

EI-486
CARNEY (KARNIG) POSTOIAN
BIRTH DATE: DECEMBER 10, 1908
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INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.
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TURKEY (ARMENIAN), 1921
AGE 10

SHIP: "THE MEGALI HELLAS"
PORT: ISTANBUL
RESIDENCES:
TURKEY: ERZUROM
US: WATERVLIET, NY

HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mr. Postoian,s wife, Charlotte, is also present.

SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Saturday, July 2, 1994, a beautiful Saturday morning. I'm in Watervliet, New York, in upstate New York, with Carney Postoian. Mr. Postoian is an Armenian born in Turkey, came to this country, you arrived October 7, 1921. You were approximately ten years old. You're not sure, because you don't know your exact birth date. Well, anyway, thank you very much for having me. You may hear, for people listening to the tape, you may hear some outside noise. There's an open window near us. And Mrs. Postoian is also with us. Anyway, Mr. Postoian, can we begin by you explaining to me when you think you were born.

POSTOIAN: Well, that I couldn't tell you, because during the massacre, you know, Armenian massacre, 1915, well, I must have been a very small child. And what happened, what I got, how I got into Arabia, Aleppo, that I don't know.

SIGRIST: Well, before we get into that, just, what date do you use as your official birth date here in this country?

POSTOIAN: Uh, December 10, 1908.

SIGRIST: And how was that arrived upon? How did you decide on that date?

POSTOIAN: How did I decide on that date? (he laughs) To be honest with you, every time I went to a school, people used to ask me how old are you, when is your birthday, and I had no recollection of my birthday. So I had to make a date. So happen to be December 10, 1908, and it stuck

with me to this day that I'm living. (he laughs) And everything I own, all my insurance, all went through 1908, December 10. So when I was age of sixty-five, I was requiring for Social Security, I went to the Social Security Department, asked for my retirement, and the birthday question came again. So I told them I have -- born in the other country. The only proof I got, my citizenship paper, and my driver's license. She says, "That's not enough." I says, "What am I gonna do?" She says, "Why can't you get your school record?"

So I happened to know the -- one of the teachers, which lives directly across the way where I live, and their children used to come over and play with my daughter. I says to her, her name was Mrs. Lardigan. She was a teacher in the school, Watervliet High School, teacher. So I ask her, "Can I get my record from the school?" She says, "I'll see what I can do for you, Carney." So after a few days it turned out to be that my record happened to be in the school Eight, and the school Eight burn right down to the ground. I have no record to show. So that's what I told to Social Security Department, the man that was in charge of it, see. Well, he says, "Mister, that's not enough." So he got me a little angry. I said, "Man. I came in this country very young age. I was never a burden to the government. I had a little business of my own. Not only I supported myself, I had people employed for me, and I support them. Today's my turn to get my Social Security, I'm deprived by my rights."

He says to me, "Mister, you're one of those unfortunate persons." He says, "The only way we can give it to you on your age of sixty-two." So I had no choice. I think they deduct I don't know how much out of my thing, so I went on sixty-two and got my Social Security. To this day, I'm living on a sixty-two basis. If I figure my age at their sixty-two, I'm not eighty-four or five, I'll be somewhere's around eighty-two, eighty-three. (he laughs) So that's the story of it.

SIGRIST: I appreciate you telling the story, because I suspect that a lot of people have been in your situation also, who didn't have actual birth certificates. And I just want to pause just for one moment. (break in tape) All right. We're now resuming with Carney Postoian. Mr. Postoian, what was your name in Turkey?

POSTOIAN: My name was Carnick.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that please?

POSTOIAN: C-A-R-N-I-C-K. There's two, three ways of spelling. K-A-R-N-I-G, too.

SIGRIST: Okay. And, um, middle name, any other name?

POSTOIAN: No, I never had, I don't remember. If they had, I don't remember.

SIGRIST: What's the earliest memory you have in Turkey before you went to Aleppo, if anything?

POSTOIAN: Well, I happened to come from a very large family. We have a, what we call our town book, the part of the Turkey, Erzinkan, Turkey. Erzurom, or Erzinkan in Turkey.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

POSTOIAN: I think E-A--- E-A-R-Z-G-A-N. Erzingan. Something like that. We happened to be one of the little villages of that area. And our family, according to the book which we have, our, we had some sort of an organization in our little village, and the organization went on and on, and people were living in America, actually were supporting that organization, sending the money from here to over there to carry their org-- organization on. And, uh, so they had written a book. My family alone, it's one hundred and eight-nine Postoians in that town. I'm the only male survivor and three girls are saved. The rest of them were what happened, massacred, killed, nobody knows. So when you're asking me my date, how could I give you my date?

SIGRIST: Do you remember the house that you lived in?

POSTOIAN: No.

SIGRIST: No. Your memories are very vague.

POSTOIAN: I tell you how I remember. I had an aunt and uncle in this city of Watervliet, which they brought me over, see. And, uh, of course, they used to speak of the town people, and this and that, and it was daily conversation all the time. So more or less, you know, as you grow up, you heard the same story over and over again, as if I was there.

SIGRIST: Do you remember some of the stories your aunt told you about the town? Does anything come to mind?

POSTOIAN: In our story in the town? Well, the story in our town happened to be a village, oh, maybe three hundred, three hundred and twenty-five families. And, uh, they're living -- like they claim my father happened to be a dyer, he used to do due dye work, dye wool. And, uh, part of my family happened to be pretty well -- well-to-do families and so their living was nothing but a farming, agriculture and, that was -- that's all, what little business went in and out, and they were living off the land.

SIGRIST: Do you know anything about your father's work?

POSTOIAN: I heard of him. I don't remember my father, I don't remember my brother, I don't remember my sister. I happened to have two brothers and a sister. I do not remember them. If you ask me if I remember my mother, I don't.

SIGRIST: Did your aunt ever talk about your father and his professional . . .

POSTOIAN: Well, as I say, what information that I got out of it, my aunt and uncle over here kept telling me who I was, where I come from. That's how I was saved from Haled [ph] to come over in this country.

SIGRIST: So once you got to Watervliet, it was really your uncle and aunt who gave you a sense of what your background and your . . .

POSTOIAN: Actually, it wasn't my real uncle and aunt. It was close to my family. Maybe it was third or the fourth cousins. Like take my wife's mother, is Postoian, and I'm married to her. She's maybe ten generation away from me.

SIGRIST: But there were so many . . .

POSTOIAN: That's what I mean, see.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

POSTOIAN: My father's name was Mesrop.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

CHARLOTTE: M-E-S-R-O-P.

SIGRIST: M-E-S-R-O-P. Mesrop.

POSTOIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And, um, what was your mother's name?

POSTOIAN: Marguerite [ph].

SIGRIST: And her maiden name?

CHARLOTTE: Do you remember her maiden name?

SIGRIST: No. Now, your parents perished in the 1915 massacre.

POSTOIAN: Massacre, right.

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollections of that event yourself?

POSTOIAN: (he laughs) I do not. But I do remember, I mean, not that I remember. As I say, I was the only male, and the two other, three other girls were saved from our family. One of the, my -- it would be my second cousin, which we happened to live in the same house. The house that we were living in, such a big house, the three brothers divided. Each one had the one section of the house, and I happened to live, one of the girls the which it was saved lived in the same house as I do. She - she used to tell me my background, my brothers, my sister, her sister and brother, how we come. You know, that was our daily conversation. So what I've learned of my background, my family, she actually taught me that.

SIGRIST: Right, because you had no . . .

POSTOIAN: I had no recollection whatsoever at all, see?

