EI-581/JOHNS

EI-581

CHRISTOS C. JOHNS

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ALBANIA (BORN OF GREEK PARENTS), 1933

AGE 11

PASSAGE ON "LA SAVOIE"

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mr. Johns is the brother of James John, Interview EI-582 (please note the subtracted "S" of the surname). Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of Oral History, 2/29/1996.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. I'm here in Worcester, Massachusetts with Mr. Christos G. Johns, who came from(clears throat) what was technically just over the border in Albania, but was a Greek city, in 1933 when he was eleven years old. I just want to say, I'm very happy to be here with you. We've both been interviewed for the same article in the newspaper several years ago, and that will also be on file at Ellis Island. And, uh, why don't we start at the beginning by your saying your birth date.

JOHNS: I was born on November 1 in 1921.

LEVINE: Okay. And where were you born?

JOHNS: In, actually it's *Northern Epirus*, which is a, a, a part, which is Greek, uh—Greek land, actually Greek—all Greeks live there, but it's, uh—right now it's in Albania, in that section, in, uh--in the southern part of Albania bordering Greece.

LEVINE: Okay. And did you live in the same place up until the time you got here?

JOHNS: I lived in the same town for, till I came to this country.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, when you think of that town, what are the things about it that, that you remember most?

JOHNS: Well, these towns are a long, you see—they're uh, in a valley, like. And most of the, uh, homes there are built along the mountainside, uh—and they're all built with, ah, stones, I remember. And in the valley is where we used to have fields where we used to grow corn and wheat and all kinds of vegetables and things like that. That's what we used to live on, I remember. I remember many times I used to help my, uh— grandfather, because I lived most of the time with my grandfather, grandmother and my mother, because my father had, after he was married there and I was born, he had come to this country and, uh, and I was raised, my first few years I was raised mostly by my grandfather, grandmother and mother. And—

LEVINE: What was your grandparents' name?

JOHNS: My grandfather's name was Savas John, S-A-V-A-S was his first name, John. Actually, the Greek name is pronounced *Yanou*.

LEVINE: *Yanou*.

JOHNS: Or *Yohanan* or something like that. But, you know, they cut names short after we came to this country, so my father had changed it to John. He came over when he was a young fellow, too. He probably came through Ellis Island originally. Uh, and, uh, of course—

LEVINE: Your grandmother?

JOHNS: My grandfather, her name was Chrisanthi. Chris, uh, the English name would be Chrisanthi, that's about it. Yeah, that's—and, uh, her maiden name, to tell you the truth, I don't remember. But, uh—

LEVINE: That's okay. Now, this was, so this was your father's—

JOHNS: My father's father and mother, right. And in the—you know, in the villages there, because of shortages of homes and so forth, most of, even when they get married, they all live together in the same house. We had a, one of the larger—ah, land, uh, where we had the mo--practically three separate buildings in this complex where we lived in, so we were pretty well off at that time, I remember. Because my father was here, and he was sending money back there.

LEVINE: I see. And your grandfather, was he farming?

JOHNS: He was a farmer, that's all. There's no other activity there in the, in this, uh—farming in

these villages. All they did was farming in the valley there, grow crops and so forth.

LEVINE: Can you remember experiences with your grandparents?

JOHNS: Oh, yes, I remember my first, the thing that I remember, my grandfather, I had a toothache and he took me, we just had the donkeys or horse or anything, of course. We just had the donkeys or horses to get a, to get around with. I remember going, he took me to a, a village further up where there used to be a dentist there. And I remember he took me there to the dentist (laughs) to have my toothache taken care of. That time I remember that very well. And he used to take me to the larger, one of the larger villages, which is *Argyrokastro*. And—

LEVINE: Can you spell that one?

JOHNS: Oh, A-R-G-Y-R-O-A-S-T-R-O. That was the Greek name. But I remember now looking in the map, it's known as *Gjirokastra*, the Albanian name for it. But the Greek name was *Argyrokastro* at that time, just like how they change names, you know, like Constantinople at that time, now it's known as Istanbul. Ah, but, and the other thing I remember, on the field one time, that's an experience I'll never forget. We were harvesting at that time, and we have this, by hand we used to do it, no machinery of any kind. And, uh, we used to have this scythe-like, trying to cut the, cut the, uh, wheat and so forth, staff and all that. I remember slipping and cutting my finger, and I still have a little mark on it, on this finger, from way back then. And I was, the rest of the day I was just laying down dizzy from that. No doctor. I just wrapped it up and that's all.

LEVINE: What, what about medical attention? When someone was ill in the town, what happened?

JOHNS: You know, we had no doctor in the town. Like I said, the nearest doctor was about, it wasn't too far, the villages were very close together, but there was one about three villages further down, and, uh—and, of course, *Argyrokastro*, which was the main, like the capital of this particular province, let's say, like this particular *Northern Epirus,* which is known as, ah, there were probably doctors there. But I remember going to any other doctor other than, uh, than dentist. They had—they used home remedies mostly if anybody got sick, I remember.

LEVINE: Can you remember any of those?

JOHNS: Oh, let's see. One thing that I remember was I had some kind of, something on my feet, like blotches, I remember. And I remember the pack, and my mother or grandfather or grandmother, I don't remember who it was, got some kind of, like grape leaves or things like that, putting them on there and wrapping them. In no time at all, they went away. It's funny, a lot of home remedies they used to have at that time. But other than that I was never really sick, or anybody in my family, I remember, was sick, where had to go to a doctor, so—even, uh, the birth, it was by, uh—

LEVINE: Midwife.

JOHNS: Midwives that used to come to the house, and we were born right in the house.

LEVINE: Do you remember—did— have you been told anything about your own birth?

JOHNS: No my own birth, but I was witness to my brothers and sisters, who were twins. And I remember that time, because there was two separate buildings, like we had three different buildings. My grandfather and I were waiting there on one of the buildings while the midwives, there was more than one, two or three ladies, my grandmother and my

aunt, my mother's mother must have been there and a couple of other ladies helping with the birth. And here I am by the stairway in the adjoining building, I remember, when we heard the first, uh, you know, the sound. And coming, and, you know how it—all, they all wanna know what gender it is. And they say, "Oh, it's a boy, it's a boy." So I rushed to tell my grandfather it was a boy. I go back again. Oh, there's another one coming along. They didn't know there was twins at that time. They didn't know. They couldn't tell. Oh, and the second one was a girl. (Laughs) It was twins. And those occasions I remember very well.

LEVINE: Uh huh. Now would there be any ceremony or any kind of an observance of, a ritual or anything like that, at a birth?

JOHNS: Not at that time that I remember. The only other ritual we have later on, when they're baptized in church.

LEVINE: And what happens then?

JOHNS: Well, they have a, you know, the Greek Orthodox have a very, uh, a very wonderful ceremony, christening ceremony, baptism ceremony. It's a special ceremony, which they have these, they immerse you in the water, in a big tub like a—and, uh, and after that, of course, they have a party and get together. And, uh, and celebrate the baptism.

LEVINE: Is the baptism done when the babies are, when they're babies?

JOHNS: Not right—no. They could be three months, two months, six months. It depends on the individual how well off, you know, the baby in good health and so forth and so on. But even now they don't have it immediately. They could wait two, three months at least.

LEVINE: And how about name days? Did people—

JOHNS: Name days is the, uh, name days the, instead of celebrating birthdays, uh, they—

J. JOHNS: They have name days.

LEVINE: Okay. Wait, we're going to pause here. (break in tap) Okay, we're going to stop this interview now, and we're going to interview James John, who is here, and is more pressed for time, and then we'll resume this interview after that. (break in tape) Okay. We're resuming now, as we—as I said earlier. I'm talking now again with Christos G. Johns, who is the older brother of James John, who I just interviewed in the break in this tape. Okay. Let's see now. We were talking about name days.

JOHNS: Yes, at that time we broke off you were asking about it. You asked me, I think, a question about what we celebrate, birthdays or something, but—

LEVINE: Yeah, right.

JOHNS: Uh, we, uh, instead of celebrating birthdays, we celebrate name days. Ordinarily when we're baptized in the Greek Orthodox church, ordinary we, uh, we get a name, or we're given the name of a saint, ordinarily, although I'm not a hundred percent, but in most cases most of us receive a name after a particular saint, which is quite a few of them. And, uh, being, my, myname being Chistos, if you remember what this, Jesus Christ's name, right, Jesus Christ, Christos is from Christ, and my name day is Christmas day.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

JOHNS: (Laughs) And that's the day that every year, for all these past years, now it's getting older, and we have children and so forth, of course, but I remember up till about three years ago I'd have the whole family up on Christmas day at my house, because of celebrating. I was the only one named Chris, Christos, because the Greek name for Christ is Christos. And, uh, all my family would get together, usually as many as, uh, we have a large family, now. We never had less than thirty-five, forty people, all the—all family members get together and celebrate Christmas at my house. But now everybody, my brothers and sisters are all, they have children, and they're married, and they're grown now, we could probably get about fifty together, and it's hard to get together. Everybody has their own family to go to. But we celebrate name days more than anything else.

LEVINE: Like, uh, a particular name—if you have a name day of a particular saint or, in your case, of Christ, is there some particular link or a bond that is between that saint and the person who's—

JOHNS: Not necessarily. It's, that's another thing, how we receive the names. Not as much these days. Now things have changed. But in, I remember in the olden days, way back in my, when I was born, let's say, even a few years later, we have what they call a godfather, which we call *koumbaro*. Even the parents don't know what the name is going to be. It's up to the *koumbaro* to choose the name. But now, of course, the parents recommend to the *koumbaro* to—what name to give it, but before, uh—they, they were just given those names, what they thought, their particular favorite saint or something that happened, not necessarily any particular link to it. Just like, uh, James, ah, John, ah, Paul, ah, St. Paul, all those saints, since that. Uh—

LEVINE: Well, do the parents choose the, the, the *koumbaro*?

JOHNS: Yes. Usually sometimes it's a relative, sometimes a very close friend. Or a *koumbaro* will come out, somebody that, a close friend of yours, they say, "I want to baptize your child."

LEVINE: Oh.

JOHNS: Well, they usually say, "Oh, fine. I'll be very happy to have you as my, uh, *koumbaro*." They call it *koumbaro* in Greek, but it's like the godfather. And they usually link together. The *koumbaro* 's responsible for raising this child to make sure the church, you know, baptize and so forth, to make sure that the child, that he's baptized, he's brought up properly in the church, and so on.

LEVINE: Is there a lot of contact between the family?

JOHNS: Usually there are. Every year, or even during, not necessarily on the name days, the *koumbaro* s the first one. Also they come to this name day celebration because they name them always on, and on their birthdays also, more in this country than in the old country, the *koumbaro* will usually give him a gift or something, and they, especially at Christmas time, the gifts are given by the *koumbaro* to the godchild. They're very close linked.

LEVINE: How about other rituals? Maybe around weddings, or deaths, or anything that you remember from the old country?

