

EI-049

DOUKENIE BABAYANIE BACOS

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SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday, May 23, 1991. We are here on Ellis Island with Doukenie Bacos, who came, who was a Turkish subject who left from Greece in 1919 when she was fifteen years old. Good morning.

BACOS: Good morning.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Bacos, could you please give me your full name, include your maiden name in that, and your date of birth, please.

BACOS: Now, I don't know if I have to mention that, but this name "Doukenie" has a meaning. My, when the Turks kept to Constantinople, my great-grandfather was one of the dukes. And he, they all scattered all over because they were afraid they were going to be killed. So one of those boys came to my town, and they got married eventually. Every family, if they had a boy, had to name the boy "Duke" because, to remember his background. Being that my father only had two girls, instead of putting "Duke", they put "Duchess." And not to be afraid, they turned to Doukenie, to hide the background from where I came. And every family that had, they used to tell the story to remember that our family was from royalty. Now this is interesting, but it was true.

SIGRIST: What was your maiden name?

BACOS: Babayanie.

SIGRIST: Could you spell that, please?

BACOS: B-A-B-A-Y-A-N-I-E.

SIGRIST: And what is your date of birth?

BACOS: 1905, December 12th.

SIGRIST: I see. Where were you born?

BACOS: I was born in Saranda Klisse, the name today is Kirk Klisse. The Turks, when they chased all the Greeks out of Saranda Klisse they named it Kirk Klisse.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please.

BACOS: So now when you have to go there, you don't mention the name Saranda Klisse. You tell only Kirk Klisse.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Kirk Klisse?

BACOS: K-I-R-K K-L-I-S-S-E. This means church.

SIGRIST: I see. What was the town like? What was it like?
What did the town look like?

BACOS: (she sighs) The Turks are not very progressive. What they had, it remained. Never saw, or never remembered to rebuild and becomes, to fix the town, to clean the town. It was ugly, really. The life, the Greek life, was very horrible. We used to live all

the time in fear. And many times they used to try to steal girls so that they can turn them to Turks, and the Greeks are very religious. The Turks have different religion. They believed, they're Mohamadans. But the Greeks are Orthodox. So always we lived in fear not to catch us out, just like they do here once in a while. You hear that they steal girls. They used to do the same thing. We were very strong in our schools. The religion, it was very strong, but we weren't allowed to have churches on top of the, it always had to be under the grounds. Three, four steps down. And during the winter, we had, the parents had to support the schools because they wouldn't get any help from Turks. We used to carry our wood, even, in school, the wintertime, to warm our rooms. But we had to learn, we had to have knowledge so that we would get out from slavery. And always, our dream was how some day maybe the Greeks will come again and capture our towns, which happened in 1920.

SIGRIST: May I ask you, geographically, where does this town lie? Where on the map? Did you say it was in Thrace before?

BACOS: Thrase. In Thrase. Athens, the Greece is "Paralio," they call in Greek, but water is all around, except Thrase.

SIGRIST: Right, which connects.

BACOS: Yes. So we cross from Athens to, up to Salonica, then Alexandroupolis, then two small towns. Then we go to Agrinople, which used to be, years ago, the capital of Greece. And then Constantinople come, and the Constantinople was the capital of Greece when, in six hundred years ago, they lost all Constantinople and the whole Thrase. So we became slaves.

SIGRIST: I see. That was when the Turks took over.

BACOS: Yes.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you, can you describe the house that you lived in as a child.

BACOS: The house, even now, when I went in 1968, remains in very good condition because two families lived in there. My house was a very large house. It was on

the road. It was four bedrooms, kitchen and in the middle, after, we used to cross a big yard, and in the middle of the yard, of the property, it was living room, another little kitchen, and a big room where we used to have dances. The Greeks believed name days. They celebrated name days. And they used to celebrate and have dances. And then again it was one big yard, used to go, on the other side of the road. The house used to face two roads, and behind the house it was a little river, which I went and saw it. And when I, I wanted so much to go and see where I was born. It was beautiful yard, with beautiful trees, all kind of trees. And when I went there I was so disappointed because, as I said, the Turks are not progressive people. They cut all the trees to warm the house, and it was just nothing. In fact, next door to my house it was my uncle. It was beautiful house, and the mayor was living there. But he happened to be, he was born in Greece. And when they exchanged the Turks and Greeks, they sent him there, and I spoke to them. He spoke a little Greek. And I said, "What happened to those beautiful trees and beautiful yards?" He said,

"Mrs. Bacos, they cut all the trees down." I remember when we moved here. In fact, I asked if it was possible to stay one night in the town and go and see the school, the room where I was growing, where I was going to study. And he said, "Madam, you'd better get your family and go back. I don't want you to stay here." It was dangerous. But meanwhile he came with us and we went outside of the school. I saw the building, but it was locked. I couldn't go in. And the house is in good condition.

