

EI-382

HARRY BILIOURIS (IRAKIIS MPILIOURIS, MBILIOURIS)

BIRTH DATE: MARCH 7, 1901

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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ALBANIA, 1921

AGE 20

SHIP NAME NOT RECALLED

RESIDENCE: VANISTA

US RESIDENCE: FITCHBURG, MA

PORT OF EMBARKATION: PIRAEUS

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service.
I'm here in Worcester, Massachusetts, at St.
Spiradon's [ph] Cathedral on Russell Street, and I'm
talking with Harry Biliouris, who came from Greece
in 1921 when he was twenty years old. Now, I'm very
interested to hear how your story unwinds. Start by
saying your birthdate for the tape.

BILIOURIS: Birthdate, March 7, 1901.

LEVINE: And where were you born?

BILIOURIS: When I was born, it was Turkey there. Then after
that Greece come in. After the Greece, Albania come
in, see. In Albania, it was not, when I left

Albania, I want to come to the United States, but the government don't let me come over here because I was ready to go to the army, and I didn't want to go there, and I didn't even speak the language either.

So my father was talking to a doctor there. He was telling my story, you know, what I want to do. So, "I'll take care of it," says the doctor. He give me a letter that I have to go to Greece for examination, certain disease, but I didn't even have it, you know. (he laughs) So they give me passport to go to Greece. In Greece now I want to come to America. How? There's no passport. I had to get a Greek citizenship to get a Greek passport to come over here. But to get a Greek passport, because only I have to stay in Greece thirty days, I have to go back. I have to go through military examination. And so increase my age from twenty to twenty-four. So the Greek government say, "Well, he's twenty-four years old, he's no more available for the service." So I went through there, and everybody said, "I didn't know twenty-four. He's nineteen, he was eighteen, twenty, except when, he says, "The man left Albania," he says, "he didn't want to go in the army there. He's Greek. He come

over here, he needs help. We got to help him out, no matter what it is." So that's why I got passport there. They give me Greek passport. I was twenty-four years old, to come over here. And I come over here, and I had three brothers over here and an uncle. I come in in Fitchburg [ph]. So, in Fitchburg I come in, I have to go and register. I register, and my uncle says, "Well, the name you got," he says, "you come here, it's a little hard for us, so we short it up." He says, "We put Harry instead of . . ."

LEVINE: What were you born? What was your name when you were born?

BILIOURIS: That's the name, right there.

LEVINE: How do you say that?

BILIOURIS: Iraklis.

LEVINE: I-R-A-K-L-I-S?

BILIOURIS: Yeah.

LEVINE: And your last name?

BILIOURIS: It says, it's spelled sort of M-P, Mpiliouris.

LEVINE: Oh.

BILIOURIS: So they changed the M-P to B.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So it began M-P-I-L-I-O-U . . .

BILIOURIS: U.

LEVINE: R-O-S [sic].

BILIOURIS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Then they changed M-B-I-L . . .

BILIOURIS: L-R-B-I . . .

LEVINE: I-O-U-R-U-S, and now it's even down to B-I-L-O-U-R-I-S.

BILIOURIS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well. Well, um, Mr. Biliouris . . . (disturbance to the microphone) If you rattle that, it will pick it up. If you put this, this is very sensitive, the machine, so if you rattle the paper it will come on. (referring to the microphone)

BILIOURIS: Oh, I see.

LEVINE: Start by telling me the name of the town where you were born, when it was Turkey.

BILIOURIS: Vanista.

LEVINE: Could you spell it?

BILIOURIS: Yeah. V-A-N-I-S-T-A.

LEVINE: Vanista. Now, did you live in Vanista . . .

BILIOURIS: Yes.

LEVINE: . . . the whole time until you left.

BILIOURIS: Until I left, yes. I was born in that town, I lived in that town, and I went to school in that town.

LEVINE: Tell me about the town. What was Vanista like?

BILIOURIS: Well, Vanista is a village, oh, I should say about seventy-five, a hundred families. We stayed right in the valley there, where all of that automobiles go right inside that town.

LEVINE: There were automobiles there at that time?

BILIOURIS: No. After the war.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BILIOURIS: After the 1912, and so forth, coming, an automobile comes down there and trucks.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh, before the war, uh, what, what did it look like? Can you describe that town?

BILIOURIS: Before the war, the people there, they are farmers. They're working on farms, in the fields and the farms, and especially women.

LEVINE: The men . . .

BILIOURIS: Most of the men got away, some of them here, some of them in Greece, some in Constantinople, you know. So, there wasn't enough production there, so they leave, they come to this country, just the way I had three brothers and an uncle over here.

LEVINE: I see. So would the men go off to make money?

BILIOURIS: To make a living. (he laughs) To make some money, extra living, you know, because there wasn't enough to bring up a family there, to support the family on the farms. Because everybody had a farm.

LEVINE: I see. So it was mainly women and children.

BILIOURIS: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: In the town.

BILIOURIS: In there, yes. Mostly women and children.

LEVINE: And when would the men, would the men come back very often?

BILIOURIS: Oh, yes. They come back, they come back. Every two or three years they come back. And they stay for a while, and they leave again, you know. They have the papers, you know, to go and back. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So everybody had a little bit of land.

BILIOURIS: Everybody had a little bit of land. Everybody had a little, I should say, a cow and a house, you know, or sheeps, just like in my home we had plenty of sheeps and cows.

LEVINE: And were they in the, were they in an area sort of under where you lived in the house?

