

EI-390

MARY (MARAM) OHANIAN ASSADOURIAN

BIRTH DATE: JANUARY 10, 1904

INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 16, 1993

RUNNING TIME: 1:57:34

INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME

INTERVIEW LOCATION: ELLIS ISLAND RECORDING STUDIO
USING THE PORTABLE DAT TAPE RECORDER

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 1/1996

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY CHARLES MITCHELL 4/2006

TURKEY (ARMENIAN), 1920

AGE 16

SHIP NAME NOT RECALLED

RESIDENCE: EVEREG

US RESIDENCE: NYC, LENOX AVE.

PORT OF EMBARKATION (IN FRANCE)

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday, September 16, 1993. I'm at the Ellis Island Recording Studio using the portable digital machine with Mary Assadourian.

ASSADOURIAN: Assadourian.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Assadourian came from Turkey. She is Armenian, born in Turkey. She came to America in 1920.

ASSADOURIAN: '20.

SIGRIST: She was sixteen when she came to this country.

Also in the room is her daughter, Barbara Dorian.

ASSADOURIAN: My daughter-in-law.

SIGRIST: Her daughter-in-law.

ASSADOURIAN: She's my daughter, like.

SIGRIST: Okay. And her last name is D-O-R-I-A-N. Dorian.
Anyway, welcome.

ASSADOURIAN: Thank you.

SIGRIST: I'm glad to have you.

ASSADOURIAN: Thank you.

SIGRIST: Can we begin by you giving me your maiden name?

ASSADOURIAN: My maiden name was Maram Ohanian.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

ASSADOURIAN: Maram, M-A-R-A-M. Ohanian, O-H-I-A-N [sic].
Ohanian.

SIGRIST: Barbara?

DORIAN: O-H-A-N-I-A-N.

SIGRIST: O-H-A-N-I-A-N. And do you know what your date of

birth was?

ASSADOURIAN: 1904, January 10th.

SIGRIST: January 10, 1904. Can you tell me where you were born?

ASSADOURIAN: One part in Turkey they call Evereg, which is city, which we had, um, (?). So my grandparents was Doughramagian, my mother's side. My father's side, we were Ohanian.

SIGRIST: Can you spell your mother's side of the family?

ASSADOURIAN: D-O-U-G-H, Dough, R-A-M-A-G-I-A-N. That's Doughramagian.

SIGRIST: I see.

ASSADOURIAN: That's Doughramagian.

SIGRIST: That's a long . . .

ASSADOURIAN: It's a long name.

SIGRIST: Can you also spell the name of the town?

ASSADOURIAN: E-V-E-R, Ever, E-G. Evereg.

SIGRIST: And whereabouts in Turkey is that?

ASSADOURIAN: Geographically I don't know much, because I didn't have my education. I was only seven years old when the Turks started massacre.

SIGRIST: I see.

ASSADOURIAN: I am one of the survivors.

SIGRIST: What we'll do is we'll talk about what you remember about life before the Turks began the massacre, and then we'll talk about what you remember about the massacre.

ASSADOURIAN: All right.

SIGRIST: When you were a little girl, you said both your mother's side of the family and your father's side of the family lived in this town.

ASSADOURIAN: In this town.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the house that you lived in?

ASSADOURIAN: The house I lived in was, had a big backyard with steps to go up to go to the, um . . .

SIGRIST: The second story?

ASSADOURIAN: No, no. The, one, (Armenian).

DORIAN: Patio?

ASSADOURIAN: Patio.

SIGRIST: Patio.

ASSADOURIAN: Patio. We had a vine, three, all the way from the ground. It had to come to that patio, covered all the patio. It was a big patio. And under the patio was our barn, which we always had, uh, a horse or a, sheeps. For a long time they used to keep those sheep for travelers to have fresh meat, but because my mother couldn't take care of it, they had to give it up. After that, then the war started. Everybody, although I was only seven, six, seven years old, but from that emotion I could tell what's going on.

SIGRIST: Before that happened, let me ask you some more about your house. How many rooms did you have in the house?

ASSADOURIAN: In the house we had a room we used to call winter room.

SIGRIST: Winter room.

ASSADOURIAN: Winter room. That has, um, hearth?

SIGRIST: Like a hearth, a fireplace?

ASSADOURIAN: Yeah, a fireplace. In the winter, it was like a closet like this. We used to use that for the winter. Another place was like a closet. It was outside. This was under, uh, panel. Not in, patio. It was on the patio. I can't remember so good. So this was on the patio. In the summer, my mother used to use that oil for cooking, but it was very pleasant, and if you sat there, sometimes when I didn't feel good, they used to make me sit down there where the blanket was warm over the hearth. I used to watch all the mountain, all ours, we had sixty apricot trees, all on the mountain. When it was in the, I still visualize. At that time I didn't know the difference, being (?). Sometimes, because I visualized, we had the beautiful scenery at that time.

SIGRIST: You had all those apricot trees. Did you sell the apricots, or did you . . .

ASSADOURIAN: No, my mother, my father used to, we used to pick it up during the fall. They used to dry it up. They used to make soup and desert through all the winter, then through all the winter. And I only, we had one pear. One side was the, one apricot. One side, the sweet. The peach was sweet. We used to eat, like, almond. And the other one was dry. We couldn't eat it. But my father was a very good grafter. We had all the trees. We didn't miss anything. We had everything.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me on tape how your father would graft the trees?

ASSADOURIAN: I think, I remember he used to cut from the small branch a small branch and cut up a little bit more on the, because I used to go with him. Being a little one, I was holding somebody's hand all the time, and that's how I know. Otherwise, my mother didn't know, because she didn't go to the garden with me, where the apricot trees were. She used to cut from the big branch a little bit. From that small branch, she used to put the tape around it.

SIGRIST: Tape around it.

ASSADOURIAN: Tape around it.

SIGRIST: So would you have like an apricot tree that had a pear branch?

ASSADOURIAN: Sometimes they had, because he used to graft it. Only one, we had one tree, one pear tree. We used to call winter pears. My mother used to put that in the cellars, hang with the branches. We used to eat that in the winter. But the other one, they used to call, they used to call honey pear. It used to taste like honey. When you bite it, it used to taste, sometimes that part of the garden was different part, where we were. When we went there, sometimes my father used to say, excuse me, "It tastes like honey, Maram. Don't you want to taste it?" I didn't want to eat. It was too much for me. But I still visualize that tree, pears hanging down, that it tasted like honey.

SIGRIST: Well, that's interesting. Tell me some more about other foods that you ate when you were a kid growing up.

ASSADOURIAN: Our apples, which was near our, our garden, didn't grow much. It used to get, uh . . .

SIGRIST: Moldy?

ASSADOURIAN: Moldy. Didn't grow much. But I didn't, we didn't care so much for apple. But major, our major was apricot and grapes. Grapes was different. We had a few kinds of grapes.

SIGRIST: Now, what did you do with the grapes?

ASSADOURIAN: With the grapes they used to make, some of them was suitable for raisins, and some of the grapes are suitable to make wine.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me how they made raisins?

ASSADOURIAN: Raisins I could see. They used to put in the, when it was season time, they used to put all the grapes with the bunches on the ground to dry, and then they used to bring it home, when it's dry.

SIGRIST: How long would it take for the grapes to dry?

ASSADOURIAN: It depends, I think, I don't know that much. But I think it depended on the weather. If it's a dry weather, usually where we were all was dry

weather. We hardly get rain in the summer, especially in the summer. They hardly get rain. One day, one of our neighbor was a farmer. They used to go to farming in different, Greek section.

I had told, my aunt used to tell me this in this country. I was only four years old. I said,

"Mrs. Kavorkian [ph], don't go today to the farm.

It's going to rain." They laughed at me. They said, "Four-year-old child, it's going to rain, the weather like this?" They caught in the rain, they got in the blizzard. All that animal which they used to bring vegetable, all scattered all over the Greek section. So every time they went sometimes down the market or going to the farm again, they used to say, "Mary, come here. How the weather is going to be?" They used to make fun of me.

SIGRIST: Sort of the local weather girl, I guess. (he laughs) What about vegetables? What kind of vegetables did they grow?

ASSADOURIAN: Vegetables, as I said, my mother wasn't, uh, didn't want to work, farming work much. But we used to rent from the Turks a few acres or, I

don't know, one acre. They used to grow the vegetables for us. In the summer we used to go there. My father used to go there. I used to go with him, too, as I said, always holding my aunt.

We used to go there, too, pick up, they used to grow it, but we used to pick it up. My father used to pay for that.

SIGRIST: And what kinds of vegetables did you eat?

ASSADOURIAN: Most of the time they had, I think, tomatoes, eggplant, peppers. And then, what is, parsley, and Swiss chard. Because that was some kind of a Swiss chard. They used to dry that for the winter, to eat for the winter, because in the winter is not like here. They don't have vegetables. You have to depend what you dry.

SIGRIST: And did you get snow in this part of Turkey?

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, yes. A lot of them. We were, the mountain that we call Ageis, which, a tall mountain, you could find snow in some village, Turks used to bring with animals to sell snow to the Armenians, from that mountain. You could see all the white, even in the summer.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when you were a little girl, a bad snowstorm?

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you remember.

ASSADOURIAN: That storm was so much. We used to come, they wouldn't clean the street. It used to cover the entrance of the house. So we had, we used to go under the snow to go out. They used to make a place, because when it freezes it stands up. When it stands up, they make room to come out from the house.

SIGRIST: Like a little tunnel.

ASSADOURIAN: Like a little tunnel. Until it, by nature, that part melts down.

SIGRIST: Now, how would you heat your house when it got that cold?

ASSADOURIAN: They used to have, most of the time they had wood or, uh, coal. Coal, coal was expensive, but we had a special place, a certain time they used to use, um, what do you call that thing, you put wood

in it to burn?

SIGRIST: Like a fireplace.

ASSADOURIAN: A fireplace. Sometimes they would, but in the winter when it was cold, they used to use the coal, which we had, underground we had another hearth, they used to put a table on the top, and in the hearth they used to use the coal. We used to sit down there to warm ourselves. And we have, one more thing was very interesting for me. We had a room in that winter, winter room, we used to call it. That was a window, a little window. We used to call them pilot. That was a little bit . . . (Armenian) A little bit space to put the, um, pilot lamp. It used to go . . .

SIGRIST: Like a sill, windowsill.

ASSADOURIAN: Like a windowsill. We used to, they used to put that. That was, we didn't have electric. We had, it used to run by, uh, kerosene. Kerosene. And that thing, it used to light both rooms. This is around the room when we went outside in the next room, the (?) used to be water to drink for us, because we had to have water in the room all the

time if we need it. And the, I don't remember much what, I think there was a toilet, too, but we were never, we didn't go out. And during the day there was, in the barrooms, floor, ground floor, they had a small place. They, sometimes they grab a man to clean if it's filled up. Otherwise, comparing, my aunt, my uncle was here, when I talk like this, he wouldn't understand me. We was so little, how can we remember? But I tell you, a couple of weeks ago they showed on here, on the television, how the children, how much the children know. I knew how much the children know, because I knew myself.

SIGRIST: You have a good memory.

ASSADOURIAN: A good memory.

SIGRIST: Tell me about the furniture in your house. What kind of furniture did you have?

ASSADOURIAN: Furniture, we had a sofa. A sofa, and chairs, like this. But the sofa was all one, one wall. You could sit all on the wall.

SIGRIST: Was the furniture homemade, or did you purchase it

somewhere?