JOHNS: Uh, in the old country I remember, well, death not so much, although I remember going to

a couple of funerals. I remember especially one who, a *koumbaro* with my god, my—grandfather in the old country was a very popular man. He was involved with church, with the church a lot. And, uh, he was always present in the community for many years, of the church community, and all that. And, uh, one of his, uh, godchildren--a godchild—had left the country because they had, I think maybe not in this country, but he might have been, a lot of the, uh, the ones that left those years, a lot of them, they couldn't get into the United States. They either went to, uh, Australia, a lot of them, or, uh, not so much Australia, but in Argentina, South America in Buenos Aires. And I remember one coming back from Buenos Aires into our village there, and he passed away. He must have been sick, but he came back there. And I remember that funeral, and I remember going to it. And I was a young, I forget how old, probably wasn't much older than seven, eight years old. We, of course, we go to the wake. They don't have any, like we have here, funeral homes over there. They do wakes at the house and so forth. And I remember going to the wake, this particular, because they were close friends of ours. And, uh, like, like, say my grandfather's, uh, godchild, and I remember being there and, uh, and I remember that, but that's the only funeral that I remember. I remember them carrying through the village, up to the, to the, uh, there's another chapel, like, St. Nicholas, at the top of the hill on the, on the, uh, village there where there's, the ground, the burial grounds, and they bury them there. That's the only funeral that I, but that's a sad affair. They get together afterwards and they, you know, but, uh, it's a sad affair. It's the only one that I remember. I remember weddings, of course, much happier times.

LEVINE: Was there—

JOHNS: The wedding that I remember very particularly, I couldn't have been very, there again I could have been anywhere between six and ten years old. Maybe, it couldn't have been, maybe five, six, seven, eight years old at that time. My cousin, uh, a, uh, girl cousin, at

that time, she's about maybe, well, yeah, she could of probably about twelve years older than I am, so I must have been five years old at that time when she got married, and, uh, the ceremony was, of course, was at her house, because she stayed with us in this complex that we had. Three separate buildings. And, uh, I remember, of course, the church wedding ceremony, so far the same. That hasn't changed one bit, up to this day. The funeral, the wedding ceremony's identical like it was in the olden days. And after that I remember they come, come into the house there and celebrating, I remember dancing, we had a band there. Because between the two houses we had a, a, uh Greek patio, a courtyard like that, and they were dancing around. And I was on the porch of one of the buildings watching down while they're dancing and all that, and I remember that distinctly. Uh, and, of course, on the courtyard there, we had this fig tree and this, uh, and the fig trees are very popular at this part of the country there, and the figs were really big, big figs, not the little figs that you're talking about. There's big, like plums, the size of oranges, some of them.

LEVINE: Were there any particular dishes that your grandmother or mother made out of those figs?

JOHNS: Uh, no. We just used to eat them like fruit, fruit, that's all. Because the cooking facilities, they weren't that great at the time. We just used to have this particular, one section of the house used to be like a kitchen you call it now, but it's mostly, the floor was made out of, like, uh, not asbestos, but, what do you call, mud, like or other material they use. But it wasn't, it wasn't wood, because of fire, because we had fireplaces to keep warm. Although it wasn't very, we don't have very cold winters there in that part of the country. It's, I don't think it got done. I don't remember any snow at all, to begin with, hardly any snow. But it used to get chilly at times, but we had built the fire like a fireplace in the nighttime, especially. We got there around the fireplace, and that's why we'd eat on the,

and we had no big tables there, and we just sit around the fireplace on the floor, and they would serve these dishes, different kinds of, uh—well, whatever they had, different, I mean, very little meat to begin with. We had no refrigeration at that time, in those years when I was there in the late, in the twenties and the early part of the thirties. No electricity, no refrigeration. So we couldn't have, the meat that you had was when you slaughter a pig or a lamb, and you had to eat it within a day or two, practically. So it's the only time you have some celebration, then you slaughter an animal and have a big time, a good time. But mostly it was, uh, cheeses, a lot of, because we had goats and sheep and cows there, and the milk, even the sheep we would milk at that time. We used to make cheese out of that, and goats and sheep we used to make, uh, this cheese. I remember my grandfather making some of that. He used to put it in sacks there and hang it on the trees to dry. Ah, it's an amazing formula how they make it, even though they had no equipment of any kind, but they still knew how to do things. And, uh—

LEVINE: Can you remember like sort of in detail the process of making that cheese?

JOHNS: All I remember is, of course, after they got the milk and so forth, how they, they used to have some kind of handmade, uh—

LEVINE: To pound it down?

JOHNS: Something like that. And then they used to put it in sacks and, uh, and I remember at one time they used to hang these sacks from a tree, and they'd drip down. And that thing that used to formulate this cheese, a block of cheese. And, uh, we used to have a lot of that. We used to love it, especially when it was nice and fresh. It wasn't really hardened. It was just fresh at that time. I remember those things happening.

LEVINE: And what about bread?

JOHNS: Bread, we used to make cornbread, a lot of corn, because we had corn. We used to, uh—we used to harvest the corn, especially those years, I remember. We used to have one big warehouse, a little bigger than this room here. Of course, it's hard to tell how big it is, but twice the size of this, anyway. And everybody that they harvest, they used to take part of their harvest into this building and use it, you know, this is during the summer months after the harvest in the fall, whatever it is, so during the winter months they'd have all this stored away in this particular place for the whole village. The village might have about a hundred families, that's all. It isn't that big a village you're talking about, for everybody. So you're talking if it's a hundred families, a lot. I don't think we even had a hundred families, maybe. Anyway, the average, some villages could have about fifty, sixty homes. Maybe we had about, one of the larger villages, maybe seventy, eighty.

LEVINE: Would there be stores? Would there be little shops?

JOHNS: Ah, there's no—oh, okay, shops. No shops to actually purchase anything in the villages. Now, in, down the valley, where [unclear] mountains are, I'll never forget, the houses, if you can picture it, were built on the mountainside. This is a valley. On the other side is another mountain, so we're in between two mountains into a valley. In the valley there's a road that continues from, let's say, *Argyrokastro*, that I mentioned before the main city which maybe had the, and city, what we're talking about city, if they had (he laughs) a thousand or five thousand people, it's a lot. Uh, and you continue on doing that area there from one end to the— all the way down to the Adriatic sea practically, *Adasarhanli*. That's another town between *Adasarhanli* and *Argyrokastro*. There's a lot of villages. There could be as many as, oh, twelve, fifteen villages in between there. And there's one road that connects all this here, down at the, going through the valley. And in certain

towns, not in my town, is the town after mine, and before mine, two other towns after mine, which are close together. You can walk in ten minutes. Both of them, it's so close together, some of them. They'd have some stores by the roadside.

LEVINE: That would sell what?

JOHNS: That would sell, well, there was a—they'd have uh, one I remember a mill. There was a mill there, we used to take the, uh, the ra—uh, the wheat, for instance, and, uh, you know, make flour out of it. I remember going with my grandfather and taking these, uh, sacks of wheat there and grind it into flour and take the flour, that's how we'd make the bread and so we'd make the bread.

LEVINE: Would the bread be made in individual homes?

JOHNS: Oh, yeah. Each person makes it, each individual home makes their own, uh, bread, they cook their own food. No restaurants to eat out. (They laugh)

LEVINE: That's when everybody got into the restaurant industry.

JOHNS: Unless you go—unless you in—unless you go into the city. (Laughs) That's right. That's one of the reasons that I got into this restaurant business here in this country. Uh—

LEVINE: Any other shops, besides the—

JOHNS: Then they'd have where you can buy the necessities, like where you can buy sugar, coffee, olives, let's say, or, uh, other, other things like that, basic products, you know, that

you wouldn't ordinarily be able to put those in your own home.

LEVINE: I see.

JOHNS: But then you have to have money to buy that. That's why a lot of them used to lee—uh, leave these villages and go, come to this country wherever they went to, because I've heard stories about how you can make money in this country especially. They thought that the golden streets and so forth. And, uh, my father left as a young boy, before he got married. He left the village with his older brother, actually his older brother, (laughs) it's funny, his older brother didn't come through Ellis Island legitimately. He had come through the southern part of the United States through, uh, I don't know if it was through Mexico or whatever this, illegal alien, but he came legal afterwards. But my other uncle, my uncle, who lived here in the city also, and he lived up until ninety-something years old, he passed away. He was an illegal alien for a long time, and he was afraid of that time actually, but eventually he became a legal resident. Uh, now where were we, we're talking about uh, the, uh, the restaurant business and so the, uh—the, uh, oh yeah, my young—my father left as a young, a young fellow. He came to this country legally through Ellis Island when he was probably, uh, in his teens, a teenager. In between, uh, during the, uh, let's see, World War One in Europe was earlier, and this country didn't enter until 1919 or something, '17.

LEVINE: So 19 . . .

JOHNS: In between there he had come to this country, and he was for this time. So, uh, so he was in this country probably during World War One. And, uh—

LEVINE: What was he doing here? What—

JOHNS: He had come here originally, what he did as a teenager, I have no idea. But I remember a lot of them used to get the, others that had left the same village or a nearby village that used to knew each other, they used to live in, work in factories or in, uh, some other restaurant already started here, but I remember a lot of them were in Fitchburg. They had some kind of a factory in Fitchburg that they used to work at there. And, uh, then apparently my father must have gone back in about 1920, at the end of 1920. And they got married, and I was born in 1921. Then after I was born apparently he came back to this country. And he didn't go back again until about four or five years later, and that's when my brother and sister were born.

LEVINE: I see. Well, now, when, when he left, after you were born, your mother, um, didn't live with his parents.

JOHNS: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, she did?

JOHNS: Lived with my grandfather and grandmother. My father's parents.

LEVINE: Right. That was usual.

JOHNS: That's the usual procedure, yeah. And because, uh, the, uh, my, actually lived a stone's throw away, and my other grandparents lived just a couple of houses further up the hill a little bit. And I remember that. I used to go there all the time.

LEVINE: What do you remember about that set of, first of all, what was your mother's name and

maiden name?

JOHNS: Her name was, uh—I mean maiden name was Arogu [ph]. Right now it's probably, in English it's turned to Rogos, R-O-G-O-S. Although we found out her brothers who had gone, they didn't come to this country, they had gone down to Buenos Aires, her two brothers, they were living in Buenos Aires, they, their name was spelled, over there, Rongo, R-O-N-G-O. I used to know it as Rogos. (laughs) They had it wrong. So it's however they spell it, who knows where they might have—French, Spanish language down there, English here.

LEVINE: So did that, did that branch of the family stay in, in South America?

JOHNS: Yeah. They never were able to come here, although my mother and father went down to visit them down in Buenos Aires. See, my father, of course, was, uh, came to this country and became a citizen in the twenties, apparently in the late uh, twenties. So after he was well-established here, uh, after my brother and sister were born, uh, came back, uh, the third time, and, uh, brought us over. He had become a citizen at that time, so.

LEVINE: What do you remember about experiences with your mother's mother?

JOHNS: I remember her mother very well. Uh, her father slightly. And I remember a younger brother she had, uh, she had about three brothers at least, and they all had left. But I remember I go, and I used to go, like I said, to their house a lot, and playing with my cousins there. One of her brothers, who was in the same category, they had gone to another country and went back and so forth, and I remember playing with my two cousins more than I remember playing with my brother and sister. It's unusual.

LEVINE: They may have been closer in age to you.

JOHNS: That's right, they were. Because, uh, I remember going, and, and I remember her brother coming over and, uh, took, uh, his wife and the two children, brother and sister, and they left before we left in 1933, but they had gone to Buenos Aires. And, uh, and I remember the house. They also had a complex about two different separate buildings, for homes there.

LEVINE: What did that grandfather do? Do you remember?