BILIOURIS: Yeah. They're there, they feed them, you know, they go to the mountains, you know, way up in the mountains, or in a valley, way down in a valley with no (?) there in a valley.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So, um, as a little boy, did you have chores that you had to do?

BILIOURIS: I didn't have no choice what to do. The only choice was at that time was I got to go to school in the morning and I got to go home (Dr. Levine laughs) in the afternoon. That's it.

LEVINE: But you didn't have work that you had to do around the house?

BILIOURIS: No. While I was in school, I didn't have no work to do, no. No.

LEVINE: Did you have sisters?

BILIOURIS: No sisters. Three brothers.

LEVINE: I see.

BILIOURIS: No sisters.

LEVINE: And, uh, what was your mother's name?

BILIOURIS: Zoitsa, Z-O-I-T-S-A.

LEVINE: Zoitsa. And her maiden name? Do you remember that?

BILIOURIS: Uh, I kind of said in English, George. Zoitsa

George.

LEVINE: Oh. Uh-huh. And what was it in Greek?

BILIOURIS: Geogious.

LEVINE: Can you spell it?

BILIOURIS: G-E-O-G-I-O-U-S.

LEVINE: And that translates as George in English.

BILIOURIS: Yeah, George.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, um, did you have grandparents around?

BILIOURIS: I don't remember my grandfather. I remember my grandmother. My grandmother, she was, when I left home she was close to ninety-four, ninety-five years old.

LEVINE: What was her name?

BILIOURIS: Uh, I forget. Eleni.

LEVINE: E-L . . .

BILIOURIS: E-L-E-N-I.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And do you remember any times with your

grandmother? What was your grandmother like? How was she with you?

BILIOURIS: She was a little short woman. Just because we were a big family in the house, she was doing nothing else but bake and cook for the whole family. And when she passed away she was a hundred and seven years old.

LEVINE: Do you remember any of the dishes that she baked or cooked that you liked in particular?

BILIOURIS: Well . . . (he laughs) I remember, of course I remember. She makes spinach pita there, making, uh, meatballs and everything like that, bake bread, cornbread, rye bread. That's what she was doing. We had an oven in the house, you know.

LEVINE: Was the oven a clay oven?

BILIOURIS: No, there was, uh, a brick oven, no gas or electricity, anything like that. Put wood in there and burn them, see.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So was the oven, was it, like, built into the wall?

BILIOURIS: Into the wall.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BILIOURIS: Into the wall, yeah.

LEVINE: Was it big?

BILIOURIS: Big.

LEVINE: How big was it?

BILIOURIS: Big enough. I should say, inside, inside it must have been big as a table, or maybe a little bigger.

LEVINE: Oh, so it was about five feet or so?

BILIOURIS: Yeah. About five, five, six feet long, and about three or four feet wide.

LEVINE: Wow.

BILIOURIS: Yep.

LEVINE: So, um, so your grandmother did all the cooking, and she did it alone?

BILIOURIS: Yeah, all by herself.

LEVINE: And then what was your mother doing?

BILIOURIS: Out working in the field or raising the family, the kids.

LEVINE: What kind of things did your mother, uh, grow and have?

BILIOURIS: Rye and corn, beans. That's all they grow there.

LEVINE: And plus the animals.

BILIOURIS: Wheat and, wheat and corn, that's all they grow.

LEVINE: And then the animals.

BILIOURIS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Who would take care of them?

BILIOURIS: We had somebody else doing that. My father was taking the animals, and we had somebody else, hire somebody to do that.

LEVINE: Now, the person who took care of the animals, did that person take care of your animals and other people's animals, too?

BILIOURIS: No, our animals.

LEVINE: Just yours.

BILIOURIS: Just our animals. Our sheeps, you know. We had about three hundred of them.

LEVINE: Oh!

BILIOURIS: See, that's what he was doing. He was taking care of those.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, what, when would you eat the sheep? Would you, you didn't have refrigeration at that time?

BILIOURIS: No, no. No refrigeration, nothing.

LEVINE: So what would happen? Say, a sheep would be killed, slaughtered, and then what?

BILIOURIS: See, the sheeps, uh, they grow, they sell it, they slaughter for meat, you know, once a week, one or another. People in the town, they're buying it, they're milking. They milk, they make a cheese out of that, see. And not all of them have sheeps there. We got sheeps, you know, and there are about a hundred families in there. The other eighty families, they didn't have any. So they buy the sheep, they milk, the cheese from the house to them.

LEVINE: And they also bought meat, when you would slaughter.

BILIOURIS: Yeah.

LEVINE: I see. So you would have enough for yourself, and then you would sell off.

BILIOURIS: And then, or if they have something else and we don't have it, we buy it from them.

LEVINE: So did your mother take the, uh, the milk and the cheese and the meat into a market?

BILIOURIS: No, no. Not on the market. They coming to town and buy it.

LEVINE: They come to your house?

BILIOURIS: Yeah. And they say, "Well, I want so much cheese."
So my father takes it and bring it to them, see.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And when your father was away would they, what, come to your house and say what they wanted?

BILIOURIS: Well, my father never went away from the home, never went nowhere.

LEVINE: Oh, he didn't go off to the other places?

BILIOURIS: No, no. Just he was taking care of the animals, the sheeps and the cows, and the farm.

LEVINE: I see. So it would be people who didn't have enough, uh, farm or produce to sell, that they would go away.

BILIOURIS: Yeah.

LEVINE: I see. Uh-huh. Oh, so you were lucky, in a way. You had your father there.

