

EI-701

SPIRO KEROS

BIRTHDATE: DECEMBER 7, 1915

INTERVIEW DATE: OCTOBER 31, 1995

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 79

RUNNING TIME:

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER:

INTERVIEW LOCATION: CONCORD, NEW HAMPSHIRE

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: NICOLE STOTZ

ALBANIA, 1929

AGE: 14

SHIP: PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT

PORT: CHERBOURG, FRANCE

RESIDENCES:

- **ALBANIA: LIBOHOVË**
- **THE US: CONCORD, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today in Concord, New Hampshire, and with me is Spiro Keros.

KEROS: Keros, K-E-R-O-S.

LEVINE: Oh, okay, there is no I. Keros. Okay, Mr. Keros came from Libohovë, Albania, the same place that Peter Goulios came from. And he was born on December 7th, 1915, and now, and then came to Concord, New Hampshire. Today is October 31st, 1995, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Well, if you would tell me, Mr. Keros, what you remember about Libohovë. What are the things that you think about when you think about that little village where--?

KEROS: I used to—working over there in Libohovë, I used to work carpenter.

LEVINE: Oh, did you go to school there, too?

KEROS: No. I went to school in a Greek school, not an Albanian school.

LEVINE: Oh, so you knew how to speak Greek?

KEROS: Sure! You?

LEVINE: No.

KEROS: Oh yeah, I speak Greek, and I write and read, everything. Sure. I've been in Greek for five, six years. My cousin used to be over there, a teacher, and I stayed with her. My uncle, too.

LEVINE: Was that in Libohovë?

KEROS: No, no.

LEVINE: Somewhere else?

KEROS: In Greece, Delvanati is name of the town in Greece.

LEVINE: Do you know how to spell that?

KEROS: No, I can't spell it now.

LEVINE: But you were in this Greek town? Okay, we have the help of our friend, here.

KEROS: Well, you've got on the tape what you want? Oh, you want spell it.

LEVINE: It's just that we type it out. At some point we type it out, and some of these words we're not that familiar with, so it helps. But okay, so you—did you leave Libohovë before you came to the United States?

KEROS: I was born over there.

LEVINE: You were born there, and how many years did you live there?

KEROS: I told you, I was born, I lived—I married over there. I was twenty-two years old, and I come over here.

LEVINE: Well, did you go and live in Greece before you came here?

KEROS: Oh, yeah, I used to go. I used to go to Greece, back and forth.

LEVINE: Oh.

KEROS: It was free, free over there. You can go any time you want.

LEVINE: And were you doing carpentry work when you did that?

KEROS: Yeah, I used to work—I learned in Greece.

LEVINE: Oh, you learned carpentry in Greece?

KEROS: Yeah.

LEVINE: I see.

KEROS: I learned over there. I learned the Greek language, and carpenter business, yeah.

LEVINE: Now, when you say carpentry, were you building houses, or you were building furniture?

KEROS: Building houses and furniture.

LEVINE: Did you do a kind of apprenticeship? Were you learning from a carpenter?

KEROS: No, we was working from the houses, building houses. Not me, but the other party with us. It was two or three of us, right Pedro?

LEVINE: Okay, so tell me your father's name?

KEROS: John.

LEVINE: John Keros. And your mother's name?

KEROS: Maria.

LEVINE: Maria. And do you remember her maiden name?

KEROS: Middle name?

LEVINE: Maiden name, before she married your father?

KEROS: Oh, Maria [pause] Notides.

PEDRO: [Unclear]

LEVINE: Okay, and how about your grandmother or grandfather? Did you ever know them, your grandfathers or grandmothers?

KEROS: Grandmother?

LEVINE: Yeah.

KEROS: Yeah, I used to know, but I can't remember how old they are.

EI-701/KEROS

LEVINE: All I wanted to ask you was: when you were a little boy, do you remember them? What they were like?

KEROS: Sure, I remember my grandmother.