ASSADOURIAN: I think they purchased it, or some men come, according your room they used to make it, and make a sofa on it, too, to make it comfortable. That, one room called summer room. When we had company they used to sit there. But in the winter we didn't have. We had chairs, and most of the time we used to sit on the ground. Even when we ate, we had a table on the ground to sit there, and we used to sit around the table to eat our meals. And before we, before, when we sat down, before we started to eat, we had to do the praying, especially the children had to be praying all the time.

SIGRIST: And what religion is this? Is this Armenian Orthodox?

ASSADOURIAN: Armenian Orthodox, yeah. But . . .

SIGRIST: Do you remember one of the prayers that you said in Armenian?

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, yes. All of them. I still pray.

SIGRIST: Would you very slowly say one of the prayers that

you would say before you eat in Armenian on tape
for us?

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, (prays in Armenian). Amen.

SIGRIST: And what does that mean? Thank you.

ASSADOURIAN: That means that, um, the table which has readied
for us, we pray. In other words, we right
judgment. We give right judgment. We thank you
for which you have given to have those to be
prepared. It's a beautiful, I can't make the
right judgment, because the translation is . . .

SIGRIST: Doesn't quite come out.

ASSADOURIAN: Doesn't come out right. It means so much
different.

SIGRIST: And is it important that you say a prayer every
time before you eat? Was that very much a part
of . . .

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, yes. Every time we eat. And another thing.
Until my father didn't stop, because we're eating
from one pot. Until my father didn't stop for
eating, the children never start eating. Never.

SIGRIST: So . . .

ASSADOURIAN: We had to wait until my father start after praying, and then we used to go slowly, not to go fast right away. I, that bothered me in the orphanage. I got a lot of things to tell you. How long a time you have?

SIGRIST: We have lots of time. Can I ask you about, when you sat down at table to eat, what kind of utensils did you have?

ASSADOURIAN: We had forks. We had big, big plates, because we were eating all from the same plate.

SIGRIST: Was the plate made out of porcelain?

ASSADOURIAN: Metal, most of the time was metal. So cooking and everything was metal. They have grates to put on the outside fire to make the cooking. So, but cooking I don't know much because I wasn't old enough to see what's going around.

SIGRIST: But you often ate out of a single dish . . .

ASSADOURIAN: Until, always on a single dish.

SIGRIST: That's interesting.

ASSADOURIAN: So that's, a single dish. And everything, the other room, where I called the first room, we had a few preservation, like cooked, hard-cooked tomato paste. Not sauce. Sauce, I think didn't last. But they no have to make the paste to last all winter. So that's how we, it goes. But . . .

SIGRIST: Because it was so cold it was important to store so much food.

ASSADOURIAN: Important, yes, yes. It was, really.

SIGRIST: We've kind of gotten a little sidetracked. (he laughs)

ASSADOURIAN: Yeah, I know. And . . .

SIGRIST: Let me ask you about your dad, since we did just bring him up.

ASSADOURIAN: Yeah. My dad, my father was the youngest of the family.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

ASSADOURIAN: Ohan. He was Ohan Ohanian.

SIGRIST: O-H-A-N?

ASSADOURIAN: The same. Yes. So he, he used to have, um, general, general store. He, starting from, uh, uh, helping everything else in it, like yard goods, of eating, like sometimes halvah. You know what halvah is, they make with time? Sometimes they sell in the supermarket, in the deli market. He used to sell things like that. When the village men, when the village Turks came, he could find something there to buy to make something for him to eat.

SIGRIST: So, like, household goods and foods and that sort of thing?

ASSADOURIAN: Foods, and everything. Everything.

SIGRIST: Was his father in that business?

ASSADOURIAN: Yes. He was in that business. So when I went, he didn't come home for lunch. I used to take his lunch from home. When my mother gave me, you know what it was like, the pail, different kind of small plates, put one on top of the other, on each other. I used to hold from the handle and carry

it to his store for his lunch. It's, also that utensil was very handfull, because you used to carry from soup up to desert to take his lunch there.

SIGRIST: And he worked there every day?

ASSADOURIAN: Every day.

SIGRIST: That was his store.

ASSADOURIAN: Every day, until the massacre started.

SIGRIST: What was your father's personality like?

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, he was, I can't tell him, he was so kind, so decent. I never hurt, like here sometimes they holler at you. Never. Never anything like that.

In my house, we were always happy. We were always, uh, happy life, calm life.

SIGRIST: It was a nice family life.

ASSADOURIAN: A nice family life.

SIGRIST: Did you know his parents, your grandparents on your father's side?

ASSADOURIAN: No, because being the youngest, I tell you one

thing. Being the youngest, uh, he didn't, I didn't have much. But what I had, I sometimes, as I said, the child knows a lot. He had a sister who was fat. And every time, being a little, at that time, when my mother took me there, he used to, she used to carry me on her stomach, because she was fat. My uncle always laughed, and I explained to him here. Every time she laughed or coughed it wiggled. It made me jump up and down. So, anyway, when the, when every once in a while Turk used to attack us.

SIGRIST: And this is before the massacre.

ASSADOURIAN: Before the massacre. They used to do that before the massacre. But being our house, near the gardens, or where there were the vegetables growing or the wine or something, it was very easy for them to come first to us. One day they were coming, they said sometimes they used to tell. They could tell that they're coming. My grandfather, everybody, they took us near the church. When something like that happened, we have a grandparent there which they donated the ground to the church, being donated to the ground,

that house was near the church. Something like this always happened, we used to go to that house to sleep all the family. But my grandfather didn't want to go.

SIGRIST: This is your grandfather on your mother's side?

ASSADOURIAN: On the father's side.

SIGRIST: Your father's side.

ASSADOURIAN: On the father's side. He didn't want to go. They begged him to go. He said, "I'm an old man. What they're going to do to me." But listen to this. When they came, in front our house we had a small garden, and there was, we used to call a bee house. We had the whole building, the whole building was beehives, beehives. So when the Turks were coming they burned the bees with bee in it. So my grandfather said, "What do you want from the bees? They don't do anything to you? Why do you want to burn them?" They shot him. They shot him where he was. So they burned the, all the (?) with it, the house, too. But at my age my father had built it again. He didn't have as many as his father had, but we had always

something in the house to it.

SIGRIST: So even before the massacre, the Turks thought very little of Armenian life. They were perfectly happy to . . .

ASSADOURIAN: If they left them alone. So, anyways, this is how my childhood was.

SIGRIST: Let's talk about your mother. What was her name?

ASSADOURIAN: My mother was Doughramagian.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

ASSADOURIAN: Like I did.

SIGRIST: You did, already, for us.

ASSADOURIAN: Well, anyway . . .

SIGRIST: What was her first name?

ASSADOURIAN: Trventa.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

ASSADOURIAN: Trventa means, uh, perpetual flower, never wilts.

SIGRIST: Armenian names, women's names are wonderful.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

ASSADOURIAN: T-R-V-E-N-T-A, Trventa.

SIGRIST: And what was her personality like?

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, my, he was, she was like a doctor, too. When my, when everybody went and got something wrong or something, even dying, they used to come to my mother. She knew how to mix leaves and roots to make dye.

SIGRIST: Do you remember some of her remedies, some of the things that she did to heal people?

ASSADOURIAN: She, one of them was this. She used to grind to soap and put some sugar on it. She used to do that for salve. She knew so many things I don't know.

SIGRIST: Salve, like ointment.

ASSADOURIAN: Salve. Ointment. She used to do so many things. At that time, I think maybe that I saw it. Otherwise I wouldn't remember what she did.

SIGRIST: Do you remember being ill as a child, as a small child?

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, yes. We had, we had, I lost one of my brother from the, uh, you know, you get the sickness from your throat.

SIGRIST: Like cholera or typhoid or . . .

ASSADOURIAN: No.

SIGRIST: Strep throat?

ASSADOURIAN: Strep throat, maybe. Strep throat, maybe. That time even in this country they didn't know what to do with it.

SIGRIST: How old were you when your brother died?

ASSADOURIAN: Must be I think, I hardly remember the burial, because they didn't take me.

SIGRIST: So you were quite young.

ASSADOURIAN: I was quite young.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me what you do remember about your brother dying?

ASSADOURIAN: I remember that one night he couldn't breathe. I was sleeping on the top of the (?). I said,

during the winter we used to sleep there in that country. I saw from there my mother was crying, because she wasn't able to do him, to take his breath. I remember, until now I visualize. He couldn't breathe. That night he died. They didn't take me for the funeral.

SIGRIST: You said you were the youngest. How many . . .

ASSADOURIAN: No, at that time I was the eldest.

SIGRIST: Oh, at that time.

ASSADOURIAN: My family, I was (?) my father's second. My mother was my father's second wife.

SIGRIST: Oh. How did your parents meet? Do you know?

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, they always make up, you know, match, matching. Like they match me, too.

SIGRIST: So your father actually had children, then, with his first wife.

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Did they live in a house with you?

ASSADOURIAN: Not in the house with me. They all had houses

their own. But my mother was respected from every one of them, because she was a gentle woman.

SIGRIST: Was there a big age difference between your mother and father?

ASSADOURIAN: Well, I don't know how much. I don't know the age. But they liked, his first wife, the families match my mother to my father. They were so, they knew each other. They said to children that we want you to come our sister's place. We don't want anybody else. It was that sister's place. That's how they met.

SIGRIST: Do you know how his first wife, did she die?

ASSADOURIAN: I think she died from, they used to talk about it, birth, uh, birth time, when she was . . .

SIGRIST: When she was giving birth.

ASSADOURIAN: Birth time. Yeah, because they told her not to eat certain things. She wanted to eat. That made the, I think the big ones used to talk, they don't tell me, but I used to hear when they talk. That made her die.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever tell you any stories about when you were born, about giving birth to you?

ASSADOURIAN: When I was born, yes. We make the Christmas three days. That's how I know my birthday. Otherwise I don't know exactly my real birthday.

SIGRIST: Christmas is three days.

ASSADOURIAN: Three days. They used to make, we have three days' prayers, after Christmas. We were invited to grandmother's house. We stayed there three days. My mother was pregnant. When we came home . . .

SIGRIST: Pregnant with you?

ASSADOURIAN: With me. When, after three days when we came home, the second day or something, somebody came saying, "Congratulations, you have a granddaughter." That's how I made my birthday, January 4th. Because by the time the Christmas was over, it was, it must be January, because we make the Christmas January 6th. By the time that we went home, I must have born January, January 10th. I gave (?) to make a birthday.

SIGRIST: Now, um, so name your brothers and sisters then, from your mother. How many other kids did she have?

ASSADOURIAN: My mother have, uh, they said if, uh, you nurse the baby, you won't become pregnant, but she did become pregnant. She, I had a brother seven years old at that time, five years old, I think, maybe I was that time, maybe nine months later they came, because they have, they didn't know protection. So he also got, that's the one who got, died from the throat, of the throat sickness.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

ASSADOURIAN: Krikory [ph]. That means Gregroy, Gregory.

SIGRIST: K-R-I?

ASSADOURIAN: Gregory, like make Gregory. So when, as I said, when he died, they didn't take me to the funeral. After that when she had another baby they still wanted to put Gregory again. Then her side of the family, they got angry at her, saying, "You put Gregory two times. You lost it. You're not going to put another name Gregory. You have to put some

new name." So they put his name Souren.

SIGRIST: Souren.

ASSADOURIAN: Which he was in this country, he died two years ago.

SIGRIST: And that's S-U-R-E-N, or S-O-U-R-E-N?

ASSADOURIAN: Souren. S-O-U-R-E-N.

SIGRIST: So there are the three of you.

ASSADOURIAN: So we were three of us.

SIGRIST: Three of you. Um, did you go to school before the massacre?

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, yes. Before the massacre I was only third grade. But, um . . .

SIGRIST: What recollections do you have of going to school when you were quite young?

