

EI-418

CHRISTINE HAGOPIAN PARSEKIAN

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RESIDENCES: KARZY, CONSTANTINOPL
WORCESTER, MA; BRONX, NY

LEVINE: Today is December 10, 1993, and I'm here in Port Washington, New York at the home of Christine Parsekian. Mrs. Parsekian came from Turkey in 1926 when she was twenty-four years old. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I want to say, Mrs. Parsekian, I'm looking forward to everything you can remember of your story. We would love to have this as part of our Ellis Island immigration collection. So let's start at the beginning. Give me your birth date.

PARSEKIAN: I was born in 1902. No, 1902?

LEVINE: 1902.

PARSEKIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And it was January.

PARSEKIAN: January 9th.

LEVINE: Okay. And where were you born?

PARSEKIAN: I was born in a small town, I guess, Yalava, Turkey.
Yalava.

LEVINE: Y-A-L-A-V-A?

PARSEKIAN: Uh-huh.

LEVINE: Yalava, Turkey. Uh, did you live in Yalava up until
the time you came to the United States?

PARSEKIAN: No, no, no.

LEVINE: Tell me where you lived, and why you moved.

PARSEKIAN: That's a story. I, uh, when I grow up, we mostly
lived in Constantinople.

LEVINE: How long did you live in Yalava. How old were you?

PARSEKIAN: Maybe five, seven, seven.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about Yalava?

PARSEKIAN: No. Yalava is the boat that comes to the village, you know. It's not, it's important for the people.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. It's the . . .

PARSEKIAN: It's small, a small place.

LEVINE: Do you remember the house you lived in?

PARSEKIAN: No, I don't think I know those things.

LEVINE: Okay.

PARSEKIAN: Then my father died. My mother had to go to work.

LEVINE: How old were you then?

PARSEKIAN: I was, uh, seven, eight. We stayed with my sister, older sister.

LEVINE: Where was she?

PARSEKIAN: My sister was married other town, other town. Then we grow up. I don't know how. We care, I mostly was with my mother.

LEVINE: What was your mother's name?

PARSEKIAN: Marina.

LEVINE: Do you know how to spell that?

PARSEKIAN: M-A-R-I-N-A.

LEVINE: And do you remember her maiden name?

PARSEKIAN: Maiden name? Torosian. My mother's married name was Torosian.

LEVINE: Uh . . .

PARSEKIAN: Toros. T-O-R-O-S-I-A-N. Armenian name is always I-A-N ending.

LEVINE: Yes. So that was her name when she was born. Then she married, uh, Hag . . .

PARSEKIAN: Hago . . .

LEVINE: Hagopian.

PARSEKIAN: She was Torosian, then she married Hagopian, yeah.
That's right.

LEVINE: And your father's first name?

PARSEKIAN: Mikael.

LEVINE: Mikael.

PARSEKIAN: Mikael. That's easy name, in the Bible.

LEVINE: And did you have brothers and sisters?

PARSEKIAN: Two brothers, two sisters.

LEVINE: And what were their names?

PARSEKIAN: My, uh, older was my sister, Surpehi.

LEVINE: If you would spell these, it would be . . .

PARSEKIAN: S-U-R-P, E, I guess, H-I. I don't know, something
like that. Surpehi. And that's me, and the second
daughter. Of course, died, a few. They usually do.

LEVINE: A few died, children.

PARSEKIAN: The, yeah. Just two boys and two girls we were, I

know. The babies I don't know.

LEVINE: So the two girls were the oldest, you and your sister were the oldest?

PARSEKIAN: No. My sister was the oldest, then my brother. Then me, then another boy, Gregory. His name was Gregory.

LEVINE: That's the baby, Gregory?

PARSEKIAN: Yes, he was. He was, yes, he was. He is a story himself. He, he went to genocide, you know, the Turkish massacre. And, uh, they all died. (she is moved) My brother was six, seven, maybe, like that, and he came alive. Just, uh . . .

LEVINE: This is Gregory.

PARSEKIAN: Gregory, yeah. Then my mother died in, eighty-nine years old, he take care of her. He put in the grave, and that's what my mother wanted.

LEVINE: Well, now, you had one other brother. What was his name?

PARSEKIAN: Mard, Mardiros, Mike, I should say, English, Mike is his name.

LEVINE: How do you spell the Armenian?

PARSEKIAN: M-A-R, Mar, D-I-R-O-S. M-A-R-D-I-R-O-S.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So, um, let's see. So you were in Yalava, and then, until you were about seven.

PARSEKIAN: Seven, eight maybe.

LEVINE: And then that's when you . . .

PARSEKIAN: But, you know, Yalava, the people don't live there.

LEVINE: They don't live there?

PARSEKIAN: It's, uh, the boat comes, that . . .

LEVINE: Oh, the boat comes there.

PARSEKIAN: Comes. We, our village was Karzy, like the stone, you know.

LEVINE: K-A . . .

PARSEKIAN: K-A, kar, K-A-R-Z, Z-Y. Something like that.

