

EI-403

FARIDA OHAN CHAVOOR

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TURKEY (ASSYRIAN), 1921

AGE 10

PASSAGE ON THE *KING ALEXANDER*

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mrs. Chavoor is the cousin-in-law of Maljan Chavoor, Interview DP-10 and the first cousin of Charles Perch, Interview EI-790. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Oral Historian, 8/7/1998.

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is October 25, 1993, a Monday afternoon. I'm in Worcester, Massachusetts, with Farida Chavoor. Mrs. Chavoor came from Turkey in 1921 when she was ten years old. She is also a cousin [sic, cousin-in-law] of interviewee Maljan Chavoor,

interviewed in 1989 [Interview DP-10]. Present also with me is Charles Perch [Interview EI-790], who is Mrs. Chavoor's first cousin and also my great uncle [paternal, by marriage], and also present is Pauline Perch [Interview EI-789], who is my great aunt [paternal]. Anyway, thank you very much for letting me come out.

CHAVOOR: You're welcome.

SIGRIST: Can we begin, Mrs. Chavoor, by you giving me your birth date.

CHAVOOR: May 17, 1911.

SIGRIST: And your maiden name, please?

CHAVOOR: Ohan, O-H-A-N.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me where in Turkey you were born?

CHAVOOR: I was born in Elizge.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

CHAVOOR: E-L-I-Z-G-E, Elizge.

SIGRIST: And did you live there until you came to America?

CHAVOOR: Oh, yeah. We lived there, yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you remember about the town.

CHAVOOR: It was a city where I was born. It was a beautiful place. Now it's much larger than when we left. But, uh, it was a very nice, we had a nice life. My father was a merchant.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the city, what sticks out in your mind as a little girl?

CHAVOOR: It's very mountainous and, uh, everybody really, they had their own gardens. They had their sheep and cattle and horsemens. (she laughs) It was very, it's a beautiful country.

SIGRIST: Was there an industry in this city that you remember?

CHAVOOR: No, no, no. Nothing, really. It's mostly, uh, merchants. They sell, in those days they had to sew their own clothes, you know. People had to buy their own yard goods and things like that, but actually there weren't any factories or anything like that.

Uh, they, they had a rug factory there that the children used to weave, you know, make rugs. They still do.

SIGRIST: Did you do that as a child?

CHAVOOR: No, no, no, no. I was too small. (she laughs)
But, no. We were quite well off, I mean, as far as that goes. My grandfather was there with his, he had seven boys. At that time, uh, three stayed there, and the four, they came to America, a couple of Charlie's uncles, too. They came to Worcester, and then they went to California. And then, uh, afterwards, uh, everybody was there except the two of them.

SIGRIST: Is this your maternal grandfather or your paternal grandfather?

CHAVOOR: My mother's.

SIGRIST: Your mother's father.

CHAVOOR: Family, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollections of this man? Do you remember him personally?

CHAVOOR: My grandfather? Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Tell me what sticks out in your mind about your grandfather?

CHAVOOR: Oh, my grandfather, he was a wonderful man. He was tall, blue eyes, blonde hair. (she laughs) And my grandmother was petite. She also had blue eyes, and red hair. And, uh, very, very nice family. He had his own store. And, uh, they had a lovely home which, incidentally, about ten years ago, I went back there and I saw the house itself.

SIGRIST: We'll talk about that later on.

CHAVOOR: So it's, uh . . .

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me your grandfather's personality in more detail?

CHAVOOR: He was a very well-respected person, not that money did anything, but it wasn't the richness that everybody loved, but he was very passionate and very, how could I explain it? To him, money didn't mean anything. If you liked the person, to him that was

the most important thing. He was very openhearted, and the house was always open. People were welcome there. They come, of course, he was quite elderly, and they took his advice to a lot of things. And, uh, the government themselves, they respected him very much.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

CHAVOOR: His name was Yegya.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

CHAVOOR: Wow. (they laugh) Y-E-G, Yegya, Y-A. Alla, they call him. He was a, that's a title that they give a person that's wellknown.

SIGRIST: And so, and his last name would be your mother's maiden name.

CHAVOOR: Elby, E-L-B-Y, yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about your grandmother, and maybe a story that you remember about her?

CHAVOOR: Oh, yes. My grandmother. I remember my grandmother,

she was petite, red hair, and just a, this, always, I never forget this. She used to have this beautiful velvet, red velvet coat. The fur was inside because in those days, you know, they had to keep warm. She used to wear that robe every morning when I used to go there. She was always wearing that. And, uh, she had, uh, let me see, me, she had four grandchildren at that time. And, uh, she used to have us there a lot of times having tea. She used to, we used to sit on the floor with a big tray, you know, the saney[ph], they called it. And we, she used to serve tea in that time. And, uh, one, one time I was about seven, I remember we had a beautiful, they, my grandfather's house was a beautiful garden. He had all kinds of fruits there. But there was one tree that was enormous, went way up, oh, I'd say three stories, and they'd call that the mulberry tree, and they used to eat that, you know, the mulberry tree. So . . .

(she laughs) One day my cousins and I, we were small, and my grandmother had guests out in the garden, they were having their little tea, you know? And, uh, Cata[ph], Yusef and I, my two cousins, we

were up the hill, we went up the roof, see, it's a flat roof over there. So they said, "Let's climb on the tree." And I, me, you know, I said to Yusef, "You're too small. Let me go there." I did get on the tree from one limb, and I fell. Limb from limb, like this, you know? I didn't fall directly, because the tree was very big. So finally I landed down, and that's all I remember. Next thing I remember is they had me on a swing, they're swinging me so I could upcheck whatever it was. Well, anyway, that was all right. I was, I was okay. I wasn't hurt at all. So my grandmother, she says to me, "Now, don't tell your mother that you went on the roof and fell." She says, "She'll kill me." So, anyway, so after a while the, uh, the guests left, and my mother came after me to take me home. So as she's going out the door, I remember this young girl, she was a servant to one of the ladies that was visiting, and she says to my mother, "Is the daughter all right?" And my mother says, "Yes, why, what's the matter?" She says, "Well," she says, "she gave my lady-in-waiting . . ."

