

EI-404

RICHARD HERBERT

BIRTH DATE: SEPTEMBER 5, 1905

INTERVIEW DATE: OCTOBER 29, 1993

RUNNING TIME: 1:00:33

INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 7/1998

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: CHARLES MITCHELL, 7/2009

LEBANON, 1913

AGE 8

SHIP NAME NOT RECALLED; WHITE STAR OR CUNARD LINE

PORT OF EMBARCATION: BEIRUT, PATRA, MARSEILLES

RESIDENCES: BLAUZA

NORTH ADAMS, MA

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is October 29, 1993. It's a Friday afternoon. I'm in Pittsfield, Massachusetts with Richard Herbert. Mr. Herbert came from Lebanon in 1913 when he was eight years old. Mr. Herbert, can we begin by you giving me your birth date?

HERBERT: September 5, 1905.

SIGRIST: September 5, 1905.

HERBERT: Right.

SIGRIST: And where were you born?

HERBERT: I was born in Blauza, Lebanon.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Blauza, for me, please?

HERBERT: B-L, B-L-A-U-Z-A. B-L-A-U-Z-A.

SIGRIST: And whereabouts in Lebanon is that?

HERBERT: North Lebanon, up in the, the Cedars.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the town for me, please, what it looked like?

HERBERT: Farm. You wouldn't call it a town. Just farm. Farms were about two to three miles apart, and you lived, like they did, in the biblical days. What you found green, you ate it, and that was it. Mostly you lived, in them days, like everybody else. Nobody had any money. There was no work. You worked you own land, and you produced whatever you, you produced off the land to live in the wintertime. And that's how it went.

SIGRIST: Did your father own that land, or was it rented land?

HERBERT: It was owned by the patriarch. Patriarch is supposed to, in them days, to protect the inhabitants in that little village. And he gave them the land, they can build on it, but what you call, the buildings were stone, one room, and you lived like they did, like your forefathers lived.

SIGRIST: So it was primitive living.

HERBERT: Primitive living, yes.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the house that you grew up in?

HERBERT: Uh, made out of stone. Made out of stone. My mother came here in 1896, before I was born. She heard that, that she could come over here, and peddled pack on the back in them days, they peddled from farm to farm, notions.

SIGRIST: We'll look at that after the tape, please.
(referring to a photograph)

HERBERT: And she went back there. In them days when they came

to this country, back eighty, a hundred years ago, they didn't come here to stay. They came here to make a few dollars and get back there and better themselves, better their lives. Well, she came in 1896 and worked peddling pack on the back. Some months she would walk a hundred miles, farm roads. My mother had walked from North Adams, Massachusetts, to Barre, Vermont. This is about a hundred and seventy-six miles. She made it in six months, peddling from one side of the road to the other, and wherever they got a place to, anybody was generous to let them sleep overnight in the barn or in the house, that's the way they lived. And she made enough money to go back and build a house, which in them days she was living with the in-laws, and there wasn't enough room.

SIGRIST: Was she married when she came in 1896?

HERBERT: Yes, she had four children when she came in 1896. She was born in 1873, she got married in 18, 1889. She had four children. And in 1896 she made the trip to America.

SIGRIST: With the four kids.

HERBERT: No kids.

SIGRIST: Oh, she left them.

HERBERT: Left the kids.

SIGRIST: And the husband, too?

HERBERT: The husband, too. Because he was connected with the patriarch, and the patriarch had told him that he will take him to heaven with him when he goes, so he devoted most of his time and life with the patriarch. The patriarch is a high priest, high bishop.

SIGRIST: How do you spell that?

HERBERT: (he pauses)

SIGRIST: Is it "batriarch," B? (voice off mike) Like a patriarch, is that what you're saying?

HERBERT: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Okay, okay. A patriarch.

HERBERT: He didn't want to migrate with her, or they couldn't, he couldn't come because she didn't have enough money.

In them days you could come from the Port of Beirut to the Port of New York for fifty dollars. That's all you had. There wasn't luxury liners. You came almost like cattle on the boat. You slept on the floor, and on the, whatever they, they had a place for you to sleep.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

HERBERT: Julia.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

HERBERT: Williams, Williams.

SIGRIST: And tell me a little bit about your mother's background, her family, and what they did for a living, that sort of thing.

HERBERT: They did the same living as the forefathers did, worked their gardens, worked their land and produced enough for them to eat, and have some food for the winter, and that's how they lived. Uh, progress in Lebanon didn't come there until 19, 1950. They were still living like they did in the biblical days. All

of them, most of them, but the cities, they were, uh, progressing a little bit better than they did up on the hills, up on the mountains.

SIGRIST: But you're talking about, basically, rural people, people who lived out . . .

HERBERT: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Was your mother pure Lebanese, or was she of some other ethnicity . . .

HERBERT: Pure Lebanese.

SIGRIST: . . . that had come to Lebanon?

HERBERT: Pure Lebanese. She was born in Blauza in 1873.

SIGRIST: Now, when she came to America in 1896, did she have family that was already over here?

HERBERT: She had an uncle. And they used to write back and forth, different families used to write back how good it is here, and come on over, and you can go peddling and you can make money and you can go back, and . . .
(a telephone rings)

SIGRIST: We're going to pause just for a moment. (break in tape) We're now resuming with Richard Herbert. You said your mother had an uncle in this country.