JOHNS: I really don't remember. But most of them, most of them were, uh, either like, say, they, like, uh, my grandfather had some sheep at that time, he was raising that. He was doing, well it, it's unusual. I don't remember, their, uh—oh, okay, my, the other thing my grandfather used to have, near the church there's a complex of a church, a school, and they had like a coffee house next to it. I remember my grandfather running that coffee house. And on Sundays I remember after church there used to be a lot of vegetable and fruit peddlers. They used to congregate at this particular area there, and they would sell their produce to the, to the people of the village after church. I used to—I remember going through there and trying to pick on my grandfather. He says, "Go ahead and pick out there." I remember I used to like cucumbers. And I, you know, they're all lined up there. They all, they have, they just sit there and wait for somebody to come by. They don't all speak out and compete. Go there, select the best one, pick one up and pay for it. And, uh, and that was, but there was a coffee house where they used to get together, you know, people from the village there

JOHNS: And school was— it's unusual. The school, there was like a hall there, and upstairs from the hall was the school. A small school, two rooms. And they used to combine grades

together, but I was there till about, what? Uh, from, uh, till nine, I would say, eleven years old. So I was in school for about five years at least. But it's a funny thing. My, uh, when I first went, the first, second, third grade, fourth grade and so forth, a regular Greek school, like I said. Uh, learn how to speak Greek, learn how to write, and different things. Then in 1931, thirty-one, the Albanian government, for some reason, they were really restricting that particular area, the Greeks. They took away their freedom practically. They want to, they closed the Greek schools. They, even want attempted to close the churches, and they brought over an Albanian teacher to teach us Albanian. And I remember my last year-and-a-half until I left, in 1932 and part of 1933 until I left there, I was going to an Albanian, I was, no Greek at all, Albanian language. And they only wanted you to talk Albanian. (laughs) No Greek at all. And, uh—

LEVINE: Was there conflict between the Albanians and the Greeks in your town?

JOHNS: Well, at that time, for some reason, the Greeks, I don't know, there was a king at that time and, uh, there was no, we never had that real, conflict. But I says, just, for some reason, I don't know what happened, but they were trying to restrict it, you know. They even had a, they're trying to get a portion of their—the products that they were producing as part of, to donate to the, which became communist country at that time after that, it became communist.

LEVINE: Were there, uh, what was the proportion? Do you have any sense of that, of how— what portion of the village was Albanian and what portion—

JOHNS: No, no, all Greek.

LEVINE: All Greek.

JOHNS: All, all these towns are all Greek, a hundred percent.

LEVINE: I see. Uh-huh.

JOHNS: Nobody knew how to speak Albanian until they started teaching it in schools those particular years. Then, of course, a lot of Greeks, they rose up, uprise, and so forth, and says, "It's not," uh—"it's not right" and so forth. They used to have, the policemen used to come to the villages. And, oh, I remember an incident when I was a young boy, and I was scary. There was the scary incident. There was a, some kind of a celebration in the town, it could have been a name day, whatever it was, maybe it was a, it was the, uh, church's name day, let's say, because every church is named after some saint, like Saint Spyridon. I think our church over there was, uh, Saint, uh, Dimitrius, I'm not sure. I think it was St. Dimitrius, which is James. And we were celebrating. And then, we were dancing in this hallway, we were talking about the schools upstairs this floor, we used to get together. If it was, uh—if the weather wasn't good we'd be inside, otherwise we'd be out on the, in the church ground there dancing and all this celebration, you know, on those big holidays, a lot of dancing. And we used to have bands, they used to come, three or four piece bands playing Greek music.

LEVINE: What would be the bands? What kind of instruments did they play?

JOHNS: Well, they had the *bouzouki*, the violin, guitar and, uh, and, and the, uh, the, uh, clarinet, which is a popular instrument in our part of the, uh, country. Clarinet is a top instrument, and the violin, actually. Violin and clarinet. But in the southern part of Greece they do the *bouzouki* and, you know, the whatever they call those, mandolins. But what happened was there was a policeman coming, which was a, in the other town, over from

our village, there was, there was like a police station there. And, uh, a policeman had come and wa-- was walking, like I said, he walked. He was coming through narrow paths. And somebody threw some stones at him, and he came to the celebration where we had, and he wanted all the children gathered together to find out who it was that threw the stones at him. And I was one of them. I didn't know. There was about five or six of us lined up in there, and he was saying he wanted to find, questioning us, you know, threatening. And here we're all scared. We didn't know. I says, "I don't know." They thought, and my grandfather and mother got so upset, he went up there and he told him, "Leave the children alone." I remember that. "They had nothing to do with it. Whoever it was is probably not here." And I remember that part, but everything turned out all right because he backed up, the policeman backed up afterwards of trying to find out who it was and so forth.

LEVINE: That's interesting. Do you remember anything else about the policemen of the town?

JOHNS: Other than that particular incident, nothing, because there's no other policemen in the town.

LEVINE: Just one man.

JOHNS: No, no, no. Nobody from our town. It just happened in the police station that the, that one of the roadside that have a station of some kind there just, you know, whatever they used to, but we never had any other policemen come. Other than the time, this happened by the time when the Albanians started to take over, you know. And I remember that time they made us, the children, well, I was about nine, ten years old at that time when this started, they had a special uniform for us, they used to dress us in the colors of the Albanian, which is black and red, something like that. The uniform, they

used to go down by this police station over there, the ground there, and they used to parade us around. From that age, they used to have us turning into soldiers, trying to turn us into, you know. And, uh, that I remember.

LEVINE: How about clothing, in general? What, where did you get your shoes, and where, how did—what did you wear?

JOHNS: You know, it's a funny thing about, that you mention shoes especially. Recently, because I have a grandson that lives in, uh, Hampton, in New Hampshire, who knew about my story coming through Ellis Island because he had read about an article that we had a meeting here in Worcester. I was—I had my picture in the paper and my story about coming through Ellis Island. And he knew about it, so they had a project in Hampton Academy about Ellis Island. So the teacher, they asked me if I would be willing to go up there and give, you know, speak about my experiences at Ellis Island. (laughs) And, uh, I did, and during the question and answer period after the nice, short speech there about my experiences, one little boy got up and he says, "Did you have shoes when you arrived?" (laughs) Or you, boy, you know, I told him when I came over from Albania there, around that section of Albania, which, like I say, was all Greeks there. And, uh, I says, "Well, now that you ask me that question, I remember, I don't remember having really any shoes at all when I was growing up there." Because the weather was warm there, we hardly wore shoes. And, uh, but I remember, I says to him one time that we, from part of the, when we was in school there, uh, we also, once in a while we'd go down to the valley there, the playground, and play soccer ball. And I remember telling him, marching down the stones and so forth, down to the playground. I had a pair of boots, because they're my size actually, but I was so proud, I was one of the few that had some kind of shoes on. But, uh—

LEVINE: What about the adults? Did they wear –

JOHNS: The adults, they had shoes. But I don't remember too well, of course. But they used to have some kind of, like, sandals, like. But not fancy shoes like we have now that we know of. Like I say, it was a very poor area down there. They had most of them, I would say, other than somebody that they had relatives in, whether it was in Greece or it was in Italy or they were in the United States, that gone somewheres where there's work, they worked, and they'd send some money to their relatives back home, and from that they could purchase whatever they could afford. But there's no doubt there was shoes, some type of shoes. But I remember exactly what type there were at that time. I remember most of the times I was barefooted.

LEVINE: Were there shoemakers or tailors that made things for people?

JOHNS: As far as clothing was concerned, most of the clothing and so forth, they buy material, I remember, and the wife, the women, my mother or my grandmothers, they'd make their own clothes, practically, a lot of them that I remember. Most of the clothing was homemade. You'd just have a pair of trousers and some kind of a shirt or something. I don't even know exactly what it was. But we didn't need much more than that at the time. Like I say, most of the time, ten months out of the year, probably warm weather, uh, over seventy, sixty, seventy degrees and so forth.

LEVINE: How about food? Do you remember any things that your mother or grandmothers made that you liked to eat when you were there?

JOHNS: Uh—food, like I say, during the summer months, which was tough on, uh, especially, we'd, uh—we'd like anything we could get a hold of as far as food. But I remember one

dish, and you'll be surprised at this actually, it's amazing, I think of it now, how I used to like it and eat it. There'd be vinegar, sugar and bread, and mix it up in there, and I used to love it.

LEVINE: Hmm. Cornbread?

JOHNS: Uh, cornbread. Mostly cornbread. Wheat bread was like having cake. Corn was plentiful in that area. Wheat, also wheat, but not as much. I don't know whether it was harder to raise wheat than corn, or what it was, I don't know. But cornbread was the staple bread. They used to, uh, all homemade. And if we used to buy the wheat bread, I remember, we be—used to be, like unusual. That was no good. Like cake, having cake and, uh—they would sell some wheat bread in these mills down there, I would mention down at, a couple of buildings by the roadside that had the store that they'd sell wheat bread and things like that. But then they'd have, uh, from cornmeal and things like that. We used to be a favorite, in the winter months especially, a staple product that used to keep you nice and warm, cornmeal. And, uh, chickens, we'd just have a lot of chickens, chicken soup, and once in a while we'd have a chicken for a meal. So, and, uh, whenever like, uh, I say, we'd slaughter some kind of an animal for some reason. On big holidays we'd have meat, but that's about the only time for meat. Plenty of milk, we used to have milk from cows. We used to have cows and, uh, goats, and uh— But, uh, other than that, for food, of course, plenty of fruit and vegetables. We used to have vegetable gardens. We used to raise our own vegetables. Fruits, we used to have, uh, grapes, plenty of grapes, and the figs, as far as our village was concerned. We used to have a lot of nut trees, some kind of nuts that we used to like to climb and knock down as young kids and eat it. Other fruits that used to have, like the fruit peddlers used to come and sell, the used to go through their, in their donkeys, loaded, one on each side, where there was, now as the type of, mostly was oranges, of course, I don't remember apples too

much, but oranges, oh, uh—grapes, of course, and ah, uh plums. Uh, oh, different kinds of fruits that used to come in. We'd barter. You know, we used to do mostly bartering, too. We'd give eggs, and they'd give us something else, because we used to have chickens, we'd barter eggs. So instead of exchanging money, some people would have these fruits, and they wanted eggs, little change like that, exchange products. So when someone had plenty of this and didn't have any of that, so we used to barter. There was one, instead of money we used to use that a lot on people there. Uh, also, um, you know, it's a funny thing. We used to have a lot of droughts there, talking about eggs now. And I remember as a young boy we used to go around to the different homes and places that, more well-to-do homes, you know, that have, uh, plenty of [grumbled]. And we used to, ah, when, to hope for, pray for the rain, and we used to go, as young children, go around the house and say, like we would say for the rain, hoping that the rain, we used to have some kind of a jingle we used to sing for the rain, like you say, "Rain, rain, go away, come back another day," but we used to have something for the rain to come as soon as possible and all that. And they'd give us an egg for our trouble. (laughs) It's unusual, things they used to do in those days.

LEVINE: Do you remember any other, either games or stories you were told as a little boy?