SIGRIST: What is it made out of?

BACOS: Stones. But not the stones that they have in these houses here. It was, but it was still kept very well, because two good families were living. One family, the one that is in the house, the section that was on the first road, and the other was living in the other section. It was, I was pleased.

SIGRIST: Now, you said that there was a yard in between. Was this a garden?

BACOS: In between. And the one yard, we had only trees,

fruit trees, and flowers. And on the other one my father used to plant vegetables.

SIGRIST: What sorts of vegetables?

BACOS: Ah, string beans and tomatoes, peppers, parsley. We used to eat from the garden during the summer. It was beautiful life. The truth is truth. It isn't, it was nature life.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the kitchen in the house?

BACOS: Oh, the kitchen wasn't modern, like they are here. It was a little stove with coal. And the stoves that we had to heat the rooms, it was wooden stoves. Big stoves, and we used to put, we had kerosene. We never had electricity in Turkey.

SIGRIST: Did it get cold enough for the . . .

BACOS: Very cold. I remember the snow, many times it was up to the door. And my father used to say, "Tonight we're going to have snow." And he used to get the, there was a little aisle, in the, before we went to the rooms to sleep. And he used to put the shovels

there, so that they can open the road the next day to go to school. It was a hard life.

SIGRIST: So you were very far north.

BACOS: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: I see. Let's talk about your father. What was his name?

BACOS: My father had, he was a very wise man. My father was orphaned seven years old, and helped my mother to raise four more children. They were five all together. She used to weave Turkish carpets.

SIGRIST: This is his mother.

BACOS: His mother. My grandma, my grandmother. And he used to be a small boy to help the family, because she was widowed. But when he grew he wanted to go away. My mother, my grandmother didn't want to lose her children. In those days it wasn't so easy to separate from the family like they are today. So she wanted to see him married. And there they used to match the girls, not like today. Sometimes it's better, though.

She found a good girl, a very good family background, and they got married. But unfortunately in sixteen months she had appendicitis. Those days, all the whole town, it was forty thousand people, Turks, Greeks, Jewish and Bulgarians. We were mixed. There were only two doctors, but they couldn't operate. So she died from poison. My father was desperate. He didn't, he loved his wife. And, again, he wanted to get away. But my grandmother again, "No, please, Jimmy. Don't go away. Don't go far. I lost your father, and I'll be all alone." All right. She found another girl, and he get married. Before, when he was engaged, now, these stories he used to tell us like stories. He used to go and visit his fiance. And he used to come home, and he used to say, "Mother, I don't think Carrie is a healthy girl." "No, dear, don't say that. Don't destroy her name. She is a beautiful girl." She was in good background again. But she had TB. And in nine months, he lost his wife again. Then he said, "Mother, I don't think God wants me to be married. I want to get out. Either I will become a priest, because he had a beautiful voice. He

used to, the Turks, many times, they used to gather together, because there they were separate, women and men. They never had parties like we have here. The Greeks were different. And many times they used to invite him, pay him, and sing. Because he had a tremendous voice. So mother, grandmother couldn't do anything any more. He went to Russia to help his family. In Russia many Greeks used to go to make money, like they started, after, to come to America. Then from there, being that he was too far, he came down to Bulgaria.

SIGRIST: What was he doing in Russia? What job did he get?