Karzy.

LEVINE: And that's the village?

PARSEKIAN: That's our village.

LEVINE: And that was near where the boat came.

PARSEKIAN: Yeah. You have to go to the boat to go to your village, by boat.

LEVINE: Oh, so the village, you could only get to the village by boat?

PARSEKIAN: By boat, yeah. And at that time, it was separate. Only Armenians in the village, you know.

LEVINE: And what was it like in that village?

PARSEKIAN: I don't remember much. Because of my father's death, I had to go to some other much bigger town with ocean and everything. We lived there, you know.

LEVINE: So when you were seven and your father died, then you went to a bigger town. Do you remember that name?

PARSEKIAN: No. For a while I stayed with my sister.

LEVINE: In Karzy?

PARSEKIAN: No. That was another village, where my sister was married. And, uh, after I grow up, my mother took me, uh, orphanage.

LEVINE: How old were you then?

PARSEKIAN: Eleven.

LEVINE: So, uh . . .

PARSEKIAN: Eleven. I'd been in the orphanage until I was twelve, I think, because I had to be twelve to go boarding school, you know. Then I went one year to the boarding school, and the war came. It's hard to tell.

LEVINE: Let's first talk about before the war came.

PARSEKIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: You were, your mother had to go to work when your father died. What did your father do before he

died? What was his work, your father, before he died?

PARSEKIAN: Well, he used to go too much to Constantinople, you know, that's the main place for Turkey. I guess, he used to bring back eggs, thinks like that.

LEVINE: He would sell them.

PARSEKIAN: And bring back orange, lemon, something to, like that. We had a store.

LEVINE: Oh, you had a store.

PARSEKIAN: Yeah. We had a store.

LEVINE: In the village, you had a store.

PARSEKIAN: In the village.

LEVINE: I see. And the store was like groceries?

PARSEKIAN: Uh-huh. Grocery, yeah. It was grocery. They exchange things, you know.

LEVINE: I see. Now, did you, was it farmland around there?
Was it . . .

PARSEKIAN: No, no, no. It's residence. Nice, a small store.
All Armenians.

LEVINE: So your father would take, say, eggs, and . . .

PARSEKIAN: Go to . . .

LEVINE: Go to Constantinople, and come back with other
things.

PARSEKIAN: Yes, yes, like that.

LEVINE: And then in the store he would sell them?

PARSEKIAN: In his store, yeah. You know, like peppers, things
like that. Something that the village don't have.
Yeah.

LEVINE: I see. So, um, then your mother had to go to work.
What did she do?

PARSEKIAN: After my father died, we came, I went to my sister.
I stayed with my sister. My sister was a different
place. And then I grow up eleven. They didn't want
me, because I wasn't twelve. So after twelve I went
to orphanage.

LEVINE: Do you remember the orphanage? Do you remember things about it?

PARSEKIAN: Yes, I do.

LEVINE: What do you remember about that?

PARSEKIAN: I, I remember orphanage was good for me.

LEVINE: It was good?

PARSEKIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: What was . . .

PARSEKIAN: Nice place. The president was Armenian. His wife was Swiss, Switzerland. And, uh, we are, we were all right. We were orphan, of course, but we had a good education, religious, mostly, Protestant.

LEVINE: Was it Armenian Orthodox, would you call it?

PARSEKIAN: Armenian Protestant, no.

LEVINE: Armenian Protestant.

PARSEKIAN: Armenian Protestant.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what kind of activities. What did you do in the orphanage? What kinds of things did you do?

PARSEKIAN: In the orphanage, during the week, we talk English. Saturday, Sunday, we used to talk Armenian. So with the Armenian and English, it was easier to live together, you know. Newcomers, things like that, they don't understand. They come, somebody comes Tuesday, she has to wait until you talk to her Armenian. (Dr. Levine laughs) And tell her what you want, really.

LEVINE: You mean during the week you could only speak English?

PARSEKIAN: During the week, yeah, because it was Protestant. I think American, too, you know, American.

LEVINE: It was like a missionary place?

PARSEKIAN: Mission, yeah, you could say that, yeah. But with private school.

LEVINE: Yeah.

PARSEKIAN: It was private.

LEVINE: And you got a good education.

PARSEKIAN: Not so good, because I was twelve, I wasn't even twelve. I had to wait to be twelve to go better school. Then that I went, I went to better school, though. I finished, at twelve, I was more than twelve, and they took me. They wouldn't take until I was twelve.

LEVINE: Before you went to the orphanage, had you gone to school before that?

PARSEKIAN: In my village, you know, I have village.

LEVINE: What kind of school was that?

PARSEKIAN: Armenian.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Was it all in one room, or . . .

PARSEKIAN: No.

LEVINE: It was different classes?

PARSEKIAN: Boys. Side by side, there was two school, one is

girl, one is boy, and we, we went to school, I went to school there. Not much.

LEVINE: Did the girls learn different things than the boys?
Were the subjects the same?

