred and fifty homes in the village, and we had a hundred and fifty-one bakeries. Every home has got a built-in bakery, oven, I should say. They all had their own ovens.

LEVINE: What were the ovens like? How did they look, and what, were they big?

DRAPOS: Well, they were like a little igloo. They were built in the one corner of the room, of the house, when we were there, the kitchen, let's call it, because that's where all the living and all the, uh, activity was, and that's where the, the, uh, oven was. And, uh, right next to it would be the open hearth, you know, where you have your heat. That was the only heat. You heat it with wood, and if you were lucky enough to have some wood brought in and so forth.

LEVINE: What was the oven like? Was it big?

DRAPOS: As I recall, it was quite big. Maybe, well, quite big, about eight feet square, in the corner of the, and that's where they used to bake the bread, or stick some food in there maybe, and a lot of times in the open, uh, fireplace, they used to do some cooking there.

LEVINE: Was the oven, what was it made out of?

DRAPOS: Stone.

LEVINE: And was it shaped like an igloo?

DRAPOS: More or less like an igloo, with an opening in front. I say like an igloo because it was in a corner of the house, and it had an opening in front, uh, like a half-moon, and, uh, it was quite large, as I recall it. It must have been at least six feet square.

LEVINE: Was it of a color, was it a colored stone, or natural stone?

DRAPOS: Well, it was fieldstone, really. I wouldn't know, it was there and, uh, it was all with, uh, plaster on top. Uh, so it was all covered up, so, you know, insulated, let's call it, so it would keep the heat inside.

LEVINE: And it had a door.

DRAPOS: It had a door. It has to have a door, of course.

LEVINE: Um, and how about, like, washing clothes. What did your mother do, washing clothes?

DRAPOS: We had another room, as you come into the house, and that's where she used to wash her clothes. And a lot of times, as you see, you used to go out in running water the field and wash clothes there. They

would build a fire, and boil the water, and wash the clothes, and rinse them out by the river, and hang them up to dry. (he laughs)

LEVINE: And what did you do for light?

DRAPOS: For light? Oil lamps, candles. No electricity. This is really roughing it. Today I understand they do have some conveniences modern.

LEVINE: Well, there was this room where, um, your mother did the clothes, and then there was the kitchen and the living area.

DRAPOS: Right. And then . . .

LEVINE: What was the other room?

DRAPOS: The other one was the bedroom, or the, uh, reception room, or whatever you want. There used to be a general-type thing that, you know, you slept on the floor, you had no beds. You used to put the, uh, mattresses, blankets and, of course, every day you had to pick them up and put them aside.

LEVINE: What were they made out of? Do you know, the mattresses?

DRAPOS: Well, mattresses, I would say, venture to say that they were all old cloth, old rags, everything that, you know, stuffed. And mattresses are not like the mattresses of today, no springs or anything. Just a heavy type of, uh, stuff pillow, you know, like, of course, a little bit larger.

LEVINE: And what were the floors made out of?

DRAPOS: Wood.

LEVINE: Wood, okay. So everyone slept in that bedroom?

DRAPOS: Well, between there and the other room we had, of course, the kitchen was quite large. That was the general area where the fireplace and so forth was, and then, uh, where there was room for sleeping there, and then some of us slept in the other.

LEVINE: So now, uh, you had, what, one brother and one sister?

DRAPOS: Yes. One brother and one sister.

LEVINE: And their names?

DRAPOS: Nicholas and Athena.

LEVINE: And were you, uh, older, younger?

DRAPOS: I was the youngest of the three. There was another brother before me, but he passed away right after he was born. And Nicholas, of course, he left 1929 to come to the States, and he was here with my

father, and he was the responsible for speeding our delivery to the States and we came in 1931, '32, let's say, the first of the year.

LEVINE: So your father came in '29 with . . .

DRAPOS: No, my father came in 1920. I never knew my father. Only through pictures and, uh, by name only, as the saying goes. I met my father the first time in New York in 1932. I had seen a couple of pictures of him but, uh, I knew him only in name.

LEVINE: Uh, how . . .

DRAPOS: He left -- and he went to Constantinople in 1919, and I was born in 1920, of course. But from there he never came back to the home. He left, and he came to the States.

LEVINE: What was he doing in Constantinople before that?