HERBERT: Yes.

SIGRIST: What was he doing for a living?

HERBERT: He had a little clothing store that he used to sell to the peddlers. In them days they used to peddle pack on the back, take a hundred dollars worth of, they didn't have any money. Take a hundred dollars worth, he'd trust them, they'd go out and sell it. When they came back, they paid for that order, and then he would give them another order to go peddle some more, and they kept doing that, and they lived beautifully.

SIGRIST: Was he in New York?

HERBERT: He was in North Adams.

SIGRIST: Oh, in North Adams. Was there a large Lebanese population there?

HERBERT: Yes. Well, it wasn't large then. They started coming in. That was the year that, from, well, some came

from the mountains of Lebanon. They came in 1880. And they'd start coming in, making money, going back and improving their lives. And that's the way they lived.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever talk about that trip to America in 1896, or what her experiences were?

HERBERT: Oh, many times.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did she tell you about those early days in America when she was here?

HERBERT: It was rough, it was rough, rough in every sense of the word. They, they knew just a little English, like ten cents, five cents, and whatever they sold for so much. And good morning, or good night. They were taught that. Then gradually they weren't speaking their own language, they had to learn a little bit of English, so they did. And, um, my mother, in 1896, she went back in 18, 1898, or '99, and she built a, she built a house for us, and then she had four more children, and she lost three. She had four more children, and then in 18, early 1900's, say the 1900,

she came back to America. She waited another three or four years and took with her, as I used to hear her say, she took about, didn't believe in paper money in them days. They used to get the five dollar gold pieces, five dollar gold pieces. Well, she, um, when she went back, she took a tomato can, a tomato can full of them five dollar gold pieces that amounted to, she said, about five thousand dollars. And when you made, in four years, five years, you made five thousand dollars, that was a lot of money in them days. So, uh, she went back. She learned, she heard here in this country that the war, the World War One was coming on. And she, she rushed to get, to get her four children, five, and she begged my father to come with her to America, where life is much better. You could live a happy life. Over there, they didn't have any machinery to toil their gardens or plow. They had to do it by hand. And that was, that was really suffering. So he didn't want to come. So, uh, she went up to the priest, and she told him her story, that the war was coming on, that she wants to go to America, her husband wouldn't come with her, so she

told him that she's going to run away with the five kids. He said to her, "Can you make that trip?" And she says, "Yes, I can, I have enough money to go back." So he said to her, "Go, and God be with you."

So, sure enough, twelve o'clock at night, she woke up the oldest one, fourteen years old, she took him to the end of the terrace, or you could call it a terrace, this is of about maybe two hundred feet, and she left him there, she told him, she went back and got the second one, and the third one. And then she put the, she put us at the end of that terrace, and she went back to get the money, because she had it, she already had it. She had it secreted in the garden. She took it out before dark and put it in the pantry where my father wouldn't see it. So when she went back there to get the money she was fishing around the pantry and the pan fell down. She had been sleeping right alongside my father when she got up at twelve o'clock. I've often heard her say it was, say that that was the most brightest moonlight night that she ever witnessed in Lebanon. So she got the money, and she ran, and we had to travel through beast

valley. Coyotes, you name it and there is it down in that valley. But she, she had a, she gave a, my oldest brother, fourteen years old, she gave him a club, and she told him, "Any beast, anything come, you hit him." Now, I was eight years old, and my brother, the youngest one, was six years old. She had to carry him, a distance of about, I'd go five miles, up the mountains. Not a road, and not a cow path, through the woods. And she had already, when she left America, she met up with a woman that lived in the village where she was heading for that was close to the, the state road, they call it the state road. There was no automobiles in them days, horse and buggy. So she went to that lady's house. She had spoken to her, that it might have to happen, that I might have to steal my children to go to America because my husband doesn't want to come to America. He wants to stay with the patriarch. So, sure enough, she welcomed her in. And my mother kept watching through the window that when any coachmens come by she's going to stop them and tell them that on the way back to pick her up and her family to go to Tripoli.

Sure enough, there was a coachman had two priests that he was taking to the, to the big church there in the next village. This was about two, three miles. She stopped and she says, "What time will you be coming back?" This way, because he had already told her that he's taking these two priests, and this is about six o'clock in the morning. So she said to him, "On your way back will you pick me up and take me to Tripoli?" Because that's where she had to come, to Tripoli, in order to get to Beirut, that's the route to go to. So he said, "Yes." And she gives him two liras, that's ten dollars, and that coachman, he, many times he worked a whole year and didn't make ten dollars. So he says, and these priests weren't giving him not too much. So he must have, he went maybe half a mile and ditched them. Tell them you hoof it from here on. Got the two five dollar gold pieces, he went right back, picked us up. In the meantime, my father and his brother had went by the house. They're looking for us, because my father knew that she's running away. So when he, uh, she saw them through the window, waiting for the coachman to come by. On