PARSEKIAN: I don't know that much.

LEVINE: Yeah.

PARSEKIAN: Different what? By religion, things like that?
They have church, too.

LEVINE: Would you go to church on Sundays?

PARSEKIAN: I guess. I was small, you know. They used to take from my home to the, the church was very fancy for us, because we couldn't go regularly, you know. We have to go far to go to church.

LEVINE: Hello.

PARSEKIAN: (Armenian)

LEVINE: Let me pause here.

PARSEKIAN: Yeah. (break in tape) Church . . .

LEVINE: We were talking, we're continuing.

PARSEKIAN: We had to go to the village church, you know. It was a long walk, with the children. I guess we had to go.

LEVINE: And did you look forward to that, to going to church?

PARSEKIAN: Yes, sure. All the people there, we wore dresses, you know.

LEVINE: They would wear their best clothing?

PARSEKIAN: Best clothes, yeah.

LEVINE: What did, what did your best clothing look like? Do you remember what it was . . .

PARSEKIAN: Colors, colors. I remember those. You know, the colors. This is red, this is green, like that.

LEVINE: You mean like during the week maybe you wouldn't wear such bright colors?

PARSEKIAN: The beginning I think they had all together in the orphanage, then they stopped that. Everybody, when

they grow twelve, thirteen, they can wear anything they want.

LEVINE: But when you're younger than that, what do you wear?

PARSEKIAN: Oh, clothes.

LEVINE: But . . .

PARSEKIAN: Just like, Constantinople, like. You know Constantinople is the . . .

LEVINE: The capital.

PARSEKIAN: First, yeah, capital. So, yeah. They were nice.

LEVINE: Did your clothing change? As you got older, did the kinds of clothing you wore change?

PARSEKIAN: (?) dress. Only the colors, maybe. Then we get sometimes they had uniforms that they had to wear certain times.

LEVINE: School uniforms.

PARSEKIAN: School uniforms.

LEVINE: Um, okay. So, uh, you went to live with your

sister, and then you went to the orphanage for one year, and your mother was working then.

PARSEKIAN: No. I was orphanage two-and-a-half years I think, because I was finish my twelve year in autumn, the school start. I went to that school, just one year, you know, 1915. I remember so well. My mother made, they had new sheets, new beds, everything new. For one year I left everything there and had to come home, Constantinople. My mother was there working.

LEVINE: What did your mother do when she was in Constantinople?

PARSEKIAN: Housework, cook. She used to cook for an important person, that he was, uh, Morganthaus [ph], first (?). We went there, because we didn't have home any more. See, we left, then I had to go school. I had to come, that my mother should come Constantinople to take me home to the village. That's why it gets longer to go there. See, we used to sleep there.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

PARSEKIAN: It's night school, private night school.

LEVINE: And what was that school like? What do you remember about it?

PARSEKIAN: Well, that was a high school. If I graduated, it would be something. That's why I went. I guess that's why they sent, because, you know, people don't have much education in Turkey. So they want me to be educated, I guess.

LEVINE: And where was that school located?

PARSEKIAN: Adapazar.

LEVINE: Can you spell that, Adapazar?

PARSEKIAN: Mmm, take a pencil.

LEVINE: Here, why don't you take this, and I'll give you paper.

PARSEKIAN: Oh, I should take, there is plenty. (she writes)
(break in tape)

LEVINE: Okay. We're resuming again. And you say the school was in Adapazar.

PARSEKIAN: Adapazar.

LEVINE: A-D-A-P-A-Z-A-R.

PARSEKIAN: Z. Uh-huh.

LEVINE: And the education was good in that school?

PARSEKIAN: For one year.

LEVINE: One year you were there.

PARSEKIAN: (?) I left that. When you are young, you cry. I forgot my (?), everything.

LEVINE: Did you learn English there?

PARSEKIAN: Yes, at the (?) school.

LEVINE: So when you left there in one year, you were able to speak English?

PARSEKIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: You were . . .

PARSEKIAN: I used, because in the orphanage we used to speak English, see? Like really language.

LEVINE: During the week, in other words.

PARSEKIAN: During the week we had no permission to speak outside Armenian. I mean, it's just routine. So we can learn our English.

LEVINE: So why did you leave the school in one year?

PARSEKIAN: Oh, after the year is over, they took the school for soldiers, the (?). Everybody had to go home. At summertime, vacation time, you go home anyway. So my mother, at that time my mother was, my sisters, and she came just to pick me and take me to my sister, because when my mother works, my sister take care. She was, (?) promise. Just two (?), my brother, my younger brother and me. We were extra for my mother. The older boy was out. He could take care himself. My mother, my sister was married. That was easy.

LEVINE: So, um, do you remember, okay. So then you went to your sister's, your mother brought you to your sister's house.

PARSEKIAN: Yes.

LEVINE: From school.

PARSEKIAN: I stayed, no. When I came, when she came to pick me from Constantinople to take to the village, the war was, so I had to stay with my mother. We had a servant, you know. From their village, the whole village.

