

EI-496

ADRIENNE DAVIDIAN KENDERIAN

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED AND REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 6/1998

SYRIA (ARMENIAN), 1920

AGE 2

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SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the
National Park Service. Today is Monday, July 11th, 1994.
I'm in Colonie, which is just outside of Albany in upstate
New York, with Adrienne Kenderian. Mrs. Kenderian was born in
Syria, came to the United States with her mother and father,
arrived at Ellis Island around Christmas time in 1920. At
that time Mrs. Kenderian was two years old.

KENDERIAN: Uh huh.

SIGRIST: Anyway, thank you very much for letting me come out.
And if we can begin with you giving me your birth date,
please.

KENDERIAN: February 25th, 1918.

SIGRIST: And tell me where in Syria you were born.

KENDERIAN: Aleppo.

SIGRIST: And can you tell me a little bit about how your
family ended up in Aleppo, because I know they didn't start

out in Aleppo.

KENDERIAN: No, they were in Urfa, Turkey, and they were, of course, first they came and took my father. And then they told my mother she had to go out. She and her mother walked through the desert, desert, walking, walking, walking, you know, just plain walking. And they come to a stream where she sees that her mother, they had to be pushed to a bridge and her mother, she gets a Turk to let her have the horse so that they can go across the stream. And she says, "Mom, I'll meet you." Well, by the time she gets there, her mother is dead. In a matter of a few hours, he must have beaten her to death. And so she says, "I buried my mother there and continued on walking." She didn't know if my father was alive. They just separated. And my father, in the mean time, is being pushed, you know, through with the men. He says, "One place we came and the men asked to go to the bathroom." He says, "I walked in and when I went into the bathroom," he says, "I noticed that there was another door in the back." He looks and he says, "Whether I go out of this door or whether I go out of that door, they're going to kill me. Let me take my chances." And he goes out the back door. Nobody comes after him and he escapes. So now, for two years neither one knew whether the other one was alive. So they finally, someone sees my mother and notifies my father that, "Your wife is alive." And somehow or other, you know, as they're walking and walking, they finally meet in Syria. They find each other. And that's where they form, you know, a family, you know, they want to start all over again. And just as they're getting started, my

mother is out walking to the store, doesn't she by a miracle find a letter in the street. She picks up the letter and there it is, Elizabeth Davidian. She looks at the letter and she says, "Who?," you know, she opens it up. She has two uncles, her father's two brothers are in America. They are looking for Elizabeth because she is the only, as far as they know, the only survivor. Uh, well, at that time they don't know that she survived. That she's the only one in the family. Elizabeth Davidian, they look for her and they find her. And she says, "Here it is, this letter. I'm reading it and it's saying 'Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Elizabeth Davidian, please contact...' and there's the return address." Well, she doesn't know how to read or write because she didn't know. So she finds somebody to write a letter to her uncle saying that we're alive. When they hear that, they quickly say, "We want you to come to America." My father says, "I won't go. I want to stay here." And my mother says, "I'm going." By that time now I'm born. I'm in the picture. And this debate is going on back and forth. She want's to come. He don't want to come. He's, he's preparing to open up a shoemaking, he made shoes. He was a cobbler. He made shoes and he's setting up a store, a business again. And she says, "I could care less. I'm not paying, he's asking me, you know. I'm not staying here. I'm not staying here." Well, anyway, to cut the long story short, her uncle's sent her two hundred dollars and she's making preparations to come to America. My father still is not coming. Well, she says, "That was the first time I ever talked up to your father, and I said if you come you are my husband. If you don't come, this

is the end." So they get up and they come. So she makes arrangements and they come to America.

SIGRIST: Okay, let's not get any farther with the story. What was your father's name?

KENDERIAN: Haig. Haig.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that please?

KENDERIAN: H-A-I-G.

SIGRIST: And the last name, your maiden name?

KENDERIAN: Davidian.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

KENDERIAN: D-A-V-I-D-I-A-N.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about your father's family background and, and what he did, were they in Turkey before they went to Syria? (Mrs. Kenderian nods "yes") Tell me where in Turkey he was from and that sort of thing.

KENDERIAN: They were both, Urfa, Turkey. My father was a, one of three boys. He had a twin. The twin died and he lived. He had an older brother and a younger brother.

SIGRIST: What were all their names, do you know?

KENDERIAN: One was George and one was Dickran.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that please?

KENDERIAN: D-I-C-K-R-A-N. And his brother was a very prominent person in Urfa. Whatever invention would be made in, would come up in Europe, he would bring it to Turkey, to our area. That's why his brother did not, he knew too many influential people. They didn't take him but they took my father. His brother had died...

SIGRIST: The twin?

KENDERIAN: No, the twin had died. The other brother had died, too, sickness, illness, whatever, you know. He had died. So it was just the two of them that lived. And, so, he became a cobbler and he used to make shoes and teach the Turk kids, they were illiterate anyway, how to make shoes. So, he was more like a teacher to them and he made a living. And he met my mother when she was sixteen. My mother was one of nine children. Her mother had nine children. Each would die from some reason or other. My mother is the only one that lived. In 1896, they had another like revolution and they go in hiding. And my mother is six months old at the time. Where they're hiding, they're afraid that my mother would cry, so they get up to choke her. And her mother pleads and says, "Please, don't. She's the only one I've got living. Please don't kill her." So they leave her alone.

As God would be with us, she says, "I didn't make a sound to, you know, show where they are." Finally, she says, "It was a twenty four or forty eight hour thing," so that it wasn't, I mean, every once in a while these things happened anyway. But that time there she says, "I was six months old." And so, when my mother was sixteen, so they, my father wants to marry her. And they get married and set up house.