She says, "She was, she was quite frightened because

she fell from the roof." And my mother turns around and she goes back to her mother, she says, "What's the matter with you?" She says, "Why didn't you tell me?" You know, "I should know . . ." "Well," she says, "I didn't want to scare you." Well, anyway, and at night, we went back to, close to each other, we were on one street, you know? So at night we went home and, uh, my grandmother says to me, "I'm going to give you a pair of gold beads," she says, "to wear it. All right?" I says, "Okay." So she gave me these little gold beads all around, you know? So I wore it, and then when at night grandpa came, and he says to me, "Who gave you that beads?" And I says, "Nana." We call her Nana, you know? And he says to my grandmother, he says, "That's a terrible thing to give." He says, "If you're going to give her, give her a good one." So he gave us a big one. That was, oh, it was beautiful. I still, we sold it afterwards anyway. But, uh, to me, well, I didn't know my father's family. They were all here. I grew up with my mother's family.

SIGRIST: So would you say that your grandparents were a very

important influence on your life?

CHAVOOR: Oh, yeah, yes.

SIGRIST: Growing up. Can you tell me something that either your grandfather or your grandmother taught you, maybe some kind of a value or, you know, this is a rule to live by, something like that?

CHAVOOR: Well, my grandfather always used to say, "When you do something bad, always admit it. Don't lie." He used to always say that to us when we were kids, you know? So he says, "The truth always comes out, so never, never lie." And that always stuck in my mind. That's true.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a story of when you were a child in Turkey of maybe doing something wrong?

CHAVOOR: Wrong?

SIGRIST: Well, something that you shouldn't have done and that, and that you either fessed up?

CHAVOOR: No. We used to go to school. We were going to Turkish school. We didn't have any Christian schools

there. And, uh, and every Sunday we went to church, and holidays.

SIGRIST: What religion were you?

CHAVOOR: Uh, Orthodox.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about your parents' ethnic background, because Turkey has all kinds of different groups living in it. Which . . .

CHAVOOR: Well, we were, uh, they called us, uh, Syriani Hadim[ph]. That's, that means that "all those Syrians," not the Syrians here now, but all Syrians, which, biblical times, Assyrians.

SIGRIST: Like Assyrians, A-DOUBLE S-Y-R-I-A-N.

CHAVOOR: Yeah, they came, they migrated there. I really don't know. As far as I know, my grandfather, my mother's side, they were all there. And as to my father's side, they say that years later my father's last name was Kerbiz.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

CHAVOOR: Kerbiz. K-E-R-B-I-Z. Kerbiz only means The Son of Kerbiz. Originally my father's great-grandfather came from, uh, the island of, uh, Cyprus. So that's why they called our name Chabazoli[ph], the Boys from Cyprus. That's, originally that's what they said. I don't remember. But, uh, we were there. Of course, my father met my mother, and they got married, and they had . . .

SIGRIST: Do you know how they met?

CHAVOOR: Huh?

SIGRIST: Do you know how they met?

CHAVOOR: Well, uh, it's a small city. I think they belonged to the same church, and that's, in those days they don't go out with each other. (she laughs) They say, well, they, uh, they have two classes over there, the wealthy people and the poorer people. So, actually, when the marriage, when a girl comes to a certain age they, uh, the family gets together, and they say it's all right, it's all right, and that's how they get married. My mother was quite educated. She went to a

French school, and she wanted to become a nun. She went to a Catholic school there. And my grandfather wouldn't have it, because he had, his wife's two sisters, my great aunts, were two Catholics, uh, nuns, and he says, "Two is enough to give to the family." (she laughs) So they, they had arrangements with my father, and they got married, and . . .

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

CHAVOOR: Sophie.

SIGRIST: And can you tell me a little bit about her personality, what was she like as a person?

CHAVOOR: Oh. (she laughs) Oh, my mother. My mother was one in a million, really. Not because it's my mother, but Charlie and Pauline know them, too. She was very understanding. She was a plain woman. She didn't go out for jewelry or anything like that. But if one person was sick, she was always there helping. She used to always say these, material things doesn't matter. She used to say, "Do good, whatever you can. If a person is down, help them out." And that always

went through, all her life she was like that.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a specific story of her helping out someone that sticks out in your mind?