the way to Tripoli, provincial police on the road. So my father and his brother stopped at the provincial police barracks, or whatever it was, and they told them, they asked them if they had seen a woman with five children come by here. They said no, but he said, "If you do, you hold them here." So now when the coachman put us in the coach and we got to that point on the way going to Tripoli, they stopped her. She got out, and she went inside, the little shed, like, and she told them her story, and she gave each one of them a five dollar gold piece. That was, that was a year's pay. So they said to her, "Go, and God be with you." Now, she gets to Tripoli, and she went over to one of her cousins that lived in Tripoli to put us up, because we hadn't slept all night. Because when she got to that house where she was supposed to, she had to, she already spoke to the woman that she's coming, we weren't there maybe two hours, not even that. So, anyways, when she got there she said, her cousin said to her, "Your husband and his brother were looking for you. You'd better get out of town." And they were really mad. So she gets back to the

coachman that took us there. She said to him, "Please, take me out on the outskirts of the town." His horses had been traveling over twenty miles, and they were tired. So he said to her, "I can't take you any further than on the outskirts, but I'll get you another coachman that will take you to the next village." So that's the way it was. One coachman would take her until she gets to Beirut. When she got to Beirut, she wanted to know a little bit about what to do. She's got five kids with her, but she's got enough money to bribe herself. So, uh, she went and saw a lawyer, and the lawyer told her, "I'm not going to send you on that boat that's coming in here two weeks from today. I'm going to send you on the shipping boat to Patras, Greece. And there you will pick that same boat that's going to leave here, you'll pick it up in Patras, Greece, because your husband is going to be on that boat looking for you." So when she went to pay him he said to her, "No, you don't." So he calls up, no, there was no phone. I guess he walked down to the dry docks, and he met the captain of the shipping boat, and he told them the whole

story. Because they're not supposed to take any passengers, only shipping, like wheat, flour. He bribed him, let's ride on that boat that's going to Patras, Greece, and in Patras, Greece, she could grab that boat that's going to leave, go to Beirut. We got to Patras, Greece, she was smart enough to put us up in a, like a tourist house, until the boat came. And we came to Marseilles, France. (he pauses) It was pretty sad, you know, for a woman with five children, but she had enough money to know how to bribe and get to where she's going. So when she got to Marseilles, France, we had to wait for a boat, I think one whole week, the next boat. Not the same boat that we came on from Beirut. That only comes to Marseilles, France. So from Marseilles we came to Ellis Island, to America.

SIGRIST: Before we get you over to America, I want to ask you some questions about growing up in Lebanon.

HERBERT: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh, first of all, I need to know what your father's name was.

HERBERT: John, Hanna, Hanna. That's translated John.

SIGRIST: And is that H-A-N . . .

HERBERT: N-A.

SIGRIST: N-A. And can you tell me a little bit, we've gotten a good sense of what your mother's personality was like.

HERBERT: Yes.

SIGRIST: Obviously she's rather adventuresome, and very determined.

HERBERT: She was one of the most courageous women that I ever heard of.

SIGRIST: What was your dad's personality like?

HERBERT: Well, in them days, the father was the boss. He held the whip. You do this, you do that, and you do this. Back a hundred, eighty, a hundred years ago, it was Hitler's life, not the beautiful life to live with husband and wife and children. There was none of that. You had to toil your own garden, your own land, in order to live, and that's the way they lived. No,

there was no, uh, no mills, no shop steward to bring in money, no stores to buy in. You had to go twenty miles, if you needed a gallon of kerosene, you had to go twenty miles to get the gallon of kerosene. That's the way they lived.

SIGRIST: When you think about your father when you were growing up in Lebanon, is there a story that sticks out in your mind about him, or maybe something that he did for you or for the family that . . .

HERBERT: One, one story goes, that I could remember. I don't remember my father because, you see, in them days the children didn't have the proteins and the vitamins and the care that it is today. You were on your own when you were, when you were a year old. You were on your own. You lived like the nannygoats did. Whatever you saw green, you ate it. And I've got to tell you, you begin to get used to it. You're half animal after living that way. But, uh, she, she had the foresight. That wasn't the life to live, in Lebanon. She saw how people lived here, and that's where she wanted to raise her family, and that's the way it went.

SIGRIST: Well, what do you remember growing up in Lebanon?
What, um, you described the house was one room made
out of stone?

HERBERT: Yes.

SIGRIST: What other things stick out in your mind about, about
being a kid in Lebanon, about your everyday life.

HERBERT: Everyday life. Well, everyday life, there was no
shower to take, no water in the house. I'd, I'd say
it was like a barn, you know? No equipment in there,
nothing, no stove. And you lived in, you had a, a
fireplace in the middle of the house. That's where
you burned, and got the heat in the wintertime.
Smoke, all through the house, smoke. Don't open the
door, don't leave the heat go out. Smoke or no smoke,
that was the life.

SIGRIST: And so it gets cold in this part of Lebanon?

HERBERT: I would say down in the valley it doesn't get cold.
You get snow, but the next day the sun comes out, it's
gone, the snow. But up on the mountains, it does
snow. My daughter-in-law had just come back from

visiting her parents in Lebanon. She says it was cold there.

SIGRIST: Did you raise any animals?

HERBERT: Yes. You had a cow for milk, you had a couple of nanny goats. If you were fortunate enough to have money to buy a couple of sheep so that you could slaughter them and have meat for the winter, you were all right. But, but they, as I told you, they were still living like they did in the biblical days.

SIGRIST: Um, what about food? What kinds of food did you eat at that time?