SIGRIST: What is your mother's name?

KENDERIAN: Elizabeth.

SIGRIST: What's her name in Armenian?

KENDERIAN: Yeghasepeth.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

KENDERIAN: Y-E-G-H-A-S-E-P-E-T-H.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

KENDERIAN: Kazanjian. K-A-Z-A-N-J-I-A-N.

SIGRIST: I'm sorry, K-H...

KENDERIAN: (correcting Mr. Sigrist): K-A-Z-A-N-J-I-A-N.

SIGRIST: I wanted to ask you about your father's parents. Do you know anything about them?

KENDERIAN: No, because my relatives are here. I ask them and they don't know. They, I have been, funny, I've been trying to find out so much about them and I can't. I don't know whether, because I have a first cousin who is here. She just came recently and I keep asking her all kinds of questions. And she can't answer any of my questions because of my parents, my grandparents' names. Now, see, my mother's side I know. My father's side I don't know.

SIGRIST: Do you know what their, you don't know their names, then, you said. (Mrs. Kenderian shakes her head "no") You don't even know your, well, tell me, tell me what you know about your mother's parents. Now, you told the story already about her mother dying on the way. What else do...

KENDERIAN: Well, her father died of a heart attack.

SIGRIST: What were their names?

KENDERIAN: Avedis, A-V-E-D-I-S, and Anna, Anna.

SIGRIST: And do you know what her mother's maiden name was?

KENDERIAN: Kadajian, K-A-D-A-J-I-A-N. I knew her.

SIGRIST: Well tell me what, tell me what you know about your

mother's side of the family and, and maybe the, you said she was, she was the only survivor...

KENDERIAN: Not too much, you know, I, they didn't go into details about the past relatives. I think they dwelled so much on the Massacre that they didn't talk about anything else. Because now when I, oh, I was, when I was home before I got married, all, every time we had company each one would start to relate their stories of what they went through. And I was so sick of hearing it. I'd say, "Don't you have anything," because you know what would happen, they'd start talking. And then, first thing you know, the whole house is crying. And I'd say, "Don't you have," well, as a kid, what would you say, all these people do is cry, cry, cry. "Don't you have anything good to talk about?" But, as I said, she loved her America. And then, when I came to, when we come to America...(birds can be heard in the background)

SIGRIST: Wait, let's not get to America yet. Tell me any stories that your parents related to you about their early life in Turkey together. Did they ever talk about like the house that they lived in or anything like that.

KENDERIAN: Well, see, yes, they would talk about where their house was and what they had and this and that. Well, the only thing she said to us that the day they were pushed out of their houses, everything that they had of value, there was a well in our courtyard. She says, "We took everything and threw it into that well so that thinking later on, when things settle

down, we would come back to our house and dig it all up."

Well, they never got back there. This is why I tell my cousin this. I says, "My mom always said, 'You have no idea what we through into that well.'" I said, "Let's go back." She says, "Seventy years, eighty years ago." So, yeah, that's why I said I don't know too much. Even my kids ask me a lot of things about them and I can't answer anything because they wouldn't talk about that. They only talked about the sad things, the sad things, the sad things that had happened.

SIGRIST: Who was more willing to talk about the, the dramatic circumstances, your mother or your father?

KENDERIAN: They both, they both. You have no idea how they would sit and cry, both of them and everybody that was in the house. Everyone. That's why she'd always say they'd come or they'd ask them that, "Did you see," any company that they had, "Did you see my relative? Do you know if they died? How did they die?" You know, and if they knew, they saw, they told, just, I'm, I'm telling you, it was only, it was so sad that I'd say, "Don't you people, can't you do anything else but cry!?"

SIGRIST: But it seems like it's such an important part of the culture, to keep all that within memory.

KENDERIAN: But, well, as a young kid, would you want to hear it day in and day out?

SIGRIST: No, and I can see where it would give you a very specific perception of what the adults...

KENDERIAN: Yeah and then, see, you know what your doing? You're trying to block it out. Now I say, "Why did I block it out?"

SIGRIST: Well, let's see how much you actually remember. Do you remember your parents talking about the day they were actually told to leave the house? Anything specific about that? Talking about the Turks coming into the town or...

KENDERIAN: Well, first she said they burned the church. they, they, they said there was like a mass meeting at church. And so they got up, she says. A whole lot of people went. She says, "I didn't let your father go and he was very upset with me that I didn't let him go." She says, "I don't know, but I had a feeling that something was not right." Sure enough, once they got the people all in the church they set fire to the church and closed the doors and they all perished into that fire. One, my mother's, see, my mother's uncles, the two that were in America, her father and another brother. There were four brothers in my mother's, uh, her, my grandfather's, okay?

SIGRIST: So the these would be great uncles to you, yes? Your grandfather's brothers?

KENDERIAN: No, my...

SIGRIST: No, it would be your mother's uncle's.

KENDERIAN: My mother's uncles. The one family with, he, he says, "I'm not going to be killed by the Turks." He sets fire to his house and burns the whole family in the house, which was foolish. But the other two uncles, two brothers had flown to, you know, they had come to America. But her father had died of a heart attack so she was an orphan. She was an only, you know, she was an only child, because her mother had nine children and each would die from some reason or other. So she was the only one that was living.

SIGRIST: What did she ever talk about when her father died? Did she ever talk about that experience?

KENDERIAN: She didn't remember her father, no.

SIGRIST: She was very young.

KENDERIAN: Yeah, she was very young. She didn't remember her father very well.

SIGRIST: Are there any other details that you can think about concerning when the turks came in to deport the people out of this particular town? Any other stories about things that might have happened at that time? You mentioned, you mentioned the church. What religion were your parents?