LEVINE: Yeah, which? Whose mother? Your mother's or your father's?

KEROS: Mother. Father's two died. He's dead.

LEVINE: So it was your mother's mother?

KEROS: Yeah, I told you.

LEVINE: What do you remember about her?

KEROS: Well, used to come in my house all the time.

LEVINE: Did you ever do things with her?

KEROS: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: What?

KEROS: What you mean, do things?

LEVINE: Would you go places with her?

KEROS: No, no, she was too old to go places [laughs].

LEVINE: Yeah, so would she cook things for you?

KEROS: Cook? Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember any of the dishes that she made?

KEROS: No. No, was too young to remember.

LEVINE: Now how about—did you have brothers and sisters?

KEROS: Yeah, I had two sisters. One sister, she's still live, and the other one die.

LEVINE: Which one is alive?

KEROS: Anita. Anna.

LEVINE: And is she here?

KEROS: No.

LEVINE: She's in Albania.

KEROS: Albania, yeah.

LEVINE: And what was your other sister's name?

KEROS: Sisters, the other one?

LEVINE: Yeah.

KEROS: Evianiya [ph].

PEDRO: Let me write it for you.

LEVINE: How do you say it again? Okay, so let's see, what do you remember about where you lived? Do you remember the house?

KEROS: Of course I remember [laughs].

LEVINE: What was it like? Was it a stone house?

KEROS: Stone house, oh, yeah. They built up the stone house, yeah. Same one—the whole town is a stone house.

LEVINE: Did you have a place for animals?

KEROS: Yeah, we had a goat, we had a cow, and we working outside in the garden, my mother, yeah.

LEVINE: What kinds of things did your mother grow?

KEROS: Oh, vegetables, corn, all that stuff. Right, Pedro?

PEDRO: Wheat.

KEROS: Wheat, yeah.

LEVINE: Wheat, yeah. And how did you get around?

KEROS: Walking, or we had donkey [laughs].

PEDRO: Horse, donkey.

KEROS: We used to have a horse—mule, yeah.

LEVINE: Oh. Did you have certain duties, things that you had to do, around the house, around the farm?

KEROS: No, no. My mother no let me nothing to do in the house. All I do—

LEVINE: So you were the only son, also? You were the only boy?

KEROS: Yeah, only one, yeah.

LEVINE: So did that give you special privileges, being the only boy?

KEROS: [Laughs] Oh—

PEDRO: Yes, yes.

KEROS: Anything else?

LEVINE: Were you a religious family?

KEROS: Visitors?

LEVINE: Were you a religious family?

KEROS: Oh, religious, yeah, Orthodox.

PEDRO: Still is.

KEROS: We used to go in church.

LEVINE: Do you remember any of the festivities that were connected with the church that, you know, celebrations?

KEROS: Christmas.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How did you celebrate Christmas?

KEROS: New Year's, or Easter.

LEVINE: Was Christmas celebrated-

KEROS: Yeah, we celebrate in the church. Over there, you had a big hall there, and we dancing every one of them.

LEVINE: Yeah, and how about Easter? How did you celebrate that?

KEROS: The same thing Easter.

PEDRO: With eggs.

KEROS: With eggs. We have red eggs.

LEVINE: Red?

KEROS: My mother would paint the red eggs.

PEDRO: Then they'd break.

KEROS: Yeah, then we broke them in church.

LEVINE: Oh, you broke the eggs in church?

KEROS: Yeah.

LEVINE: And why was that? How come you broke them in church?

PEDRO: That's their religion!

KEROS: Religion, yeah. We broke the egg.

LEVINE: And do you remember, like, dancing and singing?

KEROS: Oh, sure, dancing and singing, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember the instruments?

KEROS: We used to have an orchestra.

LEVINE: Oh, who was in the orchestra?

KEROS: Oh, I don't know.

PEDRO: Strangers.

LEVINE: Oh, strangers. But what were they playing, what instruments?

KEROS: Oh, the clarino, violin, drum, everything.