SIGRIST: What were the names of your siblings, your brothers and sisters?

POSTOIAN: What was the name? What?

SIGRIST: What were the names of your brothers and sisters? Do you know?

POSTOIAN: Well, I had one brother named Manoog.

CHARLOTTE: M-A-N-O-O-G.

POSTOIAN: G. And one brother's named Levon.

SIGRIST: Levon.

POSTOIAN: L-E-V-O-N.

SIGRIST: L-E-V-O-N.

POSTOIAN: They called Leon, or they called Levon, see. And I had a sister named Lucy, see. Like, I don't remember any of them. And I do remember this cousin of mine in Watervliet says how were we, we were massacred. Well, of course, they, more or less - they took all male, separate the woman and children, and how happened they got where they were, I don't know. My mother couldn't carry on her life any more. She grabbed her -- my small sister, and throw herself into the river to drown her. And how I got where, in Halep, that I don't remember.

SIGRIST: But you remember being in Halep.

POSTOIAN: I remember it because these rich people adopt me.

SIGRIST: Rich what?

POSTOIAN: Rich . . .

CHARLOTTE: People.

POSTOIAN: . . . Syrian Armenians, they adopt me. See, uh, how I found that out, this man who adopt me, he had a little boy. (a creaking noise is heard in the background on the tape)

SIGRIST: Go ahead.

POSTOIAN: He had a little boy, happened passed away. And he adopt me as a boy. I had a little sister. They were wealthy people.

SIGRIST: Can you describe their house for me, where you lived?

POSTOIAN: Their house for me? It's a huge hacienda, you might as well say. That's why to this day when I open my eyes, I see that beautiful garden, shrubberies, and everything else. See how my place is. That stayed with me all my life. See, I enjoy nature. I enjoy gardening, I enjoy flowers. I have a bunch of roses all the way across the way. And that's how I pass my time ever since I've been retired.

SIGRIST: Is this common for, uh, wealthy Syrian Armenians to adopt Armenians for . . .

POSTOIAN: In them days I don't know whether it was common or not, see. But this man happened to, I've heard that afterwards, see, happened to lose his small child. And most likely his wife couldn't have any more children, or whatever it was. So how I got there, that I don't remember. How he adopted me, I don't remember. Because . . .

CHARLOTTE: Whether it was legal or not, we don't know.

POSTOIAN: Because when you get in Aleppo, they call it now, well, people from different area, the minute they enter into that tropical world, they have some of those malaria sickness. See, I have a mark right here.

CHARLOTTE: Like a vaccination mark.

POSTOIAN: See? And you're more or less delirious almost five, six, seven months. And if you pull through, like I can go any part of Africa right now. I don't have to have an insulin shots or anything, because my - my body already has gone through those tropical diseases.

SIGRIST: Did that happen when you were a kid?

POSTOIAN: When I was kid, see.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about being sick?

POSTOIAN: (he laughs) I don't know I remember. That's what I'm, when I opened my eyes, I see this beautiful house, people all around me. We had a gardener, we had a chauffeur, we had a, a horse and a buggy used to take us out to lunch with my mother and sister, the people who adopt me I call mother and sister. See, everything was beautiful.

CHARLOTTE: He doesn't remember being sick.

SIGRIST: Do you remember actually being sick from the disease?

POSTOIAN: Well, I must remember. See, I was, as I say, I was so young that at that time, there must be 1914, '15, around that age, I must have been around six, seven, you know what I mean, in that age.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about the people who adopted you. For instance, tell me what he did for a living, why they were so wealthy.

POSTOIAN: He was what they call, well, how could I explain to--? In that part of the world, what they have this, a lot of transportation, were the horse and buggies. Overnight they have these huge areas, like barns, so this merchant, like—we couldn't say -- it's a hotels. Merchants, or these traveler's, they used to come and stay there overnight, and they do their transaction from that marketplace into whoever they associate. So he happened to own some of that. They also had some sort of a restaurant business in there. I mean, that I remember, you know. Like, if you ask me what's his name now, I don't know what their name is. In fact, when I got to the age where I want to find out who these people are, I couldn't remember their name, who they were, so I can get in touch with them.

SIGRIST: Of course, you'd been through so much, I'm not surprised that the memory sort of . . .

POSTOIAN: See at -- see, the age. I hold on to so much of -- as I said, it's impossible for me to remember those things.

SIGRIST: Tell me, uh, when you were in, you were in Syria for a number of years, yes?

POSTOIAN: I was in Syria. (he laughs) See, that's another story. (he coughs) After I, I don't know how long I was there, that I don't remember.

CHARLOTTE: I thought that it was (?) who brought you there.

POSTOIAN: Huh?

CHARLOTTE: Your (?).

POSTOIAN: That's what I'm going to tell you. I don't know how long I stayed there. Happen after I started feeling good, I was all around the garden, play around with my sister, and there was gardeners, people, and they were all around, see. Every day, my mother used to put me in a carriage with my sister, take me out to the restaurant where we used to run, and we used to have our lunch, and they used to bring us back home again. And then this woman that used to work in that house as a servant, she was one of the Armenians was massacred, was living in that part of the area. She had to look for a job, so she was there as a servant. And this woman turned out to be our next door neighbor, the town where I come from. (he coughs) So she started to try to get friendly with me as much as she can, which she did. And one day they changed my name. My name, instead of, they used to call me Onig.

SIGRIST: How would you spell that, do you think?

POSTOIAN: O-N . . .

CHARLOTTE: Onig. O-N . . .

POSTOIAN: O-N-G.

CHARLOTTE: O-N-I-G.

SIGRIST: G--. O-N-I-G. Onig. G's are like K's.

CHARLOTTE: Yeah.

POSTOIAN: See, they used to call me Onig. And this woman says to me, "Onig," in Armenian, ????? ?? ?????, come on over. See? I couldn't hardly speak, even, Armenian. He says, "Your name is not Onig. Your name is Karnig. Your father or mother are so-and-so in a town where we come from. These people adopt you." When she started saying those things, every little bit started coming to me. I know something went through my mind, my life, but I couldn't just picture it -- how I went through. You know what I mean? It was impossible for me to remember. As woman was talking, you know what I mean? Then I began to smell, remember that I do have brother, I did have somebody, you know what I mean? What happened?

So period this time, which I had another cousin of mine, was her name was Postoian, was living in that same town, Halep. This woman, been working in this rich family's home, she used to go and visit and take a lot of food, what leftover to her. And meantime, in that same period, this cousin which was living in Halep, I had another cousin of mine was appointed by America Near-East relief. He was an educated, a doctor. His name was Shimavon [ph] Postoian. And the, they gave him the power to go around all Islamic houses and get all the Christian people from them. So that was his job, going from one village to the other village all around Aleppo, Beirut, Syria, Damascus, you know, whatever it was, see. Because our people was all sent right down to, way down to the Damascus.

And, meantime, this woman was -- was living in this village, Halep, taking care of - in a--. Her brother was living here in Providence. This cousin of mine has already communicate with him, finding means and ways to send her sister to Providence, Rhode Island. And this woman, which was servant in our house, goes over tell my cousin over there, "You know, your cousin, Postoian, Mesrop's, Margaret's son, is in our house. These people adopt me." Well, naturally, the cousin that I had, which was appointed by the government, he's looking all around the world for a Postoian's to live. So when he found out that I was living, living in that house, he tried to take me away from them.