CHAVOOR: I'll tell you a big story that, uh, you know, during the massacre, all the Christians were gathered, they, the government, you know, they took them, the boys, especially, the men. And I had, one of my uncles, he was a, an officer in the army, but because he was a Christian, they arrested him. They put him in jail with all the other Christians, which was Armenians mostly. And two days later they were all taken away, never heard of them again. They must have killed them. But in the meantime, my mother went to that Catholic school where she was. That's where they, all that Armenian people were there, and she took these, uh, this black robe that they, the women wear, chachof[ph], they call it, and she took money with her, she bribed (she laughs) the soldiers, she got in there, and they knew her, too. And, uh, she made them dress that and took them out. She brought them home. On the way it was dark. I remember she was,

she used to say that every other quarter of a mile they had soldiers standing there, and they wanted to know where she was going, and she says, "I'm going home." "Well, who are you?" She says, "I'm Sophie Covas[ph]." You know, they knew her, so they let her go. We came to our church, and in that, over there, all the houses are walled in, the courtyard. She says, "I knocked on the door, and they won't open the door." They're afraid, whoever is inside, you know? Finally she says, "Open the door, it's Sophie." You know? So they opened the door, and she goes in, and these two soldiers that came with her, escorted her, they wanted money. So she said, "You stay right here." She says, "I'll bring you some gold." So she goes up the house, up in her room, and she takes some gold pieces that she had, she brings it, and she gives it to the men, and one man says, uh, "Well, light a match so I can see it whether it's gold or not." So the other one says, "Don't be silly." He says, "Of course it's gold." He says, "You wouldn't lie." So she got them out of the courtyard. Anyway, they went. But in the meantime, in the church, there were some

women hiding behind the altar. There were nurses from, there was an American hospital near our church.

When they heard that they were being held, you know, they all ran into the church and they were hiding there. That's what it was. So that's, that's a big thing. To this, ten years ago when I went to Istanbul, my uncle, the one that my mother helped, he says, "Well, it was because of your mother I'm still alive." (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you have other recollections of the massacre, other things that you remember?

CHAVOOR: Uh, no. It's stories, stories that they say. But, uh, actually I was only three years old at that time.

SIGRIST: Is there another story that you'd like to tell us?

CHAVOOR: No. It was a terrible thing that went. It was Christians, you know? They, whether they were right or wrong, they, they took all the Armenians, which they were Christians, and they took us, too. But finally head of the church is the priest and all those, they protested, and our patriarch in, uh,

Turkey, he protested. He says, "We have done nothing wrong." He says, "Why do you take us?" "Well, you're Christians." "So?" he says. "We didn't do anything to your government." Well, see, they found out, originally, that some, uh, men, club, rather, they were trying to overthrow the government in Turkey. Naturally they're not going to say, "You're guilty, you're innocent." You know, they took the whole lot. So, finally, they took quite a few Syrians. They killed them. But some of them, we were all safe because of that, finally they knew that we weren't involved in anything like that. So that's how . . .

SIGRIST: It was a horrible time.

CHAVOOR: It was. It was a sad thing, that's true. I mean, the innocents went, too. You know, over here now they say you take part of your family, all right, you're guilty, but the other ones aren't involved, but they didn't do that in those days. I suppose during the war they, everybody goes crazy. That's what happens.

SIGRIST: Let's talk a little bit about your dad. What was his name, his first name?

CHAVOOR: Uh, they, he was, his name was Yohanna. They call him Hadji[ph]. He went to Jerusalem, you know, when you go over there, in Mecca, they call. Well, anyway, they, Charlie went. Charlie, you got a thing, too, they put a cross on your arm, they tattoo it, you know. He was there. Hadji[ph], his name was. They used to always call him Hadji[ph].

SIGRIST: And can you, tell me sort of the same things about your father. What was his personality like?

CHAVOOR: Oh, my, my father? Uh, he was, uh, my father was a very reserved man. He was a very clean man. (she laughs) Ooh!

SIGRIST: How, what do you mean he was clean?

CHAVOOR: Immaculate. And everything, dress that he wanted, everything had to be just right. I remember when he used to wear his trousers back, put on, we had to have a, either hold his pants or he had to have a little stool so he wouldn't touch the ground. (they laugh) That's how he was, very clean. And, uh, when we came into this country, he couldn't get over people coming

into the house with their shoes on, because over there we all took our shoes off, you know. That he couldn't see. But, uh, and he was, uh, he was quiet. He was not a loud man. He never drank, he never smoked. So it's really, and he was always very nice. I never, uh, heard my father swear or hit us or anything like that. No, he was a very nice man.

SIGRIST: In Turkey was there some kind of thing that he liked to do with his family, some kind of recreation that the whole family would participate in?

CHAVOOR: Well, in those days, well, the only recreation they had was music in the house. My father used to play the violin, and they used to gather, and neighbors come, you know, they'd dance, holidays and that. That's the kind of a life we had. It was really, I mean, they didn't have any, oh, when we came here, I'll never forget. He watched television, baseball, you know, and he'd say to me, "Big boys like that just playing ball. What's the matter with them? Why don't they go and get a job?" (they laugh)

SIGRIST: What profession was your father in?

CHAVOOR: He was a merchant. He used to sell rugs.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about his profession, about rug selling, and . . .

CHAVOOR: Well, over there, of course, uh, most of the houses have rugs over there because of the winter, and they, that's the way, he used to go to Jerusalem twice a year buying things and coming back adn selling it, and he was really a very prosperous man. Of course, after the massacre, that was another story. It was quite bad.

SIGRIST: How was your father affected by that?

CHAVOOR: Affected?

SIGRIST: How was he affected by the massacre?

CHAVOOR: Well, affected is because everybody lost their jobs, I mean, their stores are closed. Because you're a Christian you couldn't do anything. It was pretty bad, but after a while . . . (she clears her throat) About two or three years later everything got to normal again. And, uh, he resumed his business

again. Of course, and then my brother, who was ten years older than I was, at that time everybody started going, hearing about America, they want to come to America. so my brother, if he didn't come he had to be, uh, going into the army. At that time it was a compulsory army, you know? And, uh, so he says, "I want to go to America."

SIGRIST: How did your parents feel about that?

CHAVOOR: Oh, my mother, my mother was heartbroken. She, she just couldn't get over it, because after he left, not even two years went by, my mother says, "We're going. I'm going after my son. I'm not going to leave him alone." That's how we started to come, too.