LEVINE: Were you a dancer?

KEROS: Course we dancing! Yeah, everybody dancing over there.

LEVINE: And let's see, what else? Do you remember any games that you played?

KEROS: Games? Oh, not much games there.

LEVINE: Not much playing?

KEROS: No, not much.

LEVINE: And can you describe the village? I know there was another village.

KEROS: Oh, another village was on top. And another village was half an hour or an hour. And one was way down. And plenty villages around, quite a few.

LEVINE: And the main city, the nearby city—did you go there?

KEROS: The city, Gjirokastër?

LEVINE: Right. Now, do you ever remember going there?

KEROS: Oh, sure, we were going all the time.

LEVINE: Why would you go to the city?

KEROS: Well, we going over there to sell stuff, or to buy it, everything.

LEVINE: Were there any, like stores, for clothing?

KEROS: Yeah, like clothing, like grocery stores, like everything, yeah.

LEVINE: Was there such a thing as a market day?

KEROS: Market?

LEVINE: Market day?

KEROS: Oh, sure.

LEVINE: What was that like, the market day? What would happen?

KEROS: Well, sellers were around. They sell a lot of stuff, and you can buy.

LEVINE: Would you buy simply food, or--?

KEROS: Yeah, vegetables.

LEVINE: Not clothes or things like that?

KEROS: Clothes is different store, but it's close in, just like here. You don't have any stores clothing and vegetables. Same thing.

LEVINE: How about things like shoes? Were your shoes home made or hand made, or did you buy them?

KEROS: Yeah, some of its hand made, some of it's already made.

LEVINE: Did you have an idea that you wanted to be a carpenter when you were a little boy?

KEROS: Oh yeah, I liked to be carpenter.

LEVINE: That's what you wanted?

KEROS: Yeah, that's what I wanted.

LEVINE: So how did it get arranged, that you would go to Greece and--?

KEROS: It was not very far, only, by walk, eight hours, from Libohovë, Libohovë to Greece. And we went over there, and stayed with my uncle. My uncle was a priest over there. And my cousin, she was a teacher. And she had a house, and I stay over there for four or five years.

LEVINE: I see, so you had been speaking Albanian in your own home, but then when you went to Greece, you learned Greek?

KEROS: Yeah, I went there. We speak Greece over there—Greek.

LEVINE: Now, did you do all your carpentry work in Greece, when you worked as a carpenter?

KEROS: Well, we learn over there.

LEVINE: And then you came back?

KEROS: I go back again, I went to Libohovë.

LEVINE: And then you worked in Libohovë?

KEROS: We would work Libohovë with the other fellows.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. I'm sorry, go ahead.

KEROS: Yeah, go ahead.

LEVINE: Now you met your wife in Libohově?

KEROS: Oh yeah, I met my—it was a little girl.

LEVINE: She was a little girl?

KEROS: Sure, yeah.

PEDRO: [Laughs]

LEVINE: Was it an arranged marriage?

KEROS: Yeah, we arrange it, all right.

PEDRO: Yeah, [laughs] tell her the story!

LEVINE: Is there a story about the arrangement?

KEROS: [Laughs] Huh?

LEVINE: Is there a story about your marriage getting arranged?

KEROS: No, no story.

LEVINE: No? Well, how did you meet her? How did you happen to know her?

KEROS: Well, my mother meet her mother, and they come up visit us over there, and that's why.

LEVINE: How old were you when you got married?

KEROS: Oh, I was about twenty-one. Twenty, twenty-one, something like that.

LEVINE: And she?

KEROS: She was sixteen.

PEDRO: [Laughs]

LEVINE: And what's her name?

KEROS: Madeline.

LEVINE: Madeline. And her maiden name?

KEROS: Middle name?

LEVINE: Maiden name, before she married you?

KEROS: Oh, Madeline Filidas.

LEVINE: P-H-I-L...

PEDRO: F, F.

LEVINE: F-I-L-I-D-A-S?