Well, naturally, by that time, maybe, oh, everything was so beautiful for me I wouldn't leave the house, period. And he come around and started talking, you know what I mean? And, uh, and every time he started talking to me, I more or less run away from him. So I don't know what happened. See, this is another thing. All of a sudden I opened up one night, wake up one night, he had me on a train traveling with him. See, he took -- he took me with him in Adana [ph]. That's another Armenian village, where he had some sort of a business. His father and mother was living in Istanbul, Turkey. He communicate with them, that how I found one of the Postoians, Karnig Postoian, Mesrop Postoian's son, and I have it with me. I think he has some cousins living in America. You better get in touch with them. And, sure enough, in that, uh,

communication back and forth between him and his father and the cousin of mine over here, they, that's how I landed in this country.

SIGRIST: Were, um, people who had Armenian children or servants in their house, were they obliged to give them up? Is that . . .

POSTOIAN: No.

SIGRIST: They didn't have to do that.

POSTOIAN: The only one they used to take it away, was the, the Christians. Whether it was an Armenian, Greek, or whatever it was, see, in Islamic homes.

SIGRIST: Out of the Islamic homes.

POSTOIAN: Out of the Islamic homes, you know what I mean? To take it and put it in an orphanage. That's the Near East Relief Program they had, remember? The Armenian Near East Relief Program? They used to have it, and he was in part of that, see. And through him, which I got his picture, see, when he sent me to, uh, we used to call it Constantinople that time, now they call Istanbul, Turkey. See, I stayed with him for quite a while with his parents. And then, uh, while they were making the communication with my aunt and uncle over here to, for me to bring it in this country, because I was so young, so I had to have somebody to, you know, come with. So they found this woman and her son was coming to America, and this man made some sort of communication with him, that's how I got into America, from when I got in America, this son was old enough, he got out of the ship, went to his father or uncle or whatever it is in Boston, and they held this poor woman and me. That's who we -- how we got into Ellis Island, see?

SIGRIST: All right. Before we get to Ellis Island, there are a couple of questions I still want to ask you about Syria. One is in the time that you were living with this adoptive family, can you tell me a little bit about the kinds of food that people ate in Syria? What do you remember about the food?

POSTOIAN: Well, their food is practically same as ours.

SIGRIST: Can you just explain that for me?

POSTOIAN: In the Easter, yeah. Like Easter we have, like the Armenian people have shish-kebob, you know, and different kind of (?), and mostly their food other than lamb, you know, the -- ninety percent of it is all vegetables.

SIGRIST: What kinds of vegetables? Do you remember?

POSTOIAN: All kinds, you know.

SIGRIST: It's a warm country.

POSTOIAN: Yeah, it's a warm country. All kind of growing, vegetables. That's all they had. Armenian, whatever the land give it to them. Mostly that's what they used to live on.

SIGRIST: If your adoptive mother wanted to make something special for a special occasion, what's a special food?

POSTOIAN: (he laughs) For me everything was special. In Halep, over that part of the world, were an awful lot of fruit. Like you take a quince, figs, apricots, quince. They used to grow big, you know what I mean? And the grapes. It really was, and their vegetable, like a cucumber, watermelon, all kinds of melon. Had entirely different tastes, because it was all natural-grown stuff. There was none of these, you know, chemically fertilizer or anything like that in there. Everything was so pure. In fact, I do remember in our house that we used to live, they used to have a huge, huge, I don't remember. It was so big, they had a wall all around their home. And, uh, part of the house there was all different kinds of trees. We used to go over there, pick up figs. Figs used to get so big, this big. They used to split open from the juiciness. And, I mean, that's the kind of a life that was there. It wasn't, you know, over here everything is chemically made, you know what I mean? A little bit different.

SIGRIST: What about school? Were you allowed to attend school?

POSTOIAN: That's another thing, see. So these people were so rich, as I say. During that period, there were few other Armenian families around that part of the country. They hired this French monk to teach us, you know, schooling. So in that part of the world, they used to speak French. It used to be under French territory, that part of time. So my first schooling was in French. Whatever I learned, like, they first thing they teach you, your feature. La tete, la bouche, les oreilles. You know, whatever I learned in that day, I've never forgotten. Like America, their (sings Marseillase) the French national song, I've never forgotten it.

So he used to take us out like a picnic, and in the areas we go, those people used to love frogs. They used to tell our kids, "Whoever catches the most frogs is going to get a trophy." We (?), you know what I mean. We didn't know anything about it. So we used to catch a lot of frogs, and they used to give it to this monk. So one day he invited us all over, and cooked those frog legs and ate it. (he laughs) It's unbelievable. It was so juicy. See, those are the delicacy they have, and the French people have, which we haven't got it, see.

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BEGIN SIDE TWO, TAPE

ONE

SIGRIST: And there were lots of frogs for you around.

POSTOIAN: Yeah, see. That I remember, see.

SIGRIST: What about, uh, were you allowed to speak Armenian, or were you . . .

POSTOIAN: I didn't know, my first language, what I learned, was Arabic, see. I was learned Arabic, see. So when, actually when I come over to, uh, Constantinople -- Istanbul, Turkey, they were making the communication to bring me over to this country. Of course, this cousin of mine, they didn't have no room or nothing, so they put me in orphanage. See, over there every Armenian town had a little orphanage. They were supporting, there were so many orphans, see. So when they put me in this orphanage, they give me two weeks, whatever I want, I had to ask for in Armenian, or else I couldn't get my food, because I speak Arabic, see. So naturally . . . (he laughs) Whether you like it or not, you're forced to learn the Armenian language. That's how I learned the Armenian language in, uh, Istanbul, Turkey.

SIGRIST: So your adoptive parents spoke Arabic in the house?

POSTOIAN: Oh, yeah. They're Arabic, they're . . .

SIGRIST: But they were Armenians . . .

POSTOIAN: They were Syrian Armenians, see. They were Syrian Armenian. They're Christian people.

SIGRIST: That was going to be my next question. Can you tell me a little bit about what your religious life was like? What religions were you?

POSTOIAN: They didn't have no religions. The Christianity only religion they had. See, we had an Armenian church over there, was all in, uh, during the war they was practically half of them, you know, ruined. What little bit left, these poor Armenian people were massacred and, you know, were living in that ruins, see. How I know it, every so often this woman, this mother who, the people who adopted me, they used to take me to church with them, see. We used to sit in the carriage, go through these ruins, you know. It's a vague memory. A little bit vague memory. I remember it was a huge area, a big church, you know. We used to stand up, and then we didn't know too much. Me and my sister, we made more jokes than anything else, you know. That's the only thing I remember about the religion and things like that. I didn't learn any religions until I grow up in this country.

SIGRIST: So that was just not really an important part of your life at that time.

POSTOIAN: Yeah, yeah, see.

SIGRIST: What about World War One? Do you have any recollections of World War One? Um, of course, there's a lot of things going on in that part of the world at that time.

POSTOIAN: But this was World War One.

SIGRIST: This was that time period.

POSTOIAN: Yeah. This was World War One period, see. This was 1914 war, see. See, actually, what I heard of it, in this country, that's where the massacres start, in our part of the country, our part of the world for . . .

SIGRIST: Turkey.

POSTOIAN: For Erzugerum, Earzygan, which is northern part of Turkey, I think it's part of the Afghan and --stan and all that mountainous area. See, that's where the villages, they started, and shifted all the way down to Arabic world, see. That's where the one-and-a-half million Armenian was killed. That's, that was, just as I told you before, I come from family of one hundred and eighty-nine people, the book says, I got the book, too. Me and three other female, I'm the only male survive out of that town.

SIGRIST: And the few Armenians that did survive from Turkey had all gone south, pretty much had been brought into Syria and to the other countries. There were very few Armenians left in Turkey, I imagine, after.