KENDERIAN: Armenian Apostolic.

SIGRIST: Apostolic. And was everyone in Urfa, Urfa is a city, right? A large city?

KENDERIAN: Turkey, in Turkey.

SIGRIST: In Turkey. I mean, was it, did it have a big Armenian population or was it mostly Turkish?

KENDERIAN: Not too much. And then the only thing they say, Urfa doesn't have too many people here because, she'd say, anytime a boy would say that, "I want to leave. I want to go. Try my luck somewhere," she'd say they'd find a girl and marry them off. And that's, they had to stay put. They couldn't, they wouldn't move out. (she clears his throat) Because I says, you know, in other (she clears her throat) places, they'd come from Dikconaget [ph], Maras, you know, Karpet [ph], whatever, there are so many of them. How come there aren't too many Urfas. And she'd, that's when she turned around and said this is what. I mean, it their own doing that they don't have too many. Now there is a lot. they have, they are coming. I mean, in California there is a whole slew of them now. We, we hear of a lot of people here. In Jersey there is a lot. But, they wouldn't let them leave. They just wanted to keep them closely together. They didn't want them to migrate elsewhere.

SIGRIST: When the Turks initially came in, were they, what

were they most interested in doing? Were they most interested in taking, separating the men and getting them out of there or were they most interested in getting the other people out of Turkey?

KENDERIAN: It's, no. I think what it is, once they get the Turks out (correcting herself), uh, I mean the men out...

SIGRIST: Right.

KENDERIAN: ...the women will be helpless. And they can do whatever they want. Oh, they did enough. They raped. They, you know, some made them turn to Turk, deny their Christianity and become Mohammeds.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about that? That's...

KENDERIAN: (she clears her throat) There's a lot of them that did. A lot of them.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about how that might have saved the person if they did that.

KENDERIAN: Well, one of my cousins did. She did. She married a Turk and saved her life. But then, later on after the war, though, she left him. She came back and, you know, some of them had to escape. They take their life in their own hands. In, a lot of them, while they're going, now one cousin of mine, what they have done when they were leaving, the baby was

six months old. They gave the baby to a sick, uh, a Kurd house, and says, "Please take care of her. We may, we'll die. Maybe she will live." But now that child wouldn't know that she was an Armenian, right? After the war, after they were all settled in Syria, they went back and kidnapped the child. "We knew where she was. We kidnapped. How many of them," she says, "we did." My mother's family, "There was forty two of us," she says. "Two survived." She says, you know, "And then we started looking around that we have Victoria in one place and Isabel in another place. Let's go and see. And we, we kidnapped them and brought them home," she says. "How many of our kids like that," she says, we did that."

SIGRIST: Sure. It must have been a rather common thing in a way.

KENDERIAN: Well, what else could they do? They just, you know, they just left them there and they says, "Well, if we survive, we will come back and see if we can get them. If we don't survive, well, at least, but they won't know that they're Armenians. They won't know." But as it, it just so happened that they are here now.

SIGRIST: Do you know what years your, your parents were, were forced to leave Urfa?

KENDERIAN: '15.

SIGRIST: It was in 1915. It was that, that year.

KENDERIAN: '15, '15.

SIGRIST: Are there any, your, your father was rounded up and taken off and you, did he ever talk about what happened to him during that experience? You already told us the story about escaping.

KENDERIAN: Well, he said, yeah, escaping. He says, he says, "Well, we were just pushed, you know, every day we were pushed further and further and further. We didn't know." That's when he says, "Maybe the Turk was good and that's why he shut his eye and didn't come after me." Maybe, I don't know. "Maybe it was an act of God," he says. I don't know. He says, "I just took off and I started running and running and running until I got to Syria."

SIGRIST: Did your parents ever talk about good deeds done by Turks or a specific Turk that helped them out somehow?

KENDERIAN: Well, see, there's that Turk, you know, soldier.

SIGRIST: Right, right.

KENDERIAN: He did.

SIGRIST: But any other...

KENDERIAN: No, he says that there were good ones amongst them.

Now, that's, my father would always say, "It's because of a Turk that I'm alive today." And other people would say, "You, you're saying that a Turk is good?" He says, "Well, I have to admit it." He says, "I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for that Turk." He says, "Now, don't knock them all." And through work, too, in business. Well, see, he was dealing with the Turkish children and he, he says, "There were some good ones amongst them. I'm not going to call them all bad but if I force you to hurt him and I'm standing here. What am I going to do? I have to do it." He says, "Don't knock them all."

SIGRIST: Because there were, there were good ones among them.

KENDERIAN: Yes, and my mother said the same thing. There were some, we can't call them all bad but, the regime.

SIGRIST: Were there any other stories that your mother relayed to you about the march to Syria? You told me the one story where, I believe, her mother died...

KENDERIAN: Oh no, well, she'd say, "We'd picked," the only thing she says, "We picked weeds. We ate that to survive." And then she says, "When we were walking at a Kurd's house, we would see them making bread. And we'd go over and help them make the bread so that they would give us one loaf so that we could survive. I mean, these are the things we did on the road," she says, "walking because we had nothing. We've only got the

clothes on our back and whatever gold, valuables
that," you know, money that they had she says, "We
wrapped around our, you know, so that's what kept us going. We
kept living on that."

SIGRIST: You've mentioned the Kurds twice now. Do you know
what the Kurd's positions were towards the Armenians, if they
were friendly or...?