HERBERT: What you grow in your own garden, you ate.

SIGRIST: Did you have a garden?

HERBERT: The house set almost on a, on the upslide. Nothing flat. If you wanted a garden, you had to build a stone terrace. And that's, they had no foresight. What they knew from growing up, that's all they possessed all their lives. They didn't know how to improve. They didn't know how to do it that way, or,

to improve.

SIGRIST: So what did your mother feed her family? She's got several children, and what did you eat when you were a kid?

HERBERT: Everyday cooking. They used wheat a lot, and flour. They made their own bread. And, uh, what do you mean, cereal? There was no such thing as cereal.

SIGRIST: And meat was rare, I assume.

HERBERT: You're, if you were fortunate enough to have a few chickens, you killed one every time you felt like having chicken, and if you were fortunate enough to have a cow that gave, a little heifer, they use it, but that's the way they lived.

SIGRIST: You mentioned that your mother lost several of her children.

HERBERT: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Did . . .

HERBERT: Three in three months.

SIGRIST: Three in three months. Now, were you born yet? Do you have any recollection of this, I guess is what I'm saying.

HERBERT: No.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever talk about that experience?

HERBERT: Oh, many times.

SIGRIST: What did she remember about losing the children?

HERBERT: She remembered one, one, he was eleven years old. He was sleeping with my father up on the roof, the flat roof. And, uh, they didn't have no, a guard rail. So it started to rain one night, and thunder and rain, and my mother rushed up to tell my father it's going to start raining. And he packed up the quilts, the pillows, and he went down, and the boy rolled over and down onto a ledge and he got killed there. Another one, the daughter was about seven or eight years old, she got pneumonia, which they did, they didn't know what pneumonia, they don't know, there was no doctors, no hospitals. And if you were going to get a doctor, you call the doctor, you had to walk five miles up the

mountain, and the doctors weren't too progressive in them days. So anyways she had pneumonia, and she was burning inside. So my father had a, a little stand that had some arrak, and that's whiskey, white whiskey, white. Anise, you ever tasted it? All right. So she saw it, she thought it was water, and she drank some of that, and with the pneumonia, she died. Another one, he was so clever, he was twelve years old. He was so clever, instead of walking and taking the two cows to pasture them, a distance of a couple of miles, he used to tie the tails of the cows, and he would ride instead of walking. So my father claimed at that time, because I used to hear my mother talking about it, that he was evil-eyed.

SIGRIST: Evil-eyed?

HERBERT: Evil-eyed.

SIGRIST: Evil-eyed.

HERBERT: Yes. By a woman or somebody that was, he went by their house and they saw him clever enough to ride on the tail of the cows while they're going. So they

claimed he was evil-eyed, and he was struck in the heart, or whatever, and he died. So, uh, that's, that was in 1906. So she, when she came in 1906 and stayed, she came in, either 1906 or 1907, I used to hear her talking about it at the time, talking to different ones about how she lived. So she must have come in 19, 1907. She worked and went again on the same route, and she took with her that five thousand dollars worth, in four years. She went back in 19, 1911 or '12, one of the two. And she kept begging my father to come to America, to come to America. She figured that when he gets here he could see how others were living, he would live the same life. Over there he's been living the same life as his grandfather, great-grandfather, way back, distant, years and years back. So, uh, he didn't want to come. So that's how she picked us up and, uh, stole us from him.

SIGRIST: Tell me about your religious life in Lebanon.

HERBERT: Religious, religious. It's the Catholic religion. The minute you hear the church bell, you dropped everything. And we were working in the garden, you

had to run to church. And it was a church life.

SIGRIST: Was there some way you practiced your religion at home that you remember?

HERBERT: I do remember that my father, my mother was in this country working. I do remember him teaching us the prayers. I do remember that. But to remember what he looked like, I don't remember. I don't remember any . . .

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of the prayers in Lebanese?

HERBERT: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Could you say one for us on tape in Lebanese?

HERBERT: (he prays in Lebanese) (he pauses) Let me go to another one.

SIGRIST: Okay.

HERBERT: (he prays in Lebanese) I can't get through that.

SIGRIST: Thank you. Tell me a little bit about education in Lebanon.

HERBERT: No education.

SIGRIST: None. Could either of your parents read and write?

HERBERT: No.

SIGRIST: Neither of them.

HERBERT: No. There's no, no education. Uh, as I told you, the advancement in life, even almost, well, you know, the advancement in life, it was here in this country, was here many years before they did over there. But there was no compulsory to go to school. There was no school. Who wants to work for nothing? They couldn't get no teachers. There was no such thing as teachers.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when you were a child in Lebanon something you did for fun? A game, or . . .

HERBERT: There was no games.

SIGRIST: Some kind of an entertainment that you looked forward to?

HERBERT: You might take a stick and scratch the dirt here and there, but that's the way you lived, yeah. But as far

as toys and all that, and books to read, and your mother there reading you a story, that wasn't known of in them days. That wasn't known of. No. As I told you, they were still living like they did years and years and years back.

SIGRIST: So your mother, she'd gone back and forth a number of times.

HERBERT: Three times.

SIGRIST: Three times.

HERBERT: She came back in 1896, 1907 and 1913.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: And she gets you out, she gets you all to Beirut.