ASSADOURIAN: You have, you, you don't even talk about it. You know you had to go to a school. My mother went to school only two days. But I was, I was supposed to be a delicate child. My grandfather, my mother's father, says, "She's so delicate. Why

are you sending her to school?" You know what she said? "Even if she die, she has to go to school."

That two days' education meant so much to her.

SIGRIST: Education was very important to these people.

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, sure. Even now, even now. Even what I did, (?) her husband, everybody is (?), until now, if I come to the world again, I'm going to go born in the school.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what the school looked like, the building?

ASSADOURIAN: The old building, they took me when I was kindergarten, even, not even kindergarten, they used, before kindergarten, we used to go to (?), which you, you want to know what the, getting less than what it means. You sit all on the benches. They sit you with other children. But after that when you go to kindergarten. That's how I remember. But I never, I always went to school. But I'm not boasting. I don't know why. They had called me one of the, one of the bright child.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

SIGRIST: Could both your parents read and write?

ASSADOURIAN: Not my mother, but my father not only could read and write, he had to learn Turkish, too, because having the store he had to have writing what he was doing with the working, villages boy, men.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what you were like as a little girl?

ASSADOURIAN: I think, I don't know. I don't know why. Everybody wanted to hug me. Everywhere I went they used to hug me, kiss me. I don't know what I had. But my aunt used to say that if your mother gave you to somebody to hold, that was a privilege for them.

SIGRIST: That was the (?).

ASSADOURIAN: I was so, I was a beautiful child. When I was going (?), the way my grandmother, my aunt told me, my mother used to have hard time to bear a child. They was ready to put another (?), which they had hospital. But she didn't want to go. She had hard time, but she had me.

SIGRIST: In the days before the massacre, what did your family do for entertainment?

ASSADOURIAN: They didn't have a chance to entertainment any more.

SIGRIST: Was there anything that you did for fun, or maybe a game that you remember playing as a little girl?

ASSADOURIAN: Like the (?). They were playing with wine, with cotton. We used to put it on our hand, on our fingers, things like that. We have some kind of, not checkers, stone. We used to play ourselves. We had no toy. But when it was winter night or something, what they teach from those schools for singing, all the one used to ask us to sing for them. That's how we did.

SIGRIST: Do you remember an Armenian song that you sang as a little girl?

ASSADOURIAN: Armenian song? That, I don't, that is, so many songs, I don't know which one to sing.

SIGRIST: Okay. (he laughs)

ASSADOURIAN: Like we have a prayer, it's twenty-four stanzas.

I knew from one, even now I pray. Because it has something to do, to help you, for God to help you spiritually, mentally, physically, everything in it. If you, on all of them. (?), everything I prayed that, twenty-four stanzas.

SIGRIST: And, as you say, religion is very important to your family.

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, yes. When, listen. When the war started, then the Turks started to massacre Armenians, they started in the city. All the, uh, educated men, they put in the, in the prison. They took the (?) from (?) and everything. Every time the people, at that time I didn't know, but from their face I could tell what they were going through, and I know. Until now I remember. Because at night, after nine o'clock, you wouldn't put any lamp or anything. You had to close it. Uh, but . . .

SIGRIST: Do you remember when the massacre came to your town, when things got bad in your town? Can you tell me about that?

ASSADOURIAN: When they started coming to the towns, on us, the woman used to go together some place to do

praying. So they kept on doing, putting more prison, more prison on the men, teachers or whatever. They, they found out, they wanted to do something to blame us, we did wrong thing, which we didn't do the wrong thing. They made it, they put it in the prison to get away with it. Someday when (Armenian). (voice off mike) One day, when they came, they said, the women came together to pray, they said God is not listening to us because we are grown-up. They said to my mother, "How about your daughters? Let her come here and pray for us." That's how I know all the prayers, because I prayed then with, they didn't know, but I went there and prayed with them. Not only that one time. We have morning prayers, evening prayers, at night prayers. A lot of prayers. I know all of them. I still know. I still . . .

SIGRIST: So in this very difficult time you really clung to your religion.

ASSADOURIAN: That's it. That's how I know, that's what I meant. That's why I know all the prayers I'm praying now.

SIGRIST: So now what happened? Did the Turks round up the men first? Is that what happened?

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, yeah. They round up the men first, and they took the men away first, and then woman and children, like my father came, when he went to work, my father came back from the store. We said, "Why you coming back? Why did you come back?" He said, "It has the government seal, locked. You know what he . . .

SIGRIST: You mean he went to work one day and it was locked.

ASSADOURIAN: He couldn't go in. It was locked. I remember that. The only thing he was sorry for, his father's watch was there, which he was keeping, like (?), because it was his father's watch. He didn't talk about the watch he had through all the store. He had three. One the sellers that was something, that was backyard, back side of the store, he used to put silver thing, and the middle one, and the front one outside. Like sometimes they go outside, he had outside part, too. I tell you this, too. One day I took him his lunch, on

the way I saw they was doing, the Turk's store, with the woman, throwing their cherries, things like that. I went, with the pail in my hand. Crying, I went to my father's store. He says, "Mary, why are you crying?" I said, "They bullying Mamadaras [ph]," which is Turkish name, "Mamadaras' cherries." He said, "Don't cry." Because he's selling wormy cherries. That's why the government watches." I thought they would only do to the Armenians.

SIGRIST: You're saying cherries.

ASSADOURIAN: Cherries, regular cherry. But it was wormy. He was selling. I guess they take care of those things sometimes, the government over there, too. That I know.

SIGRIST: So the Turkish government closed up Armenian businesses.

ASSADOURIAN: Armenian businesses.

SIGRIST: And then was your father taken?

ASSADOURIAN: My father, no. We, they deported us. We talked nothing. All they gave us, three days', I think,

time. Whatever we could take, we took. Some of them could get, buy animal. You had to have somebody to (?). So that's how we went. They started going in the desert.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you took with you?

ASSADOURIAN: I don't remember, but I don't know what they mean.

At that time I was a child. But I remember all of them crying, or some of them even carrying. They didn't have the money. They couldn't get animal to buy or to hire. One animal, that I remember. He didn't want to go. He stop, he didn't want to go, because maybe he smell the desert already, because we went to the desert. I am, did you see the last war, the desert people? I was one of them, on the (?). Always a knife with you or something to be killed, waiting for somebody, nobody help us. Here they have a lot of people to help them.

SIGRIST: Did the Turkish soldiers escort all of you?

ASSADOURIAN: They escort, but at the same time there was many on the road. Wherever they came, they could do anything they wanted.

SIGRIST: How long, how long did it take to get, were you going to Syria? Is that where this took place?

ASSADOURIAN: We went, always Syria, all the way back to (?), they used to call it. All the way, Rakka [ph], they used to call it, which is a small village. We went through the desert.

SIGRIST: Did anyone get sick or die along . . .

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, are you kidding? On the way there was time the people who was leaving, Arabs, they were Arabs, who were leaving then, the river red with blood. It was because lots of Armenians were killed there.

SIGRIST: If somebody died on the way, what would they do?

ASSADOURIAN: They leave it there. They have nothing. Like when my father died, we didn't have a tool to take the place, so they put it as much as they could. After a couple of days they said, "His body is out. You'd better go and do something."

SIGRIST: Did he die on that march? When did your father die?

ASSADOURIAN: He got some kind of disease. He only lived three days. Because, uh, you know, those sick people, dirt, disease, grew up. Even the Arabs used to say, "You came, you brought disease with you." We didn't, they took us there.

SIGRIST: Did they give you food to eat during the march?

ASSADOURIAN: Who? Who is going to, no, they had, nobody gave you anything. They call us the starving Armenians.

SIGRIST: So they were marching you into the desert with hopes that you would die.

ASSADOURIAN: Sure.

SIGRIST: That's their whole intention.

ASSADOURIAN: That was their intention. And we did. Some of the Arabs took it and kept it for themselves. Like one of my nieces, or two of them. Somebody, some Turk got it. I don't know where they are. I don't hear from them any more.

SIGRIST: They just took the women.

ASSADOURIAN: They just took the young girl, they took.

SIGRIST: Were there any kind Turks or kind Arabs along the way that tried to help somehow?

ASSADOURIAN: Arabs, I don't know. I know one of the Arabs had an Armenian girl, baby. She was three years old. She kept it for herself. But, uh, those Turks, they didn't, you don't want to go with the Turks anyway. They could get any time anyone they want anyway.

SIGRIST: Now, it's, at first it's your mother and your father, and you and your brother. One brother has died already, correct?

ASSADOURIAN: Yes, I know, yeah.

SIGRIST: So, and then your father dies along the way?

ASSADOURIAN: Along the way.

SIGRIST: Where did you finally go to? Where did you finally stop the march?

ASSADOURIAN: (Armenian)

DORIAN: No, absolutely. You tell him.

ASSADOURIAN: (Armenian)

DORIAN: She's afraid, in describing all this . . .

ASSADOURIAN: What the Turk is doing, I'm afraid.

SIGRIST: No, no.

DORIAN: You don't have to be afraid of it.

ASSADOURIAN: There are lots of Turks here.

DORIAN: In America.

SIGRIST: Oh, no. In fact, one reason that we've been interviewing so many Armenians this year is we're trying to get this story on tape before there are no people left who can tell it. No, don't be afraid. That's why we're . . .

ASSADOURIAN: I don't care for me, I'm old already. But I have my children here. If they, I give you one thing. When they married me to be supported, I didn't know what sex was. I didn't know what it was. I don't know what it meant. I wasn't that old. Nobody, I was in the orphanage, but nobody talk about life. They were thinking living, dying. Because we were thinking, they came, that's a long story. So, but, um . . .

SIGRIST: If you want to talk about what the Turks did, that's one reason why we're here is to get it on tape. So tell me what you remember.

ASSADOURIAN: So I remember that. When we went to the desert we were, there was a river. We call in Armenian Yitzaket [ph]. We landed on the other side, and the village was on this side of the river. I don't know my father, what gave to the men to put, to give us a boat to take us that to the village side. He gave some. Because we had to give something, otherwise they wouldn't do it.

SIGRIST: Like money or something.

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, yes. The Arabs. We went, excuse me. When we went that side, my father, excuse me. My father, being he opened the business there, the open market, he didn't have money to hire a store or anything, he opened place. He wasn't successful. People didn't have money to buy. So he gave up that. So after a while then he got that disease, he died. We can't, and then one of my younger sisters got sick. She died there, too. Both of them, fathers, and the youngest, from his first

wife. They were near each other.

SIGRIST: So this little village was along the march.

ASSADOURIAN: No. From that town, (?) Armenian we saw coming from my city. They didn't let him in. They took (?), the desert place. They used to call desert, that. Further in, in, uh, Syria. So when my two nieces are there, I don't know what happened to them, and we never heard from them.

SIGRIST: Do you know how many people were traveling, I mean, how many Armenians were being taken, roughly?

ASSADOURIAN: Roughly, I don't know. It was (?). You could see all you want. One day, I was lucky one day. They put me on the, on the mule, and they gave my brother, which I was here, on my lap. My brother was choking, choking because the wind, not only wind, the dust comes with it. It's in desert. Somebody said, "Why don't you give that child a little water?" Who had water? And some woman said, "Pee and wet his mouth." And another woman said, "Who's got water to pee?" We had that kind of things. Anyway . . .

SIGRIST: Would you say that the Armenians who are being taken, were you helpful to each other, or was it sort of every man for themselves?

ASSADOURIAN: How much can you, how much can you, you don't know what you want. You haven't got yourself to help anybody. But if you, somebody came or some, like one of them, Arab, that Armenian girl was still living, when Arab was, Arab or Turk, taking her away on his donkey, she happened to have the, what you call, you stick to the animal to make him walk?