DRAPOS: Uh, he was working with an uncle of his, a general, he had a store, and he used to do the delivering or any, you know, the selling, and any part of the running of the store that he had, you know, deliver orders to particular homes and so forth.

LEVINE: Do you think he was in Constantinople to work for a period of time to save money to go?

DRAPOS: Absolutely. To, you know, to better living, but, uh, the dream, of course, was to come to the States, which he managed, uh, after a year or two. I don't recall exactly. And, uh, he came here to the States and, of course, working after eight or ten years, trying to bring us over.

LEVINE: So, uh, how did the Greek people in your town or village get along with the Albanian people, generally speaking?

DRAPOS: We were all one. We never had, uh, any problems. We never had, the village was all Greek. I mean, we all talked Greek. We went to the Greek church, Greek school.

LEVINE: Oh, so there weren't Albanians living right in there?

DRAPOS: No.

LEVINE: Oh.

DRAPOS: We never had any. They were further down, further north, I guess you would say. We were south, close to the seashore. That's maybe twenty miles, or thereabouts.

LEVINE: I see.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Let's see. Okay. So when you left, where did you go from your village?

DRAPOS: From our village we went to, uh, there's a smaller town, a city. Uh, Saint, Santa Koranta they used to call it, the forty saints, I Saranta in Greek, and we took the boat from there, which is right across Corfu. And we took the small boat. I use Nichol, St. Nicholas, to go to Patras, Greece, and, uh, I'm leaving from the village in the morning, bright, early morning. My mother's family and my grandfather, they took us, they walked us down to the highway, where we got on a truck. And one of my uncles that was with us, they remember very well. See, when you left, when a boy leaves the house, they want him to come back, and they have a habit of putting a pitcher of water in front of the house, in front of the door, and you're supposed to kick that into the house, symbolizing that you got to come back, to return. And I did that, of course, to satisfy, not that I had any choice, the eldest.

And, uh, as I was saying, on the highway, my uncle walked down the road with us who, by the way, happened to come back here to make a visit last year to see his son, who runs a restaurant here in the city. He gave me a silver Turkish piece with a handkerchief. I'll never forget that. He put it on the ground, and I was supposed to pick it up and keep it, which I still have. And we got on the truck and we went to Santa Koronta and from there, like I said, to Patras. And a day later we took the boat and, uh, ten days, twelve days, I believe it was, before we made the crossing.

LEVINE: Do you remember, um, uh, the, uh, any examinations or anything before you left?

DRAPOS: Before I left there weren't any examinations. I mean, we had been to the, uh, uh, to Rana [ph] to get the papers and everything else. But, uh, at Ellis Island there was examinations, and, like I said, they kept us overnight because, not only after, it was, uh, hundreds of people.

LEVINE: Did you remember coming into the New York Harbor?

DRAPOS: Vaguely. I remember everything but, you know, nothing, I was so amazed, it was so huge and different from what you had known in the mountains and back home.

LEVINE: Uh, say the name of the ship, and anything about the voyage that . . .

DRAPOS: Saturnia. And there was a sister ship, Volcania. That was one of the last voyages it made. I never was bothered with seasickness. My mother and my sister were constantly in the room and my cousin and I used to roam around and run up and down the decks, always out in front at the bow. We used to have a great time, and we really enjoyed the sea air and the sea, being landlubbers, and never been on a boat before in our lives. It was quite a, quite a thrill, quite an experience.

LEVINE: And what do you remember of Ellis Island?

DRAPOS: Ellis Island. All I remember this huge place with people running around and being, not pushed but, I mean, herded from area to area, and examinations and questions and waiting. And finally we had to, I can't tell you right now how we passed the night, somewhere in some corner, I presume, until the next day that they released us, or gave us the word to, that we were ready to go, or we met my . . .

LEVINE: And why did you stay?

DRAPOS: There was, at the time, I believe, some question about some people that, uh, they had to examine everybody. And, I suppose timing was the important factor. By the time they got to everybody, that the rest of us had to just stay overnight.

LEVINE: Were you met at Ellis Island by your father?

DRAPOS: Well, yes. My father and my cousin's father, who he was in New York, he used to live in New York, picked us up.

LEVINE: Do you remember first seeing him?

