**EI-666**
**PETER GOOLKASIAN**
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LEVINE: Today is September 10th, 1995 and I'm here in the Ellis Island Studio with Mr. Peter Goolkasian, who was born Bedros Goolkasian in what was Turkish Armenia at that time, on July 9th, 1910. Mr. Goolkasian is eighty-five years old at the time of this interview, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I want to say I'm delighted to be able to talk with you today. It's lovely to see your whole family here with you.

GOOLKASIAN: Thank you.

LEVINE: Let's start at the beginning by your stating your birth date for the tape.

GOOLKASIAN: I was born in Meshira, which is a little town next to the capital of Harpet which is also known as Herped or Harput in English. The Turks called the state of Harput, Memuret-el-azig.

LEVINE: Can you spell that Mr. Goolkasian?

GOOLKASIAN: M-E-M-U-R-E-T hyphen E-L hyphen A-Z-I-G. And the capital name of the city is EI-AZIG, E-L hyphen A-Z-I-G. In fact, after all these years, the Armenian name has disappeared from the place and the place is known as El Azig.

LEVINE: Did you live in that place known as El Azig up until the time your family came here to America?

GOOLKASIAN: Yes. My family is originally from Husenig, a village named Husenig, H-U-S-E-N-I-G, and my father was a shoemaker. It's not like shoemakers here. You'd go and he'd measure your feet. He showed you the different styles of shoes and you'd pick the one you want and he would—in a couple of weeks he would have that ready for you.

LEVINE: Ah-ha, what was your father's name?

GOOLKASIAN: My father's name was Aharon, which is Aaron in English.

LEVINE: And your mother's name?

GOOLKASIAN: My mother's name is Tukwee, which in English means Queen or Queenie.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and do you remember your mother's maiden name?

GOOLKASIAN: Yes, Zer Mossighian.

LEVINE: And could you spell that?

GOOLKASIAN: Capital Z-E-R, capital M-O-S-S-G-H-I-A-N. You know, Zer before every Armenian name means that there was a priest in that family.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, so you had priests in your family.

GOOLKASIAN: In my mother's side.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember your grandparents?

GOOLKASIAN: I don't remember my grandparents of my father's side because he was killed before I was born. He was killed by the Turks in 1895. My other grandfather, before I was born, came to America to see what there was here because there wasn't anything over there for him and he used to send money to my grandmother asking her to come. He had three sons, but

instead she sent two of her sons over, but she never came until after the war.

LEVINE: What memories do you have of your grandmother?

GOOLKASIAN: My grandmother was with me all the time, since the day I was born. She was with my—when we came over here, she came and lived with us. My mother remarried here. Remarried my father's next younger brother, who my father had sent through college in the old country and sent here, and in turn, he sent me through college.

LEVINE: Wow, that's beautiful.

GOOLKASIAN: Yes.

LEVINE: So can you remember any activities with your grandmother when you were a little boy before you came here?

GOOLKASIAN: Yes, I remember many things. I remember going to my grandmother's house, which was in Kesserig.

LEVINE: Can you spell that?

GOOLKASIAN: K-E-S-S-E-R-I-G, which was a village not too far from where we were, and I went over with my mother one day and my uncle, my mother's brother was working on a swimming pool over there. He had dug an area for a swimming pool and there was a river going by in the back of his lot, back of his house. He put—he dug a ditch and put piping, ceramic piping from the river over. He dammed the river, so that the river, most of the water had to come through the pipes, and fill the swimming pool and the overflow went back into the river. He was a genius. He was a jewel.

LEVINE: Was that unusual for someone to have a swimming pool?

GOOLKASIAN: Well, it was unusual because people didn't take to swimming like they do here. It was—the area had no swimming pools. The nearest lake probably was thirty miles away, but that wasn't a thing, swimming. Another time I remember going with my mother to my grandmother's house, when she went in, she went into the house and I was on the outside and my uncle had planted some beautiful plants, you know, and they were in flower. They were so beautiful. So I remember picking the flowers, going to my mother and showing her and she got so

mad. She didn't know how she was going to explain it to her brother, who loved flowers. So she grabbed me and we all ran off.

LEVINE: How about in the village itself, do you remember activities that people did?

GOOLKASIAN: Well, I remember Sundays we used to go to church and church also lasted quite some time. It's not like today where in an hour you're out. It used to last probably two and a half, three hours and after church they'd all go out in front of the church and meet the families and talk and so on. There was always some cold drinks that they were selling and then candies, lollipop like candies for children, you know. I remember that.

LEVINE: Okay.

GOOLKASIAN: The village—the area that I was born in, whoever lived there always got some sort of a sore in the face or the neck or on the sideboard, you know, and it would fester up something terrible, and I got it on my chin. I was told by my mother that when I got it on my chin, my grandmother on my father's side, felt so bad because the priests in Armenia always wore a beard. She was so concerned that possibly I wouldn't be able to have a beard, so she used to go to church every day praying that I would have a beard. It's odd, you know, things like that.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, now, what was done for this condition?

GOOLKASIAN: Well, it's one of those things where once you had it, it never appeared again.

LEVINE: Oh, you were immune after you once had it.

GOOLKASIAN: You were immune and even if you were from some other area that came there, and if you stayed there a week or more or probably a month or more, you would get it, too. With me it's on my chin, but most of them, they get it around here or on the forehead. So a lot of Armenians that you might see, you might see that mark. It's like—

LEVINE: A birthmark?

GOOLKASIAN: Yes, and you could note they were born or they've been there. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Oh, wow.

GOOLKASIAN: Yeah, it's odd. It's something had to do with some germ in the ground.

LEVINE: Huh. Now, do you remember anything—I know you were young, but do you remember anything about medical care at that time? I mean was there folk medicine? Was there—

GOOLKASIAN: Oh, there was folk medicine. The family was oriented differently than here. The head of the family was the grandfather, if he was living. If he wasn't living, then the grandmother would be the head of the family, and the sons of course would be living in the same family. If they had two sons, they were married, they lived together, the whole thing as one unit, but grandmother was the boss. It was her duty to make sure that in the wintertime there was enough food for everybody. So in the summertime, whatever produce was made, it's her job to make sure that some of it was prepared for the winter, so they could reuse it in the winter. They would take meat, for instance, and lamb was the thing they used, and they would grind it and they would spice it and they would make something like salami, but it had no fat in it like salami does. Very little fat, but a lot of spices, and this was dried in cloth bags and when it was dried, it was taken out of the cloth bag and then wrapped and kept in a cool place. Whenever they needed any, they'd cut a piece here and there and eat it. It's delicious. Even here today we do that. We still have that.

Another thing they used to do was whenever they got a lamb, lamb was butchered twice a week. You knew just what market was butchering probably Tuesday and Friday. You'd go to the market that was butchering that day. You'd buy the meat that you wanted, generally a big piece and they'd bring it and they'd cut that up for different purposes. Out of it, every bit of it was used. Bones with a small amount of meat and the fat, the fat was rendered. The bones were put in that, but I don't know what they did. They would put it in the crocks and it would never spoil, and whenever they wanted to make bolvo pilaf—bolvo is made from wheat, cracked wheat—they would go and take a chunk of that with the bones and the meat and the fat and use it for cooking. Fantastic. They had their own method of doing things that they'd been using for thousands of years.

LEVINE: Well, where would be the cool place where they would keep the things?

GOOLKASIAN: Well, anything where the sun wouldn't get at, anywhere.

LEVINE: Was there smoking of meats that was done?

GOOLKASIAN: No, there was no smoking that I know of. No. But they had—over there, instead of observing birthdays, they'd have name days, and every Sunday in the calendar was a name day for at least three, four, five names, and if it was your name, you know, you would be honored that Sunday. Now, I remember one time when my uncle from America had gone. There weren't Armenian women here in America, a lot of men. Well, there were a few women got here, they got married all right, but men, some men did marry non-Armenians but they weren't too happy because the food was different, custom was different.

So my uncle had come to Armenia to find an Armenian wife, which he did and it so happened that when he had come over, one Sunday when we went to church, it was our name day. His name was Paul, mine Peter and both names are the same Sunday observance. So in church, of course, they called attention to the people that it was our names day, and then at night I remember neighbors and relatives came to see us with candles.