SIGRIST: Like a spur?

ASSADOURIAN: A spur, something. She used that, the man's hand, to get away. She ran away, and came to the caravan. That's how she saved her life.

SIGRIST: Would people be shot along the way?

ASSADOURIAN: Sure.

SIGRIST: If they did, or something?

ASSADOURIAN: Sure. If this gentleman, which we just supposed to be protected, is far away, they could take it

and kill, too.

SIGRIST: Was it mostly women and children in this caravan, or were there men also?

ASSADOURIAN: Mostly, mostly, mostly, children. Old people, children and women. They took the men before, before, as I said. They took the men before everything, yes.

SIGRIST: I see. Well, tell me a little bit about what happened once you got to where you were going.

ASSADOURIAN: Once you got where we were going, my mother happens to have, to be pregnant. He had, she had, I have a sister from.

SIGRIST: Was she pregnant through this whole experience?

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about her being pregnant during this?

ASSADOURIAN: I don't know now. I didn't know then.

SIGRIST: You didn't know then.

ASSADOURIAN: But we used to walk. With children we were able,

but every once in a while my father used to stop, put my mother on the mule. Because she couldn't walk any more, I guess. I think it was in a barn they brought, they took her baby from her, in a barn. So that's how I know she was, I didn't know what pregnant meant, I didn't know. She must be pregnant, because she couldn't walk any more. That's why my father put her on the mule, for a short time, at least.

SIGRIST: When you say they took the baby from her, does that mean she never had the child? It was taken away from her.

ASSADOURIAN: She had the child, which woman took, took from her. And she, she's still living. She's in this country.

SIGRIST: I see. Right. So, as we started saying, tell me about what happened when you got to your destination, which was in Syria, correct?

ASSADOURIAN: Well, when we went there, (?) if you pay so much money, you choose Aleppo, Syria. Which, Aleppo . . .

SIGRIST: Aleppo.

ASSADOURIAN: Aleppo is a big city.

SIGRIST: Right.

ASSADOURIAN: So I don't know what they found. They found a way to come, way, when I say way, whatever we got, they got, they gave to make us to come to Aleppo.

But when we had no money, they brought us a small village. We didn't have money. In the village they thought I, the parents already got, they were going to die, they tried to save me, being a young child. The other one was still young. They put me on a train. Somebody helped me on the train. I was coming like a (?) to, not as a person. Because they sat me on the wood.

SIGRIST: ON the wood.

ASSADOURIAN: They tried, at least, maybe if I come to Aleppo, being a city, maybe I will be (?). If I stayed there, I wouldn't start, (?) introduced me to the woman that used to work in the factory. At that time they used to make the stockings, socks, for the soldiers. I have done that, too. They gave me that, to make socks for them.

SIGRIST: So you were taken away from your parents.

ASSADOURIAN: That's, no. That's how they, I was taken away from my parents. When I came to Aleppo, that woman who said to my mother, "Don't worry, I take care of her." When she got to Aleppo she has relatives. They came to take her home, she forgot me.

SIGRIST: So this woman said to your mother, "Don't worry. I'll take care of your daughter. She'll be fine."

ASSADOURIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And then when she got to Aleppo, she just dumped you.

ASSADOURIAN: She dumped me. She forgot I wasn't there. Because she's all family, I wasn't, she didn't want, I guess, to be another burden to the family.

SIGRIST: How old are you at this point?

ASSADOURIAN: This point maybe I was about ten years old.

SIGRIST: So this whole process takes a few years, doesn't it?

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, sure. All this.

SIGRIST: So what happened?

ASSADOURIAN: So when I went there, when they took me, I said to the woman, because she forgot me. I said to the woman who took me, to take care of me, I said, "Is that anybody can tell me where the church is, Armenian church is?" Sure. "Go this way, go that way." They didn't come with me. And six, seven years old, I don't think, I was ten years old, maybe. I don't know. They just left me in the city with nobody, knowing nobody, nothing to go with.

SIGRIST: And you never saw them again.

ASSADOURIAN: No, I didn't saw. Because I didn't go there. Anyway, when I went there I saw on the way someone who was coming with us, all that traveling. He had come the same way to Aleppo like we did. He saw me, he recognized me. He says, "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm going to the church to somebody make me take in." I had nobody. Because they told me my aunt was in Aleppo, but I didn't know where, I didn't have. So you know what I

said to you? He was my lifesaver. He said, "Don't worry," he said, "Mary." I said, "He's afraid to come outside because they will take him in the army, Turk Army, to kill Armenian." So, anyways, so he said, "Maybe your aunt will come to the church for soup." So when she comes she said, he said, "You'll know her, then she'll tell you what to do." So that night, because there was no place, he took me in their house, in his house. You know what? When they gave me a little soup, I was afraid to eat. I was feeling that I was eating (?). I wasn't born to accept anybody's food. I still remember that. But he did. He said, "Eat something."

SIGRIST: And yet he was being very generous.

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, sure. Sure. So I slept that night in their house. The next day in the morning he brought me back to the church again.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how you felt as a little girl in this situation? Were you scared?

ASSADOURIAN: I was, I'm telling you. I was feeling, I cried when I didn't want to eat that food. I had

feelings. I had come from a fine family. Everybody, when I talked to, my mother's name, they say a fine family. They had a refined name.

My family had a refined name. My mother's, from my father's die I don't know much. As I said, being my father young, eh didn't have much. I don't remember even if they had.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when the woman initially took you away from your mother and father? Do you remember if you wanted to go with her, or if you wanted to stay with your mother and father?

ASSADOURIAN: No. I had to obey my mother. She thought that was the best for me. So I followed whatever she wanted to tell me. After, I went to the church the next day again.

SIGRIST: The next day, huh.

ASSADOURIAN: The next day. My aunt came for soup. She didn't want me. Because by that time I was like a skeleton. She didn't believe me the way I was looking at that time. Because when she knew me as like a child, she knew. But by that time starvation, no food, nothing, uh, I was changed.

I kept on telling our life story. She didn't believe me. She said, "Somebody, you must have heard from somebody and you're telling me this to take care of you." She didn't, to take care. I said, "No." But she didn't take. But after, after, this is amazing. Sometime nature works differently. After she walked two, three steps away, she came back. She said, "You don't look like my Mary." My (?) used to call Mary. "But you sound like her." That sound saved my life. "You sound," because they used to say I was talking fast like my father. They used to say that, "Why are you talking? You're talking like your father there." Until now I talk a little fast. So that's how she took me in. After that, she took me to take care of me. And then after that I had to go to the orphanage, because they didn't have anything to give me, too.

SIGRIST: How did you get along with your aunt?

ASSADOURIAN: Which aunt?

SIGRIST: Your aunt who . . .

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, yeah. Until they came to this country, they

were like parent to me. But when I went in the orphanage for along time they don't call you by the name. They call you newcomers.

SIGRIST: Well, now, you stayed, you stayed with your aunt in Aleppo for how long?

ASSADOURIAN: I think until she sent me to the orphanage.

SIGRIST: And then she sent you, why did she send you to the orphanage?

ASSADOURIAN: Because she didn't have anything to give me, too.

SIGRIST: Everyone is in a bad way.

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, sure. Nobody had anything. She didn't have anything to give me. That's . . .

SIGRIST: Did she have her own family?

ASSADOURIAN: No. She, they didn't have children.

SIGRIST: Is this your mother's sister or your father's?

ASSADOURIAN: My mother's sister.

SIGRIST: What was her name?

ASSADOURIAN: Also Maram. So the one which was born from my

mother in the desert, they adopted her. She is still living in this country.

SIGRIST: So how long did you stay with your aunt before you went to the orphanage?

ASSADOURIAN: Not long. In fact, one day I went, they didn't take me in. They said, "You have mother." If you have mother, they didn't take me in.

SIGRIST: You mean, to the orphanage.

ASSADOURIAN: To the orphanage. The second time I went again, I said, my family, "You didn't try hard enough." My aunt say, "Maybe you didn't try hard enough to go to the orphanage." The next day when I went there was an English woman there by the name Miss Eneke [ph]. I, the way I spoke to her, she says, "This child has nobody. We have to send her to the orphanage." That's how they put me in the orphanage. When I didn't go home, they didn't look for me, my family. Because they said, if she went to the orphanage. A couple of days later, they came to the orphanage to check if the orphanage took me in. When I went to the orphanage, they gave me, put me in bed. I don't

know. When they gave me quilt. If you went like this, you get lice. I couldn't sleep.

SIGRIST: It was very dirty.

ASSADOURIAN: Very dirty, and licey.

SIGRIST: Who ran the orphanage?

ASSADOURIAN: Well, they called Haronian [ph] Orphanage. Mostly, I think, in the hands of English people. Because when the Turks came over the orphanage, took in the orphans, too, like they did some other orphanage, English soldiers save us.

SIGRIST: So did your aunt come and visit you when you were in the orphanage?

ASSADOURIAN: Sometimes. Otherwise, sometimes I used to go. Sometimes, later on, they didn't let us go there, too.

SIGRIST: To visit.

ASSADOURIAN: To visit, too.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about what the orphanage looked like?

ASSADOURIAN: It has a big, big ground and rooms, separate rooms. They put in a room. Everyone had a room.

SIGRIST: Were the girls separated form the boys?

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, yes. Boys had different building, and the girls had different building.

SIGRIST: How did they feed you at the orphanage?

ASSADOURIAN: In the orphanage, as I said, even in the orphanage, they used to give me a bowl, they used to put seven of us a bowl of tea. And we didn't have bread. We didn't have nothing. We had a spoon, just to take with a spoon a little bit. That day, because I was, I was used to waiting for my father to start eating, I used to wait there, too. One of the girls which, I know why he, she was watching me. The next day she thought, she said, "Mary," I said, she says to me, "why do you wait until they start? Why don't you go with them? At least take a few more spoons more tea?" I wasn't used to, you see. That always, but she was still bothered. She used to tell me what to do.

SIGRIST: It's a good thing you had her, or you wouldn't have any food.

ASSADOURIAN: But the thing is, food, I don't know. She used to give you bread for breakfast, and for lunch sometimes maybe half a slice of bread or sometimes they even used to give us a peach or something. That was for lunch. And at night they used to cook something in the deck. They used to give a little bit something. I don't know. At that time I don't know what cooking was.

SIGRIST: Most of the children in the orphanage, had their parents died already?

ASSADOURIAN: Most of them brought from Arab's home, some of them with disease.

SIGRIST: Were they all Armenians?

ASSADOURIAN: All Armenians. English people, what you call . . .

SIGRIST: Like missionaries?

ASSADOURIAN: Missionary, missionary picked them up. Whatever they could, they brought to the orphanage.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay in the orphanage?

ASSADOURIAN: I think I stayed there in the orphanage two years.

SIGRIST: Oh, a long time, then.

ASSADOURIAN: A long time. I had no place to go. My aunt couldn't support me.

SIGRIST: Was your aunt, did she live in Aleppo all that time, or did she leave?

ASSADOURIAN: All that time. Her husband, my uncle, my aunt's husband was a shoemaker. He got, he got a job. But they used to live on that, but they could, they didn't have enough to support me, too. Besides, at least in the orphanage, they were giving me some education. When I came to this country I had more French than English.

SIGRIST: I was just going to ask you, what did they teach you when you were in the orphanage?

ASSADOURIAN: Well, it was, uh, they didn't have, they didn't send me in the young children's, because I was ten years old. That's why at that time I was too old to start to go from the beginning. They took me

in old people, some of them woman, everybody.
They put me in there. They used to, I used to,
whatever they taught, one day only I had geography
lesson, only one day. Because they didn't bring a
book. They were supposed to give us book to
study, they didn't bring book. So, anyway . . .