POSTOIAN: Well, the Syrian part of the world didn't have too much damage. The damage was all people living in the Turkish country, in all Turkey. The Armenians were living in Turkey, suburb of Turkey, Turkey towns and villages. Like the Armenians were living in Istanbul, Turkey, or Adana, which is, you know, one of their big cities, see. They didn't have too much of that thing. They did, got their, like, intellectual people, you know what I mean? Whatever they did, I don't know, I don't remember. But, uh, minority rule, when they didn't have too much damage at all.

The damage was done all the people that lived in outside the Turkey, in that mountainous areas. See, they're the ones that all got killed and massacred, see. Like they tell me, I don't remember, this cousin of mine tell me, he says, uh, when they come in our town, they collect all man, male folks, and, uh, what happened to them, nobody know. They claim what they did, they dug a hole in a huge area, throw them in there, throw kerosene and burn them alive. And they say, "How your father and your uncle and some of your cousins was killed. So.

SIGRIST: All right. So your cousin comes, and he gets you away from your adoptive parents, brings you to Constantinople.

POSTOIAN: No. He took me to Adana.

SIGRIST: To Adana.

POSTOIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me what happens once you . . .

POSTOIAN: When I was in Adana, he was, as I say, he worked for Near East Relief for whatever there was a Christian people in the Moslem homes. He also had, he was a doctor, but I don't know what he graduated or not, but he was some sort of a doctor. And, uh, he had friends coming to Bolis [ph], Turkey, you know, Istanbul, Turkey. So he makes some arrangement, ship me with them, took me to Turkey. See, that's how I come, I stayed with him about two, three weeks, four or five weeks, I don't know how long. But from there he made arrangements with these doctors and, uh, nurses and somebody, they took me, send me over to his father, he was -- his father was living in - in the Constantinople.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how you felt about just being taken away from that beautiful home in (?).

POSTOIAN: Oh, Jesus, that I've never forgotten. Oh, I cried and cried and cried. You have no idea, When open my eyes. I was in a train traveling. I -- I didn't know what happened. And then he took me to this little village, there was nothing there. My beautiful home, sisters -- my sister, my mother, all the servants we had, they were all gone. I was like an orphan left all alone by myself.

SIGRIST: Again.

POSTOIAN: Again, see?

SIGRIST: That's already happened once.

POSTOIAN: Yeah. That's how it happened. See, that's where he was making arrangement. He sent me over as quick as he could to Istanbul, Turkey.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about, about being in Istanbul when you were there? Because you . . .

POSTOIAN: Well, Istanbul, Turkey, they, I played around with my cousin I got there, see. See, this is the man . . .

SIGRIST: We're looking at a photograph right now of (?).

POSTOIAN: You see, yeah. This is the man, he was appointed by the Near East Relief to get all the Christian -- ities from the Moslem homes. This is his wife, and this is his wife's sister and his daughter. they were all killed, see.

CHARLOTTE: How about your picture, dear?

POSTOIAN: This is me.

SIGRIST: Oh, we're looking at a picture of Mr. Postoian.

POSTOIAN: And this is the, see, this is his half-brother. He, the one who saved me.

SIGRIST: And so this picture was taken in 1921 before you came to America?

POSTOIAN: This was taken in, in, uh, 1918, '17, '18 or 1919, somewhere's around there. This was taken in Istanbul, Turkey.

SIGRIST: So actually the process from getting from Syria to Istanbul, actually, is taking a certain amount of time, then. You . . .

POSTOIAN: Well, I don't, yeah. It took about maybe two or three months. I don't know.

SIGRIST: And then how long were you in Istanbul, before you came here?

POSTOIAN: Well, I stayed there at least about three years, 19, 1918, 1921 I got here, see. I stayed in an orphanage about two years.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about what it was like to be in the Armenian orphanage, like, your daily routine.

POSTOIAN: I tell you, in orphanage, in Istanbul, Turkey, see, the educated Armenians, the cultured Armenians, 90% of them who came from Istanbul, Turkey, which they were all businessmen, doctors, lawyers, and really it was, you know, well-educated people. That's why every twenty or thirty years Turkey massacres, because the Armenians try to get control of the Turkish, they had an idea that they gonna take our country away from us, so they massacred us. Every twenty, that's what they tell me. Every twenty, thirty years there was some sort of a massacre. 1995 [sic] on, there's always been a massacre of the Armenians. Turkish, Turks were always afraid of it, see. So, uh, when I was there, like, this uncle of mine over there used to work for some rich Armenian people. He had what they call under the stairs . . .

CHARLOTTE: A coffee shop.

POSTOIAN: A little coffee shop. He used to serve the Turkish demitasse coffee to this merchants used to come into the, you know, areas to do business, and that was his living. And he raised his kids. He sent his sons through the college. The Turks couldn't stomach it. The Armenians were always advancing, yet their people was, you know, backward. That was the bigger struggle.

SIGRIST: Tell me about what life was like in the orphanage, and what . . .

POSTOIAN: Well, orphanage -- what food we got through Near East Relief, and then the families, as I said, these rich people in the Armenian, different sections, like over here we have in Albany, like, uh, Western Avenue section, or, uh, South Troy section. The Armenians live in that area, they had maybe thirty-five, forty orphans. They had houses. Those families used to support them. Till the Near East (this is, I was told) till the Near East Relief started appropriating money, a lot of them, food started coming from America, and then they took this Turkish West Point building away from Turkey. It was almost ten, twelve thousand

orphans in this school, like West Point. Over there they were, uh, it was named the town there, was on the Bosphorus, Black Sea, between the Black and Mediterranean Sea, there was a huge building. They called Kulenli [ph.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that? (they laugh)

POSTOIAN: They used to call it Kulenli. That's Turkish word.

SIGRIST: All right. Say it very slowly one more time.

POSTOIAN: Kulenli That's a Turkish West Point, which Turks used to, you know, send their kids, you know, to become military, it was a military school.

SIGRIST: So it had been converted to an orphanage.

POSTOIAN: They took it away from Turkey, so they converted it to an orphanage. They started getting all these kids from all parts of Syria, Beirut, Lebanon, wherever there was orphans, they brought all those kids, almost ten, twelve thousand of them, was all in this huge area of a building. Well, this building was so big, it had four football field in the center. And all around, a two-story building. That's a -- a front of a, well, it was the Mediterranean Ocean, the Bosphorus and the Black Sea, maybe it was a quarter of a mile away from us. We were in that area, see.

SIGRIST: What did the inside look like where you slept?

POSTOIAN: It's a huge building, huge dormitories, maybe, oh, a hundred and fifty, two, three hundred kids. We used to have a bed layin' on top. One -- there was -- and then we had, part of that they converted to a school, which I hardly had it, because I was a little bit of a thing, I don't remember that. And then the half of that there was restaurants, you know, a place where you go and eat. There was huge wooden tables. You know, you go over and sit down there, whatever they put in front of you. In the morning time, our breakfast was a piece of dry bread and, uh, a couple of olives. If they had a tea, it was a big thing, and that was the life there. And then here I come from Halep, from a rich house (he laughs) and they put me in that place. It was unbelievable. I couldn't believe myself why, why these people did this to me.

SIGRIST: Now, did your cousin come and visit you from time to time?

POSTOIAN: Yeah. They used to come to visit me, yeah. See, so, till they said, see, that's another thing. I had an uncle, my real father's brother was living in this country. He was making plans to bring his brother in this country, which my father, too. So every time he made plans to bring it over, my father couldn't leave his children to come over here. So just before the war, he happens to work here right outside the Cohoes Mills, paper mill. And he, just before the war he says he was going to go to the, bring the family over here, he himself.