HERBERT: Yes.

SIGRIST: Your father is sort of in hot pursuit.

HERBERT: Yes. He got on the boat, because one of her distant relatives was coming over on that boat, and when they got here they told her that your husband was looking

for you, him and his brother were looking for you on that boat, and they were there for two days parading up and down the boat.

SIGRIST: Are you talking about the boat that went from . . .

HERBERT: Beirut to . . .

SIGRIST: Patras?

HERBERT: Patras, Greece.

SIGRIST: I see. Um, what sticks out in your mind about those, about the boat trips, because there are three of them, correct? One from Beirut to Patras, from Patras to Marseilles, and then from Marseilles to . . .

HERBERT: New York.

SIGRIST: New York.

HERBERT: Coming from Beirut, well, I do remember they used to unload, the hotel that she put up in, but they gave her the top, top floor, which they never rented for little or nothing, to house the five kids and her. I, looking out of the window I could remember they used

to unload the boats of watermelon that came from other parts of the world. They would be unloading them from one boat to the other, to the port. Uh, I could remember them tossing watermelons one to the other, men standing in the water, unloading. And I could remember, in Patras, Greece, they would be selling bread. Our bread is flat bread, but in Patras, Greece, it's a big, round bread. And it tasted so good, I do remember they used to have piles of it on the sidewalk, selling them like they did in Lebanon. I remember that. And Marseilles, France, uh, I could remember that the language was different than it was in Patras, Greece. But we didn't, we didn't leave the hotel, I call it the hotel, tourist house. We call it, we didn't leave it to go out here and there. You see, the mother was always with us, afraid we'd get lost. So she, she pretty well looked after us in Marseilles. Now we're coming to New York.

SIGRIST: Do you know the name of the ship that you took from France to New York?

HERBERT: When I asked for citizenship, I tried to get either

the White Star or the Cunard Line. It's one of those two, because it's, I could remember my mother talking, giving them names, the White Star Line and the Cunard Line. I used to remember her talking about those.

SIGRIST: Do you know how long the voyage was from France to New York?

HERBERT: One month.

SIGRIST: And what sticks out in your mind about that voyage?

HERBERT: That voyage, I know that when anybody died on the boat they used to wrap them up in a canvas, put a good, heavy piece of steel, steel railing with it, so that when they'd drop them off, they'd go down to the bottom, and they wouldn't be floating on top. I remember that they'd, and then it seemed that the whales knew that there was going to be a dumping off. And you would, that boat would rock when they dumped anything like that, the bodies. I remember, yes, I remember that the boat was rocking. And it wasn't on a small boat. It was one of the big jobs. And, uh . . .

SIGRIST: Where did you sleep on the ship?

HERBERT: On the floor. What do you mean, bed? No such thing.

SIGRIST: Where in the ship was that? Do you remember?

HERBERT: The ship had three floors. If you paid sixty dollars you can, it depends on what you paid. If you paid fifty, you're down where the cows are, where the cows, they used to carry to slaughter to feed the passengers. But if you came on the fifty dollar, that was way below. And, uh, but it was a beautiful, beautiful. I can remember that, that will never go out of my mind, when we heard that we're going to be landing in New York tomorrow morning six o'clock. And it seemed that everybody on that ship was to the front of the ship trying to get the first look at the Statue of Liberty. That's all you'd heard on the ship, the Statue of Liberty. America, America. Well, it was a beautiful, a beautiful feeling. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you know anything about America before you got here?

HERBERT: No, no, no way.

SIGRIST: Your mother must have said something.

HERBERT: Well, she, she mentioned that, about the food, that it was, the custard pie. She used to love custard pie. You could walk into a store and buy a pie for about twenty cents, pie, a beautiful toasted pie. And she used to mention about the food, yes, a million times better than it was over in Lebanon. And then you, you ate the same food day in and day out. Yogurt, they make yogurt out of cow's milk. You lived on that, and bread. And that's the way you lived. What the mother was eating, the father was eating, you ate. And if you didn't eat what she put in the dish for you, that's your breakfast the next day. (he laughs) Because they don't throw it away.

SIGRIST: What time of the year are you traveling? When you went through France to New York, what time of the year was it?

HERBERT: It had to be, it had to be late June, July or early August, because I can remember when we got off the train in North Adams we had to walk to my uncle's

house, and there was a store there had a display of cucumbers, oranges, out in front of the store. And it had to be because you couldn't get cucumbers in California in them days. They had to grow here. So I figured it could be late June, July or early August.

SIGRIST: Some time in summer.

HERBERT: Yeah, summer.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about being at Ellis Island?