BACOS: He had, he was smart. He had a little, not hotel. Now, here they call hotel. But there it was, let's say, one room where they used to feed the people, and one big yard where the people used to come from small towns with their wagons and take the merchandise. So Father had something like a hotel which, but he was doing very well. And then he came down to Bulgaria. He did the same thing. Bulgaria was nearer, so that he could come and see my grandmother. But by that

time my mother was married. She was beautiful woman, and she got married eighteen years old to a very rich fellow. He used to get, to buy horses from all over the towns. He used to go always with guards with him because he used to carry a lot of money. The last night, she was married nine months. The last time when he went there, he made a lot of money, and he was saying to her, to his wife, to my mother, "When we're going to come, I'm going to come back. I'm going to do this," and these big dreams. But the guard got jealous, being that he was rich. He cut his head off while he was sleeping and got the money. So they found his body without head. It was Sunday morning. My mother was expecting visitors from church, because they were living next to cathedral. And a lot of people came that day to see, to visit. She was surprised why so many people. And then all of a sudden, oh, she used to tell us, "I used to go to the kitchen to make coffee to serve them, and they used to talk. When I used to enter the living room, they used to stop talking, and I was surprised. Then all of a sudden I saw my mother and my two sisters to come, and

they came to me and they started crying. And I asked, 'Why, what happened?' And they told me that Thomas, " was his name, "was killed." And they brought him back the same day. His feet, his head was in his feet down, and his body without head. It was tragedy in the whole town, because it was something unusual. Now, my father heard these stories, after a year. There weren't cars. There weren't trains yet. He, with wagon, he came back to visit his mother. But he was twenty-five years older than my mother. When he heard about her, he went to visit my grandmother to give sympathy. And he said, uh . . .

SIGRIST: To your mother's mother.

BACOS: To my mother's mother. And he said, "I didn't come only to visit you, but I came to ask your daughter's hand." Then grandmother said, "Jimmy, I can't do nothing. She was married, and she is an individual now." All along, because in those days, mothers used to give orders. Now she's married and she's free. "I don't know if she will accept you, but I'm going to tell her." So when, now, my grandmother was widow,

but she was a very rich woman. She had mill, they used to ground with the water, not with electricity, the wheat and the, you know. So during the summer always we used to live in the mill because there was a little country home there. Mother said, grandmother said to mother, "We need the man. We have another two girls behind you. We need help. But I will never force you to get married with Jimmy because he's twenty-five years older than you." And Mother said, "Let me think about it. Give me a chance to think about it, a week." And then she said, "I will marry him because I know one thing. Many people ask my hand, but they had children." She said, "Inside me, I feel, I don't think I will be a good mother to strange children. If I get married and have my own children, I will be a very good mother, but I don't want to do something wrong." So she accept my father, and they got married. Meanwhile . . .

SIGRIST: Do you remember what year they were married?

BACOS: Oh, I was, I came about 19, uh . . .

SIGRIST: You were born in 1905.

BACOS: About five years before.

SIGRIST: 1900.

BACOS: Yeah. My father had established a good business in Bulgaria, and he left his brother to come to Kirk Klisse to see his mother. In those days, even in those days were unjust people. His smaller brother, that sent him to school, helped him to grow, he sold his business, he got the money, and he left. When my father went back they told him, "Your brother sold the business. He got everything." He comes back and tells my mother, "I don't think we will be able to marry, because I haven't got a penny." My mother said, "Don't worry. My father has left plenty. Together we're going to do, we're going to help, we're going to become somebody," which they did. They worked very hard. My father was working in the mills. He had properties. Wine, you know, vine bushes. And he used to send the wine to Constantinople. Also he was a sheriff, too. And this is the way we used to live a little bit more comfortable because he used to be with the Turks all the time as an official. But

when, in 1912, started the First World War, it started from Bulgaria. And the Bulgarians, they marched in my country, and we thought Bulgarians would remain there, being that they were Christians, we had hopes maybe we'd live a little bit better. But they stayed only nine months. We suffered a lot from Bulgarians, too. In nine months they got all out and the Turks come back. This was around '15, '16. Then the . . .

SIGRIST: And you remember when that happened.

BACOS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, I do remember. We didn't have to eat. We used to, we, the Turks, when they used to sell us bread, they used to mix bread with sand, just to kill us. In school, they closed the schools for a while, and we couldn't go. But my father was very smart, and he was a self-made man. He used to teach us at home. For a few years when schools closed, and then they started all over again. We were expecting now the war between Turks and Greeks was going on. I don't know if you ever read the Greeks walked up to Smyrna. Did you ever hear that? And Smyrna were Greek towns. Again we thought, everybody thought that

now the Greeks would remain. But politicians again, Venizelos was the leader of the Greeks, and English and French people used to help him to become, they used to help with the munitions with everything. But in between they had to change the, and when Venizelos lost, and they brought the king. The king was thrown out at that time, in 1918. So when they brought the king back, English and French people lost all the respect and they started giving the munitions to Turks, instead of to the Greeks. Meanwhile, the Greeks came to my town, and they stayed only two years. In two years again, all the Greeks had to leave the town and go scatter in Greece. Greece was a little one like this. It was very hard for them to go and settle. Because from Asia, from all over, the Turks, the Greeks had to come there. They managed, now they're all right, but still, the Greeks are always, they're not good politicians. They change always the politics. Anyway, that's a different story.