So this cousin of mine in Watervliet, which they took care of me, before he left, he had some money. I don't know how much money he had. He says to him, "Pete," which his name was Peter. "Uncle," he says, "I want you to take this money and save it. I'm going to take so much with me." Whatever he had, I don't know. He says, "In case I need it, you send it to me." So he left his uncle over here, and he came over in our home town to bring my parents over here. During that period he got -- the war came on, and he got killed.

So when they found out, his uncle found out that I was saved, and they wrote letters from the Constantinople, this man's father, that how your so-and-so's son is saved, we've got him here and he's in the orphanage, right away my uncle over here write them a letter to 'em, and send them money. He says, "Find, bring it over here." And my uncle says that money was left with him, which is dead. Nobody owns that money but his own nephew. See, through that money they sent me over, see, sent it over to this cousin of mine, and then from there I get over this country. That's how happened they -- I stayed over here with them.

SIGRIST: What did you know about America when you were in the orphanage?

POSTOIAN: Oh, Jesus, don't talk that. When I come over America from Istanbul, Turkey, I was crying day and night. I says, "How could people live I place like this?" (he laughs) Especially around here, my goodness, it was unbelievable. We used to go to school eight years. They had to put a planks. For us to cross the street was all mud. And then the American boys never accept us. We were foreigners. We were greaseballs. They used to beat us. Even - even the Armenian kid that was born in this country wouldn't accept us. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about the process of when you were told that you were going to go to America and how long it took before you actually . . .

POSTOIAN: To came over America?

SIGRIST: You said you were in, you were in Istanbul for about three years, you said?

POSTOIAN: I don't know. You know what I mean? How I got there, because you had no choice of anything.

SIGRIST: Right.

POSTOIAN: You see, whatever they tell you, you do it. There was a such thing as demanding, you wanted this, you wanted that. That was a thing of the past. They come over, "Hey, mister, you come over with me." That was it.

SIGRIST: Now, a woman was, was, um, brought in to be a chaperon.

POSTOIAN: The woman who brought it in with me is her husband or brother, I don't know who it was, living in Boston, Massachusetts. On

account of me, they held me off, they took me in Ellis Island, because I was under her care.

SIGRIST: Was she in Turkey, or had, was she in America (?).

POSTOIAN: She was in Constantinople too, yeah, see.

SIGRIST: Who was this woman?

POSTOIAN: I don't know. That's just what I'm trying to tell you, see?

SIGRIST: But her . . .

POSTOIAN: But my uncle knew it, because my uncle, when he come over and took me from Ellis Island, he took this woman with her, and called Boston to these people's parents. Evidently he had all the information. He had the letter, information who she was and what she is, and he told her that how she's taken from the Ellis Island, put in such and such a train, the train will be in Boston for somebody to meet her. Now, you want me to tell you a story about that?

SIGRIST: Wait. I want to get you to America before we get to that. We're still in Istanbul at this point. Did you have anything to take with you when you left Istanbul? Did you have any kind of objects or luggage or clothes that you took with you?

POSTOIAN: Are you kidding? (he laughs) We had a pair of pants.

CHARLOTTE: Just what he had on his back.

POSTOIAN: We had a pair of pants and a shirt. (he laughs) We stayed on, that's all we had.

SIGRIST: And where did you get the ship to leave?

POSTOIAN: From, uh, Istanbul, Turkey. It was a Greek liner, Megali Hellas.

SIGRIST: And, um, tell me about, uh, being on the ship.

POSTOIAN: Well, being on the ship, I was so young, there was a lot of Armenians over there. They all liked me, you know what I mean? They used to play with me, and give me things, that was mostly enjoyable trip that I ever had it, because everybody was paying attention to me. So the ship happened to be, as I say, a Greek liner, and, uh, anchored in Athens, Greece. They had, I don't know, he had to stay there for a few days or something. So these people were on a boat. They wanted to make a visitation here, and some were grown-up people, see. We're went to ruins of Athens, that they took me along with them.

So them days, I do remember this one, they had a, uh, a jackass, a small ponies, you had to climb into mountains, see. I was a little kid, I didn't know. So this guide, whoever was with them, they put me on the top of jackass, and I was following all the way up to the,

to this. I always tell them, every time I see that picture in the movies, I say, "Charlotte, I was there." (he laughs) Yeah. See. So after we stayed there a few days, and then the ship started for Italy, I think, and Rome. That time Mussolini was in the power. They don't let nobody get out of the ship. All they did, whatever, you know, food or they had to take it or leave it or take it out of there. We stayed in the ship. Nobody got out. And from there, we land America.

SIGRIST: So it went from Constantinople to Athens to . . .

POSTOIAN: To Italy.

SIGRIST: To Italy.

POSTOIAN: To Rome, in Italy, and then to Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: And then to, yeah. Can you tell me where you slept on the ship?

POSTOIAN: Where I slept? Well, (he laughs) I was lucky then on the ship. See, the ship has three, uh, sections. They say first class, second class and third class. Well, this uncle of mine happened to be, put me on the second class. With second class we were more or less a place to sleep and eat and this and that. And the first class, of course, there were everything ala carte. And the third class was all laying on decks upstairs, see. So I happened to be in the second class, so I had the privileges to run up and down or wherever I go, see. That was enjoyable too, see.

SIGRIST: Do you remember where you were fed on the ship?

POSTOIAN: That I don't remember. I know - I know I had food, because we were in the second class. We had a little food there. But, uh, the third class people was laying on the decks or in there, they had to feed themselves, see. But the first and second class, I think they were given some sort of a food. That I can't say yes or no. I don't remember that, believe me.

SIGRIST: Do you, um, do you remember was it a rough ride, was it a smooth ride?

POSTOIAN: (he laughs) It didn't make a damn bit of difference. I was from one end of the ship to the other. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you, did your chaperon get sick?

POSTOIAN: Well, the man was, the boy was at least sixteen, seventeen years old. See, I don't remember too much of him. The poor old lady, which she had me all the time with me, she had me under her care, see. She was a little chubby old woman, no matter which way I run around with her she was always looking for me, you know what I mean? But the son was all over, that I don't remember. So my uncle, when he come over, as I said, took her from Ellis Island, she took . . .

SIGRIST: How long was the ship? How long did it take to get to New York?

POSTOIAN: In the ship?

SIGRIST: Yeah.

POSTOIAN: Oh, we must have been on the ship at least, at least three, four weeks. Because stayed in Athens for almost a week or so, and by the time we came in Rome, I don't know how long we stayed there, because we weren't allowed to get out. Then how long we come to America, that I don't remember, you know. In them days, but I do remember, I got into America October the 7th.

SIGRIST: Of 1921.

POSTOIAN: 1921, see. That I remember. I don't know how I remember that. I made a note of it or something like that.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when you came into New York?

POSTOIAN: Joy, yeah. (he laughs) Oh, that was the first thing they did. As the ship pulled in, everybody was on the deck looking, "America, America, America," kept hollering. That's all there was to it. "America, America." That was the most joyful sight -- sight seein' that there was in it. You have no idea what kind of sight seein' that was, see. People with tears almost, to see just that sign.

SIGRIST: What about seeing New York for the first time from the ship?

POSTOIAN: Well, New York I didn't have too much to see, because, see, this is what I was going to say. When my uncle took me from Ellis Island and, uh, put this woman on a train, send it over, he took me to the hotel, see. We had some people, cousins, living in New York, but he didn't bother too much with me. He took me because I was a little kid. It was almost nighttime. He took me into a hotel. He had a room there. He says, "You sleep here." I put this woman on a ship, on a train, then I come back, and then we, tomorrow morning we start coming home, see. That I remember.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about being at Ellis Island? Do you remember how you got to Ellis Island?