JOHNS: Uh, I remember the stories that, uh, my grandfather used to tell me a lot of stories. Games, we didn't have too many games. Oh, the games we used to play, it's a funny thing. We didn't have the, uh, the things that they have here, even, uh, then here in this country, but we'd play with whatever we can get a hold of naturally. I mean, nothing that was hand-built, especially for the game, other than the ball, a soccer ball. I remember playing in the small playgrounds in the villages, some of the villages would have a little area where the children would go, and we used to play, like, for baseball we used to get a stick, just some kind of a stick and, uh, we'd have another, another other stick, shorter

stick and a big stick. We used to set it up on the thing there, and hit it down and go up in the air, and we'd try to hit it as far as possible, and then somebody else would chase it. And you'd run around like in baseball, but with sticks instead of baseball and bats and things like that, but we used to make our own, whatever. And then, and in one time I got hurt as a young boy, I remember, rushing up to my house crying. We were playing, we'd play with stones. We'd have some kind of a round stone, and another big one there, and we'd throw the stone, try and knock the other one down, you know, we said. But somehow one boy threw a stone and hit me on the head. (laughs) And I ran home crying. I remember that. And, of course, when I was in school, we used to take hikes up, further up in the mountain, into the, and, uh, one time we had gone up and we used to go to very, very top of the mountain, and from there we could see the, apparently the part of the Adriatic Sea, because we were near there. Uh, and coming down the hill, I remember, as young kids, you know, you run, you try to outrun the other, whoever gets down there first, but it's steep hills there. I remember falling, tumbling over, and I got a big gash in my knee, which mark I still have here. Because there's no doctor to sew it or nothing, so only this tried to bring it together, but it's still, the mark (laughs) you should see it here, on my knee, it's still there. And, uh, I remember that part. But everything turned out all right.

LEVINE: How about the stories your grandfather told you?

JOHNS: Oh, the story, one story that I remember, and I read more about it when I came to this country, which also is known in this country about the Ali Babba and the Forty Thieves. That's one of the first stories that I remember. It was told a little differently at that time.

LEVINE: Can you remember what it was?

JOHNS: Well, I really—uh, I don't remember the—but I remember the distinctly reading about it, reading the story. And when I re-read it in this country, it all came back to me about that story that I, I u—my grandfather used to tell me. It's about a little different, a little different, but I got that it was about the same thing. So that's about the only really story that I remember as far as fairy tales or things like that. But, uh—

LEVINE: How about little songs? Do you remember any of those, little rhymes or little songs?

JOHNS: No, we never had nursery rhymes that I know of. Oh, yeah, well, yes, yes. There's some that I still remember. Uh—

LEVINE: Could you say them?

JOHNS: Well, that's in Greek. I don't know if I can translate it or not. Uh, let's see. One of the, sometimes when I think of it I, I tell it to my grandchildren in Greek. I sing it to them, trying to sing like that. (laughs)

LEVINE: Oh, go ahead, sing it in Greek, and then you can maybe just say what it means.

JOHNS: Well, okay. Uh, the one, is it two or three? One has to do with a church thing about, uh, how, uh, let me see which one, okay. I'm trying to remember, okay. Well, one when we used to rock, especially rock a little baby to sleep or something. Like I have a two-and-a-half-year-old grandson, and I used to always say, I'd say (Speaks in Greek). Now, to translate that, I remember the words, even though I don't speak Greek fluently. It means that, they say rockabye baby until you fall asleep until, or until your mother comes, and, uh, she's going to bring you five bags, and five bags will be hatched into five little chicks (laughs) and they bring you a, a, a, a chicken and a rooster. And all that rhymes together

in Greek so well, that it's like a sing, you know, a sing-a-long. But I remember that very well, and I still remember it to this day. It used to be sung to me, you know, back home, when I was a little boy. And, uh, there's a couple of others, but I remember the words exactly. But other things about, uh, silly things, but they rhyme in Greek so well, you know how you mix words that the meaning sometimes loses, but, uh, like another one that I used to be told, that once upon a time there was a, this tomcat got into a, tried to dance, he couldn't dance very well, and they cut off his tail. Things like that. (laughs) But they rhyme in sing-song in Greek language, and I remember those things.

LEVINE: So do you remember when your father returned to take you to the United States?

JOHNS: Okay. He came, after he had become a citizen in the United States, in 19, uh, '30, at the end of 1932 he came over again to Albania, and, uh, and, this last time he came, he went over there, in the last time, then he never went back again to Albania in my life. He came over there and he told us that he was going to take us, bring us back here to this country. Uh, I remember taking a trip with him and my mother, not my brother and sister, just my father, my mother and myself. We went to the capital of Albania to Tirana, to get the proper passports for us and the paperwork. I remember going that trip in Tirana. Oh, it was, uh—

LEVINE: What struck you about going to Tirana?

JOHNS: It was the first time I ever went out of that area. And, uh, at that time, of course, we had this particular, like a taxi. It was a, uh, like a, uh, like a station wagon, took my mother and my father and myself. We went along, but it was, the road was atrocious, mountains. We had to go through mountains and all that. Because we were in this valley, to go northern part of Albania, we had traveled through a lot of mountains, mountain passes.

And, uh, and on the way we had an accident, lost a tire, and we couldn't quite fix it. Another truck came by, fortunately. We transferred all of our other stuff into the truck, and we finally got to Tirana, the first time I saw the big city. And there, again, there was hardly any, too many automobiles, mostly bicycles. And they had horse-drawn, uh—

LEVINE: Carriages.

JOHNS: Carriages, enclosed, like, you know, they used to get into them, they take you from one place to another. And my first hotel, we went to the hotel, a small hotel there. We stayed there, over there, for two, three days, I think, until we got all the paperwork straightened out. Uh, I, uh, the first time I, they had a restaurant there, okay, it was the first time I ever ate out. I don't remember what I ate, but it was good, whatever it was. I mean, something like, you know, fantastic to me, everything was. Like being in Disneyland for the first time. Disneyland. And I remember this distinctly. They were interviewing us. They were interviewing my mother and my father. And they took me separately, another fellow took me separately and was asking me questions in Albanian, in Albanian language. I had learned a little bit, because I had gone to Albanian school, and I remember hearing my mother tell my father, "Hey, what's he doing to Chris there?" And my father says, "Don't worry. He'll take care of himself. He's doing all right." So I was, you know, he was asking me my name, how old I was, and so forth, so I was giving him all this information in Albanian, which I had learned. So that helped out quite a bit. (laughs) Then I went back, and then after that we had taken, after everything was all set, we took, and I remember the last day we left there, I remember very well. It's funny how that sticks in my mind now. My mother, my grandmother, especially, crying, seeing us leave. We grew up there, all of us there, and here we were being left alone. The others already left, the other uncle already left. And my aunt had gone to her own side of the family. She had her own house. So they were left alone with all these, now three

separate buildings, just the two of them. And, uh, I remember crying, you know, my grandfather, too, of course. He doesn't show as much. Naturally a man doesn't show his emotions but, uh, then we left, we, you know, farewells and so forth.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything your mother brought back?

JOHNS: Oh, (laughs) I can tell you a story, you think it's unusual, which it's stupid in a way but, uh, okay, it had to be, okay, when we left it had to be after Easter. We have Easter eggs in Greek orthodox religion, you know, we dyed the eggs. They don't have any in this country. We have Easter eggs, everybody exchanges, and they break each others' egg and so forth. And they thought of something, you know, fantastic, Easter eggs, they bless it in church and so forth. And, uh, she had packed some Easter eggs in her big trunk that we had to bring to this country. Besides that, she had her, uh, her wedding, uh—

LEVINE: Gown?

JOHNS: It's not a gown. See, what they used to wear, it's a funny, they used to have the different kind of a wedding, it's not a dress, it was all kinds, like a vest with a lot of ornaments in the beginning, and they had this fancy, no hats that you think of at this time. I wish I had a picture of it. There was a picture that was taken of her, my father and myself before the twins were born. Apparently the time when he came over before the twins were born, it was Eastertime at that time, too. And he had brought me a suit, we're talking about clothes. He had brought over a suit for me to wear, and a pair of shoes. And I was talking to my mother just the other day. I've seen that picture. I says, "Do you know where that picture is? I don't remember." She says, "Who knows? I don't know if maybe my daughter has it, because when we cleaned out her apartment, a lot of the things were

stored in my daughter's house." And I remember that picture. I would like to have seen it, to show it to you. Talking about, I hated to wear that suit, because he wanted that picture taken, and had a photographer coming, and I was obstinate, I wouldn't even put my suit on. Finally they had me dressed up and the shoes and everything, and they took the picture. You should have seen my face, a sourpuss at that time. I was unhappy that I was dressed up like that, like a monkey. I figure, I'm never used to wearing clothes like that before. (laughs) And, uh, she had packed that same, she had on her wedding, um, outfit on. It wasn't just one dress. It was all kinds of parts. Like, uh, from here on it's a different kind of a color thing and, like I say, like a vest, like, with ornaments. And a hat that was especially, not a hat, but something's made out of, turban-like, that they wear. It's wrapped up as a cover and all that. And, uh—

LEVINE: So she had brought them.

JOHNS: She had brought that up, yeah. Those are, actually we wear, a lot of these, when we have a, here at the church when we have an affair, especially the *Epirotic*, which, we call Epirotic because we're Northern *Epirus*. We have the special uniforms they wear on occasions, whether at weddings or at festivals and so forth. Those are the only time they're, like a uniform, actually. And they wear them here, still to this day, a lot of them wear, they have these, uh, as a matter of fact, we had these Viva dances here in Worcester, and they wear these uniforms, the women got together here and made these uniforms from the way they were made in the old country those days. And they still wear them when they do that fancy dancing and so forth, those Greek dances with those uniforms on. She had brought that over. But going about the eggs now, when we arrived at the United States, naturally they go through your trunks. And I remember this when, uh, they were going through the, uh, customs there. Apparently my brother and sister already taken to the hospital in Ellis Island. The Conta de Savoya must have docked in

New York at the, uh, where they dock the passenger liners. And, uh, the trunks were taken out and so forth, and, and the customs, they saw these eggs, they says, "What are these? Take them out of there. Throw them out! You can't bring anything like that." Because they were probably rotten by that time anyway. But we figured that these eggs, because they're dyed and so forth they last a lot longer than regular eggs without being refrigerated, and we getting seven days, seven days in the boat there. So these eggs must have, who knows what, you know, throw them out, they wouldn't allow them in, of course. I remember those. Now that reminds me why it had to be Easter time, some time in April, at the end of April when we came here. Of course, in Easter time dates change. There's not a set date.

LEVINE: Do you remember leaving, um, and going for the boat to take to the United States?

JOHNS: Okay. From, like I say, from, uh, Albania we took that short ride into Italy across the Adriatic Sea where it's very turbulent, and the first time we ever got seasick was on that boat, and then from, uh, from, uh, the, uh, eastern part of Italy we took a sort of a train into the western part where we docked at the, in there in April somewheres, and, uh, we, uh, boarded the boat, the Conta de Savoya. And that's where my, uh, they discovered that my brother and sister were coming down with the measles. And they were taken directly to the hospital of the boat. Of course, I had no indication of measles. I had no—I must have had them earlier, so I couldn't catch them again. Uh, and we boarded the boat there and, uh, on our way to the United States. Uh, I think it took about seven days or so across the Mediterranean, Atlantic Ocean, into New York. And, uh, my brother and sister, being, coming down now with the measles showing pretty well, they were taken directly to a hospital in Ellis Island. And I didn't find out until recently exactly where it was located, because I paid a visit to Ellis Island recently and I asked specifically where were the hospitals here that they used to take people that were, uh, you know, supposed to be

hospitalized and pointed it out to them. I says, "Oh, no wonder I never saw them while they were there." They were in a different part of the section entirely. Uh, and, uh, we went to Ellis Island, the first thing that struck me, of course, I wasn't taken by, like my brother and sister, you know, under supervision to the hospital, we walked in, I remember this big building, looking at it, amazing, the big dome-like. And, uh, going inside there, and we, uh, there was, they said there was a floor on the first floor there, and I remember spiral stairways at that time.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

LEVINE: We're resuming now with tape two. I'm speaking with Christos John here in Worcester, Massachusetts. We'll start here with your impression when you came to Ellis Island.