SIGRIST: Let's talk about you, personally. Let's talk about . . .

BACOS: Now, me, when I was a little one, I used to see other people that they used to come to America, and they used to help and make, fix their houses, help their parents, help their sisters and brothers. We had only two little girls in the family, me and four-and-a-half years later my sister came. I used to love babies. It's a baby that I was. And any place I used to hear that they had baby, I would run and see the baby, and be a babysitter, since I was a little one. But I noticed, my mother didn't have a second child, but I noticed that a woman, and this is very interesting, she used to go to friends of ours in the neighborhood, and any time she used to visit there, a child used to come. And I used to say maybe Mrs. Eleni, Helen was her name, Mrs. Eleni brings the children. So one day, as a little one that I was, I wasn't four-and-a-half even, I went and pulled her dress when I saw her passing, and I said, "Why don't you come and visit us too, so you can bring us a child, too?" And she looked at me and she said, "Well, try and make a lira." Lira means one gold piece. "And after you get me that lira, I'm going to come and bring the child."

I went home and I said, "Mother, I have to save every penny to make a lira, because Mrs. Helen is going to bring us a baby." My mother was laughing. Four-and-a-half years later, I was four-and-a-half exactly, my little sister came. It was July. One morning in September, as children, we used to go out in the street and play. There was free. It was a free life. I went there, out, and I didn't see any child. Across the street was a neighborhood grocery store. I went there and I said, "Where are the children today?" He said, "They're all in school. It's September. Don't you know that they went to school?" The school wasn't too far from us. I walked into school. I went, I didn't say anything to my mother. I walked into school and I went, and I saw all the mothers, and the children, they were registered. When my time came to walk, the teacher said, "And you, little one, what are you doing here?" I said, "I came to school like the others." They said, "Where is your mother?" "Oh, my mother can't come out because she has a baby, a new baby." Probably the answers I gave her, they kept me. And nobody was going four-and-a-half years old in

school. I start going to school. When I came back to my mother, she started yelling at me. "Where have you been?" I said, "I went to school." She said, "What did they do?" "They kept me, and they told me to go in the afternoon again." That's how I started to go to school, since I was four-and-a-half years old. But really, I was brilliant. I was a very smart girl, and I was jumping classes. Now I used to see other people, and I used to love to get English, American books, magazines, just to see how they lived. Being that other people used to go, and it was noticeable. Such and such a family's boy is sending money to school. Such and such, they went, and they progressed, and they came back again rich. Oh, we were only two little girls in the family. My father, it's an honor to have a boy in the family, because the family is going to inherit the name. And many times I used to hear my father talking with my mother. "We have two beautiful girls. Only if we had a boy." So that they're going to get help some day when they're going to get older, because usually there the boy will take care of the responsibilities of the family.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

BACOS: And as young as I was, I used to feel for my father and I used to tell him, "Don't worry, Dad. Someday I'll become your son, and I'm going to help you. Don't worry about the future." Another thing used to hurt me a lot. When we used to grow, they would take us to church every Sunday, one from one side, and one from one side. And while we're working and growing, meanwhile, the friends from far away, they would see him, and they would say, "Hey, Babayanie, your daughter is growing. Is going to be good for my son. But such-and-such house is going to be mine." There they used to give trousseau to get married, to get good boys and get, to see their children married. Father, now it was established well. He had three houses, which was all right. Later around, we used to work again, and they used to say, somebody else, "Hey, Babayanie. The little one is growing. She's going to be my daughter. Such-and-such a house is going to be mine." And that used to hurt me a lot. I used to say, "Dad, the one wants one house, the other wants one. Who are you going to lend?" And he used to say,