LEVINE: And what other kinds of observance was there of a name day? You'd go to church—

GOOLKASIAN: Well, there was a lot of different observances. One other observance I remember was at night, after supper when it began to get a little dark, they would collectively—a lot of people together, you know—collect some wood, dry wood, put it together and build a little fire. When the fire was low, not too much flame, the elders would make a wish and jump over it and that's supposed to bring the wish true.

LEVINE: In other words, they would make a wish for the person whose name day it was?

GOOLKASIAN: Whatever—no, no. This has nothing to do with the name day.

LEVINE: Oh, not name day.

GOOLKASIAN: No, this is whatever they wished, and they wouldn't tell anybody what that wish was, see. Then they would encourage the older children to do the same, but be careful about the fire, you know.

Another time I remember my father had some sort of a carriage, four great big wheels that were almost as tall as I

was at that time, and handle at both sides. He would—and then a two-seater facing one another on the top. He would put my sister, two sisters, Annahide and Bastanich—Bastanich was—Annahide was three years older than I. Basta I think was a year and a half older than me. On one side and me on the other side and then my father would push it fast and let go and it would go by itself for a while and then finally he'd walk to it again and then push again.

Another time I remember my father and I were walking down a street and we came to a willow tree. So he reached up and grabbed one of the limbs of the tree, and cut it off and between the knots, he cut a piece off with a jackknife about four inches long and then he took the centerpiece, rolled it on his hands until the skin of the—

LEVINE: The bark of the tree.

GOOLKASIAN: Bark, yeah, loosened. He took the wood out. I don't know what kind of notches he made in it. He cut some notches in it and then he pushed the thing back into it and then made another couple of notches and then started to blow and a beautiful sound came out. I was amazed. It was a miracle for me.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. How about music, do you remember any music or dancing or anything like that?

GOOLKASIAN: There was always music, but I don't remember too much about that, outside of the music in church. That was the main music, but they did have—oh, when my uncle that came got married, they have Armenian instruments what they call daboo, which is a drum, zulna, which is like a clarinet and uloot was another similar to the clarinet, but it's not made out of a small piece of wood, you know. They used to play that and dance to it, and I remember that.

Another time—I remember an awful lot of things.

LEVINE: That's wonderful.

GOOLKASIAN: My father was a shoemaker, but he also did some tilling. I don't know what the reason for that was, but he had a field where I remember one day he had a big piece of flat wood. In my house, we owned a cow and a horse. Well, he attached the horse to the wood. He and I—he had plowed the area with the horse. He and I stood on the wood and he evened the field with our weight. It was amazing. It was very interesting.

Another time I was misbehaving at home, and my mother got a hold of my father—I don't know how—to take care of me, take me away. So my father had two people working for him. Over there you learned a trade by working with people that knew the trade, and you didn't get paid very much but that's how you learned. That's like going to college.

LEVINE: How long would it take to learn to be a shoemaker?

GOOLKASIAN: Two years possibly.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GOOLKASIAN: Well, anyway, he sent one of his men to pick me up and take me over. I remember he took me over and then he started to show me different things. He had a—I remember this definitely because when I came here, when I saw the Singer sewing machine, it came to me that my mother had one at home and my father had the industrial one in his shop. These were all foot operators and he showed me the machine, and then he showed me the different shoes that he makes, and then he showed me, oh, about twenty spindles. Spindles had patterns of the shoes that he was making, and each one was different sizes and different styles. So all he had to do was take these out patterns, but it on the—you know, to the shape and then it was ready to be souled. Then for the souls, he used to take a big piece of leather and soak it in water and it would become more pliable and then he would cut out the pieces that he needed for it.

So I got tired, so I remember he had a little balcony in the back and he took me to the little balcony and I fell asleep. I remember he put a fur piece on top of me. A lot of things I remember like that and this is when I was around four, four and a half years old. Some of it is back as far as when I was three and half.

LEVINE: Really?

GOOLKASIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: What can you remember? What's like one of your very earliest memories?

GOOLKASIAN: Well, my earliest memory was, jumping over the wood was one of them. The baby—the carriage thing was the other thing because after that, I had another baby brother born, see, and

when the massacre started, when they drove us out of our city, he was a baby and in a short time he died.

LEVINE: Oh. Is there anything else you remember about rituals? About either birth or marriage or death? Any observances that you remember?

GOOLKASIAN: Well, the only thing is the wedding, which I describe very well in the book. But offhand, I don't remember, offhand. All I know is that my father used to live in Husenig and his business was in Mezeda, which was the government center of the area. He built the house the same year that I was born and we had a house with two floors. Downstairs was attached to a barn and it was well fenced will all kinds of fruit trees. In the back there was another small building where he kept his horse.

Oh, I remember also we had a cow. In the morning, a shepherd would go by the street, collect people's cows, take them to the pastures and then about four, five o'clock at night bring them back and then the mothers would go and milk the cow, and they'd have milk for making cheese, making mazoo, which is the same as yogurt. Many things from milk.

LEVINE: Wow. Do you remember how the Armenian community was treated by the Turks prior to 1915?

GOOLKASIAN: Well, as a kid, all I knew was that it was safe for men going the streets all around in the daytime alone. At night it was better that two men were together. But as far as women were concerned, women in the daytime if there were two, you know, it would be okay, but at night it was forbidden completely because anything could happen. You see, Armenians were Christians. They were the first nation to adopt Christianity, 301 AD. This is twelve years before Rome even allowed Christianity. See, they didn't adopt Christianity twelve years later, they allowed it, which is quite a difference.

LEVINE: We were saying about the Armenian community was being treated by the Turks.

GOOLKASIAN: Oh, at night the women—oh, as I was saying, the Armenians were Christians. One wife, period, but the Turks could have as many wives as they could put a roof over their head and a loaf of bread a day for them. That was their idea. So most of them, to steal an Armenian woman and treat her as a wife and so on, it was a desire by them.

LEVINE: And did that happen? Did you ever know that to happen?

GOOLKASIAN: As a child I don't know. As a child I don't know. I know I've read stories where they had what they called the janissary system in Turkey for years. The first born son of an Armenian belongs to the state. Right after birth, it was taken and they had nursing mothers, professional nursing mothers who took care of them. That became the property of the Sultan of Turkey and when they grew up, they became his soldiers, to protect him, and they had all kinds of freedoms that no one else had. The Turks after a while began to get jealous, and they wanted their sons to become—

LEVINE: Soldiers.

GOOLKASIAN: Soldiers for the Sultan and what they did, everything broke up. It didn't work out and they had to abandon the system.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, was that system in operation in your lifetime?

GOOLKASIAN: No.

LEVINE: No.

GOOLKASIAN: No, this was before. They'd been there four hundred, five hundred years. This is prior to that, but as far as the Armenian women and girls were concerned, they were stolen left and right if you didn't watch out, and you never saw them again. They had them in their harems.

LEVINE: And this you—that was happening when you were a little boy?

GOOLKASIAN: I guess it was, but—

LEVINE: You weren't aware of it.

GOOLKASIAN: I was too young. Yeah, I wasn't too aware. I know that we had to watch out. We couldn't trust them anyway. There isn't a Turk today that hasn't got Armenian blood. This has been going on five hundred years and the Turks, when they first came there, they were Mongolian people. They looked differently than they do today. Today they look more like you and I.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So did you have any friends in your town who were Turkish? Did you or your family associate with—

GOOLKASIAN: Well, my father did a lot of work for the Turks. I'll tell you, between you and I, the Turks really were bad, but they weren't the ones that really were interested in massacring the Armenians. It's the government. Government wanted a Turkey that was only Mohammedan and only Turks. There were other nationalities like Jewish people, but they didn't say anything to them. They wanted to get rid of the Armenians. It so happened that when Turkey did business with other countries, their own people weren't educated enough to do anything and the bankers and the top level people that did things for the government were mostly Armenians and a few Greeks. So they wanted to get rid of them. They wanted the Turks to run that.

LEVINE: Was there an education system in place that was different from the Armenians than for the Turks?

GOOLKASIAN: Well, Armenians got their alphabet 450 AD. Before that, they had different kind of alphabet. Probably more like the Egyptian or some other, and they knew that they couldn't do much with that, and when they became Christians, they were using the Greek language mainly. So they wanted everything in Armenian. So they sent priests to Rome and to Greece to study the languages and come up with an alphabet, and they came up with an alphabet of thirty-six letters and they wanted to make sure that there wasn't any combinations necessary to make another sound, like C-H and so on. So they were quite successful and years later, in the next probably fifty or a hundred years, they found two other sounds that they could make, but couldn't write. So they made two letters, two more letters. So there's thirty-eight letters to the Armenian language. In generally, you can take most any language almost and read it, write it with the Armenian alphabet.