JOHNS: First I enter Ellis Island. Naturally, like I said before, the reason we went through Ellis Island was because my brother and sister had the measles, and because they were taken to the hospital at Ellis Island. My mother and I had to also be quarantined at Ellis Island until my brother and sister got much better. Now, uh, as I entered Ellis Island I was amazed at this huge building at that time, and walking into it, of course, not too much the first day because, I think it was more late, late in the evening. You couldn't see too much, I mean, at that time, naturally. I remember they gave us a, uh, small bedroom on the, let's see, there was a first floor, second floor, and then there was another floor on top of that, like a third floor, around this big, big hallway. Big, I can see a dome, like. Around, around like a, you know, you could see from the balcony, on this huge hall, there were separate rooms, different rooms. And we were given one room, my mother and I, she had a large bed and I had a little cot beside her. The room was very small. All they

had was a sink there. And, uh, of course, they had toilet bowl facilities for that, too. And, uh, a faucet for water and a sink, and we slept there during our stay there. I, in the morning we would get up. They would wake us up, and they would take us down to breakfast, way down to the first floor again, because I remember walking down, uh, stairways. It's not there this time, ‘cause I noticed it was taken out. It must have been changed around. And, uh, going up and down there for our meals down there and so forth. And most of the day we spent in this big, big hallway there. And that used to have there for activities, a big puzzle, I remember, the whole table, a big, big tables, come with this huge puzzle. And every time we try to find a piece to put on there, I used to spend a lot of time trying to find a piece to fit into the puzzle. It was only half completed at the time. It was half completed when I left, that I remember. And one of the things that I remember while I was there, uh, seeing my very first Oriental. And, in a way, I was kind of leery. You know, it looked a little strange to me, and I remember he was always close to me, sticking close to me. Because he was a young fellow also. He must have been my age, apparently. Because he probably wanted, you know, somebody my age there to fool around. I didn't realize, and I was, but we got to be, you know, we couldn't understand each other, he had his own language, I had my own language, I didn't know how to speak English at that time. All I knew was the Greek language, and little Albanian, which I learned for about a year-and-a-half when I was in school. And, uh, but, uh, we, he couldn't have stayed there too long, because I remember for a couple of days only, two or three days at the most, and, but that was my first experience with someone that didn't look, uh, you know, like a regular European. Because I've never seen anyone other than Europeans when I was in Albania. The only other ones I remember, Muslims, some women—I went to there, they used to have, the women used to have their faces covered up, all you could see was the eyes. (laughs) They used to look strange to me at that time. I says, "Who are they? Why are they dressed like that?" Because in our village we wore regular, the Greeks, we had Greek customs and so forth, nothing like

that. And, uh, something, okay. That's the only other thing I remember, was that for young people being there other than this fellow, I don't remember anybody, oh, yeah, there was a couple of others, but where they came from, I don't, unless they were children of workers there. Because I remember this young lady taking me, and if you are about, maybe three or more, three or four, we went outside to a garden, like, enclosed with a fence. They had swings there, and they had a big beach ball we used to throw around and get into the swings. And, uh, I remember one other thing that, uh, on the swings there. I used to, I wasn't used to that, because we never had swings like that in the old country that you could go, you know. The air used to make me ill. Oh, I used to get dizzy going up and down on that swing there. I was leery about it. And I remember playing with the beach ball, throwing it to the other children, and the teacher used to be in there, uh, to keep us busy during the day. The food, I remember, I, of course, any food that I ate while I was there or in this country was delicious compared we used to, you know, eat back home, because we never had, like I said, we had the, uh, it was good when we ate and made, but it was nothing like we were served at Ellis Island. It was very good. And, of course, I had that experience for the food that was served to us on the boat, which was very good, at the, you know, in Italy, when we ate there. And a couple of days when I was in Tirana and so forth. But, uh, my, my stay at Ellis Island was very, very pleasant. I enjoyed it. I wasn't scared. One time I remember also there my mother met this other woman who happened to be Greek, one other woman, and they were talking. But what reason she was there, I don't remember. But reading about it, and I realized who was there at that time, or after that time. They weren't just regular people coming into this country for immigration purposes, because I think, at that time, they didn't have to go through Ellis Island. The only ones that went to Ellis Island at that time was people, like in my category where I had to be quarantined until my brother and sister got well, and people that didn't have proper credentials and so forth.

LEVINE: That's right. Were you in steerage when you were coming over? Were you in a cabin? What kind of—

JOHNS: We were in this big room about this size, about, how many feet would you say here?

LEVINE: Fifty feet?

JOHNS: Fifty feet. It's like a hospital ward. They had a nurse there. All day long she was there, night and day, along with us. I used to sleep on, I remember on a, one of the beds, a cot, like, on one end of the room. My brother and sister were in the very other end of the room, all by themselves, so we weren't even near them in the hospital.

LEVINE: But there was no petition.

JOHNS: No petition. But they were all by themselves. And, uh, my father and mother also had separate cots by the end, where I was. At the beginning, where the nurse was, I was very close to the nurse. The first bed near where the nurse was sitting there and, you know, make sure we used to have. And, uh, and I remember an unusual thing. Like I said, electricity, we never had any electricity back home. And, uh, what little electricity that I knew about was, of course, the, uh, hotel and, uh, and in Italy there we stayed in a hotel overnight before we went to the boat. I remember an elevator, the first time I ever saw an elevator, in this hotel, this small elevator, as we went up to the hotel there. A lot of new things that I witnessed. Uh, and, uh—

LEVINE: You were saying the room that was--

JOHNS: Oh, the room, yeah.

LEVINE: This was on the ship, or on the--

JOHNS: On the boat, on the boat. And they very, at the bottom of the boat you could see that the windows maybe, the windows aren't long. You could see, like potholes, ah, not—portholes, you could see out to the ocean there. So I used to spend a lot of time looking out the porthole.

LEVINE: Was that room filled with people?

JOHNS: No, no. We were the only ones.

LEVINE: You were the only ones in the--

JOHNS: We were the only ones. And the only reason was because they happened to catch the, uh, the symptoms of the measles at that time. Otherwise we wouldn't have been on to begin with. If somebody got sick during the voyage, they bring them down there, but nobody got sick during the voyage other than there was just my brother and sister there. And we had to stay there because they didn't know whether we'd come out with the symptoms. They didn't want to spread the measles throughout the boat. Now, remember one time trying to go up the stairs to go up. I was curious, and there's a guy that, "Oh, hey, you can't come up there. You got right down back again." So that was that. That was the only try I made, trying to get out and see what the rest of the boat looked like. They wouldn't let me go out. And, uh, and talking about the food there, which was [unclear]. But I remember, then my mother must also have some Easter eggs in something that she was carrying or something with her. So one time she gave me this egg. I was gonna peel it and eat it. The nurse noticed it. "Oh!" she must have said. "You can't have that!" But she said, "No, no, no, no, no." She grabbed the egg from me,

and she brought me some eggs after that. [unclear] eating Easter eggs. (he laughs) So that was an experience that I remember on the boat. And, of course, after a week or so, maybe ten days, two weeks, it took that long, I think. Uh, they, measles, they got over the measles. They were healthy again. And my father, meanwhile, they had let my father go. See, my mother and I were the only ones left at the Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Were the three of you staying in a room all by yourselves?

JOHNS: You mean, on the boat?

LEVINE: On Ellis Island.

JOHNS: On Ellis Island, just my mother and I. My brother and sister were in the hospital, a separate building entirely.

LEVINE: And you and your mother had a separate room, and your father left?

JOHNS: My father was allowed to go back to his business and make preparations for us to get into the, you know, to go to wherever we were gonna go. And after the, uh, they were clear to leave Ellis Island, he came and he took us, and my brother and sister, myself and my mother, and we had a cousin of mine who lived in Ante, Connecticut at that time, he come down with his car, and picked us up, and he came to this, he had shipped the, uh, he had shipped us up. Meanwhile the other trunk that he had, that we had full of stuff, he had already taken care of it apparently. He had it shipped already through, to my cousin's, uh, house in Ante, Connecticut, and, uh, until we found a home, and he found a house for us in Taunton, Massachusetts. That's where he had a business there, the A-1 Restaurant. He was partners with one other Greek, and they used to do very good

business there that time. That's how apparently he was able to do what he did to bring us over, because he was successful.

LEVINE: Do you remember any first things that you saw for the first time, when you—when you

JOHNS: The only, the first thing that stuck in my mind is how amazed I was at the tall buildings in New York City. I remember we were apparently in the car, naturally he must have picked us up at the, uh, where the, uh, you know, where the boats land there, what they call there, not the wharf there, where they, even the one that they use now, the ferry that you go to Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty, around that same area. From there we got in a car, and actually I don't know what route he took, my cousin, but, you know, he didn't stay long in New York, just what drove through. And I was going—I was looking out the window, looking out the buildings, I was amazed at them. I was amazed at, you know, what he was going through there, the first time I ever saw anything like that. The closest was, of course, in Tirana, which is nothing, just one hotel and nothing else, no tall buildings at all. Even in Italy I don't remember other than the hotel there were any other tall buildings, where I went through anyway, at least. Because I didn't see too much there, because it was nighttime, going through there at nighttime on this train. And then we got to, uh, to the other end of Italy from, from the north—to the west—east side to the west side, to pick up the boat. And, uh, other than the hotel there that we stayed there overnight, I don't remember much else.

LEVINE: Do you remember your uncle's name, the one who picked you up?

JOHNS: His first name was Pericles. No, that was my cousin. That would happen to be my, uh, my father's sister's son.

LEVINE: Oh.

JOHNS: Okay, from the old country. They had left earlier from the, they were there also originally. They had come before us here, a few years earlier. And, uh, his name was, uh, Socrates, and he had a, not a saint's name, that's an unusual party. Some don't have, there's no celebration for Socrates for name day. One of the ancient Greek names, Socrates. Naturally you know who Socrates was. They're named after the other name, Greek names, a lot of them they have, like, Socrates, Hercules and things like that. Uh, Aristotle. (Laughs) So, uh, we, I had a business at that time, a very successful business in Ante, Connecticut. His name was Socrates Delligeorges. Delligeorges in Greek is George, that's how that translates, *Yoriyos* St. George. I use *Yoriyos* in Greek, and that's the one that slayed the dragon apparently. And, uh, he had, uh, his wife was with him, and naturally he had brought the whole family over. He had, also, at that time, I remember two other sons at that time. One was about my age; one was a little bit older. And, uh, we must have spent there at least a month in Ante, Connecticut. It was a small town there, outside of New London. And, uh, it was one of the best times of my life that I spent down there. It was springtime at that time, it must have been May, and we had beautiful, uh, grounds there in his house, he had a nice, big house, he had a lot of trees, uh, like fruit trees. I don't remember what kind, what they have around here at that time, but, anyway, apple trees, yeah. And, uh, we waited there, and naturally, and then it was right near the beach there, which I've never seen. The only ocean I saw was the Adriatic when I got on the boat and the Atlantic Ocean. I was amazed at the beaches they had to go swimming, which I never went swimming. I was never near any body of water to go swimming where I was born. I never learned how to swim on account of that. The only body of water we used to have there through the valley, during the summer months, there's only one river that used to run through the whole valley, and during the winter months when they got a little rain and so forth, whatever they got, they had another,

another river, two rivers. But one used to go dry in the summer months, and another one used to be constantly away, further away from us. Just to go back to one moment about the time they were talking about the water there. Water, we never had any running water in these villages. We used to go down at the bottom in the valley, we used to have a big well. And people used to go there with barrels on their donkeys, fill them up with water, and bring them back home. And, uh, the summer months was really tough. We had to go miles to this other river, which used to have, near this other river, but they used to have some pipes there, they used to have water from the mountains, from the Greek side, they used to have the water, there was constantly water there through a, we used to call [unclear] pipes coming through there. We used to go there to fill up with barrels and bring it all the way back home during the summer months. It was really tough living there, the conditions. Uh—

LEVINE: So this was the first time you had living there.