LEVINE: Do you, did you have any experience yourself about the war?

PARSEKIAN: No, no.

LEVINE: Did you see anything?

PARSEKIAN: See, no. I was lucky. I had to stay with my mother. There is no other place. I can't go anyplace. Then I go orphanage, that's fourteen, fifteen. I myself went someplace to take care of myself.

LEVINE: So in other words you would have gone to your sister's, but your sister's village was evacuated.

PARSEKIAN: I couldn't go to my, no, they went, yeah. They went. All day from, about that, you know. This new place. But those people, that time, they take care Armenians. They were nice people. They, it's the storytellers.

LEVINE: Well, um, is there anything else, is there anything that you would like to say about that time in your life when you, when you . . .

PARSEKIAN: I don't think, what can I say?

LEVINE: Well, you went, then, what? You went to Constantinople, and you . . .

PARSEKIAN: I stayed with my mother. Then after, of course, I grow up. We had to . . .

LEVINE: Did you take a job, then? Did you work?

PARSEKIAN: No. My mother and me, we had to open a business. We used to make, I did the machine, and my mother used to do sewing.

LEVINE: And what did you . . .

PARSEKIAN: That was business for us, make a living.

LEVINE: What were you making? What were you sewing?

PARSEKIAN: Sweaters. After I come America, I make the same thing.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh, uh-huh. So did you have a little shop?

PARSEKIAN: No, just a room, where we fold the beds, take off the beds, and we do the machine.

LEVINE: And then where did you sell the sweaters? Who did you sell sweaters to?

PARSEKIAN: They give you the wool, everything. And you, piecework, like.

LEVINE: So, um, so you stayed there until 1926, in Constantinople?

PARSEKIAN: Yes. Whoo, I forgot! (referring to the microphone)

LEVINE: Let me pause here. (break in tape) Okay. We're resuming again, after having a wonderful lunch of bereg [ph] . . . (they laugh) And cake and

everything. Um, now, what had you heard about America before you came here?

PARSEKIAN: Oh, that we were American. First of all, the language, you know.

LEVINE: You knew English.

PARSEKIAN: I knew English, and that came very good to me. You know, it's nice to help people.

LEVINE: Well, you were married when you came.

PARSEKIAN: Yes.

LEVINE: How did you meet your husband?

PARSEKIAN: Oh, that I stayed, I told that, matchmaker. Now, during the war everybody, all the young ones, the church, suggest them to go home and pick the girl they love. They don't want the boys to be mixed with Americans. That was their wish. So the ones that had cousin, uncle, sister, the other side, they match their brother or their, whatever, to come and pick the girls that their parents made, parents had in mind. So most of the boys (disturbance to the

microphone).

LEVINE: Wait a second . . . (break in tape) Okay, we're resuming after the microphone fell off. Okay. So the boys were advised to go find a girl . . .

PARSEKIAN: From church.

LEVINE: From church.

PARSEKIAN: From church, that was suggested that the young boys go home and pick their parents whoever they want, or they themselves pick a girl. And don't be like Americans to get mixed up with the other nation. So they did. So my husband, first of all, my brother, my mother knew that he's very energetic, you know, when he was a boy. Fifteen, sixteen, like that. So they, they asked, you know, my mother went to American school some other town, too, so she was different than the other ladies, because she knew.

LEVINE: Because she knew some English.

PARSEKIAN: Well, she, no. It was American school, too. That was American school, too. Not American, but ruled

like American school. So . . .

LEVINE: So your mother was more educated?

PARSEKIAN: No. She went to school, too. I wouldn't say educated, but it was in for the town to know that she's, she went to school, because then you go out of the house, they think that you take more better education, because the village was too small for people that they can pick the language or anything. It's worth it to send to school outside than the village. So these people, one was in the, you know, during the war, you know how it is, the young people are always in trouble. They were hold as a witness or as a wrongdoing for nothing, they're put in jail. So this family, her husband and her brother, both of them were in jail. When the war was over, they came home. You know, it was nothing, just because they're Armenians. So, and they say that to their families, that they won't stay in Turkey any more. So they ask my mother if they think that they can come, they can come with us. That time, France open her doors to go refugees, in France. You know,

French is very quiet. You don't hear about the French. But they did so much.

LEVINE: They opened their doors to Armenians?

PARSEKIAN: Armenians, refugee. Not the other people. So, and we don't have anybody now. Me and my mother and my small brother that we found, you know . . .

LEVINE: Tell me the story of your brother, what happened with him. (referring to the disturbance to the microphone) That's going to make a noise on the tape. Tell me the story about him.

PARSEKIAN: My brother, he was, how can I tell? My brother came with some other woman, that she's like a nun. She had the work of nun, Christian woman, that looks to the orphans. And this one, she used to go at night wherever the refugees are, to look orphans. Because, you know, they will corner like that, they cry, they are hungry. So his, my brother, because he knew that my mother is in Constantinople, he says he don't go nowhere. He was at that time eight, ten years old by the time the war finish. Uh, so he

says he won't go anyplace unless the teacher, they used to call her teacher, has finished the school, and I'm outside, you know. So he stay with the teacher, and they take him, it's a long story.