SIGRIST: But you learned French when you were in the
orphanage.

ASSADOURIAN: When (?), and I had the chance. After the school,
uh, French was different building, French and
English was different building. Then I had, after
I came from my school, I used to go that school to
learn French and English. Most of the time I was
so good for the French, the French teacher said,
"Why don't you come to the higher class?" I said,
"No. How about if I do left back?" "No," she
said, "I observed you. You wouldn't be left back.
You know more than the other ones." I didn't
take that chance. But this woman was Armenian,
but (?) her family, she was left orphaned, two
years old, in, um, in France, in the street. The
French couple which were Armenian mother and
French, uh, husband, they took her in. That's why

she knew Armenian and French.

SIGRIST: We need to pause here so that I can go put another tape in the machine.

ASSADOURIAN: Okay.

SIGRIST: Okay. We're gonna pause right now with Mary Assadourian.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

SIGRIST: We're now beginning tape two with Mary Assadourian. Today is Thursday, September 16, 1993. This is Paul Sigrist and we're at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum Recording Studio using the digital machine. Barbara Dorian, Mrs. Assadourian's daughter-in-law, is also in attendance. You were at the orphanage for two years.

ASSADOURIAN: At the orphanage, when I got into the orphanage the first time, they don't call you by your name. They call you newcomer.

SIGRIST: What's newcomer?

ASSADOURIAN: Newcomer. But for one day, there was a girl, they just brought from Turkish family house. She was crying. I says, her name was Eva. I said, "Eva, why are you crying?" She said, "I don't know my mother. They're going looking for my mother." They found the mother. They brought. They put her on the, uh, laundry, laundry store to work, because being an older person, they gave her the job. After a week, she died from pneumonia, because where the laundry room was was cold. And this, I felt so sorry for Eva losing the mother, because I knew what it meant to be separated from your mother. I said, "Eva, don't cry. What can you do?" I said, "Don't cry." So she come, she came so close to me, she was like sister to me. She used to comb every morning my hair, because I had grown the hair, long hair like this, since I've been here, I know someone, "How can you lose that much hair?" But forget about it. She used to comb my hair all the time, every morning. One day she came near to me. She said, "Mary, why don't you go to school?" Because at that time, afternoon, we had to go out in the yard to clean wheat from the what they're going to cook. We

used to, they used to put us on chairs to clean the stones from whatever they cook, going to cook for the dinner at night. They had to be something to go over with. That's why I didn't go. So I used to see to go to clean the stones from the, whatever. So this woman said, she said to me, "Mary," she says to me, "why don't you go to school again?" I said, "Eva, they want me here. They don't want me in school." So, anyway, so she said, uh, "I do that job for you. Will you teach me a little bit writing and reading?" I said, "All right. I try." I did try, but her mind wasn't in the right place. Anyway, the next day I went to school. They used to give you something, you know, stocking socks or something. I used to mend one sock. One day I went upstairs for the, to the class. They said, "Where is Mariam?" I said, "I'm here." I was in the back. Because being the smallest, I used to sit in the front. He said, "Why," she says, "why did you sit in the front?" I said, I said, I feel, like, guilty. I had no socks to wear. I didn't want to go without socks to the classroom. But I couldn't mend it any more. I didn't do it. Mend here, mend there.

There was nothing left to mend. So she asked the office to give me socks. I came with that socks to America anyway.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me how you got out of the orphanage.

ASSADOURIAN: Uh, that, the orphanage, when, after, after whatever life I had was there. One day I went to the French school, French class. Something started laughing at me. She kicked me out from the class. I haven't forgotten that, because I, still now I feel guilty. She says, "Maram, you're destroying the others. Why are you laughing?" I don't know. I couldn't stop laughing. So, anyway, she kicked me out of the class. So, but the English class, I was doing all right. Anyway, so I said to Eva, I said, "Because I can't go to the school any more." (she laughs) Not now. But that's the two years, as I said, when the (?) settled, my uncle. But this Eva, by the way, she has an uncle here. After a while she came to America, too.

SIGRIST: Her uncle brought her over.

ASSADOURIAN: She had the uncle here.

SIGRIST: So what happened to you when you got out of there?

ASSADOURIAN: When, I didn't get the orphanage only one week to come to America, because, as I said, my uncle, my mother's brother, was here. And my step-brother and father. They sponsored for me, for us, to come to America. That's how I came to America.

SIGRIST: Well, how, how did you get in contact with them?

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, with my uncle, which is, which was, I was with them all the time. My aunt and her husband, which they always take care of me.

SIGRIST: Who lived in Aleppo?

ASSADOURIAN: Aleppo, yeah. They, they arranged everything.

SIGRIST: Had they gone to America, or . . .

ASSADOURIAN: I came with them to America.

SIGRIST: Oh, you came with them.

ASSADOURIAN: She, he arranged to, my uncle, to have to come to America. So they told us what to do. They were sponsors.

SIGRIST: I see.

ASSADOURIAN: Until now I don't know how I left my mother there, as if I'm going from uptown, downtown, next day I'm going to see my mother. I never saw my mother any more. Because we couldn't bring, they couldn't bring my mother to America.

SIGRIST: When was the last time you saw your mother? Had you seen her while you were in the orphanage?

ASSADOURIAN: Every once in a while, not all the time.

SIGRIST: So was she in Aleppo by that time?

ASSADOURIAN: She died there. Oh, yes. I never saw it any more. She couldn't, she didn't come to America. I was going to bring America 1928, being I became citizen I was going to bring her to America. By that time she had very weak heart. When she went to take her, uh, card, what do you call visa, to come to America, the doctors saw her, she couldn't breathe. She wasn't able to breathe. So they said, said to (?), "If you go to America, I don't know if you can make, cross the ocean with your condition. But if you stay here, you can live two

more years." She just had two more years, not more than that.

SIGRIST: So when you became an American citizen in 1928, she was still living in Aleppo at that time.

ASSADOURIAN: Yeah. And then I asked her to come again. You know why she didn't come? She could have come. She says, "Where can I leave my mother?" Because her mother and sister was in Aleppo yet.

SIGRIST: Did you want to come to America? Did you want to come to America?

ASSADOURIAN: I didn't know the difference.

SIGRIST: What did you know about America?

ASSADOURIAN: America, oh, yes. Because, uh, by that time, uh, as I said, I didn't have much education, but they used to talk about America.

SIGRIST: What did they say?

ASSADOURIAN: Not much I understood because, as I said, in the orphanage, uh, we were even thinking we're not going to live. We were living day by day. Nobody cares next day any more, because we didn't know if

next day was going to come. One day, as I said, when they said, "The Turks are coming to burn the orphanage," you know what I had for treasures? One teaspoon cotton, and one needle. I took that as if, that was my treasure. I hide myself under the sink. And there was a little window, I wanted to sit near the window to see what was going, doing on the main floor, on the ground floor. But, thank God, as I said, English people came and save us. They didn't burn the orphanage. And then, after that, as I said, my uncle come, got connected for (?). He had a brother here, too, my uncle, his brother, younger brother had come from, before the war he had come to America.

SIGRIST: Where did he live in America?

ASSADOURIAN: In Lenox Avenue, Lenox Avenue he used to make a shoemaking store, my uncle, my mother's brother.

SIGRIST: And he had come before the war?

ASSADOURIAN: Yeah. Then they came, and we came to this place . . .

SIGRIST: Wait, wait. Don't tell us this yet. Let's, tell

me about what it was like, you traveled with your aunt and your uncle.

ASSADOURIAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Anybody else?

ASSADOURIAN: No. We came to Beirut, they gave visa to them. They didn't give us visa, because we had nobody to support us. We had a hard time. So we had to call friends for me to get visa.

SIGRIST: Now, did I misunderstand? Earlier I understood that you were married before you left.

ASSADOURIAN: No, no.

SIGRIST: It was here?

ASSADOURIAN: No! I never, at that time I was . . .

SIGRIST: Okay. It was a misunderstanding.

ASSADOURIAN: (?) that time.

SIGRIST: Okay. (he laughs)

ASSADOURIAN: So, anyway, so . . .

SIGRIST: You went to Beirut.

ASSADOURIAN: We had to go friends for me, Beirut, they gave them, a husband and wife and that child which my sister, they adopted, they didn't give me visa for me.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you took with you when you left?

ASSADOURIAN: What? What did I have? Nothing. Maybe a little bit (she coughs) a sock, or maybe one underpants, maybe, if I had. I don't know if I had. Anyway, because orphanage only gave you one pair. Anyway . . .

SIGRIST: Now, how did you get from Beirut to France?

ASSADOURIAN: That, I think, they had to get some, uh, agent, like (?) sometimes . . .

SIGRIST: Like a travel agent?

ASSADOURIAN: To travel there in order I be able to get my visa from there. But I had to stay there six months to be able to get that visa.

SIGRIST: But do you know how you got from Beirut to France?

ASSADOURIAN: That's how I get, I got.

SIGRIST: But how? Did you go by boat, or by train?

ASSADOURIAN: I don't remember. I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Do you remember where in France you went to?

ASSADOURIAN: I don't know that. We went to a certain place to stay there. Uh, I think in Paris some, we were in Paris in a backyard someplace waiting for the boat, I think that was boat.

SIGRIST: What did you think about France? I mean, you came from a very different kind of place. What was . . .

ASSADOURIAN: How much did I know to know the difference? At that time I . . .

SIGRIST: You spoke a little French.

ASSADOURIAN: Yes, but whenever I went shopping and everything, that French made a lot of big difference. But, anyway, they didn't help me, nobody will help me anyway. Anyway . . .

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you had to go through to get

your papers when you were in France?

ASSADOURIAN: I, I don't know. Whatever, I did whatever they told me, but first they gave the visa. He asked me a few things and I answered him in French. I remember that. So I said, "My uncle wants me to go there." "Who is your uncle?" They wanted to know is he, if he'll support me. Not the American people will support me. They wanted to have somebody to support you, otherwise they wouldn't take you. So, anyway, they were sure he could support me. So that's how they gave me a visa. When I came to the, uh, here . . .

SIGRIST: You were, wait, you were in France for six months.

ASSADOURIAN: Six months.

SIGRIST: Six months. And then you, you and your uncle and your aunt took, got a boat. Got on the ship?

ASSADOURIAN: Let me see, how did I come from France to this place? I think, yeah, I came with them again. Yeah, because they, I was with them all the time.

SIGRIST: Do you remember . . .

ASSADOURIAN: Since I had the visa, I could go with them. I can't wait . . .

SIGRIST: Once you got it, you came.

ASSADOURIAN: I come with them, because they were, they were, they, uh, arranged a sponsor, to be a sponsor to come to America.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the name of the boat that you took, the name of the ship?

ASSADOURIAN: I don't know. I forgot. I had written. I still have those, uh, my passport and everything someplace. I don't know where it is.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what the boat looked like?

ASSADOURIAN: The boat wasn't, uh, good looking boat, because we had no money to buy, to get in a good boat. I was all the way on the ground. I hardly saw the ocean, because it was our room on the ground. I was always nauseous. I couldn't eat anything. I didn't do anything. One did, only once I went to the cafeteria, what the others were eating. I went, I ate a little bit. Before I came, I had to throw it away. I didn't go any more there.

SIGRIST: So you got seasick on the boat?

ASSADOURIAN: Always. As I said, I didn't see the ocean, because I was always on the bed.

SIGRIST: Do you know what time of year this is?

ASSADOURIAN: 1920.

SIGRIST: But what time of the year? What season is it?

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, oh. November, when we came it must be September. Because when we came from the boat to the island, because there was sick people in the boat, they took us different island, uh, to make, to go through. They didn't want to take us in. We stayed different. They put us in this one island, it was.