KEROS: Yeah, that's all.

LEVINE: And so did you have a big wedding?

KEROS: Oh yeah, big wedding!

LEVINE: Could you describe it? How was it different from a wedding here, let's say.

KEROS: Oh, lots different over there.

LEVINE: Oh, good. Tell me everything.

KEROS: It's a one week wedding over there.

LEVINE: One week?

KEROS: Yeah, takes one week, started from Monday, to finish the next Monday.

PEDRO: [Laughs]

LEVINE: And what happens for that whole week?

KEROS: Dancing, and we roasted some sheeps, about ten or fifteen. And lots of wine, lots of—what do you call that?

PEDRO: Brandy [laughs], whiskey.

LEVINE: And did the bride sit on a horse?

KEROS: Oh, yeah, you have to put it on the horse.

LEVINE: Yeah? And then how—

KEROS: You put in on the horse, and then they bring him to my house over there, and then after, somebody take him down.

LEVINE: Who took her down?

KEROS: But you would have to place. You would say, "Ten dollars from me, fifty dollars from the other fellow." Who ever gives you the most of it, they take them down.

LEVINE: Wow!

KEROS: And after we started dancing all night, all day.

LEVINE: Did women have to have dowries in those days?

KEROS: Down?

LEVINE: Dowry. Did the women bring a dowry to the marriage?

KEROS: Oh yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember your wife's dowry? What was it? Was it like, linens, or a horse? What would be in a dowry?

KEROS: A horse.

PEDRO: No, clothes, you know.

KEROS: Clothes—the suit, you mean? The brown?

LEVINE: Did your wife's family have to give--?

KEROS: Oh yeah, they give it. They give good presents, see. When they come my house, my relatives are waiting with the presents. They give you presents, see.

LEVINE: What kinds of presents?

KEROS: All kinds: shirt, stockings, different, see. That's all?

LEVINE: No, no!

KEROS: Because I got to go.

LEVINE: Are you in a hurry?

KEROS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, we'll try to go quicker. Okay, so you were married, and then did you live in Albania for a while after you were married?

KEROS: Oh, I lived there six months, and I left Albania September, and I come to this country.

LEVINE: You came by yourself?

KEROS: All by myself.

LEVINE: And why did you come here?

KEROS: My father was here. He bring me.

LEVINE: How long had your father been here when--?

KEROS: My father? Oh, he been long time. He been here 1905.

LEVINE: Oh, so did you remember him?

KEROS: Of course I remember. He died over here.

LEVINE: No, I mean, did he come back to Albania, so that you knew him before you came to the United States?

KEROS: Oh yeah, we had a couple visits. He come a couple times down in Albania, see. But I was too young to bring me down there. When I was get a little older, he bring me down.

LEVINE: So you wanted to come here, to join your father?

KEROS: Yeah, he bring me here.

LEVINE: So do you remember leaving the town? Do you remember getting ready to leave?

KEROS: Oh yeah, I remember.

LEVINE: What was it like leaving?

KEROS: I remember over here on Chalder Street. Six Chalder Street, down there.

LEVINE: That's where you came to?

KEROS: Yeah, that's where I came down to down here.

LEVINE: Do you remember the voyage at all?

KEROS: What voyage?

LEVINE: The voyage on the ship?

KEROS: Oh, the ship? We come from France, from French harbor.

LEVINE: Cherbourg?

KEROS: Yeah, Cherbourg. The ship is named President Roosevelt.

LEVINE: Okay, do you remember the trip from Libohovë to Cherbourg?

KEROS: No, no ship, Libohovë.

LEVINE: I mean, how did you go from Libohovë?

KEROS: How did come from Libohovë here?

LEVINE: From Libohovë to Cherbourg?

KEROS: Oh, we went through from Italy by train, all by myself, nobody else.

LEVINE: Could you speak to anybody?