BILIOURIS: Yeah, I was lucky. I was lucky there, and I was lucky when I come over here, because I had three brothers and an uncle over here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. What was your father's name?

BILIOURIS: Evangelus. Angelus, what they call over here, but Evangelus.

LEVINE: And, um, let's see, did you have aunts and uncles in the town, in Greece?

BILIOURIS: In Greece, no. I had one uncle. He was here, and he come to Greece, to town, and he passed away there, see. But I had my other uncle, he was here, and three brothers.

LEVINE: What was, uh, could you describe, uh, the house you lived in? What did it look like?

BILIOURIS: Well, the house was built by stones. We had, in a house we had, uh, three big rooms, four big rooms and a cellar.

LEVINE: What was in the cellar?

BILIOURIS: Well, in the cellar was coal. In the cellar was cold, we keep the cheese there and we keep the butter, kept the meat, just because it was cold. Of course, not to keep for years or months, but temporarily, you know, only the cheese, because it's salty, they won't spoil, that's what it is.

LEVINE: And was it a dirt floor in the cellar?

BILIOURIS: No, stone.

LEVINE: Stone floor.

BILIOURIS: Stone floor, stone floor.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. So then you would be, uh, you would keep those things in the cellar, and then what would be on the first floor of your house?

BILIOURIS: Well, the rooms, it was upstairs, yeah.

LEVINE: And where, um, where were the animals kept?

BILIOURIS: Out.

LEVINE: Outside.

BILIOURIS: Outside.

LEVINE: They never came in.

BILIOURIS: No.

LEVINE: And, uh, was the first floor where the kitchen was, or was it like a parlor, or . . .

BILIOURIS: Well, the kitchen, there was one big room where they had the living room, like a living room, to build a fire in the night, you know, in the wintertime, and we sit all around there and talk. And it had two other rooms.

LEVINE: Bedrooms?

BILIOURIS: Bedrooms. And, for cooking, he had another, like a small room outside in the house, where they're doing all the cooking and the baking and everything in there, separate.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. So they didn't cook and bake in the house.

BILIOURIS: No, no.

LEVINE: Was that because it would make the house too hot, or do you know why they were?

BILIOURIS: Well, I don't know how, why they do that. That's when they build that there, the oven there, and, like a kitchen there, they put all the cooking in there. There was a small room. They like doing all the cooking in there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And where would you have dinner?

BILIOURIS: In the, in the house, in the house. What, the, there's a living room. A living room, I can say the living room, or I can say the family room or something like that, where they build a fireplace at night, you know, that's a big room. That's where we had the dinner, in there.

LEVINE: Um, and so it was your grandmother, your mother, your father, your brothers and you, who would be having dinner, let's say.

BILIOURIS: When my brothers were there. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Yeah. What were your brothers' names?

BILIOURIS: One he was Tudor [ph], the other one is Tommy, Tomas, and the other one was Alex, Alexandrous, what they call him.

LEVINE: And they were all older than you.

BILIOURIS: Yeah, older than me. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So tell me, um, what it was like in the school there, in Greece, when you were a young boy.

BILIOURIS: When I was a young boy in school it was very nice, because you learned something. The teachers there, they don't fool around. Either you learn, or you are not. And if you go home, and your marks are low, you get beating from your father, he says, "Why?"

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So it was strict.

BILIOURIS: Oh, yeah, very strict in schools there, everybody. Till you go, fifth grade, fifth or sixth grade. After that you can't go in a town. After that you've got to go to a bigger school in the city

somewhere.

LEVINE: Was the school with, uh, all boys?

BILIOURIS: No, boys and girls, but they were separate.
Separate, the girls were separate, and the boys were
separate.

LEVINE: Did they learn the same things?

BILIOURIS: Same thing. But, see, the girls, they have a female
teacher, and the man, they have a man teacher. The
boys, they have a man teacher, yeah. We go outside,
we play all together, you know.

LEVINE: Oh, you play with the girls and boys.

BILIOURIS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember any of the games that you
played when you were little?

BILIOURIS: I remember, but it's hard to describe to you. (he
laughs)

LEVINE: Were they, well, were they . . .

BILIOURIS: We play something like baseball over here, and
something like that we play. And, uh, other games,

you know, hiding.

LEVINE: Hide and seek, kind of?

BILIOURIS: To find it, or hide something, you know, and you go and find it. That kind of games.

LEVINE: Were the girls treated very much differently than the boys growing up?

BILIOURIS: No, it's the same thing, growing up. But, uh, the only thing, it was the girls there, they respect the boys. If the boy says something, they listen. (he laughs) See?

LEVINE: And I guess it was, it was, your family was considered, I suppose, lucky that your mother had all sons.

BILIOURIS: Yeah, all sons. Well, the way I was told, I don't know, the way I was told, my mother, she had ten children, and she lost the first six, which were four girls and two boys. And we are the four brothers left. We are the last four children.

LEVINE: Uh. Do you know, do you know anything about medical care when you were a little boy in that village?

What did they do? Did they have, uh, folk kind of remedies, or did they have doctors, or . . .

BILIOURIS: Very, no doctors. There was very few doctors there. There's not many doctors there. Not like over here, you know, children's doctor, or a woman's doctor or anything like that, no. One doctor takes everything. In my town we had a doctor in the town, and he passed away. And the teacher was in school there, he took all his, uh, library and read it, and he was, he was acting like a doctor there. That's about all.

LEVINE: Do you remember any, uh, kind of, uh, home remedies for anything that you might get that would be a sickness?