JOHNS: The first time that I had living there, they had to go swimming and so forth. And, of course, I couldn't swim anyway, but we used to go near the beach there, and I used to enjoy it so much. And then, uh, of course, after my father found a home in Taunton , to rent, a place to rent, uh, we moved to Taunton , entirely different from Ante, because Taunton 's more in the center of Massachusetts there. Well, actually not too much in the center. This is, in Worcester is the center of Massachusetts, but Taunton is about forty, uh, fifty miles from here.

LEVINE: Yeah, it's not right on the ocean.

JOHNS: It's not on the ocean, but it's in, it's south of Boston and, uh, it used to be the gateway to the cape, and one time the only road that used to go through, it used to go through

Taunton , from here, this part of this country, from Worcester, I used to have to drive through Route 140 through Taunton to go down to the cape, I remember. And, uh, Taunton was a nice, a nice, clean city to live on. Uh, [unclear] was in that, you know, that much welfare, but, uh, that first home we went to was a very small little house, only about, uh, four rooms on it. It was by a river in the backyard, but the river was a very, dirty, dirty water there. It wasn't swimmable, it wasn't, those years, I don't know. It probably clean up now, but, uh, rubbish used to be thrown, I remember tires and all that in the back there, there was thrown. And, uh, we didn't stay there too long fortunately. Maybe a few, two, three months. Then we moved to another house which was more or less a three-decker. We were on the second floor, and then, uh—

LEVINE: In Taunton ?

JOHNS: In Taunton , all this in Taunton . We went to went to three, four, three different houses. And after that one we moved to another three-decker to the very top floor, which was right near the high school. And, uh, and I remember the high school right across the street, the house over there across the street was a high school.

LEVINE: Meanwhile were you going to school?

JOHNS: Now, meanwhile, there, very interestingly enough, of course, here I was, eleven years old, eleven-and-a-half years old, now where could they put me in school? So we came here in May—the schools had closed in June, the beginning of June, so I had to wait till September. But they sent me, they had a special class in, uh, in Taunton . I remember this lovely teacher. She was an elderly woman, maybe in her sixties at that time, gray-haired woman, I remember. She was, she had an Irish name. I think her name was Reilly, Mrs. Reilly. And she was a sweet, sweet lady. I mean, she had, how she had the

patience to teach us, I don't know. But, uh, I remember that, uh, schoolroom there, Barnum Street school, they used to call it. It's a special room for special students who couldn't speak English to learn how to speak and write English, to learn the alphabet. And I remember in that class the first thing that I used to look around all the time, was these big letters all around the room, the alphabet from A to Z, small and the large capitals and all that, the first thing we learned. It helped me a lot, because the Greek language, you see, a lot of those letters are very similar to the, uh, and if you pronounce them, there isn't that much difference. A, Alpha, B, Beta, Beta, you know, in Greek. C was a different, but, anyway, we learned a lot of the letters, and you could, if you formed it properly and, you know, back in, back home the Greek schools were very thorough. They used to teach you good, maybe I just went about, what, for, I couldn't have gone more than three, three-and-a-half years, four years in Greek school, and I learned how to, to read and write and so forth. And also the English, the Albanian language helped me a lot, because the Albanian language is a lot, although a lot of it was derived from the Greek language, but it was a lot in the, in the letters and so forth, it was similar to the American language. So I was able to pick it up pretty quick. And, uh, at that age you tend to learn more fast at that time, but if you concentrate and apply yourself. And, uh, like I say, this teacher was very good. We used to sit around at the table. There was about seven or eight of us. There was a couple from Italy, I remember. There was, uh, there was a couple from Portugal. Uh, but mostly in Taunton there was a lot of, there were a lot of Italian and Portuguese. There were a lot of Portuguese in Taunton . My sister-in-law, by the way, Jimmy's, my brother's wife is Portuguese. That's where my brother met his wife there. And, uh, and each one, of course, and I don't remember, then we went through. But I, uh, I don't know how the other said it, but I remember leaving the school, we used to, with the other students, in probably the same direction, we used to walk to our homes. And, uh, that was quite an experience. But, anyway, after a year, a year there, and a half, I think. Then after that they transferred me for a half a year to the

fifth grade, to the grammar school. From there on I went right up, sixth, seventh grade.

LEVINE: You mean, you started out in the first again?

JOHNS: No.

LEVINE: Oh, no, you started—

JOHNS: The special class brought me up to the fifth grade. I had learned enough to be able to be put in the fifth grade. But I was with two years over in, you know, two years behind, and I was always two years older than any of my students, the students there in the class, because I started fifth grade when I was about, what, thirteen years old. So, uh, that was the only disadvantage. Other than that was I had wonderful experiences, going through, uh, grammar school, middle school, sixth, seventh and eighth grades, and I went to high school now. (laughs) Talking about the different homes we moved to, right when I started high school, we had moved from that house where we was near high school. I was looking forward to going to school right next door, but my father had bought, finally bought his own home, a single family house about, uh, a couple, three miles on the outskirts of Taunton there, nice, uh, a lot of land there. And, uh, we, uh, so I had to walk to high school at that time. Rain or snow, I never missed a day. I used to walk to high school. Now, just to bring one other thing I should mention here at this time. After we came to this country, my father, my grandfather and grandmother back in the old country, my grandmother passed away after, uh, two or three years later. My grandfather was left all alone. My father brought him over. He was in his nineties.

LEVINE: This is the grandfather that you were living with—

JOHNS: My grandfather that we grew up with.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

JOHNS: Brought him into Taunton , and he was, oh, he was so happy, you know. He was a great man. He was always working, even at that age, because we had this, my father had bought this, uh, the house there, uh, we had, like a lot of apple trees there in the backyard, and we had a grapevine there. And an area for (coughs) gardening, was the first thing he did up there. He had a garden there, he trimmed the grapevines, he was paying attention to the apple trees. He enjoyed himself. And then, of course, naturally, this was, had to be in 1936 or thirty-seven that he came up. And, uh, of course, I wanted to go to school during my, uh, high school and so forth he was there, so I was, uh, going to school, but we spent a lot of happy years together. Then, uh, to go along, to prolong things here, uh, I graduated from high school, naturally. Right at that time, that's when the World War II that's when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, in 1942, yeah.

LEVINE: Today actually is the anniversary.

JOHNS: Right, December 7th, today. And I remember the day that we were in, I was in, we were called in an assembly, all the high school students, in this big assembly room in high school, and there we heard the radio address of president Roosevelt, addressing, saying that, uh, infamous day, the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor, declare war against Japan. And, of course, it started the, uh, the, uh, what they call it, not the, you know, when you're drafting, and naturally I was just graduating that year. That was my last, what month was it that they bombed Pearl Harbor? It had to be near the end of, uh—

LEVINE: It had to be December—

JOHNS: The beginning of—y eah, December 7th. Okay. Yeah, December 7th. So, of course, we had the, I completely, that's why I stayed in school through, uh, through the end of the, uh, the year, and my name was in the draft, and they drafted me, right? They had an out at that time, I remember them saying that they had some kind of a project in Quarry, Maine, that they were working for, the government. And they say anybody that's graduating they had these, uh, government officials, you know, draft, whoever was running the draft and so forth coming in, they say, "Anybody that wants to join this endeavor at Quarry, Maine, to work there would be deferred temporarily from the draft." And I volunteered, you know. Not that I didn't want to go to war, of course. (Laughs) But, anyway, it worked out that I, uh, during that, during that summer when I graduated from high school, of course, I want to say this, that all during my, even high school when I was working part-time after high school, and people were helping me a lot. They knew my situation of growing up, and I had some wonderful teachers that, uh, and I want to say that they helped me a lot because I remember going to the, when I went to the, uh, sixth grade, they put me, they had divisions, A, B, C division, for students, according to the grades they were getting. So they put me in the B division my first semester. Then they put me in the A division, because I was doing so well. And I was right through my, always an honor student. And, uh, so, uh, I was always applying myself, doing my best. And I had this, I remember this, in high school, a fellow by the name of Decker. He's the one that convinced me to take business courses in high school instead of the other, languages and so forth. Because, uh, I was, I was good at arithmetic, and things like that. So, and, uh, so I took the business course there, and naturally the office practice and all that, where we go through business. And, uh, naturally then the war started. I eventually was drafted by, in October of that same year, forty-two.

LEVINE: You went to Quarry, Maine, in the summer?

JOHNS: No. I didn't go. They, for some reason it didn't pan out or something, so that didn't go through. For some reason, oh, they had to wait further up, I don't know if they ever did anything later on, but since, uh, they must have given up on that project. Uh, they, I got drafted in October. And, uh, we went through, I remember getting drafted, uh, we went to Fort Devens in Massachusetts here. And I had some lucky experiences, actually. Fortunately, I don't know, maybe God was with me. But, like I say, I had worked all during the summer months. I worked at building at this, uh, at the camp, at Miles Standysh for the soldier invocation point there. They were building a, so I worked there during the summer, working on building barracks and things like that, for the camp, camp Miles Standysh. So I had part, even (?) work at that time. I got drafted, and fortunately my, uh, my fortunes, uh, even during wartime was outstanding. I enjoyed it, you know. I always had a experiences, but for some reason I got drafted in October. In November I was, at that time they were trying to raise, they were building the air forces, the army air forces. The air forces weren't a separate unit at that time, army air forces and navy air forces and so forth, like the marines and so forth is part of the navy, air forces were part of the naval air force and army air forces. And they send me, first time outside of Massachusetts and Connecticut, to Miami Beach for my basic training. (he laughs) And there about a month or so or two months, then they, after we got the basic training they decide, because of my experiences and my good grades in school and so forth, they sent me to Louisiana State University for army administration. I went there for about, I spent there three months at Louisiana University, learning all about army administration purposes. Then, lo and behold, they shipped me back to, to Fort Devens. (he laughs) And at Fort Devens, uh, they were, they were starting there at that time, another Fort Devens at, uh, here in Massachusetts. It was an air force base down by Springfield. I forget the name of it right now, outside of Springfield, Chikopee [ph] Falls. There it was an army base, the Westover [ph] Air Base. They formed what they call the, um, the, uh,

airborne engineers. I was assigned to battalion headquarters, just starting a new battalion. The 80, 82nd Airborne Engineers, Army Airborne Engineers. And, uh, for the purposes of those battalions, of course, were two, uh, built air strips for the, um, by the pilots. Uh, and they only had three battalions of those. One went to, uh, one went to, uh, the Asia, Middle East, not Middle East but by, uh, Burma, in those areas there. And they had bad experiences there. See, that's where I was lucky. I could have been (?), I could have ended up in Burma trying to land behind enemy lines where they used to land us build airstrips. A lot of them got really banged up.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