HERBERT: Ellis Island, I do remember I used to hear them say, I learned that later what that, "Keep moving, keep moving, keep moving." And you had a tag on you that says where you're going, your name, and where you're going. They put a tag on you, like a tag on a bag of potatoes. And it was, "Keep on moving." My mother, when she came to Ellis Island, she was detained there for one whole month, detained there because somebody had to go down from around here, a close relative, to sponsor her, so that she wouldn't be a burden to the state. So she had to wait a whole month until my uncle, who was going to New York to do his buying, he

would stop in and get us out. She was detained there, but they paid her for being an interpreter for other Lebanese people. Because she had been here in this country three times, and she knew a little English, she could get along with her English, and they hired her, they paid her for being an interpreter for the Lebanese people. We were there for a whole month, and when my uncle came down, her uncle came down, I do remember that there was three judges sitting there, and, uh, they asked him how can you take, I learned this later on, because I heard my mother saying that, I learned it from her, they, one of the judges said to her, said to my uncle, "How can you support this family?" He said to him, he said, "I can support a hundred families. I've got a little clothing store. I've got a little farm that I grow and I go out peddling my fruit and my vegetables, and we're getting along beautifully." He said, "I know I can support them. And her children are almost, in a couple of years they'll be old enough to go to work." Because in them days you went to work at fourteen. You quit school. You had to quit school in order to make a

living. So there was no, not compulsory. When you got to fourteen years old, you can quit school. Well, that's what happened.

SIGRIST: What recollections do you have of being . . .

HERBERT: Down there?

SIGRIST: At Ellis Island.

HERBERT: Uh, I do . . .

SIGRIST: Because that's a chunk of time.

HERBERT: Yes. I do remember in the morning for breakfast they served three, two boiled eggs, and the biscuits, and coffee or tea. Uh, and, uh, the food was much better than the food I was getting when I was growing up. So we had to like, you had to like anything that they gave you. But we were there for a whole month.

SIGRIST: Were you staying with your mother somewhere, or were you separated in separate . . .

HERBERT: No, no. One room, one room. Uh, I think they brought in, uh, day beds into that room, about half the size

of this big room here, and we stayed there until.

SIGRIST: Did you see anything at Ellis Island that you had never seen before?

HERBERT: Everything at Ellis Island I had never seen before, everything. There were beautiful buildings in them days, and, uh, there were people from all over the world coming to Ellis Island in them days. They were coming in at the rate of, well, what was it, uh, the survey showed a hundred thousand a year, or whatever it was. They kept flocking in, coming to America. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever talk about some of the, her experiences as an interpreter?

HERBERT: She liked it. She liked it because, she was, she was kind of afraid that one of the boys or girls, she brought one girl and four boys. In them days, you've got to be examined by I don't know how many doctors, and if one is not fit to come into this country, you had to send them back, and that's what she feared. She prayed day and night that every one of us would

take that tag, bona[ph], bona[ph], bona[ph], bona[ph].

And, uh, when that, when she heard that judge say to my uncle, "Take them," she was relieved like you can't imagine, that she's ready to go, to call North Adams her home. But there was fear.

SIGRIST: Was she frightened that her, that your father might catch up with you?

HERBERT: Oh, she, when she got here, she took pictures of us, dressed us up beautifully. I did have a picture of, when I was eight years old, nine years old, she took pictures, and she sent him his ticket, and the pictures, and a letter. The letter got there, but the, a few days after he gets the letter, war broke out, no communication between here and there, no communication, 1913, '14.

SIGRIST: So he gave up pursuing your mother.

HERBERT: Yes. He gave . . .

SIGRIST: He never made it all the way to America.

HERBERT: He didn't have any money and, uh, he couldn't, he

couldn't come anyways. I have to say that. Because he, uh, he lost one eye. How he lost it, uh, they were dragging a gristmill stone where they grind the, from one town to another, and he was at the end of the rope, and I guess he must have, the rope hit him, and he couldn't see, only one eye, but I don't think that he could have came. Because they, you had to be, you had to be one hundred percent fit to come into America.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the physical exams, or anything that you had to undergo?

HERBERT: Oh, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: What, specifically, did you have to . . .

HERBERT: Your eyes, your throat. You name it, they did it. You had to be one hundred percent fit to come to America in them days. So, uh . . .

SIGRIST: It must have been boring, actually, for the five kids to, your mother's off doing her interpreting during the day, and the five kids are just . . .

HERBERT: Well, you were detained to that one room, and you couldn't leave that room. You couldn't leave that room. And, uh, her word then had to be fulfilled, or otherwise we might have never came in. So we, we knew that we had to do what she said, and we stayed in that room while she did her interpreting.

SIGRIST: So your uncle came at, her uncle.

HERBERT: Her uncle.

SIGRIST: So your great-uncle.

HERBERT: Yes, my great.

SIGRIST: And he claimed you all.

HERBERT: Yes.

SIGRIST: And then where did he take you?

HERBERT: He, uh, he went, he took us to the, uh, New York Central.

SIGRIST: What did you think when you saw New York City?

HERBERT: You have no idea what, like coming from hell into

heaven. You see the people in New York, and then, uh, like her uncle told her, well, she knew how to get around New York anyway, because she came to New York three times before. She knew how to get around. She was courageous. She, uh, with no schooling. But my mother was a nun. She was four years in the convent. She had a little, a little, uh, schooling, or guidance, and schooling, or whatever you might call it. And she was bright. She had to be courageous in order to do what she did. You don't get many women doing that. So, anyways, uh, we got to the, uh, New York Central, and he took us over to where, the sign read Pittsfield. And, sure enough, we had to stay there until the conductor announced the departation of the train aimed at Pittsfield, North Adams. We got on the train. She bought our tickets, and got on the train, came to North Adams. And I do, I do remember the going through Pittsfield. I didn't, years later, coming through Pittsfield, then going through Cheshire. Are you familiar with Cheshire? The trains had to go almost hitting branches of trees from here to North Adams, and I do remember that. Because, uh,

I was anxious to see everything, coming from Lebanon where there was nothing, and coming to where there was something. You're thrilled. Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, did you have a lot of stuff with you, or did you just have a . . .