"Don't worry, dear. God gave me two girls. God will provide for everything. You just don't worry." And I used to think at night, when I used to, "Someday I have to go to America. I have to prove it. I have to become somebody so I can help my father." Many times I used to go and see my aunt. Her daughter was well-married. And she put false teeth on her. And my father didn't have teeth all time. He didn't have money. And I used to say, "Auntie, can I see your teeth? Because some day I'm going to buy teeth for my father." That's how much I loved my father. I'll tell you. I don't know how much you believe in God, but believe in God. If God wants things to happen, will happen. If He doesn't want, all, regardless how much you'll try, you won't be able to do it. Finally, in 1918, a man came from America. We used to say, that time, that the doors from America are open, and they can come freely. One day a man came and knocked my door and I opened the door. And he said, "Where is your mother?" My mother had a brother in America that he was lost. I went and called my mother and he said, "I brought you a letter from your brother. And he

opened the letter and found twenty, check for twenty-five dollars. At that time in 1918 it was a lot of money, twenty-five dollars. Oh, she was so happy. Not for the money, but being that he was alive. So in a few days I wrote him a letter and I said to him, to thank him first for the money, and told him that my dream, I love to get out from here. I'm growing, and I want, Father will never be able to send me to Constantinople. After you finish the high school in Kirk Klisse, you have to go to Constantinople to finish. But after the war, Father wasn't so rich like before. So I wrote everything, and I said, "If you only give me a chance to bring me to America to finish my schooling, because I hear in America are free." There we had to pay the teachers. My uncle, I didn't know that, I found out later, the same night that he got the letter, he was a gambler, a heavy gambler. He played, he said the man that was playing together, he was an agent. He said, "We'll play one ticket for my niece." And he won. He said, "Another play for the expenses." And he won. Now, the agent told me, in Ellis Island, here, he never told me the truth. When

he came to see the people that he was bringing, the agent always used to come, he came near me and he said, "Are you Babayanie?" I said, "Yes." He said, "I'm the one that I sent you the tickets. Your uncle even didn't see, even, the tickets." And I said, "Where's my uncle." He said, "He's coming, but you have to get the boat and go to another." Now, he was in the boat. "You have to go to another island where they're going to come and pick you from there." That's how I knew that I had to come here.

SIGRIST: Let's not get ahead with the Ellis Island. We'll tell that when we get to Ellis Island. Talk about getting ready to go.

BACOS: Now, this is very interesting. I went to my father, oh, when I got the letter and the ticket in one month, I was so excited. And I went to my mother and I said, "Help. My ticket came." And she was happy. When my father came back from work, I said, "Father, I got a ticket to go to America." Every night that I was going to sleep, I would dream, anything I used to read, I would dream how I'm going to find America, how

I'm going to go, how I'm going to try to become like the others, be somebody.

SIGRIST: What did you expect out of America? What were your expectations?

BACOS: First I wanted freedom, because we weren't free there. And the way I used to read books, it was free life, hard life maybe. Oh, sometimes they used to write that they used to find money in the street, and I could never believe that. I was too intelligent to hear stories like this. But while I was going to school always I used to tell my friends, classmates, "I'm going to go to America. I'm not going to stay here. There is no progress here." What you are, you used to remain the same way. There wasn't foresight, there wasn't dreams to develop. The rich people remain rich. The poor people remain poor. It wasn't a chance for the poor people. Another injustice used to happen. If they see poor family, that they had good worth it boys, they would grab him to their daughters, and then neglect the poor people. And I couldn't take it. I couldn't take that.

SIGRIST: So you were very anxious to get out of where you were.

BACOS: I was anxious. I wanted justice. I wanted a different life.

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

BACOS: I'll tell you. When my father came, I said to Father, "I got my tickets." He says, "Never a child of mine will go away from my arms. I went to Russia, and I know what I went through. I went to Bulgaria and I know what I went through. Child, fifteen year old, never." Three days I was begging him and I was telling him, "Dad, trust me. Trust me, Dad. Just let me. Give me a chance." Meanwhile, I heard, around the corner was another family. The son was classmate of mine. We used to sit. I used to sit here, and he used to sit there. I heard they had two boys in Dayton, Ohio. And I heard that Effie got her tickets mother, son and daughter, to come to America. Without saying anything to my father or mother I went to my friend's house, and I said, "Effie, I heard you're going to America. Can you take me with you? I got my