LEVINE: Okay. We're going to pause here now while we turn over the tape, and then we'll continue.

GOOLKASIAN: Okay, fine.

[End of Tape One, Side A/Start of Tape One, Side B]

LEVINE: Okay, we were talking about the education of an Armenian child, versus the education of a Turkish child, when you were a little boy. What do you remember about that?

GOOLKASIAN: It isn't what I remember because I was too young at that time. It's what I know of, what I've read since. Armenia has always

believed in education and the women had as much right as men, always, in the history [unclear]. Women's responsibility at home was very high. One of the—of course, besides cleaning and so on, one of her jobs was to educate the children, and in the beginning when they first obtained their alphabet, the first thing they did was to translate the bible into Armenian. Now, they found that over the years meaning of words change, so they constructed two languages. One, the written language; one, the spoken language. The Armenian bible is written in the written language and all the ceremony in the church is in the written language where the meanings don't change.

Armenians did as much—the church especially did as much of education as possible, but they were limited in money and so on. The Christian churches throughout France, England, United States and elsewhere send people—they knew what was happening between the Turks and the Armenians and they thought that if they could interest the Turks into becoming Christians by coming to Christian schools, that would be great. They opened schools in Turkey all around Protestant churches, Catholic churches, trying to get them to enroll. Instead, the Turks didn't enroll, the Armenians enrolled, and the Armenians, out of every hundred that enrolled, probably one or two were Turks and the rest were Armenians because Armenians were so desirous of learning.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Can you tell me your personal experience with the massacre in 1915? What you actually remember firsthand?

GOOLKASIAN: Yes. Yes. Well, the way to me it started was this. One day we were in church and the priest announced that the Turkish government was going to use the area that we lived in for the war purpose. At that time Turkey and Germany were together. I guess England and Italy and so on, and there was a war going on, and that they were going to use the area for the war effort, and that they were going to tell us to move from where we were, and after the war we would be allowed to come back. That they would have a list soon of who's going when and where. So I don't know how long after that, there was a bulletin board outside the church showing which families left what days. It so happened that my family—later I found out through another book, the day that my family left, which was July 3rd—

LEVINE: And this is—

GOOLKASIAN: 1915. So two weeks before, a week or ten days—I don't know exactly, my father saw his name there and so he had to close up his shop. We had chickens. He killed the chickens. My mother and my grandmother cooked the chickens. Took some of the food

that they had prepared for the winter, so that we'd have food for us. They told us to take food enough for two weeks because that's how long it would take to get to our destination.

So anyway, everything was prepared. We had one horse, so we my father bought two donkeys and a mare and this is what we loaded things on to take with us for the trip. So Malathea was the destination we were going through. Malathea is a city of [unclear] also in the same state. I don't know exactly how many miles, maybe sixty, seventy miles, I don't know, but when you're walking it, it's a long distance. Well, I know when we got there, I remember this distinctly, they announced that all the men would have to go and give a record of who's with them. In other words, sign in and any children that they had over five years old, to take them with—any sons they had over five years old, to take them with them, but I wasn't quite five then. So my father, my two uncles and a lot of relatives went to register. While the men and women—while the people collected our donkeys, they said that they've got to take and water them and so on so they'd be ready for us when the men come back. Men and women were taken into this huge building, armory like, and told them that the men would follow. Well, night came along and no men, and the women started to, you know, ask questions and they said, "Oh, the men will be over shortly," and then we heard gunshot. Then the women got desperate and they wanted to find out what the gunshots were and they were saying that's some certain celebration they were having.

So anyway, it was pandemonium there because the facilities weren't there and everything was a mess. The next morning we were told that we had to continue on our journey and the men would follow. So this is all women and small children.

LEVINE: Was this journey any different from the journey from your town to that place?

GOOLKASIAN: Like day and night.

LEVINE: What was different?

GOOLKASIAN: The difference is we went to get our animals, and instead of getting our animals, we had a horse, a mule and two donkeys, we got one donkey and it was a sickly thing.

LEVINE: It wasn't yours? It was another one.

GOOLKASIAN: Wasn't ours. Somebody else's. Anyway, so we had to do with that. We had to walk the rest of the way and they kept saying we're not walking fast enough, so in the interim my baby brother died.

You know, things happen, you don't know how. I don't know how it was. My mother wanted to stop and bury him and they said "Nothing doing, you can't stop." So she had to carry the baby until it's night when we stopped some place, she dug a hole and buried him and said prayers and so on with the family.

Whenever we would come to a stop at night, Arabs would come and try to sell us food, if we had any money. A lot of them didn't have any money. Pretty soon we came to an area where we were by the Euphrates River and at this point we stopped and we were all tired out and the kids, you know, like me, we were in the water. We went in the water. There were a lot of kids in there and first thing I know, I heard a shot and I looked and there was a boy about twenty feet from me started yelling. He was first standing up. Now he was on his knees in the water. My mother got me out of there fast. Then we heard this gendarme. Well, Turkish soldiers that were in charge of the caravan of destitute people. One of them come over and he says, "Who's the mother of this child?" The mother of course immediately came over and he had heard that the mother was very rich and he wanted to find out a way of getting money from her. So he shot the little boy in the leg. I don't know what happened after that. All I know is that this group had been there before us. They were there from another group and we were supposed to cross over and then word came along that anybody over fifty years old wouldn't be able to endure the crossing. They would have to—endure the trip they were going to take and they would have to throw them overboard. Well, the river was very choppy and in fact, the day before that the women were still asking about the men and then they found bodies floating on it, and they knew what had happened. The men had been killed and thrown in the water, in the river and they were just floating--floating by.

They kind of came with a thing that all women fifty or over would have to be thrown overboard because they couldn't endure the trip, and then secretly word came that if you had so much money, a certain amount of money, they put the elderly in a trunk and put the trunk on the boat and that way, you know, you'd get across, see. So I had two grandmothers, so my mother had to pay them for two trunks, put my two grandmothers, my mother's mother and my father's mother in there to cross.

We did that and when we got across, of course, we were all so tired out and I remember, I'm a roamer. I'm interested in anything and everything. I'm all over the place all the time. My mother had trouble keeping me in one place. So I was walking on the beach of the other side and I noticed two soldiers, Turkish soldiers. They had a boy about fourteen, fifteen years old and one held his hand. The other one went about ten feet from him and shot him and that scared

me so much that I ran back to my mother. I told my mother and she said, "Didn't I tell you to keep over here?"

By this time she knew that what money she had, she had to be very careful with it. So she took all the—see, they didn't trust banks in those days. When they had any accumulation of money, they changed it into gold coins. So she sewed the gold coins in my clothes, so whenever she needed anything, while nobody was looking, she would take one out.

LEVINE: She sewed them in your clothing before you left home?

GOOLKASIAN: No.

LEVINE: Oh, during the trip.

GOOLKASIAN: No, during. When things got bad she did that. I don't know whether it was before we crossed or after, but I know that's what it was. That's how she kept her money. Otherwise, it would be stolen from her. So anyway, I went and I was tired and I'm lying on the sand and she's lying and everybody around us, they're all so down and out, almost giving up, you know. Half dead. And I saw this piece of handkerchief sticking out from in the sand. So I dug around it, you know, and I couldn't get at it. So I told my mother about it and she tried to dig it, she did it a little and she's trying to pull the thing out, you know, the handerkerchief, and tried and tried. I couldn't do it and then she finally tried. It came out all of a sudden and coins flew all over the place. These people were halfway dead, all of a sudden they became alive. This was food for them, if they had that money. So they went for the money, you know, and then we found it. It was in a little crock. Somebody before us had kept their money in that and had hidden it and I don't know what happened to them, but they must have been taken away or killed or something and that was for us to find.

LEVINE: Were the Turks telling you something about where you were going now?

GOOLKASIAN: No. No, that was—

LEVINE: Now you just knew that this was—

GOOLKASIAN: The idea—they knew what it was, is to kill us off on the way until there was nobody left. But anyway, the destination of Der-el-Zor, D-E-R hyphen E-L hyphen Z-O-R. That's in Syria, Syrian Desert, and area in the Syrian Desert. Well, anyway, eventually I

guess some people did arrive there and probably five percent of the people that started arrived there and they were half dead.