POSTOIAN: I tell you, in Ellis Island was a huge area, there were sections. As if we were like a, well, a huge area, maybe a hundred, a hundred and fifty people, whatever's boat they come from, that section, you know what I mean, was in that area. Some come from Bolize [ph], some from Turkey, some come from different part of the world, it was sectional. We were in that area. We each had a little tag on. So we didn't know how to speak. All they do, they come over, look at your tag, whatever your name was putting on. That's how I remember. It was a huge, I mean, big area.

SIGRIST: Did you have to undergo any kind of examinations when you were there, or . . .

POSTOIAN: Well, if I did, I don't remember that either. Well, that examination, what I went through, well, this I have to tell you. See, this uncle of mine that lived over there, he had a business in New York. From New York he moved over here in Watervliet. He went and had a little schooling. He had practically a high school education. In them days, education -- a school -- high school education be equivalent to a college, you know. So right around that period, you remember the raccoon coats? He had them, he was a young man, he had one of them. I guess school kids, college boys, see. So I was in Ellis Island. Somebody come over, they read my name and this woman's name, and say, "Follow us.", see. This was a huge corridor.

We were walking with this guard in front of us. Oh, maybe from here across the street, I see this man with a fur coat, and stayed way down in the line, you know. I said to myself, "Who's that ape?" In that part of the world, we don't know what fur is. See, we don't know what those things are. And, uh, he already had made all the arrangements. He was waiting for the guard to bring us down, so he takes us out, see. That's what I'm trying to, you ask me if I went to, see arrangements were already made. He was waiting outside on the corridor waiting for the man to bring us out. So he come close, close. He walks with me, he says, "Karnig ?? ???? ??????" He says, "Karnig, is that you?" When he said that, I said to myself, "Oh, God." As I say, when I see that fur coat, I don't want to s--I said, "Who's this ape?" And the ape turned out to be my uncle. So they didn't have, as I say, he had, he was well-educated. He had no trouble whatsoever. And he went over and put this woman on the train, and put me in a hotel. The following morning we traveled, we come over here.

SIGRIST: All right. We're going to pause just for a second, and I'm going to stick another tape in the machine.

END SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE BEGIN SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. It's July 2, 1994, a Saturday, and we're now beginning tape two with Karnig Postoian. Mr. Postoian, you just finished telling us about being at Ellis Island and your uncle with the big raccoon coat and him picking you up and taking you off the island.

POSTOIAN: So following morning . . .

SIGRIST: You were in the hotel overnight.

POSTOIAN: Yeah, yeah. We stayed in the hotel. The following morning he took me over to, oh, it happened to be some relative of ours, because he had a store in New York, you know, before he came to Watervliet. So we went over to their house, and we had a little breakfast and chit-chat, you know, I don't know what it was. He said, "I think it's time for us to come home, to go home." So we went over to New York train station, and took the train. Of course, when I started walking in New York, I see

these huge area of building following morning, you know. I couldn't get over myself. And there was always talk going on in that part of the Europe, in America, when you go to America, you pick money off the streets.

CHARLOTTE: That's what they thought.

POSTOIAN: See? Here I'm looking all around to see. (he laughs) I don't see no money, no nothing. But it was very exciting for me to look at those huge buildings, you know. Because in our part of the country we haven't got anything like that. Mostly our Mosques and things like that, you know, big, huge marble buildings, you know. It's not like America. That was exciting. So finally we got on a train. I landed in Albany. From Albany there was a trolley car. We were taking it. From Albany to Watervliet, it's almost eight, ten miles. Of course, when I sit in a trolley car and started traveling, I'm looking all around, it was all these junkyards. It was really miserable, you know, traveling.

I says to myself, "Jesus, what happened to New York? What happened to here?" I couldn't believe that. I thought I was back into Old Country again. So we come back to Watervliet. Of course, we only had a little bit of a house there on 23rd Street. My aunt saw me, she hugged me and all that. And I stayed there for a while. I think it was around Thanksgiving time, if I don't remember. My aunt says we're going to some Armenian home visiting. Armenian home visiting was my cousin. One was her mother, my wife's mother. She had her little baby, her sister, they was christening it. So that was my first time, when I come to America, I visited to my wife's house to see her sister's christening. (he laughs) My wife playing the piano. (he laughs) And after a week or so, they took me to school, kindergarten, turned out to be my wife again in the same school. (he laughs) I was in the same class with her for about, I don't know how long, to that semester. And then before you know it from there they took me out and I went to school late, second or third grade.

CHARLOTTE: He was more advanced in education.

POSTOIAN: You see, because I was in orphanage, they started teaching us, you know, little ABC and, of course, what we learned was Armenian, but still it was some sort of an education, you know. So my difficulty was English, because I knew a little bit French words, see I didn't have too much trouble to learning the English. On top of all that, my uncle had a grocery store, which I used to go over there every night, you know, try to help him. So through that, I didn't have difficulty learning English. See, in no time I learned English, then I had no trouble. My trouble was that the, uh, our boys, American boys, or the Armenian kids, they wouldn't want to play with us.

They kept saying, "You're greaseballs." What business have we got to be here? They wouldn't accept us. So we had quite a bit of trouble with that. Every time we used to go to school, they used to snowball us, kick us, hit us. So one day, I think it was the summertime, it used to be ice wagons going through the city. The kids used to jump on the ice wagons and get a piece of ice off the wagon, you know, and

suck on it. I tried to get a piece of ice, the guy hit me over the head and knocked me down.

So, when we were walking down the street, again, the couple of these boys, me and this other two kids, they come from the other side, we were friends with them. One's name was Harry, the other's name was Horan [ph]. They come from the other part of the country. So we was three of us together. They used to call us Three Musketeers. We had to protect one another. So one day they had us cornered on Broadway, a bunch of them jump on us, they're beating us. I had a little pocket knife in my pocket. I pulled out the pocket knife and I said, "I'm going to kill you. I'm going to kill you." When they saw the knife they got all scared. (he laughs) That was my protection. After that, I didn't have no trouble whatsoever. (he laughs) So that was it. From there on, we become good friends. We didn't have no trouble.

SIGRIST: You just had to prove you were tough or something.

POSTOIAN: But . . .

SIGRIST: I'm just curious a little bit about your relationship with your uncle and aunt. Um, was it a warm relationship?

POSTOIAN: Oh, yeah, very warm. My - my uncle had his grocery store and, uh, it's to support my aunt, and I used to go to school. And after school go over there and help him. So my uncle used to live over the stores. They had a room on the top. See, in fact, the whole buildings there, a few years ago I just sold them away, was left to me. And, uh, and my aunt and I, we used to live on 25th Street by ourselves. So my uncle, every day he used to come over to my aunt, used to eat breakfast, lunch and supper, and she used to wash his clothes and all that. So we were more or less family, but he was living by himself, and me and my aunt was living together on 25th Street, and he was living on 23rd Street.

SIGRIST: Was there a reason why they didn't . . .

POSTOIAN: Well, there was no reason at all. He had this, he owned that three or four pieces of property. In back of the store there was quite a big room and, you know, he was more or less them days stores was open till ten, eleven o'clock at night, and the guy was tired. All they do, lock the store, go in the back room and sleep, and get up in the morning, no traveling, no nothing, you know. The lifestyle was entirely different.

SIGRIST: Did you speak Armenian in the home, or did you speak English?