BILIOURIS: A sickness? Yeah. Well, no. You got a cold, they boil some tea, mountain tea or something else, you know, they give you hot stuff, and towels, warm towels, cold towels if you got a fever, you know. That's what they do, the women. There's no remedies. They boil things, roots, you know, they give it to you.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember any, uh, ceremonies, like

either around birth or around marriage or, uh, death? Any ceremonies that took place in the town?

BILIOURIS: Yeah. Well, they, one day somebody get married there, they get married for a week. They have celebration for a week.

LEVINE: And, uh, what would happen during the course of that week?

BILIOURIS: No. It just having a good time. They had a music there. They dance, they talk, they eat, they drink. That's all they do.

LEVINE: And was there any particular ritual about the bride and the groom that they did over there?

BILIOURIS: No. Not in particular, you know. When there was a wedding there, the whole village was invited.

LEVINE: Now, was the whole village Greek, or were there Turkish people, or Albanian?

BILIOURIS: All Greek, all Greek. No.

LEVINE: All Greek.

BILIOURIS: All Greeks.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BILIOURIS: The Greek school, Greek churches. Everything's Greek.

LEVINE: And so the school was in the Greek language.

BILIOURIS: (?)

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BILIOURIS: I wasn't there, but I heard that after the communists took over they put the Albanians inside there. You have to learn Albanian, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. How about funerals? Were they any different than they are over here?

BILIOURIS: Well, the funerals were no different than they are over here. The only thing is if somebody pass away today, they bury him the next day right away because they can't keep him.

LEVINE: Was there any kind of a ceremony or anything?

BILIOURIS: Oh, yes. The person would be there, all this the, uh, whatever it is to say, you know, for the . . .

LEVINE: Prayers and, uh-huh.

BILIOURIS: It's all in the, in the, it's, the person is there.

They get the ceremony there, just like the funeral service that they're doing over here. The same thing.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And how about mourning. Was there any particular rituals or customs about mourning?

BILIOURIS: No, no, no, no. No.

LEVINE: Uh, were you a religious family? Were you religious?

BILIOURIS: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BILIOURIS: All of my family's religious. Even my, my family here, they are religious, too.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BILIOURIS: They come over here. I went back 1929 in Greece, and I got married there.

LEVINE: You went back to get married?

BILIOURIS: Yeah. I got married there. But I couldn't bring it

over here right away, because I wasn't a citizen. In 1932 I became a citizen, and I got married 1930. I brought her over here, 1936. And we got two boys.

LEVINE: Okay, well . . .

BILIOURIS: One is over here in Worcester, and one is in Fayetteville, North Carolina.

LEVINE: Oh. Okay. Well, first let's say when, when did you leave your little town? Did you finish as far as you could go in school?

BILIOURIS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Just sixth grade?

BILIOURIS: Oh, yes, I finished. Oh, yes.

LEVINE: And then, and then where did you go from there?

BILIOURIS: I come over here.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. So you stayed there, after you finished school there, what did you do?

BILIOURIS: After I finished school, I worked on my father, you know, watching the sheeps and everything, or the

cows. I help my father, that's all, nothing else. I didn't go nowhere. When I was nineteen, I want to come to America, because my other two brothers, three brothers over here, and I says, "They must be good over there." (he laughs)

LEVINE: When did your brothers come? Do you remember?

BILIOURIS: I don't, exactly I don't remember. I know my uncle come before 1910. My brothers might come a little later.

LEVINE: And did they write home?

BILIOURIS: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: And what did they say about America when they wrote?

BILIOURIS: America, they says it's good, we're working good, they send money to me. It's (?).

LEVINE: What were your brothers doing in America for work?

BILIOURIS: Well, uh, in factory.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. In Worcester, were they?

BILIOURIS: I had a brother in Clinton, a brother in Fitchburg, and a brother in New Bedford. They're all working

in the mill factories, cotton factories. So I started working in the cotton factories, too.

LEVINE: Oh. Okay. So they, so when you got, when you decided that you would . . . (she clears her throat) Excuse me. You would come to America, you would have been inducted into the army.

BILIOURIS: In the army. Oh, sure thing. I would be there . . .

LEVINE: Into the Turkish Army?

BILIOURIS: No, Albanian Army.

LEVINE: Um, oh, well, then, maybe you should fill, fill us in here. It was Greece, it was under the Turks.

BILIOURIS: Yeah.

LEVINE: And then . . .

BILIOURIS: Under Albania and the Greeks. And then under Albania.

LEVINE: And do you remember those changes that happened as the different governments kind of took over your town?

BILIOURIS: Well, I even saw Italian come over there, too. When they (?) Italy in 19, 1916, Italy was there.

LEVINE: You mean it became Italian?

BILIOURIS: Yeah. They were there for a short time, you see. A short time with Italy, right away open up the schools, they put teachers in schools to learn, uh, Italians. So I went to school. I learned a few Italians. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And then what happened to the churches? Did they become Roman Catholic churches, or how did . . .

BILIOURIS: No Catholic churches in that sections, no. All, there's no Catholic churches, only Orthodox churches.

LEVINE: Well, um, do you remember, uh, when, uh, the Turks left? Was there a, was there a battle? Was there fighting going on?

BILIOURIS: It was a battle there when they left. They left, I believe, in 1910, 1912. Some (?) in 1912, I think.

LEVINE: Do you remember that? Do you remember fighting taking place in your town?

BILIOURIS: No, in the town (?), no. Not in the town, no.

LEVINE: How did, how did the people in the town, the Greek people in your town, how did they feel about the Turks?