tickets, too." Of course, Gregory, the brother, said to me, "Please, dear, Effie, let's get Doukenie together. We're going to have fun on the road." And she said, "Okay, we'll take you." This way I was secure that I was with family. I go back to my father and I ask him, "Would you allow me to go with such-and-such, Floridis family?" Because it was a famous family. Well, he thought and thought, and then he said, "Well, all right, as long as you're going with a family and not alone." And then he took me aside and gave me a lot of advice, and then at the end he said, "I know you're going to be desperate. One thing I'm asking you. Don't ever dirty my forehead." Just like this. Just like I see him now. "Don't ever let any man touch your hand. I raised two sisters, and they are pure. They went pure married. But don't you, if anything happen to you, be careful. I'd rather see you drown than come back." I said, "Dad, you have nothing to worry about. Just give me the chance to go." Thinking that I'm going to come here, and I'll find everything the way I was dreaming, but it wasn't like this. Anyway, we were struggling to go. The day

we got the train, the whole town was in the train, in the station, to say goodbye. Because we were two boys, and all the schools, the classmates, and all the schools that we were going together to America. We went, the door closed, and everybody was saying goodbye with their handkerchiefs. I just looked at them, and I said, "Where am I going? What courage I have to start? Will I be able to do it?" And again, I said, "Well, you were asking yourself, you're asking God to give you the opportunity. Now you are on your own feet. You have to go through. You promise and you have to go through." Well . . .

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you took with you?

BACOS: I took one old, old valise, small valise. One coat that I had, and panties, and a few stockings. That's all. Now, my money weren't enough. When we came to Athens, the family, we were living in a very poor hotel, in one room, the mother and daughter and the brother and me. We used to think that we're going to come and we're going to get the boat the next day and we're going to come. By that time the only boat that

was crossing was Magalia Hellas, Great Hellas. Hellas in Greece, the name was.

SIGRIST: Oh, Hellas. H-E-L-L-A-S.

BACOS: Yes. Magalia Hellas. Great Hellas. And they couldn't travel because something happened to the boat. We went to, oh, it was a very hard for me because I was all alone. The others went and signed their papers, their passports. Me, they didn't accept me because I was too young. I was desperate. From Athens we went to Piraeus. You have an idea, Piraeus.

SIGRIST: Piraeus, right. P-I-R-A-E-U-S.

BACOS: Yes. We went there, where the officers that they used to sign the name. And they deny me. When they went, when we went back they said to me, "What are you going to do?" I said, "I'm going to go a little under." Next day early I knew how to get the train to go to Piraeus, and I went very early and I stood outside of the door, all alone. I don't know where I was finding this courage. Till today, many times, I think, "How?" Well, the man that came, the first man, to open the

door, I hold his jacket and I said, "Please, mister."
In Greek they say, "(Greek)". "Mister, help me." I
went in, and I said to him, a few minutes, my story,
that I have to go to America. I can't go back again.
The whole dream that I had to go to school, it was
America. Please help me. By the time I was talking,
a Cretan, a man from Crete. You know Crete, the
island Crete. He was wearing those big, like, not
pants, like.

SIGRIST: Bloomers?

BACOS: Yeah. He said, "I want to go to America with Magalia
Hellas." With Greek, the other boat. The man was
saying, in high Greek, "(Greek)." That means,
"Before Magalia Hellas, the King Alexander is going to
go." But he couldn't understand, because it was high
Greek. And I'm explaining now to the man. And I
said, "Listen, before the Magalia Hellas the boat, the
new boat, and we're going to go with King Alexander."
And he understood. The other man, that he was
listening to me, he, I think he got interested. He
said, "Give me your papers," and he signed the papers.

So I came back, now we had to wait forty days in that little room for the King Alexander because they had to make alterations. They just bought it from Germany.

SIGRIST: We need to speed up a little bit here, so why don't you talk about being on the boat, because we're going to run out of time in a little while.

BACOS: Meanwhile, my money finished.

SIGRIST: While you were waiting out the forty days.

BACOS: Effie, she used to buy, being that she was about thirty years old, she used to buy a little meat in a stove in the room, she used to go, because we couldn't go to a restaurant. We didn't have money. One morning, and I gave all her money that I had to her. So one morning she said, "You share is finishing. What are we going to do." I said, "Effie, I don't know." She says, "Write to your uncle to send you more money." I says, "Effie, I haven't got the nerve to call. The man already he sent so much money. I haven't got the nerve. Please, lend me the money, and when we're going to go there, in a nice way, I'm going

to tell him." Which she did. Time came, we got the King Alexander. It was a beautiful boat. And I was playing mandolin.

SIGRIST: Where were your accommodations on the boat. Where did you sleep?