Well, anyway, after that money affair, people had money. They were buying from the Arabs that came with food, you know, and then we had to move from there and from one place to another place to another place. One place, this Turkish man, well dressed, would come over and saw my sister Annahed. At that time I was five and she was eight years old. He wanted to adopt her very badly and tried to convince my mother that there's no salvation for us. All of us are going to die. It's not his doing. It's the government's doing. That, "Please, let me have her. I'll treat her well as my daughter," but my mother would never ever adhere to that.

LEVINE: Who was this man, did you—

GOOLKASIAN: I have no idea. I have no idea. Well, anyway, so after a few days like this, going around, I saw some dead bodies and no clothes on them and I said to my mother, "How come they don't have any clothes?" and she told me, she said, "Well, there are Arabs in the area. They're all nomads. They have nothing except their flocks of sheep and when they see somebody dead like that, they figure that the dead don't need their clothes anymore. So they take their clothes, but they don't bother burying them or anything." So that's how the people didn't have any clothes.

So after seeing this a while, my mother got together with my aunt—oh, before that. My grandmother on my father's side made up her mind she's not going anymore. She's done. She says, "Let me die her," and we tried to convince her. Couldn't convince her, so finally we had to let her stay and the Turkish soldier said, "If you stay, we're going to shoot you. If you don't move, we're going to shoot you." She didn't care, so—

LEVINE: About how old was your grandmother at that time?

GOOLKASIAN: She must have been about sixty maybe. I don't know. I'm just guessing at it. So she didn't want to move anymore, so after we were gone a while we heard the gunshot and we figured they had killed her.

LEVINE: Do you remember any things that your mother was telling you along the way during this trip you were taking, or any of your perceptions?

GOOLKASIAN: Well, you know, children need to be amused and they were trying to tell us stories, and you know what the stories were? The bible stories. I didn't know they were bible stories until I came here. I

happened to go to a Protestant church, you know, and they were telling the stories, I knew them. I knew all the stories.

LEVINE: So your mother and other—

GOOLKASIAN: Mother and grandmother, two grandmothers told me the stories until one grandmother died and the other one continued. So my mother, after all these things happening, she says, "We're going to die, all of us." So in our group was my—well, my one grandmother died. The other grandmother, her oldest son's—the one that built the swimming pool—wife and son and two daughters. Oh, one of her daughters also died. I don't know just how, so that it was just one daughter left and a son. Then also the uncle that came from America, he got married. He was taken with my father, disappeared and his wife had a baby. Later on I'll tell you about it, and she was with us. She was pregnant. So my mother made up—got together with the others, that one night when the soldiers aren't looking, we're going to get away from here. The unknown was better than this. We know what this is. We know what the end is going to be.

So one night we got away from the group. Well, we went on and on. Don't know how, we disguised ourselves. My name became Sulaman, which is a Turkish name for Soloman. Sulaman, and we started to talk Turkish, so that they wouldn't detect we were Armenian on the way. I remember one place where my mother was trying to cook some food and she had started a little fire and went to get some more wood or something, I don't know what. I don't where the rest of the families were, but my brother next younger to me, went too close to the fire. His clothes got caught on fire. By the time my mother got back and put it out, he was burned very bad. He died the next day and we had to bury him.

Later on in the process, my next younger sister—I mean my next older sister, [unclear], her eyes were very bad. She'd get up in the morning and she couldn't open her eyes. Infection had set in and then infection set in on her hair. There were lice all over the place. I remember we used to spend hours killing them between our thumbs, thumbnails. She died from that and we had to bury her.

Then the pregnant aunt was going to have a baby. So they shooed the children away and I remember they gave her a bottle and told her to blow into the bottle. Blow, I guess that caused the pressure and the baby was born, but there was no food. Everything was such a mess, in a few days the baby died. And then I don't know what happened. After that, I don't know what happened to the mother, either. She may have died, too. I don't know.

We went on trying to find some place that's safe. We heard that some area beyond they were building railroad trucks for future railroad to go through. So my mother and my aunts thought that

there may be some work for them over there or something, you know. So we went—we finally got there and sure enough, they got a job and they put me in charge of a donkey. Go around. The donkey was loaded with water, you know, so the workers could, if they wanted any water, they could open the spigot and get water. That's what I was doing for a while.

LEVINE: When you were in the last leg of the journey before you reached the railroad tracks, how were you sustaining yourself with food? Did you have any food?

GOOLKASIAN: I have no idea. It may have been the coins that my mother had saved in my clothes.

LEVINE: Were you meeting up with Arab people along the way that you could—

GOOLKASIAN: There were Arab people and Turkish people and there were areas, I guess, where you could buy something. So since our names were changed, my name I know. I don't know what the others were, but being living in Turkey, we knew several languages. I knew Turkish, almost as well as I knew Armenian, even at that age, see.

Well, anyway—

LEVINE: The donkey with the water.

GOOLKASIAN: Yeah, that's what I was doing and one day this well dressed gentleman comes over with my mother and my grandmother. The only grandmother left was my mother's mother, and he asked me if this is your grandmother. Of course, with me, my true grandmother was the one that lived with us. I said, "No, that's not my grandmother." At that age I didn't know the difference, you know. So anyway, I don't know what happened. He got mad. I don't know what happened. Later on I guess it was straightened out, and then what happened was that my mother had agreed to live with him if my grandmother could live also, and of course my sister and I.

So the first thing I knew, I was in a family. I had a home. So many things happened at this point. There was a baby girl born and I don't know what her name was or anything. All I know was there was a baby girl born.

LEVINE: You mean to your mother?

GOOLKASIAN: Yes, to my mother, and I know he used to go to work. I think he was an engineer of some sort for the railroad. I don't know, but he was a Turk. After my mother had seen so many of her people, she

desperately did something to try to save my sister and I, so she figured that's the only way she can save us. So anyway, in the interim, she was cooking food for us under a tent, I remember, and the tent was built around an area that had been dug about three feet so that you could stand in it easily, you know. She was cooking food and word came along that a big storm was coming and rain and be prepared to leave the place, you know. Then shortly after that, word came that a dam had burst and water was coming where we were. We had better get out of there, and it was pouring. I remember we went up this hill to where there were homes, Arab homes and on the way I lost my one shoe. We didn't pay any attention, and my sister, my mother and I got there and knocked at the door and they let us in, and they gave us a change of clothes so we could clean up. So that we were safe then. The next morning was the brightest, sunniest day I remember in all my life. It was so beautiful and they started talking that there had been a lot of damage done, that a lot of people were killed, and they said that they'd have to go and look around for bodies and bury them.

So of course, me, I have to be with them. So somehow I got with them and the first place we came to, some dogs had gotten to the body before we had, so they shot the dog and they identified who the party was and they buried them. There were mounds and mounds of sand, like you see at Cape Cod, high mounds. The rushing water had brought all these mounds of sand down, and we went to several places. Another place the dogs had gotten. Carrion—what do you call it?

LEVINE: Birds?

GOOLKASIAN: Yeah, birds had gotten to them and they had to kill the birds and they identified who they were and buried them and so on. That was the end of that.

Another time I remember where there was a huge cloud coming our way and I didn't know what it was. It was locusts, a cloud of locusts. Everything that was green, within a few hours they left, there wasn't a thing left that was green.

LEVINE: When did that happen, the locusts?

GOOLKASIAN: In that period. I don't know exactly which came first. I couldn't say which came first. I know that that happened.

LEVINE: Yeah. Let's pause here while we change the tape, and then we'll continue.

GOOLKASIAN: Oh, boy. [Laughs]

[End of Tape One, Side B/Start of Tape Two, Side A]

LEVINE: We're beginning now Tape Two. I'm speaking with Peter Goolkasian and we were talking about the locusts that came, about the time of the rains.

GOOLKASIAN: Yes. When the locusts came, it was like a cloud, huge cloud and within a few hours they were gone and there wasn't a thing left that was green in the whole area. People were concerned that lived there that they'd have to find water and water and bring these plants to life again.

LEVINE: Now, were you still five years old? Has this what we've been talking about happened all in that same year?