SIGRIST: Can you name your brothers and sisters for me?

CHAVOOR: My brother, his name was George. Uh, he went to a, he went to a German school over there, but after he came here . . . (she clears her throat) Without knowing a word of English, I'll tell you, that was another dilemma, he, uh, he got here, there was a, he knew a lot about shoes. He worked for my uncle. He was a

shoe, they used to make their own shoes up there. So when he came here, in Worcester there was a slipper factory. They used to call it Wiley-Bickford[ph]. So he got a job there making shoes.

SIGRIST: How old was he when he came to this country?

CHAVOOR: He was nineteen going on twenty.

SIGRIST: Was he the oldest?

CHAVOOR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And name the others.

CHAVOOR: Well, uh, I had, my mother had twins. They died when they were, I guess she had a miscarriage, and then she had another girl, Frieda. She was next to my brother, and she died when she was about ten years old, I guess. I don't know what caused her to die but, anyway, she died. And then I was the last one.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when your other sister died? No.

CHAVOOR: I wasn't born then. She had died before.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the house that you lived in, just

kind of walk me through it room by room?

CHAVOOR: Well, the house we walked, we lived in, I remember you go into a courtyard. That's where, and in one part there's sort of a stable where they have the, uh, animals, they keep cows and sheep. It depends on the family, too, you know? And then I remember this house we lived in had a stairway. We used to go upstairs. The living room was, they used to call a sofa, that big room, you entertain. And then we had two or three bedrooms that we lived and, uh, the furniture was, uh, all, not soft, mahogany, more or less like that. And then a lot of times they had a built-in, uh, all cushioned in so it would, and then they put rugs over it, and then they'd sit there. And then they had a stove. In those days that's how you could keep your house warm. And then there was another one, another thing that they had a huge dining room table, and under the table they have this, how can I say it, it's a metal fire. They used to make the coal outside when it was all burned, you know? And then they used to bring it and put it under the, uh, table. And on that table they had these big comforters, and chairs all

around it, and they used to sit there, you know, warm from your feet, but your back was cold. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: So it gets cold in this part of Turkey?

CHAVOOR: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you get snow?

CHAVOOR: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember a bad snowstorm or something?

CHAVOOR: They had snows, yeah, very, snow. And, uh, the rooftops were always, they had to shovel it. Otherwise, you know, it collapsed, yeah. And in the summer, come spring they used to, they used to sleep outside, because it gets so warm during the summertime. And they sleep outside, and sometimes in the middle of the sleeping, rain would fall, and everybody would take their beddings and run downstairs. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Can you, was there a separate kitchen in the house, or was that . . .

CHAVOOR: Yeah. Away, away from the house so you, you know, no smell or anything, down in the courtyard.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the kitchen for me, that separate building?

CHAVOOR: Well, when you say could you, they had a fireplace there that they used to cook with. They didn't have any stoves or anything, over the fireplace. That's how they did it.

SIGRIST: What was your, what were typical foods that you would eat when you were a kid in Turkey?

CHAVOOR: What was our typical . . .

SIGRIST: What did you eat?

CHAVOOR: We had everything. Mostly it's grain, they have a lot of grains there. They call it bulghur, which now introduced here. Now they know what it is. But at that time, and the main dish is, uh, lamb. During the winter, during the spring they cook all this lamb and they preserve it, so in the winter when they couldn't get any meat, they have the, uh, stew meat, they used

to make it.

SIGRIST: How did they preserve it?

CHAVOOR: How they used to? They, uh, they cook it. And then, under, they had a cellar which is dug way down in the house there at the bottom, that it's very cold in the winter. That's how they, and they preserved it. And they used to put grapes and oranges and things in the hay and they'd preserve how they, during the winter they'd bring those out to eat. They, uh, they used to, uh, like tomatoes. They used to do it in the sun. They used to dry it by the sun. That's how they preserved those things, like vegetables, eggplants, string beans. They used to all dry these things, you know, and keep it in the winter.

SIGRIST: Who did the cooking in your family?

CHAVOOR: Well . . . (she laughs) My mother didn't do much cooking. We had a woman to do the cooking. They have, we had a woman that did the washing, and we had a woman that did the cooking.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me what one of your favorite foods as a

child, something you looked forward to eating?

CHAVOOR: I like everything. (she laughs) I always liked everything. And they used to eat a lot of yogurt. We used to make our own yogurt.

SIGRIST: How did you make yogurt?

CHAVOOR: Well, you take milk, and you bring it to a boil, and you let it cook. They used to always test it with their little finger, you know, if it's cool enough, then you put a couple of spoons of yogurt in there and cover it. In the morning you get up and it's all, it's yogurt. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: I see. And the yogurt that you put in was sort of like to get it started.

CHAVOOR: Yeah. You have to have that, otherwise you couldn't do it.

SIGRIST: What about for a special occasion, for instance, Christmas or something, was that a different kind of dinner for that?

CHAVOOR: Oh, yeah. Christmas time they used to, of course, as

I say, lamb. They don't have beef there. They never touch beef. They don't touch pork either. Just lamb.

And, of course, the delicacies were baklava, cardave[ph], and all that. During the holidays, that was the main thing. And fruit, very, uh, we had everything, really. I mean, when we came here, we didn't miss anything. They had here, too.

SIGRIST: Did you . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: Did you have your own garden in the courtyard, I mean, did you grow anything?

CHAVOOR: A lot of people had. No, we didn't do it, we didn't have any, but a lot of people did it. But they do have a lot of fruits. Most of them all have fruits in the yard. Apricots, they have, uh, pears, and quince, and that mulberry bush. That most, a lot of them had their own fruit there.