LEVINE: Go ahead. You're fine.

PARSEKIAN: The days came, you pick up his, she's going to leave. So he says, "(?), how you like to go to Constantinople?" "Oh," she says, "are you true?" He said, "Sure. If you want, I take you to your mother, if she's there. But if she's not there, don't be disappointed. She may have gone someplace else, and we can find her again." So . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

PARSEKIAN: Yeah. And they found each other anyway. I'm not going to talk any more. They found each other, what I was talking, now I forgot.

LEVINE: You were talking about, um, that you, I was asking the story of your brother, how he . . .

PARSEKIAN: Yeah. So naturally, halfway, somebody sees my mother. And before that the woman is talking the story, and this woman is there when she, listening to her. So she runs to my mother, and she says, "You know what happened? There was a boy with the teacher, and he says that my mother is in Constantinople. Maybe it's your son." So, yeah, truly, and these people knew us, because we were renting their house, one-room house, you know, three of us. So . . .

LEVINE: Do you remember the reunion with your brother?

PARSEKIAN: No. I don't think . . .

LEVINE: When you saw him again?

PARSEKIAN: I was at their place. I was (?).

LEVINE: So then your brother was with you, and your mother, after that.

PARSEKIAN: They found my brother. Naturally, my mother takes her home. We have no home. Mother and daughter, we have to go other places to live. There is no home.

So they found each other. Yeah. They, this is America, because my sister used to cry that I lost (?), how I am going to say my mother how I lost it. Imagine, her children, they were young, they died, four children, and this (?) lost.

LEVINE: So, um, tell, can you say anything more about the French, how the French helped the Armenians at that time, the refugees?

PARSEKIAN: Well, I stay only three months in France. My husband came from America. We got married, and we came to America.

LEVINE: Did your, your husband was one of the men that it was suggested they come and find an Armenian . . .

PARSEKIAN: No, no, no. My mother knew him, and my, uh, other friends that they asked my mother to marry. He was not strange. We knew who he was. Of course, when he came to America, a couple of years pass, but we knew who. By that, by the way, they rented our house, my father's, my mother's house, when they were fixing their own house. So we knew them very

well. My mother says so. I don't know that much.

LEVINE: But you didn't know him? Did you know him?

PARSEKIAN: No, I didn't know him. And he was nice, clean-cut young man. And we don't even know what was marriage, at that time. You know.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you thought when you first met him?

PARSEKIAN: He's nice-looking, yeah. He seemed to be nice, you know. So, what I'm going to say, my mother wants him, you know. That's the way it is in the old country, that time.

LEVINE: So he came from America, and where did you meet him? Where did he come to?

PARSEKIAN: Well, where he came, I was there, too. Where he came here, his uncle that was there, his wife. Mostly his wife wanted, you know, for him to be, my mother was a little slow. That is much better place, maybe, for me. I went to school, things like that, you know, they come, those things. But this

one neighbor of mine, she has something she can do.
So that was the marriage.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So when you, when you were in
Constantinople, then when did you go to France?

PARSEKIAN: Oh, 1926.

LEVINE: Right before you came to America?

PARSEKIAN: We had Christmas in, uh, Marseilles. In autumn, I
think August, September, that time, I went to
France. Then in Christmas was over, January was
over, January 9 I came here? Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, did you go to France on the way to America?
Is that why you went to France?

PARSEKIAN: Yes, from Turkey. I went Constantinople. I went to
France. I stayed there three months. We got
married, and I came to America, because it was easy
because it was soldier, you know.

LEVINE: Your husband was in America, but he was a soldier?

PARSEKIAN: Uh, he was during the war, my husband went soldier,

he was soldier. But after the war was over naturally, he was working wherever he was.

LEVINE: And then did you meet him in France?

PARSEKIAN: No. He came, he came, uh, to France, to me.

LEVINE: Yeah.

PARSEKIAN: Yeah. When I was there, he came. And there the rest, he knew when they were young, a couple of years he has been in America.

LEVINE: So did your mother come to America, too?

PARSEKIAN: No. Nor my mother, nor my brother.

LEVINE: So you left Constantinople by yourself to go to France?

PARSEKIAN: No.

LEVINE: No. How did you . . .

PARSEKIAN: We stay in Constantinople. Oh, that part is, uh . . . No, we went to France, my mother, my brother, too. My young brother, and my mother, and

the rest of the people, thousands of people went to France that year. Everybody that came from, uh, genocide, they went to France. France took in people.

LEVINE: So did you stay with a French family?

PARSEKIAN: No, I was with my mother.

LEVINE: I mean, where did you . . .

PARSEKIAN: From Turkey, from Constantinople, I went with my mother and brother to France, and the family stayed, they asked us to go. They went before us, because France was different passport.