HERBERT: Each kid had to carry his own blanket, his own quilt, and the clothes that he's got on his back, nothing else. The blanket that you covered yourself with, whether you slept in the woods, or on the boat. And on the boat you, there was no beds. You slept on the floor, on the blanket, whatever.

SIGRIST: And so it was important that you took bedding with you, then.

HERBERT: She had everything set beautifully. She had everything, the night that she made that trip.

SIGRIST: Well, she was an old hand at this going back and forth, so you knew what to expect.

HERBERT: Oh, yes, yes. She knew what to expect.

SIGRIST: When you got to North Adams, that was your final

destination.

HERBERT: Right.

SIGRIST: Who met you there?

HERBERT: Uh, no one met us at the, at the, we came to my uncle's house, her uncle's house, and we stayed there until he got us a house next door to him, and that's where, every year we lived in different houses.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what happened the first night that you were at your uncle's house, your great-uncle's house?

HERBERT: I was so happy, the kids, all of us, we were so happy that we're, we're coming to beautiful, beautiful places, you know, where the land was flat. Over there you, you lived on cliffs. It was hectic life there. I can't, for the love of me, I can't seem to understand how she went and built a house, cost her fifteen hundred dollars, down in that valley.

SIGRIST: You're talking about in Lebanon.

HERBERT: Yeah. I, for the love of me I can't seem to, after knowing what is here, and she could have concentrated,

instead of building over there, do the same thing that she did the last time, 1913, bring us all over. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me your great uncle's house?

HERBERT: He lived in a beautiful house. He owned it. He had a clothing store downstairs on the first floor. They lived upstairs, and he had four or five children. He was an energetic man. He, he wouldn't sleep at nights. When he had something to do, he did it, and he wasn't lazy. He, uh, he was a go-getter. If he thought that tomorrow he was going to dig the garden or cut the lettuce and put on his cart and go peddling, he was up. He was a, he was a hardworking man, too.

SIGRIST: Did his wife work also?

HERBERT: Took care of the family. Took care of the kids.

SIGRIST: Of course, now she's got two families. You know, she's got a lot of kids, and then you guys move in.

HERBERT: Well, we didn't stay too long, maybe a month, with them, until she, my mother got a house next door. The

people moved out, and he, we went in there.

SIGRIST: Tell me about how your mother went about making a living.

HERBERT: She worked, she went peddling but she couldn't do peddling because she had to go far out, like five miles, ten miles. She couldn't come back and take care of her kids because they were in school. So she got a job in the sweat shop, cotton mill, nine dollars a week. And out of that nine dollars, she had to pay three dollars a month rent. No, three dollars a week, twelve dollars a month. They paid rent by the week in them days. So she had six dollars to live on. What do you mean, doctor, in them days? She was the doctor. She was, you got a toothache? She'd burn a needle and kill the nerve in your tooth and you were all set. No such thing as going to a doctor. What do you mean, doctor? None of that.

SIGRIST: Tell me about starting school and what that experience was like?

HERBERT: Yes, it was a beautiful experience. We were enrolled

into the, the school. I do have to say that I loved the first day, going in there, being with a lot of kids, which you didn't, you played with no other kids other than your brothers and sisters back home. The next farmhouse was two miles away. The other farmhouse with the kids, if they don't walk it. But I liked that, it was thrilling to be with kids and everybody's playing, everybody's jumping rope, everybody's playing ball. It was thrilling.

SIGRIST: What was hard for you about school?

HERBERT: It didn't take me too long to learn the language.

SIGRIST: How did you go about learning English?

HERBERT: Listen to all other kids. There was no more speaking Lebanese. You heard, it was all, it was all, uh, English. You had to learn. Within a month or two, I patted it down, yeah.

SIGRIST: Were there other Lebanese children in the school?

HERBERT: Yes, there was.

SIGRIST: And Lebanese from Lebanon as opposed to born here of

Lebanese parents.

HERBERT: Not, one or two. But all the others were born here, born here. As I told you before, when they first came here, they didn't come here to stay. They came here to make a few dollars and go back and better themselves, better their lives. And, but gradually they liked it so well here, never mind, well . . .

SIGRIST: Do you remember what your first English word was, when it suddenly made sense?

HERBERT: That I, I learned too many of them at one time, so I can't. Naturally you would learn the bad word.

SIGRIST: When you were a kid in North Adams, do you remember experiencing any kind of prejudice because you were an immigrant.

HERBERT: Yes, yes. The Italians used to call us Turks, because Turkey ruled Lebanon until France, until they became, under the republic of France from, from late 1800 to 1945 they were under the republic of France. And they were doing all right. They should have stayed under the republic of France. But, no, they wanted to rule

themselves there. Now what's happening in Lebanon is the same thing that's happening in Ireland, the Protestants against the Catholics. And that's what, the Muslims against the Catholics in Lebanon.

SIGRIST: So you did, even in North Adams, which has a big immigrant population, between the different immigrant groups there was bigotry, you said the Italians.