DRAPOS: Yes, I remember first seeing him. I remember my first meal. (he laughs) Which happened to be an egg sandwich. I was not a picky eater, but didn't know, didn't like the food, didn't like, uh, the odors and so forth, you know, the change. So my father's tryin' to convince me now what I should have to eat, and he's trying to tell me all these things which, to me, was unbelievable that I could have such choices. So finally I ended up with an egg sandwich, believe it or not. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Is that what you . . .

DRAPOS: And that was my first. That's what I wanted. I says, "Well, yeah, that's good." He tried to explain to me what, we stopped at the Automat, I recall, he took us around, riding trains, and I'm looking always, constantly looking around like a, where am I, and what are these things and, uh, I'd never seen a locomotive or a train, uh, leave alone watching the elevator going by in New York, or Times Square. All a dream.

LEVINE: What about the Automat? How was that for you?

DRAPOS: Quite impressive to me. My father says, "You know, you put your coin in there, and you get your . . ." I says, "I don't believe it." "Believe it. Here." So he put in whatever it was, a nickel, a dime, a quarter, and opened up the door and take the food out. "Well, how does it get there?" You know, I wanted to know who did it and why it was done and how it was done. OF course, he explained everything. I realized what was going on, as I made my second or third trip to New York at the Automat.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything else that struck you as new and different those first days or weeks?

DRAPOS: There was so much that you really couldn't pick a particular thing, because you must remember where we were the limited facilities, the limited, uh, place where we came from, up in the hills. In the, you know, in a village that, like I said, had very limited facilities of anything. And then to come to a world, to a paradise and see all of these things are all unbelievable to you until you begin to realize where you are and what it is all about.

LEVINE: Do you remember your reunion with your father, specifically, when you first saw him, and what it was like for you?

DRAPOS: Vaguely. I remember, like I said, there was so many people and so much, I remember, of course, meeting him for the first time, a little roly poly individual, jovial looking, with his little moustache. And, of course, my uncle . . .

LEVINE: He was with him.

DRAPOS: Was with him, to pick up his son.

LEVINE: And you came here with your mother . . .

DRAPOS: My sister . . .

LEVINE: And cousin?

DRAPOS: And cousin.

LEVINE: Uh, so then how did you get from New York to Worcester?

DRAPOS: The Short Line bus. We took the bus, and we came to Worcester, it must have been three or four o'clock in the morning, and left us off in Harrison Street, and the first time in my life I saw snow up to my waist. But not my waist of then, but my waist of today, let's say, two feet of snow on the side of the road. And where we came from, we had a little bit of a dusting on occasion, but that's about it. And, uh, from there we walked around the corner, and we went home, and my brother was sleeping, my father woke him up, and all the crying and jubilation of meeting his mother again after three years, and us, of course, meeting him, and my father, that was my first, uh, experience of the States, and home.

LEVINE: Is there anything you would say about Worcester at that time, what it was like for you when you first settled here?

DRAPOS: We were very, uh, excited, reserved to a point. We didn't know, we didn't know anybody, we didn't know the language, but we happened to be close to an Italian family which we got acquainted with, and were very nice, the Negroes were very nice to us, uh, there was four, five girls and one boy, two boys, and one was more or less my age, a couple years older than I was, and we got chummy, and the school was right across the street and, uh, it was very easy to get back and forth.

LEVINE: And where did you settle? What street were you on?

DRAPOS: Water Street.

LEVINE: And how about learning the language? Did you have any . . .

DRAPOS: Well, we were, my sister and I, about the first of February we started school. And between February '32 and by the time school closed in the next five months in June, they kept us in an ungraded room. And, uh, of course, we had schooling, we knew some, but we had to get, learn the language. In one of the classrooms there was a young fellow, a Greek boy named Peter Zois [ph], and he used to take us to the coatroom next, by the, uh, homeroom, and he used to explain to us and teach us the language somewhat, and he used to be a sort of a private tutor. And to this day we never forgot him. Occasionally we meet and we talk about 1930's, where he used to teach us how to, how to think in English and interpret everything in the American way. And he, uh, stuck with us those, whenever the teacher gave him permission. And then the first of September of '32 when schools opened up again, we were each placed in our grades. I was placed in the third grade, and my sister, I guess, higher third or fourth, I believe.

LEVINE: Were you the only two children that Peter Zois [ph] tutored?

DRAPOS: Right. We were the only two. We were the only two Greek-speaking youngsters.