SIGRIST: What would your grandmother do with the mulberries?

CHAVOOR: Oh, you know, certain time when that mulberry is ripe, they have a man come and they spread sheets at the bottom of the tree, and they get up and they shake that tree there, and all the mulberry falls into the, and they eat it. Oh, my God, they eat it. (she laughs) It's just like raspberry and things, but it's sweet, though. It's very nice. They eat that.

SIGRIST: You said you had, you had a woman who cooked, and a woman who did the laundry. Did you have any other household servants?

CHAVOOR: No, those, my mother used to look after the cooking, I mean, the, uh, cleaning, you know how houses are, outside of that. And then they, twice a year they used to bake bread, these big, big breads, flat bread. And they used to put that away for the winter, get it all ready. It doesn't get moldy or anything, you know, so they stack those up. They get ready for the winter. So that's, that's what it was.

SIGRIST: Was the bread baked in the home, or was there a communal oven somewhere else?

CHAVOOR: No. They had, uh, a lot of, a lot of the houses, they had this, in the courtyard it was built, a well. It was, actually it was a well. At the bottom they put all this fire, and then they have a special woman that does all that baking, I mean, doing the bread. She wraps herself all up, you know, with heavy, uh, clothing so, you know, when she takes that bread and she slaps it against the wall of the well, and, of course, it's hot, so she has to be very careful. So she does that one, one sticks, the other one is cooked. She takes it out, and then she puts the other one. It's quite a, it's a knot. Everybody couldn't do that, so if you hire these women, they come and do it for you.

SIGRIST: I was curious about the houseful of help that you had, what ethnic background were they?

CHAVOOR: Well, mostly they were Turkish.

SIGRIST: Turkish Muslim?

CHAVOOR: Yeah, Muslims. When they have nothing, what else can they do to earn a little money, which they'd do

anything for a little money. Really, it was, it was not hard to find any, even if you said to one person, "I'll give you a meal," you come and do some work, they do. In those days, that's what it was.

SIGRIST: Well, and you're also a comfortable family.

CHAVOOR: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Because it's probably generally a rather poor area.

CHAVOOR: Oh, yeah. No, no. We were very well off, really. I mean, uh, the only reason we left that country is because of my brother. My mother didn't want to stay . . . Let me, why don't you put that . . .

SIGRIST: Is it in your eyes? (referring to the sunlight)
We're going to pause just for a moment here so we can shut the shade. (break in tape) We're now resuming with Farida Chavoer. Um, I wanted to ask you a little bit about school. You've touched on it a little bit.
Uh, you went to a French school, or . . .

CHAVOOR: No, a Turkish school.

SIGRIST: You went to a Turkish school.

CHAVOOR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me about what the school looked like, and where you had to go . . .

CHAVOOR: The school was all, uh, girls in one room, boys were in another room. And, uh, we used to go there for morning, and then in the afternoon, lunchtime, and it was mostly like this. But we had to pay over there, the family had to pay in order to go to school. And, uh, all I, all I could was talk Turkish and write Turkish. We didn't know any other language. And, uh, of course, some Armenians, we knew the Armenian language a lot, but we wouldn't talk outside. In the house you could use it, because they were afraid, mostly, because of that massacre thing, you know? And, uh, so after, when we came here, the school, of course, not knowing the language, the only thing we know to say yes or no. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Okay. We'll talk about that when we get to America. Uh, could your parents read and write?

CHAVOOR: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: What about your grandparents?

CHAVOOR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Is this, is this a reflection of their more privileged status in the community?

CHAVOOR: Yes, yeah. That's right, that's true. Yeah, they were all educated, more or less. As I say, it goes with the family, you know? If they could afford it, they went to school. If you didn't go to school, that was it.

SIGRIST: Now, you did mention French schools and German schools.

CHAVOOR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me who set these up, and . . .

CHAVOOR: Missionaries, missionaries. That's where, the Catholic school was missionary, too, and the German school was missionary. And, uh, you paid, as I say, to, well, you had your choice. You either don't go to school, or if you go to school you had to pay for it.

So my grandfather and them, they believed in education, so they, they had to go. They went.

SIGRIST: So your brother came to America when he was nineteen, and he went to work in Worcester, working on shoes. Do you remember when you were a girl at that time what you knew about America?

CHAVOOR: What I knew about America?

SIGRIST: What did America mean to you when you were in Turkey, before you came?

CHAVOOR: I didn't know anything, not a thing. (she laughs) We just knew that we were going to go. "Where?" "America." "Where is America?" "God knows." It took three days, from Sampson, city of Sampson, to Istanbul, from Istanbul to America it took us two weeks by boat to come. That's how we knew it. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: So you really knew nothing about . . .

CHAVOOR: No, I didn't know, not a thing.

SIGRIST: So your mother decided, even though she was initially

against your brother coming, she was really the impetus to get the rest of the family here.

CHAVOOR: Yeah, she wanted to come to America. So we came to, as far as Istanbul, and from there to come here, you had to have a visa, somebody to sponsor you. You just couldn't take a plane or a boat and come over here. Well, my father had three brothers here. So we, my father wrote them a letter to send us a visa. So they did, and that's how we came here.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how you felt about leaving your town?

CHAVOOR: We felt, well, I remember, because we had to leave my grandfather there, my uncle, two uncles, there, and we felt pretty bad. My father, my mother felt bad, but she wanted to get to her son.

SIGRIST: Was there some kind of a send-off party or a dinner that was given for your family before you left?