HERBERT: Well, the Italians, they didn't like the Turks and, uh, but they got along all right. They got along beautifully.

SIGRIST: Tell me about your father, left over in Lebanon, and a little bit about what his life was like after you guys were here.

HERBERT: Well, my mother got, got a letter from her cousin, 1919, stated that, how my father died. And he lived for six years all alone in that house. Which I have to say that he might have died brokenhearted. So, uh . . .

SIGRIST: Had she tried to communicate with him? I realize because of the war she really couldn't.

HERBERT: There was no communication.

SIGRIST: The war, she couldn't.

HERBERT: No communication until, from 1913 till 1919 you couldn't hear. No, there was none of that.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about if your mother became a citizen or not.

HERBERT: No. She, uh, when she got to the age where she wanted to become, she got too sick, and she died.

SIGRIST: How old was she when she died?

HERBERT: Fifty-two years old.

SIGRIST: What year was that?

HERBERT: 1926. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Oh, so she was just here, what, twelve years or so.

HERBERT: No, she was here thirteen years.

SIGRIST: Thirteen years.

HERBERT: Yeah, thirteen years. Yes.

SIGRIST: Um, well, tell me a little bit then about, in our last couple of minutes, about the first job that you got here in this country.

HERBERT: I got a job in the Barber Leather Company where you rush a piece of cardboard and it comes down and prints the seat of a chair. Barber Leather Company, nine dollars a week, a dollar-and-a-half a day, at the age of fourteen.

SIGRIST: Had you dropped out of school at that point?

HERBERT: Yes. I had to, I had to drop, everybody, all the kids were dropping out. Everybody wanted to go out and make money. They didn't value the education in them days.

SIGRIST: Well, you needed the money probably, so.

HERBERT: You needed the money.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about what you had to do specifically, or what kind of a machine did you have to run, or . . .

HERBERT: A pressing machine, a press machine. You, you send the cardboard in, and the, the, uh, the press comes down and prints the, on cardboard. You've seen them, cardboard.

SIGRIST: Sure, a different kind of a design.

HERBERT: Right, yes. Uh, that, I did that for about six months. Then I, I heard that they were hiring at the Hoosic Cotton Mill, and they're paying two dollars a day. I quit that one, go to the cotton mill, sweeper, sweeping first, you do the sweeping, and then you, every day you would, uh, watch some of the workers on the, with the cotton, coming down to go through the bobbins, and you got, you'd have to learn how to catch that thread again to go around it. I did that, then I did bobbin, taking the full bobbins and put the empty ones in for the, uh, the cotton to go on the spools, the thread, go on the spools. Have you ever been into a cotton?

SIGRIST: Yeah. How long was your day, how many hours?

HERBERT: From seven to five. No smoking break. No coffee

break.

SIGRIST: Six days a week?

HERBERT: Five-and-a-half days, work half a day Saturday.
Twelve dollars a week.

SIGRIST: And were you, were you expected to contribute your
money into the household budget?

HERBERT: Oh, yes. That's what, that's why you left school, to
help support the house.

SIGRIST: So your older siblings are doing this also?

HERBERT: Oh, yes, yes. Each one had to, had to contribute
something so that the mother accumulated enough money
to buy a house. In them days you could buy a house
for fourteen hundred, eighteen hundred. Yes, she
bought the house, and she only paid eighteen hundred
dollars. Yeah.

SIGRIST: And that was the goal, to buy the house.

HERBERT: To buy the house so that you could have a roof over
your head, that the landlord doesn't come knocking on

the door every month, "When are you going to pay the rent?" So she did that, she was a, she was smart enough to do that, and she did.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever want to go back to Lebanon to see her husband?

HERBERT: No. She didn't want any part of Lebanon any more. But I assume that if she was still living today and went to Lebanon, she would like to stay there. Because today Lebanon is an entirely different country, in every sense of the word a different country, yes.

SIGRIST: Are you glad that your mother brought you to America?

HERBERT: Oh, just a couple of days ago, I'd say last week, before I went in the hospital, my son was at the hospital there. I said to him, "You know, Dick," I says, "your grandmother, she did the best thing she could ever do in her life to bring us away from that kind of a living over there and come over here and live a human life." You lived an animal life over there. I'd have to say it was an animal life,

especially in the hills. I'm not talking about the city. The city, they were living a little bit, they were a little advanced, more than in the hills. Yes, I said, "I'm happy that I brought my family up in a beautiful environment, brought them up." If she hadn't brought us over here, I would still be there, or dead. But she was, oh, her family meant, meant to her more than anything else in the world, even if she deprived herself out of many of the luxuries that she was entitled to, her family came first. And that's very rare. You don't see that many, many mothers would devote that, all of what they got for their family.

SIGRIST: Yeah, she sounds like an amazing person.

HERBERT: Yes.

SIGRIST: Mr. Herbert, I want to thank you very much for letting me come out here to Pittsfield, and ask you about coming from Lebanon. We find very few people that came from Lebanon, so it's a treat for us.

HERBERT: There aren't many left.

SIGRIST: There aren't many. Well, not many came, actually, comparatively speaking. Anyway, we'll talk about that. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Richard Herbert on Friday, October 29, 1993, in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Thank you.

HERBERT: Thank you.