BILIOURIS: Well, I couldn't, I don't remember very well how they feel about. They were free anyway. As long as they were free in their language and their schools, their religion, that's all the people, they work (?). The only thing that was even after Albanian took over in the beginning, when they make a king, that King Zobu [ph], they was all right. But when the communists took over, then everything went dead.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember what year it was, roughly, when the Albanians took over?

BILIOURIS: I don't remember. 1918, 1918, something like that, '17 or '18.

LEVINE: So you saw it as Turkish and Italian and Albanian.

BILIOURIS: And Greeks.

LEVINE: And Greeks. Uh-huh.

BILIOURIS: I saw all of them.

LEVINE: But the town pretty much stayed the same until the communists came in, you think.

BILIOURIS: After the communists took over, change everything. No churches, different schools. No, you have no right to own nothing. Everything the government took over. And if you own a home, they left you the home, the house, that's all. If you had a farm, if you had a property, they take over, everything. Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, um, what kind of a woman was your mother? How would you describe your mother?

BILIOURIS: My mother, she was a wonderful woman. She was a hard-working woman, and she brought up a family right, and she passed away when she was ninety years old.

LEVINE: Ah. Your family lives a long time.

BILIOURIS: Yeah. My father passed away, he was ninety-two. I

am my father's age now. I'm ninety-two, but I don't know for how long he had. (he laughs)

LEVINE: You look healthy. So you, um, so do you remember any experiences, things that you did that your mother told you, or any kinds of, uh . . .

BILIOURIS: (?) in our family was so organized family. There was nothing wrong with our family, you know. All my other brothers are left, and I was by myself there. I was all the time with my father.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: How did your mother feel about your brothers leaving for America?

BILIOURIS: Why, she didn't like it. She didn't like me to leave. But my father says, "(?) she wants to go," he says, "you'd better go." He says, "He's not going by himself. He's not going alone there. We got three more boys there, and you got, they got an uncle there, we got another family over there."

LEVINE: So your father was encouraging.

BILIOURIS: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Since you wanted to go. When you went, did you think you would come back again?

BILIOURIS: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: To live?

BILIOURIS: To go back and live in Albania? No, no, no.

LEVINE: So, um, okay. So then, um, when you left home, you, uh, you would have been taken into the army.

BILIOURIS: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: So you went to Greece.

BILIOURIS: Yeah.

LEVINE: And then, uh, from Greece you would have been taken into that army. Is that right?

BILIOURIS: I want to stay only thirty days in Greece and go back to Albania, but the government in Greece find out some people they know what to do, and they took the military government to give me a passport. So that's what I, that's why I increased my age there from twenty to twenty-four, so I have no obligation

for the service. So . . .

LEVINE: And did you have relatives there?

BILIOURIS: No, I didn't have nobody. I didn't have nobody. The only thing I, in Athens, we applied for passport and they give us, it says, "Go to Corfu." It says, "In Corfu," it says, it's an Epirotic society there, and society there, and they might help you. That's how they helped me in Corfu, in Greece. The society, they knew the people there, and that's how they gave me a passport in Corfu.

LEVINE: I see. Now, were you traveling by yourself at that time?

BILIOURIS: No. I had a cousin of my mother's. He was here in the United States and they come back home, and he was coming back to United States, and I was coming with him. Yeah.

LEVINE: Is that why you happened to be going just then, because he was going back?

BILIOURIS: Yeah.

LEVINE: So, um, so you went to Corfu, and you got your . . .

BILIOURIS: I went through military people . . .

LEVINE: Examination?

BILIOURIS: Examination there, see. That's where they say, I tell you what they say, one man, he says, the others, "He's not twenty-four years, he's not this. He's nineteen, he's eighteen. And he says, "Wait a minute." He says, "Wait a minute, boy." He says, "He come, he left Albania," he says, "he was a slave. He didn't want to go to the army. He's Greek." He says, "He come over here and wants help. If we send him back, we send him to slavery again. Why don't you let the boy go where he wants to go. So each one looked each one another, you know, they stamp my passport, and I come over here.

LEVINE: Now, um, where did you leave from? What port?

BILIOURIS: Pireus, in Athens. Pireus.

LEVINE: That's P-E-R-I-O-S?

BILIOURIS: Exactly.

LEVINE: And the name of the ship?

BILIOURIS: Demistocles [ph].

LEVINE: And, uh, did you have to have examinations before you left, before, on the ship, or by the ship company?

BILIOURIS: No, no. I don't remember having any examination, no. But I have examination over here, when we land over here.

LEVINE: Okay. Uh, do you remember anything about the voyage?

BILIOURIS: Well, yeah. I remember about the voyage. I left Greece January 14th, and we land over here February 21. Now, you be more than a month in the, in the ocean. It was a slow boat. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Was this ship a freighter, or was it simply taking passengers to the United States?

BILIOURIS: The ship, I don't know, it was a Greek ship, but it was a slow ship. It was, I don't know, they take, they say they take ten knots an hour, or fifteen knots, or something like that.

LEVINE: Did they have cargo, too, or was it . . .

BILIOURIS: Oh, yeah. They had cargo, too.

LEVINE: Yeah?

BILIOURIS: Oh, yeah. Oh, as I remember, it must have been four or five hundred people in the, in the ship was sitting up on the top, one on top of the other one. No beds, no . . .

LEVINE: Oh, no beds?

BILIOURIS: No rooms. Just laying over here, it might be two hundred people over here, just three or four on the top, one on the other one.

LEVINE: Uh, when, uh, were they, were, there were bunk beds?