BACOS: Oh, I slept with them, in one room. They were four decks. But after the mother got very sick, and instead of second class they wanted to, because they had money, they moved to first class, better cabin, and they brought where I was other three girls. I was playing mandolin, and always I used to go to the deck and play mandolin. A few more girls found me, and they saw me. They said, "Why we can't play?" So we used to play. Meanwhile, a Greek fellow was travelling, and he came one day and he said, it took thirteen days to come to America. He said, "Little one, do you know any other girls that they play mandolin?" I said, "Yes." He said, "I'm thinking, being that the boat is for the first time traveling in America, I'm thinking to give a dance so that they can remember King Alexander. And I want you, I'm going to

give you some notes, and I want you to be up on the stage." Ooh, I was so happy because I would be stood again up on the stage. So the night came. We play. An American girl came to Greece to visit with her mother to her country, and she was coming back. And she rehearsed on the stage a beautiful speech. In fact, she was wearing a long gown, and everybody, in my town nobody used to wear long gowns. And many girls used to say, "Look what she's going. What kind of dress is she wearing?" I said, "Wait. Maybe we have to use the same dresses up there. We don't know." They were coming from Chicago. But this girl and the mother loved me so much. They were on the first class, too. And they used to invite me all the time with her. And the old lady used to say, "I have four boys in Chicago. One of my boys, you're going to be my daughter-in-law." And I used to laugh, because I was only a child. Many times I thought of her. See, my uncle would never give me a chance to go.

SIGRIST: So you were on the boat for how long? Thirteen days?

BACOS: Thirteen days.

SIGRIST: Thirteen days. Was it a rough trip? Did you get sick?

BACOS: No, no. It was a beautiful boat, beautiful. When we came here, so happy that I am in America now. Passing the Ellis Island, passing to come to Ellis Island. I saw the Statue of Liberty. And I said to myself, "Lady, you're such a beautiful. You opened your arms, and you get all the foreigners here. Give me a chance to prove that I am worth it, to do something, to become somebody in America." And always that statue was in my mind. But when I passed in front of this statue, it was the real truth, and I was so enthusiastic. After, oh, before we got the boat to come to Ellis Island, they started mumbling about me. And I heard two girls, elderly girls, and they said, "Maybe they're going to send you back because they, already they heard that I was coming to my uncle, and I was underage. At that time, the agent came and said, "Are you Babayanie? Don't worry. You're going to go to the island, and from there your uncle is going to come and pick you. But never mention anything that I won't be able, being that I was

underage, I didn't hear." The same night when we came my uncle comes with another woman. He said, "This is your aunt." Usually the Greeks, to a strange woman they call "aunt." "And you're going to stay with them." They have a little girl and a little boy. With another word, they investigated that he was a bachelor, and I wasn't allowed to go into bachelor's hands alone, and he had to find a family to place me there. He was helping. But three days I had to stay here.

SIGRIST: In just our few remaining minutes, tell us what it was like to stay here for three days.

BACOS: My dear boy, I saw tears. I saw tears with happiness, but I saw tears with pain. Many people came and their parents were far away from Chicago. They had to wait here, and they were living in an agony. Next to me it was an Italian woman with three children, and one of the child got sick. Now, I didn't know that it was pneumonia. The child was coughing. And she was holding the child and singing. And all of a sudden, a doctor and two nurses came to take the child away.

Now, she didn't know how to speak. They're talking to her. After I realized what they were saying, that they have hospital here, and the child has to go to the hospital. And they took the child from her arms, and she was crying, and I was crying, too, because, you know, it's not easy to take your child without knowing what they're doing. And I was crying with her, too. As I said, I saw many people, that they were waiting, and then the parents came, or the brothers came, and they were so happy. And me, I was remaining back. When the other company asked me what was your opinion about Ellis Island, I said, "Beautiful, they treat me royalty." But for me, it was just like very hard, small road with thorns. Would I be able to pass those thorns and get out to go to America, or they have to set me back again. I cry. I cry all night.

SIGRIST: You must have been very frightened.

BACOS: I had courage. I had real courage, and I was praying. I was praying so hard. Finally, the third day, they came to take me.

SIGRIST: Do you remember eating at Ellis Island?

BACOS: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you describe that a little bit for us quickly?