LEVINE: Oh. Were there not other children from other countries in the . . .

DRAPOS: No.

LEVINE: That had just come over?

DRAPOS: No, no. From there, from Ledge [ph] Street, where that happened, when we first, we moved around the corner up Providence Street, and we went to Providence Street and passed, I did sixth grade there, and from there we went to Grafton Street Junior High. I remember some of my teachers, very hard-working individuals. Mrs. Healy, Mrs., oh, Miss Begley. Wonderful people.

LEVINE: And, uh, so then how, how long did you stay in school? When did you . . .

DRAPOS: I went through junior high.

LEVINE: And then . . .

DRAPOS: And that was it. That was in 1938.

LEVINE: And then you stopped, and what did you do?

DRAPOS: Tried to earn a living. Working, my father had a restaurant, a small lunchroom, and I used to . . .

LEVINE: What was the name?

DRAPOS: And it used to, uh, it used to be, uh, Union Lunch. It used to be by Union Street where the center is being built now, on Exchange Street. And I used to run home from school and do the dishes, go back to school, and, of course, during the summer I used to work there. And I did that until, until the war, and right after the war, too, until we got into business, after my brother came out of service. And, uh, we started a coffee business.

LEVINE: And that's what you stayed with, the coffee business?

DRAPOS: Right. I have been there since, '40, since 1946.

LEVINE: Uh, you want to say the name of it, so?

DRAPOS: The Caravan Company. Caravan Coffee. My cousin and my brother and I bought this small business that a couple of other Greek boys had started, Nicholas Stefos and Vasili, Bill, uh, oh, I forget his last name, I'm sorry to say. They had it for during the war. And, uh, we bought it, and we started working, and we've been in it ever since.

LEVINE: And how did you meet your wife?

DRAPOS: How did I meet my wife? Uh, we had a small organization, uh, in church. They used to, she was from Southbridge and, uh, of course, they used to come, and we used to go to small dances, small gatherings, and, uh, that's how we met.

LEVINE: Was she also coming from, uh, Europe?

DRAPOS: No. She was born here. She was an American-born girl.

LEVINE: So, um, let's see, what's your wife's name?

DRAPOS: Vasiliki.

LEVINE: Vasiliki. And her maiden name?

DRAPOS: Betty. Kollios.

LEVINE: C-O-L . . .

DRAPOS: C-O-L-L-I-O-S.

LEVINE: And . . .

DRAPOS: No, not C, I'm sorry. K-O. Better make that correction.

LEVINE: Okay. And do you have children?

DRAPOS: One daughter.

LEVINE: Her name?

DRAPOS: Her name is Theodora. Of course, all the, the Greek heritage, names and, you know, from father or mother you have to give them, the first born, especially you have to give them, not you have to, but it was a custom, especially then, uh, the mother, you know, the mother's name, or the grandmother's name, or the grandfather's name, whatever. And, of course, my mother's name was Theodora, is Theodora, so my best man who I gave the privilege to name whatever, whatever name he wanted to give her, he chose, then he gave my mother's name to her.

LEVINE: Your best man?

DRAPOS: My best man that stood up for me, who named my daughter, our daughter.

LEVINE: Is that usual?

DRAPOS: In those days. Today they've broken away from that habit, that custom, whatever you want to.

LEVINE: Would you call your best man your daughter's godfather?

DRAPOS: Yes, he is, he is.

LEVINE: Would that usually be, or it was the case that whoever was the best man would . . .

DRAPOS: Yes. Right. He would always, it was an accepted fact, more or less, especially from our section, they would claim the first born to christen it and, you know, baptize it and give it a name. And we were buddies during the early days, and he stood up for, whoever was going to get married first, the other was going to stand up for him, either he or I. So I get married first, and he stood up for me, and, uh, christened our daughter. Of course, we never had another one since then but, uh . . .

LEVINE: So how does that fit in with the name day? Does that have some . . .

DRAPOS: The name day, the, uh, Greek people don't usually celebrate birthdays, in the olden days. It used to be name days, and especially for men. Women are second-rate citizens, if I may use the term. They were never given consideration. But men always celebrated, and there's a, there's a saint for every day in the year. And, uh, on a particular day you celebrate your name day, whatever the saints is, uh, you have a celebration.