BILIOURIS: Yeah.

LEVINE: And they were in one big area?

BILIOURIS: One big area, bunk beds, one on top of the other one, that's all.

LEVINE: And how about food?

BILIOURIS: Food was not too bad.

LEVINE: Did you have, like, a dining room, or did they give

you . . .

BILIOURIS: No, you go pass on a line, and go up on deck and eat, or wherever you find a place. All right? On line.

LEVINE: Now, did your, did your, um, how did you get your ticket? How did you get the ticket? Did you . . .

BILIOURIS: The ticket? I had the ticket. My father . . .

LEVINE: Your father got it for you. Uh-huh.

BILIOURIS: I had the ticket. I had the money to buy the ticket. I wasn't sure if I'm coming over here, but I had the money, but I (?) to buy the ticket.

LEVINE: Okay. So was there anything that happened aboard ship that you remember in particular for that month and five weeks?

BILIOURIS: Well, just because the ship, it took so long, the end couple of days the food wasn't so good, you know. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Oh, because it was getting old.

BILIOURIS: And after that there was a ship over here, as I remember, from Austria, and there was some kind of a sickness inside there. Then they leave us to go out right away. They ship us one boat to another boat, and we stay about two or three weeks in the other boat.

LEVINE: Oh, wow. So this was before you got to New York Harbor?

BILIOURIS: Oh, in New York Harbor.

LEVINE: In New York Harbor. Uh, you were, did you go into Ellis Island first?

BILIOURIS: No, after.

LEVINE: After.

BILIOURIS: After I went to Ellis Island, after.

LEVINE: But let me see if I understand. You, there was a ship from Austria that had some contagious . . .

BILIOURIS: Some kind of contagious sickness. Then they let no other ships, anybody else, to go out unless they're sure that they are no sickness on the boat. So they transfer us from the Demistocles to another ship,

and we stay about two or three weeks, I don't remember exactly, there.

LEVINE: In the harbor.

BILIOURIS: In the harbor.

LEVINE: In the other ship.

BILIOURIS: Yeah. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: But you never, the people that came from Austria, they were on a different ship.

BILIOURIS: Different ship. Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: But why did they think you . . .

BILIOURIS: I don't know why. That's how they had it.

LEVINE: Well, um, so, so, oh, so after five weeks on the sea, then you had to stay two more weeks.

BILIOURIS: Another couple of weeks. (he laughs) My father and mother thought I was lost till I, uh, I wrote a letter from the ship and mail it outside to my brother in Fitchburg. So one of my brothers come over, and I says, I told him, I says, "I'm there. I don't know when we're gonna come out." He says,

"But I don't have no clothes." Because they told us the clean clothes that I had it, so I can (?) when I come over here, they thought tomorrow we're gonna get out, and we throw all the old clothes in the ocean there, and we wait the clean ones. And then the other one, two or three weeks, he says, "They're gone." My brother come over here. Then they let him to come in and (?), and they call the name, and put, hang it down, and put my clothes there, and he send me some clothes, and he send me some money, too. (they laugh)

LEVINE: So who came up to the ship in the boat to put your clothes in the, was it like a basket, or . . .

BILIOURIS: A basket.

LEVINE: A basket.

BILIOURIS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Who brought those clothes out to the ship?

BILIOURIS: I don't know who. (he laughs)

LEVINE: But your brother was in Manhattan.

BILIOURIS: Outside, with a small boat, you know. And I was up

on the top on the deck, and he says, "I got your clothes over here," he says. So I get the basket down by the rope, put the clothes in the basket, and in one pocket with the clothes, you know, he give some money. (he laughs)

LEVINE: But you didn't see your brother?

BILIOURIS: No. I see him from the top, I'm just yelling from the top of the deck down to the other deck, that's all.

LEVINE: I see. Wow.

BILIOURIS: When I come out, I went through the Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Tell me about Ellis Island, everything you remember.

BILIOURIS: Ellis Island, I had it easy. I had it easy in Ellis Island. When I come into Ellis Island I pass through there, there was a man over here examining my, he didn't see my name, Biliouris. And he look at me, and I says to him, he says, "Where are you from?" He asked me. I says, "Oh, Albania." He looked, "Why your passport Greek passport?" He was an Albanian. And so I told him, "Hey, okay, it's all right. It's as good." And he says to me, "You

remember me?" I says, "No." "I remember you," he says. "How can you remember me?" His father was a guard in our town, you know, a guard in the town. And he went to school with us, with me. But, I says, "I was in the sixth grade," he says, "and you were in the fifth grade," he says. "Not that I know you by face," he says, "but the name. I'm so-and-so." And then I remember myself later. And he give me a basket with fruit inside, something like that, and says, "Go ahead." He put a tag on me over here.

LEVINE: Had he become an inspector at Ellis Island? Was that his job, an inspector?

BILIOURIS: Inspector, his job. I said, "Put a tag on me over here." And a woman, there were three of us, he took us, coming to Massachusetts, you know. Uh, he took me, he took me from the Ellis Island to the station, the train station, Grand Central Station. They put me in a train, and told the conductor there that I'm coming to Worcester. (break in tape) So I had to take over here, take it out (?).

LEVINE: What happened to your friend? Was he still with you, or he went somewhere else?

BILIOURIS: We went different way, he went a different way. After that he, so they took me, put me on the train, and I come to Worcester, take me off the train. Since there's nobody over here to pick me up, they took me from the train to the grocery store over here in Worcester, on Worcester, on Spring Street.