KENDERIAN: No, they were, yes, they were friendly. The Kurds
were friendly towards, because my mother would always say the
Kurds were friendly. Because she even would say to me because
of what has happened to her, when I am born she couldn't nurse
me. Well, there are no bottled milks or anything there. She
says there was a Kurd neighbor. Every time she'd hear me cry,
she'd call, you know, yell out in the courtyard or whatever
and say, "Bring her over." And she'd nurse me so
that, she had a baby and she would nurse her baby and me
everyday. She says, Ma, she'd always say to me, "You grew up
on a Kurd's milk." She'd always say that to me.

SIGRIST: I wonder if, if the Kurds had sympathy for the
Armenians because they themselves are sort of an
oppressed people, you now, they were...

KENDERIAN: But I guess the Turks weren't touching them, so, but
they were, you know, so they were feeling sorry for the
Armenians. They were just dead against the Armenians.
They had to, well, my father says one time he heard a Turk

saying, "Maybe they are, there is something to it." He says, "We kill them and kill them and we just can't, there's just no end to them. We just keep killing them." He says, "I heard a Turk saying that. 'We keep killing them and killing them.'" He knows that they're killing them. And he says, "There's no end to it." He says, "Look, look at all that there is there." (she clears her throat)

SIGRIST: Tell me what year your parents arrived in Syria. I mean, was there a length of time that elapsed...

KENDERIAN: Well, now, I was born in '18. So you give me nine months, right? There's a year there, so it must have about '17, around 1917 that they, it was two years because she says it was two years they were on the road.

SIGRIST: Did they have any children prior to leaving Turkey...

KENDERIAN: My mother lost two before me.

SIGRIST: ...that were older? Did she ever talk about that?

KENDERIAN: Oh, yes. She did. Of course, she says the day they took my father, the first girl was born. And she says, well, you get all excited and everything. She says, "I nursed the baby. The baby turned blue and died." "I must have poisoned the child," she says, because, you know, you've got so much fear in you. You got so much, uh, you're all upset. So she says, "Just as soon as I nursed that baby," she says, "I

noticed the baby turning blue." And she says, "The baby died." So, and then there's...

SIGRIST: And so she blamed herself for that.

KENDERIAN: She blamed herself. She always did. She always blamed herself for that. But I says, "How can you blame yourself, Mom? Were you responsible for what was going on then?"

SIGRIST: What about the other child? Did she ever talk about it?

KENDERIAN: No, she didn't talk about that one. She talked about the first one and she talked, you know, then me, because she says, you know, like when we were on a boat, ship, whatever you want to call it, with all the animals coming to America, and I had, I get the measles on the ship. So she doesn't know what to do. She takes, she finds powder. And she puts powder all over my face thinking that she's going to hide the measles. So when she gets to Ellis Island, as soon as she gets off, she's getting off the ship, zoom, they take me away from her. Now, she's all hysterical. Ah, she's screaming, she's crying. "They took my baby away from me. I lost my family. I came to America to be free. Now they took my child away from me." While she's standing there crying a minister, an Armenian minister hears her talking and he comes over to her and he says, "What's the matter?" And my mother says, "I looked." She says,

"There's an Armenian speaker." She doesn't find, see her uncles yet. And he says, "What happened?" So she says, "They took my baby." He says, "They didn't take your baby away from you. Your baby is sick. You come back in about a week and they'll give you your baby back to you." And she says, well, crying and all, she says, "We get and we, my uncles came and they took me to their house." In the meantime, you must understand, my father does not want to come to America, right? He's coming against his will. The first thing that happens, the baby is taken away. And he turns, he says, "You got, are you getting it?" And then they go to her uncle's house and she's got a very nasty aunt.

SIGRIST: What is the uncle's name, and the, the aunt?

KENDERIAN: Uh, Kevork, George. K-E-V-O-R-K, Kevork Kazanjian.

And he, she turns around and she sees my mother pregnant with my brother and she sees my mother and my father. She looks at, first them and then to her husband and back to them, and she says, "Look, I want you out of here. I want my two hundred dollars. It's up to you how you get it." Now my father starts in again, "Here's your America. You wanted to come to America. Now what are you going to do?" In the meantime, she says, while we were there other bachelors, they came to inquire about their parents and their kids, you know, sisters and all. And they heard my aunt, her aunt saying what she did to my mother. So they turn around and say to my mother, "Look, we've got an apartment. If you want, you can come and stay with us. You can cook and wash,

you know, whatever you can do, help us. And we can manage together." In the meantime, they find my father a job, a dollar a day, seven days, seven dollars. And so we, they get up and they go there. And she's pregnant with my brother. And we, I don't remember that. That part...

SIGRIST: You're still at Ellis Island, right?

KENDERIAN: No, after Ellis Island, that's when we came to her, I'm in Ellis Island!

SIGRIST: You're at Ellis Island.

KENDERIAN: I'm in Ellis Island, yes. (they laugh) I'm in Ellis Island. So the following week they come and they get me. I guess the measles all finished by that time.

SIGRIST: So you were there about a week?

KENDERIAN: Must be. Usually measles take about two weeks anyway, doesn't it?

SIGRIST: Yeah.

KENDERIAN: So she gets that, gets me and they, we go to these people's house. We lived there. And then one day her uncle comes again and says, "On the sixth floor there's a three room apartment and we rented it," you know, they rented that apartment and this is right across the hall from her

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: Okay, we are now resuming. We did not ascertain the name of the ship, but we did find out that you left from Beirut. The ship left from Beirut.

KENDERIAN: Yeah, yeah, because they had to from Halab they had to come to Beirut. That I know. They always talked about that. Then they came to France and from France they came to America.

SIGRIST: You said they talked about going from Aleppo to Beirut. What did they say about that?