KEROS: Yeah, they speak Greek, everybody. They are waiting for me. See, they come up for the train, they pick me up, they put me on another train, see? And went to Cherbourg over there, I stayed about a week. I stayed one week. And after the boat's coming, we came to New York.

LEVINE: And the name of the boat was the President--?

KEROS: Roosevelt.

LEVINE: Roosevelt. And do you remember anything about that voyage? Anything about the trip over the ocean?

KEROS: No, it was nice, no problems. No rough.

LEVINE: Were you in the third class, in the bottom of the boat?

KEROS: Third class, yeah. We can't afford it to pay first class.

LEVINE: What was it like?

KEROS: Eighty dollars for the ticket!

LEVINE: Really? And what were the conditions like?

KEROS: Conditions?

LEVINE: Yeah, on the boat.

KEROS: You mean the food, or--?

LEVINE: Anything, the food, the sleeping.

KEROS: Ah, not so good.

LEVINE: Do you remember when the ship, when the President Roosevelt, came into the New York harbor?

KEROS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Did you see the Statue of Liberty?

KEROS: Course I seen that. I asked them, I say, "What's that?" "It's the Statue of Liberty; we are in New York now," they say, some fellows over there, Greek fellows, you know.

LEVINE: Did you ever know about that? Did you know what it was, even?

KEROS: No, we didn't know nothing.

LEVINE: And how about Ellis Island?

KEROS: Well, this big one over there, yeah.

LEVINE: What do you remember about it?

KEROS: Oh, well, I remember over there, we landed in New York. And from New York, we took this little boat, ferry boat, and it took me to the island.

LEVINE: And what was your impression of Ellis Island?

KEROS: Nice. We stayed there about an hour. My father come out; he picked me up.

LEVINE: Did you get examined?

EI-701/KEROS

KEROS: Oh yeah, they have examination, yeah. Doctors over there, examination, "It's okay." He said, "You pass it."

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Were you treated well?

KEROS: No, no, no.

LEVINE: You were okay?

KEROS: Yeah, sure, I'm all right, yeah.

LEVINE: So then, when you saw your father, what was that like? When he came and picked you up, how did you feel?

KEROS: I know him before, because he visit us.

PEDRO: Happy!

LEVINE: And then where did he take you, when he took you off of Ellis Island?

KEROS: Well, we stay one night in New York, and the next day we come to Concord.

LEVINE: By train?

KEROS: By train, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything that struck you as new and different? Things about this country that you never saw before?

KEROS: Oh, it was the United States. We never saw before. Yeah, we were surprised!

LEVINE: Were there any, either foods, or--?

KEROS: Oh, everything here. Different foods, everything, lots of different.

LEVINE: So when you got here to Concord, did you start working?

KEROS: Yeah, we stayed about a month in a house, we got around, and after, we started to working.

LEVINE: What was your father doing when you first came?

KEROS: He was taking a shop. He used to work on cable, used to be cable here, wire.

LEVINE: Oh, wire—not TV, right?

KEROS: No [laughs]. Then after, they take me down there, too. I used to working over here, too, yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, so you worked with your father, then?

KEROS: Yeah. You know, over the bridge—bridge, there used to be a big shop over there.

LEVINE: Now, did you ever go back and do carpentry in this country?

KEROS: Oh, yeah, after when my father died, and we started to have a coffee shop, luncheonette.

LEVINE: You and your father?

KEROS: No, no.

LEVINE: Just you?

KEROS: No, the other fellow.

PEDRO: He had a partner.

KEROS: Named Peter, my cousin, Peter Laetis, name. And we started open the coffee shop on Pleasant Street, nineteen Pleasant Street.

LEVINE: What was the name of it?

KEROS: What's the name?

LEVINE: Of the coffee shop?

KEROS: Star Hot Dogs.

LEVINE: Star? So you were in partnership with him?

KEROS: With him, for thirty-three years.

LEVINE: Oh, wow! Now, did you have children?

KEROS: No, I don't got any children.

LEVINE: And when did your wife come over here, then?