BACOS: They gave us food. There were big men that always, in the morning, they used to, what I learned in Ellis Island was, "Come on, come on." It was Irish people who were guards, and they used to go, "Come no, come on." Like lambs we used to go upstairs to the rooms to sleep. One Sunday that I was, they brought, Sunday or Saturday they brought, to entertain us, ballet. And it was a beautiful day that day. But still, again, the pain was in me. I couldn't enjoy nothing, being that I was afraid they were going to send me back. And I was dreaming if they send me back, before I go to the other boat, I'm going to fall into the river and die. I couldn't go back any more. I had dreams. I promise everybody that someday I'm going to come back and you'll see me different. Well . . .

SIGRIST: Well, let's get you off of Ellis Island just quickly. How did all that happen? How did you get off of Ellis

finally?

BACOS: Uh, my uncle, as I said, he was a gambler. He didn't have a lot of money. We came, by subway we came back to go to the house. A whole week, I think it was Christmas week, I didn't go out, and I didn't know, even, if there were roads. The house was back, and where we faced, it was one big school and windows, nothing else. Finally, a week later, the aunt that I used to call aunt said to me, "We're going to go and visit somebody, family around here." I said, "Do they have girls?" She said, "No, but they have boys." I said, "Boys." My hair was down. Short hair. Very short dresses like they used to use on the other side. I wasn't dressed like an American girl. But I didn't know any better. When I went to that room, to the house, we opened the door and I saw one big table, around about seven boys. And another boy was sitting. The whole house, it was two rooms, kitchen and two little bedrooms. And in the kitchen it was very narrow bathroom, no shower, no bath, no bathtub. And on the side where is the laundry tub it was, a boy used to sit on top. The minute he saw me walking in,

he said, "This spring chicken will be for me."
Everybody started laughing. He was already five years in America. Well, I was embarrassed because I thought something is wrong with me. And I looked at them, but the lady that I was with her, she said, "Shut up." The word "shut up" in Turkish means "wine". And I thought the minute she walk in she ask for wine. In Greece, women don't get drunk and don't drink. They will drink a little cognac, but nothing else. I said to myself, "Oh, my God, I have to live with a drunk. Every minute she walk into the room, she's asking for some wine." Then they start talking to me, the boys, asking me news about Greece, about how the people over there, are they still struggling. All kind of questions. But my mind wasn't there. They gave me to play mandolin. I saw a mandolin there, and I started playing. I impressed them very much, because in Greek I am well-educated. And I was very sensible and very logical. I don't know how I got those gifts, but I was. They all were impressed. In fact, from that day, any place we used to go, you know, usually the Greeks makes dances. Every weekend you'll go to a

Greek dance. They would go, and they would invite me. And I was, and I started school immediately. When I came out of the room, when we were going out, I said, "Auntie, why did you ask for wine the minute we walk into the room?" She said, "Who ask wine?" I said, "I speak Turkish well. I know "shut up" means wine." She said, "No. Shut up means keep quiet." And she said, "Do you remember that little boy that was sitting in the back." I said, "Yes, but he never spoke." The others used to speak. He was very shy. But he knew what to say, "This spring chicken will be for me." She said he said this and this, and these were the first English words that I learned: "This spring chicken will be for me." (they laugh)

SIGRIST: That's a wonderful story.

BACOS: Meanwhile, while I was going to dances, all those boys used to dance with me, flirt a little bit, and now I started to go to school. In school I spoke good French, and I could immediately pick the words, the English, only with French accent. But in no time I start to progress. In fact, the first day they put me

in the eighth class. Problems, I could do. But the books that they gave me I couldn't read. I didn't know how. Meanwhile, one day, my uncle comes and says, "I won't be able to send you to school any more." Already I went to school three months. I said, "Why?" Now, my dream was to come to America to go to school, to go to become a doctor and show my compatriots what I could do. He said, "I lost all my money. Ten thousand dollars in one night." He gambled. I said, "Now what?" He said, "There are two ways. Either you have to go back, either you have to get married." But meanwhile, they know that he was broke.

SIGRIST: I'm going to have to end the interview in a second. Can you just tell the end of the story very quickly?

BACOS: And he said, they wanted, they were asking him, "What's she going to do? Is she going to stay here, or is she going to go back?" Because those days the Greeks, they didn't have Greek girls around, and they used to gamble, bargain. "I have so much, I have so much." So one day my uncle comes and says, "There are

many Greeks that they want to get married. Forty years old, fifty years old. They have business, they have four mink coats." I said, "Me, to sell myself?"
(interview ends)