KENDERIAN: No, uh, well, see, that's when, they could only come out from there, I guess. Maybe they didn't have a harbor at Aleppo, so they came to Beirut. They had to come out from there. That's the only thing that they would talk about. And she says, "And I had a bag and I put all our worldly belongings," possessions, the clothes on their back and just a few things in there. That's all. That's all they came with. And...

SIGRIST: So they went from Aleppo to Beirut, got on a ship, went from Beirut to France...

KENDERIAN: France.

SIGRIST: Do you know where in France?

KENDERIAN: Yeah, Le Havre.

SIGRIST: Yes, Le Havre, yeah, okay.

KENDERIAN: Yeah, Le Havre.

SIGRIST: And, and then from there they came to the United States.

KENDERIAN: Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: And this is, and this is in, around Christmas time they arrived.

KENDERIAN: Yes, because she says, "When we got here..."

SIGRIST: You're talking about your mother.

KENDERIAN: Yes, well, she would do all the talking a lot. She says they were getting ready for, Christmas trees and she says and they were getting ready, you know, there was a lot of excitement. She says everybody's all excited. They're getting trees ready and everything else. So, of course, she says we didn't have a tree because we went to, and then between Christmas and New Year's, you know, and then New Year's was cute. It seems like they would blow horns and a lot of noise for New Year's, the Old Year out and the New

Year in. Here she thinks they're coming again after them.
 She says, "I took, uh, we, we jumped into bed, pulled the covers
 over us so that they would, like they're not going to find
 us." And she says, "We woke in the morning and there's no
 noise. Everything is fine. And she asks her uncle, "What was
 all the noise about?" And that's when he explains, he says,
 "The old noi--, the Old Year is going out and they're
 greeting the New Year." And that was one night that she got
 scared again. And the Fourth of July was the next night
 that she got scared again. The banging, the fireworks
 and everything. Again she says, "We jumped into bed and
 were scared stiff because, oh, they're coming, they're
 coming after us again." That fear is in them that they're
 coming after us. As soon as we hear, of course, that's what
 would happen there, she says. All of a sudden, you
 know, guns would be going off, this would be going off,
 that. And we say, "Here we are. They're coming after us
 again." But she says, "But later on we got, we were, it was
 explained to us that, no, Fourth of July is Independence Day
 and it's this and it's that. It was explained to us so
 gradually," she says, "we started to adjust to the American
 way." She, she says, one day she says, "You know, all the
 while from Urfa to Aleppo," she says, "I never was hungry
 because I found bread, I found weeds, I found
 something to eat. I came to America, I went to bed
 hungry." Because she says, "What your father brought home, I
 gave him something to eat. I fed you two kids. There was
 nothing left for me. I went to bed hungry," she says. "But I
 still thank the good Lord I'm in America in a free country."

She loved her America. Anybody ever said anything about America, watch out. She would give it to them. "You've come to a country where you're free to do just as you please and you're complaining?" Her America, we'd say to her, "Mom, let's go back just to see your place there." "No," she says, "I don't care." She says, "If you spread gold from here to there, I won't go." She hated it. She says, "I lost everything. I don't want to go back."

SIGRIST: Tell me what your earliest memory is in the United States. Now you're, by the time you get off of Ellis Island you're almost three years old.

KENDERIAN: Uh huh.

SIGRIST: You'd be three in February. What's the first memory that pops in for you?

KENDERIAN: You know the first memory that pops that I remember as three years old, evidently my mother's labor pains must have started. See, I don't remember the moving in the back, this, I don't know this. I remember she was in bed. And she said to me, "Go call your aunt," her aunt, because she's across the hall. Now I went across the hall. I remember that. And I knocked at the door and I said, "Auntie, Mom wants you." She slammed the door in my face and she says, "I don't want you. I don't your family. I don't want nobody!" and bang went the door. I remember that door slamming like I'm standing here today. I came back and I

said, "Ma, she slammed the door in my face." What's she going to do? (a clock can be heard chiming in the background) There I don't remember, the only thing that I remember the next morning that there's a baby in the house. Her uncle must have come at night, went and found a midwife, came back and the baby was born. Because I woke up in the morning, and then I remember that they put a hook on one corner of the room to the other corner of the room and you know how you put a, you make a cradle, you know, with a blanket. And that's where the baby was.

SIGRIST: What was your brother's name?

KENDERIAN: George.

SIGRIST: And, uh...

KENDERIAN: She named my brother after her uncle, this one down...

SIGRIST: I'm going to ask you not to keep covering the microphone...(they laugh)

KENDERIAN: Oh, oh, oh, oh! This is a habit of mine! (they laugh)

SIGRIST: But I was just wondering, George, did she name him "George" or did she name him the Armenian name?

KENDERIAN: Well, George, Kevork, she named him after that uncle of hers.

SIGRIST: That uncle.

KENDERIAN: That uncle of hers. The other one was James but this one was George.

SIGRIST: Do you know what his birthday is? The actually day, year and...

KENDERIAN: Well, all I know is that I was nine years old when he died. That's all I remember of him.

SIGRIST: You were nine when he died.

KENDERIAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: What, what do you remember about that experience?

KENDERIAN: He had a thing, he had one daughter, too. See, it looks like four brothers...

SIGRIST: You're talking about the uncle who died...

KENDERIAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Oh, I thought it was your brother who died when you were nine.

KENDERIAN: No, no, no, my uncle. Her uncle.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me about that because he certainly is important to your story. What do you remember about when he died?