CHAVOOR: Oh, no, no. They, once the wagon comes and you get in your wagon and you come, that's all. That's just like the colonial days, you know? I watched that, a lot of times, out west. That just reminds me of that, how

they came.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you packed? What did your family take with them when they left their house?

CHAVOOR: Mostly bread. (they laugh) Yeah, clothes and beddings, and a few rugs, if you could manage it, you know? And, uh, of course, every night they had certain places that you could stop, they used to call Hahn, it's a hotel, like, you know? It's an inn, really. And some places are very bad, and some places are good. You had to be careful where you stop, where you, but, uh, thank God we got to, when we left our city, Elizge, it took us almost a week to come to the seashore of Sampson, they call it, And we settled there. We were there for six months. We couldn't go to Istanbul because at that time Istanbul was Constantinople, and, uh, it was, uh, an international city. It didn't belong to the Turks. So you couldn't go there, because we were in Turkey, and Istanbul was, I mean, Constantinople was an international city. Well, finally, the head of our church, the patriarch, he got permission that we were all right to get

passport, and finally after six months we went to Istanbul.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you remember about the six months in Sampson? What sticks out in your mind about that?

CHAVOOR: That place was, uh, it's a very hilly city, and they had a lot of oranges, I remember, in the yard. That stuck me . . . (she laughs) Which we didn't have, but it was a very nice city. And we lived in a, we rented a house. We lived there for six months, and we became, uh, friendly with the, there were a lot of Christians, Armenians, there, and some Greeks, too. So, uh, after six months we were glad to get to Istanbul to see George, my brother. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, now, who's traveling, your mother and your father and you?

CHAVOOR: That's all.

SIGRIST: Just the three of you. And you've got the brother in America.

CHAVOOR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: One of your sisters . . .

CHAVOOR: No, he was in Istanbul.

SIGRIST: He was in Istanbul. And had he come to meet . . .

CHAVOOR: We all came together afterwards. When we come to Istanbul, we were there over a year. By the time we got our papers and things, it took us, four of us, we came to, uh, America together.

SIGRIST: So the immigration process is a long one, isn't it? What is it, almost a year-and-a-half or two years at a time?

CHAVOOR: Oh, yeah. Almost, almost two years, yeah. Really.

SIGRIST: Tell me about the time spent in Istanbul.

CHAVOOR: Well, as I say, Istanbul is a big city, at that time.

SIGRIST: Was that the first time you had been to Istanbul?

CHAVOOR: Yeah. That was the first time I went. It's a beautiful city. But, uh, as I say, we had rented an inn. We used to live in one room, one room, for a whole year. Can you imagine that? Not only us. I

mean, a lot of people lived like that. And we're waiting. Every other day they go to the consulate, waiting for permission to come. And that was, that was another hard time, because, like everything else, everything is bribe. A lot of people, uh, they had permission, they got the, uh, papers to go, they go there. "No, your name is not there. It's at the bottom of it." It's at the top, but they put them at the bottom. You've got to give them money to, at that time, you know, it's like that everywhere, I suppose, I don't know.

SIGRIST: Well, and if your parents are prepared for this kind of situation, did they carry a lot of cash with them?

CHAVOOR: Well, the government wouldn't let us bring too much cash. They give you a certain amount of money to come to, as far as Istanbul. From there on, you're on your own. You couldn't bring any, we couldn't, we couldn't sell our furniture, we couldn't do anything. You've got to leave it there. It's their country, it belongs to them. So when we landed in the thing, Ellis Island, my father had seventy-five dollars. That's

all we had. I remember it was all one dollar bills. So they asked my father if he had any money, he says, "Oh, yes." (she laughs) He pulled out the lot . . . When I think of it, I says, oh, my God, seventy-five dollars.

SIGRIST: What I was wondering is when you were traveling in Turkey to get to Constantinople, I was wondering if maybe you had sewn cash into your clothes or, because you knew you were going to have to . . .

CHAVOOR: Yeah. No, no, no. It was open. I mean, we had money to hire a wagon and all that business, but, as I say, when we got as far as Istanbul, we had seventy-five dollars. I'll never forget that. And when we came here, seventy-five dollars, well, of course, my uncles and them, they all came and took us in, and Charlie's mother, God rest her soul, she was, she was ill at that time, too.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you remember as a ten-year-old. What sticks out in your mind about Istanbul? What really impressed you about that city?

CHAVOOR: Light. Oh, the first time we saw electric lights. We didn't have any lights in our country. We had lanterns, you know? If we went somewhere, we had to take a lantern. When we came to Istanbul, and we saw lights, and we saw the ocean. I'll never forget that. I'm looking at the sky, and I'm looking at this ocean. It looks just the same. I mean, you know? (she laughs) And the lights really got us. And then the, uh, cobblestones, the city was really made all, all of cobblestones. And they used to have these, uh, not wagons, you know, they still have it at the Central Park there, these, uh . . .

SIGRIST: Carriages?

CHAVOOR: Carriages, yeah. Made, every time the horse went, "cobble, cobble, cobble." (she laughs) We used to sit in there and go for a ride. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you attend school during that time while you were in Istanbul?

CHAVOOR: No, no schools, no. No schools.

SIGRIST: So how long, I'm sorry, how long were you in Istanbul,

again?

CHAVOOR: Oh, over a year.

SIGRIST: Over a year.

CHAVOOR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when either your mother or your father came and said, "We're finally going to leave?"