LEVINE: I see. Now, you mentioned that there was an immigrant, a Greek girl, that you heard about.

PARSEKIAN: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Tell that story for me.

PARSEKIAN: Oh, that's very sad. This girl used to work, for a while I work in American home, too, in Robert College. You must know, it's American college.

LEVINE: Robert?

PARSEKIAN: Robert College. You call, there is a girl college, too, but there was boy college. We worked there. There was a husband and wife, American, teachers. I worked there, but she worked in, with different professor. He was German, and they had a five-year-old girl. For that girl, they always change maids. They used to change for the language. And in that one year that girl picked the language up, she was very bright child. Five, six years old. So, I got tired.

LEVINE: Well, you had heard, when you were still in Constantinople, didn't you hear about this Greek girl, about, uh . . .

PARSEKIAN: Yeah. The Greek girl used to work with, when I said that they had the child?

LEVINE: Yes.

PARSEKIAN: She worked for them. And, of course, that child, she talked Greek. She learned Greek, too. She had to, because that's the way Mama took her in.

So . . . I got tired. I don't think I can talk any more.

LEVINE: Well, let's see.

PARSEKIAN: And she, you know, one husband and wife. She really liked me, you know. She knew the Greek man. Somebody told her. They got married. After they got married, and this girl, the Greek girl, used to work, so she had some money to go to America. So they tell her, "Why not come America?" That time I think America was open. There was no quota, you know. So they took the girl until Ellis Island, and they left it there. And look at all the money she spent to go to America, everything, and she was left in Ellis Island. This story, there are few people that I know, it happens to them. Most of them, they suicide after, you know, on the boat. They said they, she suicide. They come, they talk to you, you know, this one is suicide, because then they go home they have no money, they have no home.

LEVINE: So you had heard that. Before you even left for America, you had heard that story.

PARSEKIAN: We used to hear in Turkey, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, uh, so when you were in France, do you remember anything about being in France, anything that struck you as different from anything you knew before?

PARSEKIAN: No, no, no. French people are very, I don't know for me, in that three months, (?), you know.

LEVINE: They treated you nicely, and made you feel welcome.

PARSEKIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: So then, uh, you met your husband, and then you, you said goodbye to your mother?

PARSEKIAN: Yes. (she is moved)

LEVINE: And where did you leave from? Where did you leave on the boat?

PARSEKIAN: Marseilles, France.

LEVINE: Marseilles? Not Cherbourg.

PARSEKIAN: Cherbourg. The boat comes there.

LEVINE: Yes.

PARSEKIAN: So, from Marseilles, I went to Cherbourg, take the boat. What's the name of the boat?

LEVINE: You didn't have it down here. Do you remember?

PARSEKIAN: I forgot.

LEVINE: You forgot. Uh-huh. That's okay.

PARSEKIAN: I says sounds me like Luce . . .

LEVINE: Lusitania?

PARSEKIAN: Lusitania.

LEVINE: Really?

PARSEKIAN: It's, sometimes when I was thinking about it, it come to me like Lusitania.

LEVINE: Oh, well, then . . .

PARSEKIAN: Maybe.

LEVINE: Yeah, good.

PARSEKIAN: But, of course, there is a doubt it's not right in there.

LEVINE: So did you, were you examined before you got on the boat?

PARSEKIAN: No, no. We came to Ellis Island. It was around six o'clock. They had almost finished their supper when I went. My turn came to go, because one by one was first checkup.

LEVINE: Well, tell me first about the story about coming into the New York Harbor, when everybody wanted to see the Statue of Liberty.

PARSEKIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And what your husband . . .

PARSEKIAN: Both of us, we went upstairs on the boat, which we shouldn't have done. Because they ran after us, "Don't go up, don't go up." (?), what we know? We don't know nothing. The harbor we saw in Turkey, too. Turkey is, has a big harbor, too. So we lived that half because they called us back. See, we went

up there, we had no permission to go up. I didn't know. So they, not only, there's a few people with us. That's all.

LEVINE: Well, tell what your husband said about everyone rushing, that you, that you might get crushed. Remember that? About, he said everybody was so excited . . .

PARSEKIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: That maybe you shouldn't go see the statue.

PARSEKIAN: Oh, yeah. We went (?). We went upstairs. We were going someplace to stand by and see. So he said, "Oh, you're going to see the (?) on the boat, that big (?) on the boat. You don't have to see it on the boat. You go after." But we didn't. We went to Worcester.

LEVINE: But why didn't he want you to go and look at it then?

PARSEKIAN: Because they were calling us to come down from the boat. He says, "You can see other times." You

know.

LEVINE: Okay. So when you first got to Ellis Island, what was your impression?

PARSEKIAN: Like every place. It wasn't much difference. Only it was big, big spaces. And, of course, I was secure, like, you know. I says, it won't happen anything, you know. It's different. You don't feel lost. You feel that you're seeing some things. You are not in Turkey. That's why, maybe.

LEVINE: Well, now, did you get separated from your husband when you were at Ellis Island?