JOHNS: All the, anyway, after all the training, they shipped us to the, to the, uh, Far East, I mean, to the, uh, in the Pacific area. By boat, we were in California, got on a boat, we went to New Zealand, Australia, up to Port Morsby [ph] in New Guinea, and, uh, here we were building either hospitals, roads or air strips. We were working on air strips, mostly. But that was our aim, air strips, because the bombers could go further than the fighter pilots, to bomb the Japanese targets further north, you know, as far as, even into Japan. But they need to have air cover. Now, the fighters, they didn't have a distance, they couldn't go the same distance, travel the same distance as the bombers. So they had to go behind enemy lines in the mountains, I'm remembering New Guinea, in the middle of New Guinea there they landed us in this valley, like reminded me of my country back home, this big valley there, and we built airstrips there for the fighters there to land there, refuel, and continue on to escort the bombers. So that was our, in there. And then, of course, we went right up the line. Meanwhile only, the closest we came to battle was when we were threatened by Japanese that we trapped by Australians, that were driving

them north, and we were way behind enemy lines in the northern part of New Guinea, going all the way up there, and we were in (?) trying to, uh, anticipate the Japanese moving northward, to stop them there. But they did not realize, because they were caught up and they were, awful. But, anyway, from that we landed in the Philippines and Okinawa, and finally ended up in Japan, my outfit. So I was with a good, a lucky outfit. So the closest I came to being a casualty was when we were loading an LST, because instead of carrying anything by plane to the Philippines, uh, not the Philippines, from the Philippines to New Guinea, I mean, Philippines to Okinawa, I had an accident when we loaded all our equipment and everything else and on this LST. That's a boat the carries our equipment, that we needed. And I fell, and I broke my wrist. And here we were ready to leave in a couple of days. So at nighttime there, it was nighttime, I got this pain here. And I went to the medic. I said, "Oh, this pain is killing me. I can't sleep." He says, oh, take an aspirin and see him in the morning. I (?) and say, "Get me an aspirin." But the next day I went to the field hospital, they examined, x-ray, oh, you got a fracture in your thing there. They put a cast on and all that. Okay. I says, "Now I can go." "Where are you going?" he says. "Well, I got to go. We're getting packed, ready to leave." "Where do you think you're going? You can't go." "What do you mean I can't go?" I says, "I'm already packed, everything's packed." I was in charge of the post exchange besides, because of my experiences in the restaurant business with my father and all that, they put me in charge of the post exchange. (he laughs) I says, "I got to go. I got merchandise all up on there. Who's gonna take care of this?" "No, you can't go unless you get a letter from your commanding officer that they allow you to go." Oh, now I got to go find the commanding officer. I went and I saw the first sergeant, actually. "Hey, Sarge," I says, "this is just a fracture here." I said, "I can move my arm, and there's nothing wrong." I said, "But they won't let me go unless you get a letter here from the company commander that they are not allowed to go." So he signs a letter for me, and I went. Here I had an opportunity to stay behind. The guy says to me, "You're crazy," he

says, the doctor says to me. "Do you realize where you're going," he says, "they're having a big battle?" He says, "They just, uh, they're, you know, the Japanese are hari-kari. They're landing their planes on the ships and so forth." I says, "Well, I'll take the chance I got to take. Here's a chance to, probably, go back to Australia and all the way home." Instead (?) the war.

LEVINE: Do yo know why you, uh, why you opted to go when you could have stayed back?

JOHNS: Well, because I, because I enjoyed, you know, what this, my battalion was doing, what we were doing. And I never experienced any closed combat, so I never, you know, a young fellow, that I'm adventure. You wanted to go on fighting, whatever, if you had to fight, you fight, you know. We always had a rifle with us, naturally, and all that, combat packs and all that. We were ready for fighting also, when the occasion arose. But we never came to the point where we had to face somebody face to face. And the closest, like I said, I came to that was when we got strafed a few times when we were at this valley. Japanese plans came over to strafe us, but there was no casualty of any kind. So they weren't able to do it. And I remember seeing, as close as I came to actual fighting, to see actual fighting, when our fighter pilots that we had there, we had built the strip for and so forth, they got up and chased them and shot them down. I actually witnessed that, our planes shooting down this Japanese plane. So other than that, and then the only other, oh, there's so many stories to tell. I'm taking too much of your time.

LEVINE: No, no.

JOHNS: But, uh, in Okinawa, for instance, that island was a lot of caves, a lot of hills and caves there that, and, uh, mountains. And, uh, I remember we built battalion, the headquarters on top of this hill, and we had a bulldozer level it off and put the battalion headquarters

right on top of it. But we entered, and meanwhile the marines were just on the other side, between the marines actually and where the Japanese were trapped on this part of the island. And, uh, they were shooting artillery over our heads, and we didn't think nothing of it. Imagine that? And, uh, now, while we were levelling off that area there for battalion headquarters, there was a cave underneath apparently which never knew about, and when we leveled that off, we blocked that entrance to the cave and so forth, and there was two Japanese underneath, soldiers on the inside there. A couple of days later one of them was on guard duty early morning, you know, we all had guards no matter where you are, you always have guards on duty. And, uh, he sees this white flag coming through the rocks. (he laughs) And finally, you know, we reported it. The company commander went up there, they dug it open, and there is a cave entrance, but the Japanese wouldn't come out. They were scared, probably. They were afraid, naturally, because the marines at that time, they go through every cave, "Is anybody in there," one, two, three, come out, and then they throw hand grenades in there. But we didn't do that, naturally. So, and one, and I remember a cook, a Greek, too, he was a cook at the headquarters there, a cook, and he volunteered along with a second lieutenant, they go into the cave after the Japanese, and they brought him out of here, all bearded up and all that, they hadn't enough water, they probably food they ran out of, that's why they surrendered anyway, and we had called the marines and they came by and took them away. But the marines really gave us, they says, "You people have to be stupid," he says, "to go in after them. You don't go after." And he says, "You give them a chance to come out. If they don't, that's it. So that's an experience I never forgot.

LEVINE: Hmm. Now, when you got out of the service, what did you do then?

JOHNS: Okay. Uh, after I got out of the service, you know, they give you an indoctrination, they tell you what you're gonna do, how to go about it, what you plan to do, and, you know,

they give you indoctrination when you go back to civilian life and so forth. They told us about the GI Bill of Rights, and I says, well, I was saying, "Well, I say I'll go to work with my father in the restaurant." Then I says no, I'm gonna decide to go to college. Because they were, you know, the government, at that time, well, I got out in November. I couldn't start school at that time right away, so I had to wait through January or February I think, and I decided to go. Meanwhile, they used to pay us, of course, we used to call it the, uh, a hundred, no, fifty club, fifty-fifty club, or something like that, no, fifty-fifty-two club. For fifty-two weeks the government would give the soldiers that were released fifty dollars a week for fifty-two weeks. So I collected the fifty dollars until I went, tried to get into college. I got into the college in Providence, Rhode Island there, which is right near Taunton . Taunton Province only about, uh, twenty miles apart there. At the, uh, see, now I can't even remember the name of my school, which I know it very well. It's quite a college now. It's the, um, it's a business school. Anyway, I went there from February on for, because they were really loaded with GI's at that time under the GI bill. Every college at that time, all the GI's that got, uh, released from the army went to college, most of them. I don't say all of them but, uh, I would say the good majority took advantage of it. And I went there. They paid all the tuition. And, besides that, they were giving us about, uh, I forget what it was, about a hundred dollars a month or something, for our expenses. So I went for two-and-a-half years to, continuously, summer and winter, in other words, four-year course, and I finished in two-and-a-half years. I took accounting and became an accountant. After that I moved to, oh, meanwhile I had met my wife, naturally.

LEVINE: Where did you meet her?

JOHNS: Now where Worcester comes in. Uh, Taunton actually had no church there. We had a lot of relatives here. I had a cousin here. The cousin that I witnessed for marriage back in the old country had moved and was living in Worcester. My uncle, Pericles, was living

in Worcester. That was the father of this, uh, my cousin that got married. I was talking about the wedding back home. Uh, and, uh, meanwhile my father also brought my other cousin, his son, my uncle's son, who was in Buenos Aires, because my father was a citizen, and he brought him over as an uncle, to bring him to this country. He stayed with us in Taunton for a while and then moved to Worcester here, you know, with his father and sister and so forth. And, uh, I used to come to Worcester quite often, naturally. I used to come to dances here. We had no dances in Taunton because we had no Greek community. There was only about four or five families, Greek families, in Taunton . We used to belong to the Fall River church, but I used to, we used to come to Worcester here quite often. And my cousin, the one that I witnessed the marriage, introduced me, invited me to the same wedding that she was invited to. We went to this wedding. We met at the wedding. (he laughs) That's where I first met her. And it's like, almost you could say, well, it was a fixed marriage, but, uh . . . (he laughs) Then we got married and, uh . . .

LEVINE: Was she from Albania?

JOHNS: No, she, her folks come from the same part of the country that I was there, but a few villages further down. Her folks from there. They had come over here, and she was born in this country. She was about my age, maybe a little bit younger, about a year younger. Uh, but she has the same customs, and those same customs were happening, all the good customs and all that. So she speaks Greek very, she used to speak, she learned Greek and went to Greek school here in Worcester. She learned Greek and the English language. Of course, she went through high school. We got married in 1946. I got out in late 1945 from the service. In 1946, in September, what was it, when is Labor Day? The end of September? Is that Labor Day?

LEVINE: No, the beginning.

JOHNS: The beginning of September. Well, about that time we got married, about that time. And she lived in Taunton , we lived in Taunton for a couple of years until I graduate from college. Then, when I graduate from college, we moved to Worcester here.

LEVINE: Now, your father was in business in Taunton ?

JOHNS: He was in this A-1 Restaurant, right through all those years he was in the A-1 Restaurant, in the business there. But for a while during the war it had changed because they couldn't get help at that time. They turned into a cafeteria, into a regular restaurant where you serve people. A lot of restaurants turned into a cafeteria during the war because they couldn't get the help to serve people. So, uh, and then, of course, he was, he had asthma. He was a little, he wasn't feeling good. The asthma bothered him a lot. And, uh, he was working in Taunton right till, uh, you know, my grandfather, meanwhile, when I came back from the service, by the way, he had gone blind, completely blind. He, uh, back in the village he had been kicked on one side of the head there by a mule or something, and he had lost sight of one eye. He could see very well when he came to this country. But, uh, after I came back from the service he couldn't see at all, but I took him to Massachusetts General Hospital trying to see if anything could be done. I think they said his nerves were completely gone. But even when he was blind he used to get along very well, I remember. And he even came to my wedding. He was at the wedding there and, uh, he lived to a good old ripe, about ninety, he must have been ninety-eight years old, something like that, when he passed away.

LEVINE: What is your wife's name?

JOHNS: Sophia. Wisdom. (he laughs) That stands for wisdom.

LEVINE: Does it, Sophia? And how about her maiden name?

JOHNS: Uh, Chanis, C-H-A-N-I-S. Sophia Chanis was her, and, of course, we got married, like I said, we had four wonderful children, two boys and two girls, and they're all doing very well. One lives in New York City. That's when I went recently there and he took us, we went to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What are your children's names?

JOHNS: Uh, the oldest one is William, Celios, in Greek. Uh, George, two boys, and, uh, the girl, Christina, named after, Chris, Christina. And, uh, the youngest one, Constance, Constantina. Uh, and, uh, they're all married and, uh, I have six grandchildren, one, of course, George, the youngest one, he's an investment banker in New York City, uh, and the, uh, what is it, the, uh, two twin towers there, what's that?