GOOLKASIAN: I was probably—I was probably—at this time, I was probably six or seven. I was probably six or seven years old. I was growing.

LEVINE: But you lived in this sort of temporary town.

GOOLKASIAN: Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: For a few years?

GOOLKASIAN: Yes, that's right. Now, when he would go—this Turkish man, when he would leave in the morning and we wouldn't see him until at night, and in the meantime my mother associated with other people there. Something odd happened. This Turkish woman came over one day. She knew my mother was Armenian. She says, "You know, I'm almost blind. My eyes are bothering me terribly and I don't know what to do. Please, they tell me that you're pretty well on medications. What can I do to clear my eyes?" So my mother, thinking to herself that, you know, what the Turks have done to me, here's a chance I can return it. In her mind, you know. So she says, "When you go home, take some lukewarm water. Put two heaping teaspoons of salt in it, stir it well, bath your eye in it." Oh, she thanked my mother and left and a week later she comes over and she says, "I want to thank—I want to kiss your hand," she says. "It cured me."

LEVINE: She said what?

GOOLKASIAN: She said, "It cured me." She said, "The thing, I can't believe it," she says. "I did it. It hurt a while, but I kept doing it and now my eyes were okay." My mother was amazed. [Laughs] But it goes to

show you, you know, that when somebody's good that tries to do something bad, can't do it.

LEVINE: Now, did people think that you were Turkish in general?

GOOLKASIAN: No, they just knew that my mother was living with this Turkish man and so on. At this time he associated with other Turkish people, you know. I remember one day, you know, I was in another Turkish house and the woman was trying to put cosmetics and she took a walnut meat you know, and you think she would be eating it. No, she lit a match to it and it burned like a candle, and what it left was nothing but carbon, like chalk. So she used that on her eyes, you know, and it made her beautiful and I couldn't get over it. I since, "You can use countless things to beautify yourself. Why these complex unknown chemicals that they use in cosmetics?"

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, how did this Turkish man treat you and your sister?

GOOLKASIAN: I don't remember him much. All I know is he went to work and come back and as far as I know, we were treated well. Then my aunt, my mother's brother's wife that had a son and two daughters, had lost one daughter, they lived not too far, and I don't know whether she went through the same thing or not. I don't know, but I know that my grandmother used to go back and forth between the two houses, see. There's incidents where I had experience with my grandmother there.

LEVINE: Yeah, why don't you mention those?

GOOLKASIAN: Well, this incident was my cousin Yervant, that was the name of my cousin, my uncle's son. He's in Italy now and he's a dentist. He was about nine months younger than I and we were together all the time, you know. To get hot water, we had to go to where there was a train and get some hot water from the train. We'd take buckets, they'd fill it and bring it. So this day my grandmother gave me a bucket and my cousin a bucket to go and get some water, hot water. So we went over and we got too close to the waterer, I guess, you know, and he got mad, so she was going to punish us. So I knew I hadn't done anything wrong, in my mind. Why is she going to punish me? I'm not going to be punished. Well, my cousin got caught and he got punished, but I said, "Oh, heck, I'm not going to get punished." Previously, there was a contingent of British soldiers not too far from there and there were Hindu soldiers. Officers were British, but the soldiers were Hindu. Siks they call them?

LEVINE: Sik?

GOOLKASIAN: Yeah, they had these turbans on their head, you know. They were very nice people and they took to me, you know, and they liked me very much and they used to give me clothes that my mother used to cut up and make for me, you know. So I says—so my grandmother was going to punish me, so I said, "No, nobody's going to punish me. I didn't do anything wrong." So I took off and went over there and they told me that on the way, you know, there were lions and tigers and everything else, to try to scare me, you know. Well, I was ready to put up with that, than be spanked. So I went over there and of course the Hindu soldiers liked me very much, so they get word that I was okay. The next day they'd bring me back, you know. So they kept me there one day and brought me back.

LEVINE: Oh, what an adventure for a seven year old.

GOOLKASIAN: Yeah, I had a lot of adventures like that. Yeah. There was another time where there was an Arab wedding and in their wedding it's quite interesting. They sing songs and walk the street, you know, to wherever the hall is that they're going to have the affair in, and in the mean time they sing a song and they go, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa," like that. It was interesting, so I was following it, you know. So when they went in the hall, I went in the hall, too. So then they saw me and they asked me if I was hungry. I says, "Yeah." I was always hungry. So anyway, so they fed me well and left me off after that. It was interesting, but I was into everything.

LEVINE: Anything else that you remember?

GOOLKASIAN: Oh, I remember one day this Arab comes from the dessert and he had a snake, a five foot snake. He brought the snake over. He had killed it of course, and he says the snake bit him. He says he was lying down and I guess he had put his clothes down and the snake had coiled under his clothes or something and when he went to get at his clothes, the snake bit him. So he killed the snake and he had heard that if you eat the snake, that it will neutralize the poison. So he cooked the snake. I helped him eat it. I was always hungry. Always. Well, anyway, that was the snake incident.

Another time I was in the tent minding my own business, you know. I don't know what I was doing and I saw this black centipede. Coal black. It's got feet on both sides, about this long, six or eight inches, you know. It started to come on me, you know, and I had heard that they were very, very poisonous. That if you ever come across them, don't move and they'll go away. So, gee, I was scared to death. So he got up on my shoulder, up around my neck and then

come down on the other side, and the minute that he was off of me, I ran. But it was quite an experience, though, because they were very deadly that if they bit, you wouldn't last very long.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GOOLKASIAN: Yeah. I had experiences like that. I had a lot of other experiences. Before we came there, there was one place where the Arabs in that little village we came to had one well and they had lost the bucket. The bucket had gone down and they didn't know how to get the well—they didn't have any children there and I was just the right size. So they grabbed me and they asked my mother if they could lower me to get the pail for them. I didn't want to. I was crying. Against my will, they put me down the well. Finally, I got a hold of the bucket and brought it up, and oh, they treated me like a million. It was a great experience, and they treated my mother and everybody else that was with us.

LEVINE: This was when you were on route.

GOOLKASIAN: This is after we got away from the caravan of destitute people. We were on our way, you know, to we didn't know where. This is before we came to the railroad area.

LEVINE: Right.

GOOLKASIAN: But there's a lot of experiences I went through like that, that sometimes it comes to memory and then disappears. Then later on it pops up again. It's quite interesting what went on there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GOOLKASIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: So did you stay there very long after the rain and the locusts came?

GOOLKASIAN: We were in that area until armistice was signed. My mother had a baby girl. Later she had—the baby girl died. I don't know what happened, and then she had a baby boy. The Turk was very good to us and we were protected. When armistice was signed, we got word that all Armenians, wherever they were, would have free passage to Alapo, Syria. So my mother heard about this. She gathered us and my grandmother, her mother, and my aunt. By this time she had lost the second daughter she had and only her son was living. We all got together in some way and they got on the train but there was no room for me on the train. I don't know why. So she put me in charge

of an Arab that had a donkey with two pockets. So they put one kid in one pocket and one kid, me, in the other pocket. We were balanced and we went to Alapo on that donkey. In the meantime, my mother was waiting for us at the train when we got there, which was probably a day and a half later.

LEVINE: What happened to the Turkish man? Did he go with you, or he didn't?

GOOLKASIAN: No. While he went to work, we slipped out. Yeah, and, oh, the baby boy that my mother had went to the neighbor, Turkish neighbor and told her, gave her a message to thank the man for taking care of us, but we had to leave. That the boy, the baby boy belonged to him. So that's how we left. Then we gathered in Alapo, Syria. Before we got to Alapo, they had orphanages there, so we were put in an orphanage.

LEVINE: Your mother, too? The whole family?

GOOLKASIAN: No, my mother worked at the orphanage. In other words, whoever was able to work, worked, but my sister and I were in the orphanage. I was with the boys and she was with the girls. To make us feel good, the head of the orphanage was known as "father" and all the teachers were known as "mother."

Psychologically that worked very well, and I was in the orphanage and I got sick. My head lice and everything. It was terrible. That had done a job on me. They sent me to a barber there, also a young fellow that had gone through the massacres, and he gave me a haircut, tried to clear up and later on he married my sister. [Laughs] It's odd how it happens.

LEVINE: And what was his name?

GOOLKASIAN: His name is Canig de-Mejorgian.