PARSEKIAN: One night, yeah. When we came, uh, they could take us, they take me, they took him out. They went out for (?), and they took me to the dining room to eat. And, uh, I said, like this, you know, I'm watching around them, the garcon, the lady that brought that food said, "Aren't you going to eat?" I says, "Oh, I don't feel like." Oh, when I say I don't feel like she was so surprised that I talked English. But I, you don't feel nothing, you know. Your mind is in (?). Anyway, I ate. We went to the hall

where, what you call?

LEVINE: The Great Hall?

PARSEKIAN: Dancing, things like that, music.

LEVINE: Tell about the . . .

PARSEKIAN: Very happy.

LEVINE: Tell what was going on. What was happening?

PARSEKIAN: Happiness. It was going happiness. But you see in a corner, somebody's talking to someone, she's crying, somebody talking to other one, what's happening. They all had things to say said. Now, this Greek girl was tall, sure, when they go to America they're gonna take her with them and, uh, she gonna take, she gonna marry who she chooses. It wasn't like that, because there were a few people, young husband and wife, maybe family, too. I didn't see any children, though. That they, they don't want to stay. They cry. They are going back. People that was there, people that they stay a month, you know. And the month was the last stop.

After a month they would go home. People are crying for their, very sad, they part. But the other part, they were musicians, dancer, happy, happy, happy. I never saw in my life like that happiness. Anyway, in Turkey you don't.

LEVINE: So you stayed overnight then.

PARSEKIAN: Overnight I stayed there. Then next day we had breakfast, just (?). Everybody's quiet, eating, not eating. Then we came for examination. You know, your health, everything. Then there was American, young, about forty, forty-five maybe. He says, "You know you're going to be, help me, you're going to help me." I says, "How?" I said, "Just because you said how." (she laughs) You know. I said, "Ooh, I'd be glad to." You know, I was happy that I'm going to help her. So I just feel that day. So I help her, whatever it was said, and I used to say that they don't know, they, people don't know. You know, in Turkey the Protestant schools are free. Not free, it's open. There's no, you can't say that you can't go there. They take you. So that was

nice for me, you know. I felt something.

LEVINE: You felt like you, because you knew English . . .

PARSEKIAN: Yeah. That was very helpful, though. After that, when I had Mary, Mary I had too soon. I get used to, they used to call me, and they used to go help them, people that are buried, they don't know English.

LEVINE: You used to go, you went back to Ellis Island?

PARSEKIAN: No, no. When I had Mary. They called me in the hospital, too, so I can talk to them, that they can say things.

LEVINE: Do you remember any of the things that you had to translate? What kinds of things were they talking about?

PARSEKIAN: Their things. You know, she don't feel good, she, her (?) is full, there is pain, things like that. Whatever it's needed to talk.

LEVINE: And so that day when you were there, you went over to the hospital to interpret.

PARSEKIAN: No, this was . . .

LEVINE: Oh, in Worcester.

PARSEKIAN: Yeah, in Worcester.

LEVINE: In Worcester. I see, you interpreted.

PARSEKIAN: Ellis Island, now, everybody that's husbands were out, they came, and the line was finished, checkup, for checkup. And, oh, and the doctor says you don't remember, she told me, remember you've been very useful to me, and I hope you continue to be. There are things you never forget. Of course, things like there are worse (?) you (?).

LEVINE: So in other words when you first came to the United States and you were still on Ellis Island, you were useful to the . . .

PARSEKIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: By interpreting Armenian language.

PARSEKIAN: Yeah. That was very nice. I liked it. You know, because if you talk to them, they wait for something

to be free. And they cry. (disturbance to the microphone) So many people cry and cry.

LEVINE: So then your husband came and picked you up.

PARSEKIAN: Yeah. When my husband came, around ten o'clock, I believe it was, because he's very fast that way. So he went, oh, he went to hotel, (?). We went to, outside. He says we have to get for the train, and I'm not going anyplace. We can't go anyplace, because some other time maybe we come to New York. And then we came to live in New York anyway. So we went for the time train. It got dark, you know. It's January, short days. It got dark. Now we are going to Worcester by train. So disappointing, the way, you know. Dark, snow is full, they haven't seen, New York was dry, clean, everything. Finally we found the house, just a regular house. I thought it would be different.

LEVINE: What did you expect?

PARSEKIAN: I expect more like Turkey. There is big, big houses. This was, Worcester was, you know, regular,

regular house.

LEVINE: So you were a little disappointed.

PARSEKIAN: It was dark. Disappointed, from the streets. All, in Turkey, with the light, electric, everything there is. I was so disappointed. Black, dark. How we going to go find ourselves? I don't know where I'm going. He said, "I know where I'm going."

LEVINE: So then what? Where did you, when you got to the house, what was the house like inside?

PARSEKIAN: Well, nice. We had our own room, fixed up nicely. I know her from the other side. I know her from (?). I, I was young when she used to come one town to there, they have picnics, things like that, they come to each other. I was young to remember. And I knew her name. So we stayed there until she bought a house, and we move in, three-family house. I stayed there five years, then for depression we came to New York.