LEVINE: The World Trade?

JOHNS: The World Trade Center. His office is there, he works right now. He started, actually, my youngest, out of all of them, my older son did very well, too. He's a regional manager for a pharmaceutical company, he lives in Hampton, the oldest son, the one that's over where they live, where I went to make the speech on Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Oh, right, uh-huh.

JOHNS: And, uh, my two daughters are married. And, you know, you wonder why, I mean, Greek

customs and all that, but once they get to this country, it's a funny thing. They, uh, even though all my grandchildren, my children, right, my four children, went through Greek school here in this, where we're having the interview right here. Right . . .

LEVINE: The Greek school, now, would they be attending a public school and this?

JOHNS: No. This is after public, this is only about two or three times a week.

LEVINE: I see.

JOHNS: Afternoon, after regular schooling, they come for a couple of hours here and learn Greek, how to speak and write and so forth. And they go through grades, maybe four or five grades, for four or five years, and then they graduate. They had Sunday school every Sunday. And my kids all went through Sunday school, Greek school, they grew up with it, they played, uh, sports for the church, basketball, and so forth and so on, and yet none of them married a Greek. They all married different.

LEVINE: How do you feel about that?

JOHNS: I have wonderful, uh, I'm telling you, every one of them, they're all so happy, and they're all doing very well. I have no, I never felt anything bad about them. My folks were very upset, not of my children marrying, but because my son, I mean, my brother Jimmy married a non-Greek, and my mother was really upset. And my sister almost married a non-Greek. She was so upset about it, you know. She fought, "You're supposed to marry Greeks," you know. So, uh, of all the ones in my family that actually married, uh, Greeks, was myself, uh, my, uh, younger sister, well, my older sister, Jimmy's twin, married a Greek fellow also. But the, uh, younger ones, or the younger sister married a

Greek also, but my other two brothers, well, my other brother married an Italian girl, and my other brother married a Greek originally but they're divorced and he's married to another. So, uh, but the children, our grandchildren, no, our children, our children . . .

LEVINE: Right.

JOHNS: My children all married different, and my brother's children, they're not married to Greeks. And, uh, neither are my other, uh, my younger sister didn't marry Greeks. My sisters, the twin there, Jimmy's twin sister, uh, didn't marry, her children didn't marry any Greeks. So we're really (he laughs) spread out. Difference, I've never seen, so I have a Polish son-in-law, an Italian, half-Italian, half-French son-in-law. My, uh, my older son married a German girl. She happened, he had an accident of some kind playing basketball, he's six-foot-five-and-a-half tall, playing basketball. He has some kind of a muscle pull or something on his leg. He ended up in the hospital. and, uh, she was a nurse for him there, and that's where he met her. (he laughs) And, uh, my youngest son married an Armenian girl.

LEVINE: Right.

JOHNS: But they're all doing very well.

LEVINE: Well, do you, yourself, carry on any customs?

JOHNS: All the Greek customs, we follow through them. I have always stayed with the Greek customs myself. Especially my wife, we bought up, after we got married, we've been married in this church, by the way. We came from Taunton to get married in this church. So she was here anyway, from Worcester. Usually ordinarily the custom is that we get

married in the bride's church, so we got married here. And, uh, when we moved eventually, after we (?) naturally, I was a member here, and I remember the time we had started building, that's when we started raising money to build this church here, before we had one downtown, on Orange Street, which is changed entirely now from re-developing. The building was torn down down there. But, uh, we built this church here and, uh, I remember talking about the, not the fathers, but the benefactors of this church, which two outstanding ones, Mr. Cotsidas and Mr. Torner [ph]. And they were in the building fund committee, you know, raising money and so forth. When the time come to build it, uh, they had raised enough money to build it, and I remember it to the very end. We ended up without a mortgage. Which, of course, at that time, of course, it wasn't as expensive to build it, but it cost us over a half a million dollars and, uh, at the end, instead of having a while, we had paid off everything so there would be no mortgage left. And I remember after that they built the church, they says, "Now we're ready to retire." Because they were all these, all the gentlemen, the board of directors or the board of governors of the church. They were the ones that went through building the church. They says, "Well, now we're turning over to you young fellows to take over running the church." And I remember I was here a few years ago. This was in, uh, of course, I moved to Worcester in 1948, '49, and this was happening about 1953, '54, and I remember on the elections of, uh, now that you mention it earlier, that person's name, of all the, all the Board of Governors, they were running at that, they were running in the building, doing the building of the church and completion of the church. Only one Board of Directors was, stayed on to run again into the, we were only electing about seven at that time. Now we're fifteen. And that was Nicholas Drapos. He was president. We elected him, I remember, I was (?) at that time, and I was fortunate to come in the seventh person in, and I was almost tied with the eight person, so they flipped a coin or something, so I got in, because I was younger, this other fellow was another older person. He said, "I'll give these young fellows a chance." So he says, "Okay, I'll let him

take the position." And we elected Nicholas Drapos at that time president, and we went like that for a few years. Now we have elections every two years, you know, you run every two years, you run for two years' term, two year term, and then a two year term, maximum of four, then you have to lay off and give somebody else a chance, and you run again later. So I ran for the four years, and then after that, then I gave up for a couple of years, and I ran again, and I had another four years or so. So, uh, so I followed the customs of the church, you know. And then I remember the time that we built this, for instance, the, where we have an interview right now, the center, the, uh, the Greek school, the hall, and this is the reception center. This, by the way, is named after Mr. Tona [ph]. They call this The Tona [ph] Room. And I remember Mr. Cotsidas, Mr. Tona [ph] and a few others leaders got together at a luncheon in The Aurora Hotel, which was owned by a Greek at that time, this big hall he had, like a luncheon, I mean, a hall for a, for affairs. And we had invited the archbishop at that time, and they had invited about eighty business people over the Worcester area. We went at this meeting, and they, Mr. Tona [ph], Mr. Cotsidas and the priest was around the time they got up and spoke. Now is come the time to build this center after a few years. That was in the late '50s, '58, I think it was, around that time. And I was, of course, at that time, at that time my brother and I had bought this, uh, restaurant down, not a restaurant, actually. That was the bus terminal, which had all the rights to all the, uh, selling newspapers, magazines and luncheonette and all that. And, uh, they said, "Okay, now, here's the story." They said, "Whatever money that you people are willing to pledge and donate, Mr. Tona [ph] and Cotsidas will double it." That very day we pledged, those people that were there, we pledged over eighty thousand dollars. Imagine, they doubled it. Anyway, they went a little further. They says, "Whatever money . . ." They never expected that the community would raise that kind of money. They said, "Whatever the community raises, we'll double it." Ended up with the community raising about a hundred and seventy-eight thousand dollars. They doubled it, and built this for about three hundred

and fifty-one. No mortgage or anything. That's the kind of benefactors that the community really needs.

LEVINE: What do you feel most proud of?

JOHNS: I'm really proud, of course, I was always proud of my, uh, father for doing what he did. He tried hard to bring us up here and get us together. He had to make two or three trips back home to, and he ended up coming down and bringing us in. So I was always proud of my father. He worked hard all his life. And I was even proud when the time came that he brought his father here, a ninety-year-old man, to bring him here to spend his last few years here with us, which we had grown up with my brother and I and my sister. And, uh, I was proud of that. And, uh, and I was, I was really proud of this community here. That's why I stayed around in Worcester where a lot of them had left since, you know. But I've always stayed here. I says, I'm not gonna leave this community here. I'm knowing so many people here all these years since 1948 when I first moved here, and, uh, people liked Mr. Cotsidas and Tonas [ph] and Mr. Sangerelles, and Mr. Bell, a lawyer who's done a lot of work for the community, he's always been the lawyer for the church here voluntarily, all volunteer work in this community, all these years. Now it's getting to the point now, everybody wants to get paid something to do something. That has changed a little bit. Still there's a lot of volunteers that do work, but not as many that are willing to put something in it without getting something in return. But other than that this community, I'm very proud of this community.

LEVINE: Is there anything about, you know, the people you mentioned, Mr. Tonas [ph], Mr. Cotsidas, is there anything about them personally that you admire?

JOHNS: Well, I, uh, first of all, Mr. Cotsidas and Mr. Tonas, I didn't know them very well until the

time when I served in the, at one time I served with both of them in the Board of Governors. After they got out the first time, they were in again later on. That's how the people, those people were so interested in this community, int eh welfare of this community. They went again to run for the Board of Directors a few years later. As a matter of fact, on my second time around that I ran again, we got elected the same time again with them in the Board of Governors. And I admired him for that, because they never gave up on this (?). They were the first to make big donations here, to come up with how to maintain this, uh, this building here properly and have enough finances that we won't be needing, you know, (?). And I remember even Nicholas Drapos that I mentioned earlier. He worked very hard for this community. I was always proud. And, as a matter of fact, himself and Jimmy Drapos' brother, they were, Mr. Bell, especially, he was responsible for getting, because he was a lawyer and I was an accountant, we happened to have practically, in the same building he had an office, and I was working in accounting in the same office. He was my lawyer, and he was always a good advisor. Free, he never charged me a penny for any time I wanted some help he'd be there to give it to me. I don't know why. He used to, because I had volunteered myself for the community. So for the years he appreciated what I, as a young man, you know, very few young men at that time were willing to come forward and work for the, you know, everyone's looking to make a living and raise a family and so forth. But I always felt it worked out, one thing was together, they worked together, you know. You work for the community, you get help from the community also, I noticed. I know I've never had anybody that wasn't willing to give me a hand whenever I needed some help. Even when I was striving at the beginning when I came out of college, I had a hard time finding a job, and I almost asked Mr. Cotsidas, but I wanted to stick in my accounting work. So I waited until they come, everybody, all the businessmen. They says, "Well, you can do the work on my books for me part-time, and so forth." And they helped me get with an accounting firm, and I appreciated that very much. And, um, and I admired Mr. Bell

because then he eventually got me to join the order of AHEPA, which is the National Organization of the Greek American Atlantic Organization, which you at one time spoke at one of our luncheons here, which really got us all interested in this Ellis Island there. You were very instrumental in that to get everybody interested. And the AHEPA had originally had helped a lot Ellis Island. And I was one of the, because I happened to be with the AHEPA that I went up all the way. I was, of course, an officer in the chapter, served all the chairs right up to president for two years, and became a district lodge officer for six years. I was district governor, and I became a supreme governor. As a matter of fact, the time that you went to lunch and I was supreme governor of the Order of AHEPA. And we were one of the first organizations to raise funds for the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. Uh, if you remember Mr. Iacocca, he was the Chairman for the Statue of Liberty at that time and Ellis Island also? He came out and said originally, he mentioned in his speech to the retirement club, he says, "You know," he says, "the Italians is the biggest ethnic group that ever came through Ellis Island was Italians." And, he says, "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves to let the Greek organization beat you to making pledges and donations for this project. You should have been the first. Instead you let the Greeks be the first organization, national organization, to pledge at least a hundred, a hundred-fifty thousand dollars to it, the restoration of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island."

LEVINE: Wow. Well, I think maybe that's a good place to stop, because we're at the end of this tape.

JOHNS: Okay. Uh-huh.

LEVINE: I want to thank you so much for a most interesting interview. Thank you.

JOHNS: It was a pleasure meeting you originally a couple of years ago, and it was a pleasure having this interview with you, Ms. Levine.

LEVINE: Thank you. I've been speaking with Christos Johns, and it's December 7th, and this is the end of tape two, and this is Janet Levine, and I'm signing off.