LEVINE: What was the name of it? Do you remember?

BILIOURIS: I don't, it's a good question. I'm in the grocery store. And, uh, it happened, that grocery store, they were Greeks, and I know who they are, but I never met them, by the name. And I saw, I saw him in the back of the grocery store one man, but he left a couple of months before me to come to the United States, so he was here and he come back, and, back and forth, you know.

LEVINE: So he was from your town?

BILIOURIS: Yeah. And, uh, I saw him. And he says, "Hey, come here." He took me, and there was some people, a cousin of mine over here in Worcester, in Worcester, took me to them, I slept overnight. And they called from here to Fitchburg to come and pick me up. So my brother comes next day to pick me up and we went

to Fitchburg.

LEVINE: What did it feel like to see your brother?

BILIOURIS: Yeah. But my all brothers, they're gone. My uncle's gone, my brother's gone. I'm the only one left. Thank God I come over here, raise my family here, and I got two boys, one over here and one in, uh, North Carolina.

LEVINE: Where do you, what are your boys' names?

BILIOURIS: One boy's over here, he's an inspector over here. Uh, yeah, inspector. And, uh, the other boy graduated from Holy Cross over here, and he took ROTC, and he come home from Holy Cross second lieutenant. And he retired a few years ago as a lieutenant colonel.

LEVINE: And what is his name?

BILIOURIS: He's in Fayetteville, North Carolina.

LEVINE: What's your son's name?

BILIOURIS: Uh, Tom.

LEVINE: Tom. And your other son, the inspector?

BILIOURIS: He's Leo.

LEVINE: Leo.

BILIOURIS: Leonardis.

LEVINE: Leonardis.

BILIOURIS: Yeah.

LEVINE: And he, what does he inspect?

BILIOURIS: Well, I don't know. He works for the lawyers, and the lawyers send him around to inspect things. That's all I know.

LEVINE: An investigator.

BILIOURIS: I don't ask questions to know what they do.

LEVINE: So, uh, how was it that you settled in Worcester rather than in Fitchburg?

BILIOURIS: Uh, well, I was in New York when my wife come over. And New York, I didn't like it, New York, for her.

LEVINE: I see.

BILIOURIS: Because she didn't speak English.

LEVINE: Well, wait. Well, after you came to Massachusetts, when you first came to this country . . .

BILIOURIS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Did you, what, did you work here for a while?

BILIOURIS: I worked over here for a while. I worked in Fitchburg.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What did you do at first?

BILIOURIS: Cotton mill.

LEVINE: In the, uh, in the, uh, cotton mill?

BILIOURIS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And then . . .

BILIOURIS: Then the cotton mills move away from here. They went all south. I had one brother, he was in New Bedford, he was working the cotton mill, he went to New York and got a job there. So he says, "Come over," so I get a job.

LEVINE: So when you went to New York what did you then for work?

BILIOURIS: I started working in a restaurant.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So how long were you in New York before,
uh . . .

BILIOURIS: I was in New York from 1925 to '36, eleven years.

LEVINE: So when, what made you decide to go back to Greece?

BILIOURIS: I want to go back to Greece to see my father and
mother.

LEVINE: What year was that?

BILIOURIS: 1929, when the Depression was. I went there to see
my father and mother, and they wrote me, says, "Come
down and see us. We want to see you." They were
old. So I went back. So I met my wife there.

LEVINE: Did you, did you think you were going to get
married?

BILIOURIS: No, no.

LEVINE: So how did you meet, how did you, how did that come
about?

BILIOURIS: (he laughs) My mother was talking to me.

LEVINE: Your mother had picked her out for you?

BILIOURIS: Yeah. And says, "She's a nice girl, she's this and that." Ah. I says . . .

LEVINE: What was your wife's name?

BILIOURIS: Areti.

LEVINE: A-R . . .

BILIOURIS: E-T-I. So . . .

LEVINE: And do you remember her maiden name?

BILIOURIS: L-I-T-I. So I got married, but I couldn't bring her over right away because I wasn't a citizen, when I said before.

LEVINE: Did you have a big, Greek wedding?

BILIOURIS: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: With the whole town?

BILIOURIS: Oh, yeah. The whole ball there. (he laughs) The whole town.

LEVINE: And how were you received, having been in America for a period of time and then going back to your

town?

BILIOURIS: That felt good anyway. That feels good, and see old friends and see old relatives and everything. The town is there. Each one is, (?).

LEVINE: Did, were you, were you perceived as somebody who had been successful in America?

BILIOURIS: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: So that . . .

BILIOURIS: Then when I got married I says to my wife, I says, "I'm not coming back," I says to her. "I'm leaving, and I'm not coming back. You're coming to America." I told her. "Whatever you say." So that's what happened. I brought her back.

LEVINE: Well, did, how did you feel about your wife when you first met her? Did you, were you . . .

BILIOURIS: She felt all right. She wondered, you know, when you marry an American, hey. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Oh, she was happy to marry an American?

BILIOURIS: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: But did you, were you pleased with your mother's choice?

BILIOURIS: Yes. If I wasn't pleased, I don't keep my wife for sixty-three years. (they laugh) I'm married sixty-three years.

LEVINE: Yeah. That's wonderful.

BILIOURIS: As I say, I got two sons, six granddaughters and two great-grandchildren, one girl and one boy.

LEVINE: Wonderful. Well, tell me, is it, is it usual in Greece for the mother-in-law to pick out the wife for her son?

BILIOURIS: It's kind of custom like that, you know.

LEVINE: And then . . .