SIGRIST: So you think it's like September when, when you're traveling?

ASSADOURIAN: Yeah. Because in that island, when we were in that island waiting for the sick man, because there was a sick man, they said there is Thanksgiving going on in America. We made the Thanksgiving there. In other words, it must be

November.

SIGRIST: So you were here by November.

ASSADOURIAN: By November.

SIGRIST: Um, do you remember anything else about being on the boat? You were sick, and you had a cabin way down below. Does anything else stick out in your mind?

ASSADOURIAN: That was a lot of Italian people, they talk Italian. They were making (?), talking like that. Everything was new for me. But, as I said, mostly I was sleeping. I couldn't, I couldn't, I have a lot of trouble that they take.

SIGRIST: Do you remember if your aunt and uncle were sick?

ASSADOURIAN: No. My aunt was sick, too, because we were all on the same level, but my uncle was pretty good. Sometimes he used to bring food from the cafe there, a little bit, biscuits or something. But I couldn't eat that one, too. Like I said, I couldn't keep it.

SIGRIST: Was the boat clean, or was it dirty?

ASSADOURIAN: I couldn't tell the difference. I didn't care. I didn't feel anything to know what's going on.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how long the boat trip was?

ASSADOURIAN: I think it took twenty days to come to New York.

SIGRIST: Twenty days.

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, yeah. Twenty days to come to New York.

SIGRIST: And do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when you arrived?

ASSADOURIAN: That's the first thing you see.

SIGRIST: Did it mean anything to you?

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, it means something new. You were altogether different, different, uh, section of the world. Yeah. It's altogether different feeling.

SIGRIST: Of course, New York looks a lot different than Beirut must have looked at that time.

ASSADOURIAN: Yes. Before that we had to stay in the island two nights, too.

SIGRIST: That's right. Now, let me get the story clear.

There were men who were sick on the boat, and they took you to not Ellis Island but a different island.

ASSADOURIAN: A different island, yeah.

SIGRIST: Maybe Hoffman Island.

ASSADOURIAN: I think, I don't know what. Maybe, because that's the time only they brought sometimes the spaghetti. All that trip in twenty days, all the spaghetti, I ate that enjoyably. It stayed in my stomach.

SIGRIST: For the first time.

ASSADOURIAN: For the first time.

SIGRIST: So everyone at the other island, whatever that was, they let everybody off the boat then. You had to stay . . .

ASSADOURIAN: Those who could go, they had no, to come out or something, they were out. Those who didn't, no, but the first time they would have to stay in that island because it's same people from the boat. But after that they, they arranged things

themselves. Somebody came picked them up or something, that was different.

SIGRIST: And then did they bring you to Ellis Island?

ASSADOURIAN: Then they brought to Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about Ellis Island?

ASSADOURIAN: Ellis Island, when we came, we had to stay two nights. Good they fed us. They gave us something to eat two nights. I stayed in the island, in the Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Ellis Island.

ASSADOURIAN: So the next day we heard that my uncle had come to collect us, me and my uncle, too. They went, my uncle, we (?), they went out. They could go out. I got no (?). But I and my niece, which we were coming together, we had to have a sponsor. They didn't, they didn't want us. The government didn't want to help us. The sponsorship collect us. So when they came, when I and my niece, they put us behind bars. We couldn't go out. We were behind the bar. There was, on the line there was two men. They were waiting island to take us, a

few. Not only us. We were, there were many others besides us. So I said to my aunt, I said, "Helen, those two men looking at us. You think one is my brother and my uncle?" "Oh, see, you talk too much. You make everybody claim your uncle or brother." I said, "There is nobody here looking for us, nobody is (?)." I heard that, she was older than I. Anyway, she laughed at me. So I said, "Let's . . ." And you know how I came, with a ribbon, bow on my head, with the long hair like this, all the way, all the way (?). (she laughs) So one of them said (?). Which one, he didn't say. I had a pet name. "Which is Hadji [ph]?"

SIGRIST: Your nickname, Hadji.

ASSADOURIAN: That's it. Hadji. Pet name, whatever. "Which one of you is Hadji?" I said, "I am!" Then they knew who we were, because when they loved, when they left us, my brother I hardly knew, that was stepbrother, which left from my home. But my uncle, I remember seeing, he used to take me on his shoulders, he used to (?) up and down. I was that, that child, that baby, yet. That's why

sometimes when I talk to him about things I know where I was, he wouldn't believe his eyes or ears that I remember those things. They didn't know us. We were grown up.

SIGRIST: Was the stepbrother from your father's first marriage?

ASSADOURIAN: First marriage. So, anyway, I said, "I am." Then they came near the gate. "Don't be afraid. We came to take you, and tonight we're going to go." One night, uh, I think, one night they went home, but one night I stayed one more day. I don't know why.

SIGRIST: Where did you sleep on Ellis Island?

ASSADOURIAN: They had the cot. They had the cot. We (?) in, and early in the morning we got up, I think, they gave something to eat.

SIGRIST: And what did Ellis Island look like?

ASSADOURIAN: Ellis Island is different. When I came, when I, besides, when, you see the, the Statue, you say, "My goodness." All together, that you have, you can't explain. I feel like we were coming in, in,

uh, wait a minute. In heaven. So, we were coming in heaven. I was young, but I knew the difference. You feel like that, thank God you weren't killed.

SIGRIST: Rebirth.

ASSADOURIAN: Rebirth, rebirth, right. Like a rebirth. Even sixteen years old, I felt like rebirth.

SIGRIST: And was Ellis Island crowded when you were here?

ASSADOURIAN: Yes, pretty crowded.

SIGRIST: Do you remember if you had to undergo any kind of physical exams?

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, yes. The first thing, they watch trachoma. They watch everything else. When you go through the road, the gate, they tell you what you got, what you don't got.

SIGRIST: Do you, how did they test for trachoma? Do you remember?

ASSADOURIAN: Trachoma, they were checking, before you get your visa they check you.

SIGRIST: Oh?

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, yes. They don't send you here just like that. That's why my aunt (?) couldn't come. I had an aunt, she was, my aunt in my other family was left in Aleppo yet. We were supposed to bring them after. I never saw them.

SIGRIST: Was trachoma a common disease in, in the Middle East in those times?

ASSADOURIAN: Yeah. They used to be careful, I think. People used to be very careful. but thank God when I went in the orphanage, they took care of me. When this Miss, Miss Alice, I (?), she examined my eyes, she was, she went like this. "You have beautiful eyes and beautiful look." They used to talk about my eyes all the time, because I had curly, curly eyelashes and, I don't know. They used to say, beautiful, I have beautiful eyes.

SIGRIST: So as poor as you were in the orphanage, you really were better off than . . .

ASSADOURIAN: At least you were in protection.

SIGRIST: And you had some food, and you had some clothing.

I mean, you were better off.

ASSADOURIAN: Better off. But one day when I went, I went to sleep at night, I couldn't sleep. So when I went like this, there was lice. So second day caretaker watched me. Every time, before I went, after I went to bed, I used to go in the quilt and then go to bed. She was noticing me. They knew who, what family you came from. She said, "Maram, why are you doing like this? Why aren't you sleeping?" I said, I think her name is Vadya [ph]. I said, "There is lice in it. I'm not able to sleep." She said to me, "If I give you one quilt without mat underneath, will you be happy?" I said, "Sure." She gave me one quilt to take half of it to the bottom, half of it under me. Still, when I, after, in the morning we had to put all on the bed on each on top of each other. You had to collect and put it on the top, each other, you know. You can't, we were sitting on the ground. But in the morning you had to pick it off. So one day I went there. I pick it up. I was, you know what she came to say to me? She says, "Mary," she says, "Maram . . ." (she

coughs) Excuse me. "Leave until everybody puts their quilts, put on the top." That saved the lice from me. I had to, I don't know, wherever I was, I have love. One day she said to me, the mother used to get their lunch separately. Those one we called mother who take care of us.

SIGRIST: This is at the orphanage.

ASSADOURIAN: The orphanage, yeah. She said, one of the women went, she came back. She said, "They didn't give me any food for you." She sent me. I went there on, you know, I go there, I said, I said, "I know you." I didn't know her. She says, "(?)" She says, "What have you got today for the mothers?" We used to call mothers. She says, "What do you care what I got?" "I have to take some food for my mother." "Who do you think you are?" I says, "She sent me. I have to take . . ." You know, I argued. I don't have argue. She gave me. She gave me the food. I brought, from then on I was her favorite. No matter what I did, she used to take care of me. I, one, and that, we had a lot of eye sorrows. They used to have a lot of eye trouble.

SIGRIST: Eye, like the trachoma.

ASSADOURIAN: Because, beside that. Because Turks dropped, uh, dropped things to blind you. Some of them had the . . .

SIGRIST: Like chemicals?

ASSADOURIAN: Chemicals, to blind you. Some of them were blinded.

SIGRIST: You mean, like gas, like (?).

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, yes. They blinded it. Some of them were blinded. So one day, when I went there, they gave me, they were going to give it to me that, too. So I said, I said, "Mama," I said, "they're going to eye doctor." I said, "No, you're not going to go to the eye doctor." She said, "Well, how am I going to do?" "I'll do something for you." As I said, when I came, I became their favorite. She said, "I want you to go to your mother. She's in, in the city. I am in the orphanage." I says . . .

SIGRIST: This is your real mother.

ASSADOURIAN: This is my real mother. I said, "I don't know how to go." So she said, "You have to take a chance. Go this way, go that way. I don't know nothing, no, of people who speak Arabic. Go this way, go that way, go that way. I took a chance." She said, "If you stay here, you're going to get blind. Because my eyes started getting, hurting me very badly. She said, "I want to save your eyes, so you have to go to your mother." I said, "How am I going to go?" So she told me. Then I came in the city, because from the (?) they used to call it. That was the main road. I know how to call my mother. But if I had to go the side road, I didn't know how to go to my mother. I took the side road. First time I saw the girls, those who works with men? What do you call it, they give themselves to men?

ASSADOURIAN: Prostitutes.

SIGRIST: Prostitutes. So I saw from the people, they were looking at me. They thought maybe I was looking someplace to do the same thing, because they saw me young, sixteen, seventeen-year-old beautiful girl, I used to, they used to tell me, maybe they

was jealous or something. They kept on looking, looking all around until I passed the side road. When I went home, first thing I said, I said, "Ma, why are the girls are painted?" She says, "How do you know?" She said, "How do you know?" I said, "Because although my eyes hurting me, I saw them. They were all colored, dressed colored. The hair is different. They look different. She got angry. I said, she said, "How did you come?" Because she was afraid, I guess. I said, "I didn't come. My, Mama, my mother told me to come that day because she didn't want me to see from the father, which take care of ours. Because our father, which was to take care of the house, she used to, we used to walk in the (?) street. If I met her, she would, he would take me to the orphanage again. If she, if she saw me. That's why she sent me to the side. So I said to her, "This is why." So she took me in a closet, dark closet, two weeks, in order to get, relieve the sore of my eye. And meanwhile they went someplace. That time they were giving to the refugees some kind of help sometimes from the church, or from American people. So that's, she

brought something.

SIGRIST: Well, let's get you back to America (he laughs)
and away from the prostitutes in Aleppo.

ASSADOURIAN: No, everything.

SIGRIST: And, so, your step-brother and your uncle meet you
and your aunt and your niece.

ASSADOURIAN: Took us in, yes.

SIGRIST: At Ellis Island.

ASSADOURIAN: Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Where did they take you?

ASSADOURIAN: Well, me, besides me, there was a girl which we
brought her as, uh, um . . .

SIGRIST: Was she an orphan also?