LEVINE: Is this in your—

GOOLKASIAN: He's living now. He's ninety-five, ninety-six years old. He's living now and he's the one that you would probably—that was his son.

LEVINE: Yes.

GOOLKASIAN: That was his son.

LEVINE: Okay.

GOOLKASIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, about the orphanage, do you remember any experiences there?

GOOLKASIAN: Yes, we used to go fly kites. I learned how to make kites. I learned how to make different things, you know, and we were there when I had this problem with my scalp, you know. My mother's brother had married a Catholic Armenian girl, so she was in a French orphanage with her son. We were separated and they had better medical care than Near East had, so she recommended that we go and join there. So I was taken out and put there and they cleared my scalp from whatever it was that was there.

JL Were you separated then from your mother and your sister?

GOOLKASIAN: No, my mother still worked. We saw one another. My sister came on that orphanage, too, together. So we were together in every way. We went to church. There was an Armenian church and my mother saw some woman writing to America, some relative in America. Well, of course, she never knew how big America was. She thought it was, you know, a small town or something. So she said, "Do you mind if I put a note in your letter?" She says, "I have brother in-laws and a sister-in-law in America. They're probably wondering what happened to us. I'd like to get in touch with them." So that's how the letter came to Boston. That's where they were. It's amazing.

LEVINE: And that's where her relatives were and that's where the letter was sent?

GOOLKASIAN: Yeah, my father's relatives were—well, one was in Lawrence and the other one was in Charlestown. But anyway, that's how we got word, and then a letter came along with some money and she took us out of the orphanage and we took pictures and sent back, and they asked us if we want to come to America. Of course we want to come to America. This is no place to be. So they sent her the money and we took more pictures and sent back and from there we went to France. In France, we don't know the language, so we have to depend on other people. Well, there were Armenian people that were looking, men that were looking for people like us that didn't know the language. So you had to get this eye thing, eye—bono and no bono.

LEVINE: An exam?

GOOLKASIAN: In other words, a certain bacteria, bacterial infection in the eye, they wouldn't let you in the United States. They didn't want people in the United States to get that. So supposedly my eye—everybody's eye was okay, but my eye, where I couldn't talk back, was bad. So they had to treat it. So they kept us three months over there treating. Finally, my mother said, "My money's gone. I have no more. I can't pay you anymore." So then they okayed it.

LEVINE: Do you think that your eye was really bad or do you think that was a ploy to—

GOOLKASIAN: Well, maybe it was bad in the beginning, but it was well much before they okayed it. In other words, they wanted to get as much as they could before they let you go.

LEVINE: Now, where were you in France? You were in France at that time?

GOOLKASIAN: Yeah, we were in France.

LEVINE: Where in France?

GOOLKASIAN: Marseilles.

LEVINE: In Marseilles, and that's where you left from or where did you leave from when you took the ship?

GOOLKASIAN: No, no. We arrived in Marseilles and immediately the Armenians took over. We couldn't speak the language, so we had to follow everything they said in order to go to America from there. So that's how finally we got the okay, and we went to La Havre from there and took a boat from La Havre and came to America.

LEVINE: Do you remember the name of the boat?

GOOLKASIAN: Ah, Rochombeau.

LEVINE: And do you remember anything about that voyage on the Rochombeau?

GOOLKASIAN: Oh, yeah, I remember a lot of things on it.

LEVINE: Oh, good. Okay.

GOOLKASIAN: We were in the third class, which meant that we didn't have any room. We were in the corridors down below, and no privacy to

speak of and they didn't have much water on that boat. They had just wine. They drank wine in place of water. Well, anyway, I used to bring the wine around and I made friends with the people that worked there, you know, and it was very nice. My mother learned how to tell fortunes in France in the three months that she was there, you know. But it required playing cards. Well, why we were in France, I don't know how, but with what little money she had, I bought a small deck of playing cards. They were miniature, you know. So with that, she entertained the others, you know, telling their fortune on it. She got quite famous on that.

LEVINE: On the ship she was doing that?

GOOLKASIAN: On, the ship. Yeah, on the ship and it was very interesting. Then when she came here, she did that. It was quite interesting. And on the ship, we were coming to port and my mother says, "Oh, you've got to be clean. You've got to be clean when you see your uncles, you know. You have to make—first impression means an awful lot." So she found out where there was a bathtub, you know, downstairs. So we went in. Took my clothes—she first checked to see if there was hot water. Yeah, there was hot water. Took clothes of and poured the water on me and she's soaping. No soapsuds. Couldn't understand why. I tasted the water, it was salt water, ocean water they had just heated. Well, anyway, that's another experience. A lot of things like that happened.

LEVINE: Yeah.

GOOLKASIAN: And then we came over. We arrived in New York and they told us that get to ready to go up on deck because we're going to go by the Statue of Liberty. So we saw the Statue of Liberty and they explained to us, they had an interpreter to do it in the Armenian language, that that was given by the country, France—by France to welcome you to America. There were American flags around. It made a terrific impression on me and we went and they examined us and everything was fine. It took a little time for that.

LEVINE: Do you remember any impressions of Ellis Island?

GOOLKASIAN: Yes and no. The only thing I know is the flags made a big difference in me. At that time, I don't know, maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I saw only one flag, but to me it looked like a lot of flags. Made a very big impression on me, and when we were let out, we didn't—we were told that my grandfather, my mother's father that had come there years before, was to meet us. We heard somebody calling Goolkasian and we answered to that and my mother and they

hugged one another. [Voice faltering] It was great. He took us to his house. He was deaf. He was completely deaf and nothing could be done about it. He was a jeweler, but because he was deaf, he couldn't—all he could do is repair and things like that. But they didn't get the money. The ones that got the money were the ones that—

LEVINE: Were talking.

GOOLKASIAN: Yeah, that sold things, you know. Well, anyway, he took us to his apartment. I don't know whether it was third or fifth floor somewhere.

LEVINE: Where was it, do you know?

GOOLKASIAN: In New York City. I don't know. I don't know what part of New York City, and it seemed he and my mother conversed every which way you can. I don't know how. So the next day he took us to the train station and the first place where I tasted donuts which tasted so good, yeah.

LEVINE: Were there any other things that you encountered for the first time that made an impression?

GOOLKASIAN: Well, the buildings, of course. Tall buildings, and then people were rushing so fast, I was wondering where they were going. I was wondering if they knew where they were going, at the speed that they were going, you know. But I didn't realize that when you have to work and you've got so much time to get to work and back, you know, you have to rush. But I never had to do that, so going through what I learned, it was an awful lot. So anyway, we got on the train and then we got off in Worcester, Massachusetts. My mother had a brother there and in fact, two brothers, and they came and met us at the train station. We stayed with them.

There's an interesting thing happened there. The next day, they were taking us to buy us new clothes, so my mother's brother's son, who at that time must have been twenty, twenty-five years old, you know, he had me by the hand, you know. He let me go by the hand. We came to this square, you know. We walked from his house, from his uncle's house to the area where we were going to do the buying, and I knew just what streets they were. I was very observant and I saw this statue. They stopped in front of a department store. I saw this statue on a long pole. I looked at it, you know, and it was amazing how did they put the statue up there, I'm thinking, you know. First thing, I looked around, I'm alone. A lot of other people, but none of my relatives. Well, there was a turnstile, you know. I went through that. The other side, nobody. This side

nobody. I said, "Oh, nothing." Nothing bothered me, you know, because I had gone through so many things, I knew I could take care. I knew where the house was, so instead of going to the second street on the left after I left there, I went to the first street on the left and about where the house should be. It didn't look right, but I said, "Well, it must be okay." So I went up there—I don't go in the front stairs. I go in from the back. I went upstairs and I didn't even knock on the door. I just opened the door and walked in. There was this woman washing the floor in the kitchen. She let out a yell and I let out a yell and I ran out of there. Then I went back to the same place again. I was wondering where the heck they were, and I walked around again and I started to cry. So first thing I know there was uniformed man started to talk to me, you know. Of course, in English, I didn't know English. So then he took my hand and took me to the store and bought me an ice cream cone. Boy, that ice cream cone was delicious. So anyway, so then they took me over to this building and there was this woman and there many chairs there, you know. I was so tired, I pulled two or three chairs together, you know, and lied down, fell asleep. I didn't know who the woman was, but she was supposed to take care of me or something. I thought well, maybe this is the policeman's wife and I wonder if he's—I'm thinking, "I wonder if he's got any children. I wonder"—I thought I was gone. I lost my mother and then. You know, how a child that age, you know. Although I was nine years old, I had never gone to school. All the experiences I had were bad experiences. So then they woke me up, and the first thing I knew I saw my uncle's son come over and pick me up. Oh, he was so tickled pink. He gave Juicy Fruit gum to all the officers there, you know, because I remember Juicy Fruit gum I had seen in Syria. See, I remember.