LEVINE: And what was your husband doing for work in Worcester?

PARSEKIAN: He was working in a factory where they made guns.
That much I know.

LEVINE: And do you remember anything about Worcester for
those five years? What was it like to live there?

PARSEKIAN: Because, uh, we were out of the town, not near the
stores or church. I have (?) to go to church. I
didn't go often. But, uh, like, regular. I
wouldn't say special, because it was a regular
place.

LEVINE: But you were able to use your English in hospital?

PARSEKIAN: Oh, yeah, to all of them. That was in the place.
That was, all because I made the talking, you know.
The writing, the reading, it was too soon when I
left school, but the talking was all right. (she
laughs) That's what the clerk said in the, when I
got my citizen papers. He says, "You're good
talking, but where is the writing?"

LEVINE: So when did you become a citizen?

PARSEKIAN: Oh, right away. I didn't stay long, because my

husband was a citizen. They didn't give me trouble.

LEVINE: Did you go to classes?

PARSEKIAN: No.

LEVINE: To learn about the United States, to take the test?

PARSEKIAN: No. Just, he was guaranteed.

LEVINE: Oh, you became a citizen because your husband was.
Uh-huh.

PARSEKIAN: Well, of course, you read something, but not very
important.

LEVINE: So, um, then why was it that you moved to New York,
you and your husband?

PARSEKIAN: For depression. All the factories were closed. How
we're going to live? So I says we have to go to New
York, because over there I can wash dishes at least.
That's why we came.

LEVINE: And where did you go in New York?

PARSEKIAN: In New York, too, I had friends, a friend that

worked with my mother in that house. I stayed when I was alone. I stayed with my mother in that house. There was another lady, and I knew her. They came, six people. They came to America. Three one side, three, they were sister and brother. So their aunt bring them with some kind of church anyway. I don't know. Lutheran church or something.

LEVINE: And where in New York were you? Where?

PARSEKIAN: Mostly, now I forgot my New York. I was on Washington.

LEVINE: In the Bronx.

PARSEKIAN: Huh?

LEVINE: In the Bronx?

PARSEKIAN: In the Bronx? What was Washington Avenue? (voice off mike: Yeah.)

LEVINE: Washington Avenue.

PARSEKIAN: Washington Avenue.

LEVINE: And so, uh, then what did your husband do for work

when he got there to (??)?

PARSEKIAN: He learn how to press, tailor. That work. He made a living.

LEVINE: And did you have any children by then?

PARSEKIAN: I had Mary. I had Mary, no, I had Mary in Worcester. I had Mary in Worcester, because we stayed there five years, then we came to New York.

LEVINE: And then in the Bronx, did you have more?

PARSEKIAN: In the Bronx I had Christine, the one that (??).

LEVINE: Now, do you have grandchildren now?

PARSEKIAN: Ah, I have two grandchildren. Now I'm going to talk big. One is (??) college, graduating. He's, he's Master. He's going to be Master college. And the other in Hofstra College, and this one, the neighborhood college. We didn't let her go.

LEVINE: Now, let me ask you this. What difference do you think it made in your life to have started out Armenian and gone to Constantinople and then married

and come here and live in America. What difference do you think that . . .

PARSEKIAN: I have no time to think about myself. I just think that I had to make a living myself. That's America for you.

LEVINE: Did you have, did you work when you were here?

PARSEKIAN: Oh, sure. Needle.

LEVINE: The same thing you did in Constantinople.

PARSEKIAN: Yeah. Constantinople was machine, it was better, what I was doing.

LEVINE: What did you do with the needle here for work?

PARSEKIAN: Let's see. The beginning I think we did scarves, uh, the shrinks, they call? There's something on the scarf.

LEVINE: The fringe?

PARSEKIAN: The fringe.

LEVINE: And you did it at home, or . . .

PARSEKIAN: No. We used to bring home, because we have no mother, too, the children. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Oh. Uh-huh.

PARSEKIAN: I can't understand how they bring these children in and leave it, and they go to (?). Ahh. Thank God.

LEVINE: Is there anything else you'd like to say before we finish?

PARSEKIAN: I think that's it, no? Well, God Bless America. It's the only thing I have to say.

LEVINE: Well, that's a very . . .

PARSEKIAN: We all have ups and downs. I didn't fall, that's the best thing.

LEVINE: Well, thank you very much. I think . . .

PARSEKIAN: I'm tired.

LEVINE: I'm talking to Christine Parsekian, and it's December 10, 1993. Mrs. Parsekian is ninety-two.

PARSEKIAN: Ninety, well, ninety-two, January next month,

ninety-two.

LEVINE: You're ninety-one, you'll be ninety-two in January.
And I thank you so much for talking with me.

PARSEKIAN: I thank you.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service.

PARSEKIAN: I never thought I would talk to someone so much.
I'm not much talker.