ASSADOURIAN: No. Oh, yes. Because then we were coming. This
girl was in somebody's house doing cleaning,
because my uncle needed a wife, they brought, they
were looking for a girl to, excuse me, I don't
know why, to bring him.

SIGRIST: He wanted to get married.

ASSADOURIAN: A girl. What do you call her? A girlfriend,
let's say.

SIGRIST: Right, right.

ASSADOURIAN: A fiance.

SIGRIST: A wife-to-be.

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, yes, a fiance. She was coming with us.
So . . .

SIGRIST: She had never met him before.

ASSADOURIAN: No, never before. Because she was orphan, my
uncle has said, "Let's save an orphan, and
meanwhile she'll be good for the wife, she'll be
nice person."

SIGRIST: Was this a common thing for people to do,
take . . .

ASSADOURIAN: That time . . .

SIGRIST: . . . orphaned Armenians, to bring them to this
country?

ASSADOURIAN: At that time, at that time everything possible.
Whatever they could do. They did whatever they
could do.

SIGRIST: Anything to get the Armenians out.

ASSADOURIAN: Armenians out.

SIGRIST: And into America.

ASSADOURIAN: America saved them from killing, anyway. So
that's how we came to America. They got married.
And I have to live with them.

SIGRIST: All right. Where did, the first night that you
were in America, after you got off of Ellis
Island, where did you go?

ASSADOURIAN: I had to go with uncle, my uncle rented the two-
bedroom apartment. They, my uncle was shoemaker
on Lenox Avenue.

SIGRIST: Is this in Queens?

ASSADOURIAN: Lenox Avenue. No, no, Harlem.

SIGRIST: Harlem.

ASSADOURIAN: So, because he knew a lot of, uh, black people,

they knew where to find me, they to found her, him, with apartments, so they can put all of us in. So that's how we came in.

SIGRIST: What did the apartment look like? Describe the apartment.

ASSADOURIAN: The apartment was one room after another.

SIGRIST: Like a railroad apartment.

ASSADOURIAN: Because, railroad. There was a hall, and one bedroom. I don't know where we slept. Maybe on the front. It makes no difference for us.

SIGRIST: Did it have electricity in it?

ASSADOURIAN: I think they had electricity in it. So it was only for one room. So when we went there, being a little bit English knowing, I could do that much. My aunt said, you know, we were from the boat, we were all hungry. We didn't have anything to eat. She thought it would be good if she made potato salad, Armenian style. We don't put no mayonnaise, nothing, no oil. Only scallion, parsley, or onion. So she said to me, "Mary," she said, "maybe you think you could go and . . ."

She depended me. "You could go, maybe you could bring some parsley or something to make you a potato salad?" Oh, that potato salad . . . Wait a minute. I went there because I had, as I said, they saw me. They started making fun of me. You know, young girl, inexperienced, just came. Anyway, I said, I got angry. I says, "Why are you making angry? Why are you talking to me like that? You have no right to talk like that to me?" Because they wanted to make fun of, if they can get me, they want to get. But, uh, I know. My mother . . .

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE TWO

ASSADOURIAN: So, anyway, I said, "Don't, I know what I want. If I see it, I tell you." Says, "All right, look around. You're bossing around us here." So I said, "All right. Boss around or not, but when I see . . ." I saw the parsley. I took the parsley. I came home. I went home, to 112th Street. The street is the same, the avenue is the same, the house is not the same. I didn't know what to do. I said, "How can this be?" The

city's the same, the avenue is the same, the house is not ours. I said, "Let me try the other way, too." I went, because I know where I came. I wanted to make sure I go again the same way. I went the same way the other house, that's near Fifth Avenue, the house. I went, the house is ours, the number is ours, I went in. So when my uncle came from the store that night I said, "Uncle," I said to the one who sponsored, "I got some problem today." He said, "What?" How is that the house is not, the number is the same, the house is not the same." He took me out. He said, "This is Fifth Avenue, Hadji. this is Fifth Avenue. We have east and west. You have to learn how to go east side. You have to learn how to go west side." So I had that one, too. I learned that one, too. After that, after we stayed there, when they got married, uh . . .

SIGRIST: How long did you stay there before they got married?

ASSADOURIAN: Uh, after, not much. After two days they got married because they . . .

SIGRIST: They got married that fast.

ASSADOURIAN: Very (?).

SIGRIST: How did they like each other?

ASSADOURIAN: They didn't care. As long as each, always matching anyway. So she was a nice girl. But the only thing is that when you're a little bit, maybe my uncle or my brother were favoring me because I just came from, from the war or something, uh, she started to, everything I did I was wrong.

SIGRIST: She was a little jealous of you.

ASSADOURIAN: So. We didn't do this right, you didn't clean the, when I cleaned the, washed the dishes, she didn't like. When I washed the vegetables, she didn't like. Something like that. But my uncle was the same house, the one who brought me, my aunt, which they were, all during the war I was with them. They took care of me. So, because they noticed what's going on. So that's why they married me, to be supported.

SIGRIST: How soon after you got here were you married?

ASSADOURIAN: I don't think it took long.

SIGRIST: A year?

ASSADOURIAN: Not even a year. In 1921 I got married, no?

SIGRIST: So they found someone for you to get married?

ASSADOURIAN: Someone to get married, yes.

SIGRIST: How did you feel about that?

ASSADOURIAN: I didn't care. I did whatever they, I didn't know about it anyway. I didn't know what sex was. But the baby come nine months later.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the first time you were introduced to your husband before you were married?

ASSADOURIAN: Yes. When we went, one of the girl which came with us, she had the, already arranged her marriage. She married right away, too, like my, they were two sisters. Because they both are orphans, my uncle said, "We see what sisters, put . . ." They were two sisters. We save them. (Armenian) Pity. It's a pity. "Let's save them. They're orphan, too." So, but they were already one, my uncle got married, and this one

they only had the man, ready man to marry. They were married. So one day they says, "We're going to go that nice person house." When I went there, they said, "Somebody's going to come to look at you." I said, "Ah, who is going to look at me?" I was waiting there. This man comes talk English with me. Because he knew, they told her, they told him I can speak English. She made, he made fun of me talking, you know. HE, too, started making fun. He wanted to know how much English I knew, maybe. That's how I saw. That much I saw.

Next day they, when we came May 21st they engaged me, May 29th they got married me.

SIGRIST: Well, and you arrived in November, so that's just a few months.

ASSADOURIAN: So, seven months later, about.

SIGRIST: His last name was Assadourian.

ASSADOURIAN: No, his last name was Assadourian, yes.

SIGRIST: His first name was what?

ASSADOURIAN: Matthew.

SIGRIST: Matthew. And, uh, was he from, was he Armenian from Europe also, or had he been born here?

ASSADOURIAN: He had come before the war to America. That's how they, they knew him.

SIGRIST: So he'd been here for a while.

ASSADOURIAN: For, he was here for a while.

SIGRIST: What was he doing for a living at that time?

ASSADOURIAN: What was he doing for that time? I think he was a shoemaker, too. He was a shoemaker.

SIGRIST: Were there a lot of Armenians up in Harlem at that time?

ASSADOURIAN: No, no. There was nobody. In fact, one day, when I went to my uncle's store, which he was shoemaker, when they saw me, all those black people saw me, they kept on looking, "What this girl doing here?" But I wasn't afraid. My uncle was there. I went my uncle, I said to my uncle, I said, "Uncle . . ." Because he, the store was in the, at Lenox Avenue. I said, "They all looked at me." He said, "Because you're white. They're

afraid of the white." At that time they were afraid of the white folks.

SIGRIST: That's very interesting. Can you describe your wedding for me?

ASSADOURIAN: The wedding?

SIGRIST: You were married in May of 1921.

ASSADOURIAN: 1921.

SIGRIST: Can you just describe the ceremony and . . .

ASSADOURIAN: They, I'm so, I can't, they, my father, in my childhood, the stepdaughters he had, everything they used to do for her. Over there, I'm going back again.

SIGRIST: Right. These are the daughters from his first marriage.

ASSADOURIAN: Instead of, where the city I was born. They used to bring the men to take the size of the shoe. They used to bring dressmakers for her to make dress. Nobody cared for me. Nobody did anything for me. One day I remember we were eating in the, in the, uh, veranda that we were eating, I was

crying. She said, he says, "Why are you crying?"

I said, "You doing anything to Anoush." Her name was Anoush [ph], which means, I don't know, I said, sweet. But, uh, that is her name. Anyway, "You're not making anything for me." He said to me, "Anything for you? There isn't anything I do for her, I'll do for you. Don't forget, when you grow up, there's anything I wouldn't do." Then he said, "I'm going to marry you anyone you want." Because by that time they were matchmaking. By that time my father understood matchmaking is not working all the time. He was educated man. But, uh, when I got the marriage time, they . . .

SIGRIST: A few years later.

ASSADOURIAN: In America, I remember my father. I cried so much. I said, "He was going to do everything for me." He told me, "Look in the looking glass. See how you look as a bride." I didn't want to look in the looking. Until now I am sorry for it. I didn't know how I looked in a wedding gown, because it wasn't mine. My uncle's wife's wedding gown I had to wear. I said to my father, in front, they said, "Look, it was a little like

this." I said to him, I said, (?), "Dad, I'm not getting married the way you planned for me. I'm getting somebody else's wedding gown." So that's how I started to, to, that's how my wedding went.

In that time they used to invite people in the restaurant, while they were, as much as they knew.

We, they used to have some entertainment for them. And after that, I didn't know what sex was.

We had that, we had to pay two hundred dollars to get apartment. It was like now here, hard to find. This French woman was going to go back French [sic]. She had an apartment on the top floor, 28th Street. No, 33rd Street.

SIGRIST: 33rd Street.

ASSADOURIAN: 33rd Street, on the top floor. And then my husband supposed to be paid. (she laughs) He was already. So he had to pay two hundred dollars in order to be able to get the apartment. Well, we went there, I started making that house there. The apartment was on the top floor. We had no electricity at that time. They had, we got something.

SIGRIST: A gas light?

ASSADOURIAN: No, no, not gas light.

SIGRIST: Kerosene?

ASSADOURIAN: No, no. They had something soft. With kerosene you have, we used to light it with a match.

SIGRIST: Did it have a mantle on it?

ASSADOURIAN: Mantle, mantle.

SIGRIST: That's gas light.

ASSADOURIAN: Whatever. So we used to do that. And then, uh, the bathroom, there was no bath. The toilet was in the apartment building, in the hall, outside the hall. Everybody used to come to that place, everybody, (?), everybody. So that, no bath. I took bath, if you took bath we did whatever we could in the, I could whatever I can. One day, we used to wash ourselves, myself, at that time I was my own now. I used to sit up, it was something flat like this, like this, and that was a tub. I used to get up on that platform, sit on one of the tubs. It had two tubs. I used to stay in the

bath and wash myself. And I was pregnant, I washed myself. I had long hair, wet hair, I couldn't come down. The big stomach didn't want to come down. I couldn't fold myself to come down. I was almost, I cried a little bit. I said, "Am I going to wait until Matthew come home to take me down?" So I don't, I struggled this way, that way. I didn't have a chair before, on the sink. I couldn't come to the chair. My stomach was like this. So that's how I managed to come on the chair. After that I never took a chance again to go that place to wash myself. I used to sponge myself.

SIGRIST: In a way you went from being a girl to an adult overnight.

ASSADOURIAN: Overnight. No experience. I, like some people think (?) being all girls, nobody talked to them. They, as I said, we were only thinking our lives. Nobody talked anything, sex or anything.

SIGRIST: And is that common in the Armenian culture that women are not told this . . .