So he took me home and then the next day they took me out and bought me clothes. Oh, I had the greatest experience there. My uncle—

LEVINE: Let's pause here. We'll turn the tape over. We want to make sure to get the whole experience on tape.

GOOLKASIAN: Okay. Boy, oh, boy. [Laughs]

[End of Tape Two, Side A/Start of Tape Two, Side B]

LEVINE: Okay, we're going to continue now. You were talking about an experience you had, let's see, after you had the Juicy Fruit gum.

GOOLKASIAN: Oh, yeah. My uncle took me and gave the officers Juicy Fruit gum. I don't know whether he gave them anything else or not, but anyway he took me. The next day we went out. They bought me

American clothes, where it's a little different. You could point me out, you know, by the clothes I had, although we thought that we had the right clothes, but it wasn't. They were different. Well, anyway, next day they took me. Oh, my aunt had two daughters and they had a beautiful Christmas tree with candles on it and with real small candles with holders on it on the tree and so on. This was—although this was February, they knew that we were coming, so they had saved it for us. So when we came over, after getting together, they lit the candles for my sister and I to see, and we just loved it. It was so beautiful. It's a great memory, and all the neighbor men and women, you know, Armenians came over to see us and they were asking about some of their relatives, if we knew them and so on.

Well, anyway, my mother had a lot of information for them on that. Well, the next day, we were to—after they bought me clothes, the following day we took the train for Charlestown, Massachusetts, Boston, actually. South Station. No, wait a minute. Yeah, South Station. So we got there and my aunt—my aunt's husband, Oscar Cooshoyan and my father's youngest brother, George Goolkasian were there. They picked us up and took us to their house, which was on Main Street. They made room for us. They didn't have much—they had a house over a Five and Ten Cent store on Main Street and it was small, so shortly after that they moved over the meat market that they had. They had a meat market and grocery store.

LEVINE: In Charlestown?

GOOLKASIAN: My uncle—my uncle, my father's youngest brother and my aunt's husband were partners in this business. New England Provision and Supply Company on Main Street in Charlestown, between City Square and Thompson Square. They rented two apartments upstairs over the store. The first apartment, my Uncle George and my mother and us took, and the second apartment my aunt and her two sons, Seaside and Hyde Cooshoyan had that apartment. Later she had a daughter—what was her name? I can't think of her name right now, and we lived there for a year. I was taken to a school in Charlestown, along with my cousin, Seaside. He was three years younger than I. They put him in the kindergarten. They put me in the third grade.

I couldn't speak a word of English. I didn't know anything in English and I had a very hard time learning English because there's no rules: good, better, best. Instead of being good, gooder, goodest or something like that, you know. Then, of course, English is different. The verb is put at the end, while in Armenian and most of the other languages, the verb is put in the beginning. So it was very confusing.

LEVINE: Do you remember when it was that English began to click for you?

GOOLKASIAN: Well, it didn't click until about a couple of years, three years later because everything while I was learning was an exception. I didn't know any rules to go by and in fact, later on in high school when I took French, I had picked up French in three months that I was there and I had picked it up pretty good as a kid, you know. I lost everything because the pronunciation was different. The way they expressed it was different. It was a tough experience for me on that, because I had to unlearn. See. But, it turned out okay. After we were there three years—no, a year and a half, my Uncle Baxter—his name was Baldisass, but an English equivalent is Baxter. When he had heard that we had been driven out of our homes, he joined the services here. He was in France twenty-six months in the service as a—he had gone to Mass College of Pharmacy. He was a pharmacist. He was in the Pharmacy Corps and he was being let out now that the war was over, and he was trying to get a job in a drugstore.

Well, you won't believe this, but it's true. America was very clannish. They didn't respect foreigners. A man with a name like Goolkasian, a pharmacist? That was out. So he finally got a job with Rope's Drugstore in Salem, Mass. It seems that one of the fellows that he graduated with had a drugstore there. In fact, he had four or five drugstores and he had a laboratory where he made some of his own items and so he put my father—my uncle, that is, in charge of the laboratory. So he got a good job there. So I want to the laboratory one time. I saw how it was. It was very nice, and my sister went a couple of times. In fact, when people that were under him working in the laboratory were on vacation, my sister went and helped a little and so on, and got paid for it.

Well, anyway, whenever some of the druggists in the store didn't want to work certain nights, he would take their place. Finally, he got into the drug business that way and he saw that this is no good. So he had saved enough money. He and my mother got married a year and a half after we were there, and we lived in Salem, Mass and he figured that the best thing to do, after he worked in Rope's Drugstore about two years, is to have his own store. There was a drugstore an Armenian had in Somerville, Mass that was for sale, so he bought the store and he almost lived in it because he couldn't afford any help. The only help he had was my sister and I, and for years we went to school and finally Depression set in and things were pretty tough. Those days girls weren't necessary to be educated and it was against his grain, but he had to take my sister out of high school to help him in the store. Of course, every day that I went to school, afternoons I helped in the store on the soda fountain

and every other night I'd work, so that I really didn't have any childhood after that. I was there.

It isn't that he did this on purpose. It's just that one of those things he had to do. That was the only way. [Clears Throat] But we made out okay. Of course, my aunt objected to him marrying my mother because my mother was previously married, had two children. She wanted him to have his own family, his own, you know.

LEVINE: This was the next youngest brother to your father?

GOOLKASIAN: Right, yeah. My father had two older brothers and then after him the baby boy was born, was named Baldisass. Died. A year and a half later another one was born, named the same name. Died. The third one was born a year and a half after that, but he lived and this is the one that married my mother.

LEVINE: And what was his name?

GOOLKASIAN: Baldisass.

LEVINE: Oh, the same name.

GOOLKASIAN: My grandmother was insisting that's what it was going to be, see. Well, anyway, that's the way that works out.

LEVINE: Can you sort of summarize after you—well, how long did you stay in school and then what did you do in your adult life?

GOOLKASIAN: Okay. I had difficulty with English because of the irregularities in the English language. Although at the time when I started school, I could fluently speak Armenian, Turkish, Arabic. I could understand and make conversation in Kurdish. I learned a little French so that I could get along, what I picked up in France, but English was so different. It was very, very difficult. Then after that, finally, I got two double promotions. First they put me in the third grade. I was left in the third grade for three years and finally I got two double promotions, so I was right up with the same age group, and I graduated and the following year I started Massachusetts College of Pharmacy. At that time I was very interested in electronics. Electronics was just coming in, but it was one of those things you didn't know what was going to be, and it was Depression years, nothing. And my father needed help. He needed help very bad. He was putting in too many hours. So I became a pharmacist. Three years I graduated, and I worked with him for two years until I got married.

LEVINE: And how did you meet your wife?

GOOLKASIAN: Well, when I went to Mass College of Pharmacy, it was the first class—the first time in history there were so many Armenians in the class. Out of eighty-three that graduated in 1932, nine were Armenian. That's better than ten percent. Generally, there's only one or two Armenians in a class. So this was extraordinary and one of the fellows that graduated with me, he got married and I was best man and my mother was maid of honor. So he had—his wife had relatives and they were—one of the girls was, what do you call it? One of the girls in the—

LEVINE: In the pharmacy class?

GOOLKASIAN: No, no, in the wedding. I can't—

LEVINE: Bridesmaid?

GOOLKASIAN: Bridesmaid. One of the girls was a bridesmaid, you know. I guess she got quite interested in me, but I was so bashful I couldn't even talk to a girl. That's how bashful I was, even after graduating from high school—college. In fact, when we had the prom in college, I took my cousin from Lawrence with me, you know. Well, anyway, so she wanted to dance with me, and I don't know whether I did dance or not. But anyway, it ended up I married her.

LEVINE: What was her name and her maiden name?

GOOLKASIAN: Isabelle Yeshilian was her name.

LEVINE: How do you spell her maiden name?