CHAVOOR: Oh, yeah. I remember one time my father came and he says, "I got it, I got it, we got the permission. We're going to go." So we had, uh, booked a passage, this big liner called S.S. Alexander. It was a Greek church, uh, a Greek ship. And we got on that, and it took us over a week to come. They stopped at certain places, you know? We stopped in Athens, Greece. I remember that, one day. And then we came through Italy, that side, too. I remember seeing Mount Vesuvius. That I remember. My mother used to say, "See that? That's burning fire." I said, "Why is it burning?" She says, "That's the way it is. Once in a while they get mad and they erupt." You know? (she laughs) And then when we came, uh, to New York, I

remember these, uh, flying fishes, you know? We used to watch from the deck. And we landed at Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me, before we get to Ellis Island, tell me where you slept on the boat.

CHAVOOR: Oh, we had a room. We had a little room. There was four decks, you know, like, what do they call them?

SIGRIST: Bunk beds?

CHAVOOR: Yeah. We slept on those there. And I got seasick, too. Oh, God, I remember that. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: What else sticks out in your mind about the boat? Was this the first time you'd ever been on a . . .

CHAVOOR: Oh, on a boat. It was a huge boat.

SIGRIST: Was this a frightening thing for a little girl? Was it exciting? How did you feel about being . . .

CHAVOOR: Exciting. We didn't get frightened because I had my family with me, my mother and father and my brother. Why would I get frightened? No, nothing. Nothing at

all. It's, they had, at night all the, uh, immigrants, you know, will say they get on the deck, and they used to play music, dance, you know? It was really fun, in a way. And then they had a swimming pool in that place, because everybody could, if you were on the first class you could use it, but you can't. We were on the third class. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did they have any kind of, a dining room for you people in the third class?

CHAVOOR: No.

SIGRIST: Was there a separate dining room?

CHAVOOR: No. They didn't have a dining.

SIGRIST: How did you eat on the boat?

CHAVOOR: Well, they had, uh, a thing, a restaurant there that you go and you buy, you buy these things, and you bring it in your room and eat it. That's the way it was. Of course, uh, as I say, the main dish was bread, polinga[ph]. You know, they make these little breads that they, in a house, we take that along with

us, and that's filling, you know? You take that
cheese and olives and you're all set. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: So you brought a lot of your own food with you on the
ship.

CHAVOOR: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did they have any kind of safety drills on the ship
that sticks out in your mind?

CHAVOOR: No, nothing.

SIGRIST: In case there were an emergency.

CHAVOOR: No, nothing that I remember.

SIGRIST: What time of the year is this?

CHAVOOR: This was in August.

SIGRIST: Of 1921.

CHAVOOR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: You said it took a week?

CHAVOOR: Just about a week, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

CHAVOOR: Oh, yes. I remember that, yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about that?

CHAVOOR: We looked at it, and they said, "There's the America, Statue of Liberty, the woman. That's America." (she laughs) That's all. We landed there and, of course, we came there and, uh, now examination.

SIGRIST: This is at Ellis Island.

CHAVOOR: Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Yes.

CHAVOOR: Then they go, they take you one by one, they examine you, your eyes, your body, whether, you're sickness, or, you know, you have, and then they put a big, big sign there, you're okay, you know? And we went all through that. And then, uh, I remember lunchtime, we were hungry, and they told us we could buy some food there. So we went and we got some food, sandwiches

and things. That we could see. But I said this to, they had a banana in there, and I'm looking at the banana. Well, I can see the sandwiches. We ate that.

I'm looking at the banana, and my mother's looking at it, too, and I'm saying, "Well, what is this?" You know? So just then one of the custodians, I think it was, he came, and he took the banana and he peeled it and says, "Eat it." (she laughs) I says, "How can I?" So that was my first version of bananas. And then after that my uncle, who was in New York, he came, and he took us to the, uh, Union Station, Central Station, to board to come to Worcester.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what Ellis Island looked like on the inside?

CHAVOOR: I remember it was a great, big hall, enormous place. But they had different, different rooms, you know? But it was not a wonderful sight, as it was, but it was all looking, but it was . . .

SIGRIST: Was it crowded?

CHAVOOR: Oh, yeah, yeah. The whole boat, with migration and

all that, was all kinds of people, Jewish, Russians, Armenians, Greeks. You name it, they were all there.

Yeah, there was . . .

SIGRIST: And you said, you alluded to this before that, it was here that your father showed his huge wad of one dollar bills, the seventy-five dollars.

CHAVOOR: Yeah. They wanted to know if we had any money. My father says, "Yes." He pulled out his money, and he says, "I got a lot of money, you know?" It's like a pack of candy. (they laugh) When we came to Worcester, my father's brother . . .

SIGRIST: What was his name?

CHAVOOR: Uncle Simon.

SIGRIST: Simon.

CHAVOOR: Yeah. He, uh, he got us off the train, and he brought us to his other brother's, John's, Georgie's, on Bancroft Street. We got there. Of course, everybody then comes to see us. "Ooh, they're here, they're here," you know, they all come. And, uh, we stayed

there for a couple of days, and then for a couple of, another day to my uncle's and my cousin's. Well, anyway, inside of two weeks, we had to have a house. I mean, there's four of us, where are you going to live? So, uh, one of our, uh, my father's cousin had a house, a tenant, cold tenant, empty, third floor, Betty Johnson's father. So we rented that house, twenty dollars a month. There goes the twenty dollars. Not much left. (she laughs) And then come September 1st, Labor Day, they called it, they stuck me in school, which I didn't know one thing at all. And they put me there, ten years old, you know, you're in the kindergarten, and they keep, they want to know if I could read. I could read, yes, but no English. (she laughs) And my arithmetic was good, so, and they kept elevating me, you know, until I caught up with mostly my age. And, uh . . .

SIGRIST: Tell me how you learned English.