LEVINE: Well, now, say, your daughter was named Theodora.

DRAPOS: Right.

LEVINE: What would be her name day?

DRAPOS: Saint Theodora. There is, there are, in fact, there are three Saint Theodoras.

LEVINE: I see.

DRAPOS: And she (?). (they laugh) But, uh, in the beginning, she does, well, she celebrates birthdays, of course, and we do all. And, uh, but we also have the opportunity to celebrate our name day. Because that's when we became a Christian, and that's when, uh, and we are supposed to live up to the standards of the saint.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, um, the fact that you were born in what was Albania and, of Greek heritage, and came here as a, as a child, really, and has, have lived most of your life here, how do you think that's influenced your life, or affected your life, the fact that you were born there and immigrated here, rather than having been born here, let's say?

DRAPOS: How can I answer that? (he laughs) Um, in the beginning you'd have to continue thinking the way you were, and live the way, uh, you were brought up. Uh, and as you went along, you lived within the family. You were brought up, you never really did anything unless you were given permission to do. It was home and school, and work and that's it, especially where we were growing up during the Depression, and there wasn't too much else to do. Occasionally, yes. You used to go to the movies, fifteen cents, and that's about all. And then as you grew up, of course, then life began to, the circle began to enlarge, and the church, the school and, uh, of course, everybody wants to better themselves and, uh, my folks wanted to see us go, like everybody else, go to church and, uh, go to the dance, or go to the gathering, or go to, and expand yourself, improve your life, live a little bit better, and so forth.

LEVINE: And so, uh, do you think that your father's idea to come here and to have a better life, I mean, was your whole family happy that they had . . .

DRAPOS: To a point they were happy. And then, on the other hand, my grandfather, of course, and his, my grandmother, their only son, and he left. He never went back to see the home, uh, you know, for them it was the end of the world, in a sense. He did go back in, uh, '63, I believe, but his father had passed away during the war, my grandfather. But he saw his mother, and that was something. Uh, but it's difficult for a family to let go of an only heir of the family, send him miles and miles away, not knowing where and what and how they are and so forth, except an occasional letter and, of course, a trip if he ever was lucky, but he never came back.

LEVINE: And just before we close, would you say your name that you were born with and spell it?

DRAPOS: Dimitrios. D-I-M-I-T-R-I-O-S.

LEVINE: And was, Drapos?

DRAPOS: Drapos.

LEVINE: That, you were . . .

DRAPOS: That's the name, right. D-R-A-P-O-S.

LEVINE: And how did you come to get, be called James instead of Dimitri?

DRAPOS: It was sort of difficult in the beginning, uh, to get, you know, in school, and my father says, "Well, Dimitrios in Greek is James in English." So, but in school I was called Dimitri. I never, you know, in the beginning. But I changed my name, of course, as I worked in my father's business and later on. I took the name of James. But all my papers and all my legal things were in my original baptized name.

LEVINE: Did you become a citizen?

DRAPOS: Automatically I would become a citizen through my father. I never had to take, uh, you know, go to a class or anything of that nature.

LEVINE: Okay. Is there anything else you'd like to say before we close?

DRAPOS: I want to thank you for the opportunity. I hope I make some sense to you and said something that . . .

LEVINE: Well, you certainly did. You certainly did. It was really very, very interesting what you had to say. I want to thank you very much.

DRAPOS: Unfortunately, I don't, I'm not, still not the outgoing and, uh, to expound and the gifted talker, prepare myself. I, when you called me the other day, as you, I'm sure, understood, I was sort of reluctant to say yes and come and do this and what I did, I didn't give it another thought other than, "Oh, gee, I've got to do this." And I'm still, I hope it comes out to, uh . . . (he laughs)

LEVINE: I can tell you. It came out great. And it was really, you were spontaneous, which makes it always much better.

DRAPOS: It's, right. I mean, everything that came to mind, because I never really prepared myself for this, I'll be very honest with you, whether it means anything or not, that's the . . .

LEVINE: Well, I thank you very much. It's very (?).

DRAPOS: Thanks for the opportunity.

LEVINE: Okay. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. I'm speaking with James Drapos, and, uh, it's, um, August 13, 1993.

DRAPOS: Friday, mind you.

LEVINE: Friday the 13th, and I'm signing off.
EI-380/DRAPOS