KENDERIAN: My uncle? My mother's uncle? Yes, because she was, he was her favorite. He couldn't do enough for us because whenever he came he'd always bring a pencil for us and we thought that was so great. A pencil. He always had a pencil for us. He came and this one night we were in bed. And all of a sudden someone came and was banging at our door and we heard it was her daughter. She's screaming in the hall, "My father is dead. My father is dead." How this, now it's, I'll go back to my mother. The night before she has a dream. She wakes up and she says, "Something is going to happen today." "Ma, why?" She says, "I don't know. I had a dream." She says, "I had a beautiful cup in my hand, a gold cup. It was beautiful. As I was looking at it," she says, "it fell and rolled down the stairs. And I found it at the end of the stairs broken." And someone interprets that dream to her and says to her, "Someone precious to you is going to be traveling and is going to die in a train or something." That night is when my, my cousin, now, it's his daughter, comes banging at our door screaming that her father had died. He was going home from work. He is on the New York elevator [sic: elevated], if you know, did you know New York?

SIGRIST: The elevated train?

KENDERIAN: Elevated trains, we had the Second and the Third

Avenue elevated trains. He's going home on the train.
All of a sudden he falls over and he drops dead in the train,
just as her dream predicted. My mother was, had E.S.P. She
predicted a whole lot of things. And he died there and she, my
mother says, "I did lose my diamond," because he was so good
to her. The other uncle was in California so, but this
one here was near her even though the two of them
brought her back to America. But he was in
California, so she didn't see as much of him. Later on he did
come to New York but she was closest to this one here. And
he was a gem. And that's, I was nine years old when he died,
and I could, I visualized all that way he used to be
with us. I said he'd bring us a pencil. Every time he'd go
into his pocket, he'd take out pencil and we thought we
had so much.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the funeral of any of that
experience?

KENDERIAN: Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes, yes. My mother was sitting
there crying and her aunt went and yelled at her and says,
"What are you crying about?" And the poor woman shut up.
She says, "I can't even shed a tear for my uncle." And I,
that was the first funeral that I had ever gone to. And I
could remember, uh, in them days I don't think they had wakes,

or they had the wake in church. I don't remember. But they left us in the back of the church and they were in the front. And I don't know if the casket was open or not. I don't remember that. All I remembered was the casket there in church, because I don't think they had wakes in funeral parlors or at home. That I don't, well, she wouldn't have had, the aunt wouldn't have had the wake in the house in the first place. And that's what...

SIGRIST: Did your mother observe a mourning period that you can remember?

KENDERIAN: Oh yes, she did. She did.

SIGRIST: How did she do that?

KENDERIAN: Well, you now, in them days they don't go out. And they just stay home. For six weeks they have to have a mourning period. And she, she wouldn't go visiting. She wouldn't go anywhere. People would come to our house knowing the situation and, well, after her uncle died she had nothing to do with her aunt because she was a vicious person. And she says, "I don't want to ever see her." And years later, when we saw the daughter, she turned around and says to my mother, "I know what my mother did to your people. My mother was mean." She says, "I lost my best friend when I lost my father. Your mother, I worshipped her but my mother kept me away from you." She says, "She wouldn't let me come to you. And you know I, you're all I've got but

she wouldn't let me come, so what could I do?" So my mother says, "Then I didn't have luck with my uncle, either. At least he could have lived a few more years so I could have enjoyed him." So he must, she must, well, if I'm two years old, so she only had him for seven years, then. That's all.

SIGRIST: Right. Tell me about growing up with, with immigrant parents. Now you yourself,...

KENDERIAN: Oh yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST ...you yourself are young, but, I mean, I'm sure that you adapted to your surrounding easily because you were so young when you came. What was it like when you were growing up, and I would say between the ages of five and fifteen say, for you to have, to be part of two worlds, you know, to be very American outside...

KENDERIAN: Exactly! Exactly! Exactly!

SIGRIST: ...but when you went into that apartment, you were in sort of a different world, I'm assuming. Talk to me about how you handled that situation and what it was like for you.

KENDERIAN: Well, it was very hard because, of course, we didn't know any better, right? We don't know anything else, because the majority of our friends were all in the same category. And, "No, you can't do this. No, you can't go here. No, you can't, you can't, you can't!" You had to always,

it has to be family oriented. Whatever you do, family you do, nothing else. You go on a picnic, it's family. You can't go with friends. You got to go with family. If the families, you know, the friend's families go, we all go together, fine. otherwise, no. That's why, you know, in a way, I think when I got married and came to Albany [NY], and my husband just helped me spread my wings. Before that it was, "No, you can't do this. No, you can't do that."

SIGRIST: So it was almost a stifling environment to grow up in.

KENDERIAN: Yes, because I always said it to her, to her, "Mom, let me do something." I, I, you know, what was in me never came out because, "No, you can't." It's a shame. "No, you can't. No, you can't." Everything was, "No, you can't."

SIGRIST: Was your brother treated the same way?

KENDERIAN: No!

SIGRIST: Talk to me about that.

KENDERIAN: No, no. That's, that's a sore subject with me, because I'd say, "You let him do whatever he wants. He can go wherever he wants." Well, she says, "He's a boy. You're a girl. You can't go." The only time, well, in a way, I can't say my brother too, well, when he went into service. He was out. He got to do as he wanted because he was a boy. I know he skipped school. There would be a card in our mailbox telling

us that he skipped school, and I would catch the
mail. And I would say, "I'm going to tell Mom." "Please,
Adrienne, don't do it. I, I won't do it any, again." And
he'd do it. He would do it. But...

SIGRIST: So there was a big difference between how the boy
child were treated and...

KENDERIAN: Oh yes, oh yes.

SIGRIST: Can you talk to me a little bit about the woman's
role in Armenian culture. I mean...

KENDERIAN: You cleaned house, You dre--, you sew. You crochet.
You knit. School didn't mean that much to her.