CHAVOOR: In school, very fast. It's amazing how you learn. When you're young, you ask me now to learn it, he couldn't do it now. But at that time we spoke, my

mother used to say, "Not one word in any other language. English, English, English, English." (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you remember what your first word was?

CHAVOOR: Uh, I remember one word I heard that they used a lot. "Shut up!" You know, when they say that, and I'm, so I'm waiting. I says to my mother, "Are they going to give shut up?" Shut up means wine in Turkish, you know. My mother says, "No, that's something else," she says. So she asked my cousin, "What is it?" They say, "Be quiet." Oh, I says, "Shut up." (she laughs) I remember that. But they put us to school, and the teachers were very nice. I remember one, one young girl, she was Irish, tall, very good-looking young woman. She was the kindergarten teacher. So she took me, and she says, "Your name." "I'm Rose," she says, "you're . . ." I caught on what she said, Rose, you, I says, "Farida." "Farida," so she spelled my name. F-A-R-I-D-A. "That's you. Farida, Farida." (she laughs) So little by little we, we learned.

SIGRIST: Tell me about how your parents adjusted to this

country.

CHAVOOR: Well, it was really hard, on my father it was, mostly.

My mother was very, uh, alert on things. It didn't, she was always a go-getter. She'd buy hook or crook, by signaling or anything, she'd do her ordering, and she'd go and buy things, you know, and she did that. My father, he didn't like this country because of the language.

SIGRIST: Did he attempt to learn English?

CHAVOOR: Yeah, but, you know, at that age, when you're in your late fifties going on sixties, it's pretty hard to . . .

SIGRIST: What business did he get involved in once he got here?

CHAVOOR: Oh. Oh, this is another thing. He couldn't, we couldn't get a job for him. What could he do? He wasn't, sure he could read and write, but not in English. So finally Harrington Richardson Arms Company, here on Park Avenue, they used to make guns. So he got a job there drilling holes into the guns, firearms. That's how he learned. He used to hate it,

but he had to do it.

SIGRIST: I was going to ask, did he find this degrading to have to do this?

CHAVOOR: Well, it was. It was very, to us it was, anyway. But, and then, on the other hand, he used to say, well, we get money, we pay, they pay us, so, we have to have money to pay the rent. You have to buy this, you have to buy that. So it's pretty, and then, uh, of course, we got the house, and we didn't have any furniture. (she laughs) We had three rugs, I remember, and we had some beddings, comforters, you know? And our clothes, that's all we had. So my father's sister was married to an elderly man. One day he came to us when we moved into this house, he said, "Hadji," to my father, he says, "I'm going to take you shopping?" So my father says, "Shopping on what?" He says, "Furniture." My father says, "I have no money. All I got is fifty dollars left." He says, "That's all right. I'm going to take you." So he took us to this Fowler Company. It was a big furniture place. So he picked out a table, four

chairs, one stove and two beds, and a thing, bedding, you know? So he says, "Now, we're going to give you twenty-five dollars down, every week you're going to pay one dollar a week, bring it down." That's how we got our furniture. But, you know, that makes, he was, he sponsored us. That's, in other words, he signed. So every week I used to take a dollar to that furniture company. But my mother says, "It's worth it. It's nice. We got a roof over our heads." She wasn't despondent at all. We made it. So.

SIGRIST: You said your mother adjusted more easily than your father. Was there something that your mother simply couldn't get used to, or simply couldn't adjust to?

CHAVOOR: No, no, no. She was very, uh, very, uh, she . . . (voice off mike) Oh, yeah. And she wanted to go to school. She went to high school over here at night. They used to have a, an English school, you know? She used to read. But her mostly English was French accent. She couldn't lose that. I don't know why. It was so funny. Everything she'd read or write it would be always that French accent, you know? But . . .

SIGRIST: Well, she had learned French when she was young, too,
so

CHAVOOR: That's what it was, yeah. So, uh, she, to her,
adjusted. And then one time she heard that the
slipper company that my brother was working for, you
bring slippers at home and you baste them, you know,
and they pay a penny a thing, a penny a pair of
slippers. And we used to bring that every week, a
hundred, imagine, a hundred, a hundred pennies. My
God almighty, when you think of it. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about, did your family experience
any kind of prejudice in those first couple of years
because you were . . .

CHAVOOR: Yes. I'll tell you. At that time they were very
prejudiced. Especially my father used to go out, and
they used to say, they used to call him Turk, you
know? And he used to say, "What's the matter with
these people? Why is it, even if I am a Turk, why is
it . . ." Well, you know how kids are. They used to
throw snowballs at us. You know, they didn't like
this, they didn't like that. But, uh, eventually it,

uh, they got used to it. Well, to them, too, there were, they never had seen foreigners, I suppose, to them, over here. So they got used to us, too. They realized that after all we're human beings too, you know. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: In our last minute, I just want to ask you, how do you think your life would have been different if you had stayed in Turkey?

CHAVOOR: Oh, altogether different, too, I suppose. I don't know. I would have gotten married, I suppose, who knows where, who or what. (she laughs) I mean, mostly I gained more than anybody else because I was small, I came, and I was raised here, went to school. And, uh, got married. I was better off than any one of them.

SIGRIST: So coming to America was the right thing to do.

CHAVOOR: The right thing, yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, Mrs. Chavoor, I want to thank you very much for letting me come here, and . . .

CHAVOOR: Oh, you're welcome. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: And asking a few questions about coming from Turkey.
This is Paul Sigrist, signing off, with Farida
Chavoor, on October 25, 1993 on a Monday afternoon in
Worcester, Massachusetts. Thank you.

CHAVOOR: You're welcome.