ASSADOURIAN: No, no. I don't know at that time how the others

do. I didn't know. I had no experience. I can't tell you anything, how they went through. I don't think so.

SIGRIST: Tell me, did you see anything in America that you had never seen before in those first couple of years? What was the most new and different?

ASSADOURIAN: Everything was different for me. Everything was new to me. Nothing was nothing I knew.

SIGRIST: Maybe something like riding on a subway or . . .

ASSADOURIAN: Subway I think my uncle used to take me sometimes, when we went shopping. He used to tell me what fruit to pick up, how to do. Things like that he showed me. Subway, I never took subway at that time. They had bus, I think. But I used to go once in a while someplace. I don't know. I forgot.

SIGRIST: When you were, those first couple of years you were here, did you feel very alone, because, you know, a lot of your family, you've either lost them or they're still over across the ocean.

ASSADOURIAN: Everything was so new to me, I didn't feel any,

any lose, or maybe I was young, I didn't feel it.

SIGRIST: When did you have your first child?

ASSADOURIAN: After nine months, 1921. They married me 1920.
Nine months later, the baby came.

SIGRIST: And how many kids did you have?

ASSADOURIAN: Then that's another thing. My husband, all the others went public hospital to have their babies. My husband said, "Because when you come home you have nobody," he put me in the Women's Hospital, they used to call, 29th Street. She arranged me there, because that was private hospital. They kept me fourteen, they kept you fourteen days. So, because you pay for it. Fourteen days. After fourteen days you came, you come out. But, uh, after, when the baby was born, uh, they didn't trust me the baby. They said, "You're a child yourself. How are you going to take the baby yourself home?" But I said, "No. The baby's mine. I can take care of him, of her, of him." Anyway, but when he was two days old they turned the skin of the penis to clean, two days old. When they turned it, the skin scratched, and the

nurse, the stupid nurse, put iodine on it. The iodine burnt all the skin. He was sore. They used to call crybaby all the time. He cried because he had sore. So because he had sore they said when the fourteen days were over, private fourteen days were over, which I was supposed to stay only fourteen days, they didn't send me home.

I used to say, even at that time, "I want to go home. Every day sounds a month, every month sounds a year." I used to tell the nurses that time. I could speak that much. So when the time came they didn't send me home. They didn't want to send me home. Then they were strict. Then they had to tell me why I can't go home. My husband had to sign to take me out. He didn't want to sign, because they were responsible. I had to stay in the hospital until his sore got healed. So I stayed twenty-eight days in the hospital before I, but after I came home, sometimes when I don't sleep I wonder myself sometimes, all the things I did with no experience at all. And every time they, I had to take, I came home today, I had to take the baby at the hospital to be checked for the sore. But on the

ward, I never missed anything, what you're supposed to do to the child. I was nursing. I nursed seven months, the other one six, seven months. I nursed both of them. But I read what I should do, what's good for the baby. I did everything that was written on it when I was home.

How to bathe, how to, I used to wash my nipple before I nursed him.

SIGRIST: You were very lucky that you learned English in the orphanage, because that came in handy when you got here.

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, sure. Oh, sure. Even . . .

SIGRIST: It gave you a little head start.

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, sure. Even the French I know, on the road everybody used to call me what to talk. And I, because in French I didn't tell, most of the time we took oral lesson in the class, oral.

SIGRIST: Order?

ASSADOURIAN: Oral, oral.

DORIAN: O-R-A-L.

ASSADOURIAN: L. Oral lesson.

SIGRIST: Oh, oral!

ASSADOURIAN: Oral lesson.

SIGRIST: Like oral history.

ASSADOURIAN: No, oral lesson.

SIGRIST: Oral lesson. Yes, okay.

ASSADOURIAN: That's how I knew good French. I had more French than English when I came to this country. So, like Arthur, my older son, took French. He used to translate in the book, but he wasn't able to talk French as much I used to. Because, as I said, we learned oral. When we used to sit, I used to be the last one to sit, because I knew the answers what they talked to me, because if you don't answer right, they make you sit down. We were sixty of us on the line. That's how we took oral lesson. That's how, I was pretty good in the French.

SIGRIST: So what was the name of your first child?

ASSADOURIAN: Arthur.

SIGRIST: Arthur. And then you had other children?

ASSADOURIAN: I had Edward, her husband.

SIGRIST: Arthur and Edward were your two boys.

ASSADOURIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Um, tell me a little bit about getting your citizenship papers in 1928, what you had to go through for that experience.

ASSADOURIAN: When I went there, when I went to bring, as I said, to bring my mother, I went to there.

SIGRIST: You'd been in contact with your mom?

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, yes. For letters, only letters. No phone, nothing. So, anyway, always. In fact, they used to say, some of them, they didn't get letters, "Why don't you learn lesson from Mary? She's sending letter to her mother. She's sending letter to every week." The only time she didn't get letter was because I had put some money in it.

I didn't know the rule at that time. I used to put some money in it for my grandmother to have, to pay, in the church, when the, what they, when

the pass the plate.

SIGRIST: Collection?

ASSADOURIAN: Collection. I used to say to them, "This is for my grandmother, (?) collection." When I was in America and I had. And I used to say, "Cent by cent." Myron didn't have money, not much money. Anyway . . .

SIGRIST: So you wanted to bring your mother over here.

ASSADOURIAN: Over again. When I went there, that day I had such a headache. He asked me a couple, a few questions.

SIGRIST: Did you have to go to class?

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: To learn things?

ASSADOURIAN: No, I had the book. I learned from the book.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did you have to learn to take your citizenship?

ASSADOURIAN: Whatever you had, whatever, who's the president, who's vice-president, who elects it, how do they

do it, all these things. I knew everyone, like my lesson. I follow sometimes that. Anyway, I went there, I said to him, I said, when, I wasn't sure, I answered the third answer. I said, "I think, I think, did I answer the third lesson right?" He said, "Why?" He said, "Yes, why?" "Because I have headache. Sometimes I'm not sure. I have very bad headache." So after that there was a few things to answer. When I went to the (?), I said to the judge, "Did I pass?" He says, "Excellent."

SIGRIST: Was that a proud moment for you?

ASSADOURIAN: Of course. I became citizen.

SIGRIST: Was your husband already a citizen?

ASSADOURIAN: No. He was, (she clears her throat) in 1921 if I married a man who was citizen, I become citizen, uh . . .

SIGRIST: Automatically?

ASSADOURIAN: Automatically. But because I married 1922, I lost that. That's why I had to go for examination. I went for the examination. But I couldn't bring my

mother, as I told. By the time, 1928, she had a very bad heart, heartache.

SIGRIST: Was that a great disappointment to you?

ASSADOURIAN: Of course. The only happiness I could give to her was that, to bring. I was hoping every minute. I couldn't see her any more.

SIGRIST: Um, we're almost out of time. I want to ask you, in your life, what was your proudest moment? What are you most proud of that you've done in this life?

ASSADOURIAN: Raising my children. Raising my children. When, uh, when they were grownup, you know, when they become especially high school student, I wanted to know where they were, what they're doing. Uh, so, I had give them rule to come home at this hour. One day her husband . . .

SIGRIST: That's Edward?

ASSADOURIAN: Edward, didn't come out, didn't come up on time. When he came up, I said, "You're late." "No, Mom, I'm not late. I was in the hall." I said, "Edward, I don't know where you are. You're in

the hall or in the, outside, you're not here."
Most of the women which parent, the children are
bad. Sometimes I go back what I was doing. He
says, "You're so strict. I was in the hall." He
said he didn't know the time. From now on the
time is streetlight. As soon as you see the
streetlight, you have to be here. And they did,
they did. And her husband . . .

SIGRIST: That's Edward.

ASSADOURIAN: Made the, Edward. City College free, so did
Arthur. Arthur, when the Second World War came,
army took him. When the day came to examine him,
because that, they were against Russia, because we
were Armenian they thought we had some connection
with Russia, which we had nothing, I didn't know
what Russia was, but they had to check up, and
inspection came, all the, inspector came, asks
what Edward, what my Arthur did. Because they
were going, as I (?), do you know where it is?
(?), where they examined the airplane before they
go to the war. He was in the reserve. Her
husband went two years in the army. So anyway,
but, uh, thank God they came home, uh, what do you

call?

SIGRIST: Safe?

ASSADOURIAN: No, not safe. With the big name. I mean, I was proud of them. When you said about, I was proud of them. So, as I said, her husband, even the six (?) people praise her husband. Maybe she doesn't know it. When I go some, I used to go sometimes, when he started business, I used to go there sometimes to take two, three buses, doing nothing, just to take two, three buses., doing nothing, just to be in the street, in the store. Everybody said, "Oh, you have a gentleman son." Well, anyway, I'm not praising, but . . .

SIGRIST: But that's what you're proud of, (?).

ASSADOURIAN: What's the truth is truth. I can't say it if they're not there. I can't lie. I don't want to lie. I don't make up things. I don't believe in. If I talk something about you, wrong thing, is somebody told you, "You know what Mary thought about you?" I must know what I could tell you, too, what I talked about. I don't go two faces, until now. That's why many people, even the

Center. I go to the Center now. I'm talking too much. But, uh, wherever I go, they call me Little Lovely Mary.

SIGRIST: Have you ever gone back to Turkey, to (??)?

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, yes. We did. In 19, um, seventy, '76, I think we went, we traveled all the way to Armenia, and then from Armenia we had, we went to Turkey.

SIGRIST: What, did you go back to the town that you were born in?

ASSADOURIAN: No. I asked to my husband, I asked my husband, he was afraid. He said we don't want to take a chance. We went to Constantinople. We stayed in a hotel. I wanted to go with him. I wanted to see what my city looked like, where was I born. At least I wanted to see, to know where I was. He was afraid to go. So we didn't go. We only went Constantinople. We stayed in the hotel. After that we came home.

SIGRIST: What did it feel like to be in Armenia on that soil again where you . . .

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, in Armenia you have, you can't get, you have a

dream there. There isn't anything you want to see in Armenia.

SIGRIST: Was it emotional to go back?

ASSADOURIAN: Oh, everything, Armenia, when you go there on the street, they're all speaking, talking Armenian, you have a (?). Once there was the earthquake. Everybody asked me on the street, on Pelham Park Avenue, "Mary, did you have somebody over in the earthquake?" They were all mine. I said, "They were all mine." How can I say this and that? They were all mine. We haven't got, especially now, they have a lot of trouble now. We have independence, but they have to have a big support to take care of, to run the place.

SIGRIST: I think I know the answer to my final question but I'll ask it anyway.

ASSADOURIAN: Ask anyway.

SIGRIST: Are you glad that you came to this country?

ASSADOURIAN: Well, there is always glad. I grew up here. I did everything I know, I, what is the word, I, huh? Huh? No, I came, I got, living, what I got

now, I came form the people of this world.
Emotionally, spiritually, everything. So, uh, I,
as I said, I know who's, what's right, what's
wrong.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Assadourian, I want to thank you very much.
This has been delightful. You're a wonderful
storyteller, and you've certainly had a dramatic
life, and I'm very pleased to have gotten a chance
to put it down on tape.

ASSADOURIAN: Thank you very much. You had a hard time to
listen to me. I gave you hard . . .

SIGRIST: Well, you do talk quickly sometimes. (he
laughs)

ASSADOURIAN: Tha'ts why, that's why I got, my aunt took me in
because I talk like my father. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: There you go. It saved your life, as you say.
This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Mary
Assadourian.

ASSADOURIAN: Assadourian.

SIGRIST: On Thursday, September 16, 1993, with Barbara

EI-390/ASSADOURIAN

Dorian in attendance, in the Ellis Island
Immigration Museum Recording Studio on the digital
equipment. Thank you.

ASSADOURIAN: You're welcome.