SIGRIST: Your mother, you said she couldn't read or write.

KENDERIAN: So evidently she thought, well, it's not necessary.

You can get by without it. No, when I get, you got to learn
how to cook. I hated it. You got to sew. I hated it. You
got to crochet. I hated it. The only thing that I loved was
music. I wanted a piano.

SIGRIST: Now what, what kind of music were you interested in?

Were you interested in traditional Armenian music or were you
interested in...

KENDERIAN: No, classic, the classic.

SIGRIST: Which, of course, would be sort of foreign to your parents.

KENDERIAN: Yeah. No, the classic. Although, see, I had an ear for music. I could pick up a tune right away on the piano, so I, to pacify them I would play the Armenian, too. But my, my thing was, I was twelve years old when I finally got a piano because our apartment was so small you couldn't fit a piano into it.

SIGRIST: How did you finally convince them to buy you a piano?

KENDERIAN: He surprised, he surprised me. We had gone away and my father, I guess somebody somewhere, how I don't know, sells him a piano for fifty dollars. And in a New York apartment you don't bring it up the stairs. You bring it up through, they hoist it up through the window. They take the window out, bring the piano in and then put the window back in. And I came home and I'm seeing a piano in the house. And I looked and I says, "Dad." He says a customer sold it to him for fifty dollars and delivered it. Imagine. So, that started it off and I wanted to play. As luck would have it, you know, if you don't have luck you don't, you just don't have it, the Depression came in. And I used to take piano lessons a dollar a week for one hour, and that teacher used to come to my house. I was progressing very nicely. My mother told me, "Adrienne, you can't have no more lessons." "Why?" In front of the teacher she says, "I don't think you

can come anymore." Well, that teacher was so good, she came for a whole year without getting paid. And then later on, when my mother could afford a few dollars, she would give her two dollars every week to pay for the back. And when she caught up, she says, "No more, Adrienne. I can't do it any more." So I, that was the extent of my music. I was progressing. And the teacher said, "This is child prodigy. Don't, don't do this to her." She says, "I can't help it." But my, my thing was, she made me go to Armenian school. She didn't have a dollar for my piano lessons (she is moved) but she had a dollar for the Armenian school.

SIGRIST: And how did you feel about that, because...?

KENDERIAN: Oh, yes!

SIGRIST: ...that's perpetuating the old country...

KENDERIAN: That's all. I had it in for her. And I used to say to her, "Yes, Ma. Thank you." And it hurt me, too, because one day I said to her, later on in years when she came to stay with me, I says, "Ma, you never let me do what I wanted to do. You always wanted me to do what you wanted me to do. You never did." She says, "Oh, is that the way it is?" I said, "Yeah, Ma. I have it in, it's inside of me. What your son wanted to do, you did for him. But what I wanted to do..."

SIGRIST: But how much of that is your mother's personality and

how much of that is a cultural thing?

KENDERIAN: No, I think it's her personality because she didn't have it. And she didn't know the difference.

SIGRIST: But she may well not have had it because it's simply how Armenian women were brought up, you know, it...

KENDERIAN: Well, could be. She didn't know the difference. She didn't have schooling. All she knew was, uh, needlework to make a living because, as I said, she lost her father. And they used to do embroidery and all kind of needlework so that they could survive until she got married. So she didn't know any different and she was pushing that on me. A girl has to learn how to read (correcting herself), uh, to knit. A girl has to do sewing. A girl has to do this, a girl has to, a girl is not good if she can't do these things.

SIGRIST: It sounds to me like it's a cultural thing...

KENDERIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...you know, that this is just the way they were brought up, which leads me to my next question. Now you, of course, are speaking English in school.

KENDERIAN: Ah.

SIGRIST: Did your parents learn English, and if they did, who taught them? Was that the children's responsibility or...

KENDERIAN: No, she, well, we were kids. And as I said, my father used to come home late at night. She used to leave us home alone and go to school at night. And a few times I woke up to find Ma is not there and Pa is not there. And she'd come home finding me crying and, of course, you know, my brother is sleeping and I'm standing there hysterical because there's nobody in the house. And so she thought she'd learn by herself at home. And this is a nice joke, because as we, we got a little older, now we're learning how to read, right? And she started to go to school during the day while we are in school. And she'd say, "Come on, let me, help me with my homework." And that's all she'd have to say is "homework" and we'd get into hysterics and start to laugh. And she'd start to read, "This is a man. This is a woman," (she laughs) and we would start to laugh. She'd get so upset with us she'd take that book and throw it right on the floor and she'd say, "That's right! Make fun of me!" And, you know, now I say we shouldn't have. She, she could, she couldn't read or write but she managed the home. She knew how to take subways, go all over creation. She, she'd go to New Jersey, she'd go to Brooklyn, to Long Island, no matter where. She knew her way around. She did manage.

SIGRIST: What about your father? What about...

KENDERIAN: My father worked. He was a shoemaker.

SIGRIST: But did he, did he have an Armenian clientele or did he have to learn English for business?

KENDERIAN: No, no, no, no, no, no. He had learned English for business, no Armenian. In fact, he was in just like a black neighborhood. That's where...

SIGRIST: I never did ask you what the address that you lived at in New York. Do you know what the address was?

KENDERIAN: Yes, 201 96th, East 96th Street. We lived there for, until I was twelve years old. And from there we moved to Washington Heights and that was 501 174th Street. And we lived there until I got married and came here, so I've lived, I was in New York for twenty four years there.

SIGRIST: We have just a few minutes left. Let me get just a few more things in. What year did you get married?

KENDERIAN: '42. July 4th, 1942 (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, that's patriotic.