GOOLKASIAN: Y-E-S-H-I-L-I-A-N. Isabelle Yeshilian, and we had two daughters, and after working for my father two more years, I wanted to expand and I really thought there was something in pharmacy. That if we all worked together in a single good-sized pharmacy in the square, that we could all do well and wouldn't have to work so hard, see. At that time we were in Somerville, so Davis Square was the thing I was interested in. But I couldn't get my father interested. He says, "I've worked hard." He says, "I'm done." He says, "I can't." So I said, "Well, gee," I said—my brother was coming up now. My brother, his son was growing up and he was interested in pharmacy. So anyway, I told him that, gee, "You know, this store we have isn't enough for two families. I've got to think about myself." He says, "That's okay, there's no hard feelings. Nothing." So I left and I opened a drugstore in Waltham and then from Waltham I went in

business with a cousin of mine, George. Uncle George's son became a pharmacist, also. So he had gone to war and come back and he was working at a place in Boston. So together we opened a drugstore. My brother was supposed to come in with us, but he didn't somehow, something.

Well, anyway, we were there six years and the landlord was terrible. There was no area to park and you couldn't expand the business very easily. So I was still interested in electronics. So we broke up and I went into electronics.

LEVINE: How did you do that?

GOOLKASIAN: Well, while I was working in the drugstore I got interested with a doctor who was an anesthesiologist in Medford, and at that time I was on the side fooling around with electronics. I was deeply interested in it. So I had developed a pulse monitor. You put a little button on here and the gauge goes back and forth and you can see how the pulse is doing and so on, you know. The doctor encouraged me and he says, "That's a good thing." He says, "They need something like that." At that time they didn't have too many equipment in the hospitals. So anyway, finally, I got a patent on that and through that I got into electronics, and I worked for Honeywell in research. Did some research on the modules that they sent up in the guidance system using transistors and so on. I had some interesting experiences there, and then finally after five years, the headquarters were in Minneapolis, Honeywell and they broke up the division, research division in Boston. So we were all given good references and I began to work for another outfit, Bolt, Branick and Newman in Cambridge. These people didn't have any electronics, but they were organizing a chemistry division. Well, chemistry's down my line, so I got the job there. After we were there three years, the headquarters thought we weren't making enough money for them, so they wanted to do away with it. So we got the permission to take the company out, [unclear] Company out of the Bolt, Branick and Newman and become independent. So only a half a dozen of us went out. Less than that, and each one put out a little money, and I put a little money in it, too, and got out in it. So I worked on that for fifteen years and then retired from that.

LEVINE: Wow. Well, when you think your whole life experience and all that you went through as a young child, what effect or what impact do you think it had on you later in your life, as a person?

GOOLKASIAN: Well, I was always shy and I knew that I was shy and I knew that that was the worst thing in the world for me to be. So since I came to America and I found out five or six years later that I was shy,

I did my darnedest to get away from that. I knew it was wrong. I had to do something about it and I did get away from the shyness. That's why I talk to so much.

LEVINE: Well, why did you think it was so wrong to be shy?

GOOLKASIAN: Well, because when you're shy, you know something, you don't get anywhere with it. If you don't know anything and you're not shy, you can still get ahead. I found that out early. So I figured that shyness is no good for anybody. It's the worst thing in the world, and I have to get rid of it at any expense and that's why I say, sometimes I talk too much. I say too much, and my wife—

LEVINE: Not in this instance at all.

GOOLKASIAN: My wife tries to stop me on that a little, but I have a wonderful wife and she understands me and we understand. We're very close.

LEVINE: Wonderful. What would you say you feel most satisfied about? I mean, when you think about your whole life, what is it that makes you feel proud or satisfied?

GOOLKASIAN: Well, coming to America was the greatest thing that could happen to me, and I know I had talents because I was interested. The trouble is, some people are interested in this, A, or B, or C. I was interested in A through Z. Everything interested me, and that was the downfall for me. That's why I'm not a millionaire, I'm not a rich man. If I had stuck to one thing, not that I didn't do good on the things that I did go into, but I would have been better off if I stuck to one thing and went to the limit on that. But you learn that too late in life sometimes.

LEVINE: Well, your old age, this age that you're at now after your retirement, what do you feel about that?

GOOLKASIAN: I feel that I could have accomplished a lot more than I did. But I'm satisfied. I'm not a pauper. I'm not a rich man, but in memories and satisfaction that I've lived to this age, where so many of my contemporaries didn't, and I outlived my father. It's a great feeling. I wish he was living to see me.

LEVINE: What do you—what do you attribute your ripe old age and your vitality to?

GOOLKASIAN: Well, going into pharmacy helped a lot because I got to know better how to take care of myself. Outside of that, as far as the vitality, from the time I was very small, I was always eager. Yeah, eager, but during the war, all the things that happened to me, put me way down to such a degree that I was—I couldn't talk to anybody.

LEVINE: When you first got here, you mean?

GOOLKASIAN: Yeah. For instance, when I first got here, on the side I used to sing songs, you know, that I had learned, Arabic songs and so on. They tried to get me to sing in front of a group, couldn't do it. In front of a group, I was down. In fact, even when—after I graduated from college, I had opportunities with groups, you know, and I was at one time president of Harper Junior League. But I had that thing in my mind that I couldn't do the job good, and I couldn't do it.

LEVINE: Do you think that had anything to do with all that you had been through?

GOOLKASIAN: Oh. Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. To give you an idea, my own two children, two daughters, they have advanced so fast, so good because they had no hindrances. My youngest daughter Priscilla is a violinist. When she worked in my drugstore, she come in, I just had to tell her how to do a thing once and she knew it right off. She could do it. My older, Diane, the same. Priscilla today helps her husband, you know. She's fantastic. She's so versatile and everything. Diane is the same way. She makes up her mind she's going to do a certain thing, nothing can stop her. In fact, she married a Jewish fellow from Iran and he's a very learned man. He's with a high degree, worked for the government. They have two sons and she's raised those two sons fantastic. Priscilla's got two sons. They're doing great. I'm so proud. Although I have no money, I AM THE RICHEST MAN IN THE WORLD.

LEVINE: We don't have too much more time, but let me ask you a question about your memories.

GOOLKASIAN: Yes.

LEVINE: Your memories that you have from going through the genocide and all that, how do you think they've changed over the years in the way that you remember it?

GOOLKASIAN: They haven't changed any. The only thing I say to myself is that the Turks had a group—had a nation like Armenian that were so eager. They weren't interested in politics. They were interested in

doing a good job on whatever they did. They tried to do away with them. They were the losers. They are the losers because these people that they killed, their children are doing fantastic everywhere they go. Today in the United States there's close to a million Armenians. In the last ten years, twenty years probably, is when it's doubled. The ones that came before, the children and grandchildren of these people that went through the war, they have done so well today, it's amazing.

LEVINE: One last question. How do you consider yourself as far as being Armenian and being American? Can you sort of talk about how you think of that?

GOOLKASIAN: Well, I'm an Armenian American. There is no such thing as just American. This country is made up of conglomerate. It's either you're French American, Armenian American, Greek American, Italian American and so on. So I'm American, period, but I have my roots are still in Armenia because it's in such a state that it needs my approval.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Uh-hmm. Okay, is there anything else you'd like to say before we close?

GOOLKASIAN: All I can say is this. That I wish that the Americans would appreciate America more than they do. Those that have been here for years and years and years, those are the ones that are getting in trouble here. And also, when I came here, I didn't know the English language, and I learned it. The English language should be the main language of this country. You can't have two, three languages, you know, one here, one there and so on. You can't. You go to Florida, southern Florida, they speak nothing but Spanish. All the signs on the streets are Spanish. You'd think you were in Spain. America was founded under the English language. It should be kept in that English language. You can't do good—you know, I think the reason why some of the other nationalities aren't doing so well is because they're sticking to their own language too strongly.

LEVINE: Okay.

GOOLKASIAN: You better learn that, you're here now. This is your country.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Well, we're going to stop here. I want to thank you very much for a most interesting interview. It's a privilege for me to have been speaking with Peter Goolkasian, who came from Turkish Armenia in 19—

GOOLKASIAN: ’20.

LEVINE: When you were just about ten years of age.

GOOLKASIAN: Right.

LEVINE: And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service signing off. Thank you very much.

GOOLKASIAN: Thank you.

[End of Interview]