KEROS: Well, I went back again.

LEVINE: When did you go back?

KEROS: 1944.

PEDRO: No, no, '35, not '44.

KEROS: '34, '35, something like that.

LEVINE: Well now, the year that you came here for the first time--?

KEROS: Yeah, all by myself.

LEVINE: That was 19--?

KEROS: '29, yeah. I stayed four or five months. I was be an American citizen.

LEVINE: You became a citizen?

KEROS: Yeah, became citizen. And after I went back again, 1945—

PEDRO: '35.

KEROS: '35, and I bring my wife, too.

LEVINE: Now, did she have to come through Ellis Island? No, because you were a citizen.

KEROS: Citizen, yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, let's see. Well how do you feel about having come to this country as a young man? What difference do you think it's made, the fact that you started out in Albania, went to Greece, then you ended up really living your life out here?

KEROS: Yeah.

LEVINE: How do you feel about that?

KEROS: I like it, yeah. That's why I stay here.

LEVINE: That's why you stayed, yeah, uh-huh. And what makes you feel really satisfied? Anything you've done in your life that makes you feel really good, that you were able to do it?

KEROS: Well all the time, it's nice and good here [laughs], yeah.

PEDRO: Freedom.

LEVINE: Yeah, so are you pleased that you chose Concord, New Hampshire, to live?

KEROS: Yeah, we like it. There used to be plenty friends here, but everyone, they die now. They gone.

LEVINE: Was there a big Greek or Albanian population here?

KEROS: Oh, there's was big, yeah, quite a few, about fifteen, twenty-five families. They're all gone now.

LEVINE: Yeah. What was the Greek community like here in Concord? Did people stick together?

KEROS: Oh yeah, they stick together, sure.

LEVINE: They went to the same church?

KEROS: Yeah, same church.

LEVINE: And you must have seen a lot of changes in Concord?

KEROS: Oh, sure!

LEVINE: Do you remember some of the things that were here when you first came that are no longer here any more?

KEROS: Everyone that I miss them, is gone.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah, right.

PEDRO: The railroad station.

LEVINE: The railroad station—do you remember the old railroad station?

KEROS: Oh yea, the railroad station, bus station, trolley cars I remember here.

LEVINE: Oh, yeah?

KEROS: Used to be trolley cars from here to Manchester.

LEVINE: Really?

KEROS: Yeah. After trolley car, they put a bus, going to Manchester. After bus, I buy a car myself.

LEVINE: What was your first car?

KEROS: First car? A Dodge.

LEVINE: A Dodge. What year was that?

KEROS: During the war time. It was during the war time.

LEVINE: Maybe 1940.

KEROS: You can't buy any car, but you have to do application to get you one.

LEVINE: Oh. So do you remember, was the Depression a hard time for you?

KEROS: Oh yeah, big Depression, yeah. I used to work in a dishwasher, five dollars a week, yeah. Big Depression.

LEVINE: And then when the war started, were you drafted? Were you brought into the service at all?

KEROS: The service? No, I didn't go in the service, yeah.

LEVINE: And how is this time of your life? Now that you're retired, how is life for you at this stage?

KEROS: Well yeah, nice to be retired, but [laughs]—

LEVINE: It's nice to be retired, but--?

KEROS: The restaurant business is a very hard job, very hard.

LEVINE: A lot of hours?

KEROS: A lot of hours. I open seven to eleven [laughs].

LEVINE: Seven in the morning to eleven at night?

KEROS: Yeah, yeah!

LEVINE: Wow. So you're glad to be retired, or do you miss it?

KEROS: No, I don't miss anything [laughs]. Hard work, see, in a restaurant. That's all, I got to go.

EI-701/KEROS

LEVINE: Okay, wait, let me unhook you. I want to thank you very much.

KEROS: You're welcome.

LEVINE: I have been speaking with Spiro Keros, and this is Janet Levine, and I'm signing off, thank you.

[End of Interview]