BILIOURIS: There they're looking, they're picking up the, uh, the family, what kind of family it is, where they come from, how they are. That's what they, but they used to those days. Not now. They don't do it now. Those days they do it, see.

LEVINE: Well, then, when you got married and you went back to America, did your wife then live with your

mother?

BILIOURIS: Yes. She lives with my mother and father.

LEVINE: And that would be usual that the wife would come
in . . .

BILIOURIS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. So then it's important they get
along.

BILIOURIS: (?)

LEVINE: Yeah. Uh-huh. So, okay. So you came back here.
And then did you, did you work in New York again, or
did you come up . . .

BILIOURIS: I work in New York again. When my wife was coming
over, I moved from New York, I come to Worcester.
Because my wife, in New York, you have to keep your
wife, if I had a house, it's gonna stay in a house,
know nobody. Over here, we had relatives, we had
friends. That's why I come over here.

LEVINE: So there wasn't a Greek community in New York?

BILIOURIS: It is, it is Greek community. But . . .

LEVINE: But not . . .

BILIOURIS: It's not like a small town or a small cities.
Nothing like over here. Everybody, the whole
community knows each other. Over there they don't
know nobody.

LEVINE: So it was how many years then, uh, after you got
married, in 1929 you got married.

BILIOURIS: 1930.

LEVINE: 1930. Then you came back here yourself. Then when
did you . . .

BILIOURIS: No, I didn't go back myself.

LEVINE: Oh.

BILIOURIS: I go back when I got, I went back 1929, and I got
married 1930, and 1930 I come back to the United
States, but I didn't go back. i sent for my wife to
come over here.

LEVINE: I see. So you sent her a ticket?

BILIOURIS: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: And what year was that?

BILIOURIS: '36, 1936.

LEVINE: And then when she came over, you came to Worcester.

BILIOURIS: To Worcester, yeah.

LEVINE: So did you stay in the restaurant business then?

BILIOURIS: Where?

LEVINE: Did you stay in the restaurant business?

BILIOURIS: I stay in the restaurant business, yeah. New York, the restaurant business, I worked forty-five years in the restaurant business.

LEVINE: And then when you came to Worcester?

BILIOURIS: I ran a restaurant, a restaurant.

LEVINE: Do you remember the name of the restaurant here in Worcester?

BILIOURIS: In Worcester? Yeah, I know. The first job I got, it was Wholesome Lunch. Wholesome Lunch.

LEVINE: Wholesome Lunch, uh-huh.

BILIOURIS: And then I went The Terminal Restaurant. That was

(?), about four years, I went to another restaurant, Whalen's [ph]. I worked two years there. And then I went to Terminal, sixteen years there.

LEVINE: Is that where you retired from?

BILIOURIS: No. Then after there I went to a liquor store, uh, somebody asked me, says, "You want to come to a liquor store, forget about the restaurant?" I said, "I come. More money." And I worked for them, for the owner, I worked for the owner two years. And, uh, he passed away. And then the family, they told me you manage the package store. And I managed the package store for seventeen years for them, till they sold it after. I'm still, I didn't collect Social Security until I was seventy-two years old.

LEVINE: Then no more?

BILIOURIS: Huh?

LEVINE: Then you didn't collect it any more?

BILIOURIS: Yeah, but I stopped working when I was seventy-two.

LEVINE: Oh, you stopped when you were seventy-two.

BILIOURIS: I retired at seventy-two.

LEVINE: Wow.

BILIOURIS: And I was seventy-two when I retired.

LEVINE: Wonderful. Well, what are you most proud of that you've done in your life? What do you feel real proud of?

BILIOURIS: Uh, proud of? The only thing proud of, my family. I got a good family, good sons, and I got six, as I said, six granddaughters, they all, two of them they are married, four are single. They got twins, two granddaughters are twins. Half of them in North Carolina, and half of them here. That's where they are.

LEVINE: Um, do you, can you think of, uh, any, uh, what do you think it meant to you that, that you started out in, in Greece, and you, and you came here as a young man and made your life here? Uh, is it, could you say, like there's a part of you that's Greek, and there's a part of your that's American, or . . .

BILIOURIS: There's no part of my, for me, in Greece or Albania or nowhere over here. This is my life. This is my everything over here. This is my country. I forget

all about them. I went and visit a couple of times,
but not to stay there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. Is there anything else you can think
of that you'd like to say before we close?

BILIOURIS: What can I say? What can I say? I'm married for
sixty-three years, and a good wife. I got a good
family, and I'm proud of it.

LEVINE: Wonderful. Well . . .

BILIOURIS: And the only thing I'm doing now, helping the
church.

LEVINE: In this phase of your life, the church is very
important.

BILIOURIS: Now is, after I retire. Even before, but after I
retire, the church, and I'm helping the church over
here. I'm doing anything, anything what I can do
for the church. When they have festivals, I work
for the festivals, I cook for the festival.
This . . .

LEVINE: Well, the church has been important to you all
through your life.

BILIOURIS: Oh, yes, very important in my life. Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I want to thank you very much. This has really been a pleasure.

BILIOURIS: Thank you for calling me.

LEVINE: A wonderful interview and story, and it will be a welcome addition to the Ellis Island library.

BILIOURIS: (he laughs) Yeah. Thank you very much.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine. I've been talking with Harry Biliouris here in Worcester, and he came from Greece in 1921 when he was twenty years old. Now, today you're ninety . . .

BILIOURIS: Ninety-two.

LEVINE: Ninety-two. And this is August 13, 1993, and I'm signing off.