KENDERIAN: Yes. (they laugh) We were patriotic all right.

SIGRIST: Considering your mother thought that Independence Day was the second coming of the Turks. (Mrs. Kenderian laughs)
And what was the name of your husband?

KENDERIAN: Vahan Kenderian, V-A-H-A-N.

SIGRIST: And then Kenderian, like your name. And did you have children?

KENDERIAN: Three, yeah.

SIGRIST: And what are their names?

KENDERIAN: Ronald, he's my first, Suzanne and Jane.

SIGRIST: Okay. I just wanted to make sure I got that on tape before we finished.

KENDERIAN: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: When you, when you were a teenager (Mrs. Kenderian laughs), was it ever difficult for you because your parents were immigrants, and were obviously immigrants?

KENDERIAN: I couldn't go no place. I couldn't go no place. I couldn't do, everywhere we went it had to be with the father and the mother. No, no, I didn't have no teenage life, no.

SIGRIST: What other, I mean, this is, this so Old World in the way it, what other Old World ways did they perpetuate when they were here? A woman is only supposed to do certain things, the boy can do anything. That's one, one way. What are some of

the other Old World kind of things that they perpetuated here?
For instance, what about food?

KENDERIAN: Oh, food was Armenian. I hate to tell you I never went into a restaurant. I didn't know how to act when I went into a restaurant the first time, and that's when I went to work. The girls said, "Let's go out to lunch." In fact one girl, because I had my spoon in my coffee cup when I was drinking my coffee, she says, "Adrienne, take the spoon out before you drink your coffee." I didn't know how to act. And I really was ashamed. I didn't want to go and they kept saying, "Come on, Adrienne. let's go." And, you know, I himmed and hawed. I says, "Okay," because I didn't know how to order food. I didn't know the first thing about acting in a restaurant. And then later on I confessed. I told the girls. I says, "Please don't laugh at me. And if I ask questions, you know, don't, don't laugh at me please. But my mother had never gone into a restaurant. We don't know what it is to eat out." We didn't know how to open cans. Everything had to be fresh. We didn't know what was in a can. Them days, of course, we didn't have frozen food. Everything was in cans. And the first time my mother opened up a can of peas, and she looked and she says, "Oh my, look. How nice." We didn't know. We opened up a can of corn. We couldn't get over it, you know. These are little things that...

SIGRIST: But they tell a lot.

KENDERIAN: They tell a lot.

SIGRIST: The neighborhood that you were in, was it primarily an Armenian neighborhood where you lived?

KENDERIAN: Oh, there was Armenians around but it was more Italian. Like the block we lived in, there was a lot of Italian people, you know. A few blocks down there was a lot of German people and a lot of Irish people. Looks like they were, you know, in sections.

SIGRIST: What about the relationship between the different nationalities?

KENDERIAN: They had, we had nothing to do with nobody. We had nothing to do with anyone. In fact, my brother had an accident one time. He went out. As I said, my mother was very psychic. My brother wanted to go out across the street and play baseball and my mother kept saying, "Please don't go out." He says, "Ma, I won't play. Please let me go." He got his way. He went out. The moment he walked out the door she says, "That boy's going to come back crying." I says, "Ma." Sure enough, ten minutes didn't go by. He came back crying. And I opened the door and don't I see my brother's face all in blood. What had happened, the boy, he's not playing. He's standing there. The boy that was playing with the bat, he goes "boom" like this (she gestures). He's standing right there and it hits him right in the eye and cracks it open. Now, as I said, we don't have

nothing to do with neighbors. But this woman across the hall sees us all excited with the blood all over his face. And she was a nurse. She pushed us. She says, "You go in. Stay there." And she took my brother and went into her house, cleaned it all up, fixed it. And she made a paste with cornstarch and water, and it patched up the cut, the scar he had. He doesn't even have a scar there. It healed it up.

And she says, "We'll leave it that there for a week.

In a week I'll change the bandage. Don't touch it." And she healed him up and he worked out. But I said we had no relationship with them, you know. Then, later on, we used to say "hello" to her when we'd see her in the hall. Otherwise, there was one thing about when I came here [i.e. Albany NY], neighbors talking to each other like that.

SIGRIST: Here, once you got married and came...

KENDERIAN: Came here. But in New York. That's what they always say, neighbors, you never know who your neighbors are in New York.

SIGRIST: Well, I think you have to understand, too, that your parents came from such an environment...

KENDERIAN: Environment...

SIGRIST: ...where it was, you probably had to be careful what was said to whom. And so they probably just carried that on here.

KENDERIAN: Yeah, I think so. I think so. They didn't have anything to do with anyone.

SIGRIST: We have two minutes left. Tell me what is inherently Armenian about you. What, what personality...

KENDERIAN: My church, my church. My Christianity.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me how, how that is important to you and...?

KENDERIAN: To me, yes, because I had a vision when things were the worst. I went to bed. I had a vision. I saw the Lord and he turned his hands out to me (she is moved). And he said, "I have suffered, too." When I woke up in the morning, I told my husband, "I saw the Lord. And he says, 'I have suffered, too'" And from then on, the Lord is my master. And he guides me. That's why my church comes first. I don't care about anything else, my church comes first. My religion comes first.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Kenderian, thank you very much for letting me ask you all these questions...

KENDERIAN: (she is moved) Thank you for making me remember.

SIGRIST: I think we could be here maybe for another hour. (Mrs. Kenderian laughs) This is Paul Sigrist signing off with

EI-496/KENDERIAN

Adrienne Kenderian on Monday, July 11, 1994
outside of Albany.

in Colonie, just

KENDERIAN: Did you have trouble finding the place...?