POSTOIAN: No, we speak Armenian in the home. Because our people, them days none of us know how to speak English. You know, mostly, like my uncle, as I say, he had a little education. He spoke English. But the rest of the Armenians mostly all spoke their own language.

CHARLOTTE: When we were bringing, you know, our parents didn't speak English, we had to speak Armenian.

POSTOIAN: See, like her. See, it's the same way.

SIGRIST: Of course, your uncle knew, must have known English just to carry on business in the store.

POSTOIAN: Yeah. As I say, my uncle had, he was in New York and, uh, he had a store. In the meantime, I think he went to a night school, high school. He graduated high school, because he was well-educated. And, uh, in fact, till his dying day he always had his New York Times and New York Journal. Always [not understood] to buy it. He was no dumbbell.

SIGRIST: I'm still very much taken with the fact that you are now really with your third set of parents basically, how your life has gone on.

POSTOIAN: Yeah, that's it.

SIGRIST: And I'm curious, did you instantly accept them, or did it take you longer to sort of warm up to them?

POSTOIAN: I had no choice, man. I had nobody to turn. (he laughs) Whether I like it or not, I had to accept them. Not only I had to accept them, they loved me. They gave me loving care. So to me it was everything that I wanted to. Of course, what I had in Aleppo, that the rich people adopt me, that I would never forget. You know, their way of living, their customs, their house, garden, hacienda, so beautiful it wasn't funny. And, uh, of course, eventually I forgot all those things.

SIGRIST: Of course, and here life was much more modest.

POSTOIAN: Yeah. So what I see in those scene more or less stayed with me. Now where I live, my twenty years, fifteen, eighteen years of retirement, my pastime is playing around with roses, flowers.

SIGRIST: The house looks great.

POSTOIAN: Like I have, first I started my tulips, daffodils and tulips. (he laughs) Then I pulled them out, then I put my different kinds of flowers all around. I got my hedges. I cut it and trim it. It's the only enjoyment I get. I can go out there, no matter how sick I am, I can work and work and never get tired.

SIGRIST: And you think this all stems from your appreciation of all the gardens in Syria.

POSTOIAN: I think it's all -- what I opened my eyes, I seen those beauties, and never went out, you know, I'd never forgotten it. See, I never forgotten the beauty of the area that I was living. I mean, it's so beautiful, it's a garden. You see it sometimes in the movies, you won't believe it. That's just the way they used to live.

SIGRIST: Tell me what's . . .

POSTOIAN: Of course, over there, this huge area, mostly the house of that sort, they had this walls to protect them, all around, see. And then inside, of course, they were sectional. One part was like a, their gardens, one part was their trees, you know, fruit trees and vegetables. Then they have a stables for their horses. You know, they had everything just separated. So actually you didn't have to get out of the house. You had everything right in there to move around. And that's what I seen it. And then from there they took the face from me. From there they put me in an orphanage. How the hell are you going to take that? But eventually, you know what I mean, you have no choice, you get used to it.

SIGRIST: Tell me about, uh, your uncle and aunt. Were they religious people at all?

POSTOIAN: Yeah. My aunt was very religion. My uncle, he was a Christian, but they did what too much, but he did his share. He gave his dues to the church, but my aunt was very religious.

SIGRIST: Tell me about celebrating Christmas, that first Christmas here in America.

POSTOIAN: I tell you, them days, we didn't have too much of that celebration, you know what I mean. If you had a daily butter on your table, you know what I mean, like a piece of pork chop or a lamb chop or an Armenian pilaf, you know what I mean? It was a, it was a meal itself. It wasn't like this, you know. The time has changed. There wasn't such thing as, they had a little celebration, yes. They used to hang your sock down, if you put a, a dime and a nickel, or an orange, or a small piece of candy, it was a godsend, you know. But today it's a little bit different, man.

SIGRIST: Did you see anything in America those first couple of years that you had never seen before in Europe, something that was completely new to you, other than the language?

POSTOIAN: What was that again?

SIGRIST: Did you see something, when you came to Watervliet . . .

POSTOIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you see something here that you had never seen before, something that, like a telephone or something?

POSTOIAN: I tell you, no. What I seen different, people over here, I've seen a little different of an education. They were a little more culture, no illiterate people. See, that part of the world, half, about, are illiterate. See, over here, as you grow old, then you start to separate from a little education -- uneducated. Because there used to be quite a few Armenian people around here, they used to get letters from the old country, you know what I mean. Armenian written letters, they couldn't read.

They used to call us, come on over and read this letter for me. See? That, there was quite a few of that. Of course, now, their generation, their children are all grown up. Half of them are doctors, lawyers. Right now in Troy, Watervliet, we have seven, eight, nine lawyers. We've got half a dozen doctors. In them days, my goodness. If you had a little - little grocery store or shoemaker shop, like my life was a cleaning business. I was in the cleaning business fifty-one years.

SIGRIST: What was the first job you got in America?

POSTOIAN: (he laughs) Well, my first job in America, I was so young, I run away. I was, you know, how the kids do. I went over to Amsterdam. I heard in Amsterdam there were a lot of rug mills.

SIGRIST: Rug mills, in Amsterdam, New York.

POSTOIAN: Yeah, right. Amsterdam, rug. Sanford Mills, and quite a few. There used to be an awful lot of rug manufacturing, Amsterdam, see.

SIGRIST: Why did you want to run away? What were you unhappy about?

POSTOIAN: I wanted something. There was -- a young kid, you know what I mean? You had foolish ideas. Why? I don't know myself, see. The other kid had a car, I wanted a car. And, of course, I was too young to have a car. It was one of those things, you know. What I did it, I don't know why I did it, too. Before, you know, I got all the way up to Fonda, Johnstown, Fonda. Of course, them days, you hitchhike, you know, and that's all there was to it. A horse and a buggy, and I was there maybe a week or ten days, I don't know. And, uh, so when I got, I heard that Amsterdam, rug mills were hiring people. So every morning I used to . . . I had no money, nothing to sleep. There was a hayfield. They had the hay stacked up into big, what they call that?

SIGRIST: Like a haystack.

POSTOIAN: A haystack, yeah. And they had a, one of those wooden, uh, stepladder, you know, on the side. So I used to climb up on the side, get up on top of the haystack, and sleep right on there. There was a lot of fruit trees. I used to pick apples and pears, and I used to live on that. I get up early in the morning, I walk over to the Amsterdam mills, and wait in the line, maybe seventy-five, a hundred people or so, all waiting in the line. The guy come over, walks up and down the line. He points his finger, you walk in, goes down, few more, points his finger, you walk in. He picks so many of them, and the rest of them say, "That's all," and they walk away.

So I'm standing in line, every time look at me, and he just walks away. I was a little bit of a kid. See, I was short, and I was a little bit of a thing. So two, three days I tried it. So one morning, I says, "I'll try it again and see what happens." I stayed in the line. Before you know it, he went up and down, up and down, he said, "You walk in." When he said that, geez, my eyes popped open, see. So I walked in there, an they put me -- they examined me. They says, "You come over to work tomorrow morning." Well, I haven't got no money, nothing, in my

pocket. How I'm going to work? And I'm thirty-five miles away from my house, Amsterdam to Watervliet, you know.

The only transportation there was them days, trolley cars. So I had enough money in trolley car to get as far as Schenectady. And from Schenectady I had no money, I hitchhiked to Watervliet, because following morning I had to go back to work. So I come home Watervliet, this aunt of mine, I told her what I've done. She had a few dollars, twelve, fifteen dollars, she gave it to me. I had a friend of mine, his name was Horan Ohanacian [ph]. He was a very dear friend of mine. He passed away. I told him what I did. He says, "Let me go home and tell my father. Maybe he - you can get something."

So he goes home and tells his father, and his father gives him fifteen dollars. So he come down, he give me fifteen dollars, I got thirty dollars in my pocket. I took the trolley car from -- trolley car used to go right by our house. Actually, it used to go over to Sixth Avenue, from here, 19th Street, right up. So I took the trolley, went up to Schenectady, Amsterdam. I got myself a rooming house. You had to pay your rent in advance. I think it was three dollars, which I paid it. Now you got to wait two weeks before you get your pay. They hold your paycheck. So I had fifteen dollars, I mean, thirty dollars in my pocket. Well, I had enough.

So when I went to work the following morning. They said - they -- man called me over, he give me a basket, one of those huge push baskets. Inside the basket was all different kind of a spool of a different wool thread. So I used to push that basket up and down the line. Man was working on the weaving machine, he used to holler, "Give me a spool of red!" So I used to throw him the spool of red. That was my job. See, I used to go up and down. (he laughs) That's all I used to do. So I did that for almost two, three weeks of it, two, three -- two months or so, maybe a little more. That I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much you got paid?

POSTOIAN: I think it was twelve, thirteen dollars, something like that. That's all it was. Twelve, thirteen, something like that. Right around that time, this Horn Ohanacian [ph], which he was the same age or maybe a year older than me, (?) Peabody used to run the shirt factory in Troy, and this, some Polish man, boy, used to work for them, and he used to contract shirts for ironing, and, you know, carry -- hire his own employees. So he hired this Horan Ohanacian [ph], and a bunch of the Armenians. This Horan Ohanacian [ph] told me, "Why don't you come over? Maybe I can get you a job in the shirt ironing (?) Peabody?"

So afterwards I said, "Two months," sure in hell, I came back here, and he got me a job shirt ironing in a, outside here in Troy. There was a building outside Hoosick Street. And, uh, so it was a, more or less piecework. As fast as you were, they give you so much each shirt. If you did twenty shirts you get, you know, twenty, if you get twenty-five, you get five more shirts extra money for, see. So I was kind of always fast, you know. I was making somewheres around eighteen,

twenty, twenty-two dollars, it was big money in them days. So that went on about six, seven, eight months.

So one day I was over the house. There used to be Jewish -- old man used to go around house to house like repair windows, glasswork, and sell clothing and this and that and the other thing. And my aunt had a broken window. This man come over and fixed the window for her, and here I was sitting over there. He says to me, "Hey, boy, you want a job?" I says, "Yeah." He says, "My son-in-law in Albany, he's in the cleaning business, he's looking for somebody like you." So he give me his address. I took the trolley car, went back to Albany, I went to the man. Sure in hell, his name was Rudolph Shogan [ph]. He was running Metropolitan Cleaners on Lark Street.

So he looked at me, he liked me. He says, "Okay. Twenty-five dollars a week." Twenty-five dollars is a lot of money, man. (he laughs) And, uh, I started learning business. He also did his own cleaning, and he had a, he does a little dye work on the side. Them days, feather dyeing was a big business, and a lot of wealthy people live in Albany. They used to have feather ha-- hats. And, uh, he was more or less specialized. So we had a place on Chestnut Street, and they used to take me with him, teach me the business. Before you know, I become a cleaner and a dyer.

SIGRIST: I don't think I've ever interviewed anyone who dyed feathers before. (he laughs)

POSTOIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How do you dye a feather? Tell us on tape how you dye feathers.

POSTOIAN: In them days they used to have this huge kettle dyes, different kind of dyes. We used to dip it in there, raise it up and hang it. They have a, they didn't have no drier. They used to have, like, a room of this side, pipelines running back and forth to heat it up. They closed the door, they had racks over that. They used to hang clothes, from the heat used to dry up. They didn't have no tumbler or anything like that, see. This was in 1927, '28, you know what I mean. And they liked me so much, before I know it, my twenty-five dollar went up to thirty dollars, my thirty dollars went up to thirty-five dollars. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: And you were in the cleaning business for your whole life?

POSTOIAN: No, yeah. So, if you (?) at that time, I had an uncle over here. Not Uncle Pete. I had another uncle, Postoian, he was in the meat business, too. And there was a cleaning establishment in Albany for sale, they used to call Valerteria [ph]. And somehow he had a friend who was a tailor, and through him he talk him into it, or whatever he did, you know, I don't know. Before you know it, they went over Albany and bought that cleaning shop. Well, the cleaning shop happened to be directly across the street where I work, in a national commercial bank

building, and I was work, living across the street on Lark Street, both of them. One was in one corner, one was the other corner.

Well, this cousin of mine, from the meat business he went into the cleaning business. He doesn't know his head from his tail. Here I am, got all ready. Six, eight, nine months of the cleaning business, got a little bit of an edgy, you know, knowledge of it. He wants me to go ahead and work for him. But this man is taking care of me is so nice, I haven't got the nerve to say, "Mister, I'm going to quit my job." To this day, that man owes me a week's salary. I, I never had the nerve to go back in. (he laughs)

So I quit, and went to work for my cousin. So before you know, I got into myself. So from there on, fifty-one years, I went back and forth in Albany, I was doing the cleaning. I had people working for me. I had half a dozen stores. I had trucks running around in the city. War came on, then we were rationed for gasoline. One of my driver got killed. He was an aviator, I think it was in the Pacific part of the war. He got killed. So from two trucks it went down to one truck. Before you know, I started getting on the truck doing the delivery myself, because it was rationed. But the place I was located in Albany, which it was in Lark Street, all surrounding me was wealthy people. So I had a very good section. And that was it.

SIGRIST: In our last two minutes, we have two minutes, can you tell me what year you were married?

POSTOIAN: We were married 1934?

CHARLOTTE: Wait a minute.

POSTOIAN: We got it right here, Charlotte, here.

SIGRIST: What's your wife's name?

CHARLOTTE: '34.

POSTOIAN: My wife's name is Charlotte Torigian, maiden name.

SIGRIST: Can you spell her maiden name, please?

CHARLOTTE: T-O-R-I-G-I-A-N.

SIGRIST: T-O-R-I-G-I-A-N. And, uh, you were married, what was the date?

CHARLOTTE: 1934. June 3rd.

SIGRIST: June 3rd, 1934. And did you have children?

POSTOIAN: One daughter.

SIGRIST: And her name?

CHARLOTTE: Linda.

POSTOIAN: Linda Postoian.

SIGRIST: Linda Postoian. Grandchildren, or . . .

CHARLOTTE: Oh, yeah.

POSTOIAN: Four.

CHARLOTTE: We got four grandchildren.

SIGRIST: Four grandchildren. Um, well, I guess my final question for you is are you happy that you were brought to this country?

POSTOIAN: Well . . .

CHARLOTTE: In the beginning he wasn't.

POSTOIAN: In the beginning, no. (he laughs) That's right. Becoming my own business, you know what I mean, growing up, learning a little more, then I said to myself, "There's no place like America. God save the king? No, God save America." (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Well, Mr. Postoian, thank you very much. This has been a wonderful interview. We've been talking for an hour-and-a-half now, and, uh, you've been very patient, and I appreciate it.

POSTOIAN: In fact, we've just celebrated our sixtieth wedding anniversary.

SIGRIST: That's right. That's right. It's 1994. Well, congratulations.

CHARLOTTE: June 3rd was our sixtieth anniversary, yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, this is Paul Sigrist, signing off, with both Mr. and Mrs. Postoian on Saturday, July 2, 1994, in Watervliet, New York. Thank you both.

EI-486/POSTOIAN